

Minutes of the ordinary Meeting of Covingham Parish Council held on:

Monday 12th October 2026

At 7.00pm in the Small Hall at St Paul's Church and Community Centre, Covingham

Present: Councillors V Curtis (Chair), Anupindi, Bacon, Bates, Hawkes, May, Parsons, Ricketts, Wichall

Also in attendance: Laura Cutter (Clerk & RFO), A Hughes (Maintenance Engineer) and M Stratan (Maintenance Engineer)

1. Scottish & Southern Electricity (SSEN) Community Resilience

Members received a short presentation from SSEN on practical tools for unplanned power outages and community support. Tips included:

- **Priority Services Register** – free support for vulnerable residents, including older people, those who are hard of hearing or visually impaired, and households with children under five.
- **Emergency contacts** – keeping all important telephone numbers stored in one place.
- **Winter power cut kits** – high-priority customers can receive a kit containing a rechargeable torch, thermal hat and touchscreen thermal gloves.
- **Community engagement** – SSEN is happy to attend local community groups at the church to provide advice on being prepared for power cuts. The team is based locally in Dorcan.
- **Information and communications** – the toolkit can be added to the Council's website, with information shared through Facebook, noticeboards and the Handy Mag.

Members thanked SSEN for the presentation.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr L Walker (unavailable).

3. Declaration of Interests

Cllr Curtis reminded all Members that they should declare any known interests in any matter, to be considered at the beginning of the meeting and during the meeting, if it becomes apparent that they have an interest in the matters being discussed.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 14th September 2026.

Proposed: Cllr R Bacon;

Seconded: Cllr S Wichall

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 14th September 2026 as a true record.

5. Action Review Summary / Matters arising from the previous minutes

- **Dorcan Brook Maintenance** – Maintenance Engineers have submitted photographs of brooks requiring maintenance. These will be reported to Swindon Borough Council and/or the Environment Agency, depending on the location and the respective responsibilities of each authority.
- **Assertion 10 Website** – Still ongoing. Need another Working Party meeting to finalise actions.
- **Trees For Climate** – The Covingham planting scheme will include 42 trees and forms part of a wider project to plant 500 trees.

- **Covingham Park Entry/Exit** – No response from SBC.
- **Maintenance Engineer Laptop** - The laptop has been purchased, the necessary software packages installed, and it is now in active use.
- **Flowerbox Kingfisher Road** – Built and installed.
- **Flowerbox Maintenance** – The Contractor has agreed to undertake the maintenance of the flower boxes. Additional costs will be confirmed in due course.
- **Weed Spraying** – Routes have been received from Swindon Borough Council (SBC), for the weed spraying. Covingham and Dorcan is not included on the list, as this service is already carried out by the Contractor and the Parish Council is satisfied with the service provided.
- **Speed Indicator Device Batteries** – The new batteries are lasting twice as long and are lighter, making them easier to install and improving compliance with health and safety requirements. Data is being downloaded weekly.

6. Public Forum

There were no Members of the Public present.

7. Police Updates

No personnel from the Police were present.

8. Chair's Verbal Update

Nothing to report.

9. Clerk's Verbal Update

Nothing to report.

10. Parish Maintenance Engineers

- **Verbal Updates** – There has been a downturn in gas bottle usage. A total of 36 gullies have been cleared of leaves and debris in preparation for the rain. A survey of the streams and brooks has also been completed. Issues were reported with Swindon Borough Council not collecting the Eurobins; however, the bins were emptied today.
- **Monthly Reports** – Members noted the reports.
- **Play Area Inspection Reports** – Cllr J Ricketts circulated the report in advance, summarising the key findings from the annual external play area inspection. The findings were broadly similar to previous years, with several issues relating to hot weather and movement in the ground conditions and edging.

Actions: Cllr J Ricketts will continue to progress maintenance and replacement requirements with local play area companies and the Maintenance Engineers. The Clerk will order a new sign for the Multi Use Games Area.

11. Recommendations from the Data Protection & Governance Working Party

No updates were available ahead of the meeting. The Working Party will reconvene and provide an update at a future Parish Council meeting.

12. Planning Matters

- Members noted that no planning applications had been received.
- Members noted that there were no comments from the Planning Working Party submitted between meetings.
- Members noted that there were no local planning decisions made by Swindon Borough Council.

13. Financial Matters

- Members approved the Schedule of Payments for October 2026.

Proposed: Cllr J Parsons;

Seconded: Cllr S Wichall

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the Schedule of Payments as presented.

b) Members received the monthly accounts reconciliation as at 30th September 2026.

c) Members noted the Q2 Budget Monitoring (July – September).

14. Limited Assurance Review

The Clerk provided an update on the conclusion of the audit. A note was raised regarding the approval of the Terms of Engagement and consideration of the Internal Auditor's independence. Although these matters were addressed in 2018, the supporting documentation could not be located in the historical records and, therefore, could not be approved retrospectively by the External Auditor.

15. Internal Auditor Appointment

Members unanimously agreed to re-appoint Auditing Solutions to undertake the Council's Internal Audits for the financial years 2026–27, 2027–28 and 2028–29.

Proposed: Cllr S Wichall

Seconded: Cllr S May

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To re-appoint Auditing Solutions for the next three years.

Members also agreed the Terms of Engagement, with the Clerk to sign and return a scanned copy to Auditing Solutions and retain a copy on file for the Council's records. Members further noted and considered the Internal Auditor's independence.

16. Flower Box Request – Dobbins Close

Members considered and approved the request for flower boxes at Dobbins Close. Residents will be responsible for maintaining the flower boxes after the Maintenance Engineers have built and installed them.

17. Wanborough Allotments Draft Contract

The proposal has been submitted to Wanborough Parish Council. No response was received in time for the meeting, as negotiations are still ongoing. However, both parties are close to finalising the agreement, which will be brought to a future Parish Council meeting for consideration.

18. Swindon Borough Council's Swindon Local Plan 2043 – Regulation 19: Publication Stage

Members noted that the deadline for consultation responses had been extended to 12 November 2026, with a series of public drop-in consultation events taking place throughout October.

Members reported difficulties accessing the relevant documents on Swindon Borough Council's website. The discussion covered the importance of retaining local land for leisure, protecting open spaces, and safeguarding Swindon's cultural and heritage offer, which members felt could be at risk. Members also reviewed the Council's objectives and aspirations.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was considered, with concerns raised regarding shrinking plot sizes, smaller gardens and increased overlooking. Members also discussed the reduced provision of affordable housing and the potential impact of further development on local infrastructure, particularly hospitals and schools. The importance of achieving and enforcing the proposed 30% green open space/tree provision for Swindon was also raised.

Members noted a further meeting scheduled for Thursday 15th October 2026 with Swindon Borough Council Officers and agreed to discuss the consultation response at the next Parish Council meeting on 9th November 2026, with the aim of preparing a final response ahead of the 12 November 2026 deadline.

19. The Handy Mag

The following topics were proposed for the next edition of the Handy Mag:

- Season's greetings
- Maintenance Engineer updates, including gully clearing in preparation for rainfall
- SSEN community resilience information and advice on preparing for power cuts

20. Matters for Consideration

Cllr S Wichall: Reported that a recently replaced fence panel had been left propped against a garage wall but had since blown over and was now lying on the grass verge in King Fisher Drive. The situation will continue to be monitored, and if the panel is not removed, it may be reported as fly-tipping.

Also requested that the Armed Forces Covenant is considered at a future meeting. The Covenant is a promise by the nation to ensure that serving and former members of the Armed Forces, their families and the bereaved are treated fairly. Members recognised the opportunity to formally demonstrate the Parish Council's commitment to inclusivity and to acknowledge and celebrate its current workforce, which includes serving and former Armed Forces personnel.

Cllr P Bates: Noted that the application for a memorial bench at Covingham Park had been declined the previous month. An alternative suggestion was made to consider providing a memorial book where residents could leave messages to loved ones. Members noted that a similar facility may already be available at St Paul's Church. The Chair will make enquiries with the church's administrative staff to establish whether this is already in place.

The meeting ended at 20:28

Signed..... Date.....