

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 14th April 2026 7.00pm.

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

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
D Marsh (virtual) Head of Corporate Services
I Haynes (virtual) Head of Environmental and
Community Services
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillor: Y Farrell

13590 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillor Farrell.

13591 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13592 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13593 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 16th March 2026.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2026 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13594 RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER – ARRANGEMENTS

At the Staffing Committee meeting held on the 2nd February 2026 Members supported a recommendation from Corporate Services on the separation of the Responsible Finance Officer and Town Clerk roles.

Members were asked to consider this recommendation prior to the minutes of the Staffing Committee being formally accepted as a correct record and signed accordingly at its next meeting. Some concerns had been raised at the March Town Council meeting regarding process, and the Town Clerk had emailed Members details explaining how the process had been followed.

While one Member expressed willingness to approve the recommendation, this was challenged by Cllr Carroll who felt that due process had not been observed. Cllr Carroll felt a number of issues needed to be addressed:

- The appointment of RFO was changed on 1st April and there was a delay in the policies being adapted
- Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Scheme of Delegation would need to be amended accordingly
- Relevant staff contracts would need to be updated.
- Internal and external evaluations would be required
- Suitability of workload
- Members were being asked to agree a resolution prior to draft minutes being confirmed
- Not all Members had access to all the information, specifically that in confidential papers as presented at Staffing Committee. Cllr Carroll felt that this meant Members were denied access to all the relevant information prior to voting.

Cllr Henderson joined the meeting.

Standing Order, 3a which named the Town Clerk as the RFO, was specifically referred to. Cllr Carroll expressed that these issues were personally felt and not necessarily shared by other councillors.

The Town Clerk responded that:

- Policies were a work in progress and would be finalised at the AGM
- Contracts for Town Clerk and Head of Corporate Services would not require amending. The appointment of RFO would form part of the job description
- HRTC did not carry out internal job evaluation. The Head of Corporate Services role had been evaluated externally, and the outcome had been fed back to the Staffing Committee. The Staffing Committee had also requested that the Town Clerk role be evaluated, and this was being undertaken.
- Consideration had been given to whether the workload would be manageable
- Council decisions were effective from the date of the meeting
- HRTC had sought legal advice regarding Members attendance in private session and had been advised that non-members had the same rights as members of the public.

Concern continued to be expressed that Members were being asked to approve decisions without access to all the relevant information. Cllr Carroll felt that he would be unable to vote in favour of the recommendation on these grounds.

Members suggested that access to confidential papers and confidential sections of council meetings should be discussed on another occasion as this appeared to be the primary issue. It was highlighted that to change the process on closed sessions would mean going against legal advice.

Cllr Jones proposed accepting the recommendation

Cllr C Slough seconded the proposal

Cllr Carroll requested a recorded vote

On being put to the vote, Members votes as follows:

In favour: Cllrs A Slough, C Slough, E Billington, W Henderson, D Jones, T
McMahon and E Cooper

Against: Cllrs J Carroll, and C Rollins

Abstained: Cllrs M Herber, P Burgess, D Taylor and E Costello

Resolved: To approve Minute 13519, namely, to formally recognise that the responsibilities of RFO be transferred to Head of Corporate Services from 1st April 2026.

13495 STRATEGIC POLICIES 2026/27

Members had been provided with information to enable a review of the Town Councils strategic polices prior to them being presented at the Town Council meeting to be held on 20th May 2026. Approval of the policies had been deferred from the Town Council meeting in March for further adjustments to be made.

In summary the amendments included:

- Standing Orders – no amendments
- Financial Regulations - amendments to Financial Regulation 13.3 to align with section 38 of the Scheme of Delegation
- Scheme of Delegation - amendments included reflecting the transfer of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)
- Committee Functions & Terms of Reference - amendments included:
 - 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.

- 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 (see Point 3 above)
- Replacement of Combating Crime Working Group with Community Safety Sub Committee
- Inclusion of Town Centre Community Venue Task & Finish Group

Councillor Carroll referenced Standing Order 7a regarding confidential matters and reiterated the wish to see access to the issue revisited. The Head of Corporate Services stated that going into private session was to ensure the integrity of the process rather than exclude Members from relevant information.

The Town Clerk questioned if Members would like confidential matters to be discussed as a separate item on the AGM agenda or at the June meeting. Members were of the opinion that this should be addressed at the AGM. The Town Clerk confirmed that, in response to the request from Members, a report on confidential matters would be generated and this would be brought forward at the AGM.

Resolved: To recommend to the Annual Meeting of Town Council approval of the following:

- **Standing Orders**
- **Financial Regulations as amended**
- **Scheme of Delegation as amended**
- **Committee Functions & Terms of Reference as amended**

13496 COUNCIL CALENDAR 2026/27

Further to the March meeting of Town Council, Cllr Jones had met with staff to review the draft Calendar of Meetings.

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

In summary, the following meetings had been diarised:

Town Council: 15th June; 12th October; 7th December 2026, 25th January and 22nd March 2027

Corporate Services Committee: 1st June; 7th September; 30th November 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 12th April 2027

Town Partnership Committee: 28th July; 27th October 2026 and 16th March 2027

Annual Towns Meeting 17th May 2027

Notes:

1. At the March Town Council meeting it was suggested that the Community Safety Sub Committee and the Community Engagement Sub Committee be disbanded as these committees primarily dealt with operational matters. Members were advised that a report was to be included on the Community Services agenda for 27th April. Should the committee decide to alter the arrangements for these sub committees the calendar would be adjusted accordingly.
2. The calendar also included dates for Leaders Briefings. These were scheduled to be held monthly, usually the first Monday of each month at 11am. These could be adjusted should there be any changes to nominated group leaders to ensure meetings dates were convenient.

Members highlighted that the Arts and Culture event had been moved from May to 25th July 2026 and needed to be amended in the schedule.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services joined the meeting

The Town Clerk highlighted that further amendments might be required, depending on decisions regarding the Community Safety Sub-Committee and the Community Engagement Sub-Committee.

Members expressed appreciation for the meeting invitations that were sent out to those who requested them but suggested that an opt-out option would be more appropriate.

13497 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS

Members were advised that officer consideration has been given to the timetable for the budget setting process.

Several Members had highlighted that the timetable placed a significant concentration of work in early January, often immediately before the Town Council meeting. This could make it difficult for councillors to engage fully with the detail and lead to feelings of pressure or frustration.

The revised timetable aimed to address these concerns and support more effective scrutiny and decision-making.

The proposed timetable was as follows:

- Officers would prepare a draft budget, based on the Financial Forecast, by 30 September.

- This draft would be included on Standing Committee agendas throughout October and early November.
- A revised officer draft, reflecting committee feedback, would be circulated in early November.
- The tax base was usually received around 10 November; officers would assess its implications and, if required, issue a further updated draft.
- The final budget would then be presented to Town Council at the scheduled meeting in early December.

A scheduled town council meeting in January would allow for the draft budget to be presented if necessary.

Members were generally in favour of the proposed budget setting timetable but felt that decision making on the precept should not be made earlier than necessary.

13498 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

Members were provided with a draft Annual Report for 2025/26 for approval.

The Annual Report provided a transparent account of the council's work over the year, demonstrating how public funds had been used and how key decisions had supported the town's strategic priorities. It highlighted progress across all committees, showcased achievements, and evidenced the council's commitment to openness, accountability and good governance.

The Town Clerk informed Members that some of the figures in the report might require updating at year end.

Members felt it was unnecessary to for code numbers to form part of the public document. Members also noted that the expenditure detail was perhaps more extensive than necessary.

Resolved: To approve the Annual Report 2025/26.

13499 PROJECT H

Members received a report outlining considerations for the tender process and the naming of the venue.

In relation to the tender process members considered:

- A restricted tender invitation process
- Means of tender submission
- Tender opening process

Members were requested to decide on the process they would prefer to implement regarding the naming the venue. Members suggested an alternative option to those presented: for the Task and Finish Group to generate a shortlist of suggestions, to put this list out to consultation and using the consultation responses for the Task & Finish Group to make a recommendation back to Town Council.

Resolved: Tender Process:

1. To approve a selective tendering process for Project H, based on the identified benefits of inviting a small number of proven contractors, thereby ensuring a competitive exercise, reducing procurement risk, and securing value for money. (Suspension of Financial Regulation 5.6)
2. To approve the use of an electronic tendering process in accordance with the provision within Appendix 1, point 2 of Financial Regulations).
3. To approve the Proper Officer and Town Mayor to open the tender submissions on behalf of HRTC, in accordance with Standing Order 18, d iv.

Venue Name:

4. To request that the Task and Finish Group generate a shortlist of suggestions, to put this list out to consultation and using the consultation responses for the Task & Finish Group to make a recommendation back to Town Council.

13500 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- Project H

Proposed by: Cllr Jones Seconded by: T McMahon

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.

13501 PROJECT H

Members were requested to consider the appointment of a consultant to undertake the Tender Analysis process and the appointment of a consultant to act as the Contract Manager.

Resolved: Tender Analysis

1. To appoint Common Works to support to review, analyse and recommend on tender submissions at a cost of up to £2,450. To fund this via EMR 355.

Contract Manager

2. To appoint Stockton Bradley to act as the Contract Manager for the delivery of the fit out of Project H at a cost of 7.5% of the most economical tender bid (with a minimum fee of £18,000). To fund this as part of the capital cost of the project as to be determined by Town Council in due course.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.13pm

Dated this 20th day of May 2026

Chairman

DRAFT