

# WEMBDON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Council Clerk, Tony Jay, 5 Maple View, Kewstoke, Weston-super-Mare, BS22 9XQ.  
Email [clerk@wembdon.org](mailto:clerk@wembdon.org) Telephone 07859911204

Minutes of a meeting of Wembdon Parish Council held at Wembdon Village Hall on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 that commenced at 7.30pm when the following business was transacted.

Present: Councillors A Reed (Chairman), C Chalk, L Edwards, D Gliddon, J Hayden-Briffett, B Hedaux, P King, P Major and M Phillips.

Parish Clerk: Tony Jay

29/24 To receive any apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Councillor D Claydon.

30/24 To receive declarations of any pecuniary interests on items relating to this agenda, which have not been previously declared in the Councillors register of interests.

The Clerk granted a dispensation to all Councillors to consider agenda item 34/24 as they all have a pecuniary interest.

31/24 To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

It was unanimously resolved to approve the minutes as being a correct record of the meeting.

32/24 To receive a summary of the current financial situation faced by Somerset Council, and the potential implications for Wembdon Parish Council from the Parish Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer.

The Clerk gave the following report to the meeting:

The financial problems currently faced by Somerset Council are widely known. We are not here this evening to discuss the background to these problems, but to consider the effect that they will have on Wembdon Parish Council and more specifically the amount of Council Tax that the Parish Council will be asking its parishioners to pay in 2024-25.

Who gets your Council Tax? In 2023-24 it was split in these proportions:

1. Somerset Council 78.7%
2. Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner 12.7%
3. Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service 4.6%
4. Wembdon Parish Council 4.0%

All Local Authorities e.g. Somerset Council have statutory responsibilities to provide certain services including adult and child social care, highway maintenance and waste collections. These statutory items take up the majority of their expenditure.

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The remainder of Local Authority expenditure is on non-statutory items, which they do not have to provide if they cannot afford to.

Non-statutory expenditure consists of many things including:

- Playgrounds.
- Hedge and verge cutting at the side of the highway.
- Public right of way maintenance.
- Pavement and street sign maintenance.
- Street and gulley cleaning.
- Drain jetting.
- Road sweeping.
- Litter and dog bin emptying subsidies.
- Community Safety (which includes CCTV in public areas and street & dog wardens).
- Fly tipping clearance

Somerset Council have to find £100 million to make their 2024-25 budget balance. Some or all of their non-statutory expenditure will either be cut back or stopped completely unless Town and Parish Councils take over the financing. Put simply, many of the things that Wembdon has traditionally been provided with by first Sedgemoor District Council and now Somerset Council, and have probably taken for granted, will now have to be funded by the Parish Council or will be reduced or will end.

All Town and Parish Councils must submit their precept demands to Somerset Council by February 2nd. Councillors from all over the county are asking a) what services will be cut and b) how much will it cost for us to take them on. They need this information by February 2nd, or they cannot set their budgets for the following year. However, Somerset Council will not be making their own decisions about what will be cut until their budget setting meeting on February 20th. Therefore all Town and Parish Councils are in the impossible position of having to set their own budgets and precept demand without knowing what their 2024-25 expenditure will be. What a crazy situation!

Many Parish Councils have already decided to include a contingency amount to cover this unknown extra expenditure in their 2024-25 budget, which naturally involves an increase in their precept demand. Other Councils who hold large reserves can finance their extra expenditure by using these funds, but they may not be available in subsequent years. Wembdon Parish Council holds a sensible amount of reserves, which is acceptable to our auditors, so I would not recommend this option to your Councillors.

The Wembdon Council Tax Base is the number of dwellings that pay council tax in the parish. As this figure changes slightly every year then consequently the amount that everyone pays varies slightly. As an example,

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in 2023-24 Wembdon Parish Council left their precept demand unchanged compared with the previous year, but everyone paid 2% less as there were more dwellings in the Council Tax Base.

If Wembdon Parish Council was to increase its precept by £10,000 then a Band D Council Tax household would pay an extra 63p per month. Every additional £10,000 would similarly cost a further 63p per month.

As your Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer I do not get a vote in the setting of the budget and precept demand, however it is my job to advise the Councillors. My advice will be to include a contingency figure of £20,000 for the unknown devolution costs in 2024-25, and to fund this by an increase in the precept accordingly. The situation can then be reassessed the following year when the actual cost of devolution will be much clearer. This would ensure that the parish continues to receive the services that it has always done, and that the Parish Council's finances remain sound.

33/24 To invite public speaking.

Three members of the public spoke regarding agenda item 34/24.

34/24 To consider the Parish Council's budget and precept demand for 2024-2025. It was unanimously resolved to accept the budget previously considered by Councillors, with an addition of £20,000 as a contingency figure for the unknown financial consequences of devolution. This will mean that the precept demand for 2024-2025 will be £130,992.

End of minutes.