HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council
meeting held on
12th October 2026 7.00pm.

Present:	Councillors:	D Jones	Town Mayor
		J Carroll	
		E Billington	
		E Cooper	
		Y Farrell	
		W Henderson	
		M Herber	
		S King	
		T McMahon	
		C Rollins	
		C Slough	
		D Taylor	
	Officers:	Clare Evans	Town Clerk
		Ian Haynes	Head of Environmental & Community Services
		Louise Senior	Head of Democratic Services
Apologies	Councillors:	E Costello	
		A Slough	

13706 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received form Councillor A Slough and Councillor Costello.

13707 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13708 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13709 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 15th June 2026.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2026 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13710 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

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Corporate Services Committee	1st June 2026 Minute number 13566 – For information this was approved at Town Council on 15th June 2026. Minute number 13570 – Code of Conduct Complaint Handling To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Code of Conduct Complaint Handling policy. Minute number 13571 – Communication Strategy To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils newly developed Communication Strategy. Minute number 13572 – Whistleblowing Policy To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Whistleblowing Policy
Community Services Committee	27th April 2026
Environment & Leisure Committee	21st April 2026
Planning Committee	2nd June and 22nd June, 13th July, 3rd August and 24th August, 14th September 2026
Staffing Committee	2nd February 2026
Town Partnership Committee	28th April 2026

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendations and to adopt the policies contained therein:
Minute number 13570 Code of Conduct Complaint Handling
- **To adopt the Town Councils Code of Conduct Complaint Handling policy.**

Minute number 13571 Communication Strategy
- **To adopt the Town Councils newly developed Communication Strategy.**

Minute number 13572 Whistleblowing Policy
- **To adopt the Town Councils Whistleblowing Policy.**

13711 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor advised that he had attended 30 events as Town Mayor. These included the Carnival, where he had run tombola stalls, supported summer holiday activities, including the Skate Jam and open-air theatre.

Three fundraising events had been held: an afternoon tea, a Civic Reception and a coffee morning. The total raised was not yet available.

The Mayor reiterated his support for his three chosen charities, Motor Neurone Disease Association, Hospice at Home and Keech Hospice, he expressed particular thanks to the Mayoral Secretary for her assistance and support.

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The Mayor had also supported events hosted by other mayors, highlighting three in particular: the Choral Nova Proms at the Priory concert, which raised over £2,000; the Ampthill charity curry night; and the Dunstable Sea Cadets awards evening.

The Deputy Mayor reported that she had deputised for the Mayor on five occasions. Engagements included Heritage Day, Anglia in Bloom, the Bedford Justice Service and a quiz night.

13712 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillor Farrell reported that the Memorial Hall floor had been renovated and measures were being taken to ensure longevity of the floor. Forthcoming events included a Halloween quiz followed by a disco, and a Craft and Christmas Fayre. Also attended was the opening of new Linmere Co-op.

Councillor McMahon reported on an online Super Councils Network session. Topics included revisions to the proper practices guidance, which had been rewritten and simplified, a code for internal auditors and the rollout of the digital Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The session also provided an overview of changes anticipated for 2028 and a consultation closing on 31st October.

Councillor McMahon also referred to the NALC study tour to Oswestry in 2027 and advised that the NALC conference would take place on 23rd June 2027.

Councillor Herber provided an update on South Beds Dial-a-Ride, including its Annual General Meeting and a special meeting concerning a dispute with Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the issuing of Blue Badges. She also reported that she had deputised for the Town Mayor at the opening of the new Linmere Co-op.

Councillor Jones provided an update on the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils (BATPC). He referred to two meetings in December and advised that the Annual General Meeting would take place on the coming Wednesday.

Work was underway to update the BATPC constitution to remove outdated wording. Meetings had also been held with Bedford Borough parishes to discuss concerns regarding the shortfall in housing land supply.

It was reported that Bedford Borough Council had withdrawn its Local Plan 2040 and commenced preparation of a new plan. Its housing land supply stood at 3.35 years, which was below the five-year requirement.

Reference was also made to Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan reaching five years old in 2026. Members were advised that the Government's standard method for calculating housing need would then need to be adopted, resulting in a reduction in the available number of years of Central Bedfordshire Council housing land supply.

BATPC would also attend a "Become a Councillor" event to promote the role of town and parish councils.

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13713 PROJECT H

Council had agreed at its meeting on 14th April 2026 to invite tenders for the detailed design and fit out of Project H, including electrical, mechanical and audio-visual installations.

The report provided detailed information to enable Council to award the fit-out contract and determine how the works would be funded.

An update on progress with the lease was requested. It was advised that the lease was close to completion. The solicitor acting for the Town Council required evidence and copies of the collateral warranties to be included in the lease documentation. Central Bedfordshire Council was locating these documents for onward transmission to the solicitor.

Concern was expressed that costs were increasing while completion of the lease remained outstanding. It was clarified that although there was an element of inflation, costs were not increasing by the suggested £30,000 per month. It was explained that certain elements, including ventilation, audio-visual installations and other finishing works, had not been included in the initial costs.

An amendment was proposed for recommendation 5.

The officer recommendation read:

For Houghton Regis Town Council at its meeting on 21st October 2026 to seek the approval of the Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to apply for a PWLB annuity loan of £500,000 over the borrowing term of 7.5 not over 8 years for the fit-out of Unit 1, All Saints View, as a Community Hub. The annual loan repayments will come to around £79,398.
It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.

The proposed recommendation:

For Houghton Regis Town Council at its meeting on 12th October 2026 to seek the approval of the Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to apply for a PWLB annuity loan of £500,000 over the borrowing term of 11.5 not over 12 years for the fit-out of Unit 1, All Saints View, as a Community Hub. The annual loan repayments will come to around £59,398.
It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.

Members voted on the amended recommendation; this was agreed by members and as such became the substantive motion.

Resolved:
1. **To note the Project Summary Report;**
2. **To authorise the Mayor and the Town Clerk to sign the lease for Unit 1, All Saints View;**
3. **To receive the tender analysis report;**

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4. **Subject to lease being signed, to appoint contractor A, Form, as the contractor for the fit out of Unit 1, All Saints View, as a Community Hub, up to a contract value of £669,153 (including a 10% contingency)**
5. **For Houghton Regis Town Council at its meeting on 12th October 2026 to seek the approval of the Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to apply for a PWLB annuity loan of £500,000 over the borrowing term of 11.5 not over 12 years for the fit-out of Unit 1, All Saints View, as a Community Hub. The annual loan repayments will come to around £59,398. It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.**
6. **To note that funding currently coded to 199-4991 will be re-purposed to a new code to facilitate the loan repayments.**
7. **To note that any contract variations during the construction phase will be determined as follows:**
    - **Variations to works within or less than the budget to be agreed by Town Clerk, the Head of Environmental & Community Services, Cllr Jones and Cllr McMahon**
    - **Variations in excess of budget to be agreed by Town Council**

13714 LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME – GOLD APPLICATION

The Corporate Plan included an objective under Pillar 4, Management & Operations, to apply for the NALC Local Council Award scheme. The scheme offered 3 levels of accreditation: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

As part of the process Council was required to confirm by Resolution that all the required documents, information and conditions were in place for the award.

Resolution:
1. **To confirm that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Bronze award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable;**
2. **To confirm that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Silver award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable**
3. **To confirm that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Gold award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable**

13715 2023–2027 TERM REVIEW AND 2027 ELECTION PROMOTION

2023–2027 Term Review

As the 2023-2027 term of office draws to a close reflecting back on member experiences would provide a useful learning opportunity for the council. It was hoped to use feedback to support or amend council administrative processes to improve councillor experiences.

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2027 Election Promotion

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 placed duties on Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers to encourage participation in the electoral process.

Whilst this statutory duty did not fall directly upon the Town Council, Houghton Regis Town Council could support democratic engagement by raising awareness of the 2027 elections and encouraging residents to participate in the local democratic process.

It was requested that updated maps of Central Bedfordshire and its wards be obtained from Central Bedfordshire Council, as these would provide a useful tool to support promotion of the May 2027 elections.

Resolved: **1. To support the review of the 2023-2027 term of office;**
2. To support the election promotion process for May 2027.

13716 INTERNAL CONTROL POLICY

Members received the Town Council's Internal Controls Policy for review and approval as part of the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control, required under Regulation 6(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

It was noted that the system comprised an ongoing process to identify, prioritise, evaluate and manage risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives.

Members were invited to consider the internal control environment set out in Section 3 of the Policy and confirm the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control. Members were advised that the legislative framework relating to internal control requirements remained unchanged.

Resolved: **To confirm the effectiveness of the council's internal control system in accordance with the council's Internal Control Policy.**

13717 PLANNING COMMITTEE VACANCY

Members considered the vacancy on the Planning Committee. As no nomination was forthcoming, members were advised that the vacancy would be a recurring item on future Town Council agendas until the vacancy was filled.

13718 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2025/26

Members received the following:

- Audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26
- Completion Letter dated 18th September 2026

Members noted under Section 2 of the External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2025/26 that following review of the Town Councils Annual Governance and Accountability Return, no matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met and therefore, as under Section 3 have certified

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they have completed their review and discharged their responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31st March 2026.

The completion letter raised no minor issues for improvement in 2026/27 however it did provide the following information:

1. ***Amendment to the Practitioners' Guide 2026/27 in respect of Section 2 Box 11 Trust Fund Transactions***
   As part of the Accounting Statements (Section 2), the authority is asked to confirm whether there are any trust fund transactions included in the figures. Box 11 has been amended to state the authority should answer based on whether trust fund transactions have been excluded from the AGAR. We wish to draw attention to a change within the 2026/27 Practitioner's Guide (point 2.32) which confirms the authority will need to respond 'Yes' where the figures include trust fund transactions. We would encourage all authorities to familiarise themselves with the 2026/27 Practitioner's Guide (available on the NALC website) ahead of completing their 2026/27 AGAR.

Members were advised this information would be considered when completing the 2026/27 AGAR.

2. ***Accessibility Regulations***
   We are aware that the Accounts and Audit Regulations requirement for a physical 'wet ink' signature on the original AGAR, does not allow parish council's to fully comply with the Accessibility Regulations. The National Audit Office are aware that the two pieces of legislation are not compatible, therefore smaller authorities are advised to make it clear on their website that the document is a scan and will not be fully compliant with the Accessibility Regulations.

This advice remains provided on the Council's website.

Resolved:
1. **To approve and accept the Audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26;**
2. **To note the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 18th September 2026.**

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8:18pm
Dated this 7th day of December 2026

Chairman

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