

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Corporate Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
2nd March 2026 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chairman
E Billington
J Carroll
E Costello
W Henderson
M Herber
C Rollins

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

Public: 0

13542 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

13543 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13544 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13545 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 1st December 2025.

Members agreed to approve the minutes but requested that ‘expediate’ be amended to read ‘expedite’ (Minute 13450).

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2025 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13546 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.

The Chair queried if there was some inconsistency between the report and the budget: the Architectural Fees relating to Project H did not appear to be included under capital in the report. The Head of Corporate Services responded that the final cost of Professional Fees was as yet unknown, and that a PO would be raised once the sum was confirmed. Expenditure under Professional Fees related to items at the early stages of the process.

13547 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members were requested to receive the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for November and December 2025 and January 2026.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To approve the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for November and December 2025 and January 2026;**
 - 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

13548 LIST OF PAYMENTS

For information and transparency, Members were provided with a list of payments for the period November and December 2025 and January 2026. (inclusive).

13549 INVESTMENT REPORT

This report was provided in accordance with the approved Committee Functions, Financial Regulation 12 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.

- Resolved: To note the report**

13550 INVESTMENT WORKING GROUP

Members were provided with the minutes from the Investment Working Group meetings held on the 14th January 2026 and 11th February 2026.

Members of the Investment Working Group had reviewed the draft Treasury Management Strategy and the agreed direction and adjustments to be incorporated into the revised Strategy were as follows:

- The Strategy should include flexible parameters to allow officers to manage investments without requiring formal approval for every update;
- Arlingclose to provide an updated Treasury Management Strategy Statement template in November with an updated version being provided in January ready for adoption;
- The External Context to be included as an appendix in order to streamline the main Strategy document;
- The Strategy should be scheduled for annual approval by the Corporate Services committee, ideally after the budget setting process has been completed i.e. March;

- That a revised risk appetite of A- be accepted. A- still represents a very low level of risk;
- The strategy should clarify that the Council does not anticipate borrowing for the purpose of investing;
- To agree that a limit of 3 Money Market Fund accounts can be opened;

The Investment Working Group agreed the maximum period for which funds may be committed should be based on cashflow forecasting.

The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that officers had begun work on the draft Treasury Management Strategy. Members agreed that a special meeting of the Corporate Services Committee might be required once the strategy was finalised.

Resolved: To note the minutes of the Investment Working Group from the meeting held on the 14th January 2026 and 11th February 2026.

13551 FIDELITY GUARANTEE COVER

The Internal Auditor had recommended the Council review the level of its Fidelity Insurance and consider whether it was adequate to cover the value of cash and bank balances held.

The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that the town council's insurer, Zurich, had been approached to establish whether the level of cover could be increased from £5 million. The underwriters had responded that this was not something that could be offered.

Members were advised that enquires had been made with other Town and Parish Council Insurance providers to seek whether a higher level of cover was available; however, no response had been received.

The town council was in a long-term agreement with the current insurance provider until 31st May 2027.

The Head of Corporate Services reminded Members that the risk of misappropriation of funds were minimised by internal controls in place, as follows:

- Funds were placed in multiple accounts
- Any funds transferred from investments were placed straight into the council's bank account
- Dual authorisation was required for payments
- The spread and levels of investments reduced risk

The Head of Corporate Services advised members that the Town Council could possibly tip over the current £5m fidelity level twice a year when the precept was received but this would only be for a short period, around one month, if at all, due to operational costs.

Head of Corporate Services informed Members that the current fidelity guarantee cover limit reflected the total of all the losses in any one year and not per claim.

Members considered this information and agreed that the level of Fidelity Guarantee was sufficient.

Resolved: To agree the level of Fidelity Guarantee Cover was sufficient.

13552 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT INTERNAL AUDITOR

Members were requested to confirm the appointment of IAC Audit & Consultancy Ltd as the Town Council independent Internal Auditor for work relating to the 2026 Annual Return as per the existing contract.

The Head of Corporate Services advised Members that the External Auditor had questioned the minuting of the appointment of the Internal Auditor. Including this item on the agenda allowed Members to formally accept the appointment and would henceforth appear annually as an agenda item.

Resolved: To confirm the appointment of IAC Audit & Consultancy Ltd as the Town Council independent Internal Auditor for audit work in relation to the 2026 Annual Return.

13553 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.

Members were provided with a copy of the VAT Returns for quarter 3 for financial year 2025/2026.

13554 AI POLICY

Members were requested to consider the adoption of an Artificial Intelligence Usage Policy and were presented with a report and draft policy. The policy was intended to formalise the Town Council's use of AI.

The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that officers should use Microsoft Copilot for its AI requirements rather than employing a variety of platforms. It was hoped Copilot provided a greater level of protection and provided an option to prevent data being used for training purposes.

Members were supportive of introducing an AI policy and made the following points:

- The policy should be reviewed annually or in the event of significant technological changes
- It should be stated explicitly in the policy that the Town Council would ensure that data entered into platform would not be used for training purposes
- In the event that Copilot introduced different models, this change should be covered in the policy.

Members were happy to accept the recommendations with the inclusion of these items.

- Resolved:**
- 1) **To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the AI policy.**
 - 2) **To recommend to Town Council that it formally commits to the Venice Pledge.**

13555 COMMUNICATION POLICY

The updated policy aligned with the Town Councils Social Media Policy and IT policy; it did not contain any major changes but brought the current document up to date prior to the production of a new strategy.

The Head of Corporate Services advised Members that, following a recommendation by the Corporate Peer Challenge, Community Services had been working on a more comprehensive Communication Policy which would be presented to Corporate Services on its completion.

- Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Communication Policy**

13556 CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

Members were advised of upcoming employment law changes that would take effect in April and October 2026. The Town Council's Contract of Employment would be updated to reflect these changes.

- Resolved: To note the updates to the Town Council's Contract of Employment.**

13557 CYBER LIABILITY INSURANCE

Members were advised the Town Council did not have Cyber Liability Insurance cover.

The Town Councils insurance provider had confirmed they did not provide this type of cover; therefore, the Head of Corporate Services was undertaking research to enable a report to be brought to the next meeting of the Corporate Services Committee for consideration.

The Head of Corporate Services informed Members that cyber liability cover was not offered by insurance providers, but was a third party add on.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.58pm

Dated this XX day of XXXX

Chairman