

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 15th December 2025 7.00pm.

Present:	Councillors:	M Herber E Billington E Cooper E Costello Y Farrell W Henderson D Jones T McMahon A Slough C Slough D Taylor	Town Mayor
	Officers:	C Evans I Haynes A Samuels	Town Clerk Head of Environmental & Community Services Administration Officer
Apologies	Councillor:	P Burgess J Carroll C Rollins	

13461 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Burgess, Cllr Carroll and Cllr Rollins.

13462 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13463 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13464 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 13th October 2025.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 13th October 2025 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13465 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

WP

Corporate Services Committee	1 st September 2025 Minute number 13334 – Protocol for Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure or Local Holder of High Office To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils marking the Death of a Senior National Figure or Local Holder of High Office protocol.
Community Services Committee	21 st July 2025 3 November 2025 Minute number 13409 – Operation Hana for 2026/27 To request Council considered that any underspend of cost centre 306/4059 at year end be transferred to an Earmarked reserve to be used for future Community Safety initiatives.
Environment & Leisure Committee	28 th July 2025 Minute number 13296 – Income and Expenditure Report To recommend to Town Council that the expenditure in Cost Centre 293 UKSPF be drawn from general reserves.
Planning Committee	6th & 27th October 2025
Staffing Committee	3 rd June Minute number 13221 – Staff Appraisal To recommend to Town Council, the adoption of the Town Councils Appraisal Policy and process.
Town Partnership Committee	29th July 2025

Minute 13409

Members voiced concern regarding the recommendation for Minute 13409, Operation Hana. Members expressed the opinion that this recommendation would constitute an inappropriate use of earmarked reserves which were for specified and evaluated projects.

It was counterargued that the use was not unspecified but would support community safety projects. Due to circumstances outside of HRTC's control, historical underspends on the budget had resulted in available funds not being fully utilised.

The Town Clerk suggested that the most transparent process would be for an underspend to be reported through the budget-setting process. The Community Safety Sub-Committee could then submit a request through the budget-setting process to establish an earmarked reserve for capital spend for Community Safety projects.

While sympathetic to the reasons for wishing to utilise any underspend, some Members remained uncomfortable with the proposal, which did not follow due process, and Town Council was respectfully requested to reject the recommendation.



Members were requested to vote on Minute 13409:

For: 4

Against: 7

The recommendation was not carried.

Minute 13296

It was noted that the contribution to General Reserves in 2024/25 from the UKSPF grant was £18,890, accordingly members felt that the amount in 2025/26 which should be allocated to General Reserves should be reflective of this.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To receive the Minutes detailed above;**
 - 2. To approve the recommendations and to adopt the policies therein;**
 - Minute number 13334 - Protocol for Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure or Local Holder of High Office**
 - Minute number 13296 – Income and Expenditure Report**
 - In regard to Staff Appraisals (Minute number 13221) to approve the process and to adopt the following policy:
Town Councils Appraisal Policy**

13466 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor had represented Houghton Regis at 37 events and had hosted her civic reception and a fundraising coffee morning and the Mayor's carol service. The Town Mayor had also represented the Council at the Armistice Commemoration and Remembrance Sunday service and the council's firework display. The Mayor had also undertaken visits to care homes, presented an award at Thornhill school and attended charity events hosted by fellow mayors. There had been continued fund raising and their stall at Santa's Grotto had raised in the region of £500 for nominated charities.

The Mayor extended thanks to council staff and volunteers for all their help.

13467 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Cllr A Slough reported that the Friends of Windsor Drive continued to do well. Waiting for the log on the field to be replaced by a kissing gate.

Cllr Jones informed Members that the BATPC budget had been set for the upcoming year. The Police and Crime Commissioner had attended the last meeting and discussed police performance. The Town Clerk of Dunstable Town Council had also visited and was keen to ensure that voluntary organisations remained unaffected by cuts to grants from Central Bedfordshire Council.

Hospice at Home Volunteers remained financially secure and continued to grow. A concern was that the referral rate coming through from practitioners was not reaching anticipated levels but it was hoped this would change.

Future grant funding had been discussed at the Chews Foundation meeting.



13468 EXTERNAL AUDITORS REPORT & AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2024/25

To advised members of the outcomes of the external audit 2024/25.

Members referred to the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 14th November 2025 and under Section 3 of the AGAR.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To approve and accept the Audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2024/25**
 - 2. To note the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 14th November 2025.**

13469 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND SCHEDULE

In accordance with Financial Regulation 2.2, the council is responsible for putting in place arrangements for the management of risk. The Clerk shall prepare, for approval by the council, risk management policy statements in respect of all activates of the council. Risk policy statements and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.

Members were provided with a copy of the Risk Management Strategy and Schedule. Members were reminded that the Risk Management Strategy and Schedule was approved at the Town Council meeting held on the 16th May 2025 which noted the register has been extended to include reference to s106 / deferred income. However, since this approval the Town Council had resolved to establish a Town Centre Community Venue at Unit 1, All Saints View, therefore the Risk Register has been updated to include this project.

Members were requested to approve the Town Councils Risk Management Strategy and Schedule as revised to include Unit 1, All Saints View.

- Resolved: To approve the HRTC Risk Management Strategy & Schedule.**

13470 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Members were advised that the next stage consultation of the Community Governance Review had commenced and closed on 26 January 2026.

The Draft recommendations from CBC were:

1. that the parish name of Houghton Regis should remain unchanged
2. increase the number of parish councillors on Houghton Regis Town Council from 14 to 17
3. create a new parish ward of Thorn with 3 members (see map)
4. reduce Houghton Hall parish ward from 5 to 4, retain Tithe Farm with 5 members
5. increase Parkside Ward from 4 to 5 to accommodate the Linnere Development



6. undertake a further community governance review of the parish within five years to ensure effective community governance arrangements in light of the development at Linnere
7. reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton

Members were advised that the HRTC suggestion of altering the parish boundary with Chalton, created complexities due to the location of the constituency boundary.

Members noted that some of the proposals from CBC differed from those proposed by HRTC. It was felt that HRTC needed to submit a more robust response, especially with regard to extending the parish boundary. Members requested that this item was deferred until the next Town Council meeting in order for a suitable response to be formulated. It was proposed that the working group that previously considered this matter should reconvene in January 2026 for the purpose of drafting HRTC's response.

Members agreed unanimously to defer the decision until the next Town Council meeting in January 2026. The Town Clerk confirmed they would provide Members with a report which outlined the variances between HRTC proposals and those from CBC.

13471 INDEPENDENT TREASURY SERVICES

At the Corporate Services meeting held on the 1st December 2025, Members supported (minute number 13444) a recommendation from the Investment Working Group that the Council enter into a three-year contract with Arlingclose Treasury Services for independent investment advice.

Members of the Corporate Services Committee had requested Council approve the use of General Reserves to fund the first year of service and to ensure suitable budgetary provision be made for the remaining years.

Members accepted the recommendation and confirmed their preferred option to seek investment advice at the earliest opportunity rather than defer consideration until after the budget had been agreed.

Resolved: To agree the sum of £11,000 to be taken from General Reserves to fund the cost of independent investment advice for 2025/2026 financial year and to ensure suitable budgetary provision be made for the remaining years.

13472 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY & IT POLICY UPDATES

At the Corporate Services meeting held on the 1st December 2025 Members agreed (minute number 13449) to recommend to Town Council the adoption of the revised Social Media Policy and the revised IT Policy.

Members recognised the need for the Town Council to have an up-to-date adopted IT policy as this was going to be a requirement on the new assertion (assertion 10) on the AGAR from 2025/2026. The Social Media policy was revised to mirror that of

the IT policy. Members therefore recommended Town Council adopt these revised policies at the meeting to be held on the 15th December 2025 so as to ensure the Town Council was compliant as soon as possible.

Members were provided with a copy of the revised policies.

Resolved: 1) **To adopt the Town Council's Social Media Policy**
2) **To adopt the Town Council's IT Policy.**

13473 INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Members were advised that the interim Internal Audit (IA) for 2025/26 had been completed.

Members were provided with the following:

1. Cover Letter dated 24th November 2025 detailing the areas covered by the audit.
2. Observations, which included detail on the audit test, the IA observation and any IA recommendation.
3. Revised Standing Orders - also attached was a revised copy of the Town Councils Standing Orders to regularise the tender threshold level to comply with Financial Regulations.
4. Summary.

Resolved: 1) **To support the Comments provided on the interim Internal Audit Observations report**
2) **To agree to the revision of the tender threshold figure contained within the Town Councils Standing Order (18 b v) to comply with the figure agreed in the Town Councils Financial Regulations.**

13474 HR ADMINISTRATION SOFTWARE

At the Corporate Services meeting held on the 1st December 2025 Members agreed (minute number 13450) to recommend the Town Council enter into a contract for the provision of HR administration software at a cost of £3,500 per annum.

Town Council was requested to agree the use of General Reserves to fund this contract and to ensure suitable budgetary provision be made during future budget setting processes.

Members agreed that the continued growth of the Town Council meant that administration had become increasingly time intensive and supported the proposal. The Town Clerk confirmed that a suitable provider had been found and detailed the costs.

Members queried the necessity of approving the sum of £3500 as this would not reflect the required sum for the current financial year and a more accurate figure could be agreed as part of the budget setting process in January; consequently, Members requested that the recommendation was amended as follows:



- Recommendation 1): to omit 'at a current cost of £3500'
- Recommendation 2): to insert 'in 2025/2026' for clarity.

Resolved:

- 1) To agree to the Town Council entering into a contract for the provision of HR administration software
- 2) To use of General Reserves in 2025/2026 to fund this contract and to request suitable budget provision is made during future budget setting processes.

13475 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Members voted unanimously on the exclusion of the press and public:

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.

13476 STAFFING FORECAST REVIEW – UPDATE FOR 2026-2027

Members agreed that the staffing forecast was in line with what was expected.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.52pm

Dated this 19th day of January 2026

Chairman

