

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
10am – 12 noon

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
DEVON
EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee

DRAFT MINUTES – YET TO BE APPROVED; Part ONE Minutes (Redacted)

Held in person on Monday 2nd December 2024. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Bridge (PB), Dowdeswell (MD), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Paice (EP), Price (JP) and Walden (JW).

(Meeting was declared as quorate with 9 members present).

Also present:

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH)

No members of the public in attendance.

Chair welcomed all in attendance and ran through meeting procedure and protocol.

Chair highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits.

Public Forum session.

No public representations.

No members of the committee wished to speak in public forum at this point of the meeting.

As such, Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.05pm

SF24/067

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF24/068

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies for absence and reasons therefore:

Apologies received from:

Cllr. Bull (JB) due to a conflicting work commitment.

Cllr. Burrough (KB) due to being unwell.

Cllr. Warwick (TW) due to a conflicting work commitment.

Cllr. Willey (DW) due to a conflicting work commitment.

Absence and reasons for absence approved by Chair, seconded by EP.

Resolved unanimously.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/069

To note members of committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:

Cllrs. Brooker and Langdon were absent. Noted.

SF24/070

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:

A declaration at this point does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during this meeting.

No declarations of interest put forward by members.

SF24/071

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 28th October 2024 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

Approval of minutes proposed by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously.

Matters arising:

Publication of Environment Agency letter queried by Chair. Clerk confirmed on social media and website.

SF24/072

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: None raised by committee members other than to note that item already listed on this agenda (SF24/082 (IC)).

Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

SF24/073

To receive a report from the RFO on the outcome of the recent meeting with the internal auditor (to undertake the interim internal audit for this authority) and to consider the recommendations in their report.

Chair confirmed that they had circulated the Internal Auditor's interim report to all members which was, in itself, a indication of good practice in terms of mitigating any risk of malfeasance. The content of the report was noted by members. No current recommendations to implement.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/074

To note progress with the ongoing FY24-25-26 Town Council risk management & assessment review (RAMR);

RFO presented a verbal report and sought member input and direction on additional / revised / enhanced risks to the Council. Noted. Clerk to bring RMAR back to S&FComm. in February 2025 ready for final consideration and approval by FULL Council in March 2025 ready for AGAR submission after 31-3-2025.

SF24/075

To consider a request from RFO that the UTB MultiPay card limit be increased to £5000.

Chair proposed that the monthly spend limit be so increased to value above in order to facilitate smooth and efficient financial transactions within the Council. Seconded JW.

Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: Please note and complete the necessary UTB forms for members signatures.

SF24/076

To receive a further update report from RFO in relation to the SWR CCIF grant project taking into account the recent interventions and discussions with SWR as to potential use of funds in accordance with their CCIF project criteria.

Report noted by members. No further action required at this time.

Chair proposed (seconded by JW) that RFO be authorised to process return of the grant funds currently held as and when called upon by the funding partner. Resolved unanimously.

SF24/077

To receive a report from RFO in relation to the EDDC CAP24 grant funding agreement and to consider progress with the project completion (Guildhall De-carbonisation and Energy Efficiency).

Report noted by members. No further action required at this time other than to ensure that expenditure was completed by the EDDC deadline of 31/3/2025. RFO outlined project management to date and spend values. Councillors were keen to see financial savings in conjunction with reduced Co2 values in the next financial year.

JW stressed that there should be significant press coverage and publicity arranged once the de-carbonisation works were completed as this was a ground-breaking moment for the Guildhall and the town as a whole. Clerk to note and arrange accordingly in liaison with the Deputy Clerk.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/078

Committee to receive most recent Bank Reconciliation, Balance Sheet and Summary (Budget) report (financial information) as per recommendation of FULL Council.

October's reports noted and received. November's bank reconciliation was not yet available but RFO confirmed that this would be available to FULL Council on the 9th December for their review.

SF24/079

To receive draft budget forecast from RFO for FY25-26 with anticipated reserves data for FY24-25 and to consider recommendations to FULL Council on 9th December 2024 for the setting of the annual budget and precept for the forthcoming financial year.

Chair thanked the RFO for the comprehensive budget forecasting and calculations provided and asked that committee's thanks be formally noted in the minutes.

After a lengthy and vigorous debate involving all committee members, it was agreed that a recommendation be put forward to the FULL Council (as only they can resolve a decision to set a budget and approve a precept demand) to propose the expenditure budget of £1.027m for the FY25-26 financial year, and a **precept increase of inflation plus 2%**. It was noted that additional financial information was due to be received and circulated by the RFO in December 2024 and therefore the final decision of FULL Council on these matters should be taken in January 2025. The proposed increase would add 13pence per week to a Band D household Council tax bill (with 70% of Axminster Households in band's A to C paying less).

Committee members recognised the forthcoming challenges to household financial budgets over the coming 12 months and confirmed their intention to minimise the Town Council's precept increase as far as possible to ameliorate the overall effects of other preceptor demands (EDDC, DCC and Police/Fire services) whilst acknowledging that, in doing so, the Council would anticipate expenditure restraint and possible reductions in Council's spending (and service provision) over the commensurate period; the proposed precept would cause a technical deficit of approximately £32,000 within the Council's accounts in FY25-26 if all other estimates and financial forecasts remained constant and unchanged.

Recommendation as above proposed by Chair, seconded by JP.

5 votes for, 0 against, 4 abstentions. Resolved.

Recommendation to be presented to FULL Council on 9th December with final decision at FULL Council in January 2025.

RFO also raised the topic of current JPAG guidance which recommended that Council's prepare and consider 3-year MTFP (Medium term Financial Plans). Members acknowledge the guidance but felt that such longer term financial budgeting was not possible given the unique circumstances of the Town Council's budget and financial transactions at the present time.

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SF24/080

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion/notation only.

RFO asked the Chair of Operations to exercise their delegated committee authority to purchase two GoPak tables to replace items damaged in transit; cost £300 max. Approved.

SF24/081

To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee; 24th February 2025.

SF24/082

JW proposed that under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, (as amended by the Local Government Act 1972 the public, (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted. SL seconded the proposal. Resolved.

Part ONE recording was stopped at this point and the meeting moved into Part TWO (Confidential) session whereupon recording was resumed.

Committee business to be considered in Part Two:

SF24/083 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to tenancy agreements between the Town Council and 3rd party commercial tenants; to bring members up-to-date on legal discussions, advice received and responses.

RFO presented report to members on ongoing negotiations and tenancy agreements. Noted

RFO: Please continue discussions and keep members of committee up-to-date on developments in this regard..

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.25pm.

Continued overleaf.

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Chair thanked all committee members for their time and attendance.

Signed Date: 25th February 2025

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