

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

MINUTES APPROVED 29th September 2025; Part ONE Minutes (redacted)

Held in person on Monday 28th July 2025. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Bridge (PB), Dowdeswell (MD), Hayward (AH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Paice (EP), Price (JP), Walden (JW) and Willey (DW).
(Meeting was declared as quorate with 10 members present).

Also present:

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH)
Deputy Town Clerk, Sarah Jackson (SJ)
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

SF25/052

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF25/053

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

Apologies received from:

Cllr. Dunsbury. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

Chair proposed that this absence and reason be approved. Seconded DW. Resolved.

Cllr. Warwick had emailed the Clerk prior to the meeting but the email had not been received in time for the apology to be passed to the committee members present. Noted in minutes.

Continued overleaf.

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SF25/054

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

Cllrs. Hurren and Keen. Absences noted (see also Cllr. Warwick above – SF25/053)

SF25/055

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.

SF25/056

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Strategy & Finance Committee meeting held 2nd June 2025 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes.

Approval of minutes proposed by Chair, seconded by JP. Resolved nem con.

Matters arising:

Clerk confirmed that installation of the CAP24 plaque at the Guildhall was still in progress. In addition, Clerk confirmed that publicity around the new community orchard had been arranged re: new assets provided and site amenities improved. Noted.

SF25/057

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 (SF25/066 to 67(IC) inclusive).

Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

Continued overleaf.

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SF25/058

Update on administrative actions relating to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for FY25-26 will contain a new assertion (A10) noting that the Town Council will be required to conform to the eight new actions as laid out in the JPAG guidance document for 2025;

Clerk/RFO provided an update report for members. Administrative tasks were progressing to ensure compliance with Assertion 10 in April 2026. Noted.

SF25/059

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

Reports for June 2025 were noted and approved. **Proposed Chair, seconded JP. Resolved.**

SF25/060

To consider proposals for hardware/software upgrades to facilitate user online/digital donations towards Guildhall costs (to be considered in conjunction with the Business Plan Financial Agenda item below).

After debate, it was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that the committee recommended that Council should not proceed with the procurement of the hardware/software as the potential benefits to the Council (and Guildhall) were outweighed by the likely costs. Resolved unanimously.

SF25/061

To consider a first draft of the nascent Guildhall Business Plan FY25-28 and to review the draft financial report as directed by Full Council on 14th July and decide upon further actions.

Summary of debate:

Committee noted and accepted that The Guildhall operated on three distinct tiers; as a commercial entertainment venue, as a community hub for hire to local groups, and as the civic base of the Town Council in Axminster.

Members acknowledged the improvements in the facility over the last few years and paid tribute to the staff involved in bringing these together, and for making the venue more attractive to performers and for other hires.

Members agreed that PRS/PPL fees must be on-charged to hirers and included within their hire fees to ensure that the levy of such PRS charges did not fall to the taxpayer as a burden.

Members were unanimous in their assertion that hire charges MUST meet all costs of the hire (in terms of staff cost, energy/utility costs, 3rd party charges such as PRS, rates, licences etc) but also accepted that the more commercially profitable activities in the venue went some way to offsetting the losses from community hires; comparisons drawn and noted with other venues nearby.

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Clerk/RFO was directed to work with the Guildhall Manager to prepare a data table of all hires over the last 24 months to ascertain what the costs of hires, performances were for each hire/event period, the staffing costs for that period, the ancillary costs shared between all users, the contributions from bar sales/ticket sales etc, and any other financial factors that could be determined in order to provide clarity on the profitability/unprofitability of the venue as a whole. Noted.

Clerk: Please note and prepare data accordingly as soon as practicable.

Chair thanked Clerk for the draft nascent Business Plan which should provide direction for the venue moving forward.

Chair proposed that part of this agenda item should be discussed in Part Two due to staffing matters involved. Seconded by JP. Resolved (see below).

SF25/062

To consider what direction Committee wishes to take re: creation of draft budget / expenditure plan for FY25-26, and to instruct RFO accordingly to prepare a budget plan/proposal that accords with these directions.

RFO suggested that a “budget workshop” session be arranged for members (particularly the newer councillors) to understand how the budget for FY25-26 was prepared, the costs facing the Council in forthcoming years and the impact of those costs on service delivery in the face of impending local government reorganisation. A date of the 11th September (evening) was agreed upon.

Clerk: Please note and arrange accordingly, with invites to all members of the Council.

SF25/063

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

None raised by Chair / Clerk.

SF25/064

To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee;
29th September 2025 and other dates as per published agenda.

SF25/065

JP 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. The Chair seconded the proposal. Resolved.

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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:

SF25/061 (IC): (see above).

The debate regarding the Guildhall Business Plan and Financial Modelling continued in Part Two as certain aspects of the debate related to staffing matters which due to their confidential nature could not be considered or discussed in Part One session. Noted.

SF25/066 (IC)

To consider update report on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse.

As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive topic, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

RFO provided an update on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse complex.

It was proposed from the Chair that RFO be afforded delegated authority to act on Council's behalf in matters relating to The Old Courthouse as discussed in Part Two session. Resolved unanimously.

SF25/067 (IC) To consider update report on matters pertaining to improved/upgraded play facilities/amenities at Millwey Rise and Cloakham Lawns.

As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive business, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

Report received from Clerk. Noted. No further action for the time being.

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: 29th September 2025

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APPROVED