

Marlborough Town Council



Finance & Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Policy Committee held Monday, 20 October 2025 in the Council Chamber, Marlborough Town Hall at 7pm

PRESENT	Councillor Abi Beaumont Councillor Emily Trow Councillor Mervyn Hall Councillor Kym-Marie Cleasby Councillor Peter Morgan Richard Spencer-Williams Dawn Whitehall	Chair Town Mayor (<i>ex officio</i>) Town Clerk Corporate Services Officer
ALSO PRESENT	Councillor Nicholas Awbery Sarah Hart and Ken McDougall Plus 4 members of the public	Observing 2 nd Marlborough Scout Group Marlborough Area Youth Forum, including Lisa Farrell <i>NB Lisa Farrell was not present as a councillor, and withdrew from the meeting in this respect</i>

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Caroline Thomas, Marlborough Area Youth Forum (MAYF) referred to agenda item 8, a proposal by **Councillors Shantry** and **Wrench** relating to the MAYF use of the Community & Youth Centre. As neither Councillor was present, she asked whether it would be possible for her to speak at that point in the meeting. The **Chair** confirmed that she could suspend Standing Orders if required.

- 211/25 APOLOGIES**
Apologies for absence were received from **Councillors Fogg, Shantry** and **Sheppard**.
- 212/25 DECLARATIONS**
Councillor Hall – agenda item 8 – MAYF – non-pecuniary (as a Trustee of MAYF).
- 213/25 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**
There were no announcements.

214/25 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held 30 June 2025 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

215/25 ACTION LOG

There were no outstanding actions on the action log.

216/25 GRANTS

RESOLVED: to award £545 to 2nd Marlborough Scout Group to fund 50% of the cost of a coach to take the group to camp in 2026

Members noted a letter received from Wiltshire Sight to thank the Town Council for a grant awarded in April 2024 which had enabled them to continue to run a Community Sight Loss Service in Marlborough over the past 12 months.

Two people left the meeting

217/25 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR): CONCLUSION OF AUDIT

Members noted the conclusion of audit for 2024-25 and that the external auditor's report and certificate gave the Town Council a clean bill of health.

218/25 MARLBOROUGH AREA YOUTH FORUM (MAYF)

Councillor Hall did not take part in the discussions or vote on any proposals

The **Chair** summarised the request, submitted by **Councillors Shantry** and **Wrench** on behalf of MAYF, asking the Town Council to reduce the cost of hiring the Community & Youth Centre (MCYC) from individual hire charges to an annual, set amount (say, £500-£1,000) for 2 sessions per week plus 2 activity days in the Recreation Ground, to be reviewed every three years.

The Property Committee had reviewed hiring figures and confirmed that it could support the proposal (*Min. No. 190/25, 29 September 2025*). It was now for the F&P Committee to decide whether to support the request and recommend it to Full Council. The **Chair** invited Members' views, noting:

- Young people were a major part of the town but did not get a vote or a say: for this reason, she believed Councillors should give them any help they could
- Having reviewed the Town Council's finances, she believed the request could be accommodated
- An annual booking would mean guaranteed income: she recommended that there should be a charge rather than offering it free of charge – kids are heavy on wear and tear and there would be maintenance costs to the Council
- The Chair recommended that Members consider that a specific amount is recommended for the Full Council to consider

Discussion points included:

- Support for the proposal
- Concern about having different arrangements in place for different organisations, and whether a new policy was required for community and charity organisations for clarity. This was asked to be added to a future agenda, as it was not directly relevant to this agenda item
- Whether MAYF should be given the use free of charge
- Whether MAYF was run entirely by volunteers
- Noted that other similar halls available for community hire were more profitable than MCYC
- Recognition that the Town Council needed to find a balance between generating an income and supporting the community
- That the Town Council had running costs (power, heat etc)
- Whether there were issues of publicity about this proposal – the Town Clerk confirmed that it was not commercially sensitive and should therefore be transparent and in the public domain. If recommended to Full Council, Councillors would need to carefully consider the context of the arrangements in regard to other hirers

During a suspension of Standing Orders **Caroline Thomas** and **Councillor Lisa Farrell** (representing **MAYF**) answered questions:

- Confirmed that in addition to volunteers, MAYF employ one person with a salary – a part-time position equivalent to a third of a full time employee
- There is no charge to the young people or their family to attend the youth club events
- All income comes from grants
- MAYF uses the first floor social area and kitchen, the sports hall and toilets but not the music room on the ground floor
- There are usually 60-70 attendees at each session
- Lisa Farrell has been running the youth club for many years and put in a lot of work to raise funds, including to pay the rent of MCYC
- As well as youth activities, the volunteers deal with issues such as grooming, drugs and bullying, providing support to families as well as young people
- A desire to work in partnership with the Town Council

Two proposals were put forward by the Chair but not supported (both recommended an annual charge of £600/year, to be reviewed after 3 years).

RESOLVED: that the Finance & Policy Committee recommends the proposal to Full Council as written by Councillors Shantry and Wrench “...that MTC reduces the rent payable by the Forum for its 2 sessions per week to a fixed amount – say £500 or £1,000 p.a. reviewed every 3 years...”

All remaining members of the public left the meeting

FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MTC PROPERTY PORTFOLIO

Members considered a proposal put forward by **Councillor Morgan** *“to permit full financial assessment of the MTC property portfolio, it is proposed that an itemised income/expenditure annual spreadsheet for all properties is required. This will permit a regular financial feasibility exercise of the properties and allow the Finance and Policy Committee to make evidence-based recommendations on budgets and subsequently financial direction to full Council”*:

- Members found it difficult to see how this could be conducted
- As an alternative, whether an assessment of rental income vs expenditure could be conducted
- Whether an annual assessment was too frequent
- The main point of the property portfolio was the value of the properties as a main, long term investment (interest on cash investments was generally lower than the appreciation of property value)
- Rents of domestic properties were designed to cover running costs
- The Council had agreed a principle of setting private rent below market rates in recognition of the lack of affordable housing in Marlborough
- That the properties were not run as a business, but regarded as a portfolio and an investment
- Whether preparing the spreadsheet was a good use of officers’ time, especially with a requirement to work out staff costs associated with rental properties, and whether a sub group of Councillors should conduct this exercise
- Whether the current cost centres in the accounting system were too opaque to interpret
- Whether properties should be seen as a cost centre: if they were not seen to be making money, to consider whether the Town Council was charging enough rent
- In a business scenario, there was not enough information to decide whether the properties represented good value or not
- Acknowledgement that the Council is not a business, but it still had a duty to spend public money wisely
- Acknowledgement that providing some sort of summary information would be helpful for new Councillors
- Agreement that there may be a benefit from finding out the current market value of each property, and whether to seek updated property valuations
- A recognition that members of the Property Committee were much closer to the information and knew the history of the property portfolio and rental arrangements. They were also aware of the status of each property, and discussed issues as they arose
- Whether a decision about agreeing to the proposal should be made at Full Council rather than this Committee
- Whether there was a danger of looking at properties in a different way, re-emphasising that the Council was not a business
- That the Property Committee had delegated authority to oversee the management of the Council’s properties and was able to recommend whether to make adjustments to rental income

- That the Property Committee had already voted against conducting such an exercise
- That it was important to recognise that personal information about tenants is treated sensitively
- **Councillor Morgan** stated that he couldn't be involved with this Council if costs were not clear
 - He referred to big projects for the Council such as alleviating traffic which would be costly, and stated the Council was sitting on a property portfolio worth £28M
 - Other Councillors did not recognise this figure and Councillor Morgan could not recall the source
- The **Chair** reminded members that the budget for property maintenance was £15,000 and suggested the exercise was therefore not urgent and perhaps it could be an exercise for FY 2026-27
- The **Chair** would be interested in finding out the current value of each property, but that was not a part of the proposal under consideration

The Town Clerk (also Responsible Financial Officer) provided clarification and answered questions:

- Confirmed that the Property Committee already receives regular reports on income from properties as well as general expenditure, split between corporate and residential
- That the accounting system provides reports showing a breakdown of income per property; it does not report costs at the same level, which were represented in one summarised expenditure line. It may be possible to split this down to identify whether each property pays its way but he would need to check whether the accounting system could produce this type of report. Any such report would be in order of payment, not property. It may also have to be a manual exercise to check invoices
- Officers' time spent dealing with rental properties is not currently logged: if this was to be part of the proposal it could only be done in future, not retrospectively
- The Kingsbury Street property containing a number of studio flats was dealt with as one property, not individual units. He did not see any merit in breaking down costs to individual units
- That some cost centres had been centralised at the request of the previous F&P Chair
- It may be possible to clarify the budget structure going forward
- That maintenance costs of commercial properties were the responsibility of the businesses, not paid for by the Town Council
- Whether the proposal assumed an intention for each property to make a profit, which was not necessarily in line with the current Council approach
- That the rental property values were recorded on the asset register (total value £9M), not in the accounting system

Following the discussion, **Councillor Morgan** agreed to amendments to his proposal, and proposed :

To permit full financial assessment of the MTC property portfolio, it is proposed that an initial one-off exercise to prepare an itemised income/expenditure spreadsheet for all properties is required. This will permit a regular financial feasibility exercise of the properties and allow the Finance and Policy Committee to make evidence-based recommendations on budgets and subsequently financial direction to full Council

The **Chair** seconded the proposal. There were 2 votes for and 3 against, therefore the proposal was not carried.

220/25 POLICIES

RESOLVED: (i) to recommend the draft Lone Working Policy to Full Town Council for adoption

RESOLVED: (ii) to recommend the draft Community Champions Awards policy and Mayor's Community Award policy to Full Council for adoption

RESOLVED: (iii) that the draft Pension Scheme Discretionary Policy is accepted for adoption

221/25 HERBERT LEAF TRUST

Members considered the Town Clerk's report about the Herbert Leaf Trust and specifically whether the current simple trust was sufficient for administering the funds, and if not, how to do so and whether there was a better way to build interest from the bequest and how it could be used:

- A working party had been set up to move the Trust forward in the previous Council term. Unfortunately, a Member had resigned on ill-health and there had been no appetite for other Councillors to replace him to help move it forward.
- Members debated the merits of the current simple trust versus creating a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (which had been attempted in the past).
- That the current simple trust met legal requirements and the funds could be accessed and disbursed.
- All Town Councillors were Trustees: if the current arrangements were retained, Full Council would need to review the Trust four times each year.
- The fund had accrued minimal interest (approx. £3,000) since the Trust was last reviewed.
- Whether the objects should be clarified and made fit for purpose so there was a clear, agreed policy about how the funds could be used. The original purpose was stated as *"to assist community projects in the Parish of Marlborough for the benefit of the public by making grants"* and according to Council records for *"people in need"*.
- The **Chair** proposed an alternative, creating a "Herbert Leaf" ear marked reserve (EMR), although **Councillor Cleasby**, having no objection to this, stated that a clear policy and criteria on how the funds would be spent would still be required in order to honour Herbert Leaf's wishes.
- The **Town Clerk** would not endorse merging the funds into the Town Council's accounts and recommended keeping it in a separate account but suggested moving it to one that attracted a higher rate of interest. He did not believe a

separate EMR was required: a separate bank account would have its own audit trail.

- Members agreed that the current arrangements would suffice, but that a draft policy was required to outline the criteria (e.g. how people could apply for funds, and what they could be used for). Members discussed whether a third party could be commissioned to help with this, or whether there was in-house capacity for Officers to prepare it.

RESOLVED: (i) To draft a policy that provides extra detail on the Herbert Leaf Trust

RESOLVED: (ii) To move the Herbert Leaf bequest to a high-interest account

ACTION: share background information on the bequest

222/25

QUARTERLY FINANCE REPORT

Members noted the finance report for Month 6 (Q2) and reviewed the current EMRs. Comments on EMRs included:

- 324 CCTV Fund – insufficient funds to cover costs of updating the system
- 328 Neighbourhood Plan – funds would need to be built up in preparation for updating the plan
- 329 Flood Resilience – ringfenced grant money that could not be used for anything else
- 330 Youth Development – ringfenced grant money that could not be used for anything else
- 353 Stonebridge Meadow – was this EMR still required? The Town Council and Action For The River Kennet had now reached an agreement on how to cover costs (the Town Council to pay for works to trees, ARK to fund other works)
- 357 Climate Emergency Response – whether this was still required
- 367 High Street Projects – ringfenced Wiltshire Towns Programme grant funds

The **Chair** asked whether a narrative for each EMR should be produced.

223/25

COMMITTEE PRIORITIES AND BUDGET REQUIREMENTS

Members considered priorities and budget requirements as input to the annual budgeting process.

There were some priorities that could be progressed within the current financial year, and Members agreed:

RESOLVED: (i) to delegate to the Town Clerk to progress phase 1 of the CCTV update in the current financial year, up to an expenditure of £20,000

RESOLVED: (ii) to replace the obsolete defibrillator with costs taken from the emergency fund, and include budget to replace others in FY 26-27

RESOLVED: (iii) that the Finance & Policy priorities for 26-27 to be submitted to the annual budgeting process are:

1. Ensure all aims are realised and managed within Local Government Financial Regulations
2. Ensure each aspirational aim is supported by the necessary resource (time and money)
3. Ensure Council policies are up to date and relevant
4. Ensure the Christmas Lights infrastructure, and review the lighting scheme with recommendation to Full Council for 2026/27 (or 27/28)
5. Maintain and improve CCTV coverage at key locations
6. Review and safeguard the defibrillators in the town

Members noted that the proposed F&P budget for 2026/27 was more than £20,000 lower than the current FY.

RESOLVED: (iv) that the Finance & Policy budget requirements for 2026/27 of £865,623 are agreed as input to the budgeting process

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Signed:
Chair

Date: