STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4th MARCH 26 AT 7.15PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

PRESENT:
Cllr P Batstone
Cllr L Cooper
Cllr A Donaldson
Cllr C Fraser
Cllr L Jackson – attended remotely
Cllr D Mantock – Vice Chair
Cllr P Marks
Cllr J Rose - Chair
Cllr S Trim

IN ATTENDANCE:
K Squire (Town Clerk)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 7

MINUTE NO	COMMENTS

25/26/263 To receive comments and questions from members of the public

- The Chairman of the Newton Residents Association spoke regarding the proposed extension of the 30mph limit on the A357 currently under consultation.
- The Chairman of the Allotments Association thanked the Town Council for a recent community grant and regarding agenda item 25/26/269.
- A member of the public enquired regarding a Town Council governance review and the awaited response to correspondence he had previously sent to the Town Council.
- A member of the public requested a correction of the previous minutes to remove the word members from item 25/26/242.

25/26/264 Report from Dorset Councillor Carole Jones
Attached to these minutes.

25/26/265 Apologies for absence
Apologies were received from Cllrs Dobson & Lacey. These apologies were accepted by members.

25/26/266 To approve declarations of interest and written applications for dispensation
No interests were declared and no written requests for dispensation received.

Chairs Initials .....

25/26/267 To approve the minutes of the previous Town Council meeting held on 4th February 2026.

The minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 4th February 2026, having been circulated and published prior to the meeting, were taken as a true and correct record and duly signed by the Chair subject to the agreed deletion of the word members from agenda item 25/26/242.

25/26/268 To approve recommendations from the following Committees:

- **Planning & Environment Committee 18th February 2026**

There were no items for recommendation from the Planning & Environment Committee.

25/26/269 To consider results of Allotment Project survey and agree further actions

Councillors considered a report regarding the results of an online survey carried out with the Allotment Association that had been previously circulated by the Clerk.

The Council resolved to support the project to extend the Filbridge Rise allotment over the Coles Close green space and submission of the Section 106 grant application to fund the project.

25/26/270 To consider a public statement regarding the 26/27 precept

Councillors considered an example public statement previously circulated by the Clerk. Member suggested amendments to include:

- Earlier placed and expanded explanation of lack of other income to offset expenses.
- More detail in grants received.
- Paragraph dealing with tax base.

The revised version would be sent by email to Councillors.

25/26/271 To consider the second interim Internal Audit report

The Council noted the recommendations in the Internal Audit report previously circulated by the Clerk.

25/26/272 To consider the 25/26 asset register

The Council considered the 25/26 asset register previously circulated by the Clerk.

The Council resolved to approve the 25/26 assets register.

25/26/273 To consider the 25/26 updated risk assessment of internal controls

The Council considered the 25/26 risk assessment of internal controls previously circulated by the Clerk.

The Council resolved to approve the 25/26 risk assessment of internal controls.

Chairs Initials .....

25/26/274 To receive a report from the Town Clerk regarding assertion 10 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return

The Council received a report previously circulated by the Clerk.
The Clerk will clarify regarding personal emails featuring the title Councillor, used for electioneering and non Town Council business.

25/26/275 To consider and approve a report from the Town Clerk regarding powers to spend for 25/26

The Council considered a report previously circulated by the Clerk setting out the legislative powers to spend for each of their budget codes for 25/26.
The Council resolved to approve the powers to spend for 25/26 as set out in the report.

25/26/276 To consider and approve ear marked reserves 25/26

The Council considered the ear marked reserves 25/26 report previously circulated by the Clerk.
The Council resolved to approve the ear marked reserves 25/26.

25/26/277 To review fees and charges and agree further actions

The Council reviewed the fees and charges for 25/26 previously circulated by the Clerk and resolved not to make any changes.

25/26/278 To consider investigating a change of website provider

The Clerk reported having concerns about the level of service she had received from the website provider over the year. She requested permission to investigate more user friendly options to bring back to Council for consideration. This was supported by members.

25/26/279 To consider mentoring support to increase social media community engagement

The Council agreed they should first agree a strategic plan and communications strategy before committing to support and training.

25/26/280 To consider allocating additional funding to the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) for support and training

The Council agreed they need to receive the final report and a quote for support with any agreed recommendations before considering additional funding.

25/26/281 To review and approve Information Technology Policy

The Council reviewed the Information Technology Policy previously circulated by the Clerk. This was based largely on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) template with an additional section covering Artificial Intelligence (AI).
The Council resolved to adopt the Information Technology policy subject to correction of one grammatical error.

25/26/282 To approve payments over £2000

The Council resolved to approve payment of £2073.40 to DAPTC.

Chairs Initials .....

25/26/283 To receive correspondence

The Council received correspondence from the Choral Society thanking them for a recent community grant.

25/26/284 To receive a report from the Town Clerk

The Clerk had nothing to report that had not already been covered previously.

25/26/285 To receive a report from the Town Mayor

The Town Mayor reported:
24th Feb: Dorset Council Civic day. Visit to Dorset History Centre, visit to the Roman Town House, We took part in a mock trial in the County Court, presentation by the Youth Voice team on Corporate Parenting (working with Young People in Care) – the team would be interested in coming to Stur to give a presentation on their work. Day ended with the Citizenship Ceremony
26th Feb: Cllr Mantock and I met with Dorset Councillor Carole Jones to begin exploring ways to rebuild a relationship between the Council and councillor Jones. A positive start, but we have a long way to go.
Cllr Joe Rose
Town Mayor

25/26/286 To receive information from members and proposals for future business

Cllr Donaldson – had attended the business breakfast meeting, he advised members he had received approval to fell a dead plum tree in his garden, he expressed concern about the mud on the road at Rolls Mill due to the housing development works.
Cllr Batstone – Reported working with the Chamber of Trade, LitFest and Riverside Fest.
Cllr Marks – advised that he was looking at expanding the current Community Emergency Response Plan by giving talks and advice on security planning for businesses.
Cllr Fraser – asked the Clerk to write a letter to Dorset Council and the Hinton St Mary Estate expressing concern about the area near the weir known locally as the pier which is very badly disintegrating, there is a risk of damage to the sluice gates if repairs are not done by the owners of the pier.
Cllr Cooper – Felt the Town Council could help the local police to better promote their regular community contact points. He enquired as a member of the North Dorset Trailway group about a people counter at the trailway. The Clerk advised that the Countryside Rangers were investigating a portable device. He also asked the Clerk to contact the Dorset Council Countryside Rangers about the tree at Colber Bridge.
Cllr Trim – Advised that the Community Land Trust had met and been told the works at Market Fields were delayed by six months due to the recent weather conditions.
Cllr Mantock – Asked for an update on the Mill lease. The Clerk reminded Councillors of the previously resolved process. She also asked if there was committee/trust overseeing the Youth Club. The Clerk advised this is not necessary for the stand alone club but an organisation had been set up and funded by Town Council several years ago to oversee the larger youth hub

Chairs Initials .....

project, this organisation was currently inactive due to the issues with the project but it may be used in the future so had not been dissolved to avoid duplication set up costs in the future. She asked for clarification that the HR company currently being used by the Town Council was employed on an Ad-Hoc basis and that the Council should look at this. She enquired about the status of the proposed lease to the Allotment Association. The Clerk advised that this was on hold while the project is in progress to avoid additional legal fees to amend lease documents. She requested a copy of the Community Emergency Response Plan which she had not seen.

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.42pm

Chairs Signature..... Date Approved .....

25/26/264 Report from Dorset Councillor Carole Jones

I attended an online meeting with Police this week. It was good to see other town councillors and clerks attending from Blandford, Shaftesbury and Gillingham. Invitations are sent to all Town Clerks, the next meeting takes place on Friday March 27th at 2pm, the Town Clerk will have the joining details. Overall, there is a 5-year crime low in all areas: Criminal damage down by 11%, dwelling burglary down by 12% (incidentally, these figures represent a decrease from last year only). Public Weapons offences down by 15%, Public order offences down by 21% and robbery with a threat of violence down by 21%. Theft from motor vehicles is down by 25%. 5 years ago, there were 913 reports of anti-social behaviour; the most recent figures show 606. I asked specifically about domestic abuse, but this is not reported as a neighbourhood crime. The Vale Family Hub in Stur can provide assistance in this respect if anyone requires it.

Dorset Council has been awarded the National Winner of the Cleaner Energy Power Award 2026 at the APSE energy awards, which is run with the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero. Our clean power program has reduced expenditure by £520,000 annually and generates new income through the smart export guarantee.

Dorset Council's Budget was voted through at the last Dorset Council Meeting, our group voted against the budget as we did not feel the current administration could deliver the budget, having made no substantial savings at all since 2024. To provide an example of this – the spend on children in care is extraordinary – it always has been, and it is difficult to plan in an exact way, as a child or family of children could suddenly be taken into care. In the last administration, the annual overspend was in the region of £7M – but there was a significant amount of work underway to create a more sustainable model. The current overspend in this directorate under the new administration runs in the region of £50M.

I had a meeting with our local Fire Service (thank you Liam!) The stats provided are out of date, and there is no doubt that we cannot afford to lose any part of the front-line service. The rurality of North Dorset means that if any incident broke out, engines could come from as far as Poole – a 30-minute drive on Blue Lights. If a house fire breaks out, a total of 3 engines must attend, and

if a fire takes hold, the entire house could burn out in 10 minutes. Currently, Stur has just one fire engine. 2 fire engines must attend a motor vehicle accident, and I was on site a while back to witness one where the car had overturned with people trapped inside. The Dorset & Wiltshire fire service is already stretched to breaking point. Since 2010 the service has lost a fifth of its firefighters. The current proposal is to cut a further 96 roles. However, most disappointingly, there are **no** plans to cut the back-office staff, which continues to grow and far exceeds the support staff-to-firefighter ratio in other areas. Can I please urge everyone to complete the consultation and fight against further cuts? The current climate change is driving more severe wildfires, and when we have one, as we did in Holt Heath, the fire involved all trucks, as well as others being drafted in from other counties, and the service was literally brought to its knees.

A number of people have asked how Coombe House is performing since it opened. People will recall the £10M purchase of the old St Mary's School just outside of Shaftesbury. This was a strategic move by the old administration to work to reduce the amount of money being paid for children being placed in care outside of the Dorset Council area. We currently have around 150 children on roll there, which saves 2.7M each year. Gradually, that number can increase to around 250.

Finally, following our last Council Meeting where I expressed my feelings around the attitude towards me by many members of the Council, which included staff. I understand that there is a feeling that the issue revolves around me being the Dorset Councillor whilst also wearing the Vale Family Hub hat - I would like to state publicly that this is the council's problem and not mine. I am quite able to carry out all functions of both efficiently, and my real disappointment lies in the lack of any support from what is really an incredible resource that this Town is lucky to have, helping so many individuals, young and old, which I don't feel is supported or recognised by the Council.

My meeting with Cllr Rose last week was left in that we would hold a private meeting between all councillors and myself to thrash out all areas of perceived problems. I am happy to attend this meeting on the basis that **all** councillors attend and we can all be totally truthful with each other.

Chairs Initials .....