

Minutes of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**
held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY**
17th DECEMBER 2025 at 2.15 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor M. Bonfield (Town Mayor) – Chair

Councillor T. Foster
Councillor C. Moreton
Councillor G. Suttle
Councillor C. Sutton
Councillor C. Tomes
Councillor S. Vile

Also in attendance: -

Councillor J. Bishop

Dr M Ayres Town Clerk and RFO
Mr C Milmer Visitor Services and Business Development
Manager (to 3.40 p.m.)
Ms G Percival Assets & Compliance Manager (to 3.40 p.m.)
Miss A Spencer Finance Manager

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

1. **Apologies**

There were no apologies to record on this occasion.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Agenda Item No. 5 (a) – Councillor Bonfield declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of being employed as a taxi driver and hiring a grid space in the boat park.

Agenda Item No. 5 (a) – Councillor Tomes declared a non-pecuniary interest in the scale of charges under the Code of Conduct by reason of close family members being private beach hut site licensees.

3. **To Consider Minutes of the Meeting of the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Sub-Committee meeting held on 2nd December 2025**

The minutes of the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Sub-Committee meeting were noted.

4. **Internal Audit Report 2025/26 – Visits 2 & 3 of 6**

Consideration was given to an Internal Audit Report – Visits 2 & 3 of 6 for the 2025/26 financial year prepared by Darkin-Miller – Chartered Accountants.

The following areas had been reviewed during the audit visits:-

- Minute review- work in progress
- Income (general testing)
- Petty Cash
- Payroll

It was highlighted that the report contained only one reportable medium level recommendation and one low level recommendation to be addressed by officers. Members noted the report.

5. **Budget Setting 2026/27 -To Review:**

(a) **Draft Estimates 2026/27**

The Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer introduced the Preliminary Budget Report 2026/27, which included the recommendations made at standing committees, with a finance workshop also having been held for Members. An overview of the Council's current position was given, with it being noted that the council was forecast to be in a better financial position over the next three financial years, than had been estimated in previous years. However, a cautionary note was struck due to the difficult national economic background and the as yet undetermined financial impact of the Green Seafront Scheme. Attention was drawn to the significant weight being placed upon demand driven revenue streams and the continuation of the positive impact of the second homes premium on the precept to be raised via the council tax.

In reference to the estimates for 2026/27, the importance of maintaining the Council's general reserve (general fund balance) above a risk-assessed minimum sum of £614,000 was highlighted, as a cushion against any potential financial shocks.

Members scrutinised the Preliminary Budget Report, noting the budget proposals that had been submitted by each committee. Detailed consideration was given to the recommendations for grants, donations and contributions to third parties. A lengthy discussion arose as to the funding of the Swanage Primary School Crossing Patrol, given a recommendation to 'upgrade to automatic flashing lights' made by the Community Services Committee. It was acknowledged that this matter required further discussion with the school, PTA and parents and should be reviewed again at a future meeting of the Community Services Committee. It was noted that a budget of £6,500 had been included in the draft budget for 2026/27 to fund this service, whichever option was determined. In light of this discussion, the recommendation made under Minute No. 4 of the Community Services Committee meeting held on 15th October 2025 was not moved.

Attention was drawn to the continued inclusion in the estimates of an annual grant of £5,250 to the Swanage Town & Herston Football Club, a sum equivalent to the rent received by the Council from CTIL (Vodafone) for the telecoms mast at Day's Park. In light of uncertainty around the current rent review process, Members considered whether or not the grant should be subject to retrospective revision should the rent be reduced. However, in light of the Football Club's continued commitment to community sports, it was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND:

That an annual grant in the sum of £5,250 should continue to be paid to Swanage Town & Herston Football Club until such a time as the revised rent is agreed with the telecoms mast operator, with no back rent adjustments being made to that sum.

It was noted that the draft estimates also included the following budget allocations for contributions to third parties: an £8,000 grant to the CAB (further to the recommendation contained in Minute No. 7 of the Community Services Committee meeting held on 15th October 2025); £4,300 to Dorset Council for Bay

Safety Enforcement; £15,000 to fund cultural initiatives (either as a grant or direct funding following the unsuccessful Town of Culture bid earlier in the year); £15,000 for environmental partner funding; and £10,000 for small grants to local charities/voluntary organisations.

In addition to the recommendations made by committees for one-off significant expenditure, it was reported that a further £5,000 had been included in the draft budgets for insulation works at the Town Hall (Environment & Green Spaces Committee) and £60,000 as a contribution towards works at the Sports Hall at Day's Park. It was noted that the latter sum would be deducted from the funds set aside for grant funding for the Football Club and was not an addition to existing budgets.

i. **Scale of Fees and Charges 2026/27**

Consideration was given to a draft scale of fees and charges for the Council's services for the 2026/27 financial year. It was noted that the fees and charges had been considered by a Task & Finish group in the first instance, and then by each relevant committee, with the exception of the Private Beach Hut Site licence fee. It was noted that the fees for Council-owned beach huts had already been approved and would be excluded from any voting requirement.

Members noted pressures on the economy and the impact that this may have on income from tourism and demand driven supplies. It was further noted that the draft charges included a recommendation by the Events Management Working Party of a revised charge for £750.00 for events, a reduction from the £1,000 recommended by the Tourism and Local Economy Committee. It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Vile and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th January 2026:

That the Scale of Fees and Charges, Appendix G of the Preliminary Budget Report, excluding Taxi Permits, Boat Park and Private Site Licence Fee charges, be approved and adopted.

Further to his declarations of interest in sections of the scale of charges under item 2) above, the Chairman left the meeting. Councillor Tomes assumed the chair.

It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th January 2026:

That the Scale of Fees and Charges for the Boat Park and Taxi fees, included in Appendix G of the Preliminary Budget Report, be approved and adopted.

Councillor Bonfield re-entered the meeting and assumed the chair.

Further to his declarations of interest under item 2) above, Councillor Tomes left the meeting.

It was noted that the proposed Private Beach Hut Site Licence fee had been increased by 4% year-on-year, in line with the general increase applied to other charges. It was reported that the chair of the private beach hut site owners' association had been informed of this proposal by e-mail but no representations

had been received. It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Foster and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the Scale of Fees and Charges for the Private Sites Licence Fee, included in Appendix G of the Preliminary Budget Report, be approved and adopted.

Councillor Tomes re-entered the meeting.

ii. **Revenue Budgets 2026/27**

Consideration was given to the draft Revenue Budget summarised in Appendix A of the Preliminary Budget Report, incorporating the significant one-off revenue expenditure shown in Appendix B, as recommended by standing committees, and the grant/third party funding considered under Minute No. 5(a) above. It was proposed by Councillor Vile, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the Revenue Budget, incorporating Appendix B and grants/third party funding, be approved and adopted.

iii. **Capital Programme 2026/27**

Members gave consideration to the draft capital programme, Appendix D to the Preliminary Budget Report.

The most significant item on the programme was noted as the Green Seafront Scheme. It was reported that for the purposes of budget profiling, a sum of £4.75m had been used, with a start date of September 2027 and finish date of April/May 2028. It was noted that the budget for this project was indicative, pending the finalisation of the business plan and approval of the preferred option. A funding gap of £185,000 was highlighted, although it was noted that this could be partially mitigated by a transfer from the general fund to the Green Seafront Scheme Reserve. It was noted that this is in accordance with the adopted Reserves Policy. There was also discussion of the potential to re-allocate some funding from the Environmental Projects Reserve to fund the Biodiversity Net Gain element of the seafront works. It was AGREED:

That the budget proposals to be presented to the Estimates meeting on 12th January 2026 should contain an increased allocation to the Green Seafront Scheme Reserve.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the draft Capital Programme, be approved and adopted.

iv. **Precept 2026/27**

Members gave consideration to the Precept to levy for 2026/27. It was noted that further to consideration at the budget workshop, the draft budget included a figure of £1,159,000, an increase of £74,000, equivalent to a 6.82% increase in total

precept. It was further noted that due to a 4.72% increase in the tax base, this would equate to a 2.01%/£3.79 increase on a Band D property. During consideration of this proposal, Members highlighted the need for the council to ensure a robust financial position for the future in order to be able to maintain the town's assets and continue to deliver high-quality public services. Particular attention was drawn to the financial uncertainty facing the council, arising from the national economy, the yet-to-be determined cost of the Green Seafront stabilisation and enhancement proposals and the unknown impact of the second homes premium in future years.

It was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the Town Council approves a precept of £1,159,000 for the 2026/27 financial year, equivalent to a Band D bill of £192.64, an increase of 2.01%/£3.79 on the current year's charge.

(b) **Reserves Policy**

Consideration was given to the Council's Reserves Policy, last revised and adopted 20th January 2025. The proposed amendments to the Reserves Policy were noted as the merger of the King George's Play Area and Skate Park Reserve with the King George's Field Management Account and the introduction of a Grants Reserve, which would hold any underspend on the community grants budget line.

It was proposed by Councillor Sutton, seconded by Councillor Vile and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the revised Reserves Policy be approved and adopted.

(c) **Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statement 2026/27**

The Finance Manager presented the draft Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statement 2026/27 (TMISS).

It was noted that only one change had been proposed to investment counterparties and limits, the criteria within which officers operated treasury activity, from the 2025/26 financial year, this being an increase in Money Market Fund limits to £0.75m per fund and £2m for the sector.

It was proposed by Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Suttle and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND to the Estimates meeting on 12th

January 2026:

That the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy Statement 2026/27 be approved and adopted.

6. **IT Policy – Draft for Consideration**

Further to Minute No. 7 of the Finance & Governance Committee meeting held on 12th November 2025, it was again noted that an IT Policy was now a requirement to comply with Assertion 10 of the AGAR Section 1-Annual Governance Statement.

Consideration was given to a revised document which had been tailored to ensure its consistency with the council's existing Internet and E-mail Policy, contained in the Staff

Handbook. After further discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Foster and RESOLVED UNANIOULSY:

TO RECOMMEND:

That the draft IT Policy be adopted.

Further to the discussion about member training recorded under Minute No. 4(a) of the Finance & Governance Committee meeting held on 12th November 2025, it was noted that training regarding cyber security would be provided by Dorset Police in the near future. It was also suggested that Members be provided with some online learning opportunities.

7. **Items of information and matters for forthcoming agendas**

- (a) **Update on creation of FOI webpage** – It was reported that the webpage should be live in January 2026.
- (b) **To note receipt of Data Protection Compliance Report** – The executive summary of the report, and the improved compliance rating of 81%, was noted.
- (c) **Review of Social Media Policy**

8. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 25th February 2026.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 p.m.
