

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Town Council
meeting held on
Monday 16th March 2026 7.00pm.**

Present: Councillors: M Herber Town Mayor
J Carroll
E Billington
P Burgess
E Cooper
Y Farrell
D Jones
T McMahon
C Rollins
A Slough
C Slough
D Taylor

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 1 (virtual)

Apologies Councillor: E Costello
W Henderson

13567 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillor Costello and Councillor Henderson.

13568 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13569 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13570 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 19th January 2026

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2026 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13571 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee	1 st December 2025
Community Services Committee	3 rd November 2025 10 th November 2025
Environment & Leisure Committee	20 th October 2025
Planning Committee	5 th January 2026 26 th January 2026
Staffing Committee	24 th November 2025
Town Partnership Committee	21 st October 2025 26 th November 2025

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

New Cemetery Sub-Committee None

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above.

13572 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor had attended 15 events including: the Houghton Hall Park mini forest planting; civic services; charity fund-raising events; a St Patrick's Day parade; and the South Beds Dial-a-Ride quarterly meeting.

The Deputy Mayor had also attended the St Patrick's Day parade.

13573 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillor Jones had attended the BATPC Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Accounting Committee.

The Community Governance Review had been the main topic of discussion in both meetings. There was general disappointment with the proposals in the review and the BATPC had submitted a representation in response.

Councillor Farrell informed Members that the tickets for the afternoon tea being held at the Memorial Hall had all sold out.

13574 CORPORATE PLAN REVIEW & UPDATE

The Corporate Plan had been updated and presented to Members.

The Town Clerk believed that the Corporate Plan was progressing well.

Resolved: To note the update on the Corporate Plan.

13575 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS REVIEW REPORT

The majority of items in the report were recorded as 'complete'. The single Amber item was the Town Partnership Terms of Reference which was outside the control of Houghton Regis Town Council.

Councillor Carroll highlighted that he did not feel that the separation of the role of RFO from the role of Town Clerk had followed due process as it had not been approved by Town Council in accordance with Financial Regulations. As such Cllr Carroll requested that this item be deferred.

Proposed by: Cllr Carroll Seconded by: Cllr Rollins

Councillor Jones voiced unwillingness to defer the entire Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) Action Plan.

It was proposed that the recommendation should be amended from:

'To endorse the updated Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan'

To:

'To endorse the updated Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan subject to reconsideration of the status of the RFO action.'

Proposed by: Cllr Jones Seconded by: Cllr A Slough

Councillor Carroll withdrew his proposal to defer endorsing the CPC Action Plan.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the amendment which then accordingly became the substantive motion.

Members voted unanimously on the substantive motion.

Resolved: To endorse the updated Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan subject to reconsideration of the status of the RFO action.

13576 FINANCIAL FORECAST

In line with Financial Regulations and the Corporate Plan, Members were provided with a 3-year budget forecast to 2029. This was intended as a financial guide only.

Standard items of expenditure had been increased including maintenance costs and the precept by 3%.

Members requested that the transfers to an earmarked reserves needed to be against specified projects. It was suggested that funds received from additional interest could be used to reduce the precept.

Resolved: To receive the 3-year financial forecast to 2029.



13577 STRATEGIC POLICIES 2026/27

An addendum regarding Committee Functions and Terms of Reference had been circulated to Members earlier.

Members were requested to review the Town Councils strategic policies prior to presentation at the Town Council meeting on 20th May 2026.

- Standing Orders – no amendments
- Financial Regulations - Financial Regulation 13.3 had been amended to align with section 38 of the Scheme of Delegation.
- Scheme of Delegation – amendments to reflect the change in responsibilities for the Head of Corporate Services and RFO.
- Committee Functions & Terms of Reference – various amendments including
 - Updated table on Page 2
 - Corporate Services Committee – clarification of policies to be considered by this committee, namely legislative policies relating to Council governance, compliance, finance, data protection, health & safety, equality, and other statutory obligations
 - Environment & Leisure Committee – to extend the functions of this committee to enable it ‘To consider and determine matters surrounding the development of a new cemetery for Houghton Regis and to commission specialist services such as may be deemed appropriate in progressing options for future cemetery provision’.
 - Staffing Committee – clarification of policies to be considered by this committee, namely ‘To draft, implement, review, monitor and revise policies for staff’.
 - Inclusion of Investment Working Group
 - Deletion of proposed New Cemetery Sub Committee
 - Replacement of Combating Crime Working Group with Community Safety Sub Committee
 - Inclusion of Town Centre Community Venue Task & Finish Group

Members highlighted that further amendments would be required to Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation arising from the separation of the responsibilities of RFO from the position of Town Clerk.

Members requested clarification on financial responsibilities within the Scheme of Delegation. The Town Clerk responded that most financial responsibilities would sit with the RFO, however strategic financial responsibilities would remain with the Town Clerk, including responsibility for writing off irrecoverable debts of up to £1000.

The Town Clerk confirmed that Members would receive advice on the suitability of the process followed to reallocate the responsibilities of RFO. If necessary, this matter would be brought back to Town Council. Further amendments to strategic policies would be reviewed.

The Town Clerk advised that a special meeting of the Town Council was being scheduled for April primarily to enable Council to determine the tender process for Project H. Policy revisions could be represented to this meeting if required. Members agreed that this would be a suitable opportunity.

Members suggested that, in line with the CPC recommendation that HRTC improve the strategic quality of its decision making, the necessity for the following committees should be appraised:

- Community Engagement Sub-Committee
- Community Safety Sub-Committee

The Town Clerk informed Members that consideration was being given to scheduling the Community Safety Sub-Committee in alternate months. Further discussion of these proposals could take place at the April meeting.

Resolved: To defer consideration of Strategic Policies until the April Town Council meeting.

13578 COUNCIL CALENDAR 2026/27

Members were provided with a draft calendar of meetings and events for 2026/27.

The following meetings had been diarised:

Town Council: 15th June; 12th October; 14th December 2026, 18th January, 15th March and 19th May 2027

Corporate Services Committee: 1st June; 7th September; 1st December 2026 and 1st March 2027

Community Services Committee: 20th July; 2nd November; 9th November (Grants) 2026; 22nd February and 26th April 2027

Environment and Leisure Committee: 6th July; 19th October 2026; 11th January and 5th April 2027

Planning Committee: meetings held every three weeks

Staffing Committee: 21st July; 20th October 2026 19th January and 13th April 2027

Town Partnership Committee: 28th July; 27th October 2026; 26th January and 27th April 2027

Councillor Jones requested that the 2027 Annual Towns meeting was held after the May elections but before the AGM on 19th May, either on the 10th or 17th May. Members agreed that further consideration should be given to the timing of this meeting in an election year.

Councillor Jones requested that consideration be given to moving the following meetings back by a week:



- Budget setting meeting in January
- Audited Accounts meeting in June

The Town Clerk responded that annual accounts had to be submitted by 30th June and suggested that putting back this meeting may cause difficulties should there be an issue with the annual accounts.

The Town Clerk accepted that the earlier January date caused time pressures for councillors should they leave detailed budget discussions until after the Christmas period. Councillor Jones stated he would look at the schedule and come back with some suggestions regarding meeting dates.

Members agreed to the draft calendar being represented at the April meeting.

13579 ANNUAL REVIEW OF COUNCIL ASSETS

Members were provided with a list of council assets held on 31st March 2026, as amended by additions and disposals during 2025/26.

This report was presented for information only.

13580 UNRECOVERABLE DEBTS

The Town Clerk informed Members that there were five debts in total: four relating to invoices issued in February and as such were not of concern and one older debt where discussions were ongoing regarding payment.

The Finance Team was praised and thanked by the Town Clerk for efficiently managing the debtors list and this was echoed by Members.

This report was presented for information only.

13581 BIODIVERSITY POLICY

Members were requested to adopt the Biodiversity Policy, which had been endorsed by the Environment and Leisure Committee at its meeting on 12th January 2026.

The policy would help the town council meet its legal obligations, benefit the community, and allow HRTC to participate in the Local Council Award Scheme run by NALC.

Members agreed unanimously to adopt the policy.

Resolved: To adopt the Biodiversity Policy.



The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.07pm

Dated this 14th day of April 2026

Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. E. Barber", is written on the right side of the page.