



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

A

Minutes Council

Time and date

6.00 pm on Thursday 18th December, 2025

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Councillors

Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Mat Brown
Councillor Sally Dickson
Councillor Tony Fairclough
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Chris Jackman
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Michaela Martin
Councillor George Murray (Mayor)
Councillor John Ward
Councillor Graham White (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Tim Woodhouse

Apologies for absence

Alan Earwaker, Brodie Mauluka, Mark Merryweather and Kika Mirylees

Officers Present:

Iain Lynch (Town Clerk), Lucy Dorkins (Business & Facilities Manager), Jenny de Quervain (Civic and Planning Officer)

There were 7 members of the public and 1 member of the press in attendance.

Prior to the meeting, prayers were led by Pastor Michael Hall of the Wey Church.

C68/25 Apologies

Apologies were reported from Cllr Merryweather, Mirylees and Mauluka.

C69/25 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

C70/25 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th October were approved with the addition of Cllr Woodhouse to the list of apologies, and the addition of “ and the removal of evening charges” to Resolution C60/25/1/1.

C71/25 Questions and Statements by the Public

1 Ms Ionella Emmett addressed the Council and relayed comments from other residents, including individuals with disabilities who were unable to attend.

She commended the Council on recent initiatives, including the new Christmas lights and Farnham sign, the success of the Christmas Market, and the £1 festive parking offer, which was said to have encouraged town centre footfall and support for local businesses.

She also raised concerns regarding the impact of current and forthcoming roadworks on access to the town centre and requested that the £1 parking scheme be extended until at least the end of July, to cover ongoing disruption, including anticipated works on Castle Street and school traffic. She also suggested that the Brightwells car park be made free for the duration of the works.

Ms Emmett raised safety concerns about the Castle Steps which had been investigated by SCC officers but not fixed; about access to Farnham Park which was hazardous for pedestrians, and about parking access for people with disabilities in the Hart Car Park.

In response, the Mayor advised that car parking was not a Town Council responsibility but the budget meeting for car parking at Waverley Borough Council was coming up in January and he encourage a question be raised in that forum.

2 Mr Steve Hamilton, a business owner on Downing Street, addressed the Council regarding issues arising from recent works delivered through the Farnham Infrastructure Programme (FIP). He expressed concern about the design and maintenance of new pavements, noting that a high proportion of space has been taken up by flower beds, loading bays, and crossing points which were felt to be poorly defined and impractical.

He said the newly installed surfaces already appear dirty and stained, including oil and diesel spillages outside premises on Downing Street and asked what long-term cleaning and maintenance arrangements would be put in place to protect the Council’s investment. He advised, on behalf of businesses, the closure of The Borough and Downing Street, with required clarity on traffic diversions and the likely impact on traffic flow between North and South Farnham to avoid congestion and safety issues at key junctions, including Folly Hill and Castle Street.

In addition, Mr Hamilton expressed disappointment that the streetscape improvements had not resulted in a cohesive or heritage-sensitive appearance, citing the placement of large refuse bins and street furniture as detracting from the town’s character. He suggested, if space allowed, that town centre noticeboards be installed at key locations to provide information about events and activities, particularly for residents who do not use social

media. The removal of previous banner infrastructure was noted, and concern expressed that visitors and residents are often unaware of what is taking place in the town.

In response, the Mayor confirmed that street cleanliness was recognised as an issue and that although Farnham Town Council was not responsible for street cleansing, discussions were ongoing with Waverley Borough Council, and trials had taken place using mechanical cleaning equipment and the Town Council was prepared to contribute to enhanced cleaning arrangements.

The Mayor clarified that works on Downing Street and The Borough were not yet complete, with further phases still to be delivered and there were ongoing discussions regarding the design and positioning of rain gardens/planters, both locally and with Surrey County Council and the FIP team and FTC input had already influenced changes. The Mayor advised the Council was seeking to represent business interests wherever possible. In terms of parking and traffic management, Surrey County Council had been asked to improve enforcement, particularly in relation to illegal parking by delivery vehicles and lorries as poor parking and also review the traffic signal operation, particularly on West Street.

Concerns relating to street furniture were being addressed with FTC agreeing plans to replace existing bins with a more heritage-appropriate design and the possibility of installing town centre noticeboards was noted.

Cllr Martin advised that noticeboards could be funded by Your Fund Surrey.

C72/25 Town Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor reported on recent civic engagements, including attendance at the Civic Service held on 3 December at St Andrew's Church, which was well-attended and a enjoyable occasion with the amazing Farnham Youth Choir.

The Mayor also reported attendance at a number of Christmas lunches, carol services, and church events, including delivering readings at services. He had also supported the Farnham Christmas Market which was a significant success.

Members noted the Mayor's extensive engagements across the community during the Christmas period.

C73/25 Questions by Members

C74/25 Budget 2026-27

The Leader introduced the detailed Budget Report for 2026–27 at Appendix D to its agenda, following extensive discussion at Strategy workshops and formal review by the Strategy & Resources Working Group. Members acknowledged that this was one of the most challenging budget-setting exercises in recent years, shaped by inflationary pressures, uncertainty arising from Local Government Reorganisation, anticipated Community Asset Transfers, and increasing demand for services.

The proposed budget sought to balance prudence with the need to protect services, invest in the town's environment and community, and ensure organisational resilience during a period of structural change. Members discussed income assumptions, including sponsorship

and service income, noting that targets were considered achievable but challenging. Concerns were raised about the scale of the projected shortfall and the potential impact on the precept at a time of wider cost-of-living pressures. Specific discussion included:

- The increase in funding for the museum and its long-term sustainability
- Costs associated with taking on green space and services from principal authorities
- Staffing pressures and the limitations of vacancy management
- Whether additional savings could be identified internally
- The need to balance financial prudence with continued support for voluntary and community groups

Members acknowledged that further clarity would be available in future years once the impact of reorganisation and asset transfers is known.

Having considered the report, the annexes and the recommendations of the Strategy & Resources Working Group, Council agreed that the proposed level of expenditure was appropriate and justified in the circumstances.

It was RESOLVED, with one abstention and no one against, that the gross expenditure budget for 2026–27 be approved at £2,205,030.

C75/25 Working Group Notes

1 Environment Working Group

Cllr Brown introduced the Minutes of the Environment Working Group which had met on 27 November 2025 and considered a comprehensive range of matters relating to the stewardship of Farnham's green spaces, allotments, cemeteries and environmental initiatives. Members received detailed operational updates from officers and reflected on both the pressures created by external infrastructure projects and the importance of maintaining high environmental standards across the town. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that responsibility is only accepted for assets that are properly designed, sustainable, and capable of being maintained to the standards expected by residents.

The Working Group had considered the recently completed "green street" rain garden installations delivered by Surrey County Council as part of the town centre works. Members expressed significant concern that, as constructed, these features were not operating as intended, were subject to flooding, vehicle overrun and soil displacement, and risked creating an ongoing maintenance and safety burden. It was agreed that Farnham Town Council should not take on long-term responsibility for these installations unless they are first brought up to an acceptable and fully functional standard **and were fit for purpose**. Members noted that discussions with Surrey County Council and the project team are ongoing, with the intention of securing remedial works so the installations operate as designed. Councillors expressed concern that, if defects were not resolved, responsibility would in practice fall to the Town Council regardless, as residents expect the Council to maintain the town centre environment. This would create unplanned costs, particularly for watering and maintenance, which were not anticipated when the scheme was proposed.

i) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that responsibility for taking over the green street gardens from Surrey County Council not be accepted unless and until they were made fully fit for purpose, including the resolution of ongoing flooding and design issues.

The Working Group also reviewed the programme of external competitions and awards, including South and South East in Bloom. While recognising the importance of maintaining

Farnham's strong reputation in horticultural excellence, Members noted that Gostrey Meadow would be subject to extensive construction works during 2026, including the development of the new amenity building. Entering the site during this period was considered inappropriate and unlikely to reflect the park at its best.

- ii) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that Gostrey Meadow not be entered as a separate entry in the South and South East in Bloom competition in 2026.**

2 Strategy & Resources Working Group

The Leader introduced the Minutes of the Strategy & Resources Working Group which had taken place on 11 December 2025 to consider financial performance, strategic risks and emerging priorities for the Council. The meeting took place against a backdrop of continuing economic uncertainty, rising costs, and the significant implications of Local Government Reorganisation. Members examined a number of issues requiring formal recommendation to Council, including the suggested budget, town centre infrastructure matters, parking initiatives, and strategic planning responses.

Members discussed concerns arising from the Farnham Infrastructure Programme, particularly the visual and environmental impact of standard plastic bins introduced within the Conservation Area. It was felt that these detracted from the historic character of the town centre and were inconsistent with the quality of the surrounding public realm. The Working Group agreed that more appropriate bins should be installed and that funding should be met from the existing Infrastructure Programme earmarked reserve.

- i) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that Farnham Town Council fund the provision of upgraded bins more appropriate to the Conservation Area from the Farnham Infrastructure Programme earmarked reserve and reallocate existing bins to other parts of Farnham.**

The Working Group revisited the issue of rain gardens installed as part of the town centre works and reaffirmed concerns regarding their construction quality, functionality and long-term maintenance implications. Members were clear that these matters should be escalated formally and pursued with Surrey County Council to ensure that agreed design standards and performance expectations are met.

- ii) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that the ongoing concerns regarding the poor construction and performance of rain gardens be raised formally with the Surrey County Council project team and the relevant portfolio holder.**

The Working Group had considered the Council's involvement in the £1 after 1pm Christmas Parking Scheme, introduced to support town centre businesses during the festive period. Members noted that the scheme had commenced later than planned due to statutory advertising requirements but had been extended by Waverley Borough Council to the end of December. It was agreed that Farnham Town Council's financial contribution should continue only on the basis previously agreed and not increase as a result of the extension.

In response to a question from Cllr Jackman about further extending the scheme during the FIP works, he was advised that footfall data would not be available until the second week of January and FTC would require detailed information from Waverley Borough Council's review. Members also hoped the BID would also come forward with the experience of businesses during the subsidised period.

- iii) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that Farnham Town Council agree to continue its contribution to the £1 after 1pm Christmas Parking Scheme until 31 December 2025, provided that the cost does not exceed the amount previously agreed.**

The Working Group reviewed the proposed Farnham Town Council response to Waverley Borough Council's Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation. Members considered that the response accurately reflected Farnham's strategic priorities, constraints and long-standing planning principles, particularly in relation to infrastructure capacity, landscape protection and sustainable development.

iv) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that the Farnham Town Council response to Waverley Borough Council's Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation be endorsed.

The Working Group had considered a motion agreed by Waverley Borough Council expressing concern over revised national housing targets and the implications for constrained rural authorities. The Working Group recommended that Farnham Town Council should formally support the motion and make its own representations to Government to ensure that local circumstances are fully understood.

v) It was RESOLVED *nem con* that Farnham Town Council support the Waverley Borough Council motion on national housing targets and write separately to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to raise the Council's concerns.

The Working group had received an update on the Gostrey Amenity Building Tenders noting the process had returned 11 tenders with costs higher than previously estimated, reflecting increased material and labour costs. Officers confirmed that further analysis would be undertaken and funding options explored, including CIL, grants, and borrowing if required.

Progress on Asset transfers was noted, including approval of Morley Road Recreation Ground and that the next tranche of transfers was going to the WBC Executive on 10th February 2026.

3 Community & Wellbeing Working Group

Councillor Earwaker provided an update on the recent Neighbourhood Area Committee meetings which he attended as Lead Member for Community and Wellbeing along with the Mayor, and Cllr Beaman who represented Waverley. He advised that children and young people's mental health had been agreed as a priority area, with short- and long-term actions identified. He also informed Council that the pilot would continue into 2026, subject to Surrey County Council confirmation, and the evaluation of the pilots was underway. Council noted there could not be a one-size-fits all approach and there should be one arrangement where there were town or parish councils and one where there were no parish councils. Cllr Beaman added a note of caution, saying that whilst there had been a lot of enthusiasm in the pilots, unless resources were made available enthusiasm from partners could wane.

C76/25 Planning and Licensing Applications

Cllr Laughton introduced the Minutes of the Planning and Licensing Consultative Group meetings held on 10th and 24th November and 7th December. He summarised recent matters, including objections to the Premier Inn expansion based on the bulk of the design and its industrial nature, the refusal of the Centrum Business Park application by Waverley Planning Committee, and concerns regarding access and environmental impacts at land West of and opposite Old Compton Lane.

Licensing decisions were noted, including extended opening hours granted to a town centre convenience store, with members expressing concern about the potential precedent of this decision and its residential impact.

Cllr Beaman advised that the Planning Bill had just become law and would reduce the powers of planning committees.

C77/25 Actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation

The Town Clerk reported progress on the procurement and implementation of a new CRM system from Abavus.

C78/25 Reports from Other Councils

Cllr Martin reported on the roll out of the new Integrated Care Board which would cover Surrey and Sussex and see Frimley and Farnham commissioning brought into Surrey. There was concern that the new ICB would cover a population of some 3.4m population making it one of the largest in the UK.

C79/25 Reports from Outside Bodies

- 1) Cllr Hesse reported that he had attended the Farnborough Airport Consultative Committee and reminded Council that the new planning application was open for objections and comment until the end of December.

He pointed out that the application was to increase flights by more than 51% from 8,900 flights to 13,500 but based on historic data he had researched the need for increases was not proven.

- 2) Cllr Beaman advised that Stagecoach had now published revised bus timetables for when the Borough was closed.
- 3) Cllr Martin reported that the Business Improvement District had run some campaigns in the run up to Christmas to increase footfall, and that its Rangers were doing a good job.

C80/25 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Meeting was agreed as Thursday 29th January 2026.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 9.05 pm thanking members, officers, and the public for their contributions during the year and wished all present a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Chairman

Date