



HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Peel Street, Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire, LU5 5EY

Town Mayor: **Cllr E Cooper**

Tel: 01582 708540

Town Clerk: **Clare Evans**

e-mail: info@houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk

9th December 2024

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

To: All Town Councillors

Notice of Meeting

You are hereby summoned to the Meeting of the Houghton Regis Town Council to be held at the Council Offices, Peel Street on Monday 16th December 2024 at 7.00pm.

Members of the public who wish to attend the meeting may do so in person or remotely through the meeting link below.

To attend remotely through Teams please follow this link: [MEETING LINK](#)

Clare Evans
Town Clerk

***THIS MEETING MAY BE
RECORDED¹***

AGENDA

- 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
- 2. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

In accordance with approved Standing Orders 1(e)-1(l) Members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda.

The total period of time designated for public participation at a meeting shall not exceed 15 minutes and an individual member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes unless directed by the chairman of the meeting.

- 3. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

¹ *Phones and other equipment may be used to film, audio record, tweet or blog from this meeting by an individual Council member or a member of the public. No part of the meeting room is exempt from public filming unless the meeting resolves to go into exempt session.*

The use of images or recordings arising from this is not under the Council's control.

Under the Localism Act 2011 (sections 26-37 and Schedule 4) and in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare any interests which are not currently entered in the member's register of interests or if he/she has not notified the Monitoring Officer of any such interest.

Members are invited to submit any requests for Dispensations for consideration.

4. MINUTES

Pages 7 - 12

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2024.

Recommendation: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2024.

5. COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Pages 13 - 40

To receive the minutes of the following committees and consider any recommendations contained therein

Corporate Services Committee

9th Sept 2024

Minute number 12967 – Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy:

To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy.

Minute number 12968 – Freedom of Information Policy and Model Publication Scheme:

- 1) To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Freedom of Information Policy
- 2) To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Model Publication Scheme

Minute number 12969 – Reserves Policy:

To recommend to Town Council, the adoption of the Town Councils Reserves Policy

Minute number 12970 – Internal Audit Planning, Reporting and Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification:

To recommend to Town Council that the Internal Audit Planning, Reporting & Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification be approved.

Minute number 12971 – Health and Safety Policy:

	To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy (as amended).
Community Services Committee	22 nd July 2024
Environment & Leisure Committee	None to present
Planning Committee	16 th Sept 2024 and 7 th Oct 2024
	16 th Sept - Minute number 12981 – Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Group:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To recommend to Town Council a Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Sub-Committee be formed, consisting of a combination of councillors and representatives of the community. 2. To consider the creation of an Implementation Sub-Committee to monitor the usage and effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) and provide regular reports on its application in planning matters. 3. To consider the frequency of meetings to track the NHP's impact and propose updates as required. 4. To approve the use of £3,000 from General Reserves, as set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and supported by Town Council.
Town Partnership Committee	30 th Jul 2024

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

New Cemetery Sub-Committee	None to present
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Please contact the Head of Democratic Services if you would like a copy of any of these policies re-sent to you.

- Recommendation:** To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendation contained therein as follows:
1. Minute number 12967 – Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy;
 2. Minute number 12968 – Freedom of Information Policy and Model Publication Scheme
 3. Minute number 12969 – Reserves Policy
 4. Minute number 12970 – Internal Audit Planning, Reporting and Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification
 5. Minute number 12971 – Health and Safety Policy

In relation to Minute 12981; to refer consideration back to the Planning Committee in light of pending feedback from the CPC Progress Review which was more encouraging of expanding the remit of the Planning Committee to review the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP)

6. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

A verbal report will be provided.

7. REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillors are requested to provide verbal reports from meetings they have attended of outside organisations or from training courses they have attended on behalf of the Council.

8. SPORTS HALL IN HOUGHTON REGIS

Pages 41 - 44

To enable members to consider the way forward.

- Recommendation:**
- 1. To explore a way to secure the retention of the sports halls as an interim measure;**
 - 2. To submit a community asset transfer application to CBC for the transfer of the existing leisure centre sports hall to enable public usage of a sports hall to be maintained when the new hall at Houghton School is unavailable for public use.**

9. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Pages 45 - 61

At the Corporate Services committee meeting held on the 2nd December 2024, members resolved to approve and recommend to council the adoption of new Financial Regulations, based on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) model template.

In order to expedite the use of the new regulations, council are being requested to agree to the adoption of the regulations at this meeting, see attached.

Officers felt it was important to highlight to members one new section of the updated regulations. Financial Regulation 4.8 (extract below) is in bold text and therefore refers to a statutory obligation the council cannot change.

4.8 Any member with council tax unpaid for more than two months is prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and must disclose at the start of the meeting that Section 106 applies to them.

Recommendation: To adopt the Town Councils Financial Regulations.

10. PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

Pages 62 - 66

To enable members to consider the CPC recommendation to establish a Committee to consider matters of a strategic importance which may have an impact on Houghton Regis.

- Recommendation:**
- 1. To establish a Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee in accordance with the draft committee functions & terms of reference;**
 - 2. To nominate 5 councillors to comprise the Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee.**

11. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROCESS

Pages 67 - 69

To enable members to discuss the Community Governance Review process and options for community engagement.

- Recommendation:**
- 1. To use appropriate communication means to promote the Community Governance review Process in due course;**
 - 2. To hold a series of public engagement events to promote the process further subject to budget availability in 2025/26.**

12. DUNSTABLE MARKET CHARTER

Pages 70 - 72

To enable members to consider a way forward.

- Recommendation:** **To seek legal advice on challenging Dunstable Town Council's market rights policy and for this to be funded through 190-4059.**

13. INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Pages 73 – 78

Members are advised that the interim Internal Audit (IA) for 2024/25 was completed on 20th November 2024 by IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd.

Members will find attached the following:

1. Cover Letter dated 22nd November 2024 – this details the areas covered by the audit
2. Observations – this includes detail on the audit test, the IA observation and any IA recommendation. In the Comments column Members will find the Clerks response to the Recommendation. Members are requested to consider the Recommendation and the response in the Comments Column.
3. Summary – this summarises the audit

- Recommendation:** **To support the Comments provided on the interim Internal Audit Observations report.**

14. ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOITING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS – OPEN CONSULATION

Members are reminded that the government has announced a commitment to allowing councils to hold remote meetings, and a [consultation is now open](#) to gather feedback. This is a crucial opportunity to demonstrate strong support for the flexibility that remote

meetings provide. The consultation closes on 19th December 2024. NALC are strongly encouraging parish and town councils, county associations, councillors, and clerks to participate in this essential consultation. Input is vital in maintaining the momentum from the previous call for evidence and ensuring the continued benefits of remote meetings for councils across the country.

Members are encouraged to respond via the link above and then clicking on the Respond via Citizen Space link under the How to respond heading.

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HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 14th October 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: E Cooper Town Mayor
E Billington
E Costello
Y Farrell
W Henderson
M Herber
D Jones
T McMahon
C Slough
D Taylor

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 1

Apologies Councillor: P Burgess
J Carroll
C Rollins
A Slough

13003 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Burgess, Carroll, Rollins and Slough.

13004 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A statement from the Head of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire, covering the following points, was read out to Members.

The proposal to move sports hall provision to Houstone School, where access would be limited, would result in ACB experiencing a significant loss to their ability to provide PE. ACB currently paid for the use of the sports hall, but this cost would increase if it became necessary to transport students to another site. On opening in 2012, ACB had access to a facility, but access was subsequently removed in 2013; since 2013, payment had been made to the leisure centre for use of the facilities as there was insufficient space and funding to build a sports hall on campus.

A large portion of the ACB curriculum was dedicated to PE lessons; however, loss of the hall and increased costs meant that PE would be timetabled less frequently. This would impact the education of the students, and result in less support for their wellbeing and mental health.

There were 73 students on Kingsland Campus, 40% of whom were 'pupil premium', 41 received free school meals allowance, 26% had an EHCP and 8% were subject to a child protection plan. It was necessary to have an engaging curriculum to ensure attendance by

students who were disadvantaged or at risk of abuse. Should the quality of the curriculum drop it was anticipated a fall in student attendance would also be seen.

ACB had been used in support of the initial bid to secure funding for the building of the new leisure centre. That the building of the new leisure centre should then have a limiting impact on the delivery of sports to pupils was hard to accept.

Any other further opportunity to discuss the leisure centre remaining accessible to ACB and the wider community would be welcomed.

This concluded the statement.

A representative for the Academy added that, whatever Service Level Agreement existed with Houstone School, indoor leisure space would remain at a deficit and the loss of a preventative space would have a significant impact. It was suggested that Houghton Regis Town Council formally approach Central Bedfordshire Council requesting that a new sports hall be added to the leisure centre currently being built. It was felt there was sufficient land to achieve this.

It was additionally proposed that HRTC approach CBC to establish the situation in the interim, and to propose taking on ownership of the existing sports hall as a community asset. Purchase of the sports hall could be achieved by borrowing money, raising the precept and potentially a public work loan.

The Town Clerk responded that it would not be possible to discuss or determine an outcome at this meeting as the issue would need to be presented as a committee report.

An update was provide on discussions with CBC at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was felt that there had been insufficient awareness at CBC of the issue. The situation had since stagnated and further discussions were yet to be confirmed.

It was brought to the attention of Members that Houghton Regis Badminton Club had met with the leisure services contract manager and had been informed that the need for a sports hall was evaluated by an algorithm. This had been based on population at that point and had, therefore, failed to take into account the increased population of Houghton Regis.

It was emphasised that it was not simply the loss of courts that was problematic but the time available for the community to use indoor leisure facilities. Approximately 98 hours per week, 50 weeks per year were currently available, but this was likely to fall to 48 hours, 35 weeks per year when accounting for school use.

It was felt that individuals within the community would be significantly affected, and this would be especially detrimental to those who were disadvantaged or vulnerable. Members of the Committee highlighted that public use of school facilities had proven to be an unsatisfactory model which resulted in all parties involved being negatively impacted. Members expressed their frustration that this situation had been allowed to arise.

It was suggested to the speakers that they attend the next Town Partnership meeting since this would provide a further opportunity to present this case to Central Bedfordshire councillors. It was agreed there would be merit in attending the meeting as the Town Partnership Committee as an executive member was due to attend who would be able to take these concerns back to the relevant member of the executive at CBC.

13005 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13006 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13007 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the following committees and considered any recommendations contained therein

Corporate Services Committee 10th June, 23rd July and 27th August 2024

- Minute number 12868
 - Family Friendly Policy
 - Flexible Working Policy
 - Capability Policy
 - Grievance Policy
 - Officer/Member Protocol
 - Training Agreement
 - Training Statement of Intent
- Minute number 12870 (as agreed in private session)

Planning Committee

To request approval from Town Council for the use of General Reserves up to £4,000 for supporting IT 13th May, 3rd June, 24th June, 15th July, 5th August, 27th August 2024

Community Services Committee

8th April 2024

Environment & Leisure Committee

29th April & 29th July 2024

Town Partnership Committee

23rd April 2024

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

New Cemetery Sub-Committee

None to present

-
- Resolved:** To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendation contained therein as follows:
- **Minute number 12868**
 - Family Friendly Policy**
 - Flexible Working Policy**
 - Capability Policy**
 - Grievance Policy**
 - Officer/Member Protocol**
 - Training Agreement**
 - Training Statement of Intent**
 - **Minute number 12870 (as agreed in private session)**
 - To request approval from Town Council for the use of General Reserves up to £4,000 for supporting IT**

13008 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor updated Members that forty-five events had been attended since the last meeting. The events had included:

- The Army Benevolent Fund, June
- Bedfordshire Games Committee, July
- Birds of Prey, August
- Newport Pagnell Cultural Committee event, September.
- Luton and Dunstable Fundraising concert, October

The Deputy Mayor had attended 18 events including:

- The Luton Irish Forum which offered support to all members of the community
- The Army Benevolent Fund – Members were requested to urge veterans in need of support to contact the organisation.
- Three fund raising events and a resident's 100th birthday

13009 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillors were requested to provide verbal reports from meetings they had attended of outside organisations or from training courses they attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr Farrell advised Members that the kitchen at the Memorial Hall was progressing, as were external works to make the pavements safer.

Cllr Herber had attended the South Beds Dial-a-Ride AGM where it was confirmed their lottery funding had ended. Hospice at Home Volunteers had highlighted that Dunstable and Houghton Regis Town Councils were the main source of funding and asked whether Houghton Regis Town Council could provide a Service Level Agreement for £2,000 annually.

Cllr McMahon informed Members that the pathway at Houghton Hall Park was due to be resurfaced soon and that three memorial benches were to be installed. The MacMillan Coffee Morning had raised £546.10. Forthcoming events were being advertised online

and it was hoped to include a food historian coming in to demonstrate processes used in the past.

Cllr Jones apologised to Members as he had been unable to attend many of the committees he represented due to various reasons. The APPP meeting had been attended and the main item of business had been a discussion with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

13010 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2023/24

Members were advised of the outcomes of the external audit 2023/24.

A recommendation had been made for the internal auditor's letter to be shared with the external auditor - a point which had been raised the previous year and was something that needed to be actioned, with clarification sought on the procedures to be applied.

An item had been raised at the June meeting (Minute 12884) regarding a discrepancy between the interest paid on the public works loans in the previous year and the current year. It was questioned whether this should have been accrued and how the discrepancy would be accounted for in the coming year. The Town Clerk requested the opportunity to investigate this further outside of the meeting and to update Members at a later date.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve and accept the Audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24.**
- 2. To note the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 23rd September 2024.**

13011 INTERNAL CONTROLS POLICY

During a recent internal audit, it was noted that the Town Council did not have a specific Internal Controls Policy. In order to rectify this, Members were provided with an Internal Controls Policy for approval.

Internal controls were set up by the Clerk/RFO, but Members needed to ensure they had an understanding of those controls and were responsible for checking that they were operated effectively.

The following changes to the document were proposed:

- The wording at the top of page 89 of the document be amended to read 'current financial year' rather than 'the coming year'.
- The wording of the last paragraph on page 91 to be amended to read 'but whilst no significant internal control issues were identified during the year, the council strives at all times...'
- There were four references in the document to the RFO as Responsible Finance Officer or Responsible Financial Officer. There needed to be consistency.

Members were happy to move the recommendation with these alterations being implemented.

Resolved: To review and adopt the Internal Controls Policy.

13012 MARKET CHARTER

At the Community Engagement Sub-Committee it had been requested that an update be provided regarding the Dunstable Market Charter.

Dunstable Town Council was considering HRTC's request for them to consider the use of Market Charter rights at the Community Services Committee meeting in November.

As such, a more comprehensive update was anticipated to be provided to Council at the December 2024 meeting.

13013 2025/26 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS

Members were advised of the anticipated budget setting process for the financial year 2025/26.

The budget preparation process had been brought forward to allow for more consultation. It was felt that 3rd January being scheduled as part of this process was extremely close to the Christmas break. The Town Clerk highlighted that this was how the dates fell when taking into account the agenda publication dates, and that bringing the budget process forward allowed councillors more flexibility in their considerations. Members asked if it would be possible to delay the budget setting by a week when setting the following year's calendar, thereby allowing more time post-Christmas. The Town Clerk advised that extensions had been requested in previous years and that precept information would still be requested ahead of the Town Council meeting.

There had been discussions about using Members open sessions for training. It was confirmed this would form part of the October briefing.

It was confirmed that the tax base was announced in November.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.05pm

Dated this 16th day of December 2024

Chairman

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Corporate Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
Monday 9th September at 7.00pm.

Present:	Councillors:	D Jones E Billington P Burgess J Carroll E Costello T McMahon C Slough	Chairman (Substitute) (Substitute) (Substitute)
	Officers:	Debbie Marsh Louise Senior Clare Evans	Corporate Services Manager Head of Democratic Services (Part)
	Public:	0	
Apologies:	Councillors:	W Henderson M Herber C Rollins	

12956 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Henderson (Cllr Slough substituted), Cllr Herber (Cllr McMahon substituted) and Cllr Rollins (Cllr Burgess substituted).

12957 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12958 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12959 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 10th June 2024, 23rd July 2024 and 27th August 2024.

Members agreed to approve the minutes with the amended date of 4th March 2024 contained in Minute 12853 and the resolution.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2024, 23rd July and 27th August 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

QJJ.

12960 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS AND CONSIDER ANY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED THEREIN

Personnel Sub-Committee: 7th May 2024

Resolved: To receive the Minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting of the 7th May 2024.

12961 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

For information purposes, Members were provided with the income and expenditure report, highlighting significant variances, for Corporate Services Committee to date.

It was noted that there were two overspends in the report and it was likely further expenditure would be made under Miscellaneous Establishment Costs (190-4020).

12962 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members received the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for May, June and July 2024.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for May, June and July 2024.**
- 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

12963 LIST OF CHEQUE PAYMENTS

For information purposes, Members were provided with a list of payments for the period May to July 2024 (inclusive).

12964 INVESTMENT REPORT

In accordance with Committee Functions, Financial Regulation 8 and Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investment Arrangements.

The Corporate Services Committee are to oversee and manage the financial obligations of the Council, including:

To receive quarterly reports on investments containing a forecast of capital expenditure, investment opportunities and a recommendation for further investment including where length and amount.

This would potentially be the final report on the CCLA Property Fund account as Houghton Regis Town Council had given notice to withdraw the funds held.

Members were reminded that at the Corporate Services meeting held on the 4th March 2024 Members resolved (minute number 12731) to withdraw the Town Councils



funds from the CCLA Property fund and to subsequently invest these funds in the CCLA Deposit account as it is a AAA rated investment.

12965 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

At its meeting on the 16th July 2024, the Town Council endorsed the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

In addition to this, Town Council under minute number 12906, resolved to approve the use of General Reserves up to £14,000 to support the Amber flagged projects within the Action Plan to enable delivery, subject to Committee approval, in 2024/25.

In doing so, the Corporate Services Committee was allocated a project to be funded through general reserves. Below was the detail of that project.

Corporate Services Committee

Ensure that the council fully utilises the talents and skills of current members of staff	Consider the engagement of external support to undertake a skills audit of staff, to identify any skills gaps and develop a training and development strategy	Budget availability	£2000	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
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Resolved: To support Town Councils recommendation of the use of £2000 from General Reserves to support the delivery of the amber flagged project for the Corporate Services Committee as detailed.

12966 CCLA MANDATE

CCLA Investment Management Ltd was committed to maintaining up to date accurate information. A review of the Town Councils account files had identified that CCLA must request up to date details of account information.

The CCLA required a minimum of two or more (maximum 4) authorising persons on the account. Names and job titles of those authorising persons needed to be sent to CCLA along with the accompanying minutes confirming this detail.

Members were reminded that any funds withdrawn, by officers, from the CCLA were deposited in the Town Council's NatWest bank account.

J.S.

Resolved: To confirm, the following persons:
Ms Clare Evans, Town Clerk
Mrs Debbie Marsh, Head of Corporate Services
Mr Andrew Gaudion, Finance Officer
 are authorised by the Council, to manage Houghton Regis Town Councils accounts held by the CCLA

12967 DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE POLICY

Members received the Town Councils Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy. Members were advised that it was proposed to remove paragraph 5.2 from this policy. Other than this proposal the policy remained fit for purpose.

It was clarified that the proposed changes were to discourage alcohol consumption on council premises and that failure to comply could potentially result in disciplinary action.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy.

12968 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY AND MODEL PUBLICATION SCHEME

Members were advised that the Town Councils Freedom of Information Policy remained fit for purpose; however, the Town Council Model Publication Scheme had been revised.

Members were provided with a copy of the report.

For clarification, it was explained that the Transparency Code requirements only applied to councils with an income of over £25,000 and under £6.5million. Houghton Regis Town Council had adopted this in principle by publishing expenditure over £500.00; however, there was other legislation, more applicable to the Town Council, which was the Model Publication Scheme applying to any expenditure over £100.00. The auditor had clarified which piece of legislation the Town Council should apply and now the Model Scheme of Publication relating to £100.00 and above showed on the ICO template document.

An amendment to item 20 on page 98 was requested, changing wording from 'Her Majesty' to His Majesty'.

Resolved: 1) To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Freedom of Information Policy
 2) To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Model Publication Scheme

12969 RESERVES POLICY

Houghton Regis Town Council was required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation.

The purpose of this policy was to set out how the Council would determine and review the level of reserves.

Members were provided with a copy of the report.

While the report set out the approach, there was some feeling that more robust parameters were needed to determine what the reserve level and policy should be. The policy would form part of the annual budget setting and, therefore, the reserves would be reviewed every year

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council, the adoption of the Town Councils Reserves Policy

12970 INTERNAL AUDIT PLANNING, REPORTING & REVIEW POLICY AND INTERNAL AUDIT SPECIFICATION

At the Corporate Services meeting held on the 4th October 2022 (minute number 12208) it was agreed that, although historically this document had been presented annually at a full Council meeting, moving forward this policy should be added to the Policy Review list in order that the Committee had sight of it, for comment, before being presented to Council.

Members were provided with a copy of the approved document. There had been no changes in legislation, therefore it was suggested that it remained suitable and fit for purpose.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider the Internal Audit Planning, Reporting & Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification and make a recommendation to Town Council for approval.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Internal Audit Planning, Reporting & Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification be approved.

12971 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

Members received a copy of the Town Council's Health & Safety at Work Policy. There were no changes proposed to this policy, therefore it remained fit for purpose.

It was brought to the attention of the Committee that a reference was made to a previous employee in the policy (page 132, reference 3.2) and further occurrences subsequently appeared. It was requested that these be amended.

Members were happy to support the recommendation with the suggested amendments.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy (as amended).



12972 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS, INVESTMENTS STRATEGY & INVESTMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Town Council's Banking Arrangements, Investments Strategy & Investment Arrangements policy had been amended to reflect the Town Council's decision to remove investments being placed in the CCLA Property Fund. Members were aware that the Town Council gave notice to remove funds from this account and for those funds to be placed in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit account.

Members were provided with a copy of the amended policy.

The policy had been amended to remove references to CCLA Property Fund. (Pg 138 item 4) and there had been some discussion about investing in more liquid investment options. The amended document reflected the present situation, but Houghton Regis Town Council would be taking further investment advice going forward.

Members were informed that there had been some investigation into gilts, but further investigations were required in order to ascertain whether this type of investment would be appropriate. It was highlighted that other councils had put funds in high interest accounts in high street banks

It was highlighted that the document referred to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) but that this department had been renamed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Investments would need to be approved by the Committee and a recommendation to update the policy could be made as necessary.

Members were advised that it was hoped a report on potential investments would be made at the next meeting. It was, therefore, suggested that this item was noted and considered further once the report had been produced.

12973 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- **Staff Plan**

A recorded vote was requested:

Proposed by: Cllr Billington

Seconded by: Cllr McMahan

In favour: Cllrs C Slough, Cllr Billington, Cllr Costello and Cllr McMahan.

Against: Cllr Carroll

Abstention: Cllr Burgess

Resolved: In accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item set out below on the



grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

12974 STAFF PLAN

At the last Corporate Services Committee meeting, members were presented with an initial proposal for a 5-year staffing structure plan.

Following discussions, members comments were taken on board, thus a revised report was submitted to the committee containing additional information for consideration.

Members engaged in a thorough review and discussion of the revised report, considering the various options presented to meet the council's future staffing needs.

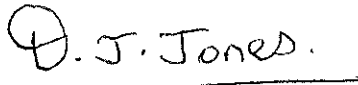
Members voted on the recommendations contained within the report.

Accordingly, option 2 was carried.

Resolved: To agree the suggested way forward.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.13pm

Dated this 2nd day of December 2024



Chairman

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Community Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
22nd July 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors: E Costello Chairman
P Burgess
Y Farrell
T McMahon
A Slough
C Slough

Officers: Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &
Community Services
Tara Earnshaw Community Services Manager
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Other: J Carroll

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillors: E Cooper

12909 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Cooper.

12910 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12911 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12912 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Members were invited to elect a Vice Chair for Community Services Committee for 2024/25.

Nominee: Cllr C Slough Proposed by: Cllr Farrell
Seconded by: Cllr A Slough

Nominee: Cllr McMahon Proposed by: Cllr Burgess
Seconded by: Cllr McMahon

A recorded vote was requested:

Members in favour of Cllr C Slough: Cllr Farrell, Cllr A Slough and Cllr C Slough
Members in favour of Cllr McMahon: Cllr Rollins and Cllr Burgess

Accordingly, Cllr C Slough was duly appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Community Services Committee.

12913 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8th April 2024

Resolved: To confirm the minutes of the Community Services Committee meetings held on 8th April 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12914 HRTC YOUTH SERVICES



Members were provided with an update on recent youth and community work.

- The Youth Council currently has 14 members. Some were expected to leave, but there was interest from younger people to start in September.
- The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Bav Shah, enjoyed the #KnifeFreeHoughton event organised by the Youth Council.
- The Youth Café was still progressing well and had an enhanced experience at a restaurant.
- YIF funding supported a sailing residential trip, boxing sessions, and six weeks of scooter/BMX coaching sessions.
- Skate Jam took place on the 22nd of July.
- There were plans to arrange an enhanced session in Corby.
- A boxing session had taken place at Luton Town Boxing Club.
- Open access sessions have taken place at the Houghton Regis Baptist Church and Sandringham Community and Enterprise Hub.
- Multi-sports were scheduled over a 4-week period at Parkside Recreation Ground.
- A schedule of summer activities had been planned and promoted.
- The Later Living Group (LLG) was increasingly popular, and members requested that meetings be increased from one to two sessions per month.

Members questioned whether more graffiti events were planned or could be arranged. Officers agreed that this would be reviewed and, where possible, another graffiti session could be arranged, and potential sites for temporary graffiti walls would be identified. This would be followed up.

Members also questioned whether there were opportunities for the youth group and the LLG to participate in joint events. It was confirmed that intergenerational events had taken place, and officers raised concerns that timings could be an issue. However, this will be reviewed and followed up.

Members requested an update on the Shop Local initiative. Members were advised this would require continued engagement to rebuild relationships post-lockdown and to get shops involved. While Shop Local merchandise was included in the resident packs, further action would be needed to reinforce the message, as it has been over three years since restrictions were lifted. Officers will provide a written update at the next committee meeting.

12915 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING WORKING GROUPS AND CONSIDER ANY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED THEREIN

Events Working Group	14th March '24 and 25th April '24
Combating Crime Working Group	20th March '24, 17th April '24 and 15th May '24.

A discussion followed regarding the purchase of electric bikes, and officers confirmed that the Combating Crime Working Group and, therefore, the parent committee members are awaiting further information from Bedfordshire Police before a formal decision can be made.

It was confirmed that the dates on page two of the signed Combatting Crime Working Group minutes of 17th April 2024 were incorrect, and these would be corrected.

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above.

**12916 COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE FINANCIAL REPORT 2024/25**

In accordance with the Committee's functions, a periodic review of its income and expenditures should be undertaken. Members were provided with the budget report for the Community Services Committee alongside the Budget Explanation.

12917 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

Members were provided with the income and expenditure report, with appropriate commentary, for the Community Services Committee to date. This was accurate as of 16th July 2024.

12918 THE DELIVERY OF YOUTH SERVICES FROM APRIL 2025

Members were advised that the YIF funding would end in March 2025, and this would have a significant impact on the provision of youth services. Post-funding, there were three options:

1. To revert to previous provision levels at a cost of approximately £10,000
2. To continue with what HRTC had been providing with YIF but remove the enhanced sessions, residential events and additional coaching. This would be budgeted at £50,000 in addition to the sum from option 1. Costs going forward should be planned as part of a 5-year programme.
3. Examine what YIF-funded events had proved most successful and look to enhance this. This would involve a restructure of the youth work team and would include a full-time qualified youth worker to manage future provision, including the line management of the two youth lead workers. The two lead youth workers would, in turn, manage the youth support workers. This would increase the capacity of the Community Services Manager and allow them to undertake more strategic work. It would also involve enhanced partnerships with schools, other youth service providers, stakeholders and CBC. This would allow four evening and two afternoon sessions a week. HRTC could also look to enhance delivery by seeking extra funding and recruiting an apprentice youth worker. This would have an impact on precept of £80,0000.

It was agreed that more advertising, involvement with schools and engagement was needed to encourage participation in youth service events.

Members were informed that HRTC could circumvent some of the limitations imposed by funders by providing funding itself.

Members were encouraged to consider a longer-term plan for the delivery of youth work and were unanimously in favour of option 3

Resolved: It is recommended that Members consider option 3, as described within the report, to continue the future development of youth services in Houghton Regis Town Council and include it in the emerging budget for 25/26.

12919 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

At its meeting on July 16, 2024, the Town Council endorsed the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan. In doing so, the Community Services Committee was allocated a number of small projects to be funded through general reserves.

The two projects that would be delivered first were:

- Improve the HRTC communications strategy
- Develop a plan to create community centres – in the town centre and all estates

To ensure a prompt commencement of these projects, Members were asked to delegate authority to the Head of Environmental & Community Services to deliver these projects in liaison with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, who would agree on the required detail and scope.

Resolved: To delegate authority to the Head of Environmental & Community Services to deliver these projects in liaison with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, who will agree on the required detail and scope

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.44 pm

Dated this 30th day of September 2024

Chairman



HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Planning Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on
16th September 2024 at 7.00pm**

Present:	Councillors:	M Herber E Billington J Carroll E Cooper D Jones C Slough D Taylor	Chair
	Officers:	Louise Senior Amanda Samuels	Head of Democratic Services Administration Officer
	Public:	0	
Also present:	CBC Councillor	S Goodchild	

12975 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

12976 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12977 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

12978 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th August 2024

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 27th August 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12979 PLANNING MATTERS

(a) The following planning applications were considered:

[CB/24/01851/ADV](#)
(click for more
details)

Advertisement: Installation of non-illuminated signage to outside of building.

Unit 1B, Thorn Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6TZ

Konica Minolta Business Solutions UK Ltd.

Comments: Houghton Regis Town Council raised no objection to this application.

Noted:

[CB/24/02469/DOC](#)
(click for more details)

Discharge of Conditions 22 and 23 against planning permission CB/12/03613/OUT (Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. Development to comprise: up to 5,150 dwellings (Use Class C3); up to 202,500 sqm gross of additional development in Use Classes: A1, A2, A3 (retail), A4 (public house), A5 (take away); B1, B2, B8 (offices, industrial and storage and distribution); C1 (hotel), C2 (care home), D1 and D2 (community and leisure); car showroom; data centre; petrol filling station; car parking; primary substation; energy centre; and for the laying out of the buildings; routes and open spaces within the development; and all associated works and operations including but not limited to: demolition; earthworks; engineering operations. All development, works and operations to be in accordance with the Development Parameters Schedule and Plans))

Houghton Regis North Site 1, Land on the northern edge of Houghton Regis

[CB/24/02390/DOC](#)
(click for more details)

Discharge of Conditions 1,2,8,14 and 16 against planning permission ref. CB/23/00066/RM (Reserved Matters: following Outline Application CB/12/03613/OUT (Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. Development to comprise: up to 5,150 dwellings (Use Class C3); up to 202,500 sqm gross of additional development in Use Classes: A1, A2, A3 (retail), A4 (public house), A5 (take away), B1, B2, B8 (offices, industrial and storage and distribution), C1 (hotel), C2 (care home), D1 and D2 (community and leisure), car showroom, data centre, petrol filling station, car parking; primary substation, energy centre, and for the laying out of the buildings, routes and open spaces within the development, and all associated works and operations including but not limited to: demolition, earthworks, engineering operations. All development, works and operations to be in accordance with the Development Parameters Schedule and Plans)approval sort for layout, scale, appearance and landscaping for 188 dwellings on parcels 3 and 4, along with parking and landscaping) materials, levels, cycle parking, fire hydrants, EEP

Houghton Regis North Site 1 Phase 3 Parcels 3 and 4 Houghton Regis

[CB/24/02496/DOC](#)
(click for more
details)

Discharge of Conditions 32 and 33 against Planning Permission CB/12/03613/OUT (Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. Development to comprise: up to 5,150 dwellings (Use Class C3); up to 202,500 sqm gross of additional development in Use Classes: A1, A2, A3 (retail), A4 (public house), A5 (take away); B1, B2, B8 (offices, industrial and storage and distribution); C1 (hotel), C2 (care home), D1 and D2 (community and leisure); car showroom; data centre; petrol filling station; car parking; primary substation; energy centre; and for the laying out of the buildings; routes and open spaces within the development; and all associated works and operations including but not limited to: demolition; earthworks; engineering operations. All development, works and operations to be in accordance with the Development Parameters Schedule and Plans.)

Land To The North And East Of Houghton Regis, Sundon Road, Houghton Regis

[CB/24/02519/NMA](#)
(click for more
details)

Non-material amendment to planning permission CB/21/05552/RM (Reserved Matters: following Outline Application CB/12/03613/OUT Mixed Development, supported by an Environmental Statement, which was submitted to the council during the application's determination process. Reserved Matters sought for Access, Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale for 100 homes and retail units (Use Class E)) amendment sought : Car park access moved on Hockett Street

Parcels 1 and 2 of Phase 2 of Houghton Regis North Site 1, Land on the northern edge of Houghton Regis

[CB/24/02420/LDCP](#)
(click for more
details)

Lawful Development Certificate Proposed: Part garage conversion

6 Tavistock Place, East End, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5NA

Permissions / Approvals / Consents

None received.

Refusals:

[CB/24/01770/FULL](#)
(click for more
details)

Erection of a detached house, associated parking and amenity space.

Land at Midway Cottage and The Cottage, Bedford Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6JP

Withdrawals:

<u>CB/24/01175/FULL</u> <u>(click for more details)</u>	Change of use from 16 bedroom C2 care home to F1 school (ground floor) and C2 residential institution (floors above ground floor). Hillside, Chalk Hill, Dunstable, LU6 1RT
<u>CB/24/01623/FULL</u> <u>(click for more details)</u>	Change of use of amenity land to garden land and creation of a new boundary line with a new 2m fence 29 Constable Close, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5ST

12980 CB/23/03551/RM - BURY SPINNEY, THORN ROAD

Members were presented with a notification from Central Bedfordshire Council regarding amendments to application CB/23/03551/RM.

The deadline for responses was 10th September; however, Members were advised that Houghton Regis Town Council had been given an extension to this deadline for responses to be submitted.

It was noted that some of the issues regarding this application had been addressed. There had previously been concerns regarding the development's proximity to water, but safety officers had confirmed they were satisfied that there was no risk.

Members raised the issue of the police report which outlined concerns regarding security, and questioned how these concerns were likely to be addressed. While there was no objection to the amended application, Members requested that the Committee's support of the police observations be noted.

Resolved: **To consider the Town Council's response to the amendments to application CB/23/03551/RM**

12981 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

Members were requested to consider an implementation group to ensure the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan and to set a renewal date for review and revision.

A discussion followed and it was suggested that the implementation group should be a sub-committee, since this would ensure transparency and follow council procedures. Another suggestion was that the duties could be adopted as part of the Planning Committee remit. It would be possible to maintain community engagement by inviting community members to Planning Committee meetings twice a year, specifically to discuss the Neighbourhood Plan.

The formation of a sub-committee would allow for the involvement of councillors from other committees and for co-opted members from the community to take part. The Planning Committee would still be able to pass relevant information to the sub-committee for action. In turn, the sub-committee would monitor how the Neighbourhood Plan was working and recommend changes, where necessary, back to the Planning Committee, which could then decide what action was required. This

would prevent potential conflicts of interest between Houghton Regis Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan currently being formulated by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Members agreed that two meetings a year would be sufficient, but this could be revised and/or extraordinary meetings held as necessary.

Members questioned how the £3,000 would be used and it was confirmed that this would predominantly be for professional fees. This expenditure was in line with the recommendation made in the Corporate Peer Challenge Review for the formation of an implementation group.

It was requested that the recommendations be considered individually.

An amendment was proposed to recommendation 1 to read:

To recommend to Town Council a Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Sub-Committee be formed, consisting of a combination of councillors and representatives of the community.

The officer recommendation read: *To recommend to Town Council a Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Group be formed, consisting of a combination of councillors and representatives of the community.*

Members voted on the proposed amended recommendation:

Seconded by Cllr Cooper

Members voted on the amendment

In favour: 5

Abstentions: 2

Accordingly, this became the substantive motion.

Members voted on the amended recommendation

In favour: 5

Abstentions: 2

Members agreed that the change of wording would carry throughout all recommendations where relevant.

Resolved:

- 1. To recommend to Town Council a Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Sub-Committee be formed, consisting of a combination of councillors and representatives of the community.**
- 2. To consider the creation of an Implementation Sub-Committee to monitor the usage and effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) and provide regular reports on its application in planning matters.**
- 3. To consider the frequency of meetings to track the NHP's impact and propose updates as required.**
- 4. To approve the use of £3,000 from General Reserves, as set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and supported by Town Council.**

12982 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES/LOCAL PLAN- UPDATE/PROGRESS

Woodside Link – No substantive update to report.

A5 M1 Link – No substantive update to report.

All Saints View – No substantive update to report.

Linnmere – No substantive update to report.

Bidwell West – No substantive update to report.

Kingsland – No substantive update to report.

Windsor Drive – No substantive update to report.

Section 106 Monies – No substantive update to report.

Resolved: To note the information

Before the meeting closed, Councillor Jones provided an update to Members regarding recent work conducted at Vane Cottage, a listed building located within a conservation area.

Issues Raised

1. Unauthorised tree removal
2. Potential violation of conservation area regulations
3. Lack of proper applications for tree work

Current Status

- Planning Enforcement had been notified and was now involved in the matter.
- The Planning department had been requested to halt ongoing work at the site.
- Members of the Planning Committee were not aware of any submitted applications for tree work to be carried out.

Members wishing to pursue this matter further are advised to contact the Town Clerk. The Clerk had received communication from Lorna Carver, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place and Communities, regarding this issue.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.36pm

Dated this 7th day of October 2024

Chairman

7/10
M. Carver

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Planning Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on

7th October 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: M Herber Chairman
 E Billington
 E Cooper
 D Jones
 C Slough
 D Taylor

Officers: Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Apologies: J Carroll

Public: 0

12997 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Carroll.

12998 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12999 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

13000 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on the 16th September 2024.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13001 PLANNING MATTERS

(a) The following planning applications were considered:

[CB/24/02548/FULL](#) Retain existing site boundary fencing
 (click for more 2 Arnald Way, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5UN
 details) Mr & Mrs Roche

Comments:

Members highlighted that this work had already been completed.

UKR

Houghton Regis Town Council raised an objection to this application on the grounds of:

- **Enclosure of amenity land**

[CB/24/02417/ADV](#)
(click for more details)

Advertisement: Installation of high and low level illuminated fascia signage, non-illuminated vinyl graphic signage and externally illuminated monolith sign to the car park.
Houghton Regis Leisure Centre, Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5PX

Comments:

Houghton Regis Town Council raised no objections to this application.

[CB/24/02593/ADV](#)
(click for more details)

Advertisement: 1no D6 (digital advertisement) screen
Esso, Houghton Green Service Station, 7 The Green, Houghton Regis, Dunstable

Comments:

Houghton Regis Town Council raised an objection to this application on the grounds of:

Safety concerns, causing a potential distraction risk to drivers

[CB/24/02679/FULL](#)
(click for more details)

Erection of 2.4m palisade fence
Unit F, Townsend Farm Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5BA
Hemel Eggs and Dairy Limited

Comments:

Houghton Regis Town Council raised no objections to this application.

Noted:

[CB/24/02701/DOC](#)
(click for more details)

Discharge of Condition 15 against planning permission CB/23/01706/RM(Reserved Matters: following Outline Application CB/12/03613/OUT (Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. Development to comprise: up to 5,150 dwellings (Use Class C3);) Reserved matters for Parcel 1 and 2 - AMP3 for 236 dwellings, access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale)
Parcels 1 & 2, Houghton Regis North 1, Sundon Road, Houghton Regis, LU5 5GX
Stonebond Properties (St Albans) Limited

CB/24/02658/DOC
 (click for more details)
 Discharge of Condition 18 (Parts 1 & 3) against planning permission ref. CB/22/04525/VOC (Removal of condition 10 and Variation of conditions 13, 15 and 21 of planning permission CB/19/04220/OUT (Outline Application for Residential Development for up to 100 Dwellings with all matters reserved, except access) vary condition 13 from the requirement of 14 mainstream housing together with 9 units for care/support to 13.72% of total units suitable for the elderly and condition 21 to be amended to "The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plan: 13060as2.15 Rev D (in so far as it relates to the means of access)")
 Bury Spinney, Thorn Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6JQ

Permissions / Approvals / Consents

None received.

Refusals:

CB/24/01770/FULL (click for more details)
 Erection of a detached house, associated parking and amenity space.
 Land at Midway Cottage and The Cottage, Bedford Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 6JP

Withdrawals:

CB/24/01175/FULL (click for more details)
 Change of use from 16 bedroom C2 care home to F1 school (ground floor) and C2 residential institution (floors above ground floor).
 Hillside, Chalk Hill, Dunstable, LU6 1RT

CB/24/01623/FULL (click for more details)
 Change of use of amenity land to garden land and creation of a new boundary line with a new 2m fence
 29 Constable Close, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5ST

13002 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES/LOCAL PLAN– UPDATE/PROGRESS

Woodside Link – No substantive update to report.

A5 M1 Link – No substantive update to report.

All Saints View – No substantive update to report.

Linnere – No substantive update to report.

Bidwell West – No substantive update to report.

Kingsland – No substantive update to report.

Windsor Drive – No substantive update to report.

Section 106 Monies – No substantive update to report.

Resolved: **To note the information**

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.10pm

Dated this 28th day of October 2024

Chairman



Nominee	D Jones	Proposed by:	C Slough
		Seconded by:	Y Farrell

No further nominations were received.

Accordingly, Cllr Jones was elected as Vice Chair of the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee for the municipal year of 2024/2025.

1033 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from David Gibbons

1034 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE CO-OPTION

The Terms of Reference require the list of Co-opted Members to be reviewed annually, by the Town Joint Committee.

Members had received applications for co-option from:

- David Gibbons - a co-opted member during 2023/2024, confirmed would like to be co-opted again
- Jo Anderson – a co-opted member during 2023/2024, confirmed would like to be co-opted again
- Carole Regan – a co-opted member during 2023/2024, confirmed would like to be co-opted again
- David Hill – Chairman of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society
- Roger Turner – Trustee of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society and former town and district councillor for Houghton Regis
- Tim Haines - director of HRCDC, a co-opted member of the Community Association and a resident of Bidwell West

Members were invited to consider whether they would like to explore the possibility of seeking to co-opt further local stakeholders onto the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee. Members felt that a co-optee who had an education involvement would be beneficial to the group.

Resolved: To approve the Co-optee applications from:

- David Gibbons
- Jo Anderson
- Carole Regan
- David Hill
- Roger Turner
- Tim Haines

1035 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

1036 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

1037 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd April 2024.

Members approved the Minutes with the amendment of the date from 24th April to 23rd April 2024.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd April 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

1038 COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members received the Terms of Reference which related to this committee.

Members felt that councillors from both authorities should work more closely in order to increase the effectiveness of the Partnership Committee. This was one of the points highlighted in the HRTC Corporate Peer Challenge report.

It was suggested that the remit of the meetings needed to change and that an action plan should be put together to explore different methods of operation and ways to improve. It was also thought that the relationship would benefit if Central Bedfordshire Council could discuss potential actions prior to decision making.

It was proposed that the Chair of the Partnership Committee could put forward, to Central Bedfordshire Council, any issues raised by the committee.

The Chair agreed to seek what mechanisms were in place for doing so.

1039 CONFIRMATION OF THE SECRETARIAT

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the Committee was required to confirm the Secretariat for the Partnership Committee for 2024/25.

The Secretariat role had traditionally sat with the Town Clerk of Houghton Regis Town Council. The Town Clerk had suggested that the Partnership might want to take the opportunity to make a change; however, they were happy to continue in the role if Members resolved to maintain the current arrangement.

Members discussed the possibility of appointing a representative from Central Bedfordshire Council to the role and what that would mean to the Partnership.

Members agreed to maintain the status quo for the current year but agreed that this was something that could be explored further prior to confirming the Secretariat in 2025/26. In the meantime, information could be gathered to establish how such an arrangement would work and whether CBC was likely to have the capacity.

1040 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Members were invited to consider the Partnership Committee workplan.

CTA

Members were invited to suggest which items from the workplan should be given priority. It was suggested that these should be:

- health and wellbeing in Houghton Regis (inc. primary health care)
- education (inc. primary school places)

It was questioned whether customers would remain at the Townsend Centre until the new facilities were available. The new site was due to open in spring 2025 but delays meant this could be extended to summer.

The Community Engagement Manager advised that colleagues were seeking approval to consult on the policy and principles to inform the draft school organisation plan and were looking at engagement opportunities to attend the joint / partnership committees to discuss priorities.

It was highlighted that many Houghton Regis residents were having to travel outside of the area for healthcare. As the provision of child services was based on doctor registrations, this would mean that figures were unlikely to provide a true representation. In addition, the Houghton Regis Medical Centre, which was the town's primary healthcare provider, was rated as Amber.

1041 CBC STRATEGIC UPDATE REPORT

Members received, for information, an update report from Central Bedfordshire Council on the following:

- HR Leisure centre
- SEND provision
- Local plan process
- HR Day Centre
- Townsend Centre
- HR Quarry

The CBC Community Engagement Manager informed the Committee that the Houghton Regis Together meetings had been reconvened to look at how local organisations could work better together to support local residents and develop a way of working following the end of Time 2 Connect. There was a potential for these meetings to be held at venues around Houghton Regis.

The Committee discussed that there was a perception that Houghton Regis was viewed as separate areas and that residents felt more isolated. The new leisure centre might alter this perception, but it was necessary to look at ways to create a greater sense of union. It was suggested that the Houghton Regis Town Crier could contribute by including more information on external groups and events.

It was suggested that, as the Town Partnership did not get to make some of the bigger decisions, perhaps it needed to set goals within the municipal year and to focus on ways of achieving them or review why they were not achieved.

It was highlighted that Bidwell West was in need of a community centre; however, this should not preclude the delivery of a community centre within Houghton Regis town centre. There was always a need for more spaces, and it was suggested that sites could be assessed by CBC and how best to utilise them.

CA

1042 LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

Sian Farrier, Policy and Planning Manager - Strategic Growth, CBC, gave a presentation on the Local Plans launch and engagement process.

The Local Plan was a key document that set out how Central Bedfordshire would grow in the future.

The launch had commenced in July and would run until September. The purpose of the launch was to:

- Raise awareness of the local plan
- Build understanding of the benefits of the Local Plan
- Shape early thinking with initial questions to understand aspirations and inform strategy direction

The Local Plan was due to be adopted in December 2028, but it was emphasised that engagement was a priority in addition to keeping everyone informed throughout the process.

One of the core aims of CBC's Strategic Plan was to get the right homes in the right places and ensure housing growth and infrastructure were carefully considered. The Local Plan played a key role in achieving this.

The approach to engagement would be predominantly digital, but paper copies of documents would be available from libraries and on request. It was critical that underrepresented groups and young people would also form part of the process.

Councillors would be enabled to share information using a toolkit of information. There would be a clear feedback loop to ensure optimum communication, and a bespoke website had been created.

Six main themes were being covered:

- Green space and nature
- Jobs
- Homes
- Transport
- Local facilities
- Enhancing the unique character of local areas

Residents would be kept involved and feedback options would be available, including map-based feedback.

A toolkit was also available for ward members and town and parish councils to help circulate the information.

The Town Partnership was invited to contribute and promote the plan.

Members raised the subject of the new Government's planning policy proposals and the impact these proposals would have on the Local Plan. The Policy and Planning Manager confirmed that CBC would form a response to these. It was also questioned whether the Local Plan would align with the Neighbourhood Plan. The Policy and Planning Manager

CA

informed Members that the Neighbourhood Planning Officer, Jane Hubbard, would be liaising with communities to provide them with guidance.

Assurance was sought that public engagement would be a listening exercise and that there was no set agenda. It was emphasised that the feedback loop was particularly important and that the process would be transparent.

1043 HRTC CORPORATE PLAN - TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

At the previous meeting it was agreed that the Partnership Committee would support HRTC's request to help deliver on 3 objectives within the HRTC Corporate Plan. The objectives were:

- Improve the visual appearance of the town centre
- Work with partners to improve the quality and accessibility of the public realm in the town centre
- Stimulate local business development and employment and training opportunities

An update on town centre improvements was provided by Beverley Gaynor, Central Bedfordshire Councils Programme Manager, on relevant work her team were undertaking. Members were advised that this was the final year of the UKSPF which covered three elements:

- Communities and Place
- Supporting local business
- People and skills

Town centre improvements would be the focus of the last year of delivery. An investment plan had been put together and the following items were currently being worked on:

- Parking problems outside All Saints View
- Supporting inclusion in Britain in Bloom
- Improving the power supply for the Christmas lights
- Highways improvements close to Chequers roundabout being discussed.
- A rain garden

There were also funds to support cultural activities in the area being progressed to encourage integration.

CBC was in the process of procuring benchmarking reports to compare the current situation to allow evaluation when then projects had been delivered. A Community Grant Fund had been applied for and a Cultural Grant Fund to support cultural groups.

Members raised the issue that gateway signage did not encompass the new developments. New signage would be welcomed, along with noticeboards to help the feeling of inclusion. It was highlighted that this would be done once the land had been transferred to the Town Council.

1044 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

A verbal update was provided by Ian Haynes, Head of Environmental & Community Services, HRTC, on the work HRTC was undertaking in engaging with young people.

Houghton Regis Town Council had received investment from the Youth Investment Fund up until the end of March 2025. At the Community Services Meeting (Minute no 12918), it

CA

had been agreed for the town council to include funding, at budget setting, to allow the work to continue in 2025/26. It was envisaged, that future funding, would allow for a full-time qualified youth worker to be employed along with an apprenticeship role being created. In appointing to these posts would allow for outreach work to continue.

Lisa Wright Youth and Participation Manager – Children’s Services, provided members with an update.

Members were informed that CBC had a Youth Parliament that young people were elected to for a two-year term. Thirty-eight young people worked on campaigns requested by young people in Central Bedfordshire; these were common themes across Central Beds. Members of the parliament had individual issues they stood for as part of the election process. There had been much success in encouraging young people to take part in the transportation consultation and would be ensuring that young voices were heard in the Local Plan process. Work with The Authentic Voice panel for domestic abuse had also been carried out helping to create awareness of these issues amongst young people. There had also been a meeting with the Strategic Alliance: a group including the DCS and other lead representatives who impact on children’s services.

1045 ITEMS REQUESTING ATTENTION BY CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

Members had previously been advised of the CBC process to determine further consideration, at CBC committee level, of items and issues.

Members of this committee were able to use this process to forward items for CBC’s attention via the CBC Joint Committee Chair or CBC Joint Committee Vice Chair.

Members were requested to identify and confirm if there were any requested items for CBC’s attention.

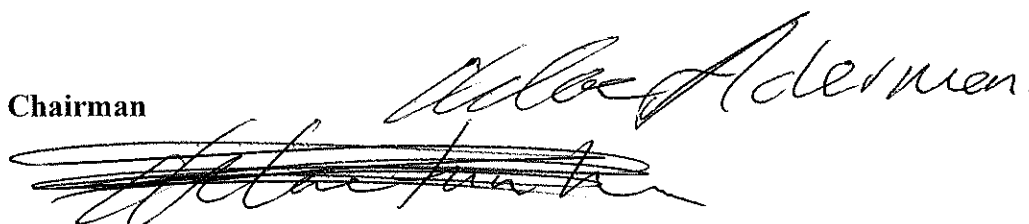
Members requested that the Chair pursue the Town regaining possession of the community centre in Bedford Square. It was understood that lease would expire in July 2026 and Members agreed that it was necessary to plan the next step now. The Chair agreed to pursue this issue.

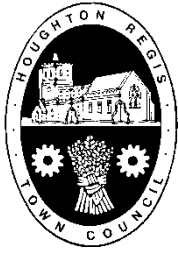
It was highlighted that a review of principles and plans for school places was scheduled for September 2024. There was a need for accurate data to be captured since current boundaries no longer reflected the full scope of Houghton Regis and children were attending school outside of their area. More funding was needed for schools and new schools needed to be built.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.00pm

Dated this 22nd day of October 2024

Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Alderman', is written over a horizontal line. Below this line, there is another horizontal line with some scribbled-out text underneath it.



Date: 16th December 2024

Title: SPORTS HALL IN HOUGHTON REGIS

Purpose of the Report: To enable members to consider the way forward.

Contact Officer: Clare Evans, Town Clerk

1. RECOMMENDATION

1. To explore a way to secure the retention of the sports halls as an interim measure;
2. To submit a community asset transfer application to CBC for the transfer of the existing leisure centre sports hall to enable public usage of a sports hall to be maintained when the new hall at Houstone School is unavailable for public use.

2. BACKGROUND

Discussions have been held on sports hall availability in Houghton Regis at a number of meetings¹, including;

- Houghton Regis Annual Parish Meeting on 15th April 2024,
- Town Council meetings on 18th March 2024 and 14th October 2024
- Partnership meetings on 23rd April 2024, 22nd October 2024 and 27th November 2024.

These discussions have been in depth and have shown considerable strength of feeling on the lack future lack of availability of a sports hall during school hours from both community representatives and members of CBC and HRTC. The discussions have also questioned the suitability / accuracy of data being used on which decisions were based. CBC have highlighted the opportunity to view supporting information submitted as part of the planning application process for Houstone School² and the new Leisure centre³ which may provide some clarity on figures.

¹ The Minutes of these meetings can be found here: [Committees \(houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk\)](https://www.houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk/committees)

² [Central Bedfordshire Council Planning Pages](#) – Houstone School

³ [Central Bedfordshire Council Planning Pages](#) – new Leisure Centre

3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

In summary:

- Current sports hall provision is provided 7 days a week, usage spans across the days and the week
- CBC are developing a new leisure centre due to be open in Spring 2025, this new centre does not include a sports hall
- Future sports hall provision will be provided by Houstone school, this will be available for use outside of school hours and exam periods. The details of how this facility will be managed have not been made public at present.
- Current users of the sports hall will be displaced to Houstone School or Dunstable Leisure centre
- CBC maintain that:
 - most existing users have been accommodated either through Houstone School or Dunstable Leisure centre
 - data shows a declining use of sports halls
 - need for sports hall provision will be met through Houstone School or Dunstable Leisure centre
 - there is no service need for the existing hall to be kept open
- community / sports and education representatives maintain that the data CBC used was not suitable and that demand is there and that the alternative provision in Houstone School and Dunstable Leisure centre will not accommodate existing users or the demands of a growing town
- Of particular note is the use of the current sports hall by the Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB). This school supports excluded young people and their curriculum is heavily reliant on sport and physical exercise. They have very limited provision within their school and rely heavily on use of the sports hall. Transporting their young people to Dunstable provides significant challenges and higher costs.
- The ACB are willing to explore opportunities for a joint management arrangement.

4. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The special meeting of the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee on 27th November was convened to enable members of that committee to consider the continued provision of a sports hall in Houghton Regis when the new hall at Houstone School is unavailable for public use (during school hours).

Members of Partnership were invited to consider the feasibility of a dedicated community sports hall in Houghton Regis and what might be involved to make that happen. The resolution⁴ from Partnership was:

For this committee's support to be given to HRTC for detailed consideration by HRTC to explore a way to secure the retention of the sports halls as an interim measure whilst

⁴ The draft minutes of that meeting are being prepared, it is anticipated that they will be available ahead of Council by following this link [Committees \(houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk\)](https://www.houghtonregis-tc.gov.uk/committees)

a community asset transfer application be developed and submitted for determination by CBC.

The recommendation provided as part of this report seeks to further the resolution of the Partnership Committee.

5. HRTC CORPORATE PLAN

2 Local Services and Facilities: To provide a broad range of high quality services and facilities for our residents, visitors and businesses

2.5 Maintain and enhance sporting provision both at existing and soon-to-be-adopted sites.

3 Quality of Life: To enhance the quality of life of our residents

3.2 Encourage a healthier lifestyle through healthy eating, smoking & vaping cessation and improved activity levels.

3.3 Improve access to services and support through the provision of a network of Parish-wide community hubs.

4 Management and Operations: To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Council as the key local service provider

4.4 Work with CBC and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for the adoption of additional community assets by the Town Council.

4.5 Enhance the role of the council.

4.6 To actively consider and weight the impact of new and existing initiatives and services.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Implications

- Staff implications

Legal Implications

- There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations

Financial Implications

- There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations

Risk Implications

- Reputation – will ensure that the town council is best representing its residents to secure continued service provision

Equalities Implications

Houghton Regis Town Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage

and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This project / issue does not discriminate.

Climate Change Implications

- There are no climate change implications arising from the recommendations

Press Contact

The decision relating to this agenda item should be communicated to the press, via the website and social media.

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This issue has been debated at length. There is pressure from the community and the ACB to maintain sports hall availability during school hours and there has been wide spread political support from members of HRTC and the Partnership Committee to see this provision remain in Houghton Regis.

8. APPENDICES

None



Houghton Regis Town Council

Financial Regulations

Date of Approval:	
Date of Review:	2 nd December 2024

Based on NALC Financial Regulations 2024

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1. General

- 1.1 These Financial Regulations govern the financial management of the council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the council. They are one of the council's governing documents and shall be observed in conjunction with the council's Standing Orders.
- 1.2 Councillors are expected to follow these regulations and not to entice employees to breach them. Failure to follow these regulations brings the office of councillor into disrepute.
- 1.3 Wilful breach of these regulations by an employee may result in disciplinary proceedings.
- 1.4 In these Financial Regulations:
 - 'Accounts and Audit Regulations' means the regulations issued under Sections 32, 43(2) and 46 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and then in force, unless otherwise specified.
 - "Approve" refers to an online action, allowing an electronic transaction to take place.
 - "Authorise" refers to a decision by the council, or a committee or an officer, to allow something to happen.
 - 'Proper practices' means those set out in *The Practitioners' Guide*
 - *Practitioners' Guide* refers to the guide issued by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) and published by NALC in England or Governance and Accountability for Local Councils in Wales – A Practitioners Guide jointly published by One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks in Wales.
 - 'Must' and **bold text** refer to a statutory obligation the council cannot change.
 - 'Shall' refers to a non-statutory instruction by the council to its members and staff.
- 1.5 The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) holds a statutory office, appointed by the council. The Clerk has been appointed as RFO and these regulations apply accordingly. The RFO;
 - acts under the policy direction of the council;
 - administers the council's financial affairs in accordance with all Acts, Regulations and proper practices;
 - determines on behalf of the council its accounting records and control systems;
 - ensures the accounting control systems are observed;
 - ensures the accounting records are kept up to date;

- seeks economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of council resources; and
- produces financial management information as required by the council.

1.6 **The council must not delegate any decision regarding:**

- **setting the final budget or the precept (council tax requirement);**
- **the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of its internal controls**
- **approving accounting statements;**
- **approving an annual governance statement;**
- **borrowing;**
- **declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence; and**
- **addressing recommendations from the internal or external auditors**

1.7 In addition, the council shall:

- determine and regularly review the bank mandate for all council bank accounts;
- authorise any grant or single commitment in excess of the revenue budget provided.

2. Risk management and internal control

- 2.1. The council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control, which delivers effective financial, operational and risk management.
- 2.2. The Clerk shall prepare, for approval by the council, a risk management policy covering all activities of the council. This policy and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.
- 2.3. When considering any new activity, the Clerk shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals for consideration by the council.
- 2.4. **At least once a year, the council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control, before approving the Annual Governance Statement.**
- 2.5. **The accounting control systems determined by the RFO must include measures to:**
 - **ensure that risk is appropriately managed;**
 - **ensure the prompt, accurate recording of financial transactions;**
 - **prevent and detect inaccuracy or fraud; and**

- **allow the reconstitution of any lost records;**
- **identify the duties of officers dealing with transactions and**
- **ensure division of responsibilities.**

2.6. At least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council.

2.7. Regular back-up copies shall be made of the records on any council computer and stored either online or in a separate location from the computer. The council shall put measures in place to ensure that the ability to access any council computer is not lost if an employee leaves or is incapacitated for any reason.

3. Accounts and audit

3.1 All accounting procedures and financial records of the council shall be determined by the RFO in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

3.2 The accounting records determined by the RFO must be sufficient to explain the council's transactions and to disclose its financial position with reasonably accuracy at any time. In particular, they must contain:

- **day-to-day entries of all sums of money received and expended by the council and the matters to which they relate;**
- **a record of the assets and liabilities of the council;**

3.3 The accounting records shall be designed to facilitate the efficient preparation of the accounting statements in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

3.4 The RFO shall complete and certify the annual Accounting Statements of the council contained in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with proper practices, as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year. Having certified the Accounting Statements, the RFO shall submit them (with any related documents) to the council, within the timescales required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

3.5 The council must ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and internal control system in accordance with proper practices.

3.6 Any officer or member of the council must make available such documents and records as the internal or external auditor consider necessary for the purpose of the audit and shall, as directed by the

council, supply the RFO, internal auditor, or external auditor with such information and explanation as the council considers necessary.

- 3.7 The internal auditor shall be appointed by [the council] and shall carry out their work to evaluate the effectiveness of the council's risk management, control and governance processes in accordance with proper practices specified in the Practitioners' Guide.
- 3.8 The council shall ensure that the internal auditor:
- is competent and independent of the financial operations of the council;
 - reports to council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one written report during each financial year;
 - can demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and
 - has no involvement in the management or control of the council
- 3.9 Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:
- perform any operational duties for the council;
 - initiate or approve accounting transactions;
 - provide financial, legal or other advice including in relation to any future transactions; or
 - direct the activities of any council employee, except to the extent that such employees have been appropriately assigned to assist the internal auditor.
- 3.10 For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to internal audit the terms 'independent' and 'independence' shall have the same meaning as described in The Practitioners Guide.
- 3.11 The RFO shall make arrangements for the exercise of electors' rights in relation to the accounts, including the opportunity to inspect the accounts, books, and vouchers and display or publish any notices and documents required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.12 The RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

4. Budget and precept

- 4.1 **Before setting a precept, the council must calculate its council tax requirement for each financial year by preparing and approving a budget, in accordance with The Local Government Finance Act 1992 or succeeding legislation.**

- 4.2 Budgets for salaries and wages, including employer contributions shall be reviewed by the relevant committee at least annually by December for the following financial year and the final version shall be evidenced by a hard copy schedule signed by the Clerk and the Chair of the relevant committee.
- 4.3 No later than November each year, the RFO shall prepare a draft budget with detailed estimates of all receipts and payments/income and expenditure for the following financial year taking account of the lifespan of assets and cost implications of repair or replacement.
- 4.4 Unspent budgets for completed projects shall not be carried forward to a subsequent year. Unspent funds for partially completed projects may only be carried forward (by placing them in an earmarked reserve) with the formal approval of the full council.
- 4.5 Each committee (if any) shall review its draft budget and submit any proposed amendments to the council not later than the end of January each year.
- 4.6 The draft budget forecast, including any recommendations for the use or accumulation of reserves, shall be considered by the council.
- 4.7 Having considered the proposed budget, the council shall determine its council tax (England) requirement by setting a budget. The council shall set a precept for this amount no later than the end of January for the ensuing financial year.
- 4.8 **Any member with council tax unpaid for more than two months is prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and must disclose at the start of the meeting that Section 106 applies to them.**
- 4.9 The RFO shall **issue the precept to the billing authority no later than the end of February** and supply each member with a copy of the agreed annual budget.
- 4.10 The agreed budget provides a basis for monitoring progress during the year by comparing actual spending and income against what was planned.
- 4.11 Any addition to, or withdrawal from, any earmarked reserve shall be agreed by the council or relevant committee.

5. Procurement

- 5.1 **Members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times.** Any officer procuring goods, services or works should ensure, as far as practicable, that the best available terms are obtained, usually by obtaining prices from several suppliers.
- 5.2 The RFO should verify the lawful nature of any proposed purchase before it is made and in the case of new or infrequent purchases, should ensure that

the legal power being used is reported to the meeting at which the order is authorised and also recorded in the minutes.

- 5.3 Every contract shall comply with these the council's Standing Orders and these Financial Regulations and no exceptions shall be made, except in an emergency.
- 5.4 **For a contract for the supply of goods, services or works where the estimated value will exceed the thresholds set by Parliament, the full requirements of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or any superseding legislation ("the Legislation"), must be followed in respect of the tendering, award and notification of that contract.**
- 5.5 Where the estimated value is below the Government threshold, the council shall (with the exception of items listed in paragraph 5.12) obtain prices as follows:
- 5.6 For contracts estimated to exceed £100,000 including VAT, the Clerk shall advertise an open invitation for tenders in compliance with any relevant provisions of the Legislation. Tenders shall be invited in accordance with Appendix 1.
- 5.7 **For contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT, the council must comply with any requirements of the Legislation¹ regarding the advertising of contract opportunities and the publication of notices about the award of contracts.**
- 5.8 For contracts greater than £5,000 excluding VAT the Clerk or Head of Service shall seek at least 3 fixed-price quotes;
- 5.9 where the value is between £500 and £5,000 excluding VAT, the Clerk or Head of Service shall try to obtain 3 estimates which might include evidence of online prices, or recent prices from regular suppliers.
- 5.10 For smaller purchases, all officers shall seek to achieve value for money.
- 5.11 **Contracts must not be split into smaller lots to avoid compliance with these rules.**
- 5.12 The requirement to obtain competitive prices in these regulations need not apply to contracts that relate to items (i) to (iv) below:
- i. specialist services, such as legal professionals acting in disputes;
 - ii. repairs to, or parts for, existing machinery or equipment;
 - iii. works, goods or services that constitute an extension of an existing contract;
 - iv. goods or services that are only available from one supplier or are sold at a fixed price.

¹ The Regulations require councils to use the Contracts Finder website if they advertise contract opportunities and also to publicise the award of contracts over £30,000 including VAT, regardless of whether they were advertised.

- 5.13 When applications are made to waive this financial regulation to enable a price to be negotiated without competition, the reason should be set out in a recommendation to the council or relevant committee. Avoidance of competition is not a valid reason.
- 5.14 The council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.
- 5.15 Individual purchases within an agreed budget for that type of expenditure may be authorised by:
- The Budget Holder, under delegated authority.
 - Such authorisation must be supported by a minute or other auditable evidence trail.
- 5.16 No individual member, or informal group of members may issue an official order or make any contract on behalf of the council.
- 5.17 No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the budget for that type of expenditure other than by resolution of the council or a duly delegated committee acting within its Terms of Reference except in an emergency.
- 5.18 In cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises, the clerk may authorise expenditure of up to 5,000 excluding VAT on repair, replacement or other work that in their judgement is necessary, whether or not there is any budget for such expenditure. The Clerk shall report such action to the Chair as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.
- 5.19 No expenditure shall be authorised, no contract entered into, or tender accepted in relation to any major project, unless the delegated committee is satisfied that the necessary funds are available and that where a loan is required, Government borrowing approval has been obtained first.
- 5.20 An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services. Copies of orders shall be retained, along with evidence of receipt of goods.
- 5.21 Any ordering system can be misused and access to them shall be controlled by the RFO.

6. Banking and payments

- 6.1 The council's banking arrangements, including the bank mandate, shall be made by the RFO and authorised by the council; banking arrangements shall not be delegated to a committee. The council has resolved to bank with NatWest. The arrangements shall be reviewed annually for security and efficiency.
- 6.2 The council must have safe and efficient arrangements for making payments, to safeguard against the possibility of fraud or error. Wherever possible, more than one person should be involved in any payment, for

example by dual online authorisation or dual cheque signing. Even where a purchase has been authorised, the payment must also be authorised, and only authorised payments shall be approved or signed to allow the funds to leave the council's bank.

- 6.3 All invoices for payment should be examined for arithmetical accuracy, analysed to the appropriate expenditure heading and verified to confirm that the work, goods or services were received, checked and represent expenditure previously authorised by the council before being certified by the relevant Head of Service. Where the certification of invoices is done as a batch, this shall include a statement by the RFO that all invoices listed have been 'examined, verified and certified' by the RFO.
- 6.4 Personal payments (including salaries, wages, expenses and any payment made in relation to the termination of employment) may be summarised to avoid disclosing any personal information.
- 6.5 All payments shall be made by online banking, in accordance with a resolution of the council or duly delegated committee, unless the council resolves to use a different payment method.
- 6.6 For each financial year the RFO may draw up a schedule of regular payments due in relation to a continuing contract or obligation (such as Salaries, PAYE, National Insurance, pension contributions, rent, rates, regular maintenance contracts and similar items), which the council or a duly delegated committee may authorise in advance for the year.
- 6.7 A copy of this schedule of regular payments shall be signed by two members on each and every occasion when payment is made - to reduce the risk of duplicate payments.
- 6.8 A list of such payments shall be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the Corporate Services Committee for information only.
- 6.9 The RFO shall have delegated authority to authorise payments in the following circumstances:
 - i. payments of up to £5,000 excluding VAT in cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises.
 - ii. any payment necessary to avoid a charge under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 or to comply with contractual terms, where the due date for payment is before the next scheduled meeting of the Corporate Services Committee, where the RFO certify that there is no dispute or other reason to delay payment, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council.
 - iii. Fund transfers within the councils banking arrangements up to the value of half the precept, provided that a list of such movements

between the councils bank accounts shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council or corporate services committee.

6.10 The RFO shall present a schedule of payments requiring authorisation, forming part of the agenda for the meeting, together with the relevant invoices, to the council or Corporate Services committee. The council or Corporate Services committee shall review the schedule for compliance and, having satisfied itself, shall authorise payment by resolution. The authorised schedule shall be initialled immediately below the last item by the person chairing the meeting. A detailed list of all payments shall be disclosed within or as an attachment to the minutes of that meeting.

7. Electronic payments

- 7.1 Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, RFO shall be appointed as the Service Administrator. The bank mandate agreed by the council shall identify a number of councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts and a minimum of two people will be involved in any online approval process. The Clerk may be an authorised signatory, but no signatory should be involved in approving any payment to themselves.
- 7.2 All authorised signatories shall have access, if requested, to view the council's bank accounts online.
- 7.3 No employee or councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the council or its banking, to anyone not authorised in writing by the council or a duly delegated committee.
- 7.4 The Service Administrator shall set up all items due for payment online. A list of payments for approval, together with copies of the relevant invoices, shall be sent by email to two authorised signatories.
- 7.5 In the prolonged absence of the Service Administrator an authorised signatory shall set up any payments due before the return of the Service Administrator.
- 7.6 Two councillors who are authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment.
- 7.7 Evidence shall be retained showing which members approved the payment.
- 7.8 A full list of all payments made in a month shall be provided to the next Corporate Services committee meeting.
- 7.9 With the approval of the Corporate Services Committee in each case, regular payments (such as gas, electricity, telephone, broadband, water, National Non-Domestic Rates, refuse collection, pension contributions and HMRC payments) may be made by variable direct debit, provided that the instructions are signed/approved online by the RFO. The approval of the use

of each variable direct debit shall be reviewed by the Corporate Services committee at least every two years.

7.10 Payment may be made by BACS or CHAPS by resolution of the Corporate Services committee provided that each payment is approved online by two authorised bank signatories, evidence is retained, and any payments are reported to the Corporate Services committee at the next meeting. The approval of the use of BACS or CHAPS shall be renewed by resolution of the council at least every two years.

7.11 If thought appropriate by the council, regular payments of fixed sums may be made by banker's standing order, provided that the instructions are signed by the RFO, evidence of this is retained and any payments are reported to council when made. The approval of the use of a banker's standing order shall be reviewed by the Corporate Services committee at least every two years.

7.12 Account details for suppliers may only be changed upon written notification by the supplier verified by the RFO and authorised signatory. This is a potential area for fraud and the individuals involved should ensure that any change is genuine. Data held should be checked with suppliers every two years.

7.13 Members and officers shall ensure that any computer used for the council's financial business has adequate security, with anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software installed and regularly updated.

7.14 Remembered password facilities should not be used on any computer used for council banking.

8. Cheque payments

8.1 Cheques or orders for payment in accordance with a resolution or delegated decision shall be signed by two members and countersigned by an authorised officer.

8.2 A signatory having a family or business relationship with the beneficiary of a payment shall not, under normal circumstances, be a signatory to that payment.

8.3 To indicate agreement of the details on the cheque with the counterfoil and the invoice or similar documentation, the signatories shall also initial the cheque counterfoil and invoice.

8.4 Cheques or orders for payment shall not normally be presented for signature other than at, or immediately before or after a council or Corporate Services committee meeting. Any signatures obtained away from council meetings shall be reported to the council or Corporate Services committee at the next convenient meeting.

9. Payment cards

- 9.1 Any Debit Card issued for use will be specifically restricted to the Clerk and will also be restricted to a single transaction maximum value of £1000 unless authorised by council or corporate services committee in writing before any order is placed.
- 9.2 A pre-paid debit card may be issued to employees with varying limits. These limits will be set by the Corporate Services committee. Transactions and purchases made will be reported to Corporate Services committee and authority for topping-up shall be at the discretion of Corporate Services committee.
- 9.3 Any corporate credit card or trade card account opened by the council will be specifically restricted to use by the Clerk and Heads of Service and any balance shall be paid in full each month.
- 9.4 Personal credit or debit cards of members or staff shall not be used under any circumstances.

10. Petty Cash

- 10.1 The RFO shall maintain a petty cash float of £250 and may provide petty cash to officers for the purpose of defraying operational and other expenses.
 - a) Vouchers for payments made from petty cash shall be kept, along with receipts to substantiate every payment.
 - b) Cash income received must not be paid into the petty cash float but must be separately banked, as provided elsewhere in these regulations.
 - c) Payments to maintain the petty cash float shall be shown separately on any schedule of payments presented for approval.

11. Payment of salaries and allowances

- 11.1 **As an employer, the council must make arrangements to comply with the statutory requirements of PAYE legislation.**
- 11.2 **Councillors allowances (where paid) are also liable to deduction of tax under PAYE rules and must be taxed correctly before payment.**
- 11.3 Salary rates shall be agreed by the council, or a duly delegated committee. No changes shall be made to any employee's gross pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of the Corporate Services committee.
- 11.4 Payment of salaries shall be made, after deduction of tax, national insurance, pension contributions and any similar statutory or discretionary deductions, on the dates stipulated in employment contracts.

- 11.5 Deductions from salary shall be paid to the relevant bodies within the required timescales, provided that each payment is reported, as set out in these regulations above.
- 11.6 Each payment to employees of net salary and to the appropriate creditor of the statutory and discretionary deductions shall be recorded in a payroll control account or other separate confidential record, with the total of such payments each calendar month reported in the cashbook. Payroll reports will be reviewed, under an exclusion of press and public agenda item, by the Corporate Services committee to ensure that the correct payments have been made.
- 11.7 Any termination payments shall be supported by a report to the council, setting out a clear business case. Termination payments shall only be authorised by the full council.
- 11.8 Before employing interim staff, the council must consider a full business case.

12. Loans and investments

- 12.1 Any application for Government approval to borrow money and subsequent arrangements for a loan must be authorised by the full council and recorded in the minutes. All borrowing shall be in the name of the council, after obtaining any necessary approval.
- 12.2 Any financial arrangement which does not require formal borrowing approval from the Secretary of State (such as Hire Purchase, Leasing of tangible assets or loans to be repaid within the financial year) must be authorised by the full council, following a written report on the value for money of the proposed transaction.
- 12.3 The council shall consider the requirement for an Investment Strategy and Policy in accordance with Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments, which must be written in accordance with relevant regulations, proper practices and guidance. Any Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.
- 12.4 All investment of money under the control of the council shall be in the name of the council.
- 12.5 All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO.
- 12.6 Payments in respect of short term or long-term investments, including transfers between bank accounts held in the same bank, shall be made in accordance with these regulations.

13. Income

- 13.1 The collection of all sums due to the council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.

- 13.2 The council will review all fees and charges for work done, services provided, or goods sold at least annually as part of the budget-setting process, following a report of the Clerk. The RFO shall be responsible for the collection of all amounts due to the council.
- 13.3 Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the council by the RFO and shall be written off in the year. The council's approval shall be shown in the accounting records.
- 13.4 All sums received on behalf of the council shall be deposited intact with the council's bankers, with such frequency as the RFO considers necessary. The origin of each receipt shall clearly be recorded on the paying-in slip or other record.
- 13.5 Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the council.
- 13.6 The RFO shall ensure that VAT is correctly recorded in the council's accounting software and that any VAT Return required is submitted from the software by the due date.

14. Payments under contracts for building or other construction works

- 14.1 Where contracts provide for payment by instalments the RFO shall maintain a record of all such payments, which shall be made within the time specified in the contract based on signed certificates from the architect or other consultant engaged to supervise the works.
- 14.2 Any variation of, addition to or omission from a contract must be authorised by the Clerk to the contractor in writing, with the council being informed where the final cost is likely to exceed the contract sum by 5% or more, or likely to exceed the budget available.

15. Stores and equipment

- 15.1 The officer in charge of each section shall be responsible for the care and custody of stores and equipment in that section.
- 15.2 Delivery notes shall be obtained in respect of all goods received into store or otherwise delivered and goods must be checked as to order and quality at the time delivery is made.
- 15.3 Stocks shall be kept at the minimum levels consistent with operational requirements.
- 15.4 The RFO shall be responsible for periodic checks of stocks and stores, at least annually.

16. Assets, properties and estates

- 16.1 The Clerk shall make arrangements for the safe custody of all title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the council.

- 16.2 The RFO shall ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets and Investments is kept up to date, with a record of all properties held by the council, their location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 16.3 The continued existence of tangible assets shown in the Register shall be verified at least annually, possibly in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets.
- 16.4 No interest in land shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law. In each case a written report shall be provided to council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate where required by law).
- 16.5 No tangible moveable property shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of, without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law, except where the estimated value of any one item does not exceed £500. In each case a written report shall be provided to council with a full business case.

17. Insurance

- 17.1 The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the council and the property and risks covered, reviewing these annually before the renewal date in conjunction with the council's review of risk management.
- 17.2 The Heads of Service shall give prompt notification to the RFO of all new risks, properties or vehicles which require to be insured and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.
- 17.3 The RFO shall be notified of any loss, liability, damage or event likely to lead to a claim, and shall report these to the Corporate Services committee at the next available meeting. The RFO shall negotiate all claims on the council's insurers.
- 17.4 All appropriate members and employees of the council shall be included in a suitable form of security or fidelity guarantee insurance which shall cover the maximum risk exposure as determined annually by the council, or duly delegated committee.

18. Charities

- 18.1 Where the council is sole managing trustee of a charitable body the Clerk and RFO shall ensure that separate accounts are kept of the funds held on charitable trusts and separate financial reports made in such form as shall be appropriate, in accordance with Charity Law and legislation, or as

determined by the Charity Commission. The Clerk and RFO shall arrange for any audit or independent examination as may be required by Charity Law or any Governing Document.

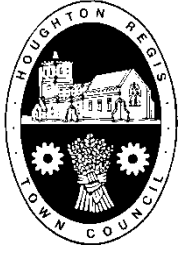
19. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations

- 19.1 The council shall review these Financial Regulations annually and following any change of clerk or RFO. The Clerk shall monitor changes in legislation or proper practices and advise the council of any need to amend these Financial Regulations.
- 19.2 The council may, by resolution duly notified prior to the relevant meeting of council, suspend any part of these Financial Regulations, provided that reasons for the suspension are recorded and that an assessment of the risks arising has been presented to all members. Suspension does not disapply any legislation or permit the council to act unlawfully.
- 19.3 The council may temporarily amend these Financial Regulations by a duly notified resolution, to cope with periods of absence, local government reorganisation, national restrictions or other exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 1 - Tender process

- 1) Any invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk shall obtain the necessary technical assistance to prepare a specification in appropriate cases.
- 2) The invitation shall in addition state that tenders must be addressed to the Clerk in the ordinary course of post, unless an electronic tendering process has been agreed by the council.
- 3) Where a postal process is used, each tendering firm shall be supplied with a specifically marked envelope in which the tender is to be sealed and remain sealed until the prescribed date for opening tenders for that contract. All sealed tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the Clerk in the presence of at least one member of council.
- 4) Where an electronic tendering process is used, the council shall use a specific email address that will be monitored to ensure that nobody accesses any tender before the expiry of the deadline for submission.
- 5) Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Order 18 and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.
- 6) Where the council, or duly delegated committee, does not accept any tender, quote or estimate, the work is not allocated and the council requires further pricing, no person shall be permitted to submit a later tender, estimate or quote who was present when the original decision-making process was being undertaken.

* * *



Date: 16th December 2024

Title: Proposed Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee

Purpose of the Report: To enable members to consider the CPC recommendation to establish a Committee to consider matters of a strategic importance which may have an impact on Houghton Regis.

Contact Officer: Clare Evans, Town Clerk

1. RECOMMENDATION

1. To establish a Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee in accordance with the draft committee functions & terms of reference;
2. To nominate 5 councillors to comprise the Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee.

2. BACKGROUND

The CPC Report, March 2024 and the arising CPC Action Plan, June 2024, both advocate for the establishment of a committee to consider matters of a strategic importance which may impact Houghton Regis. In a wider sense this proposed committee supports many of the objectives within the HRTC Corporate Plan.

This report presents a draft terms of reference for this committee for members to consider.

3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Given the recent and anticipated level of change within Houghton Regis and the impact this may have on the town, its services and facilities and residents, the establishment of a Committee to proactively look forwards and take steps to prepare for change has been encouraged through the CPC process and supported by members through the CPC Action plan.

Attached to this report is a draft Committee Functions & Terms of Reference for consideration.

The CPC report suggested a ‘Futures’ Committee, however it is suggested that a more suitable name be the Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee as it give more immediate clarity as to its role and purpose.

The functions of this Committee are based on the following:

Purpose

- To proactively identify, analyse, and prepare for strategic challenges and opportunities that may impact our town's long-term prosperity and resilience.

Objectives:

1. Horizon Scanning
 - Identify potential challenges and opportunities 5-10 years in advance
 - Track demographic, economic, technological, and environmental shifts
 - Analyse potential local and national policy changes that might affect the town
2. Risk and Opportunity Assessment
 - Identify and assess any emerging risks for the town and develop mitigation strategies
 - Identify strategic opportunities for economic and social development
 - Assess infrastructure resilience and future needs
3. Strategic Policy Development
 - Create adaptive strategic plans and scenario planning
 - Provide evidence-based guidance for long-term decision-making

Key Areas of Focus:

- Economic Development
- Infrastructure Planning: residential, retail, industrial, transport, technology
- Environmental Sustainability / Climate Change
- Social / Community Services
- Community Resilience
- Population Demographic Changes

It is envisaged that this committee will meet every 6 months, although at the outset it may be desirable to meet more frequently to establish initial thoughts and a work programme.

4. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Committee may benefit in due course from seeking co-opted members, such as:

- Local business leaders
- Community representatives
- Representatives from key local sectors

5. HRTC CORPORATE PLAN

- 1 Town and Community: To unify all areas of the parish as one community and foster civic pride in our town**
- 2 Local Services and Facilities: To provide a broad range of high quality services and facilities for our residents, visitors and businesses**
- 3 Quality of Life: To enhance the quality of life of our residents**

4 Management and Operations: To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Council as the key local service provider

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Implications

- The work of this committee may provide useful insights for other committees of HRTC
- Staff implications – time implications for research, agenda and minute preparation and clerking

Legal Implications

- There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations

Financial Implications

- There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations

Risk Implications

- Capacity – at the current time it is felt that there is the capacity within the staff team to support this new Committee, Members may like to give consideration to their capacity to feed into and attend this committee.
- Reputation – a proactive approach to future possible changes would serve to enhance the reputation of the Town Council

Equalities Implications

Houghton Regis Town Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This project / issue does not discriminate.

Climate Change Implications

- There are no climate change implications arising from the recommendations

Press Contact

- There are no press implications arising from the recommendations although in due course the committee may consider co-option, public communication of its deliberations, and channels for community input.

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The establishment of a Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee is a positive and proactive way forward, supported by the Corporate Plan, the CPC Report and the CPC Action plan.

The draft Committee Functions & Terms of Reference clearly define the role and scope of the Committee to enable it to function effectively.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Draft Committee Functions & Terms of Reference for the Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee

Appendix A

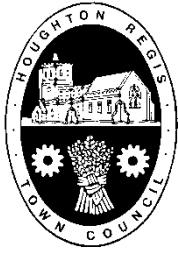
Draft Committee Functions & Terms of Reference for the Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee

Terms of Reference

- To consider any matters referred to it by the Council or other Committees.
- To respond on behalf of the Council to initiatives from other organisations relating to matters under the Committee's jurisdiction.
- To assemble and submit to the Town Council estimates of income and expenditure for each financial year in respect of all the services of this Committee no later than 30th November each year.
- To proactively identify, analyse, and prepare for strategic challenges and opportunities that may impact our town's long-term prosperity and resilience, including but not limited to:
 - Political change
 - Economic development
 - Infrastructure planning: residential, retail, industrial, transport, technology
 - Environmental sustainability / climate change
 - Social / community services
 - Community resilience
 - Population demographic changes

Functions

- The Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee shall function and operate in accordance with the Council's approved Standing Orders.
- The Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee shall consist of five Councillors. The quorum shall be half of its members (three).
- To appoint sub-committees or working groups as necessary including setting out membership and terms of reference.



Date: 16th December 2024

Title: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROCESS

Purpose of the Report: To enable members to discuss the Community Governance Review process and options for community engagement.

Contact Officer: Clare Evans, Town Clerk

1. RECOMMENDATION

1. To use approved communication means to promote the Community Governance review Process in due course;
2. To hold a series of public engagement events to promote the process further subject to budget availability in 2025/26.

2. BACKGROUND

CBC intend to start a Community Governance Review process in Spring 2025. As members are aware the CPC process highlighted the challenges and opportunities that this process may present.

Through this report members are invited to consider the extent of endeavours they feel that the council should put into this process.

3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

In advance of the commencement of the Community Governance Review (CGR) Central Bedfordshire Council is intending to invite, during Spring 2025, all of the parishes to submit a case for any changes (boundaries, councillor numbers, wards) that they would wish for their respective parish in order that Central Bedfordshire Council can include these proposals in the initial consultation stage.

Due to developments within and around the parish of Houghton Regis it is anticipated that HRTC and local residents may have some significant comments to make as part of this process.

Members thoughts are requested on whether HRTC should be proactive in encouraging engagement in this process and if so what this engagement may look like.

For information a local organisation have been approached on a preliminary / exploratory basis to enquire as to their ability to support a resident engagement process. Their support would comprise:

- To produce display material for use at events providing information on the governance review, the influence the community can have and the implications of any changes
- Use local contacts / partners and social media to further promote the planned drop in events (HRTC will produce publicity material and also promote through their channels)
- Distribution of publicity to key locations (shops, cafes etc)
- 1 member of staff at 5 x 2 hrs drop in events (1 event in each town ward plus Bidwell and Linnere), supported by HRTC staff and Councillors. HRTC to support with securing venues. HRTC to pay for venue hire.
- Produce surveys which can be completed at events or online
- Analyse survey results and summarise.

4. HRTC CORPORATE PLAN

1 Town and Community: To unify all areas of the parish as one community and foster civic pride in our town

- 1.1 Improve integration between existing and new communities.
- 1.2 Support the sense of arrival and identity.

4 Management and Operations: To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Council as the key local service provider

- 4.5 Enhance the role of the council.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Implications

- This issue will be presented to the anticipated Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee in due course.
- Staff time implications
- Town wide engagement would support and encourage participation in the process

Legal Implications

- There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations

Financial Implications

- Budget provision may need to be made in 2025/26 depending on the level of engagement supported

Risk Implications

- Reputation – promotion of this process would support the reputation of the town council

Equalities Implications

Houghton Regis Town Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This project / issue does not discriminate.

Climate Change Implications

- There are no climate change implications arising from the recommendations

Press Contact

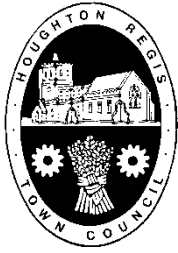
- There are no press implications arising from the recommendation at this stage

6. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This is an important process for HRTC and the local community to engage in. Proactive work by HRTC would support the community in engaging effectively in this process.

7. APPENDICES

None.



Date: 16th December 2024

Title: DUNSTABLE MARKET CHARTER

Purpose of the Report: To enable members to consider a way forward.

Contact Officer: Clare Evans, Town Clerk

1. RECOMMENDATION

To seek legal advice on challenging Dunstable Town Council's market rights policy and for this to be funded through 190-4059.

2. BACKGROUND

HRTC has been considering the Dunstable Market Charter and its implications for events and markets in Houghton Regis for some time. This report provides an update and a suggested way forward.

3. UPDATE

Update on Dunstable Town Council deliberations

Dunstable Town Council (DTC) considered HRTC's request for them to consider their use of their Market Charter rights at their Community Services Committee meeting in November. At this meeting it was resolved to 'confirm the Markets Working Group's recommendation to continue to apply the Council's Market Rights Policy, and publish the summary documents provided in Appendices 1 and 2'. To view the agenda and draft minutes please follow this link: [Community Services Committee – Dunstable Town Council](#)

Update on legal advice from NALC

Members have previously been advised that legal advice on the validity of the Dunstable Market Charter has been sought from NALC but unfortunately due to a conflict of interest, arising from both HRTC and DTC being member councils of NALC, has been declined.

4. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Whilst this issue remains outstanding, HRTC will continue to operate under the Dunstable Market Charter but going forwards these are the main options:

1. Continue to operate under the Dunstable Market Charter whilst seeking to arrange HRTC events which do not clash with DTC and their market and review the effectiveness of this approach in 12 months
2. Continue to operate under the Dunstable Market Charter whilst seeking legal advice
3. 1 and 2 - Continue to operate under the Dunstable Market Charter whilst seeking to arrange HRTC events which do not clash with DTC and their market and review the effectiveness of this approach in 12 months and seek legal advice

As there is considerable strength of feeling over this matter it is suggested that the 3rd option is the most suitable. Due to the specialist nature of the legal advice being sought it has only been possible to get 1 quote. The issued posed is:

To provide advice on challenging Dunstable Town Council's market rights policy.

Based on a preliminary discussion with this legal firm the following quote has been received:

Counsel's fees: £2500-£3000

Solicitors fees for reviewing the papers, instructing Counsel and liaising with HRTC :
£750

Total £3,750

To provide some leeway members are requested to consider the use of up to £4,000 from 190-4059 (Central Services – Other Professional fees) for HRTC to obtain this advice.

5. HRTC CORPORATE PLAN

1 Town and Community: To unify all areas of the parish as one community and foster civic pride in our town

- 1.4 Develop an annual programme of community events across the Parish.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Implications

- There are no corporate implications arising from the recommendations.

Legal Implications

- There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations

Financial Implications

- Budget required from 190-4059

Risk Implications

- There are no risk implications arising from the recommendations

Equalities Implications

Houghton Regis Town Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This project / issue does not discriminate.

Climate Change Implications

- There are no climate change implications arising from the recommendations

Press Contact

- There are no press implications arising from the recommendations

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

DTC have determined to continue to use their market rights. As such it is suggested that HRTC seek legal advice on challenging Dunstable Town Council's market rights policy to enable HRTC to determine a suitable way forward.

8. APPENDICES

None



Clare Evans
Town Clerk
Houghton Regis Town Council
Council Offices
Peel Street
Houghton Regis
Bedfordshire
LU5 5EY

22nd November 2024

Dear Clare,

Interim Internal Audit

An audit was carried out by Kevin Rose on Wednesday 20 November 2024. This was the interim internal audit, part of the annual internal audit coverage of the Council. Prior to the audit a 'Pre-Audit' was carried out remotely which tested items which are required to be published on the Councils website.

The audit was undertaken using the standard IAC Audit Checklist, that we use for all Local Councils, which has 207 items. A total of 103 items were tested during this audit, including items that were examined and tested as part of the pre-audit process. A balance of 104 items remain to be tested.

The following 'Internal Control Objectives' of the Annual Internal Audit Report (part of the AGAR) were checked and confirmed as being Not Applicable to your Council for this financial year.

- Exemption from External Audit (Box K)*
- the Transparency Code (for Smaller Authorities) (Box L)*
- Trust Funds (Box O)*

Areas subject to audit were;

- the Accounting system and records (Box A)
- the Payment system (Box B)
- Risk and insurance (Box C)
- Budget and precept setting and monitoring (Box D)
- Income billing, collection and VAT (Box E)
- Petty cash (Box F)
- Accounting Statements (Box J)

Of the 97 applicable items tested a Positive response was obtained in respect of 93 tests. There were 4 Negative responses identified and 10 Observations were made, details of which are set out in the attached Interim Internal Audit Observations.

Summary of tests undertaken during this audit

Positive response	93
Negative response	4
Not Applicable to your Council	6
Total tests carried out	<u>103</u>

I am pleased to advise that no 'Non-Compliances' were identified at this stage that would give rise to a negative response on the statutory Annual Internal Audit Report.

I would like to express my thanks for the assistance and hospitality provided to me during my audit.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Rose'.

Kevin Rose ACMA
Director

Houghton Regis Town Council
Financial Year 2024-25



IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd

Audit date: 20 November 2024

Visit 1 Internal Audit Observations

A *Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.*

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	Are accounting entries correct with few correcting entries?	Yes	<p><i>It was noted that the Council had accounted for the loss on the investment held with the CCLA Property Fund, rather than accounting for the full receipt value (this was discussed with the Clerk and Finance Officer during the audit visit).</i></p> <p><i>The effect of this is that Council income for the year and the value of the General Reserve is significantly understated.</i></p>	The Council to review this transaction (if necessary in consultation with the Council's accountant) and ensure that the full value of the receipt is correctly recorded.	Medium	This is noted and will be rectified ahead of year end.

This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

B

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	Are bank signatory arrangements (the bank mandate) in accordance with Financial Regulations?	No	<p><i>The Council recorded, in detail, in the Minutes of the May 2024 meeting, the signing authorities in respect of cheque payments. It was noted that the approval of online payments, which is carried out by Officers and is the most common payment method used by the Council, has not formally been Minuted by Council.</i></p>	The Council to formally review and approve the mandate to apply for making Online payments.	High	This is noted and will be presented for consideration and approval to Corporate Services Committee at its meeting on 3rd March 2025.

2	Council has in a place a process to regularly check and agree supplier statements of account	Yes	<i>It was noted that there are a very large number of unallocated transactions to utility supplier accounts (Wave, Castle Water and other utility suppliers). There is a potential risk that there may be unrecorded liabilities on these accounts.</i>	Council to undertake a reconciliation of these supplier accounts.	Medium	This is noted and will be addressed by the Finance Officer during 2024/25.
3	Has the Council complied with the requirements of the Public Contract Regulations?	Yes	<i>It was noted that the Council has not updated Contracts Finder with the details of awarded contracts.</i>	The Council to use that Contracts Finder is updated with details of awarded contracts.	Medium	This is noted and officers will update Contract Finder accordingly during 2024/25.

C This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	The Council, meeting as a whole, has reviewed the effectiveness of its internal control system as required by Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015	No	<i>The Council has documented Internal Controls but has not formally not reviewed the effectiveness of its internal control system as required by Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.</i>	Council to note the requirement for it to regularly review the Effectiveness of its internal control system.	Medium	This is noted. When the Council consider the year end internal audit, council will also be asked to consider and confirm the effectiveness of its internal control system.

D The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	When preparing the budget, and subsequent precept demand, did the Council specifically consider the level of its General Reserve and whether the level of the General Reserve was adequate and not excessive?	Yes	<i>Council Minutes record that the Council considered the level of reserves when setting the precept for 2024/25, but is not clear that the Council formally compared the level of General Reserve to the recommended level as set out in the Practitioners Guide.</i>	When setting the budget the Council should specifically consider the level of its General Reserve. The Council should set the level of its General Reserve in line with the guidance set out in the Practitioner's Guide paragraphs 5.33 - 5.35 (in particular paragraph 5.35).	High	During the budget setting process in January council are advised of the predicted GR figure at year end and of the recommended level of GR in accordance with the Practitioners Guide as part of its agenda and budget paperwork. Going forwards this consideration will be given greater prominence during the considerations and the Minutes will record this consideration.

2	Council has returned to IAC completed Internal Audit Observations spreadsheets from prior audit(s)	No	<i>The Council has not provided its response to the Internal Audit Observations from the previous audit and returned it to IAC.</i>	Council to provide its comments on the previous Internal Audit Observations.	Medium	This is noted and will be actioned going forwards.
3	Does the budget recorded in the Councils accounting system agree to the budget set by Council?	No	<i>It was noted that Council Minutes record a deficit budget of £66,265, however Omega records a deficit budget of £67,897 a difference of £1,632.</i>	Council to review the budget recorded in the Councils accounting system to ensure that it agrees to the budget approved.	High	This is noted and will be actioned.

J *Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure),*

agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	Prior year accruals have been correctly reversed in the current year. (interim)	Yes	<i>It was noted that there are unreversed balances left on prepayments on nominal 110 £1,764.70. Also £910 left on accruals code.</i>	Council to review accruals previously made and arrange to make any appropriate reversals in the current year.	Medium	The unreversed prepayments of £1,764.70 refer to CCTV Maintenance for 25/26 and 26/27 in the sum of £882.35 for each year. These will be reversed in both years. The unreversed accruals of £910 will be reversed during 24/25.

L *The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.*

No.	Audit Test	Response	Observation	Recommendation	Priority	Comments
1	The Council has complied with the publication requirements of the ICO Model Publication Scheme for Parish Councils. (This includes a requirement to publish the Annual Internal Audit Report).	Yes	<i>The Council has published a Model Publication scheme but this appears to be an old version</i>	The Council to review and update the version of the Model Publication Scheme in accordance with the ICO Model Publication Scheme (version 3). Although this is not a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Council should note that it is a statutory requirement under the Freedom of Information Act.	Advisory	The Corporate Services committee, at the meeting held on the 9th September 2024, reviewed and recommended to council the adoption of the Town Councils Model Publication Scheme in accordance with the updated version of the ICO's Model Publication Scheme. This recommendation will be presented to Town Council at its meeting in December 2024.

Interim audit summary Houghton Regis Town Council

(shaded Internal Control Objectives are not applicable to your Council)



Audit 1 Date 20 November 2024

Internal Control Objective	N/A	Tested	Positive	Negative	Observations	Non Compliance
Box A <i>Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.</i>	-	6	6	-	1	
Box B <i>This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.</i>	-	33	32	1	3	
Box C <i>This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.</i>	2	9	6	1	1	
Box D <i>The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.</i>	2	16	12	2	3	
Box E <i>Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.</i>	2	15	13	-	-	
Box F <i>Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.</i>	-	9	9	-	-	
Box G <i>Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	
Box H <i>Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	
Box I <i>Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	
Box J <i>Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.</i>	-	2	2	-	1	
Box K <i>If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2023/24, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2023/24 AGAR tick "not covered")</i>	-	-	-	-	-	
Box L <i>The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.</i>	-	1	1	-	1	
Box M <i>The authority, during the previous year (2023/24) correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).</i>	-	5	5	-	-	
Box N <i>The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2023/24 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).</i>	-	7	7	-	-	
Box O <i>(For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee</i>	-	-	-	-	-	
Totals	6	103	93	4	10	-