Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council

Ordinary Meeting of the Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council held at Welsh Newton Village Hall, Welsh Newton, Herefordshire, HR2 8QL on Tuesday 30 June 2026

Minutes

Present: Cllrs Ed Walker (Chair), Julie Francis, Steve Francis, Sue Parkinson and Lissy Tomlinson.

Absent: None.

In attendance: Andrée Mitchell (Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer).

Members of the public: none.

The meeting opened at 7.43pm.

1. Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

2. Declarations of interest and written applications for dispensation

Cllr Tomlinson declared a standing Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in items relating to the Clerk's employment and pay. There were no other declarations. No written applications for dispensation had been received.

3. Minutes

3.1 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on 16 April 2026

3.2 Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on 14 May 2026

Neither set of minutes was available for approval. A Member raised concern about delays in the availability of minutes and asked whether they should be available within a set period after each meeting; the Clerk confirmed that the aim is for minutes to be available within a month of the meeting. Both sets of minutes were therefore carried forward to the next Ordinary Meeting for approval and signature.

4. Vacancies and co-option

4.1 Llanrothal ward casual vacancy

The Clerk reported that two expressions of interest had been received. One candidate had withdrawn on the day of the meeting; the other had not yet responded to contact. Cllr S Francis offered to make further contact with the remaining candidate to establish continued interest, and Members were content for him to do so. No co-option was made.

4.2 Welsh Newton ward casual vacancy

The Clerk reported that Herefordshire Council's decision on whether an election would be called was awaited, expected shortly after 3 July 2026. If no election were called, the vacancy would be advertised for co-option. It was NOTED that co-option was unlikely before the September meeting.

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

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5. Public Question Time

5.1 Representations from members of the public

There were no members of the public present.

5.2 Ward Councillor's report

The Ward Councillor, Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst, was not present. No written report had been received since her May 2026 report, circulated by email, which was NOTED.

6. A466 road safety

6.1 Report from Cllr Parkinson

Cllr Parkinson reported continuing concerns about heavy goods vehicle (HGV) traffic diverted along the A466 during closures of the A40; the absence of signage for a 7.5-tonne weight restriction agreed by Monmouthshire County Council; and the difference in speed limits either side of the England–Wales boundary. Concerns had also been raised by residents. The Ward Councillor had already raised the matter with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for highways and had met the relevant officer.

Members did not support reclassification of the A466 as a B road, noting that classification alone confers no weight restriction and that an enforceable, properly signed restriction would be more effective.

6.2 Representations

Members supported the Ward Councillor's representations to Herefordshire Council Highways rather than duplicating them. The Clerk will ask to be kept informed of progress and to be given notice of any site visit so that a Councillor may attend.

7. Planning

7.1 Application 261772 — hedgerow removal notice, land at St Wulstans Farm, Welsh Newton Common, Monmouth, NP25 5RR

Cllr Parkinson reported records of dormice, a European protected species, approximately 50 metres from the site, and offered to supply a map. Members noted the need for mitigation, including a fingertip survey timed for hibernation; the loss of a biodiverse hedgerow forming part of a wildlife corridor; the Neighbourhood Development Plan hedgerow policy; and the absence of routine hedge maintenance, as noted in the applicant's own report. It was AGREED to submit a comment (not an objection) drawing attention to these points.

7.2 Other planning applications and decisions

This item was taken after item 8. A Member asked for an update on access across Welsh Newton Common to the Steepways site. The Clerk advised that there was no update and that the matter will be brought to the next meeting.

8. Roads, Drainage and Footpaths

8.1 Urgent matters, including the road to Llanrothal

The Clerk reported on two footpath issues near the Old Shop on Manson Lane: the footpath from Manson Lane into Buckholt Woods, which requires significant repair (steps and handrail) and where access for works is constrained; and the Manson Lane end of footpath

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LO11, where there is no fingerpost and the entrance is not readily visible, which would come to the next meeting. A Member noted that a contractor would be needed for the work.

It was AGREED that the Clerk may spend up to £100 on updated footpath mapping (Ordnance Survey and Herefordshire Council public rights of way mapping), the figure being a cap. The Clerk reported that she will write formally to Terry Griffiths Contracts for quotations in relation to the gates, in accordance with minute 15.1(c) of 14 May 2026. The Chair suggested that the council consider an annual programme of footpath works. No update was given on the road to Llanrothal.

9. Defibrillators

9.1 Status following work carried out in June 2026

It was NOTED that all three council defibrillators (Welsh Newton Village Hall, Parsonage Farm Llanrothal and the telephone box) are working and compliant following replacement of pads and batteries in June 2026. A Member noted that the telephone box housing one unit needs redecoration and asked that this come to a future agenda.

9.2 The Circuit registrations

Guardian registrations on The Circuit had lapsed for two of the three units. The transfers for the Welsh Newton Village Hall and Parsonage Farm units have been completed, both now showing as available 24/7 with current pad data; the transfer for the telephone box unit is in progress with its guardian. NOTED.

10. Clerk's Report

10.1 Annual governance review

The Clerk presented her report, circulated in advance, on (i) the annual review of the effectiveness of the council's internal audit arrangements for 2025/26, which supports Assertion 6 of the Annual Governance Statement, and (ii) structural and procedural issues relating to 2016/17 to 2023/24, identified in the course of current work.

Internal audit. The Clerk set out the matters the council must consider in reviewing the effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements, as set out in the Practitioners' Guide, including whether the internal auditor is independent and competent. The report set out the basis for the internal auditor's independence: WTG Consultants Ltd (Theresa Goss), appointed at the meeting of 30 May 2024 (minute 13.3.4.1), has no involvement in the council's financial decision-making, management or control, no personal connection to any member or officer, and does not provide accounting or financial services to the council. The council's conclusion is recorded at resolution (c) below.

Historic review. Members asked why the matters had not been identified earlier and whether reviewing a period in which no current Member was in office was proportionate. A Member considered that identifying the risks would help to show that the council was guarding against recurrence, and asked what the implications might be for the council's annual returns for those years. The Clerk advised that the issues had come to light through current work; that some may require further action, including VAT matters to be resolved with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and aspects of past audit arrangements; and that she has obligations as the council's officer to report them. In the light of this, the Member

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who had questioned the proportionality of the review withdrew the point. A fuller report is being prepared.

Disclosures. In the interests of transparency, the Clerk placed on record: her concurrent clerkship with Upton Bishop Parish Council, disclosed at appointment and agreed as a condition of employment; a second concurrent clerkship held at the time of her appointment, since relinquished; that she is a director of Outlore Limited, an inactive family company, which has not provided and will not provide any services to this council or to Upton Bishop Parish Council; and that Upton Bishop Parish Council has appointed Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd as its internal auditor, which does not audit this council.

A Member suggested that a single internal auditor for both councils served by the Clerk might produce efficiencies; the Clerk advised that it would not reduce the work involved. No action was agreed.

The Clerk confirmed her assessment that the council could answer "Yes" to all applicable assertions in the Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2026, the historic matters relating to prior years.

It was RESOLVED:

- (a) that the council notes the findings of the Clerk's governance review identifying structural and procedural issues relating to the period 2016/17 to 2023/24, and agrees that a fuller report will be brought to a future meeting;
- (b) that the council notes and formally records the standing disclosures made by the Clerk as set out above;
- (c) that the council confirms it has reviewed the effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements for 2025/26 and is satisfied that those arrangements were adequate and effective, completing the annual review required under Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Practitioners' Guide issued by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG);
- (d) that the risk register be reviewed and updated to reflect the historical audit findings, to be brought to the council alongside the fuller governance report.

11. Governance

11.1 Asset Register 2025/26

The updated Asset Register 2025/26 was presented; no amendments were proposed. It was AGREED to adopt the Asset Register 2025/26.

11.2 Bank account signatories

The current arrangements were reviewed. The internal auditor had recommended that additional signatories be added. It was AGREED that the current signatory arrangements continue for the present and be revisited at a future meeting.

12. Finance

12.1 Finance report

The Clerk presented the bank reconciliation and current balances: current account £2,672.18; reserve account £27,108.12; total £29,780.30. A Member queried the movement

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in balances since the year end (current account £9,861.80; reserve account £7,093.97). The Clerk explained that it reflected transfers between the two accounts, with no effect on total funds, grant receipts and expenditure, and receipt of the first instalment of the 2026/27 precept. NOTED. Budget monitoring was not available and was carried forward to the next meeting.

12.2 Longer-term savings arrangements

It was NOTED that the council had previously agreed to review options for a better return on reserve funds not required for short-term cash flow. No further action was agreed.

12.3 Payment for approval

12.3.1 WTG Consultants Ltd — invoice TG/50/26 — internal audit 2025/26 — £300.00 — due 11 July 2026

APPROVED. A Member queried the increase on the previous year's fee; the Clerk explained that it reflected a general increase in the auditor's charges and a charge for late submission of documents under the letter of engagement. Members noted that the fee was comparable with fees charged elsewhere.

12.4 Payments made between meetings — defibrillators

12.4.1 MedUK Group Ltd — order WEB21525 — replacement pads and batteries — £418.00 incl. VAT — paid 24 June 2026 — authorised under the urgent provisions of the Standing Orders

12.4.2 Defib4Life Ltd — order D4L5980 — replacement pads — £348.00 incl. VAT — paid 1 June 2026 — authorised under minute 17.4 of 14 May 2026

Payments 12.4.1 and 12.4.2 were RATIFIED.

12.5 Payment made between meetings — insurance

12.5.1 Clear Councils Insurance — invoice LCO02152 — annual renewal effective 1 June 2026 — £615.12 — paid 29 May 2026 — authorised at the Annual Meeting, item 11.4

RATIFIED.

Cllr Tomlinson, having declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, left the meeting for items 12.6 and 12.8.

12.6 Payments made between meetings — Clerk's salary and PAYE (Financial Regulation 6.9(c))

12.6.1 Clerk's salary — May 2026 — paid 26 May 2026

12.6.2 HMRC — Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and National Insurance (NI) — May 2026 — paid 26 May 2026

12.6.3 Clerk's salary — June 2026 — paid 24 June 2026

12.6.4 HMRC — PAYE and NI — June 2026 — paid 24 June 2026

The regular contractual payments 12.6.1 to 12.6.4 were NOTED.

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

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12.7 Payments made between meetings — bank charges

12.7.1 Lloyds Bank — service charge — £4.25 — 19 May 2026

12.7.2 Lloyds Bank — service charge — £4.25 — 22 June 2026

NOTED.

12.8 Reimbursement of Clerk's hosting expenses

The Clerk had paid Fasthosts personally on 25 June 2026 for the council's legacy domain and email hosting, retained under delegated powers for one further year:

12.8.1 Invoice 86498553 — web hosting and domain renewal — £7.68 incl. VAT

12.8.2 Invoice 86498626 — email hosting — £13.20 incl. VAT

It was AGREED to reimburse the Clerk £20.88.

Cllr Tomlinson returned to the meeting.

12.9 Monies received

12.9.1 Lloyds Bank — reserve account interest — May 2026 — £3.11

12.9.2 Lloyds Bank — reserve account interest — June 2026 — £6.11

NOTED.

12.10 VAT126 reclaims

The Clerk sought authority to submit VAT126 reclaims, as set out in her note circulated in advance. Members raised no objection, and it was AGREED that the Clerk prepare and submit VAT126 reclaims to HMRC for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26, and report the amounts claimed at the first available meeting following submission.

12.11 Schedule of regular payments (Financial Regulation 6.6)

It was AGREED to defer adoption of a schedule of regular payments, including the Clerk's salary and PAYE, to the next meeting, a schedule not being ready for approval.

12.12 Defibrillator equipment — additional expenditure

It was AGREED to approve additional expenditure of £226.34 (excluding VAT) on defibrillator equipment from general reserves, the total cost having exceeded the budget provision of £412.00.

12.13 Herefordshire Council Purchase Order 11251867

Receipt of Purchase Order 11251867 (Lengthsman Scheme 2026/27, £1,638.00; final claims by 9 April 2027) was NOTED.

13. Transparency Statement

The Clerk presented a Transparency Statement covering Clerk remuneration, councillor allowances and the council's principal contracts, in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Assertion 10. It was RESOLVED to approve the Transparency Statement for publication on the council's website.

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

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14. Data Protection and Freedom of Information — Policy Adoptions

Members had not had the opportunity to read the policies at items 14.1 to 14.7 and 15.1 to 15.8 in advance of the meeting. It was AGREED to defer items 14 and 15 in full to the next meeting, Members to read the policies and send any comments to the Clerk in advance.

15. Employment Policies

Item 15 was deferred with item 14. After the deferral had been agreed, the following points were raised:

- A Member noted that the draft employment policies contain no provision for annual appraisal.
- In response to a Member's question, it was noted that a date for the Clerk's appraisal had not yet been fixed.
- A Member noted the internal auditor's recommendations to adopt a dignity-at-work policy and a Freedom of Information policy.
- A Member identified that several draft procedures route complaints or grievances to the Chair and, in the Chair's absence, the Vice-Chair, with no provision for a case in which either has a conflict of interest. It was AGREED that the drafts be amended to add a fallback to another nominated Member before adoption.
- A Member suggested adopting policies on a rolling basis in future rather than in a single block.

Item 15.9: the Expenses Policy v1.0 and Pay Policy v1.0 remain deferred pending consultation with Autela Payroll Services.

16. Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26

16.1 Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

The Clerk presented the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 prepared by Theresa Goss, WTG Consultants Ltd, following the internal audit carried out on 9 to 11 June 2026. All applicable internal control objectives were assessed as met. The Clerk took Members through the internal auditor's recommendations (covering accounting software, the bank debit card, presentation of budget figures within minutes, frequency of VAT submissions, publication of the asset register, the review of internal audit effectiveness, a dignity-at-work policy, the former council laptop, the data security incident procedure and the record of processing activities) and the council's response to each. It was AGREED to approve the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 and to note its recommendations.

16.2 Internal audit appointment 2026/27

A Member questioned whether a competitive exercise was proportionate for a fee of this size when the incumbent is familiar with the council's records. It was AGREED to note that WTG Consultants Ltd has completed three years as internal auditor (2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26) and that the appointment for 2026/27 will be subject to a competitive procurement exercise, with the specification and timetable to be brought to a future meeting.

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Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

16.3 Annual Governance Statement (Section 1)

The Clerk took Members through each of the assertions in the Annual Governance Statement, having regard to the Annual Internal Audit Report (item 16.1) and the review of the effectiveness of internal audit (item 10.1). It was RESOLVED unanimously to approve the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) for the year ended 31 March 2026, answering "Yes" to assertions 1 to 8 and 10, and "Not applicable" to assertion 9 (trust funds), and to authorise the Chair to sign it. The Annual Governance Statement was signed by the Chair and the Clerk at the meeting.

16.4 Accounting Statements (Section 2)

The Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026 had been certified by the Responsible Financial Officer on 9 June 2026, before presentation to the council. Following approval of the Annual Governance Statement, it was RESOLVED to approve the Accounting Statements (Section 2) for the year ended 31 March 2026, showing balances carried forward of £16,956, and to authorise the Chair to sign them. The Accounting Statements were signed by the Chair at the meeting.

Later in the meeting, the Clerk drew Members' attention to a correction made to the supporting explanation of variances after the papers were first circulated on 25 June 2026: the explanation of 2024/25 receipts now attributes them to interest rather than to a grant instalment. The corrected version was circulated on the day of the meeting and tabled. The correction did not affect the Accounting Statements.

16.5 Submission and publication

It was RESOLVED to authorise the Clerk to submit the completed AGAR to the external auditor, PKF Littlejohn LLP, and to publish the Notice of Public Rights and the approved AGAR on the council's website. As set out in the briefing note, the period for the exercise of public rights will commence on 1 July 2026 and run for 30 working days, including the first ten working days of July.

17. Correspondence between meetings

No correspondence not already covered on the agenda was reported.

18. Items for the next meeting

Items for the next meeting were noted: the deferred policies (items 14 and 15); and, as the agenda would be full, a limited number of footpath matters, focusing on footpath LO11, together with grant applications.

19. Date of next meeting

The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Thursday 9 July 2026 at 7.30pm at Welsh Newton Village Hall. Members thanked the Clerk for her work in preparing for the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.46pm.

Signed by the Chair _____ Dated _____

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