

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 27th April 2026: Part ONE (redacted)

Held in person on Monday 23rd February 2026. Meeting started at 7.10 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Price (JP) (VC), Dowdeswell (MD), Dunsbury (RD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Paice (EP), Walden (JW) and Willey (DW).
(Meeting was declared as quorate with ten members present).

Also present:

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward

Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson

No members of the public in attendance.

*The Chair welcomed all in attendance and ran through meeting procedure and protocol.
The Chair highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits.*

Public Forum session.

A question was asked regarding payment of non-domestic business rates. RFO provided the information required and it was noted that they held delegated authority to act in this matter for the Town Council once the new financial year begins on 1/4/2026.

Subsequently, the Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.18pm

SF26/018

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF26/019

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

Apologies received from:

Cllr. Ashkettle. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

Cllr. Norman. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

Cllr. Osborn. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

Cllr. Warwick. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

The Chair proposed that these absences and reasons be approved. Seconded Vice-Chair. Resolved.

Continued overleaf.

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SF26/020

To note members of committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:
None.

SF26/021

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.

*At the FULL Council meeting held 09/02/2026, Cllr. Willey was afforded a dispensation * to discuss and vote upon matters pertaining to The Guildhall. This dispensation applies until May 2027 (unless rescinded prior to that date) and is afforded in respect of Cllr. Willey's disclosable pecuniary and personal interests as set out in the Register of Members Interests. * Localism Act 2011 (s.33).*

SF26/022

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Strategy & Finance Committee meeting held 5th January 2026 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes.

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

Matters arising:

None raised.

SF26/023

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 those items already listed on this agenda (SF26/038 to 39(IC) inclusive).*

Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

Continued overleaf.

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SF26/024

To receive an update from the RFO on forthcoming meeting with the internal auditor (to undertake the end-of-year Full Internal Audit for this authority) and to receive any feedback from members of the committee that they wished to be raised at the internal auditor meeting.

Members noted the update report. No comments / feedback for the internal auditor at this time.

SF26/025

Committee to receive most recent (Q4) Bank Reconciliation, Balance Sheet and Summary (Budget) Monitor report (financial information) as per recommendation of FULL Council.

Members noted January's Financial Report and contents, all of which had been considered and approved by FULL Council on 12th January 2026. No comments.

SF26/026

To consider draft wording of Council's annual budget and precept statement for the forthcoming financial year (FY26-27).

This will ordinarily be published online and presented by the RFO on the Council's behalf at the Annual Parish Meeting in March.

Chair proposed some minor grammatical edits and the deletion of one sentence relating to FY25-26 budget figure which was felt to be confusing and could be misconstrued. Agreed.

It was subsequently proposed by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-Chair, that the substantive precept statement be published. Resolved unanimously.

SF26/027 & SF26/028 (combined for ease of debate)

To consider report from RFO on previous and anticipated Cemetery & Allotment income, and potential future revenue and capital expenditure (as per recommendation of the Internal Auditor).

Verbal report from RFO received and noted. Members directed the RFO to separate the costs of grass cutting (under contract) between the cemetery and Jubilee Field to provide a more accurate representation and assessment of these costs for year-on-year comparison.

Members noted the anomaly in cemetery expenditure between FY24-25 and FY25-26 relating to non-domestic business rates (charges and discounts applied).

Continued overleaf.

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SF26/029

To receive a report on the Town Council's current reserves (earmarked and general) and to consider any potential virements between reserve funds in light of anticipated expenditure within cost centres prior to financial year end (31st March 2026).

Noted. No proposals made at this stage for virements/reserve movements.

SF26/030

To consider the RFO statement on Council's Investments, Deposits and Reserves incl. the draft FY25-26 CIL Statement (subject to revision and finalisation by 31st March 2026).

Noted. A further (final) investment, deposit and reserve statement will be presented to the committee after the year-end (at the meeting scheduled for 27th April 2026). No changes anticipated for the CIL statement which requires publication by 30th June 2026 as per EDDC and statutory requirements.

SF26/031

To consider and review the Council's draft Internal Financial Control Review for FY26-27. Noted. The Chair proposed some minor grammatical revisions but the substantive wording and process of the Internal Financial Control Review remains unaltered.

It was subsequently proposed by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-Chair, that the substantive Internal Financial Control Review be approved and adopted. Resolved unanimously.

SF26/032

To consider and review the Council's revised Investment and Borrowing Strategy Policy for FY25-26 taking into account recent FULL Council resolutions to enter into a deposit agreement with Insignis Asset Management Limited (FCA registration 813442).

Noted. The Chair proposed some minor grammatical revisions but the substantive wording and process of the Investment and Borrowing Strategy Policy remained unaltered other than for the inclusion of amended wording relating to the new investment platform agreement.

It was subsequently proposed by the Chair, seconded by JW, that the substantive Investment and Borrowing Strategy Policy be approved and adopted. Resolved unanimously.

SF26/033

To receive a draft report on the Town Council's Asset Register as at date of agenda publication (subject to revision and amendment at year end).

Noted. Members acknowledged that some further amendments would be necessary prior to the creation of the final version after the financial year-end (31/03/2026). No comments or questions to the RFO.

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SF26/034

To note progress with the ongoing FY2025-26 Town Council risk management & assessment review and to consider Risk Management / Assessment Report (1st draft):

At the Chair's agreement, the consideration of this matter was deferred to a later date to enable more information to be collated and to reflect ongoing H&S assessments across the Council's scope of operations. Noted. **[RFO: Please prepare and circulate as soon as possible]**

SF26/035

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

(Matters not clearly shown on the agenda may not be decided upon or resolved – LGA 1972 S.100B)

The RFO raised two urgent matters, which members noted (delegated authority was afforded to the RFO and Chair to deal with the first matter relating to vehicle insurance on the basis of timing, and to the RFO on the second matter relating to utility supply on the basis of ongoing negotiations and deliberations).

SF26/036

To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee;

27th April 2026

29th June 2026

28th September 2026

30th November 2026 (initial budget and precept review)

4th January 2027 (budget finalisation)

Additional meetings may be required if other matters of urgent business need to be considered.

SF26/037

Recommendation: 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 Parag. 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. The Vice-Chair proposed the motion. The Chair seconded the motion. Resolved.

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

Continued overleaf.

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Committee business to be considered in Part Two:

SF26/038 (IC) To consider update report on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse.

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

RFO provided an update on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse sale. RFO sought delegated authority to take specific confidential / commercially sensitive matters forward with the prospective buyer's legal team.

It was subsequently proposed by the Chair, seconded by JW, that this delegated authority be afforded to the RFO as sought on the grounds of sale expediency. Resolved unanimously.

SF26/039 (IC) To receive update report on matters pertaining to recent theft at Axminster Municipal Cemetery

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

Update / Progress report received from Clerk. Noted.

No further action for the time being other than to note ongoing procurement as per previously afforded delegated authority and procurement exemptions resolved.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 7.55 pm.

Chair thanked all committee members for their time and attendance.

Signed Date: 27th April 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee.

Held in person on Monday 23rd February 2026. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVED 27th April 2026: Part ONE (redacted)