Forton Parish Council

Minutes of Meeting
Held at 7.00pm at Forton Cricket Club
Wednesday 18th November 2026

Present

Councillors:	A Hawkins (Chair), D Carver (RFO), O Thomas, P White.
Borough Councillors:	Cllr Scott Spencer
Clerk:	W Brookfield
Member of the Public:	Ashley Gillum (Forton Cricket Club)

Public Open Forum

Councillor Spencer shared the following information: -

Planning: Stafford Borough is endeavouring to speed the planning process by adopting new rules as follows: - the calling in of applications, formerly available to Councillors would no longer be permitted. Planning for one to nine houses will now automatically go to the LA designated officer. Nine to 499 houses will go to the planning department and larger developments (500+ houses) will go to the planning committee as before. Councillors can still raise objections, but these will carry less weight than previously.

A519 footpath: The footpath between Sutton and Forton is badly overgrown and needs improvement. Councillors are pressing for it to be maintained. Further discussion on public footpaths is under agenda item 26/033.

Politics: Following a directive from Labour's NEC, local Labour councillors will no longer form a coalition with Green party councillors. In Stafford Borough this will mean the Labour party will now operate as a minority ruling party.

Councillor Spencer left the meeting to attend another meeting.

26/025 **Apologies**
Cllr. C Tait.

26/026 **Declarations of Personal Interest**
A Hawkins, O Thomas if the discussion on footpaths includes those where a footpath crosses land owned by the individual Councillors.

026/27 **Minutes of Previous Meetings**
The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2026 were approved.
The note of the abandoned meeting on 15 July was approved.
The meeting of 15 July 2026 was cancelled due to it not being quorate. A further meeting was held by email over 06/07 August to

agree to arrange a new bank mandate. (See para. 1.4 of the Finance Report below). The minutes of the email meeting completed on 07 August 2026 were approved.

26/028 **Councillor Vacancies**

No potential future Councillors have come forward, Councillors to continue to ask in the area.

26/029 **Finance Report for Quarters 2 and 3**

1 Quarter 2 (brought forward from the meeting abandoned on 15 July 2026).

1.1 The Q2 financial statement dated 03 July 2026 was tabled. It balanced to the relevant bank statements: -

Current Account @ 03 July 2026	£208.02
Reserve Account @ 03 July 2026	£1,424.76
TOTAL	£1,632.78

The Q2 financial statement was approved and signed by the Chairman.

1.2 Quarter 2 Payments

Precept Payments	Budget	Agreed to Pay
Clerk's Salary – 3rd quarter *(gross)	£134.84	£107.84
PAYE	nil	£27.00

The above payments had already been made and were now approved retrospectively.

1.3 Annual Audit 2025/2026

The internal Annual Audit was completed by accountant Hannah Follows ACA and no external audit is required. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) has been on the website since 19 May and the notice of Local Government Electors Rights, since 02 June, (the right to view papers, which closed on 14 July). There have been no requests to view. Hannah Follows made no charge for her work and councillors expressed their gratitude for her service and asked the Clerk to send a message of appreciation.

ACTION: Clerk

1.4 Bank Mandate

Cllr Hammond resigned after the May meeting, leaving the RFO as the only remaining cheque signatory and cheques require two signatures. A new bank mandate was required. A resolution to add all remaining councillors to the mandate was carried forward to the special meeting held by email over 06/07 August 2026 and the new mandate became active on 08 October 2026.

2 Quarter 3

2.1 The Q3 financial statement dated 01 November 2026 was tabled. It balanced to the latest bank statements: -

Current Account @ 01 November 2026	£250.00
Reserve Account @ 01 November 2026	£1,901.61
TOTAL	£2,151.61

The Q3 financial statement was approved and signed by the Chairman.

2.2 Payments for Approval

Precept Payments	Budget	Agreed to Pay
Clerk's Salary – 3rd quarter *(gross)	£134.84	£107.84
PAYE	nil	£27.00
Clerk's Expenses – 3rd quarter	£15.00	nil
Cricket Club Room Rental for 18/11/2026	37.50	37.50

The above payments were approved.

Active Direct Debits	
HugoFox: Website Bronze Annual Subscription: next payment due 13th March 2027	£143.86
HugoFox: .gov.uk emails: due on the 8th of every month	£20.99

Continuation of the above direct debits were approved.

2.3 Payroll

Sandra Hockenhull of Woodseaves Farm has been providing the Council's payroll service, gratis, for several years and is retiring at the end of next March. Cllr Thomas and the Clerk agreed to look into undertaking PAYE calculations from April next year.

Councillors agreed a note of appreciation should be sent to Mrs Hockenhull.

ACTION: Clerk

5 Concurrent Grants

Councillors were reminded that any Concurrent Grants for the current year must be paid by 31 March 2027 or risk being forfeit to Stafford Borough Council. Councillors would therefore encourage written applications for consideration by the Council no later than the next meeting in March.

By 2028, the end of year audit process and reporting will have moved to an online system. RFO, Councillor Carver has now received free training to assist with this and proposes to start using the system for the audit this year.

26/030 **External Reports**

1. The Red Lion: Councillor White gave an overview and update regarding the premises: There are a number of fundamental issues with the site, the pub has its own soak-away but this would provide insufficient capacity, should multiple properties be developed on the site. The premises are also in a state of disrepair following significant vandalism.
   Friends of The Red Lion have commissioned an independent valuation of the property. A rough estimate of cost to bring the ground floor back into a reasonable usable state is £100k. The commissioned report should set the market value for the property to inform future discussion for purchase with the owner.
2. Forton Village Hall: No report has been received. There is a planning application in process for the external toilet facilities. Action: Councillor A Hawkins to request a further update for the next meeting, if contact with members of the committee overseeing the refurbishment can be made.

26/031 **Budget 2027/28**

A draft budget for next year was tabled by the RFO. This was based on the forecast to the current year-end which indicates a precept balance being taken forward of £1,237.20. This is lower than last year chiefly due to .gov.uk emails being unbudgeted last year. The new budget, as drafted, would require a precept of £1,973.50 (including Council Tax Support Grant which is expected to remain close to last year's £36.70).

Year	Precept £ p	Concurrent £ p	TOTAL £ p
*2027-2028	*2,573.50	270.00	*2,843.50
2026-2027	1,196.70	270.00	1,466.70
2025-2026	1,218.07	270.00	1,488.07
2024-2025	1,032.85	270.00	1,572.85
2023-2024	1229.65	270.00	1,499.65

* Precept increased by £600 after discussion by councillors (see below).

Inflation is expected to rise, for at least the rest of the calendar year. The Consumer Prices Index (CPIH – All items) in September 2026 was +3.6%, so an increase of 3.7% has been generally applied in the draft budget in anticipation of that rise.

Clerk's salary: the Clerk has been asked whether she believes our estimate of 10 hours per quarter is proving realistic. She has said that it appears to be an underestimate for much of the year, but she is prepared to continue on the present basis for 2027-28, with a review based on more evidence for the following year. Councillors agreed to awarding a cost-of-living increase of 3.7% onto the basic

salary of £134.84 (+£4.98) making £139.82 (gross). The Clerk said she was content with this settlement.

Room Rental: The Parish Hall looks to be little nearer completion so we have checked with Ashley Gillum of Forton Cricket Club who confirms it will continue to allow the Parish Council use of the pavilion at the rate of £37.50 per meeting. We need to confirm the dates for the rest of the year (see 26/035). Please note that the Cricket Club made no charge for our last, abandoned, meeting – the RFO has thanked Ashley for his understanding.

The general contingency remains at 20% being £385.12 (last year £371.72).
The Chairman raised the desirability of taking on one or more significant projects. At a minimum, it was agreed that the 3 noticeboards are approaching the end of their useful lives and we need to start to accrue funds to replace them. Councillors initially agreed to add £1,000 to the precept to be added to our reserves. This was later thought to make too much of an impact on the precept and councillors agreed to limit the increase to £600.
Stafford Borough Council has not yet announced its level of concurrent grant but the RFO has assumed it will remain at £270.00. Councillors agreed to authorise the RFO to ask SBC for the maximum figure.

ACTION: RFO

4 Councillors, having debated and amended the draft budget, then approved it. The RFO would now complete a fair copy for the Chairman to sign.

ACTION: RFO & Chair

26/032 **Email Scams**

The Parish email address has received emails associated with potential scams. Councillor O. Thomas led a discussion on everyone being mindful and things to look for, which will assist members to identify scam emails.

26/033 **Public Footpaths and Bridleways**

Following the issue raised by Councillor Spencer, the Council discussed the Local Authority's responsibilities for maintaining other public rights of way, footpaths and bridleways. Members noted that a number of finger-posts and badged-posts need attention and that a number of badges are missing.
ACTION: Councillor Hawkins to email Councillor Spencer identifying the signage that needs attention. Councillor Spencer will raise the matter with the responsible LA officer.

26/034 Items requiring attention by the Parish Council
The number of potholes continues to be of concern. Local resident and Councillors to continue to report these to the Local Authority. [post-meeting note: Meretown Lane potholes were repaired on 23/11/2026]

26/035 **Any Other Business**
None raised

Dates of the Next Meetings
17th March 2027
12th May 2017 Annual Meeting followed by Council Meeting
14th July 2017
17th November 2027
15th March 2028

Meeting closed at 19:55.