



Needham Market Town Council
Governance & Finance Committee
Minutes 3rd June 2025

Present

Councillors C Goodchild (Chair), T Cook, G Blake, R Darnell, K Hunter, T Lawrence, M O'Shea, M Ost, A Reardon, J Reardon, G Sinnerton, L Cornish and Locum Clerk M Thurston.
No members of the public present.

1. To receive and approve Apologies for Absence. None

2. To receive any Declarations of Pecuniary or Non-Pecuniary Interests by Members.

The Chairman and Cllr J Reardon regarding the Community Centre item 9.a.

3. To approve any Dispensations with respect to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. None.

4. To receive and confirm the Minutes of the Governance & Finance Committee meeting held Thursday 8th May 2025.

The minutes were proposed for acceptance by Cllr Lawrence, seconded Cllr Hunter.

All in favour. Signed by the Chairman.

Cllr Lawrence asked that the council consider for future meetings, agenda item to include "Matters Arising" from the previous meeting. This would ensure that any actions from the last meeting have been dealt with. The Chairman agrees and this will be including Matters Arising on the next agenda.

5. Questions from Members of the Public. No public in attendance.

6. To elect a Deputy Chairperson of the Governance and Finance Committee

Cllr J Reardon proposed Cllr Cook, she informed that she is happy to take on the role. Seconded Cllr Darnell, all in favour.

7. To receive a verbal report from the Town Clerk

No report was given as Clerk not in attendance.

8. To receive a report from the Responsible Finance Officer

The report has been circulated to all in advance of the meeting.

The year end accounts 2024/2025 have now been completed by Scribe.

Financial part of the AGAR form 3 is now completed and signed by the RFO and ready for the council's approval.

12th June is the deadline for all internal audit information to be sent to SALC, all in on track.

The Internal Audit will commence on 23rd June to 27th June.

1st July is the deadline for approved AGAR and supporting documentation to be sent to PKF Littlejohn.

Therefore, PKF Littlejohn has granted the Council an extension for the AGAR and supporting documents to reach them by 14th July. The Council may need to call an emergency meeting to approve the AGAR, but this will be decided at the next Council meeting on 8th July.

Cllr A Reardon advised that the RFO is grateful for the extra support that the Council is giving her whilst the Clerk is on sick leave. Should the Council make a plan of further support for the RFO, as she is expected to take on the extra work at this time? The Chairman informed that this is being looked at.

9. To consider requests for Grants/Donations 2025/2026

a. Needham Market Community Centre. Report received in advance of the meeting and circulated to all. One of the main tasks under the Facility Improvement Project is to install solar panels & battery system and external & internal door replacements.

At this stage it is the intention to apply for 100% project cost from Biffa (£75,000). The projects collectively are budgeted to a maximum of £75,000, based on the solar panel/battery system costing approx. £35,000, the two automated doors schemes costing £30,000, plus two further corridor door replacements £10,000. Professional fees (£10,000) not included.

To facilitate this, the requested contribution from the Council is £15,000 in total (£7,500 for the 10% Third-Party Contribution, plus £7,500 contribution toward the professional fees.

The Charity will match the Council's contribution i.e. £15,000 to cover the necessary facilitation works.

Cllr Lawrence informed that the district council have funding available for sports facilities. His opinion is that the Council should not commit to any funding until the community centre has applied for alternative grants.

The Chairman advised that this item will be referred to the full Council for further discussion and a decision.

b. Needham Market in Bloom. Cllr A Reardon read out communication received from Needham in Bloom, who have recently had a meeting. They had discussed the ongoing issue of the planter near the new housing development in Venus Fields and would now like to make a formal request to the town council for £250 in compensation for the removal of the planter.

The Chairman recommends that this request is deferred for the Council to discuss at the next meeting, as it is understood that Alison Homes may be compensating Needham in Bloom.

10. Update on Governance and Finance Arrangements

a. To monitor the Council's approved Budget 2025/26 against actual expenditure. The budget spreadsheet has been circulated to all in advance of the meeting. The Chairman acknowledged that the spreadsheet needs to give a clearer and more concise overview of where the budget is at. Also, that the tab showing Grants needs to be made obvious.

Cllr Lawrence would like to see a totals column showing comparison of the last quarter, this would enable performance of the budget to be monitored.

Cllr Hunter informed that the district council gives a grant for street cleaning therefore the council should make use of this money. Co-ordination is also needed with the disposal of the towns waste.

The Chairman agreed that some work needs to be done on the spreadsheet to show overspends and underspends, and this will be highlighted to Scribe, the accounting system.

b. Review of the Council's Financial Management Procedures. To be dealt with later in the meeting.

c. Review of Council's Community Infrastructure Levy priorities and expenditure. The Chairman informed that there have been no changes since the last meeting.

d. Review of Council's policies. The Chairman informed that a review list is to be drawn up.

e. Review of the Council's Risk Assessment. The Chairman informed that there have been no changes since the last discussion but advised that the Risk Assessment must be checked regularly.

Cllr Lawrence informed that he had recently carried out a full review of the Risk Assessment and highlighted changes which he had copied to the RFO on 10 May. He had expected the Council to have seen a copy. The Chairman will ask the RFO to circulate the document and will include the Risk Assessment as an item to review at the next meeting.

f. Review of the Councils Investment Strategy. The Chairman advised that as yet the RFO has not had time to provide the exact figures to the Council but will do so for the next meeting.

11. To consider for recommendation the adoption of Model Financial Regulations 2025.

In line with the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2025 the following changes to be made, which have been circulated to the Council in advance of the meeting;

5.4 – Replacing The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 with The Procurement Act 2023 and The Procurement Regulations 2024

5.9 – To amend the value threshold where the RFO should seek three estimates, changing it from £500-3000 to £500-£300.

5.15 – a) Changes the maximum purchase that can be authorised by the Clerk under delegated authority from £1000 to £500.

b) Changes the maximum purchase that can be authorised by the Clerk and the Chair of Council or Chair of Committee under delegated authority from £3000 to £2000.

5.18 – Changes the maximum purchase that can be authorised by the Clerk in emergency situations from £3000 to £2000.

6.7i) – in line with 5.15a) above

6.7ii) – in line with 5.18 above

10 – Reduction of the petty cash float from £500 to £250.

The Chairman asked to receive approval of the Council to recommend the change to the Model Financial Regulations to the Town Council at next week's meeting. Proposed Cllr Ost seconded Cllr Darnell. All in favour.

12. To consider matters raised in the Councils Internal Audit Report 24/25

The Chairman informed that a report has not yet been carried out by the Internal Auditors.

13. To scrutinise any matters referred from, or to, The Council's Community and Assets Committee and/or Planning Committee

Cllr Lawrence reported that issues which had been raised at the last planning meeting have not yet been uploaded onto the district councils planning portal, as access had been denied.

Cllr A Reardon informed that the district council planning department has been informed by email of any issues which were raised at the last planning meeting.

14. To discuss the Neighbourhood Plan Review

Cllr Ost read out his proposal, which was circulated to councillors.

Cllr Hunter appreciates the proposal, which is very helpful. The landscape of Needham Market has changed over time. Is the Town Council informed enough to be able to go into a review, taking into account what is happening with the Local Plan. He suggests that a Neighbourhood Plan team member could be asked to attend a Council meeting to discuss and give clarity on the way forward.

Cllr Lawrence suggests that without an updated plan the town could find that developments will be targeted. Therefore, a review should commence.

Cllr Hunter proposed that the Council invite a representative from the district council neighbourhood planning department to attend a town council meeting ASAP, seconded Cllr Sinnerton. All in favour.

Cllr Ost will present his proposal again at the full council meeting next week.

15. To receive a report relating to Newsletter costings 2024/25

The summary prepared by the Chairman had been circulated to all in advance of the meeting. It outlines newsletter production costs, advertising income, and net expenditure over the past four financial years. Figures are drawn from published accounts, with additional clarification from the RFO re: 2024/25. The 2024/25 production cost appears slightly lower than in previous years, though this may be due to quirks around year-end and dates of invoice vs payment. Steps were taken earlier in the year to reduce the size of the newsletter. Production is paid a month in advance, meaning invoice timing can affect which financial year costs appear in. The low advertising income in 2024/25 is not a reflection of actual activity, but rather due to advertising not being invoiced during the financial year. This is a procedural issue related to staffing changes in 2024/25 and can be addressed to ensure income moving forward. The production costs include both the physical printing and the editing service that's provided. The printing costs are the significantly larger element of this. The low advertising figure in 2021/22 was due to advertising fees being waived during the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of wider support to local businesses. Cllr Cook informed that advertising rates may need to increase which will help reflect costs. Confirm invoicing arrangements for 2025/2026. Consider periodic checks to ensure the Council is obtaining value for money. The Chairman recommends that the Council gets a couple of quotes to sense check, but must be like for like quotes. Proposed Cllr Blake seconded Cllr Cook. All in favour. Chairman will get quotes and circulate to all in time for the next meeting.

16. To receive a report from the Newsletter Working Group.

Most of which was covered in the previous item. Cllr Cook welcomes any suggestions/ideas for the newsletter. Cllr Ost informed that the council used to employ an editor for the magazine.

17. To confirm the Date, Time and Location of the next Governance and Finance Committee Meeting.

The Chairman reported that the next scheduled Governance and Finance Committee Meeting is to take place in September. However, as a review will need to be carried out after the internal Audit has been completed, he suggests an additional meeting is planned for 22nd July, 7pm in the Green Room of the Community Centre. Proposed Cllr Ost, seconded Cllr Sinnerton. All in favour.

The meeting closed at 8.32pm.

Chairperson..... Date.....