

**Questions and Answers for the
Full Council Meeting, 31st July 2025
Elmton with Creswell Parish Council**

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Parish Council



The Chair allowed the first question to be from someone who had written in regarding the Freedom of Information documents he received from the Parish Council. He outlined the figures for the last three years for the H&WC and asked Councillors if they were happy with this? A further discussion took place regarding a full debate in September and if the H&WC will close.

Answer: Councillors said they were not happy with the figures and engaged in the discussions.

Pre-submitted questions prior to the meeting (read out by the Chair):

1. The internal audit report highlights inappropriate procedures for the handling of cash - how has this been rectified and what are the new procedures?

Is there a new procedure now in place for the handling of cash deposits and cash floats?

Answer:

See The Financial Regulations:

10.1: "The council will not maintain any form of cash float (except for the purpose of discharging the business of the bar in the Council's events centre). All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the Clerk or RFO (for example for postage or minor stationery items) shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly.}"

13.7 "Where significant sums of cash are regularly received by the council, the RFO shall ensure that more than one person is present when the cash is counted in the first instance, that there is a reconciliation to some form of control record such as ticket issues, and that appropriate care is taken for the security and safety of individuals banking such cash".

Cash received amounts to bar takings and occasional room hire. Petty cash is not used for large purchases, salaries etc only bar incidentals. Cash will be regularly banked and reconciled by officers.

The Chair said that in future the Property Committee will be more involved in auditing and stock takes etc.

2. The internal audit report notes a bad debt of £24,000 for room hire at the Events Centre; Who owes this amount?

Why has this debt occurred and what time period does this debt cover?

Answer: This relates to an assumption from the May 2024 to March 2025 bookings. There was a period where there was no Clerk and RFO, additionally the Events Centre Manager had unfortunately passed away. When the new Clerk/RFO and Locum Consultant were appointed, they had to make a reasonable estimate on room hire owed based on previous bookings/missing records. There was also a new bookings system implemented, and some information was pre-populated. The actual amount was being disputed by the hirer. The RFO has spent a significant amount of time with the new Events Centre Manager working out the debt and this is now confirmed at just over £12,000. It relates to one hall user and

the Parish Council will not release the name of the user due to GDPR. We believe this will be paid imminently.

3. The internal audit report

Notes the lack of policies for Grievance procedure and Health and Safety In addition it notes there is no procedure in place for the regular review of all policies.

Answer: These will hopefully be reviewed and put to Council for approval at the September meeting. Time permitting – Officers have been extremely busy and only work part time. When Officers have time, an index will be produced of all policies in place, policies must have, policies should have etc. There will be an itemisation of date approved and date for review. Depending on the policy, some will need annual reviews, some may not need review for three years, unless there is legislative change.

4. Have the missing policies been drafted yet?

If not when will they be in place?

Here are a list of policies that were approved at the May Council meeting

- (a) Standing Orders*
- (b) Financial Regulations*
- (c) Members Code of Conduct*
- (d) Data Publication Scheme*
- (e) Data Protection Policy*

Here are a list of policies that were deferred at the May Council meeting and will be reconsidered in the September or October meeting:

- (f) Freedom of Information Policy*
- (g) Complaints Policy*
- (h) Vexatious Complaints Policy*
- (i) Investments Policy*
- (j) Debtors Policy*
- (k) Events Centre Booking Policy & Rates*
- (l) Equal Opportunities Policy*
- (m) Data Retention Schedule*
- (n) Sexual and General Harassment Policy*
- (o) Lone Worker Policy*
- (p) Expenses Policy*
- (q) Risk Management Policy*

5. Has a policy review process been put in place and what is the schedule? If not when will this be in place?

Answer: See above.

6. The internal Audit report notes that the Asset Register is not meeting the legal requirements as asset valuations and Insurance values are missing. Are these Valuations of each Asset now in place? Are the Insurance values now in place? If yes what are the figures please? If no, when will these be available?

Officers have not yet had time to address this. This will take time.

7. The Internal Audit Report notes aspects of the required Compliance and Transparency to be lacking; reverence of accounts payable and reporting of bank balances etc. Have these compliance and transparency issues all addressed and actions taken? If not, when will full compliance and transparency be assured?

The Parish Council have been working hard to address compliance. Regarding the Local Government Transparency Code, payments over £500 for Q1 have been published, all agenda reports, data and supporting documents are published on the website.

Minutes are published on the Council website within a month of the meeting taking place – The Clerk aims to do this within a week if time permits.

All Freedom of Information requests are responded to. The Clerk and RFO aim to respond to all correspondence and requests for information.

A schedule of payments will be published for meetings along with reporting of the Councils bank balances.

At the May Annual Meeting, a list of payments will be listed, that should be made by standing order and Direct Debits (regular payments).

There have been no invitations to tender to provide goods and services with a value exceeding £5,000 (this Quarter).

The minutes show which Councillors are appointed to each committee.

Officers are committed to being open, transparent and compliant.

8. The Internal Audit Report notes aspects no compliance re public access to annual financial records for 2024/5 - can we be assured that the public scrutiny period is now in place and if so what are the dates for this?

Answer: Please be assured this is already in place. The RFO made the announcement on the 18th July – The Notice of Public Rights was published on the website, Events Centre and Noticeboards, along with the Accounting Statement (Unaudited) and Governance Statement. This was noted in the Extraordinary Meeting held on 17th July 2025 – Minute ECPC-33/25 e.

The dates of the period to exercise Public Rights are Monday 21st July to Monday 1st September 2025. Appointments can be made by contacting the RFO.

9. Overall the Internal Audit Report notes a number of key issues as highlighted above which require immediate actions and procedural reform or creation. We have been asking for effective governance and clear roles and responsibilities set out for Parish Councillors as well as an effective training policy and schedule of training for ALL Parish Councillors to participate in fully. This must be actioned as soon as possible.

Noted.

10. Given that staff costs already exceed the total precept income for 2024–25, and assuming even modest inflation and wage increases, can the Parish Council confirm whether the draft budget for 2025–26 is forecasting another operating deficit?

Answer: We are not forecasting another operating deficit.

11. What measures are being taken to ensure financial sustainability — particularly in light of falling reserves, rising debt, and uncertainty over the repayment terms of the £533,000 loan from Bolsover District Council?

The Parish Council has reserves of £100,000, these are not currently falling.

The Parish Council is not spending money on any new projects. Any proposals or new projects that will incur spending over £5,000 will require a risk assessment to be undertaken and Full Council approval. Officers will recommend if Council should or should not spend in these instances. Large payments are all budgeted for, for example – loan payments, salaries, management fee for the H&WC, utilities, maintenance, NNDR etc.

There is no uncertainty over the repayment terms, the terms of the loan are quite clear and the terms are being met.

12. Can the Parish Council explain what formal process exists for tracking public questions raised during meetings — especially when answers are not immediately available and are deferred?

Answer: Since the current Clerk and RFO started, the Q and As are all published in the Meeting Documents file on the website. If answers are not immediately available, members of the public are asked to email in their question. There is a request that all questions are submitted prior to the meeting so that the officers can prepare accurate answers to questions.

13. Will the Council commit to publishing a public log of all questions received — along with status updates or responses — so residents can have clarity and confidence that concerns are being addressed?

*Answer: See above. The officers are working **extremely** hard to keep on top of phone calls, emails, FOIs, complaints and requests for information. The officers are trying to ensure every report, significant items of correspondence and payments are all publicly available for meetings. There have been staffing issues to address, records to get up to date, Audit and a huge amount of correspondence to respond to. This all takes time and it is becoming increasingly difficult to move forward and put in place actions and procedures for best practice. Both officers only work part time and spend a large amount of this time being reactive, hence the Parish Council are advertising for an Administrative Assistant to help with the workload.*

14. In January 2025 a question was asked about Creswell residents receiving a discount on the membership fees at the Well-being Centre. Has this been progressed?

A price list for membership can be found here: <https://www.creswellhwc.org/price-list>

Additional questions asked in Public Participation (not pre-submitted):

1. The H&WC was based on a plan done by BDC. Did the Parish Council see any marketing or figures done by BDC? It will still lose money if used every hour of every day. What other research was done?

A member of CERAG said this information had already been released.

2. Can the Parish Council have a second meeting in September to discuss finances and the H&WC future?

Councillors said another meeting may be arranged. The RFO said he would try to work on costings for closure options but Officers were on annual leave for some of August and a new Clerk was being recruited.

3. A MOP said the Asset Register was out of date and not detailed with figures. She asked when this would be updated.

The Clerk said it was on the to-do list but was a large task.

4. A MOP read out a prepared statement detailing concerns of debt and asked all Parish Councillors to respectfully step down and force BDC to take over and manage the situation.

Additional statements and questions asked at the end of the meeting (8.06pm) when Standing Orders were suspended for a further 15 minutes:

1. A MOP said the Parish Council should write to BDC regarding the merger of the 2 doctors' surgeries to reiterate that this was not dependant on the Growth Plan.

2. Someone said the dog mess on Archaeological Way was disgusting. The RFO said he would look into this. Who enforces dog mess and FPNs? The RFO said this was BDC and NEDC. A comment was made about the path needing repairs on the old pit site. A Councillor said this was County Council responsibility.

3. Another MOP asked about more dog waste bins. A Councillor said there was sufficient bins if they are used properly and that normal bins could also be used.

4. There was a discussion about how often bins are emptied and that as you leave the village going towards Frithwood Lane to Poulter Park there are no dog bins

5. A MOP asked why the Parish Council doesn't put the grounds maintenance contract out to tender. This would be an option for the future

6. Someone stated BDC do not report any more at meetings.

7. Someone else asked how much it cost to set up the Charitable Trust. The RFO said he would look into this.

8. A MOP asked where the minute is regarding the loan not being attributed to the Parish Council, but to the Charitable Trust.