

Minutes of the Governance & Finance Meeting

Date: Thursday 20 November 2025

Time: 7:00 PM

Venue: Town Hall, Bridge Street, Downham Market PE38 9DW

Present

Chair – Cllr Hobbs

Councillors Brewer, Dickson, Lane, Perkin

Claire Dornan (Town Clerk)

There were no members of the public present.

Cllr Hobbs reminded members that phones need to be placed on silent. Cllr Hobbs also reminded members of the fire evacuation procedures.

1. To note apologies for absence

All members were present.

2. To receive Declarations of Interest and consider requests for Dispensations

Members noted that they are all residents of the town so will be affected by the budget.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2025

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record.

Proposed: Cllr Hobbs, Seconded: Cllr Brewer, 4 in Favour. 1 Abstention – Cllr Dickson

4. To discuss Committee budget requests for 2026/2027 and make recommendation to Full Council

Human Resources Committee

Members reviewed the Human Resources Committee budget and noted that no increase had been requested. Members queried whether the HR advice line provision remained adequate.

Planning Committee

Members noted that the Planning Committee budget request had been merged into the Human Resources Committee budget under the Travel & Expenses line.

Events Budget

Members noted that the Events budget continues to be supported by Full Council.

Ear Marked Reserves (EMR)

Members reviewed the Ear Marked Reserves and noted the following:

- The Electric Vehicle Charging Point EMR of £10,000 has been reallocated to the Assembly Room curtains project, resulting in a surplus of £2,162 to be returned to Reserves.
- The Car Park EMR stands at £57,519 against an anticipated £60,000 requirement.
- The Town Square EMR of £5,000 remains unchanged; Members queried whether this reserve is still required given that the Town Square lighting upgrade has been completed under an alternative budget.
- No increase had been proposed for the Town Hall Window Renovation EMR of £25,000.
- No expenditure has been made under the Town Hall Amp, Speakers, Drapes & Projector Upgrade EMR of £10,000; Members questioned whether this remains necessary.
- Expenditure from the Cllr Doyle Memorial EMR of £1,000 will be deferred to 2026/2027 pending the JCC Site Working Party's review of the memorial boat location.
- No expenditure has been made under the Town Hall Table & Chair Replacement Project EMR of £10,000; Members queried whether this is still required.
- No expenditure has been made under the Information Point Upgrade EMR of £3,200; Members queried whether this remains necessary.
- Members were satisfied with the allocations for the JCC Boiler EMR (£4,000) and the Paradise Road Pump Electric Relocation EMR (£15,000).

Property Committee Budget Recommendations

Members reviewed the Property Committee budget and recommended the following amendments:

<u>Budget Line</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Amendment</u>
Town Square Lights (Already upgraded)	£1,000	£0
Paradise Road Business Rates	£6,930	£6,025
Hollies Business Rates	£11,500	£10,000
Priory Road Business Rates	£4,340	£3,900
Town Hall Car Park Business Rates	£2,310	£1,850
JCC Business Rates	£8,085	£5,550
Town Hall Business Rates	£10,395	£8,800

Members further noted that:

- The additional £60,000 requested for Car Park Repairs, if approved by Council, should be funded from existing reserves rather than added to the precept.

- The Town Clerk should use the Professional Fees budget to commission an independent consultant to undertake a condition survey of the car parks and advise on maintenance over the next three financial years.
- Members expressed concern that an estimated £120,000 allocation for Car Park Repairs was disproportionate given that the car parks generate no income and their condition is comparable to other local authority car parks in West Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.
- Members supported the creation of a new EMR for Council Van Replacement (£5,000) and noted the Town Clerk's supporting report.
- Members questioned whether the Tree Maintenance budget of £2,000 was sufficient, particularly given the recommendation to commission a full tree audit. A budget in the region of £5,000 was suggested.
- Members queried why the Jubilee Community Centre (JCC) Maintenance Budget was set at £22,000 when potential refurbishment is anticipated within the next few years, while the Grade II listed Town Hall has a maintenance budget of only £21,000. Members recommended halving the JCC maintenance budget unless a detailed maintenance schedule is provided. Members also noted that £4,000 is already earmarked for the boiler—the major anticipated expenditure.
- Members questioned whether the Town Hall Lighting Upgrade line (£1,000) could be absorbed into the general Town Hall Maintenance budget.
- Members noted that the Drapes Budget had increased to £10,000 and queried why this was not being allocated to the existing EMR, and whether quotations had been obtained to justify the increase.
- Members queried the ongoing annual request for JCC LED Lighting Upgrade (£2,000). This line has appeared repeatedly and should, at a minimum, be transferred to EMR and not re-requested through the precept.
- Members recommended increasing the Town Hall Cleaning Supplies budget from £2,000 to £3,000.
- Members queried the Outdoor Gym Equipment and Skate Park budget line (£10,000). As Skate Park improvements are expected to be funded through CIL and grants, Members suggested reducing this line to £2,000 to cover routine maintenance and the annual inspection. Members also queried whether monthly inspections could be conducted in-house.
- Members queried whether the Town Hall & No. 6 Broadband budget (£2,500) was necessary as these costs appear to be covered under the Administration Telephone budget.

Members expressed the need for the Council to adopt a 5-year Business Plan and Maintenance Schedule to support longer-term financial planning.

Skate Park Removal

Members queried why the Skate Park removal had not been referred to them given that the expenditure exceeded the approved budget. Members asked who had authorised the removal, noting that it had not been considered by Full Council. Further concerns were raised regarding procedural compliance, including whether a contract had been issued and whether a method statement, waste transfer notice, Public Liability Insurance details, and a Risk Assessment had been obtained.

The Town Clerk advised that she had not been involved in the process and would investigate the matter.

Asbestos

Members requested an update following the Asbestos Condition Assessment Report circulated to Council on 19 November 2025. The Town Clerk reported that remedial work had been completed on 20 November 2025 at a cost of £550 + VAT. In accordance with Financial Regulations, this was authorised as Emergency Expenditure with approval from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The previously used asbestos surveyor was re-engaged due to their existing knowledge of the building and prior work for the Council.

RESOLVED – That the actions and expenditure authorised by the Town Clerk are supported by the Committee

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour

Town Hall Alarm

Members requested clarification regarding the failure of the kitchen alarm and the update issued on 19 November 2025. CTS Security Limited attended the same day, and the works were completed at a cost of £117.25 + VAT. This expenditure was approved under Delegated Authority. Three quotations were not obtained due to the existing contract with CTS Security.

RESOLVED – That the actions and expenditure authorised by the Town Clerk are supported by the Committee

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour

Remembrance Sunday Event

Members noted that the Town Clerk had authorised additional expenditure of £140 under Delegated Authority to provide extra CSAS-qualified staff to support the amended parade route. The initial approval was £695 + VAT, with the final invoiced total being £835 + VAT.

RESOLVED – That the actions and expenditure authorised by the Town Clerk are supported by the Committee

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour

Replacement Mobile Telephones

Members discussed the Town Clerk's report of 18 November 2025 regarding damage to the Maintenance Team mobile phone and the inability to update the Reception mobile phone. Members agreed that the phones were essential operational tools and authorised their replacement under Emergency Expenditure. Three quotations had been obtained.

RESOLVED – That the following items be approved under Emergency Expenditure:

Motorola Moto G35 5G (Maintenance Phone) – £82.50 + VAT

Apple iPhone 14 (128GB) (Reception Phone) – £414 + VAT

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour

6. To review Interim Audit Report from meeting on 23 October 2025 and make recommendations to Full Council

Audit Findings

- **Asset register**

It would be useful to have an asset register, possibly an abridged version, on the DMTC website.

- **Committee terms of references**

All committees need terms of reference.

- **Noting of external auditor's report**

This should happen at Full Council.

- **Minutes of all meetings need to be approved at the next full council meeting**

Some meetings, such as the G&F meeting of June 2025, have not been approved. Councillors should be able to agree about what happened at meetings even if they disagree with the outcomes. It is further noted that some HR committee meetings were not approved at the next full council meeting but were put on the agenda en bloc to be approved at an HR committee meeting. Minutes of HR committee meetings need to be approved at the next meeting of Full Council.

- **Approval of payments**

Payments should be approved at Full Council.

Members noted that they were happy with content and the steps taken by the team to meet the requirements of the previous audit.

RESOLVED – That the Interim Internal Audit Report should be adopted by Full Council.

Proposed: Cllr Dickson, Seconded: Cllr Hobbs, All in Favour.

7. To review finance papers for Chair's signature

7.1 October 2025 Bank Reconciliation

Petty Cash	31/10/2025	£0.00 (Not held)
Business Current Account	31/10/2025	£21,863.99
Working Balance Account	31/10/2025	£460,027.57
Reserve Account	31/10/2025	£358,724.39
Ear Marked Reserves Account	31/10/2025	£111,948.43
Credit Card	31/10/2025	£0.00 (Not held)
CIL Account	31/10/2025	£153,505.53
JCC Account	31/10/2025	£28,301.43 (Ring Fenced)
Money Market Account	31/10/2025	£500,372.69 (Capital Project)
Cash In Hand	31/10/2025	£1,634,744.03

RESOLVED – That the Chair of the Committee be authorised to sign the Bank Reconciliation to 31 October 2025.

Proposed: Cllr Lane, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour.

7.2 Bills for payment

RESOLVED – That the Chair of the Committee be authorised to sign payment 425 - 519.

Proposed: Cllr Lane, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour.

It was noted that these payments will be presented to Full Council for dual sign-off.

7.3 Bank statements

RESOLVED – That the Bank Statements be accepted as presented.

Proposed: Cllr Lane, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour.

7.4 Receipts list

RESOLVED – That the Chair of the Committee be authorised to sign receipts 713 - 862.

Proposed: Cllr Lane, Seconded: Cllr Dickson, All in Favour.

It was noted that the receipts will be presented to Full Council for dual sign-off.

8. To agree date for 10% finance check for October 2025

It was agreed that Cllrs Hobbs and Perkin will complete the 10% finance check on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 10am.

9. Review General Reserves and make recommendation to Full Council

10. Review Investments and make recommendation to Full Council

Item 9 & 10 were discussed together in light of the Review of Council Cash Balances and Savings Options report provided by the Town Clerk to the Committee.

RESOLVED – That Cllr Dickson will work with the Town Clerk to look into options to improve the interest yield for the Town Council as it was felt the Town Clerk's suggestions were to risk averse.

Proposed: Cllr Lane, Seconded: Cllr Hobbs, All in Favour.

11. To review and update the asset register

Members reviewed the Asset Register and agreed the following amendments as listed on the agenda:

A00521 – New Laptop (Admin): Addition approved.

000387 – User Change: Updated from Admin to Maintenance.

000169 – Old Maintenance Laptop: Approved for disposal.

Members further noted the following required disposals:

Maintenance Mobile Phone – Asset 000408: Item to be disposed of.

Reception Mobile Phone – Asset 000296: Item to be disposed of.

The Town Clerk reported additional items requiring disposal:

Office Chair – Asset 000305: Broken and approved for disposal. A replacement will be purchased.

Office Kettle – Asset 000417: Broken and approved for disposal. A replacement kettle was purchased from Morrisons on 18 November 2025 at a cost of £7 and has been added to the register as Asset A00522.

12. To review draft Standing Orders from 12 November 2025 and make recommendation to Full Council

This item was rolled to the next meeting as the updates were outstanding.

13. Review Risk Register and make recommendations to Full Council

Members reviewed the Risk Register in full and agreed that the level of risk had increased in the following areas:

Governance and Financial Management

Incomplete or inaccurate financial records

Members noted an increased risk due to instances where a Councillor appears to have entered into a contract without Full Council approval or an agreed Terms of Reference.

Breach of Financial Regulations

The same concerns regarding unauthorised contractual agreements contribute to an elevated risk in this area.

Grants paid to community groups not used appropriately

Members agreed that a diary system should be implemented to ensure timely receipt of monitoring reports from grant recipients. These reports should be submitted to Full Council for review.

Misappropriation of funds

The risk level has increased due to unauthorised contract agreements made by at least one Councillor.

Invoice not paid in line with expectations

Members were advised that an outstanding invoice had not been presented to Full Council for approval, creating procedural and reputational risk.

Breach of Standing Orders

Recent meetings have shown inconsistent compliance with Standing Orders, and some Councillors are not attending mandatory training.

Council and Committee Functioning

Failure of Councillors to attend committee meetings / risk of inquorate meetings

Vacancies on both the Governance & Finance Committee and the Human Resources Committee increase the likelihood of meetings becoming inquorate.

Failure of Councillors to comply with the Code of Conduct

Multiple complaints are currently under investigation by the Monitoring Officer, including a complaint submitted by the Mayor on behalf of the Council.

Declarations of interest not declared or managed properly

This matter is also under investigation with the Monitoring Officer.

Reputation and External Relations

Libel or slander claims

Members noted risks arising from allegations made against businesses and individuals during live-streamed meetings, which could expose the Council to legal claims.

Poor relationship with the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Relations have become strained due to the conduct and comments of some Councillors.

Poor relationship with Norfolk County Council

The Mayor and Town Clerk no longer hold regular liaison meetings with NCC Highways representatives.

Adverse press coverage

Instances of Committee decisions not being upheld or respected by other Councillors contribute to negative media attention.

Strategic Capacity and Leadership

Difficulty recruiting Councillors with appropriate skills

The Council's reputation within the parish has declined, discouraging potential candidates.

Insufficient capacity to deliver Council objectives

The Council currently has no agreed objectives or business plan, significantly increasing long-term strategic risk.

Staffing and HR Risks**Excessive hours / risk of burnout**

The Deputy Clerk is regularly working hours beyond contract requirements.

Inadequate training

Full Council training remains outstanding, and Councillors are not attending training opportunities provided by NPTS.

The Health & Safety Audit also identified the need for Mental Health and Stress Awareness training for staff.

Unplanned absence of key personnel

During the Town Clerk's one-month unpaid leave, the Council was unable to secure locum cover despite six months of attempts.

Additionally, the Deputy Clerk is not willing to assume the RFO role in the event of prolonged absence of the Town Clerk.

Bullying and harassment

At least one Councillor is currently under investigation for alleged misconduct.

Lone working risks

An incident on 1 November 2025 remains under investigation.

Operational Risks**Damage to Skate Park and outdoor gym equipment**

Recent antisocial behaviour has resulted in damage to Council assets.

Breach of data protection or information security

Some confidential material is being stored outside Council premises. This is currently being addressed.

Inappropriate data retention

Material held by Councillors away from Council premises prevents appropriate assessment. Training is recommended.

Inappropriate recording of Council meetings / risk of inaccurate minutes

Minutes are not always approved at the next scheduled meeting, increasing the risk of inaccuracies due to fading recollection.

Lack of understanding of tourism

The Council no longer operates a Business & Tourism or Community Development Committee, limiting expertise in this area.

Lack of Councillors available for emergency decisions

There is limited availability of Councillors to deal with urgent matters outside normal hours.

Adverse environmental impact

The Council currently has no Environmental Policy. Review and reinstatement are required.

Allotments

The Council no longer has access to allotments, reducing service provision for residents.

Insufficient support for the Armed Forces community

The Council is no longer progressing the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge.

Digital and Cybersecurity**Loss of data / Cyber breach**

The Council has agreed to undertake Penetration Testing to identify vulnerabilities and inform improved training and procedures.

RESOLVED – That the amended Risk Register be recommended to Full Council for adoption.

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Lane, All in Favour

Meeting Closed: 8:58 PM