STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28 October 26 AT 7.15PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

PRESENT:
Cllr Donaldson
Cllr Goodland
Cllr Lacey (Chair)
Cllr Trim (Vice Chair)
Cllr Rose – From 7.45pm

IN ATTENDANCE:
K Squire (Town Clerk)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 1 from 7.45pm

MINUTE NO **COMMENTS**

26/27/197 **To receive comments and questions from members of the public**
No comments or questions were received.

26/27/198 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Cllrs Batstone due to personal circumstances, Cllr Cooper who had a prior commitment but nominated Cllr Goodland to attend on his behalf and Cllr Rose who, as Mayor, was attending the Youth Connect Southwest Young Persons Awards at the Youth Club and would arrive late. These apologies were accepted by members.

26/27/199 **To approve declarations of interest and written applications for dispensation**
No interests were declared and no written requests for dispensation received.

26/27/200 **To approve the minutes of the previous Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on 22 July 26**
The minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on 22 July 26, having been circulated and published prior to the meeting, were taken as a true and correct record and duly signed by the Chair.

26/27/201 **Financial Matters:**

1. **To approve any payments over £2000**

There were no payments over £2000 needing approval.

2. **To approve the income and expenditure report as at 30 September 26**

The Clerk presented the report to the Committee. Members enquired regarding the overspend on mill water, the Clerk explained ongoing billing issues with the supplier which had prompted an end to the contract and investigations into charges. Also, an overspend in the youth club rent, which would be offset by a grant from the Charity of William Williams. And the mill insurance which the Clerk advised is due to be recharged from the Hinton St Mary Estate, she would chase the invoice.
The Committee resolved to recommend approval of the income & expenditure report as at 30 September 26 to the Town Council.

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3. To approve the balance sheet as at 30 September 26

The Chair of the Committee confirmed checking the balances against the bank statements as correct.

The Clerk advised that she would transfer funds from the current account to the public sector deposit fund which had a better interest rate. She also confirmed receipt of the second instalment of the precept payment.

The Committee resolved to recommend approval of the balance sheet as at 30 September 26 to the Town Council.

4. To approve the reserves as at 30 September 26

The Committee considered the ear marked reserves, noting that the safer cycling fund would be used to install bike racks at Station Road.

The Clerk advised that guidance and advice from the internal auditor and through the practitioner's guide suggested best practice for larger town councils was to allow for three months running costs in reserve, she felt six months was too high and any current excess could be used to progress projects.

The Committee resolved to recommend approval of the reserves report as at 30 September 26 to the Town Council.

26/27/202 To approve payments made under delegation between 1 July 26 – 30 September 36 and confirm a sample of payments made between these dates had been checked by Cllrs Donaldson and Rose.

The Committee resolved to approve payments made under delegation between 1 July 26 – 30 September 26 and confirmed a sample of payments made between these dates had been checked.

26/27/203 To approve the following policies:

- **Expenses**
- **Investments**
- **Reserves**
- **Records Retention – edit to existing policy**

The Committee resolved to approve the above policies subject to an edit to the investment policy, clause 6.4 'A councillor who is not the Chair **of the Council** will:' for clarity.

26/27/204 To consider benchmarking reports on Town Council Facilities and Cemetery Fees and Charges and agree fees and charges for 2027.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Full Council that the Cemetery Fees and Charges should remain unchanged for 2027.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Full Council to make the following changes to the Facilities Fees and Charges for 2027:

- Increase the Council Chamber standard rate from £35 to £50 per session.
- Increase the local non-profit Sturminster Newton community rate for Chamber hire from £5 to £10 per session. Chamber hire remains free of charge for the Allotments Association and the Heritage Trust who manage Council assets.

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- Increase the local football/cricket fee from £42 to £45 per game and the non-local fee from £47 to £50 per game.
- Increase the croquet pitch charge from £8 to £10 per game per pitch.
- Increase the local and charitable event fee from £65 to £75 per day and the other event fee from £100 to £115 per day.
- Retain the refundable damage deposit at £200.
- Charge utilities at £25 per day where applicable.
- Hire of the Youth Club at Unit 2 to be considered on a case by case basis at the discretion of the Mayor and Clerk at £50 per session with a £200 refundable deposit to cover any damages and subject to appropriate insurance cover.

26/27/205 To consider interim internal audit report and agree further actions

1. Confirmation of independence of Internal Auditor will be considered at the 4 November 26 Full Council meeting.
2. Acceptance of Office form has now been amended to include formal acceptance of receiving information by electronic means.
3. Outstanding Register of Interest forms are being followed up to comply with statutory requirements.
4. Changes to the financial regulations and invoicing processes will be considered at the 2 December 26 Full Council meeting.
5. The Clerk is looking into the possible increase in existing fidelity guarantee insurance.
6. The Chair of the Finance & Policy Committee has now signed the bank statements previously checked against the bank reconciliations and will continue going forwards.
7. The Committee discussed ongoing issues with a Cllr not using their assigned council email address for council business and conversely using other Cllrs personal email addresses likewise for council business. Despite repeated warnings that this leaves the Cllrs private correspondence open to investigation by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) in the event of a data breach and the Council at risk of failing external audit. The Clerk has been advised by the Internal Auditor only to correspond with Cllrs on assigned email addresses and suggests that other Cllrs do likewise.
8. A data audit is in progress and will be completed by the year-end deadline.
9. Data Protection policies will be scheduled for annual review going forwards.
10. Data Protection training is provided and has been completed by all officers, the Clerk will monitor completion by Councillors.

26/27/206 To consider quote for additional CCTV cameras and agree further actions

The committee considered a report circulated with the meeting papers.
The committee resolved to approve the installation of the three CCTV cameras at Church Street car park and the Old Market Hill / Station Road junction, using the quote from Partnership Fire & Security and authorises the Clerk to proceed to instruct Enerveo to do the connection works up to a total cost of no more than £1000. To be funded using £1500 from the 26/27 CCTV budget and the remaining from the CCTV replacement ear marked reserve

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26/27/207 To consider extending Isuzu truck lease for an additional 12 months

The Committee resolved to extend the lease of the Isuzu Trooper from 48 months to the maximum term of 60 months at a monthly cost of £366.26.

26/27/208 To consider a report from the staffing committee and approve recommendations

The Chair of the Staffing Committee reported on non-confidential matters considered at a meeting on the 16th October 2026:

The committee considered the request from Dorset Councillor Jones at the 7 October 26 Town Council meeting to allow the Grounds Team to cut back areas of Dorset Council hedge where Dorset Council do not have the staff capacity for their workload.
The Committee agreed to recommend to the Finance & Policy Committee to permit only exceptional requests from a relevant Dorset Council Officer with budget spending authority under a written protocol. Each request requiring confirmation of ownership and permission, an assessment of capacity and risk, approval through the Town Clerk and Grounds Manager, and agreement on costs. A protocol would not have to commit the Council to accepting any particular job.
If Dorset Council wishes the Town Council to undertake recurring work, the authorities could consider a defined, costed agreement specifying locations, standards, frequency, payment, liability and termination arrangements.

Staffing review pre budget setting for 2027/2028
The Committee reviewed operational capacity and recommend the following staffing changes to support effective grounds management, governance, project delivery and longer-term resilience.

- Part Time Grounds Operative increase in hours from 20 to 37
- Assign two days office time to the Grounds Manager for managerial responsibilities.
- Receptionist/Communications Officer/Mayors Secretary increase in hours from 30 to 35.
- Professional training to strengthen organisational capacity and succession planning, including the Receptionist/Communications Officer/Mayors Secretary to complete the CiLCA qualification during the 27/28 financial year.

The draft staffing budget has been updated to reflect these recommendations.

The Committee agreed that job descriptions for all roles should be reviewed at the next staffing review meeting in March 2027 to ensure accurate reflection of current roles.

The Finance & Policy Committee resolved to approve the recommendations of the Staffing Committee.

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26/27/209 To consider the operations only budget report for 2027/2028 and agree further actions

The Committee considered the operations only budget report and notes circulated with the meeting papers.

The Committee resolved to recommend the operations only budget to Full Council subject to the following amendments:

- Any underspend in the training budget for 26/27 should be ear marked for future training, with training needs reviewed for 28/29
- Plant purchases to be increased £200
- Fuel to be increased to £3850
- Energy to be increased by 10% of forecast figures
- Clerk to contact Hinton St Mary Estate for confirmed insurance figure.
- £10k funding for Citizens Advice at The Exchange to be held in projects budget and reviewed in 28/29.

26/27/210 Information from members and proposals for future business.

No information was shared or proposals made.

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.54pm

Chairs Signature…… Date Approved ……

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