

COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee Meeting held in the Dining Room, Northwood House, Cowes on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 5.15pm.

Present: Councillors Carter (Chair), Ellis, Hollis, Marriott, Nicholson, Peacey Wilcox, Rafferty & Walters.

In attendance: Councillors Wardrop (non-voting); Kate Scragg, Deputy Town Clerk.

1090 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

1091 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Marriott declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 1095 as she is a trustee and volunteer for Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd.

Councillor Peacey Wilcox declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 1093 as she is Vice President of the Friends of Northwood Cemetery.

Councillor Carter declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 1093 as she is a member of the Friends of Northwood Cemetery.

Councillors Carter, Ellis, Hollis, Marriott, Rafferty and Walters declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 1093 as residents of Cowes and subject to the Town Council precept.

1092 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting held on 11 November 2025 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1093 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2026 / 2027

The Chair presented Councillors with the draft Budget (v1) for 2026 / 2027. The budget is split into three sections; each section was reviewed line by line.

1. General Administration – An increase in the Clerks' salaries of £14,500 to £154,500 due to the splitting of the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer's role and resulting increase in hours. Office Rent (including Business Rates) has increased by £300, being a 3% inflationary increase. Stationery / Sundry Office Expenses / Software has increased by £800 to £2,000 to cover increased costs. Office Equipment has reduced by £7,000 to £2,000, as new computers were purchased in 2025 / 26. Telephone / Broadband / Website has increased by £1,400 to £2,500 to cover increased website maintenance charges. Conference fees & travelling has increased by £500 to £1,000 to accommodate new staff needs. Training has increased by £3,000 to £4,000 to accommodate new staff needs. Subscriptions have increased by £1,000 to £3,500 to enable staff to undertake CiLCA training. Insurance has increased by £200 to £3,500 to cover increased costs. Audit and Accountancy has increased by £500 to £3,000 to cover expected increased costs. Mayor's Allowance has increased by £500 to £2,500 to cover increased costs. Elections / Admin Contingency has reduced by £12,000 to £4,000. 'Bank charges' budget heading of £300 has been added to cover increased bank charges. **The overall increase in this section being £4,000.**

2. Discretionary Services – There has been a small increase to the Grounds Maintenance Contract at Northwood Recreation Ground and other green areas in Cowes of £498 to

£17,080, being a 3% inflationary increase. Northwood Park Grounds Maintenance has increased by £200 to £13,000 to cover increased costs. A new budget heading of 'Friends of Northwood Cemetery' of £4,000 has been added, following a request for funding. A new budget heading of 'Arts and Culture' of £5,000 has been added. The 'Northwood Park toilets – cleaning only' budget heading has been combined with the '5 Public Toilets – Cleaning + other costs'; this budget has increased by £38,300 to £100,000 to procure suitable contractors. The Facilities Management budget heading has been removed as costs are included in the salary budget heading. Cowes Library has increased by £848 to £27,348 to cover annual staff pay increase. The cost of the Environment Officer Services has increased by £368, being 3% inflationary increase. Park Road Crossing Patrol budget heading has been removed as Cowes Primary School is now closed, a saving of £6,000. **The overall reduction in this section being £26,786.**

3. **Town Improvements / Grants / Special Events** – An increase of £500 to £4,000 has been made to Street Furniture Maintenance. New Projects has been increased by £1,000 to £5,000. Remembrance Sunday & Charity Donations have been increased by £500 to £2,500. Public toilet refurbishment & Capital Projects has been increased by £20,000 to £60,000 to meet ongoing refurbishment plans. Picnic in the Park 2026 has been increased by £500 to £4,000 to cover increased costs. Flags, Banners and Bunting has been increased by £500 to £2,500 to cover increased costs. **The overall increase in this section being £23,000.**

Overall within the three sections there is a proposed increase to the budget of £214 and the proposed precept for 2026 / 2027 will be £531,428.

COWES TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET 2026-2027 DRAFT v2	
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	2026 - 2027
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION	
Town Clerks' salaries / NIC/ Tax / Pension	£ 154,500
Office Rent (Including Business Rates)	£ 9,200
Stationery / Sundry Office Expenses/Software	£ 2,000
Office Equipment / Photocopier / Computers	£ 2,000
Telephone / Broadband / Website	£ 2,500
Postage	£ 300
Conference fees & Travelling	£ 1,000
Training	£ 4,000
Hire of Meeting Rooms and / or Zoom	£ 800
Subscriptions	£ 3,500
Insurance	£ 3,500
Audit and Accountancy	£ 3,000
Mayor's Allowance	£ 2,500
Newsletter / Publicity	£ 4,000
Elections / Admin Contingency	£ 4,000
Civic Regalia	£ 500
Bank Charges	£ 300
	Sub Total £ 197,600
DISCRETIONARY SERVICES	
Grounds Maintenance: Northwood Rec; St Mary's Park; Moorgreen Reservoir; Arctic Park; Mornington Green; Brunswick Road playground; Park Road Rose Bed; Egypt Point; Mornington Woods	£ 17,080
Northwood Rec - Skate Park / MUGA / Outdoor Gym Maintenance	£ 7,500

Northwood Park Grounds Maintenance	£ 13,000
Northwood Park Toilets - Cleaning Only ***	
Friends of Northwood Cemetery	£ 4,000
Arts and Culture	£ 5,000
Dog + Litter bin emptying	£ 7,000
6 Public Toilets - Cleaning + other costs ***	£ 100,000
Facilities Management	
Cowes Library	£ 27,348
Cowes In Bloom	£ 12,000
Environment Officer	£ 10,400
Warmer Cowes	£ 500
Park Road Crossing Patrol	
Discretionary Services Contingency	£ 8,000
Sub Total	£ 211,828
TOWN IMPROVEMENTS / GRANTS / SPECIAL EVENTS	
Street furniture maintenance	£ 4,000
Place Plan Projects	£ 12,000
Festive lights / Xmas Tree	£ 17,000
New Projects	£ 5,000
Grants	£ 15,000
Remembrance Sunday & Charity Donations	£ 2,500
Public Toilet refurbishment & Capital Projects	£ 60,000
Picnic in the Park 2026	£ 4,000
Flags, Banners and Bunting	£ 2,500
Sub Total	£ 122,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£ 531,428

Councillors discussed the level of Reserves. Reserves were within the guidelines set by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) of between 3 – 12 months. To strengthen future financial planning and ensure full compliance with audit expectations, the Town Council will look to implement a Reserves Policy. The level of Reserves were formally considered in determining the precept for 2026 / 27, in accordance with the requirement set out by the External Auditor.

Following review of the draft budget and Reserves, it was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council approves the draft budget v2 which will mean that the Cowes Town Council precept for 2026 - 2027 will be £531,428.

It was agreed:

ACTIONS

1. The Chair will circulate a brief summary of the draft budget and Reserves for Councillors prior to the Town Council meeting on 18 December.
2. The Chair will prepare a draft Reserves Policy for consideration at the next meeting of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee.

1094 ACQUISITION OF PREMISES

Councillors were interested in pursuing the idea of the Town Council procuring their own premises in Cowes, to give the Town Council a presence in the town. It was agreed:

ACTION

Councillor Peacey Wilcox would make enquiries into possible premises acquisitions in Cowes.

1095 OFFICE LEASE

Councillors discussed the office and storeroom lease renewal terms received from Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd, being £632.76 per month for the period 1 December 2025 to 30 November 2026, with an offer to extend the lease period to a 16-month term, extending to 31 March 2027 for the same rate; a six-month break clause is included as standard. As previously advised, the Town Council would be required to pay their own Business Rate charges, following the Trust receiving guidance from the Charity Commission in this regard. Councillors discussed the lease offer and it was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council extends the Lease for the Town Council Office and Storeroom at Northwood House until 31 March 2027; the fixed rental fees from 1 December 2025 being £632.76 per month.

1096 NORTHWOOD PARK GROUNDS MAINTENANCE COSTS FROM 1 APRIL 2026

The Town Council had been asked to consider funding the grounds maintenance charges of the grounds of Northwood Park, to provide well-kept leisure space for the community and visitors. Costs for the 2026 / 27 financial year would be £13,000, being an increase of £200 from the 2024 / 25 and 2025 / 26 financial years. Councillors requested clarification that Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd seek multiple quotations for the contract.

Following discussion, it was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council pays £13,000 for the grounds maintenance of Northwood Park for the 2026 / 27 financial year.

It was agreed:

ACTION

The Town Clerk will ask Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd to advise their process when seeking quotations for the grounds maintenance contract.

1097 POWERING COMMUNITIES TO NET ZERO GRANT FUNDING

The Town Council received notification that it had been successful in its bid for funding from SSE's Powering Communities to Net Zero Fund, and had been awarded £15,000 towards emergency equipment for residents impacted by flooding. Councillors wished to thank the Admin Assistant for completing the grant submission. The funding would need to be spent on the items identified from the original application, and be spent within twelve months. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council accepts the grant funding from SSE's Powering Communities to Net Zero Fund.

1098 UPDATE ON EXISTING HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND OF £5,000

The Deputy Town Clerk gave Councillors an update on the Household Support Fund. Cowes Town Council had received £5,000; the Clerks have purchased vouchers to the full value of the £5,000. The Clerks had handed out 84 vouchers from the 100 Aldi vouchers purchased, 16 remained available for issue. The IW Foodbank and local schools had been approached to allocate the remaining 16 vouchers. Councillors requested the Food Pantry also be included.

1099 CHAIRMAN'S FINANCE TRAINING

Councillor Carter, Chair of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee, attended a Finance training session organised by the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC) on 29 October 2025. Slides from the training had been circulated to all Town Councillors. The Chairman found the training very useful.

1100 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR OF THE FINANCE, ACQUISITIONS AND STAFFING COMMITTEE

Councillors noted that the Chair of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee would be unable to physically attend meetings in January – March 2026 due to being out of the country. They considered appointing a Deputy Chair for this period, however, the Chair advised that she would be available to answer correspondence. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That a Deputy Chair of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee is not appointed.

1101 UPDATE ON RECRUITMENT OF A TOWN CLERK AND RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor advised that IWALC's recruitment checklist was being followed and they were on track to advertise for the position of a Town Clerk and a Responsible Financial Officer later this week. A date for interviews had been set and would be included in the interview pack. The Deputy Town Clerk would cover day to day administration tasks and attend meetings in the interim. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor would take responsibility for interim staffing matters. Councillors Carter and Rafferty were thanked for their assistance with the process.

1102 UPDATE ON RECRUITMENT OF A DEPUTY TOWN CLERK

The recruitment of a new Deputy Town Clerk would be deferred until February 2026, following completion of the recruitment of a Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer positions.

1103 TEAM BUILDING AND ALIGNMENT PLAN

A draft team building and alignment plan was tabled at the meeting. It was agreed:

ACTIONS

1. The draft team building and alignment plan will be circulated to all Councillors.
2. Councillor Marriott will speak to prospective facilitators for the team building and alignment plan and provide an update at a future meeting of the Finance, Acquisitions and Staffing Committee.

Councillors Wardrop and Walters left the meeting at 7.28pm.

1104 ENHANCING COUNCIL AND STAFF WELLBEING THROUGH STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT DELEGATION

This item would be deferred for six months, following completion of the staff recruitment process.

1105 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND 360-DEGREE REVIEWS

This item would be deferred for six months, following completion of the staff recruitment process.

1106 OTHER STAFFING MATTERS

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor advised they had met confidentially with each member of staff. These meetings would continue throughout the recruitment and appointment process.

The Deputy Town Clerk requested that staff be provided with an update on the recruitment process. It was agreed:

ACTION

The Mayor would update the staff with any progress.

1107 HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

The Chairman of the Projects Committee and the Facilities and Town Manager had completed fire risk assessments for each of our public convenience facilities. Once the risk assessment reports had been written up, the Chairman of the Projects Committee would sign them off as complete.

1108 STAFF CONCERNs

No staff concerns have been raised with the Deputy Town Clerk.

1109 ITEMS FOR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

- Reserves Policy – Councillor Carter

The proceedings terminated at 7.36pm

CHAIRMAN