Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

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Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

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Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,

15th June 2026 at 7.00 pm at Axminster Guildhall.

Draft minutes, not yet approved.

Present: Cllrs Walden (JW) (Re-elected Chair), Price (JP) (Outgoing Vice Chair), Willey (DW) (newly elected Vice Chair), Dowdeswell (MD), Dunsbury (RD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Norman (LN) and Paice (EP).
The meeting was quorate.

Also in attendance were the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward, and the Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson.

No members of the public were in attendance.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm.

The Presiding Chair of the Committee, JW, welcomed all in attendance and outlined the fire precautions, exits, etc. and ran through the agenda procedure and protocol, noting the agenda statements as published.

Public Forum:
No members of the public were present, and no Councillors wished to speak in Public Forum.
The Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7.01pm.

OC26/038
To elect a Chair of the Operations Committee.
The Chair invited nominations.

Cllr Walden was nominated by MD. Seconded by EP.
Cllr Willey was nominated by AH. Seconded by WH.
There were 6 votes for JW and 3 for DW with 1 abstention.
Cllr Walden was duly re-elected as Chair of the Operations Committee 2026 – 2027.

OC26/039
To elect a Vice Chair of the Operations Committee.
The Chair invited nominations.

Cllr Willey was nominated by WH. Seconded by MD.
There were 9 votes for, with 1 abstention.
Cllr Willey was duly elected as Vice Chair of the Operations Committee 2026 – 2027.

OC26/040
To note the members of the committee present.
Please see those listed above.

OC26/041

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence). (LGA 1972 S.85 (1))

The Committee noted apologies from Cllr Ashkettle, Cllr Farrow, Cllr Osborn and Cllr Warwick.
The Chair proposed that the reasons for these apologies be accepted, which was seconded by JP.
Resolved unanimously.

OC26/042

To note members of the Committee not otherwise in attendance.

All members of the Committee were accounted for.

OC26/043

To receive any declarations of interest from members of the Committee in relation to items of business on this agenda and to note any dispensations previously afforded.

*At the FULL Council meeting held 09/02/2026, minute reference FC26/027, Cllr. Willey was afforded a dispensation * to discuss and vote upon matters pertaining to the Guildhall. This dispensation applies until May 2027 (unless rescinded before that date) and is afforded with respect to Cllr. Willey's relationship to the Council as a regular hirer of the Guildhall*. *** Localism Act 2011 (s.33).**

There were no other declarations.

OC26/044

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 23 March 2026 and to consider any matters arising.

The Chair proposed approval of these minutes. Seconded by MD.
Approval of the minutes was unanimous. Resolved.
Action: The Chair to sign the approved minutes.

Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

OC26/045

To consider any matters listed on this agenda that Councillors consider should be dealt with as confidential business as per the provisions of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

Three matters were already tabled for Part Two consideration - [see agenda items OC26/058 to 060(IC)].
One item (OC26/047/v) was later moved to a confidential session due to the nature of the discussion. The justification for this decision is provided under that agenda item.

OC26/046

To consider revised draft wording for the committee's Terms of Reference.

The Clerk outlined the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference.
The Chair felt that a quorum of 3 was too small and that this made sense when the Committee was smaller, but less so now.

The Chair proposed that the Committee recommend to Full Council that the Quorum for the Operations Committee be raised to 5. Seconded by DW.
Resolved unanimously.

The Chair proposed that the Operations Committee support the amended Terms of Reference and recommended to Full Council that they be adopted. Seconded by JP.
Resolved unanimously.
Action: Clerk, please add the recommendation of the amended Terms of Reference to the next Full Council meeting.

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC26/47
To consider matters pertaining to The Guildhall.

To receive update reports on previous actions/decisions regarding that building.
The Clerk provided an update about how it was proving challenging to find roofing contractors with availability to assess the Guildhall Roof.

i) **Thermal blinds / screen installation in the Main Hall and Jubilee Room as part of the ongoing Guildhall CAF decarbonisation project (match funding balance).**
The Clerk gave a brief update and explained that the blinds could be paid for via an alternate stream CAF grant as the project would qualify as a carbon footprint reduction project.

JP proposed that the Council proceed with the thermal blind trial project, but pay for it using surplus CAF grant funding rather than reserves. Seconded by MD.
Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, reallocate a proportion of the surplus grant fund to the thermal blinds trial and bring a report back to the earliest available meeting once costs and outcomes are known.

ii) **Jubilee Room storage area and tech booth.**
The Clerk gave a brief update on the progress of the roof repair and remedial works, but highlighted the possibility of reconfiguring the space to create a tech booth and storage, and sought direction from the Committee on whether to proceed with these investigations.
Discussions covered hirer complaints about damage and odour from the roof leak; potential impacts on roof and ceiling repairs; risks to flooring, electrics, and lighting; damp concerns; and the need for storage and tech booth facilities.

JW proposed obtaining quotes for the work as a storage room only, excluding the tech booth window. Seconded by SL. There were 9 votes for and 1 abstention. The proposal was carried.
Actions: Clerk, please obtain quotes for the creation of a storage room and bring the proposals back to Full Council for expediency.

iii) **Creation of a COSHH storage amenity cupboard on the ground floor.**
The Clerk gave a brief update detailing the need for a dedicated COSHH cupboard accessible during performances which the current cleaning cupboards are not. The current COSHH arrangements, electrical and networking reconfiguration, and possible fire risks were discussed.

JW proposed that the council progress with getting quotes for the creation of a COSHH cupboard, subject to the Health and Safety consultant confirming that it wouldn't present an adverse fire risk. Seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, please get quotes for the creation of a COSHH cupboard and bring the proposals back to Full Council for expediency.

iv) **Purchase of volunteer locker amenity (to be sited in main hall storage area [ex-kitchen]).**
The Clerk updated on a recent volunteer event and a request for lockers to improve security for belongings. The estimated cost was £300.
Councillors discussed potential storage needs, siting (including access, lighting and CCTV), locking mechanisms, and any liability implications arising from providing the facility.

JW proposed that the Council proceed with the purchase of lockers, subject to identifying a more suitable location than the one proposed. Seconded by LN.
There were 7 votes in favour of the proposal, 1 against and 2 abstentions. The proposal was carried.
Actions: Clerk, please liaise with the Guildhall Manager to identify a more suitable location and proceed with their purchase thereafter.

v) Sound desk / AV replacement for enhanced performances and functionality.
After a brief discussion, it was felt that, as the item related to staff and contractor matters, it would be more appropriate to discuss it in the confidential part of the meeting.

vi) Guildhall CCTV update.
The Clerk provided an update on the remaining CCTV installations, licensing requirements, and the recommended supplier, who maintains the Council's existing systems. The estimated cost is £2,367. Due to urgent Health and Safety and licensing needs, the Council may consider suspending Financial Regulations to proceed without additional quotes.
The Clerk confirmed planned changes would improve coverage, with two additional cameras and some repositioning, and that no sightlines would be adversely affected.

JP proposed suspending the Council's Financial Regulations and contracting the recommended supplier to install the remaining cameras for £ 2,367, as a matter of urgency. Seconded by MD.
There were 9 votes in favour of the proposal and 1 abstention. The proposal was carried.
Actions: Clerk, please commission the nominated supplier to install all remaining CCTV cameras.

vii) Asbestos survey report from the Clerk.
The Clerk gave a briefing on the partial Asbestos Surveys conducted in the past and the quote from our current Health and Safety Consultant for a full building survey. The Clerk sought direction from the Committee on how it wanted to proceed.

The Chair proposed commissioning the Health and Safety Contractor to carry out a full asbestos survey and produce a live register, unless a suitably qualified contractor can offer a lower quote.
Seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, please seek additional quotes for an Asbestos survey and proceed with the most cost-effective contractor.

viii) Emergency Lighting / external perimeter lighting (update report from the Clerk).
The Clerk gave a brief update following a full assessment of the building's licensing and operational requirements, along with a possible lighting scheme design that would satisfy those needs.
The Clerk will report back in due course with quotes for this work once known.

ix) Provision of heating in WC areas.
The Clerk explained that, as with the thermal blinds project, this work would qualify under the CAF grant and sought direction to utilise this grant fund to pay for the works previously agreed. However, the Clerk highlighted that, as this would be an electrical system installed in an environment with a water supply, different units would be necessary. The anticipated cost for parts and labour is in the region of £1200.

The Chair proposed that the Council proceed with the installation of the recommended heating units in the WCs, but pay for them using surplus CAF grant funding rather than reserves. Seconded by JP.
Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, reallocate a proportion of the surplus grant fund for the purchase and installation of energy-efficient heating in the Guildhall WCs.

x) To ratify expenditures made under officer-delegated authority.
a) Replacement of WC sanitaryware in ground floor gents toilets - £565
b) Repairs to Town Council main noticeboard at Guildhall frontage - £534

The Clerk gave a brief explanation of the funds spent under delegated authority and the reasons for these purchases being outside the ordinary procurement process.

The Chair proposed that the Committee ratify the purchases made by the Clerk under Delegated Authority. Seconded by SL.
Resolved unanimously.

OC26/048

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services, and to receive updated reports on previous actions/decisions regarding amenities in the town and parish.

i) **Town Centre CCTV upgrades / enhancements (update report).**
The Clerk provided an update on CCTV mapping following the Full Council decision of 8 June and confirmed that the new camera at Symonds and Samson is operational, improving coverage of Trinity Square. Councillors discussed local crime rates, CCTV blackspots, and the roles of the Police, local authorities, and other organisations, and whether additional CCTV coverage was value for money in reducing crime. The Deputy Clerk provided an update on the noticeboard vandalism report and the Police's new incident-mapping system.

Actions: Clerk, please liaise with the local Police and Chamber of Commerce to determine what additional provisions are desired.

ii) **Millwey Rise Play extension (update report).**
The Clerk reported receipt of advice from EDDC's communications team on the consultation approach, with draft questions to be presented to Council ahead of a six-week consultation. He also noted current opportunities for Town and Parish input into S106 spending via EDDC's Participatory Budgeting process, which may change following Local Government Reorganisation.

Actions: Clerk, please progress this accordingly.

iii) **Old Courthouse bench asset re-purposing and relocation report.**
The Clerk provided an update on benches at the Old Courthouse, covering their number, materials, condition, memorial status, and potential relocation options.
Discussions highlighted the maintenance demands of ageing wooden benches compared to more durable MMT replacements, sensitivities around moving memorial benches, and ongoing discussions with EDDC regarding seven benches in poor condition, believed to be EDDC assets.

Actions: Clerk, please make your best endeavours to identify any third parties associated with the benches with inscriptions and, with the assistance of the Deputy Clerk, bring back a report with a relocation proposal.

iv) **Civic Regalia repair / refurbishment proposals.**
The Clerk reported on the proposed refurbishment of the Chains of Office, using volunteer support and a local engraver to keep costs significantly lower than employing a specialist.

DW proposed that the Council proceed with the refurbishment of the Chains of Office as per the Clerk's suggested proposal. Seconded by MD.
There were 9 votes in favour of the proposal and 1 against. The proposal was carried.
Actions: Clerk, please progress with the refurbishment of the Chains of Office

v) **Request from Raymonds Hill / Crewkerne Road community group for additional VAS amenity with data capture facility (which can also be used elsewhere in the town for traffic management purposes).**
The Clerk reported a request from the Raymond Hill Residents' Association to address speeding, noting the current VAS is outdated, lacks data capture, and could be replaced using CIL funds.
Councillors discussed VAS locations and rotation, noting it is already sited in the area around half the time; siting rules for valid data; perceptions of speed vs actual speeding; issues in other areas; resource implications of running two units; the condition and limitations of the existing VAS; and the use of a pole on private land.

JW proposed purchasing a new VAS using retained CIL funds, but utilising our existing mounting posts rather than installing new ones. Seconded by JP.
There were 9 votes in support of the proposal and 1 abstention. The proposal was carried.
Actions: Clerk, please progress with the purchase of the new VAS and communicate the decision to the Raymonds Hill Residents Association.

The Chair moved to suspend the standing orders so that the meeting could continue beyond 2 hours. Resolved Unanimously.

vi) **To note and consider RBL Remembrance Day parade correspondence.**
The Committee considered RBL correspondence on alternative parade arrangements. Councillors raised concerns about insurance, road closures, resources, and the precedent of Council involvement in third-party events.
The Clerk advised the matter had originated via DCC regarding informal closures and had progressed to potential Town Council involvement. He outlined resource implications, confirmed a report could be brought to Full Council, and would review how parades are managed elsewhere in Devon.

Actions: Clerk, please seek clarification on the proposed parade route and ask the Devon County Councillor to explore how such arrangements are undertaken elsewhere in the County, then report back to Full Town Council for expedience.

vii) **Defibrillator pad replacements and unit servicing options.**
The Clerk reported supply issues for defibrillator pads, with suppliers prioritising large contract customers. With five sets due to expire soon, a 12-month service contract (£912) is currently the only viable solution to maintain operation. Existing budgets cover pads but not a contract, though grant funding may be available. The issue has been raised with the MP due to its national impact. Councillors expressed concern about the supplier's approach, which they felt was akin to price gouging, and sought clarification from the Clerk on the contract terms.

JP proposed entering into a 12-month service agreement and asked the Deputy Clerk to explore whether any grants are available to recover these costs so that this life-saving equipment can remain available. Seconded by MD. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, please make the necessary arrangements to enter into a service agreement, purchase the required pads, and inform anyone locally known to be hosting HeartSine defibrillators of the supply chain issues. Deputy Clerk, please seek potential grant funding to offset the costs.

viii) **To ratify expenditures made under officer delegated authority.**
a) **Replacement of glass panel in Trinity Square bus stop - £341**

JP proposed that the Committee ratify the purchase of a replacement glass panel for the bus stop for £341. Seconded by EP. Resolved unanimously.

OC26/049
To consider matters pertaining to allotments.
The Clerk provided a brief update, noting that all previous items are progressing as resources allow.

i) **To consider the officer recommendation to freeze allotment rents (at FY26-27 level [based upon new banding criteria]) for the FY27-28 allotment year (effective from October 2027).**
The Clerk explained the reasons for the recommendations to freeze allotment rates for one year.

JW proposed that the Committee accept the officer's recommendation to freeze the allotment rates for the 2027/28 allotment year. Seconded by SL. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, please ask the Administration and Services Officer to notify and bill allotment holders accordingly.

OC26/050

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery (Chard Rd) and to receive update reports on previous actions/decisions regarding the cemetery.

i) **To consider any matters pertaining to the Town Council cemetery.**
The Clerk provided a brief update, noting that all previous items are progressing as resources allow.

OC26/051

To consider matters pertaining to Town Orchard and Wildflower Meadow (Chard Rd).

The Deputy Clerk updated the Committee on volunteer and grounds team activities, including planting Yellow Rattle, creating log piles, fruit thinning, companion planting, aphid control, and plans for autumn bulbs and hedging. She also highlighted a video showcasing the amenity. Councillors agreed the amenity looked excellent at the moment.

OC26/052

To consider any matters pertaining to Axminster Town Council Emergency Planning protocol/policy, and the ongoing activity and involvement of the Axminster Emergency Plan Working Group.

The Clerk drew attention to the reports previously made to Full Council and reported that he was in the process of organising the next Emergency Planning Working Group meeting.

OC26/053

To consider any matters pertaining to parish footpaths, bridleways and other related P3 issues, and to receive update reports from the Clerk on that subject.

The Clerk drew attention to the circulated update report and explained there was nothing further to add.

OC26/054

To consider any matters pertaining to Jubilee Field amenity.

The Clerk gave a brief update, including that the Deputy Clerk was actively progressing the pathway project, undertaking site visits with prospective contractors, and acquiring quotes for the work.

OC26/055

Presiding Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency for discussion only to be noted.

The Clerk raised one matter of urgency regarding the current energy supplier, namely issues he was experiencing in trying to have the meter upgraded so that surplus energy can be sold to the National Grid.

Actions: Clerk, please proceed as necessary and report back once options are known.

OC26/056

Date of next scheduled meeting for the Committee: 7 September 2026, 7pm, at Axminster Guildhall.

For future committee meetings, see the 2026/27 meeting calendar available online.

OC26/057

DW proposed that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act namely, the financial affairs or business affairs or employment affairs of the Town Council by virtue of the fact that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Seconded by MD. Resolved unanimously.

Matters to be considered in confidential committee session (Part Two).

The agenda items below were considered confidential due to the commercially sensitive subjects/topics to be discussed and the involvement of 3rd parties or employee matters which would necessitate disclosure of confidential information during the discussions. (see OC26/045).

OC26/047 v (IC) – Carried over from earlier Part One discussions above.
Sound desk / AV replacement for enhanced performances and functionality.
This matter was deemed confidential as it related to a third-party contractor and an employee matter.
The Clerk provided Councillors with a briefing.

The meeting was unexpectedly adjourned at 9.47pm to address an urgent safety matter and resumed at 9.57pm.

JP proposed purchasing the suggested equipment using General Reserves from a supplier that can also provide training for its use. Seconded by SL. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Clerk, please purchase the equipment and arrange staff training for its use.

OC26/058 (IC)
To consider matters pertaining to the honorary civic role of The Town Crier.
This topic was deemed confidential as it involved legal / financial matters between Axminster Town Council and a third party.
The Clerk provided an update on correspondence received from the Town Crier, and a brief discussion followed regarding the requests it contained.

Actions: Clerk, please bring this item back to the next Full Council meeting.

OC26/059 (IC)
To consider matters pertaining to Jubilee Field curtilage and assets.
This topic was deemed confidential as it related to matters involving a third-party.
The Clerk directed the Committee toward the confidential briefing report and sought direction on how to proceed. After some discussion, it was felt that no further action should be taken at this stage.

OC26/060 (IC)
To consider matters pertaining to Axminster Town Council Woodbury Park allotments.
This topic was deemed confidential because it related to matters involving a third party.
The Clerk provided an update on correspondence received from a third party and outlined the available options. The Deputy Clerk highlighted the steps already taken to address pest-related issues.

The Chair proposed that the Committee proceed with the recommendations laid out in the briefing report. Seconded by EP. Resolved unanimously.
Actions: Deputy Clerk to arrange for the undergrowth along the hedgeline to be cut back and for the gap in the hedge to be closed when resources allow. The Town Clerk was asked to work with the Deputy Clerk to review pest control practices and to correspond with the third party, outlining the actions already taken, the further steps planned, and the measures they could take to help mitigate pests on and around the allotments.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 10.15pm.

Signed .... Date: 7th September 2026.

Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday, 15 June 2026 at 7.00 pm. at Axminster Guildhall.

Draft minutes, not yet approved.