

YARNSCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING  
Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2026  
7.30pm, Village Hall

Present: Cllrs. Brice (Chair), Ellison, Jeffery, Newberry, Pengilly, Nick Evans (Representative of Gt. Torrington Rugby Club and Martina Dymond (Clerk)

**26.11 Apologies, Declarations of Interests and Dispensations**

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr. Farr, Cllrs. Elliott and Lock (Torrington District Council/TDC), Cllr. Cottle-Hunkin (Devon County Council/DCC) and PCSO's representing Torrington Rural. There were no declarations of interest, no requests for dispensations were received.

**26.12 Public Participation and Feedback**

DCC is providing Community Hub Resources for first 100 communities that apply. Yarnscombe PC already has an Emergency Plan, with specified roles. Cllr. Newberry will register. Setting up of Community Hub in Yarnscombe Village Hall would need permission and co-operation of Yarnscombe Village Hall.

**Actions taken** - Item to be put on next agenda. Once Cllr. Newberry has more information, clerk will contact Rebecca Lewis (representative of VH)

**26.13 Representatives Reports**

- 1) County/District Councillors
  - a) COUNTY

January and February have been significant months for Devon. Devon County Council has now agreed its 2026–27 budget, our first full budget under the new administration, setting a clear direction: stabilising essential services, starting to repair what has been neglected, and investing in the foundations that keep our rural communities moving. [Devon Council spending plans for next year with nearly 5 per cent tax increase - Yahoo News UK](#)

**£19 Million Extra for Highways Including £4 Million for Drainage and Gullies**

The condition of Devon's roads remains one of the biggest concerns for residents, especially after the severe storms and freeze thaw damage we have faced this winter. I'm sure you will all be pleased to hear this year's budget includes £19 million of **additional** highways funding, with £4 million of this ringfenced specifically for drainage and gullies.

Improving drainage is one of the most effective forms of preventative work. When water is allowed to sit on or under the surface, roads deteriorate rapidly. This investment will support more ditching, gully clearing and preventative work, helping reduce future potholes and protect new resurfacing work. There are also plans to work more closely with town and parish councils on highways issues over the coming years through a "Community Protocol", strengthening local input and collaboration.

The reality is that it would take hundreds of millions of pounds to bring Devon's roads up to standard because they are now in such a poor condition, after more than a decade of decline and underfunding. However, I sincerely hope the £19M increase in

funding this year will deliver noticeable improvements. Let's all hope for some drier weather and progress on the ground.

As the weather improves, highways teams will move from winter emergency response into planned resurfacing and extensive drainage work. Please continue reporting problems, the easiest way to do this is through the "DCC- report a problem" website; your reports directly help prioritise work. [Report a problem - Roads and transport](#)

### **Protecting Essential Services**

Despite huge funding pressures, (and National Government not properly recognising the impacts of Devon being a huge rural county and the significant increased costs of delivering services compared to urban areas), Devon County Council has delivered a balanced budget for the year ahead. The budget was approved unanimously by Council, with 52 votes in favour, 2 abstentions and 0 against. This strong level of support demonstrates the shared commitment across the council to prioritise essential services and ensure long term financial stability.

Adult social care represents nearly half of the Council's total spend, and demand continues to rise as Devon has one of the oldest populations in the UK. The budget aims to stabilise and modernise services while maintaining dignity and independence for those who rely on support.

There has also been major national news for children's services and SEND. The Government has confirmed it will write off around 90% of councils' historic SEND deficits, including 90% of Devon's £200 million High Needs overspend. This deficit was not caused by local overspending; councils were required to support children's needs even as national funding fell behind. The write off essentially corrects a long-standing national funding gap, but nonetheless the news was a very welcome relief. [Most of Devon County Council £200m SEND debt cleared - BBC News](#)

### **Libraries, Community Investment and Locality Funding**

The response to the recent Devon Libraries consultation has been nothing short of incredible. More than 22,000 residents took part, which is around four times more than the last major library consultation. This shows just how much our communities value their libraries. Libraries, especially in rural areas, are warm hubs, digital access points, advice centres, learning spaces and vital community meeting places, going far beyond the statutory book-lending service.

The results of the consultation will be published later in the spring, but, as cabinet member with responsibility for libraries, I have been attending many community meetings as part of the consultation, and the message from the public has been very clear: residents truly value these spaces and want their libraries protected. I am really pleased that the Council will be keeping the library budget the same as last year at just over £7M, with an extra £1M set aside to invest in genuine transformation of libraries and community-led improvements. [Devon libraries budget sees surprise plot twist in new funding reversal - North Devon Today](#)

I also want to highlight the great success of the new Youth Grant "Places to go, things to do". All £160,000 was allocated in the form of small grants right across Devon. It was so

successful that I am pleased to say we are continuing with it this year. It has been brilliant to see new youth groups form and to be able to support more activities for our young people, especially in areas where they are a long way from any kind of youth centre.

Locality (community) budgets are also increasing, with each County Councillor receiving £10,000 from April to fund projects specifically within their area, supporting community organisations. These small grants can make a really big difference at parish level, supporting a range of initiatives, from youth work, events, equipment, to accessibility improvements.

### **Rail Investment and The Tarka Line**

Later this month, I will be attending the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) Rail Convention, where one of my key priorities will be making the case for urgent upgrades to the Tarka Line, and the need to find a parking solution at Eggesford Station. This rail route is vital for our rural economy, education, commuting and connectivity, yet it continues to suffer from reliability issues and outdated infrastructure.

Our petition, taken to Parliament by Ian Roome MP, has already received encouraging responses from ministers and National Rail. We are determined to keep up the pressure for proper long-term investment in the line. [Tarka Line rail investment petition handed to Parliament - BBC News](#)

### **Broadband**

There is finally some real progress being made in relation to broadband and Project Gigabit. I have for months requested meetings with government ministers, and last month had an online meeting with Programme Director Andrew Field from Building Digital UK (BDUK). I have also been working with Devon MPs, and the government have now reopened the voucher scheme for suppliers. We are currently looking at which areas are best placed to use these, with the voucher deadline being August. I will update when I have more information.

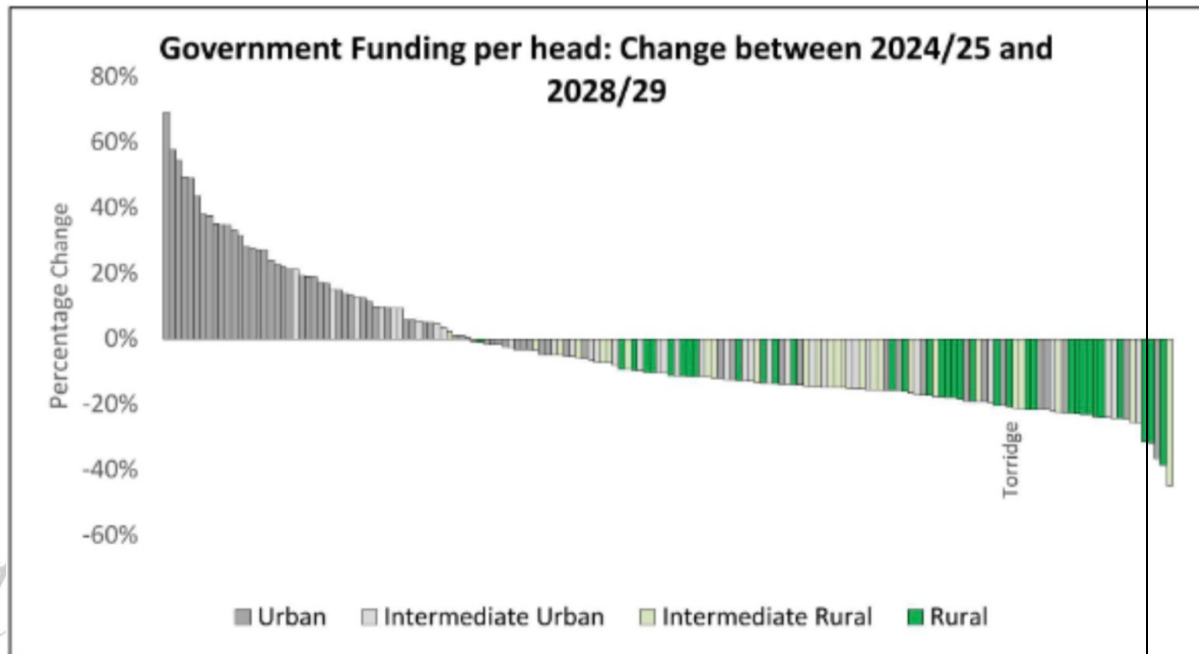
b) DISTRICT (Cllr. Elliott)

Rosemary sends her apologies.

A long winded and detailed report for you this time around, I thought I would make up for not having much to say the last month or two.

At Torridge, we have a balanced budget for the financial year ahead (26/27) but we have had to use £400,000 of our reserves to do this. The good news, is that we only had to use £12,000 of our reserves for the year (25/26). However, due to the Labour government cutting rural authority funding, going forward, this will require us to find circa £1 million for the years ahead as our reserves are forecasted to run out by around the 27/28 financial year.

Here is a graph to show how the government has cut our funding.



We need £13.7 million to run our services and contribute to reserves. We can raise £13.3 million from local taxes and government grants. This is where we draw £400,000 from our budget stabilisation reserve.

The impact of the funding cut from government will be felt in 27/28 and this is to be around £537,000, while our costs to carry out the services we provide obviously rise.

We must hand over a stable authority to the new unitary, however that may look. There is the consultation currently running on the new unitary and we encourage that everyone fills it out and have your say. It is looking like the new unitary will be in place by April 2028 and by this time next year we should have a better timetable as to where, when and what is happening.

### **COUNCIL TAX, THE DREADED ANNUAL RISE:**

Clarity:

We have not yet voted on whether to raise council tax and these figures are for Torridge's portion only and not what the other council tax beneficiaries intend to do. However, reality is we need to, otherwise our reserves will run out quicker. If we don't increase council tax, it will save you and I, the tax payer 11p a week (on a band D). It will though, cost the council £154,000 a year **FOREVER** as due the referendum we cannot increase it enough to ever catch up, being restricted to 2.99%

**Current Band D Charge: £195.17** (Torridge's portion only)

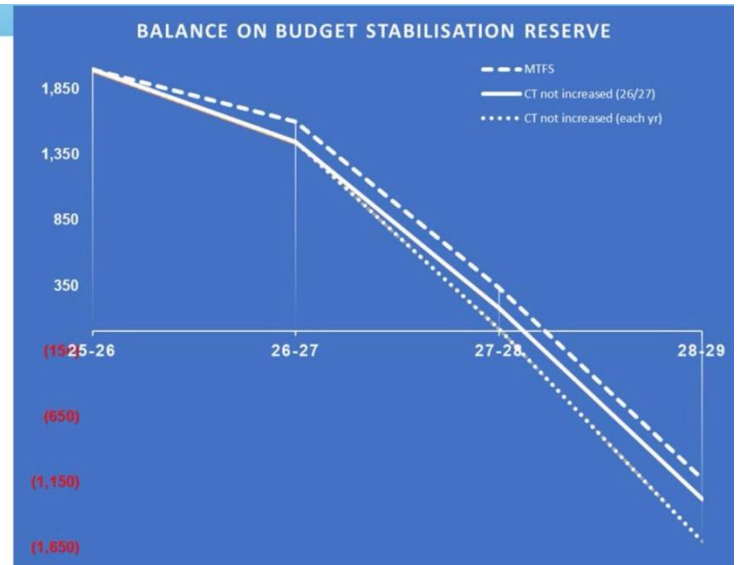
**If Increased by 2.99%: £201.01** (£5.84 increase = 11p per week)

Band	Properties	Current Charge	Increase (2.99%)	Weekly Increase
A	8,452	£130.11	£3.89	7p
B	7,494	£151.80	£4.54	9p
C	7,340	£173.48	£5.19	10p
D	6,118	£195.17	£5.84	11p

Below is a graph on how not raising council will effect when our budget stabilisation reserve runs out.

### **Council Tax Increase**

- Not increasing
  - saves residents 11p per week
  - Costs £154k per year, **forever**
- £154k compounds
  - £645k lost in year 4
  - £1.6M 4 year cumulative
- Referendum rules mean we can **never catch up**
- Reserve depletion brought forward to 27/28



### **How the governments decision will effect business rates:**

This is based on a formula, a formula which favours urban areas rather than rural areas.

- **Torridge = Billing Authority** (40% kept for local government)
- However, 40% is adjusted by “fair funding review”
  - “Top Up” authorities get extra funding
  - “Tarriff” authorities (like Torridge) have funding reduced
- Torridge’s retained business rates:
  - 25/26 = £4.6m
  - 28/29 = £2.1m

All doom and gloom. However, I hope that explaining why we need to increase and why we do it (subject to a full council vote), gives clarity to those that are quick to slate us for doing so. Just a reminder, for every £1 of council tax paid, Torridge only get to keep £0.07 (7.7p to be exact)

2) Village Hall / Social Club  
None.

3) Youth Club  
None.

4) PCSO/Police Report  
None.

5) Playing Field  
Nick Evans, a Yarnscombe parishioner, introduced himself as a representative of Torrington Rugby Club (TRC). He coaches the under 8's tag rugby team and also works as a personal coach. He was interested in using the playing field on a Sunday (9.30am start) for his team. It being tag rugby, there would be no use of a ball.

Councillors would like to see a copy of enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service), also the TRC's and Nick's own insurance, before a risk assessment can be carried out. Parking would not be an issue, with the Village Hall car park offering plenty of space. Cllr. Ellison suggested that he would get in contact with his daughter, who is on Village Hall & Social Club Committee to find out whether it is possible to use facilities of Village Hall. Nick also offers one off workshops as a personal coach. Same conditions apply as above. Once appropriate documents have been presented and all is in order, councillors are happy to proceed.

**Actions taken:** Cllr. Ellison to contact Becky Lewis (Village Hall), who in turn will liaise with Nick. Nick Evans to email relevant documents to Becky Lewis and clerk of parish council.

6) Snow Warden  
None.

#### 26.14 Minutes of Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Minutes were approved and signed off as a true record

#### 26.15 Matters arising from last Meeting

1) Signing of electronic payment schedule and online approval of BACS payments.

Eagle Invoice £60-00. Cllr. Brice proposed, Cllr. Pengilley seconded. All agreed to pay invoice.

**Actions taken:** Electronic payment schedule signed by Cllrs. Brice and Pengilley. Both councillors are approved for full online access, so once clerk makes BACS payment, they should receive notification from bank for approval of payment. Clerk to inform Cllrs Brice and Pengilley when payment is made, in return they will inform her, if they received message for approval.

Grant for Citizens Advice Bureau £50-00

Cllr. Brice proposed, Cllr. Pengilley seconded. All agreed to donate £50.

**Actions taken:** Electronic Payment schedule signed by Cllrs. Brice and Pengilley. Clerk will make BACS payment, once approval system for electronic banking system is working.

#### 26.16 New Matters

1) Feedback of AI webinar attended by Cllr. Pengilley

District and County should use AI, as they have the quantity/complexity of data that would benefit from use of AI.

**Actions taken:** None at present.

2) Approval of IT Policy

Policy had been circulated amongst councillors. Phasing out of 3G is scheduled for next summer.

**Actions taken:** All agreed to approve IT policy.

3) Assertion 10 update

Council has just two months to be Assertion 10 compliant, website needs to fulfil accessibility criteria and be in line with GDPR 2018.

**Actions taken:** Update at next meeting.

**26.17 PROW Monthly Report**

Council had emailed DCC to ask for clarification regarding "Purchase Order of £120". She had received email from PROW department asking Jon Boyd (main contact at DCC) to assist clerk with this transaction. Yarnscombe PC bank account had neither be debited or credited. So far, clerk had received no response.

**Actions taken:** Clerk to contact Jon Boyd again.

**26.18 Planning**

1/0607/2025/FUL Demolition of existing storage sheds and erection of commercial building (B8). Agricultural Building At Grid Reference 255977 123750, Yarnscombe, Devon - application permitted

1/0984/2025/AGMB Prior notification for the change of use of agricultural building to 2no. Dwellings and associated building operations under class Q, barn at grid conference 256449 121983 Yarnscombe, Devon – application permitted

**26.19 Additional Planning**

None.

**26.20 Accounts**

1) Eagle Invoice £60-00. See item 26.15

2) Grant for Citizens Advice Bureau £50-00. See item 26.15

Meeting ended at 8:20pm