BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Finance & Staffing Committee
held on Monday 23rd March 2026 at 7:05pm held in the Corn Exchange

DRAFT Subject to confirmation

PRESENT

Cllr L Hitchings – Committee Chairman
Cllr C Stevens – Committee Vice Chairman
Cllr R Holmes – Chairman of T&GP
Cllr M Putt
Cllr S Chapman – Chairman of R&A
Cllr S Hitchings
Cllr A Cross
Cllr T Clarkson

SITTING IN

Cllr M Spruce
Cllr G Del-Pinto

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk
Responsible Financial Officer
Operations Manager

65. PUBLIC SESSION

There were no members of the public in attendance.

66. APOLOGIES

Cllr H Miéville – Chairman of Council

67. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None

68. APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS:

68.1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8TH DECEMBER 2025

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED.

68.2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28TH JANUARY 2026

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Clarkson, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 abstention/non-vote) that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED.

69. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE

The report was noted (see Appendix A).

Staff & Councillor Training – Since the March meeting in 2025, Councillors and staff have attended numerous courses, which are listed in the agenda.

Work Experience Students – The Blandford School had asked the Town Clerk to take on two students for work experience week starting 9th March 2026. Both students attended the Commonwealth Day event and a variety of meetings and learnt a lot about the Town Council's services and facilities.

Thank You Card – The Town Clerk informed the Committee that a thank you card had been received from each of the work experience students. The Committee Chairman asked the Town Clerk to present the work experience students with a voucher, thanking them for spending their work experience week with the Town Council.

69. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE (cont.)

Wedding Fair – The wedding fair organised by Jacqueline Robinson and Kat Rann was well attended and very successful for the Town Council with lots of enquiries and some bookings.

EV Charging at Park Road – Company Change – An email has been received to advise that Iduna EVCI Holdings Limited, a member of the Iduna Infrastructure Limited group (the "Iduna Group"), has acquired Mer Charging UK Limited (the "Company") with effect from 13th March 2026. The Iduna Group trades as Be.EV. Staff have been asked to update their records. All other existing terms and arrangements remain unchanged unless otherwise notified.

Personal / Premises Licence – With the Town Clerk leaving at the end of April, the DPS on the premises licence needs to be changed. She has checked with the Dorset Council Licensing team who have confirmed the following and both office and grounds staff have been asked if they would be prepared to undertake the course and exam for the Corn Exchange licence to continue as it is. The incoming Town Clerk has agreed to take this on and has been signed up to the course and exam.

If you were to remove yourself from the licence as the DPS, your removal needs to be submitted to the Premises licence Holder and the Licensing Authority. Once this has been received the Premises cannot sell any alcohol under its premises licence until a DPS has been added to the licence, the person who is to be the next DPS must have a personal licence. You are correct that if anyone wishes to sell alcohol at the premises, if a new DPS has not been appointed via a variation of the DPS application, then they would need to apply for a TEN, this would include the Town Council themselves. I have attached a VARY DPS form and consent form, the cost of a Vary DPS is £23.00.

Town Museum Talk – The Town Clerk has been asked by the Dr Hixson Andrews at the Town Museum to step in to provide a talk on the Corn Exchange project because someone has had to cancel their slot. This is now being held in the Town Hall instead of the Parish Rooms on Friday 27th March 2026.

Incoming Town Clerk – The first handover session took place on Friday 20th March 2026 and the second will be this Friday, up until 24th April 2026.

70. ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET FOR THE FOLLOWING:

70.1 Administration Budget for the year to 28th February 2026

The paper was noted (see Appendix B).

70.2 Overall Revenue Budget for the year to 28th February 2026

The paper was noted (see Appendix C). Cllr S Hitchings spotted an error with the figure for the Corn Exchange income, which should be in the region of £12,000.

70.3 Reserves Accounts as at 28th February 2026

The paper was noted (see Appendix D).

71. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION

71.1 Petty Cash Transfers 7-9 totalling £383.56

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens AGREED unanimously that

The petty cash transfers 7-9 totalling £383.56 are received and retrospectively approved.

71. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION (cont.)

71.2 Direct debit payments for the period 1st October 2025 to 31st January 2026 (sheets 225-228) totalling £156,169.28

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

The direct debit payments for the period 1st October 2025 to 31st January 2026 (sheets 225-228) totalling £156,169.28 are received and retrospectively approved.

71.3 Online Faster Payments FP 327– FP 342 totalling £570,908.78 (including transfers of VAT return to other Town Council accounts)

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Holmes and AGREED unanimously that

The Online Faster Payments FP 327– FP 342 totalling £570,908.78 (including transfers of VAT return to other Town Council accounts) are received and retrospectively approved.

71.4 Online Corn Exchange Faster Payments CE076 – CE077 totalling £20,566.49

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED unanimously that

The Online Faster Payments CE076 – CE077 totalling £20,566.49 are received and retrospectively approved.

71.5 Investment Account for the period to 28th February 2026 and to consider future investments

The paper was noted (see Appendix E).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

The investment account is noted and Councillors Stevens, Clarkson and S Hitchings will be added to the signatories, with the removal of past members. The new Town Clerk will also be added with the current clerk being removed from 1st May 2026.

71.6 Report by Chairman on Bank Reconciliation and Petty Cash checks

The Committee Chairman, Cllr L Hitchings confirmed that the monthly bank reconciliation and petty cash checks had been undertaken during the period, and everything was found to be in order.

71.7 Bank Reconciliation to 28th February 2026

The report was noted (see Appendix F).

72. INTERNAL AUDITOR

72.1 To receive the Internal Auditor's Reports for 18th February 2026 (visit 2 of 3)

The Internal Auditor's report is received and noted (see Appendix G).

72.2 To confirm the Internal Auditor appointment for 2026/2027

The paper was noted (see Appendix H).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

72. INTERNAL AUDITOR (cont.)

The Committee reaffirms its appointment of Company A as the Internal Auditor for the financial years 2025/26 – 2029/30, based on 4 x 7 hour days, and with the long-term five year contract (giving a 2.5% saving on the hourly scale rate, which they anticipate rising by £1.50 per scale hour from 2025/26 to 2026/27), the cost to the council would be £1,425.82 plus VAT for 2025/26, £1,472.31 for 2026/27, £1,518.80 for 2027/28, £1,580.80 for 2028/29 and £1,642.78 for 2029/30 giving a five year total of £7,640.51 plus VAT. The long-term contract could be terminated at any time by either party giving three months' notice and would give an approximate saving of £172.55 over the five years. The number of days required is based on historical performance and generally proves fairly accurate. In the event that additional work arises, this will be invoiced at the quoted rates. If less work is needed the Town Council will be charged proportionately less. The Committee recommends to full council that the Internal Auditor appointment is approved for the 2026/2027 financial year and they are totally independent of the Town Council.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

73. INSURANCE RISK ASSESMENT RELATING TO THE TOWN COUNCIL'S INSURANCE COVER AND APPROVAL OF INSURANCE PREMIUMS FOR 2026/2027

The paper was noted (see Appendix I).

It was agreed to delegate the matter to full Council when it will need to:

- Confirm there are no other aspects of insurance that they wish to amend.
- Selects the preferred insurer for 2026/27 (Expenditure Authority: Localism Act 2011 s1-8).

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

74. REVIEW OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT POLICY (INCLUDING FINANCIAL) ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2026/2027

The report was sent to councillors prior to the meeting.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Town Council approves the Risk Management Policy (including Financial) arrangements for 2025/26 and has no amendments.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

75. REVIEW OF ASSET REGISTER

The report was noted (see Appendix J).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The asset register is approved.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

76. REVIEW OF VARIABLE DIRECT DEBITS

The report was noted (see Appendix K).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Holmes and AGREED unanimously that

76. REVIEW OF VARIABLE DIRECT DEBITS (cont.)

The direct debits are noted and approved.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

77. TO CONSIDER THE CURRENT STATUS OF BAD DEBTS WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL

The report was noted (see Appendix L).

78. TO REVIEW THE FINANCE & STAFFING COMMITTEE REMIT AND THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The report was noted (see Appendix M).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Finance & Staffing Committee Remit and Financial Regulations are approved.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

79. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE FREE VENUE HIRE REQUESTS RECEIVED FOR 2025/2026

The report was noted (see Appendix N).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The free venue hire process is amended by adding a 25% / 50% / 75% discount to hire as an option instead of a blanket free hire award.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

80. TO APPROVE AMENDMENTS TO THE INVESTMENT POLICY

The report was noted (see Appendix O).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Investment Policy is approved but with the retention of the Hampshire Trust Bank.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

81. TO CONSIDER THE VIREMENT OF UNDERSPENT RESERVES AND THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE GENERAL RESERVES

A verbal report was given by the RFO.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Committee discussed the possibility of various transfers (to be confirmed on 30th March 2026) and initially approved the following transfers:

- **Tree maintenance to be vired to Tree Surveys**
- **Corn Exchange lanterns and curtains to be vired to Corn Exchange 1105**

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

82. TO APPROVE DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO THE RFO, TOWN CLERK AND INTERESTED COUNCILLORS TO REVIEW AND AGREE ON UTILITIES CONTRACTS

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Clarkson and AGREED unanimously that

Delegated Authority be given to the RFO, Town Clerk and Councillors S Hitchings, L Hitchings and Stevens to review and agree on utilities contracts.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

The RFO left the meeting.

83. CONFIDENTIAL

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Holmes, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously

The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

83.1 Town Clerk's Report

The Town Clerk summarised the last year with the council and explained various moments that had been challenging and unacceptable. The Committee expressed its support and asked that the Town Clerk has an exit interview with the external HR company.

83.2 To consider approving a change in responsibilities/hours between two roles

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that

The change in responsibilities/hours between the two roles is not approved at this time but it is recommended that the staffing is reviewed in six months' time by the incoming Town Clerk.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

The meeting closed at 9:08pm.

SIGNED: …… DATED: ……..