

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Corporate Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
Monday 3rd March 2025 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chairman
E Billington
J Carroll
Y Farrell (Substitute)
W Henderson
C Rollins

Officers: Debbie Marsh Head of Corporate Services
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillor: E Costello
M Herber

13122 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Costello (Cllr Farrell substituted) and Cllr Herber.

13123 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13124 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13125 MINUTES

Members noted an error under minute number 13046. The date shown should have been 2010 not 1010. The minutes were amended by hand and initialled by the Chair.

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 2nd December 2024.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13126 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS AND CONSIDER ANY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED THEREIN

Personnel Sub-Committee: 8th July 2024 and 25th November 2024.

Resolved: To receive the Minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting of the 8th July 2024 and 25th November 2024.

13127 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

Members were provided with a copy of the income and expenditure report, highlighting significant variances, for Corporate Services Committee to date.

Gas (pg 20) - a faulty meter had meant that Houghton Regis Town Council were not charged for several months. It was queried whether there would be back billing from the supplier and the Head of Corporate Services informed Members that this would not be the case.

Cllr Rollins joined the meeting.

Computer costs (pg 21) – there was an overspend of £2,000 in the current year and Members queried what the increase would be for 2025/26. Members were informed that the budget for the coming year was £8,500 which was thought sufficient to cover all licences.

With regard to the report, it was highlighted that an email had outlined how the loss incurred from the sale of the property portfolio would be treated in the accounts. Following input from the auditor, there was now a new budget heading showing the full amount of the sale proceeds but omitting to account for the £600,000 original cost. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that the sum had been accounted for in the nominal ledger; however, following a request from Members, it was agreed that the issue would be addressed in an explanatory note for inclusion in the Minutes.

13128 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members received the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for November and December 2024 and January 2025.

Members felt that the statements presented should be as current as possible and suggested that the Corporate Services Committee meetings should be scheduled later in the month to allow this. The Head of Corporate Services advised Members that even if meetings were moved to a later date in the month, due to the distribution date of the agenda it was likely this information would still be a month behind upon receipt.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for November and December 2024 and January 2025;**
- 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

13129 LIST OF CHEQUE PAYMENTS

Members were provided with a list of payments for the period November and December 2024 and January 2025 (inclusive).

Members drew attention to the extensive list of payments to the water provider. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that the Finance Officer had raised this matter with the provider and the issue would be rectified.

13130 INVESTMENT REPORT

This report was provided in accordance with the approved 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.

Members had been presented with an extensive report and were informed that Flagstone was a platform that allowed users to access and manage accounts at multiple banks and building societies. Members queried the advantages of using Flagstone over CCLA, which was AAA rated, allowed instant access and provided a good return. The Head of Corporate Services stated that the proposed investment via Flagstone was in response to the auditor's advice to diversify the portfolio while still providing a satisfactory level of liquidity.

Members agreed to approve the minimum investment of £150,000, rather than the proposed £250,000, for a 12-month trial period, to commence in April 2025 at the start of the new financial year. The performance of the investment would be monitored during the year and reviewed at the end of the trial period.

Proposed by: Cllr Henderson

Seconded by: Cllr Carroll

Members voted unanimously in favour of investing the minimum sum of £150,000 with Flagstone for a 12-month period.

The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that there would be some amendments to the banking arrangements, and these would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: To approve the investment of £150,000, held in the Town Councils CCLA Deposit Fund, with Flagstones cash deposit platform.

13131 BANKING & SIGNING ARRANGEMENTS

At the Town Council meeting held on the 15th May 2024, the banking arrangements for the council's bank accounts were approved as follows (Minute number 12837).

Banking Arrangements

To approve the bank mandate be set up as follows:

- 2 signatories from Group A (councillors) and 1 signatory from Group B (officers);
- Group A to comprise current serving councillors
- Group B to comprise Clerk & RFO and Head of Service

Following receipt of the Interim Internal Auditors report, under the observation made under number B1, it was recommended that the Council formally review and approve the mandate to apply for making online payments. At the Town Council meeting held on the 16th December 2024 it was agreed to support the comments made in response to the Interim Internal Audit Observations/Recommendations (Minute number 13074). The comment in response to this observation/recommendation was:

This is noted and will be presented for consideration and approval to Corporate Services Committee at its meeting on 3rd March 2025.

Therefore, Members were requested to recommend to Town Council the following revision to the banking arrangements.

Officers on the approved bank mandate have delegated responsibility for electronically approving online payments and transfers between bank accounts and investments, on behalf of the Council.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the inclusion of the following, officers on the approved bank mandate have delegated responsibility for electronically approving online payments and transfers between bank accounts and investments, on behalf of the Council.

13132 REVIEW OF CHARGES 2025/2026

In accordance with Financial Regulation 13.2 Members were presented with a list of charges for 2024/25 which were under the control of this Committee. In order to support users of these facilities, it was suggested that Members consider applying the same charges for 2025/26.

Members were requested to note under section 2 of the Fee Schedule that the officer determining had been changed from the Town Clerk to the Head of Corporate Services.

Resolved: To approve the charges for 2025/26 as attached.

13133 VAT RETURN

In accordance with Financial Regulation 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.

For information, Members were provided with a copy of the VAT returns for quarters 1, 2 and 3 for financial year 2024/2025.

13134 SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK LEGISLATION – POLICY UPDATES

Following the introduction of the new Sexual Harassment at Work legislation a number of the Town Councils policies had been revised.

Members were provided with a report and copies of the revised policies.

Members sought clarification on the level of changes within the policies. The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that the Bullying and Harassment Policy had been written almost in entirety; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Social Media had included significant changes while the remainder had minimal amendments. The Whistleblowing policy was also due to be updated.

The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that all policies accorded with current legislation. While the policies would not be presented to Town Council until June, HRTC already had them in place and had been shared with staff.

It was confirmed that the Safeguarding Policy had been presented to the Community Services Committee.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council, the adoption of the following updated policies:

- a) Bullying and Harassment Policy**
- b) IT Policy**
- c) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**
- d) Disciplinary Policy**
- e) Social Media Policy**

13135 HOLIDAYS AND OTHER ABSENCES POLICY

Members were informed that following an enquiry by a member of staff, in regard to the Town Councils Policy on Reservists, the Town Councils Holidays and Other Absences Policy had been revised.

Members were provided with a report and revised Holidays and Other Absences Policy. It was agreed by Members that the proposed changes were appropriate.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Holidays and Other Absences Policy.

13136 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Proposed by: Cllr Henderson

Seconded by: Cllr Carroll

Members voted unanimously in favour

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.

13137 PAY SCALES 2025/26

At the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on the 3rd February 2025, Members received a list of the Salary Point number for all staff, along with overtime rates, additional payments, mileage rates and employer and employee pension contribution rates and resolved to recommend to Corporate Services (Minute number PE347) that these be noted and signed by the Chair of Corporate Services at its meeting to be held on the 3rd March 2025.

Members were provided with a list, as presented to the Personnel Sub-Committee.

Resolved: To note the list of the Salary Point number for all staff along with overtime rates, additional payments, mileage rates and employer and employee pension contribution rates and for this list to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.09pm.

Dated this 9th day of June 2025

Chairman