Clerk's Report – October

Co-Option

Three council positions re-published on 'We Are West Meon' social media page and West Meon Parish Council website. No emails of interest have been sent to the Clerk at time of writing this report.

Finance

Draft Budget for 2027/28

The draft budget for 2027/28 has been circulated for initial consideration. Members are asked to review the proposed income and expenditure, identify any omissions or additional cost pressures, and consider provision for planned projects and earmarked reserves.

Consideration is required for staffing costs, tree works, playground maintenance, road safety initiatives and replenishment of the Car Park earmarked reserve following the agreed transfer to the Pétanque project.

Any amendments agreed will be incorporated into the next draft before the final budget and precept are presented for approval.

Governance

Appointment of internal auditor for 2026 27

Eleanor Greene of Do the Numbers Ltd is proposed as the Council's internal auditor for 2026/27. Do the Numbers undertook the Council's previous internal audit in May 2025 and 2026.

Members are asked to assess the proposed auditor's competence and independence using the appointment information circulated with the agenda pack. The assessment should consider relevant experience, the proposed scope of work and any involvement in the Council's accounting or management arrangements that could affect independence.

The proposed fee for 2026/27 Internal Audit remains unchanged at £320.00 (VAT Zero rated).

Decision requested: Subject to being satisfied with competence, independence and the terms of engagement, appoint Eleanor Greene of Do the Numbers Ltd as internal auditor for 2026/27.

HR

National pay award

The 2026/27 NJC national pay award is 3.3%, effective from 1 April 2026. The hourly rate for SCP 18 increases from £16.35 to £16.89; the hourly rate for SCP 19 increases from £16.62 to £17.17. The national award and the proposed progression following ILCA are separate changes. To note that the Clerks current hourly rate of £15.48 does not align with 2025/26 SCP 18 figures.

Progression following completion of ILCA

The Clerk successfully completed ILCA in October 2026. The contractual provision, as reported in the advice supplied to the Clerk, provides for a one-point increase on completion of ILCA. Progression from SCP 18 to SCP 19 is therefore presented for formal agreement, with a proposed effective date of 1 November 2026.

Payroll (Xenadin) should calculate the actual arrears using the applicable paid hours and rates, together with employer pension and National Insurance costs. Any separate historical pay discrepancy is outside this report.

Decision requested: Implement the national award from 1 April 2026 and authorise the resulting payroll adjustment; agree progression to SCP 19 at £17.17 per hour from 1 November 2026.

Sources: Contract for B Gibson-Ost and NALC published updated local government pay scales for 2026/27 circulated.

Clerk's hours and annual leave

The Clerk has worked 10 additional hours during a busy period progressing the draft budget and other key Council matters. Approval is requested for payment of these hours.

Community

Downlighter on the road towards East Meon

Lights On in Hampshire has confirmed that the previously reported issue with the angled downlighter on the road out of West Meon towards East Meon, before the nursery, has been resolved. However, on inspection, the angle appears unchanged. The Clerk has requested clarification of the work undertaken. **For information.**

High Street Christmas trees

J West Christmas Trees has quoted £130.00 including VAT for six Norway spruce trees, plus delivery. There has been an increase in trees this year and the price for six is £10.00 higher than the 2025 price of £120.00. The delivery charge and total payable remain to be confirmed, last year delivery was £30.00.

- Wylds Farm, prices start at £35 per tree
- Burcot Farm Shop, prices start £34 per tree

The trees are intended for the existing High Street display. Delivery should be confirmed when placing the order.

Decision requested: Whether to approve the purchase of six trees and the delivery cost. If the delivery charge is not available at the meeting, agree a maximum total expenditure and authorise the Clerk to place the order within that limit.

Christmas tree at The Cross

The options identified are a potted tree of up to 6 ft or an unpotted tree of approximately 12 ft. Indicative prices for a 12ft include: -

- J West Trees – 12ft Nordmann or Norway Spruce £150.00 (ex VAT), delivery costs not known.
- Rotherbarn Christmas Tree Farm – 12ft Norway Spruce £155 (VAT Zero rated) + £30 delivery charge and £30 if collection is required.
- Burcot Farm Shop – 12ft Nordmann Fir £204 (ex VAT).

Members should consider the total cost, including delivery, secure installation (proposal to dig a hole) and removal of the tree, alongside the lighting arrangements.

The proposed Holm Oak works on 24 and 25 November should be considered when agreeing the position.

Decision requested: Whether to provide a tree at The Cross and, if so, agree the option, maximum expenditure and arrangements for purchase and installation, subject to the costs presented.

Christmas lights and decorations

The previous battery-operated lights were considered insufficiently bright for the High Street display. Battery operation is preferred because the trees are attached to private properties and the Council wishes to avoid using residents' electricity.

The aim is a brighter, coordinated display suitable for the six trees. Options should be compared for outdoor suitability, brightness, timer operation, battery life and replacement battery costs. Cllr Fowler has investigated options, and this will be presented to council at the meeting.

Decision requested: Consider the options and costs presented and agree whether to purchase lights, the maximum budget and any delegated purchasing arrangements.

Alton Road village entrance sign

Hampshire Highways has responded to the report of the damaged village entrance sign under reference 21922108. The case has been closed because the repair is not considered a priority at this stage. If the sign becomes dangerous at a future point, then an update using the above reference number is advised.

For noting: The response and closure of the case.

Open spaces trees and assets

Meonwara play area lease

The Clerk has requested clarification from Winchester City Council on several items in the draft lease, including responsibilities for grounds and tree maintenance, potential shared costs, registration fees and liability for damage.

A further update will be provided once a response has been received, before the lease is presented to the Council for approval. **For information.**

Holm Oak at The Cross

The Council previously approved the felling of the Holm Oak. An appeal was submitted against the replacement planting condition attached to the consent. Members are now asked to withdraw that appeal and authorise the Clerk to arrange the previously approved work.

The Clerk has written confirmation from Winchester City Council that work may proceed once the appeal is withdrawn and the relevant consent conditions are met. Withdrawal would be at no additional cost, as stated in the agenda.

Tree Assist confirmed that the initial quote 1289 (circulated) still stands, £1925.00 (ex VAT).

Withdrawing the appeal would leave the replacement planting condition to be adhered to by February 2027. Any change to the replacement species or planting arrangements should be confirmed in writing with the authority.

The proposed work dates are Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 November 2026. Vehicles must be clear of the affected area before 8.00 am. These dates remain proposed pending confirmation of the council's decision.

Subject to the Council's decision, the Clerk would prepare and deliver a notice to immediate neighbours explaining the work dates, the area to be kept clear, any temporary effects on access or parking, and a contact for queries. Any alternative

parking arrangements should be confirmed before being included in the notice. A website or noticeboard update could be included to support wider notification.

Decision requested: Whether to withdraw the appeal; authorise the Clerk to arrange the previously approved felling and authorise notification of immediate neighbours about the works and access or parking arrangements.

Meonwara Crescent tree inspection

Winchester City Council's Natural Environment Team has confirmed that the trees were inspected on 10 March 2026 and found to be in fair condition. No remedial works were identified as necessary. The trees remain on the City Council's routine three-year inspection cycle.

The assessment took account of proximity to neighbouring properties alongside tree condition and other risk factors. Winchester City Council does not consider pruning necessary at present. This is the City Council's inspection finding and does not constitute a new independent assessment by the Parish Council.

For noting: Winchester City Council's response and the inspection arrangements. The findings can be communicated to the residents who raised the matter.

Court House Meadows watercourse

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has advised that back in July a complaint was raised to Hampshire Highways after their ash dieback works had seen significant materials dumped in the riverbed. Hampshire Highways resolved this within two weeks. On receiving the Clerks email HIOWWT inspected the full length of the channel and found no obstructions or ash branches. The Trust intends to continue monitoring the channel throughout the winter.

For noting: The Trust's inspection findings and its intention to continue winter monitoring.

Boundary survey

Following the Council's appointment of Terrain Geomatics Ltd, the survey has been scheduled for between Wednesday 28th to Friday 30th October 2026. The agreed quotation of £1,185.00 plus VAT covers the site survey, investigation and letter report with plans.

Vertex Surveys Ltd and Meon Valley Surveys have been notified that their quotations were unsuccessful.

Authorisation to pay the invoice following satisfactory completion of the work is included under Finance, should payment fall due before the December meeting.

Rural parish affordable housing need questionnaire

The questionnaire and associated paper have been circulated previously to councillors for consideration. Members are asked to agree the Council's response and seek clarification from Cllr Silk if certain aspects are unclear.

Decision requested: Agree the Council's response to the questionnaire and authorise the Clerk to submit the agreed response.