

STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

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Annual Town Public Meeting **Thursday 23 April 2026** **7.30pm in the Council Chamber** **Minutes**

1. Welcome and Introductions.

The Mayor welcomed the 22 people in attendance.

2. To approve and sign the minutes of the Annual Town Public Meeting held on Thursday 30th April 2025.

The Minutes were approved and signed by the Town Mayor Cllr Joe Rose as a true and correct record.

3. Community Star Awards.

The Mayor presented Community Star Awards to:

Gwen Francis – To recognise outstanding service and dedication by supporting community life in Sturminster Newton.

Sharon Clifton - To recognise outstanding service and dedication by supporting community life in Sturminster Newton.

4. Presentation from Local Community Groups.

The following Local Community Groups had been given grants from Sturminster Newton Town Council this year and gave short presentations on their work and what their grants had been used for:

Sturminster Newton Allotment Association – the grant is being used to install two water tanks and a trough to collect rain water for use at the allotments.

Sturminster Newton Community Building Trust – the grant has paid for the hire of a room which will be used weekly for the Citizens Advice Bureau to be accessed by the community.

Sturminster Choral Society – are using their grant to enable the cost of membership to be affordable for all and to part fund their next concert.

Sturminster & Hinton Cricket Club – have purchased new practice nets for the youth team to practice and are now forming links in with Sturminster Newton High School, it's hoped that the youth teams will be able to join the U13 League.

SturLit Festival – the grant is helping with costs for a war artist to give a talk on the war in Ukraine.

Sturminster Newton Brownies & Guides – the grants given will help with insurance costs, they reported a rising number of girls attending.

Stepping Stones Preschool – a sofa has been purchased which is being well used at the preschool.

5. Report from the Town Mayor.

Good evening everyone, and thank you for coming to the Sturminster Newton Annual Town Public Meeting. As Mayor, it is a real privilege to welcome you and to share an update on what your Town Council has been doing over the past civic year—what we have delivered, what we have learned, and what we are focusing on next.

Everything we do is rooted in the same aim: to support a thriving town where people of all ages can feel connected, safe, and proud of where they live. This year, that has meant a strong focus on opportunities for young people, investment in community spaces, and practical work to keep valued local assets safe and accessible.

Supporting young people

Our main new project this year has been the Youth Club at Unit 2 on Butts Pond Industrial Estate, delivered with the support and expertise of Youth Connect South West. This has only been possible thanks to grant funding from the William Williams Charity, One Stop, the National Lottery, the Blackmore Vale Masons, and the generosity of a number of local businesses. On behalf of the town, thank you for investing in our young people and helping us to create a welcoming place for them to meet, take part in activities, and access support. Alongside this, we have also been progressing the larger, permanent youth provision project. A pre-application has now been submitted to Dorset Council, and we have received helpful advice from the planning team on how best to move forward. This is an important step, and we will keep residents updated as the proposals develop.

Listening to our young people is just as important as providing facilities. We continue to meet with the Youth Council at the High School, and we are planning to extend this to Yewstock and

William Barnes Primary Schools so that we can hear from an even wider range of pupils. My thanks go to Councillor Lacey for coordinating this work and ensuring young voices are part of our decision-making.

Looking after community assets and spaces

We have also carried out works at the Mill to ensure the safety of volunteers and visitors. I'm pleased to say that milling recommenced this month, which is a wonderful milestone for this much-loved part of our town's heritage and a testament to the dedication of those who give their time to keep it going.

At Ricketts Lane, the play area has been resurfaced, helping to keep the site safe and enjoyable. Our play areas and sports pitches continue to be well used by William Barnes Primary School for PE and playtime, which is exactly what these spaces are there for—supporting healthy activity and everyday community life.

We are also working with the Allotments Association on a project to increase the number of allotments available in the town, making use of developer grants where possible. Demand for plots remains high, and we see allotments as a valuable resource for wellbeing, sustainability, and community connection.

Community engagement and events

At the beginning of the civic year, we marked the VE Day anniversary celebrations in the Railway Gardens—an occasion that brought residents together to remember, to reflect, and to celebrate the strength of community across generations.

We have continued to increase community engagement by working with Volunteer Centre Dorset to support local community groups, and by funding the printed copy of the *What's Happening in Stur* newsletter. This publication, produced by David Shepherd and Penny Mountain, plays an important role in keeping residents informed and connected—thank you both for your hard work and commitment.

We are also continuing to work closely with the police to share information where appropriate and to support investigations by providing CCTV footage when required. Community safety is a shared responsibility, and this ongoing partnership is an important part of keeping Sturminster Newton a safe place to live and visit.

Our staff team

This year we welcomed Portia Potter as our new receptionist, who has also taken on communications—helping the Council to share information more consistently and respond to residents more effectively. We have also welcomed two new members of staff to the Grounds Team. I want to place on record my thanks to all Council staff for the professional and practical work they do every day to keep town services running.

Governance, transparency and value for money

Good governance is essential if we are to maintain trust and ensure we are representing residents well. We are currently working with our local association on a governance review to make sure the Council continues to operate in a way that best represents the residents of Sturminster Newton. This work sits alongside our compulsory internal and external audits, which are completed each year in line with government legislation and include both financial checks and governance checks.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus on practical improvements that make a real difference—especially for our young people, our community spaces, and the ways we communicate and engage with residents. Thank you to everyone who volunteers, supports local

groups, and takes the time to get involved. Your input helps shape the priorities we set and the decisions we make.

6. Open Forum – an opportunity for discussion.

- A member of the public spoke of the Town Council’s generosity with time and resources. We really ‘punch above their weight’ in this small town. We are very lucky to have so many activities available and The Exchange, which is ‘quite something’. Thank you to the Town Council for pulling things together for us all.
- A trustee of The Exchange spoke of the Open Day at the Exchange and gave some information on how many activities happen in the building. He commented that support of the Town Council remains outstanding.
- Another member of the public asked why the town’s precept is the highest in the UK and gave some figures relating to the cost of council tax. The Mayor suggested that as the resident has raised a number of questions, some of which related to Dorset Council’s budget, he could leave his notes and contact details and Cllr Rose would respond, however the information wasn’t given to the Town Council.

There being no further comments or questions, the meeting was declared closed at 8.07pm.

Signed Date