Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jack Price
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

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Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee.

DRAFT MINUTES NOT YET APPROVED.

Held on Monday 29th June 2026. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Presiding Chair), Price (JP) (Vice Chair), Ashkettle (JA), Dowdeswell (MD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Walden (JW), Warwick (TW) and Willey (DW).
(***Meeting was declared as quorate with eleven members present***).

Also present:
Town Clerk, Paul Hayward
Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson
Three members of the public were in attendance.

The Presiding Chair welcomed all in attendance and ran through meeting procedure and protocol. The Presiding 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 Presiding Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.01pm

SF26/061
To elect a Chair of the Strategy & Finance Committee:
JF proposed JP as Chair. Seconded by JW. JP accepted the nomination.
No other nominations were proposed. Resolved 10 votes for, 1 abstention.
Cllr. Price took the Chair.

SF26/062
To elect a Vice-Chair of the Strategy & Finance Committee:
The Chair proposed AH as Vice-Chair. Seconded by MD. AH accepted the nomination.
No other nominations were proposed. Resolved 10 votes for, 1 abstention.
Cllr. Hayward took the Vice-Chair.

Continued overleaf.

SF26/063
To note members of committee present:
Attendance at meeting shown above. Meeting was quorate with 11 members present.

SF26/064
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.
Cllr. Paice. Reason for absence noted and accepted.
The Chair proposed that these absences, and the reasons given, be approved.
Seconded DW. Resolved unanimously

SF26/065
To note members of committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:
Cllr. Norman. Absence noted.

SF26/066
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).**
No other declarations received.

SF26/067
To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Strategy & Finance Committee meeting held 27th April 2026 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes.
Approval of the minutes was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW subject to a minor edit of wording relating to future meetings of the committee. Resolved. (RO abstained as not present at that meeting).
Matters arising:
One matter was raised relating to a potential debtor and RFO replied that he could bring members up to date on that topic but that this would have to be discussed in Part Two session.

SF26/068
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 (SF26/076 below).

Continued overleaf.

Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

SF26/069
To note the financial reports for May 2026 including budget monitor, bank reconciliation, the Insignis investment portfolio summary and reserve fund summary and to consider any virements that the Council consider appropriate or necessary:
Noted. Questions from members regarding training budget (reserve), allotment deposits (retained) and Guildhall staffing costs.
JW proposed that the retained Allotment Deposits Earmarked Reserve (£400) be deleted and the funds placed into general reserves as the costs they related to have already been incurred. Seconded by Chair. Resolved 10 votes for, 1 against.
RFO: Please action accordingly and adjust reserves balance summary to reflect this action.

SF26/070
To consider any financial or strategic matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse:
The Clerk provided a verbal update on progress re: sale/disposal of the building. Noted.

SF26/071
To consider Axminster Town Council Action Plan FY26-27: To review the Council's aims, objectives and goals for the future:
Noted. No amendments or revisions to the Action Plan considered necessary at this time. JF thanked all members for their time and effort in reviewing the plan which was a key component of the Council's Quality Award application.

SF26/072
To consider any matters relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) that may affect that plan; members to discuss future service / amenity and the impact of such service delivery upon the Town Council's resources and finances and future budgetary considerations and decisions:
There was a lengthy discussion between members as to the potential impact of LGR on the Town Council's resources, operational capacity and overall financial position. A summary of that debate is show below:

* No decision reached by Secretary of State as yet (anticipated on 16/7/2026) and so difficult to truly assess the impact of the LGR proposals until more clarity known. An extraordinary meeting of the Town Council had been arranged for the 10th August.
* Acceptance that smaller authorities (towns and parishes) in a geographic area will be obliged to co-operate and act collegiately to ensure service delivery and to deliver economies of scale for local residents / taxpayers.
* Understanding that there would likely be the need for additional precepting in the future and that decisions may have to be made at a quicker pace (due to higher tier authority pressures) than would ordinarily be welcomed.
* Frustration at the lack of tangible information available to lower tier councils from the higher tier ones which made future planning and strategic visioning extremely difficult to formulate and decide.

Continued overleaf.

SF26/073
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 Clerk raised three matters of urgency for notation which would necessitate a discussion of those topics in Part Two (confidential session) due to the nature of the business. The Chair proposed that these be both discussed in that closed session. Noted.

SF26/074
To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee;
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.

SF26/075
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.

Committee business to be considered in Part Two:

SF26/067 (IC) – Matters arising from minutes.
The RFO updated members on a matter relating to a potential debtor and outlined the measures being taken to mitigate any possible loss in this regard. The Chair thanked the RFO and asked that members be kept informed of progress / development / debt recovery measures. Noted.

SF26/073 (IC)
To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion or notation only (Part Two) – see above.
a) The Clerk updated members on a matter relating to staffing resource and workload capacity, and space/operational constraints. Members discussed possible sources of funding for remedial works and possible additional recruitment but the matter was ultimately deferred to the Employment Committee for debate at the next scheduled meeting with a suggestion that the Clerk and the Chair of Employment Committee meet beforehand to formulate some possible options for debate. Noted.

Continued overleaf.

b) Members discussed some recent correspondence from the Chair of "Light Up Axminster" regarding 2026 Christmas lighting project and Clerk was given direction to make urgent contact with the Chair of that organisation to arrange a meeting so that more clarity could be obtained on matters such as funding, resourcing, administration and asset/equipment availability. Because this was simply a matter for notation, no decisions were possible regarding Town Council involvement and funding, although the RFO did confirm that the FY26-27 budget did contain an allocation of £2000 towards the costs of festive lighting in the town. Noted.
Clerk: Please action accordingly and bring this matter back to Full Council on the 13th July if progress has been made with LUA discussions.

c) The Clerk updated members on an ongoing matter pertaining to Jubilee Field curtilage and recent correspondence received (following earlier resolutions of the Council). After debate, Clerk was asked to use his delegated authority to seek some further advice in this regard and report back to Council formally at the next earliest opportunity. Noted.

SF26/076 (IC) To consider update report on matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse.
As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive business and 3rd party tenants, 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 had previously resolved to maintain the status quo on the basis of site security and safeguards to other tenant's property and assets. After further debate on this subject (following additional correspondence from a tenant), it was proposed by the Chair, seconded by JF, that the central gate bolt remain padlocked thus enabling the right hand (hasp and padlock) gate to remain operational. Resolved 9 votes for, 2 against. Clerk was directed to convey this decision to the 3rd party involved as a matter of urgency. Noted.

On the subject of the ongoing sale / disposal of the building complex, the Clerk was directed to liaise with the Council's legal representatives to seek a defined date (by the end of July) for exchange of contracts with a longstop completion date of 31st August 2026. Noted.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 9.07 pm.

Chair thanked all committee members for their time and attendance.

Signed …………………………………………… Date: 28th September 2026

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