

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 2025 in Chi Austel, White River Place, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5AZ at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Clemo, Cohen, Gray, Hamilton, Lanxon, Preece, Thompson, Whitehouse and Young

In attendance: David Pooley (Town Clerk) and Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk).

F/25/17) Apologies for absence

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors: Kimber, Marshall, Pearce and Rowse.

F/25/18) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/25/19) Dispensations

None.

F/25/20) Minutes of meeting held on 23rd June 2025

Members asked that within minute number F/25/07 (Matters to Note), clarification is provided with regard to the insurance claim.

F/25/13 (Paperless), it was noted that "e" should be added to "Th" in the last paragraph.

It was **RESOLVED** that subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

Councillor Brown arrived during the next item

F/25/21) Matters to Note

Page 2. The Clerk advised that the insurance claim for the damaged wall at Bethel Park has been paid and an invoice has been received from Cornwall Council with regard to the uncontested elections in May. The contested election invoice is still awaited.

F/25/22) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

Councillor Lanxon arrived to the meeting

F/25/23) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk explained the key variations outlined in the report.

The car park revenue and interest income are both good compared to budget and grant income has been received from Cornwall Council.

The miscellaneous expenses relate mainly to town centre projects expenditure, most of which are grant funded. The IT software licences have been paid in advance, so this is showing an overspend which will even out over the year. The transport and machinery budget is over budget due to the purchase of a new vehicle. The underspend on salaries and wages is due to a number of vacancies.

The Clerk added that the outturn for the rates is likely to be higher than budgeted hence the overspend shown. He added that business rates will, in due course, be payable on the Stable Block.

During discussion, Members raised questions on the following:

- Other Transport/plant expenses
- Room hire costs
- Rental income
- Insurances

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

F/25/24) Budget Timetable

The Clerk advised that as in previous years, he would like to hold a series of meetings to steer the budget setting process for the 2026/27 financial year and that a first draft budget will be available for Members to consider at the informal meeting on the 7th October. It is hoped that the Town Council will be able to approve a budget, precept and Council Tax leaflet at their meeting on 15th December 2025 (changed from 8th December 2025). Members noted that the pension contributions might change following the triennial review due around October/November.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the budget timetable set out in the report noting that the full Council meeting will be held on 15th December 2025 and not 8th December as outlined in the report.

F/25/25) Priory Car Park Fees and Charges

The Town Clerk advised that although car park income is not as buoyant as it was pre-pandemic, the income is reasonable and to assist the town centre, he would like to recommend that the Town Council freezes its car park charges for the 2026/27 financial year. He added that in previous years, the Town Council has supported the Christmas town centre activities by making the car park free on the last four Saturdays leading up to Christmas. There is also a Christmas concert proposed for Friday 5th December which would benefit from free parking on that evening.

During discussion, the Clerk explained the regulations under which the Town Council operates the car park and the need to have a new car park order if Members wished to increase the charges. He added that a reduction in charges does not need a new order. Members expressed a view that to help the town centre, the car park charges should be frozen for the 2026/27 financial year.

A question was raised about where Cornwall Council staff are parking when they work out of the Chi Austel office.

The Clerk advised that he would contact the Property Team to offer season tickets in Priory Car Park for Cornwall Council staff if other arrangements have not been put in place for them.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. The existing car park charges be frozen for the 2026/27 financial year;
2. Parking be made free of charge in Priory Car Park on the four Saturdays leading to Christmas and for the evening of Friday 5th December 2025 for the School Christmas concert at St John's Methodist Church.

F/25/26) Land Disposal Policy

The Clerk advised that the Council at its meeting on 14th July 2025 resolved that the Clerk should draft a policy on the disposal of Town Council land. He advised that the disposal of public land is very complex and outlined in detail the following:

- Legislative restrictions;
- Considerations that the Town Council must take into account before agreeing to the disposal of land;
- A procedure for disposal

During discussion, the following amendment was suggested to the draft policy:

Land which may be disposed of

*Land where the benefit(s) of disposal **to a private landowner** outweighs the environment or amenity value lost to the general public*

During further discussion, this amendment was not supported.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to approve the draft Land Disposal Policy as outlined.

Councillor Brown asked that it be noted that he voted against this proposition

F/25/27) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Clerk advised that it is a requirement of most grant funders that applicants have an up-to-date Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy in place and that having reviewed the Town Council's Policy approved in May 2023 he proposed that no changes are required.

During discussion, Members stressed the importance of committing to the equal access to services and facilities and that equality, diversity and inclusion training should be mandatory for all Councillors and staff.

Arising from the above discussions, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that a training session on Equality and Diversity had been arranged for Thursday 6th November, 6pm at The Stable Block for all Councillors.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to re-approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy subject to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training being mandatory for all Councillors and staff.

F/25/28) Youth Council

The Clerk advised that the Council at its meeting on 1st September 2025 resolved that the Clerk should draft a report on the process for setting up a youth council.

The Clerk explained the history of the last youth council, the considerations to be given before setting up a Youth Council and suggested that a Working Group is set up to take the initiative forward.

Councillors Cohen, Gray, Preece and Whitehouse volunteered to be on a Working Group to discuss the setting up of a Youth Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that a Working Group be set up consisting of Councillors Cohen, Gray, Preece and Whitehouse to consider the detail of setting up a Youth Council.

F/25/29) Members Internal Audit

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

F/25/30) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update on the staffing, volunteers and activities at St Austell library and advised that SALSA continue to be invaluable to the library's success and outlined a number of events that had taken place over the summer months. The Deputy Clerk advised that planning is underway for a Halloween silent disco for primary school children and that reindeers and a Father Christmas have been booked for part of the library Christmas activities. She added that a number of home educated children and home workers use the library on a regular basis which has required a reconfiguration of the space available to facilitate people using their own laptops. St Austell continues to be in the top two performing libraries in Cornwall which is extremely pleasing.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that Cornwall Council is keen for the Town Council to take on the freehold of the library with further discussions are expected in due course. A report will be brought to Members once the full details of the offer from Cornwall Council are known.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library had a successful summer reading challenge with 720 children signing up to the challenge and 529 finishers equating to a very healthy 73.5% finish rate.

The Town Clerk added that the High Sheriff is working with the Town Council's grounds team on a tree/hydrangea planting scheme for the front garden.

Members noted the update.

F/25/31) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 3rd November 2025.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.