

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 3rd NOVEMBER 2025 in Chi Austel, White River Place, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5AZ at 6pm.

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

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Pearce (TEAMS) and Councillor Taylor.

F/25/32) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kimber and Preece.

F/25/33) Declarations of Interest

Councillor Whitehouse declared an interest in agenda item 11 by virtue of his stepmother being on the St Austell Festival of Music and Speech Committee.

F/25/34) Dispensations

None.

F/25/35) Minutes of meeting held on 29th September 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/25/36) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that further to minute number F/25/25, Cornwall Council has confirmed that their staff are expected to either pay for parking or find suitable parking in the town when visiting Chi Austel.

F/25/37) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/25/38) Budget 2025/26 and 2026/27

The Clerk advised that following the informal budget/priorities meeting at the beginning of October, a draft budget for the 2026/27 financial year had been produced and highlighted the assumptions made within the draft:

- Provision for maternity leave cover
- Additional senior officer resource
- Deletion of the Regeneration Officer post at the end of March 2026
- Renewal of the lease of the Stable Block and the associated costs required within the Heads of Terms
- Continuation of CCTV/monitoring costs and security personnel
- £20,000 budget for events (reduced from £30,000)
- An increase from £8,000 to £10,000 for the Small Grants Scheme

- A £5,000 budget for the Youth Council when it has been set up
- An additional Grounds Maintenance Apprentice
- £50,000 for playground equipment repairs/maintenance
- £25,000 for a vehicle or mower replacement
- £25,000 for pump priming projects

In addition, the Clerk advised that Cornwall Council has not yet invoiced the Town Council for the contested election in May, but when it is received, it is likely to be in the region of £7,000. Cornwall Council is also expected to announce the pension contribution rate and council tax base in November which will adjust the draft budget slightly.

The Clerk advised that the budget and Council Tax is due to be set at the Town Council meeting on Monday 15th December 2025 and recommended that a Council Tax increase of in the region of 8.2% for the 2026/27 financial year would set a balanced budget, maintain services and provide some small growth. He clarified that a Council Tax increase of 8.2% equates to a 31p per week increase for a Band D property.

During discussion, mixed views were expressed with regard to the increase in Council Tax that should be levied. Overall, Members felt that although they would like the Town Council to have more resource, they were mindful of the impact Council Tax increases have on the electorate.

Arising from a question, the Clerk confirmed that the £80,000 underspend from the 2024/25 financial year and the £27,000 in saving in election costs has been placed into a reserve and in due course he will put a report to Members suggesting one or two projects that the money could be used for.

A view was expressed that a wheelchair swing should be installed in Poltair Park. The Clerk responded that the Operations Manager is looking at the refurbishment of the play park in Poltair Park and that 2-3 designs with various pieces of play equipment, including accessible equipment will be brought to Members in due course for consideration.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that subject to any reasonable adjustments required following announcements with regard to the Council Tax Base and the pension contribution rate, the Council:

1. Approves the revised draft budget for the 2026/27 financial year;
2. Approves a Council Tax increase of approximately 8.2% for a Band D property paying the full Council Tax charge.

F/25/39) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk explained the key variations in the report for the current financial year to 30th September 2025 and raised no concerns.

Members noted that the car park income is performing well against budget.

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

F/25/40) Standing Orders - Trusts

The Clerk explained that the Town Council as a whole is legally the trustee for one charitable trust and one trust which is not a registered charity, but the Standing Orders are silent on the minimum number of councillors required for meetings of these trusts.

He suggested that at least 1/3rd of the whole number of members of the council should be present and that this should be reflected in the Standing Orders.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Standing Order 3U should be amended to read as follows:

No business may be transacted at a meeting unless at least one-third of the whole number of members of the council are present and in no case shall the quorum of a meeting be less than three. Where the Council is meeting in its capacity as a trustee for a formal trust this clause shall apply. See standing order 4d (vi) below for the quorum of a committee or sub-committee meeting.

F/25/41) Interim Internal Audit Report

The Clerk advised that the Interim Internal Audit Report for the year ended 31st March 2026 has been received with one recommendation regarding the reconciliation of contactless card payments for Priory Car Park.

The Clerk advised that he would contact the software provider to see if the amounts received into the Town Council's bank account can be independently verified.

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

F/25/42) Small Grants Scheme

It was **RESOLVED** to award a grant in the sum of £250 to the St Austell Festival of Music and Speech.

Councillor Whitehouse took no part in the voting on the above item

F/25/43) Licencing Reforms Programme (at the request of Councillor Brown)

Councillor Brown referred to his draft answers to the questions contained within the Government's consultation paper on "Licencing Reforms Programme – Call for Evidence"

During discussion, Members suggested that a reference to the general lack of awareness of the Government's public notice portal and the use of on-line newspapers should be included in the response to question 16.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the draft response subject to the additions suggested above.

F/25/44) Town Councillor Vacancy – Poltair and Mount Charles Ward

The Town Clerk advised that following the resignation of Councillor Pears, a Notice of Vacancy for Poltair and Mount Charles Ward has been issued by Cornwall Council. If an election is not requested by Friday 7th November 2025, the vacancy is eligible to be filled by co-option.

The Clerk explained the Town Council's co-option procedure which invites interested parties to complete a short application form outlining why they would like to be a Town Councillor. The completed forms are validated, and the applicants are invited to attend a full Council meeting to perform a short presentation to Members. After the presentation by each candidate, each Member votes for their preferred candidate.

A view was expressed that a by-election coinciding with the Christmas holidays would be unfortunate.

It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Town Council's co-option procedure if a formal election is not triggered and authorise the Town Clerk to advertise the vacancy within the Poltair and Mount Charles Ward at the earliest opportunity.

F/25/45) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update on the Library as follows:

Staffing

There are 2 full time staff, 6 part time staff and a vacancy of 24 hours has just been filled. Renewal DBS checks for each member of staff and the volunteers within the library are underway. The volunteers at the library are carrying out general library duties and administering the Home Library Service. The library is open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 1pm on Saturday and continues to hold a number of core activities during the week including Sing and Shake (0-4 year olds), Story Time (0-4 year olds), reading and writing groups, whole school visits and Knit and Natter.

SALSA continue to hold events at the library with a number of activities for Christmas planned including a craft fair, wreath making, Father Christmas, reindeer and a mini-Christmas tree competition. A "friendship bench" for the library garden is also being purchased. The High Sheriff has been working with the grounds staff on a landscaping scheme in the front garden and an oak tree will be planted by the High Sheriff and Mayor on 10th November 2025.

Cornwall Council is still keen for the Town Council to take on the freehold of the building and discussions are due to resume again. The main issue to resolve before the transfer is the age and condition of the boiler.

F/25/46) To consider excluding the press and public

It was **RESOLVED** that under Section 1 (ii) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the remainder of the business of the meeting in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

F/25/47) Office/Depot Lease Renewal

It was **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. Renew the lease as per the Heads of Terms, for 5 years with effect from 11th December 2025 with an annual break clause for the tenant;
2. Recharge telecommunications cost to Cornwall Council as outlined in the report in accordance with the existing lease dated 11th December 2018;
3. Explore independent options before a commitment is made to new premises on the Penwinnick Road site.

It was **RESOLVED** to return to open session.

F/25/48) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 16th February 2026.

The meeting closed at 7.32pm.