MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE HELD ON

MONDAY 26th JANUARY 2026 AT 7.30PM

*	Cllr Martin Adams (Chair)	*	Cllr David Jacobs
*	Cllr Alex Chapman	*	Cllr Miriam Swainston
*	Cllr Sarah Copley	*	Cllr John Wyllie
*	Cllr Calvin Horner (Vice Chair)		

* denotes present

Also Present:
Cllr Yvonne Estop

In attendance:
1 Member of the Press
Mark Westwood (Chief Finance Officer)
Huw Jones (Chief Executive Officer)

FP53. RECORDING OF MEETING

No Council Members or Members of the Public indicated an intention to record the meeting.

FP54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

FP55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

Minutes Approved
Chairman:
Date:

FP56. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

FP57. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 10th NOVEMBER 2025

It was RESOLVED that:

the Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 10th November 2025 be approved as a true record and duly signed by the Chair.

FP58. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS TO END Q3

It was noted that the Financial Accounts to the end of the 3rd Quarter showed the Council in a favourable financial position, although it was noted that there were a number of high expenditure items to be included before the next Quarter (e.g. purchase of electric/hybrid vehicle and "grass-crete" surface at Sworders Field). Furthermore, the delay in the Sale and Leaseback transfer for South Mill Arts had resulted in a higher than anticipated interest income. It was further noted with that a greater than predicted number of burials had taken place in the Council year (including at weekends and for those "Out of Town" burials which were at a higher price).

Recognising that the Council managed public purse money, Members also welcomed the action that had been taken to seek to keep the outstanding monies owed by Aged Debtors to a manageably low level and the Finance Team were thanked for their work in preparing this report together with the Council Budget 2026/27.

It was RESOLVED that:

the Financial Accounts to End Q3 2025/26 be received and approved.

Minutes Approved
Chairman:
Date:

FP59. BUDGET & PRECEPT DEMAND 2026-2027

Budget

The budget was described as balanced and responsible, maintaining service provision, protecting reserves, and enhancing the Council's operational resilience.

The introduction of a Chief Operations Officer post was noted as strengthening service delivery, compliance, and asset management, while reducing reliance on a single point of dependency on the Chief Executive.

Despite ongoing inflationary pressures, the budget avoided the unsustainable use of reserves and was not based on high-risk assumptions. Overall, it was considered a prudent budget that supported staff, protected services and safeguarded the Council's long-term financial sustainability.

It was noted that to avoid reprinting, Councillors would be asked to bring the Budget Report (hard copy) to the Full Council meeting on 2nd February 2026.

Precept

The recommended Precept represented a nil percentage increase for Bishop's Stortford taxpayers, notwithstanding a reduction in the Tax Base arising from an increased number of residents claiming Council Tax Benefit, despite ongoing development. It was noted that the financial impact of the Council's adoption of St James's Park would not be realised until 2027. Members further noted that neighbouring Town Councils operated significantly higher Precept levels and had increased their Council Tax demands year on year.

It was RESOLVED that:

(i) the Town Council's draft budget 2026/27 be recommended for approval by Full Council at its meeting on 2nd February 2026;

Minutes Approved
Chairman:
Date:

(ii) the Precept Demand 2026/27 be recommended to be set at £1,222,786 (based on nil percentage change: £68.69 Band D x Tax Base 17,801.52) by Full Council at its meeting on 2nd February 2026;

(iii) Full Council on 2nd February 2026 be recommended to approve that unspent Earmarked Reserves for the Cemetery Garages Rebuild Project (£4.5K) be transferred to Pensions Reserve; and

(iv) Full Council on 2nd February 2026 be recommended to approve that funds remaining after installation of Grasscrete at Sworders Field be reallocated to Play Equipment Earmarked Reserve (bringing total play equipment allocation for 2026/27 to £110.4k).

FP60. MAJOR CAPITAL GRANTS

It was noted that the £50,000 grant awarded to Birchwood High School in 2022 (Tranche 2) had been for a cycling and running project that was now not realisable and therefore the Committee was asked to reconsider an alternative use, namely a basketball court with markings for two pickleball courts. It was noted that Tranche 3 had awarded some monies for Basketball equipment to Stortford Vikings.

It was RESOLVED that:

on the basis that there was no change to the amount of funding approved previously by Council, the change of use for the deployment of the Major Capital Grant (Tranche 2) to Birchwood High School be approved (change to outdoor basketball and pickleball court(s)) on condition that the School provided an Annual Report to the Council and demonstrated that the facilities were available for public use at times and not only for students of the School.

Minutes Approved
Chairman:
Date:

FP61. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was RESOLVED that:

under Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Press and Public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting and that reporting on the remainder of the meeting likewise be prohibited in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted relating to negotiations for Assets for Acquisition prior to contractual agreement and Staffing Matters.

FP62. ASSETS FOR ACQUISITION STRATEGY AND NEGOTITIONS

Potential EHDC Assets

While the potential benefits to residents of the Town Council adopting play areas in Bishop's Stortford currently managed by EHDC's contractors were acknowledged, uncertainty arising from Local Government Reorganisation and the absence of detailed financial information on resource implications meant the Committee was unable to make a recommendation at this stage. The Chief Executive Officer was requested to continue discussions with EHDC officers, particularly in relation to Castle Gardens, including seeking a visual plan identifying the areas that EHDC may be willing to transfer. It was generally considered that the costs of any investigative works should not be borne solely by the Town Council.

Land at Pig Lane

It was noted that the Chief Executive Officer would continue discussions with the landowner and propose that a report be commissioned to assess the viability of the site for a tree-planting initiative, similar to that at Jenkins Lane, rather than for allotment use. The Committee would be kept informed of any further developments.

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Chairman:
Date:

FP63. STAFFING COSTS AND TERMS AND CONDITIONS 2026-2027

It was RESOLVED that:

the recommendations by the Chief Executive Officer for the budget for pay adjustments for staff not on NJC terms and Staffing Terms and Conditions 2026/27 be recommended to Full Council on 2nd February 2026 for approval (confidential File Note to be submitted to meeting).

FP64. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA

It was noted that items for future Agendas included:

- Town Council Staff Handbook (Gifts and Hospitality protocol)
- Consideration of Staff Pension provision and impact of leaving LPPA scheme

FP65. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.30pm. It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 5th May 2026.

Minutes Approved
Chairman:
Date: