

**Minutes of the Sourton Parish Council meeting held at 7pm
on 13th October 2025 at Sourton Village Hall.**

Council Member Present:

Cllr Mott (Chair)
Cllr Horn
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Kaczanow
Cllr Southcott

In Attendance:

Mrs A Horn (Clerk) 6 members of the public

A minutes' silence in memory of Geradine Jury, former Sourton Parish Councillor was observed.

79	Chair's Report	No report
80	Apologies for Absence	None
81	Public Forum	It was agreed that questions raised during the public participation session would no longer be recorded in the minutes, as they were addressed during the meeting.
82	Declarations of Interest	None
83	WDBC, DCC, DNP PCC and Sourton Hall Report	WDBC No report DCC No report DNP National Park Forum is 13 th November PCC The PCC reported that the grass cutting this year had been a great improvement on last year. The PCC have mended the gate, cut the hedges and removed a fallen limb from a tree for which thanks from SPC have been given. Sourton Hall No report
84	PART TWO – CONFIDENTIAL	On the proposition of Cllr Southcott, seconded Cllr Kaczanow it was RESOLVED that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items which are CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council.
85	WDBC Enforcement	An update was noted
86	Governance and Finance Review	On the proposition of Cllr Mott and seconded by Cllr Southcott it was RESOLVED to attach the Governance and Finance Review (Appendix A) and public statement (Appendix B) to the minutes and read the public statement out at the meeting. Cllr Mott and the Clerk left the meeting

87	Staffing Committee	On the proposition of Cllr Kaczanow and seconded by Cllr Horn it was RESOLVED to attach the Staffing Committee Report (Appendix C) to the minutes. Cllr Mott and the Clerk rejoined the meeting
		On the proposition of Cllr Edmonds, seconded Cllr Southcott it was RESOLVED to exit Part 2 and ratify decisions made therein.
		Cllr Mott read the statement
88	Minutes	
88.1	Minutes of the previous meeting	On the proposition of Cllr Edmunds and seconded by Cllr Kaczanow it was RESOLVED to approve and sign the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 1 st September 2025 with the amendment to min 61 Public participation point 9 response -The PC does not have a formal retention policy therefore the 6yr retention is not applicable in this instance. In line with the Data Protection Article 5(1)(e) data shall be kept for no longer than necessary for the purpose of which it is processed. As the person in question had resigned any lawful basis for retaining data no longer applied.
88.2	Staffing Committee Minutes	On the proposition of Cllr Edmonds and seconded by Cllr Ivor it was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Staffing Committee Meeting held on 7 th July 2025
89	Co- option	
89.1	Co-option of Councillors	No applications had been received.
90	<u>Planning</u>	
90.1	<u>2827/25/AGR</u> Spurham Farm Thorndon Cross EX20 4NQ	The application was noted
		6 members of the public left at 19:55
91	<u>Governance</u>	
91.1	Meeting Dates for 2026	On the proposition of Cllr Mott and seconded by Cllr Horn it was RESOLVED to accept the proposed meeting dates subject to village hall availability.
91.2	Mobile Phone	The new phone was noted and that the new council mobile phone number is 07453561940
91.3	Cluster meeting	The minutes of the meeting were circulated to all councillors
91.4	Lloyds Bank Closure	On the proposition of Cllr Mott and seconded by Cllr Southcott it was RESOLVED to request a review for a banking hub as Sourton is a rural parish that has strong ties to agriculture receiving market cheques. Sourton also has an elderly population, poor internet

connection and mobile phone signal making using the banking apps difficult.

92 Finance

92.1 Finance Report

On the proposition of Cllr Edmonds and seconded by Cllr Southcott the Bank Reconciliation report and budget report dated 30th September 2025 were agreed.

92.2 Payments

On the proposition of Cllr Mott and seconded by Cllr Edmonds it was **RESOLVED** to approve the list of payments totalling £436.87 plus VAT but not to pay the village hall invoice until it had been queried.

92.3 Grants

No application has been received as requested

92.4 Payment Card

On the proposition of Cllr Edmonds and seconded by Cllr Horn it was **RESOLVED** to apply for a Unity card Corporate Multipay Card. The card will remain allocated to the council, not to the individual. The card remains linked to existing banking system; Comes with least financial risk for the Council; Reduces the risk of administrative errors being made; Will be quicker and easier in use and will thus save staff time. The Vat the Council will be able to reclaim will offset the monthly fees and make the council compliant with the new financial regulations.

93 Policies

93.1 Policies to review.

On the proposition of Cllr Mott and seconded by Cllr Southcott it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the policies en block with the change of Deputy Chair to Vice Chair in the Continuity Plan

93.2 Policies to adopt

On the proposition of Cllr Ivor and seconded by Cllr Southcott it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Data Retention Policy

94 Drains

It was agreed that the Clerk would write to the Commoners and ask them to clear the drains as the land was common land and they were paid to look after it. The Clerk would also report the issue again to Dartmoor National Park.

95 Councillor reports

The Silent Soldier would be erected on the green at the beginning of November

Cllr Kaczanow asked the Council to acknowledge and thank Dave Trant for work carried out by on the Church Gate and Tony Batten for adding a stay to the gate by the cycle track.

96 Items Brought Forward

Closed churchyard
Drains

97 Date of Next Meeting

4th November at 7pm

The meeting closed at 9.20pm

Appendix A

Sourton Parish Council

Finance and Governance Review – September 2025

1. Introduction

Following a series of questions submitted by parishioners regarding the Council's finances, governance, and related matters, the Council has undertaken a review of key documents and processes. This report sets out the questions raised, the Council's findings, and the actions agreed to strengthen governance and transparency.

2. Findings

A. Fixed Asset Register

- Date of Register – Historically reviewed in February. Future registers will be dated as at 31 March to align with financial year-end.
- Disposals – Two assets from 2022 remained listed. This was an oversight carried over from a previous council.
- Notice Board Disposal – The Sourton Green notice board was disposed of by a past councillor without prior council approval and subsequently gifted to a neighbouring parish church. This will be corrected in the asset record.
- Computers – Multiple IT purchases were made by a previous council. Current Council will assess need and disposal arrangements for older equipment.
- Printer Disposal – Sale and replacement at the same price confirmed.
- Grants Column – Differences reflect the method of payment. This will be standardised in future.
- Replacement/Anticipated Life – Future budgets will make use of earmarked reserves for replacement as necessary.
- Silver Presentation Dish – Recorded as an asset for many years. It was gifted to the Council and never purchased. On return to the Council following the dissolution of the Sourton Show, an independent valuation will be arranged and the register updated accordingly.

B. Bank Reconciliation

- PayPal Account – No current balance. It was only used during late 2024, following councillor resignations, to pay the Clerk's salary in order to avoid HMRC penalties. All payments were authorised by prior council resolution. No transfers were made to PayPal in FY25.
- Rounding and Formatting – Variances due to the template supplied by PKF Littlejohn, the external auditor.

C. Payments Over £100

- The payments list is presented to Council at each meeting.
- Clerk's salary and HMRC payments are discretionary to disclose and have been treated accordingly.
- All payments are visible in the monthly schedules and audited annually. No errors were identified by the Internal Auditor.

D. Variances and Balances

- Minor differences (under £200) between carried forward figures are not material for statutory purposes but will be clearly explained in future reports.

E. Internal Audit

- No errors or omissions were identified.
- The Internal Auditor is independent, experienced, and used by multiple councils.
- Recommendations (e.g. CiLCA recognition, membership of professional body) are advisory only and not binding.

F. Staffing Matters

- Employment and performance issues remain within the remit of the Staffing Committee.
- Only Staffing Committee members attend staffing meetings.

G. Accounting and Governance Statements

- Discrepancies arise from template formatting, not from substantive financial errors.
- Bank balances are checked against original bank statements. Internet banking access is available to signatories.
- Recording of meetings is permitted by law. Personal recordings made by the Clerk are for the purpose of preparing minutes and not subject to FOI disclosure, in line with ICO guidance.

H. Budget and Precept

- Budgets are presented with forecasts and virements where appropriate.
- A National Lottery grant accounted for FY25/26 variances.
- Underspends are moved into earmarked or working reserves.
- Insurance premiums reflect a standard calculation based on council size, not specific assets.

I. Other Governance Matters

- The Council has no control over the editorial content of BaSE magazine.
- All questions raised at meetings have been answered, with additional time given beyond the statutory public participation period.
- A draft Document Retention Policy will be considered for formal adoption in October 2025.
- The Council strongly refutes any suggestion of fraud, malpractice, or inappropriate conduct by the Clerk or Chair. Both are entitled to protection from harassment, bullying, or unreasonable demands under employment law and the Nolan Principles of public service.

3. Conclusion

The Council has carefully considered all questions raised. No evidence has been found of financial malpractice, fraud, or systemic governance failure. Oversight inherited from previous councils (notably in asset records) will be corrected, and policies updated to ensure clarity going forward.

The Council remains committed to transparency, accountability, and proper stewardship of public funds, while also safeguarding the welfare of its employees.

Statement on Persistent Questioning and Clerk's Welfare

Sourton Parish Council wishes to express its concern regarding the persistent and repeated questioning directed at the Clerk, both during council meetings and by email. While the Council recognises the public's right to ask questions and seek clarification on council business, the volume, tone, and frequency of these approaches is now causing undue pressure on the Clerk.

As the employer, the Council has a legal duty of care to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of its staff. The Council takes this responsibility very seriously and will not hesitate to take appropriate steps if it believes that the Clerk is being placed under unreasonable or harmful pressure.

The Council will continue to ensure that all legitimate concerns raised by parishioners are considered in a fair and transparent manner, but it will also act where necessary to protect its employee from any form of harassment, bullying, or unreasonable behaviour.

Appendix B

Statement from Sourton Parish Council

Sourton Parish Council is deeply concerned about what appears to be a sustained campaign by a small number of residents aimed at undermining and harassing the Clerk and councillors. The reasons behind this campaign are not known to the Council, but its impact is both damaging and unacceptable.

As the Clerk's employer, the Council has a legal and moral duty of care to provide protection and support in the face of such conduct. The Council will not hesitate to take any and all appropriate action to safeguard its employee and to uphold the integrity of the office of Clerk.

The Council is also increasingly concerned that this behaviour is discouraging members of the community from coming forward to join the Parish Council. The negative effects of this campaign are therefore not limited to the Clerk but are preventing the Council as a whole from attracting new members, thereby undermining effective local democracy.

It is the wish of the current Council that Sourton Parish is able to move forward in a positive and constructive manner, free from hostility and division. The current Council is committed to restoring and maintaining a vibrant, respectful, and cohesive community for the benefit of all who reside in the parish.

Appendix C

Sourton Parish Council

Report of the Staffing Committee – 15th September 2025 Clerk’s Contract of Employment and Salary Increment

1. Introduction

The Staffing Committee has reviewed questions raised concerning the Clerk’s contract of employment, salary increments, and other related governance matters. This report sets out the Committee’s findings and recommendations for consideration by the full Council.

2. Clerk’s Contract and Salary Increments

The Clerk’s contract states:

“You have been appointed to a single salary point and the Council will review your salary on the anniversary of your appointment.”

From this clause, the Committee notes:

- The Clerk is appointed to a fixed salary point (SCP 7), not to a salary scale with automatic progression.
- The contract requires the Council to review the salary annually, which permits discussion and reconsideration each year, but does not entitle the Clerk to automatic advancement.
- Salary increases are not prohibited but should be supported by material justification (e.g. increased responsibilities, additional qualifications) and national guidance.

Previous Decisions

- On 9 October 2023, Council resolved (proposed by Cllr. Firth, seconded by Cllr. Jeffries) to increase the Clerk’s salary by one scale point from 1 April 2024.
- In April 2025, acting on the Staffing Committee’s recommendation, Council awarded a further increment in recognition of the Clerk’s satisfactory performance and attainment of the CiLCA qualification.

The Committee notes that while the Internal Auditor raised recommendations, those comments were advisory and not binding. Council acted within its powers in making the April 2025 award.

Committee Position

The Committee is satisfied that the salary recommendations made to Council in April 2025 were lawful, reasonable, and consistent with precedent.

3. Future Recommendations

The Staffing Committee recommends that its proposals presented to Council on 7 July 2025 be deferred until at least November 2025. This is subject to a special motion being passed by the Council to amend the resolution dated 7th July 2025.

This will allow:

- Integration of decisions into the 2026/27 budget-setting process, and
- Adequate time for Council to review the draft employment contract provided by DALC.

4. Other Matters Raised by Residents

Debit / Prepaid Card

- Councils may lawfully use debit or prepaid cards, provided proper controls are in place (spending limits, councillor authorisation of top-ups, monthly reporting).
- DALC and NALC guidance confirms this practice is permissible if supported by Financial Regulations.
- The suggestion that only credit cards are valid is incorrect; many councils operate successfully with prepaid debit cards.

Alleged Alteration of Website Documents

- The definitive legal record of Council decisions is the signed minutes, not the website.
- Policies and contracts may only be amended by resolution at a properly convened Council meeting.
- Good practice is to keep signed hard copies/electronic archives for cross-checking against website versions. DALC's advice to retain paper copies reflects this.

Website Access

- In small councils it is common for the Clerk to be the sole website administrator.
- However, good practice would allow for either:
 - Limited or read-only access for a second person (e.g. Chair or nominated councillor), or
 - Regular archiving of signed versions to ensure integrity.

PayPal Account

- Parish councils may lawfully operate a PayPal account if:
 - It is in the Council's name,
 - It has been formally approved in the minutes,
 - Transactions are subject to two-councillor authorisation, and
 - All activity is fully recorded in the cashbook, reported in the payment schedule, included in bank reconciliation, and open to audit.

Duty of Care as Employer

- The Council, as employer, has a statutory duty to safeguard the Clerk's health, safety, and wellbeing.
- This includes protection from bullying, harassment, or unreasonable demands by members of the public.

5. Conclusion

The Staffing Committee confirms that the Council has acted lawfully and reasonably in awarding salary increments and recommends deferring further employment-related decisions until November 2025.