

## **Minutes of the Governance & Finance Meeting**

**Date:** Wednesday 12 November 2025

**Time:** 6:00 PM

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

### **Present**

Councillors Brewer, Lane, Perkin

Councillor Hobbs arrived at 6:39pm

Claire Dornan (Town Clerk)

There were no members of the public present.

Cllr Lane chaired the meeting in the absence of Cllr Hobbs and continued for the whole meeting. Cllr Lane reminded members that phones need to be placed on silent. Cllr Lane also reminded members of the fire evacuation procedures.

### **1. To note apologies for absence**

Cllr Pegg had resigned from the committee prior to the meeting.

Cllr Dickson had given apologies due to ill health.

Cllr Hobbs had advised that he would arrive late due to unforeseen circumstances.

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

There were no declarations of interest made by members.

### **3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record.

Proposed: Cllr Perkin, Seconded: Cllr Lane, 2 in Favour. 1 Abstention.

### **4. To review Committee Terms of Reference following resolution made by Full Council on 04 November 2025**

The Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference following the decision by Full Council to transfer responsibility for leases, licences, contracts, and hire agreements to the Property Committee.

#### Committee Renaming

The Committee agreed to request that Full Council approve the re-naming of the Committee from Governance & Finance Committee to Governance Committee. This follows advice from the Internal Auditor that the Bank Reconciliation, Bank Statements, and Quarterly Reports should be presented directly to Full Council, removing the need for duplication within Committee.

It is therefore requested that Full Council approve the removal of the word Finance from the following line of the Terms of Reference:

“Two members of the Governance & Finance Committee to attend meetings with the Internal Auditor.”

#### Proposed Amendment to Committee Aim

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the amendment of the Committee’s aim from:

“To monitor, manage the Council’s policies and financial responsibilities, highlighting matters of note or for decision at Full Council.”

to:

“To monitor and manage the Council’s policies and procedures, highlighting matters of note or for decision at Full Council.”

#### Proposed Removals from the Terms of Reference

- Administrative Checks

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the removal of the following clause:

“To undertake six-monthly periodic checks of the Council’s administration procedures and additional spot checks, if necessary.”

It was noted that this is a Full Council responsibility, and therefore all Councillors should participate in these checks.

- Health and Safety Compliance

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the removal of the following clause:

“To ensure compliance with Health and Safety, Risk Assessment and Governance, and make recommendations to Full Council as needed. Two Councillors to carry out six-monthly checks of compliance.”

It was noted that Property Health and Safety would fall under the remit of the Property Committee, and staff Health and Safety under the Human Resources Committee.

- Financial Compliance and Training

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the removal of the following clauses:

“Two Councillors, that is one member of the Governance & Finance Committee and another Councillor, to carry out monthly checks to confirm compliance with the Council’s Financial Regulations. In particular, checks of salary, pensions, PAYE, and a 10% check of all payments. Two Councillors to carry out a quarterly VAT check. To undertake annual finance training commensurate with the responsibilities of the committee.”

It was noted that these functions are the responsibility of Full Council, and therefore all Councillors should complete the relevant checks and training.

- Insurance Review

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the removal of the following clause:

“To review and ensure the Council is adequately covered by its General Council Insurance.”

It was noted that this responsibility now falls under the remit of the Property Committee.

- Finance Reports and Procurement

The Committee requests that Full Council approve the removal of all items under Finance Reports, as these are now Full Council responsibilities.

It also requests that Full Council approve the removal of all items under Procurement, as these responsibilities will now fall under the remit of the Property Committee.

**RESOLVED** – That the updated Terms of Reference be recommended to Full Council for approval.

Proposed: Cllr Brewer, Seconded: Cllr Perkin All in Favour.

## **5. To review Standing Orders and make recommendations to Full Council**

The Committee undertook a comprehensive and detailed review of the Council’s Standing Orders. Members devoted significant time to considering each section carefully, ensuring that the document remains legally compliant, up to date with current best practice, and reflective of the Council’s operational needs.

The following amendments are recommended to Full Council for consideration:

### Detailed Amendments

- Standing Order 3(i)

It is proposed to remove the requirement for Members to stand when addressing the meeting.

- Standing Order 12(e)

It is proposed to add an additional point (i), to exceed the legal minimum requirements, as follows:

“It shall publish draft minutes of all Full Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings on a website which is publicly accessible and free of charge not later than two weeks after the meeting has taken place.”

- Standing Order 15(b)(xiv)

It is proposed to remove the requirement to record every planning response in a book, as this information is already included in the minutes of the Planning Committee and published on the Borough Council website as part of the public planning portal.

- Standing Order 15(b)(xv)

It is proposed to amend the reference to 'Planning and Environment Committee' to read 'Planning Committee' and include a cross-reference to the Council's Planning Protocol.

During the discussion of the above items, **Cllr Hobbs arrived** and was briefed on the proposed changes before actively participating in the conversation.

- Standing Order 18(d)(v)

It is proposed to update references to read:

"Proper Officer, the Mayor, and the Deputy Mayor, and where possible, the Deputy Clerk."

- Standing Order 18 (General)

It is proposed to add a reference to Section 80(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 1972, using the wording provided by Cllr Perkin, to clarify eligibility in relation to the holding of Council contracts.

- Standing Order 19(b)

It is proposed to replace the term 'most senior member of staff' with 'Proper Officer' and to remove the requirement to notify absences of staff at the next Human Resources Committee meeting.

- Standing Order 19(e)

It was agreed that this section should be reviewed in line with the Council's Grievance Policy, as the Mayor usually sits on the Appeals Panel. The Committee will revisit this item at a future meeting and explore the possibility of a reciprocal arrangement with another Council to ensure independence in grievance appeals.

- Standing Order 21(b)

It is proposed to amend the language to remove gender-specific terminology ('His') to ensure inclusivity.

- Standing Order 24(b)

It is proposed to remove this section in its entirety.

- Standing Order 25(a)

It is proposed to add the phrase 'by Full Council' for clarity of authority.

- Standing Order 26(b)

It is proposed to insert the number '5' within the brackets, as appropriate.

### Additional Notes

- Standing Order 3(t)(iii)

It was noted that while apologies for absence are recorded by the Clerk, the names of Councillors who are absent without apologies are not currently stated in the minutes. The Committee requested that this be reviewed to ensure consistent and transparent record-keeping.

### Next Steps

The Town Clerk was requested to incorporate all proposed amendments and present the revised Standing Orders at the next meeting for further review and formal recommendation to Full Council.

### **6. To review Procurement Policy (Preferred supplier list out of date) and make recommendations to Full Council**

It was noted that the Council is awaiting further legal advice regarding procurement within the Town Council. This follows an outstanding question raised at Full Council on 4 November 2025 concerning whether Councillors are prohibited from holding Council contracts under Section 80(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 1972.

It has already been confirmed that a motion, which was subsequently withdrawn at Full Council on 4 November 2025, would not have been illegal or unlawful had a resolution been made. This confirmation was provided by Roger Taylor of Wellers Law Group via email on 5 November 2025. Wellers Law Group provides legal advice to both Norfolk Parish Training and Support (NPTS) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and is therefore highly experienced in Town and Parish Council governance matters.

Further advice has also been sought from the Monitoring Officer at the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

The Committee reviewed the Procurement Policy in light of the legal advice received from Roger Taylor. The Policy has been simplified and updated to align with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, which came into effect on 24 February 2025.

The Committee agreed to recommend the following amendments to Full Council:

- **Quotations**

Although legislation permits verbal quotations for purchases between £1,001 and £5,000, it was agreed that, in the interests of transparency and good governance, the Town Council should maintain a formal record of all quotations. Accordingly, all quotations should be obtained in writing or by email.

- **Tenders**

It was agreed that tenders must not be accepted by email. All tenders should be submitted in hard copy, sealed, and opened in the presence of the Town Clerk, the Mayor, and the Deputy Mayor, and, where possible, the Deputy Clerk.

The Committee further agreed that tender assessment must be conducted through a formal, documented process to ensure transparency, fairness, and compliance with the Council's Procurement Policy. Tenders must not be opened or assessed by any Committee.

- **Preferred Supplier List**

It was agreed that the Preferred Supplier List should include the expiry date of each contract to assist Members and Officers in monitoring and managing contractual arrangements.

**RESOLVED** – That the updated Procurement Policy be recommended to Full Council for approval.

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

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

The Town Clerk advised that the formal written Interim Audit Report from the meeting held on 23 October 2025 had not been received prior to this meeting.

It was therefore agreed that consideration of this item will be deferred to the next available Committee meeting, at which time recommendations to Full Council will be made.

**Meeting Closed: 7:22 PM**