

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 Monday 29th June 2026

Held in person on Monday 27th April 2026. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Price (JP) (VC), Dowdeswell (MD), Dunsbury (RD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Paice (EP), Walden (JW), Warwick (TW) and Willey (DW).

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

Also present:

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward

One member of the public was 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.

No representations/questions from the public or from members present.

Subsequently, the Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.02pm

SF26/040

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF26/041

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.

The Chair proposed that this absence and the reason be approved.

Seconded Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously

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SF26/042

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

Cllr. Norman. Absence noted.

SF26/043

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:

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 This dispensation applies until May 2027 (unless rescinded prior to that date) and is afforded in respect of Cllr.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).*

SF26/044

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Strategy & Finance Committee meeting held 23rd February 2026 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes.

Approval of the minutes was proposed by Chair, seconded by DW. Resolved nem con (TW abstained as not present at that meeting).

Matters arising:

None raised.

SF26/045

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: *None raised by committee members other than to note those items already listed on this agenda (SF26/059 to 60(IC) inclusive).*

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Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

SF26/046

To consider Axminster Town Council Action Plan FY26-27: To review the Council's aims, objectives and goals for the future, and to consider any matters relating to Local Government reorganisation that may affect that plan.

Members considered items for inclusion in the draft emerging action plan.

The Clerk was directed to collate/prepare the draft Action Plan and bring that to the next meeting of the FULL Town Council for adoption as a recommendation from this committee.

The Clerk was also directed to add the "Action Plan" to all future Strategy & Finance Committee meetings as a standing agenda item, and for the Action Plan to be reviewed and discussed at Full Council at least 6-monthly. Noted. Cllr. Price also requested that an item be placed on the agenda for the Annual Meeting of the FULL Council in May to consider the Town Council's aspirations for asset and service devolution (& abrogation) from higher tier authorities in the future. Noted.

SF26/047

To receive and consider draft copies of the end-of-year Annual Governance Return and Accounting Statements (FY25-26) for this authority prior to internal auditors visit (final approval of the AGAR must be undertaken by the Full Council).

Draft AGAR documents (Sections 1 and 2) received and noted. The RFO was thanked for his work on creating them for consideration by the committee. RFO advised that the internal auditor was due to visit and complete their annual internal audit on 29th April. Noted. No comments.

SF26/048

To note the Council's obligations under The Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency and to confirm that the Council has provided and published the necessary information required within those regulations; AGAR Section 1 (Internal Audit) Assurance 1 & AGAR Section 2 (Governance Statements) Assertion 10.

Noted. Committee members confirmed that the Town Council had published the necessary statutory information in compliance with the relevant legislation and good practices.

SF26/049

To consider any necessary revisions to the Council's bank signatory register.

Noted. No alterations proposed.

Clerk: Please add ratification of the bank signatory register to the agenda for the Annual Meeting to be held on 18th May 2026 as per requirements of the extant Standing Orders.

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SF26/050

To consider any financial or strategic matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse.
The Clerk/RFO provided an update on progress. Noted.

SF26/051

To consider wording of the draft “Anti-Bribery and Corruption” Policy.

Members considered draft wording. The Clerk was directed to summarise the preferred wording and bring a draft substantive policy back to FULL Council on the 18th May 2026 for members approval and adoption. Noted.

SF26/052

To consider wording of the draft “Dispensations” Policy.

Members considered draft wording. The Clerk was directed to summarise the preferred wording and bring a draft substantive policy back to FULL Council on the 18th May 2026 for members approval and adoption. Noted. Members were clear in their assertion that it should not be a duty of the Town Clerk to consider and grant dispensations for members, but rather that this matter should always be a consideration for all members at a meeting of the FULL Council. Noted.

SF26/053

To consider wording of the draft “Statement on Confidential Business ie. Part Two session”

Members considered draft wording. Chair suggested some minor grammatical and style edits to the wording/document. Noted and agreed. The Clerk was directed to summarise the preferred wording and bring a draft substantive statement back to FULL Council on the 18th May 2026 for members approval and adoption. Noted. The finalised document to be published on the Town Council agenda page for public review and reference.

SF26/054

To review and, if considered fit, re-approve and adopt the Strategy & Finance Committee Terms of Reference; previously adopted in June 2023

Members considered current wording. The Chair suggested some minor edits to the wording of the extant document to reflect current processes and committee objectives. These were noted and agreed. The Clerk was directed to edit the wording accordingly and bring the substantive version of the Terms of Reference back to FULL Council on the 18th May 2026 for members approval and adoption. Noted. The finalised document to be published on the Town Council Strategy & Finance agenda page for public review and reference.

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SF26/055

To consider any matters pertaining to the Town Council's ongoing relationship and service agreements with the principal authorities ie EDDC and DCC.

At the Chair's suggestion, the consideration of this matter was deferred to the next FULL meeting of the Town Council on the 18th May 2026. Noted. Resolved.

SF26/056

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)

a) The Clerk suggested that committee members may wish to consider the wording of a suitable Delegations Policy, and had provided draft wording for such a policy. Members were broadly in agreement but suggested some revisions and wording edits. The Clerk was asked to bring the revised substantive policy wording to the Full Town Council meeting to be held on the 18th May 2026. Noted.

b) The RFO wished to raise a matter of urgency but sought Chair's agreement to do so in Part Two (confidential session) as it related to a specific Guildhall event performance artist and the financial aspects of that performance. Noted and agreed (see below)

SF26/057

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

29th June 2026

28th September 2026

30th November 2026 (initial budget and precept review)

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

SF26/058

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.

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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:

SF26/056

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion or notation only (Part Two) – see above.

b) RFO / Clerk outlined a matter regarding a potential Guildhall debtor.

Clerk confirmed that he had relevant legal papers and was hopeful that the monies would be recovered without recourse to legal actions but that this was an option open to the Council to pursue. Noted.

Councillors discussed the situation and were agreed that no further payments should be made in advance (other than holding deposits to secure acts) to any performers to prevent a recurrence in the future. Noted by RFO / GH Manager.

SF26/059 (IC) To consider update report on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse.

As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive business and a 3rd party tenant, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

RFO provided an update on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse. Noted. Clerk also raised another matter regarding site security and 3rd party actions that could potentially threaten the security of the complex. Councillors agreed to maintain the status quo as previously resolved; Clerk was directed to convey that decision to the 3rd party involved. Noted.

SF26/060 (IC)

To receive update report on matters pertaining to ongoing Section 106 play projects

As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive business and the legal interests of another Local Authority, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

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Update / Progress report received from Clerk. Noted.

Members noted the recent decision of EDDC to not allow a merger/asset transfer of the adjacent HRA play area amenity to the Town Council (citing potential legal and resourcing challenges) and therefore agreed to proceed with the stand-alone S106 play project on the leased area, subject to S106 consultation, design, and procurement procedures.

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: 29th June 2026

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