MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2026, 6pm in Chi Austel, White River Place, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5AZ.

Present: Councillors: Clemo, Cohen, Gray, Kimber, Lanxon, Marshall, Nott, Preece, Stephens, Thompson, Whitehouse and Young.

In attendance: David Pooley (Town Clerk), Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk) and Annie Etheridge (Interpreter).

Also in attendance: Councillor Colin Hamilton

F/26/35) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brown and Rowse.

F/26/36) Declarations of Interest

None

F/26/37) Dispensations

None

F/26/38) Minutes of meeting held on 28th September 2026

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2026 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/26/39) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that Cornwall Council has omitted to apply for a warranty for the new boiler at the library so an undertaking has been requested that when the freehold of the building is transferred to the Town Council, Cornwall Council will offer a guarantee for the boiler for the next 5 years. A response is awaited.

The Heads of Terms have been agreed for the leasehold transfer of The House, but Cornwall Council cannot provide a date for completion due to a backlog in their governance processes.

The Standing Orders have been amended as suggested and will be placed on the Town Council's website within the next few days.

F/26/40) Public participation

The member of the public present advised that he did not wish to speak.

F/26/41) Budgets 2026/27 and 2027/28

The Clerk advised that since the informal meeting in October, he has refined the budget slightly to reflect the priorities identified and the Council Tax increase is now showing at 12.6%. The Clerk reminded Councillors that the Council still has a very low base budget and a small monetary increase in the Council Tax will be quite large in percentage terms which is quoted on the Council Tax bills.

The Clerk advised that he fully expects Cornwall Council to increase their element of the Council Tax to the maximum permitted without a referendum (4.99%). No details have been provided on the Police element of the Council Tax.

The Clerk explained that he has earmarked within the draft budget funding for inflation, playground upgrades, additional CCTV cameras and additional hours for the street marshals following the withdrawal of OPCC funding. Current budget projections indicate that the Town Council should be able to purchase Mount Charles Social Club and carry out the required refurbishment from reserves with no borrowing. The reduction in reserves would however mean less interest on investments.

The Clerk advised that the legal processes are still ongoing with regard to the purchase of the Mount Charles Social Club which should be completed within the next couple of weeks once the final searches have been returned. He added that when the Town Council has access to the property, he will invite all Members to see the building and commission architects to produce designs for the Town Council to consider.

The Clerk advised that Cornwall Council has issued a consultation on Council Tax Support (CTS) which could impact the council tax base figure if changes are made. Having made enquiries of Cornwall Council's Finance Team, it is likely that Cornwall Council will issue two versions of the council tax base to Town and Parish Councils, one with a Support Grant reduction and one unchanged. Cornwall Council will not make a final decision on the CTS until their meeting on 17th January which leaves very little time for Town and Parish Councils to submit their precept by the deadline of 31st January. The Clerk advised that if there is no further clarity on Cornwall Council's final decision with regard to CTS before the Town Council's December Council meeting, the Town Council will have to defer setting the budget to its January meeting.

The Clerk advised that he has assumed no changes to the CTS in the draft budget but if Cornwall Council decide to reduce the CTS this would result in a higher tax base and a smaller Council Tax increase for the Town Council.

During discussion, Members thanked the Town Clerk for his hard work in working up the draft budget and agreed with the budget proposed on proviso that a positive communications strategy is put together to explain the services that the Town Council provides, the planned improvements and the need to budget for uncertainties eg: inflation, energy and fuel increases.

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

1. Approves the revised draft budget for the 2027/28 financial year;
2. Approves a Council Tax increase of approximately 12.68% for a Band D property paying the full Council Tax charge.

F/26/42) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk explained the key variations in the report for the current financial year to 30th September 2026 and raised no concerns.

Members noted the increase in expenditure for fuel and that the car park income is performing well against budget.

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

F/26/43) Skateboard Park – Poltair Park

The Town Clerk advised that following Mavericks presentation to the Town Council tender documents have been prepared to procure a contractor to consult the public, design a new skatepark, obtain funding and deliver the project. He advised that potential skateboard contractors seemed to prefer this approach and fully expected 2-3 contractors tendering for the work. He advised that to make the project more attractive to potential grant funders, he would like the Town Council to be able to offer £50,000 in pump prime funding.

It was **RESOLVED** to authorise the Clerk to start the tender process for the procurement of a suitable contractor to build a new skateboard park for Poltair Park and £50,000 be set aside from reserves to assist with pump priming.

F/26/44) 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/26/45) CCTV Cameras

It was **RESOLVED** to instal two CCTV cameras at Polkyth with the associated connectivity to Newquay Police Station utilising Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) grant funding in the sum of £10,000 and £16,000 from the Town Council's CCTV and security budget.

F/26/46) Appointment of consultants to undertake survey work

The Clerk outlined the importance of engaging with the public to inform the Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS) and advised that a quotation has been sought from PFA Research who did the public survey work in 2016 when the Town Council took on a package of services from Cornwall Council. He added that £20,000 has been side aside in the Town Council's budget for Local Plan/NPS work.

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint PFA Research in the sum of £7,195 to undertake survey work to inform the Town Council's Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS).

F/26/47) Re-admittance of the press and public

It was **RESOLVED** to re-admit the press and public.

F/26/48) Cornwall Council – Consultation on proposed changes to Council Tax Support

The Clerk advised that Cornwall Council is consulting on options for changing the current 75% maximum discount available for claimants of working age under the Council Tax Support Scheme from April 2027 onwards.

A proposal to respond to the consultation suggesting that the discount should be reduced by a minimum of 10% was not seconded.

The majority of Councillors present felt that the CTS should remain as any discount would adversely impact the less well off.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk should respond to the consultation suggesting that there should be no change to Council Tax Support.

Councillor Kimber asked that it be recorded that he voted against this proposition

Councillor Marshall asked that it be recorded that he abstained from voting on this proposition

F/26/49) Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library has had a very busy few months with lots of activities undertaken including the annual summer reading challenge, SALSA events, school visits and group activities. There are 10 staff (2 full time, 8 part time) at the library who following a period of change and staff training have settled down and are performing well. The library is performing extremely well against other Cornish libraries as shown in the monthly statistics produced by Cornwall Council where St Austell is regularly the top performing library for "number of issues".

A few internal improvements are planned for the library before the year end and will hopefully include some defects which are the responsibility of Cornwall Council.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that she has made enquiries of Cornwall Council staff about budget cuts to the Library Service and has been advised that the library service is expected to make cuts but they will not affect the resource budget (eg: the servicing of books for the library).

Members asked that their gratitude be passed on to the library staff.

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

F/26/50) Dates of Next Meetings

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is scheduled to take place on Monday 15th February 2027.

The meeting closed at 6.57pm.