

Chairmans report for Norton Parish Council Mat 2024 – 25.

This year, as last year, has been dominated by the issues surrounding the formation of the Unitary authority. We have had a most frustrating year attempting to get answers from Somerset Council including to such simple requests as “How much does it cost to empty a poo bin?” We have seen a massive redundancy programme implemented in an attempt to balance the budget and to save money. This has led to a huge amount of frustration as contacting the correct officer to deal with our issues has been difficult due to numerous personnel changes. A further and ongoing consequence of these budgetary constraints saw an increase in our precept to cover services that we as a Parish Council, may have to pay for in the future. Unfortunately, we remain largely in the dark regarding which services we will have to pay for, when and how much we will have to pay once devolution occurs.

However, after many hours of calls, site visits, legal wranglings and with a large number of people involved we finally saw repairs carried out to the wall in Minchington Recreation ground. The Parish Council is hoping that this asset can be devolved to us in the near future as currently the lack of maintenance of both the grass and the play equipment means numerous complaints have been received regarding the condition of the Rec.

As previously mentioned, 2024/25 saw a rise in our precept. It is the Parish Council's policy to be as open as possible with the residents of Norton as to how, when and why monies are spent within the Parish and although most households received a significant rise in their bills, the residents have been very understanding as to why this has happened. We as a council, are very lucky that we receive such support from our residents.

The increase in the precept has also meant that we can continue to support Hamdon Youth Group and to maintain our Section 137 payments to local groups such as the Newsletter and The Village shop and can cover other costs such as maintenance of the Church Clock.

Both the Chair and the Clerk attended the LCN meetings last year but both felt this was a very unproductive forum which was frankly a complete waste of their time in attending. This year we have seen a very successful clerks forum enable communications and workings between the parishes to become both easy and desirable. This has also led to more local parishes attempting to work together to share ideas, resources and information which we hope this will become even more productive once devolution occurs. Thanks must go to all clerks involved.

Yet again, it has been a pleasure to work with all Parish Councillors and our Unitary Councillors Mike and Ollie and I thank everyone for their time and enthusiasm. Several other individuals also deserve our thanks, in particular Matt Orchard who has helped out on numerous occasions this year with both flooding and tree issues. Austin Harding who continues to give his time to help us with footpath issues. John, our unofficial litter picker, who does a fantastic job keeping the village tidy and Kath Crouch for helping with the allotments. A thankyou must also go to Bagnell farm for literally keeping the roads clear and to Lindsey Elliott for helping us with the budget and the financial reports.

The PC could not function without Louise who has probably had the most frustrating year of her entire PC career. She continues to give us many more hours than she is actually paid for, keeps abreast of any developments outside the parish which may have an impact on the village and does this whilst maintaining her professionalism and, most of the time, her sense of humour. I personally could not chair this council without her unwavering support.

Sue More 6/5/25

