



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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Notes

Strategy & Resources

Time and date

2.00 pm on Monday 21st July, 2025

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Strategy & Resources Members Present:

Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Mat Brown
Councillor Alan Earwaker
Councillor Tony Fairclough
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Michaela Martin
Councillor Kika Mirylees
Councillor George Murray (ex-Officio)
Councillor Graham White (Lead Member)

Officers:

Iain Lynch (Town Clerk)
Ben Binnell (Interim Business & Facilities Manager)

1. Apologies

All appointed members were present.

2. Declarations of interest

Cllrs Murray and Fairclough made personal declarations for the re-appointment of the Internal Auditor as they both know him personally.

3. Minutes

The Notes of the meeting held on 9th June were agreed as a correct record.

4. Finance Report

1 Quarterly Finance

The Working Group reviewed the papers for the Quarterly Finance Report attached at Appendices B, C, D and E. Expenditure was running at the expected level for the first three months of the year with income at 57.8% given the payment of the first half of the precept and expenditure at 37.4%. There were no debtors being a cause for concern with 90% being the result of invoices issued in June

The Working Group noted responses to some specific questions on the detail within the papers, and the finance report was agreed.

2 Grant Request: St Peter's Lychgate

The Working Group considered a grant request towards the restoration of St Peter's Churchyard Lychgate in Wrecclesham. The request was backed by a detailed proposal by Luard Conservation, and on a proposal by Cllr Murray, seconded by Cllr Fairclough **it was agreed to recommend to Council that a contribution of 25% of the cost up to a maximum of £5,000 be pledged to the project to restore the St Peter's Lychgate.**

3 Reappointment of Internal Auditor

The Working Group considered the reappointment of the current Internal Auditor for a further three years in order to allow continuity for the new Council after the 2027 elections. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Council is required to maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit. The internal auditor must be independent of the Council's operations and demonstrate competence in reviewing financial and governance controls. Mr Mike Platten, April Skies Accounting Ltd has provided internal audit services to the Council since 2019. Mr Platten is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), which regulates professional standards through an independent disciplinary scheme. The scope of work includes assessment of the Council's financial regulations, risk management, budgeting process, bank reconciliations, accounting practices, payroll, asset registers, and publication of financial information in accordance with the Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP - formerly JPAG) Practitioners' Guide.

April Skies Accounting Ltd confirms that it has no relationship with any councillors or staff and will not undertake any consultancy work for the Council, thus maintaining independence in line with sector guidance and best practice.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council reappoints Mike Platten of April Skies Accounting Ltd as Internal Auditor for a further three-year period (2025/26 to 2027/28), subject to annual confirmation of ongoing independence and professional competence.

4 Bank signatories

As part of a request for updated information for an investment account, it became clear that the Council's banking mandates for different accounts required updating. In the past, the main bank account and South Street Trust accounts were set up to be signed by all councillors. In practice, only a few are involved in banking transactions and it was agreed to recommend that a smaller number be included on mandate (with any two typically required to authorise transactions).

Recommendation: It is recommended that:

- 1) **The following be signatories on council banking and investment accounts with any two used for particular transactions: Cllrs David Beaman, Alan Earwaker, George Hesse, Andrew Laughton, Michaela Martin, George Murray, John Ward, Graham White.**
- 2) **The Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer continue as the person authorised to manage the accounts and investments.**

5. Contracts & Assets update

The Working Group received a report updating on various contracts and assets matters at Appendix G to its agenda.

- 1 It was noted that the triennial tree survey had identified four immediate and 181 priority 3 works required to FTC trees. 90% of the required tree works need to be contracted out to specialist tree surgeons due to the nature of the work, which often involves working at height or in technically challenging locations (e.g., near roads or involving large trees over 10 metres).

The priority 3 works had been tendered and the detail presented to the Environment Working Group. Using the contractors' lowest quotes per site, the total value for Priority 3 tree work (excluding allotments) is £36,620, including £3,980 spent on emergency felling of a lime tree at Badshot Lea Cemetery. There will be a resurvey fee for 64 trees covered in ivy once that has been removed. This sum exceeds the budget and a virement will be proposed in the sixth month finance report to cover the expected £50k total for 2025/26.

What is clear is that with more land taken on and climate changes the available budget will need to be significantly enhanced from 2026/27 onwards.

Recommendation;

It is recommended that the tree works be progressed by three arboricultural companies with a report to vire budget to cover the costs made in the six month financial report.

- 2 Gostrey Meadow Play project

The Working Group noted the project was scheduled for completion by 25th July. A number of snags had been identified and were being corrected by the contractor. A small delay had occurred with the ordering of the three trees for the playground. A site inspection had taken place on the site of the Phase 2 playground works and the Gostrey Amenity Building, and councillors considered it beneficial to remove the old safety surfacing and put down a hard surface over most of the area. Discussions were taking place with Eibe over the extent of these works within the tender price but the Working Group agreed work now would make the area safer and be a start for required works on the Borelli Shelter.

On a proposal by Cllr White, seconded by Cllr Fairclough, it was agreed that a provisional sum of £5,000 should be allocated for clearing the area and putting a Type1/Scalping. This work was agreed (ahead of the playground opening) under the scheme of delegation urgency provisions with the Mayor, Leader and Town Clerk agreeing to progress this.

Recommendation:

The actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation to improve the surfacing outside the playground be endorsed at a cost of up to £5,000.

The Town Clerk advised that there was a contribution of £33,000 agreed by Surrey County Councillors Martin and MacLeod from their funding allocation. It was noted this was to contribute to a wider package of activities they wished to support including table tennis and a trim trail.

The Working Group proposed a vote of thanks to Councillor MacLeod and Cllr Martin for their very welcome contribution.

- 3 The Working Group also received updates on the Library Gardens and access to Bishops Meadow; the Hale Chapels water supply, with further reports expected on the FTC vehicle replacement plans. The Working Group also discussed the misaligned new bridge leading into Brightwells, and it was noted that this was a matter for Waverley Borough Council and Surrey County Council and Crest Nicholson
- 4 **Christmas Lights Tender**
The Working Group received the detailed analysis shortlisting, interviewing and current recommendations to date for the Farnham Christmas Lights tendering process, following the submission of 6 bids received on 9th June 2025.

The summary analysis is attached at Exempt Annex 1.

In total 13 companies considered the tender and 5 advised they would not be bidding because of timescale or capacity issues. 5 bidders were invited to attend FTC to present their proposals, meet Officers and Councillors and a BID representative and for a 2-way Q&A session, which was held on Wednesday 9th July.

It was clear that some contractors had not included costs outside the Town Centre, and several would be using sub contractors. There was a wide disparity in costs - ranging from £240,000 to £456,000 and it was unanimously agreed that the best value and most cost-effective option was to appoint Thomas Nagy.

Recommendation

Subject to references and final design details, the Christmas Lights Contract be offered to Thomas Nagy at a cost of £280,000 for the initial five year contract.

6. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

- i) Cllr White outlined arrangements for the two meetings being held with Cllr Dalton and Cllr Dalton on 23rd and 24th July to discuss sub-unitary arrangements in the two or three unitary options. Cllr Mirylees suggested that councillors should have a series of questions they wished to have answered and offered to circulate a list of seven questions she had prepared in discussion with other councillors. It was agreed these should be sent in advance to Cllr Oliver. The Mayor encouraged everyone to attend if it were possible.

Cllr Fairclough left at this point.

- ii) Councillors congratulated the FTC team on the FTC leaflet being distributed to all households which explained the Government's Consultation on the reorganisation of local government in Surrey. It was hoped people would read and respond.
- iii) The Working Group received, at Appendix I to its agenda, a letter sent by the Surrey Association of Local Councils to Surrey CC and district and borough leaders setting out the expected requirements from and Neighbourhood Area Committees terms of reference and operational requirements. These were based on learning from other areas that were already operating similar structures.

The Town Clerk advised that these arrangements were going to be introduced as part of new legislation so the SALC letter was a helpful contribution.

iv) The Working Group received the summary paper at Appendix J to its agenda on the just published English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#). The Bill promises a major shift in governance, aiming to strengthen regional mayors, streamline local government, boost neighbourhood control, and revive local democracy. However, for those in the town and parish council sector, experience has shown that such reforms often marginalise the very local voices they claim to empower. The Bill seemed to be focused on creating engagement in areas without town and parish councils rather than strengthening the sector. Further work on the Bill needs to be undertaken.

v) Community Asset Transfers

The Working Group discussed the report at Appendix K and the example expression of interest form at Annex 1 to Appendix K. At the June 2025 Council meeting, FTC agreed to progress 'packages' of community assets which it would request from principal councils to safeguard services and green spaces that were important to local communities.

Initial formal expressions of interest went to WBC in March. These were for Waggon Yard garages; Weybourn and other allotments (six Bells); Thurbans Road community green space; Morley Road Recreation ground; Borelli Walk and the Brightwells green space.

Since the June Council meeting, the scope of assets proposed to be part of the packages have been categorised and evaluated as the first stage of detailed business plans. There are three categories: Green Spaces, Sport and Cultural and Community as outlined in the report to Council in June (initially excluding areas which were protected Village Greens the Bourne Recreation Ground and Hale Recreation Ground).

The Working group noted that together with evaluating each asset, the impact on the resource and funding requirements of increasing the asset base substantially needs to be assessed. As individual assets (with the exception of Farnham Park) none individually would overly stretch the current FTC resource infrastructure, but as a group there are significant implications. There are also benefits to be gained, through increased scalability opportunities to improve efficiency. The focus initially has been on the Green Space assets. There is limited information available from WBC as they do not release any detail around the assets until a formal application is made under the CAT Policy.

However, initial estimates indicate the first 14 green spaces would add 22.06 hectares (220,629 sq metres) with a requirement for ¾ additional grounds staff, an investment in equipment and an additional budget requirement.

To make detailed proposals, a comprehensive (circa 2000 word) business plan template has been created for the Green Space assets with each plan needing to cover the five key areas of the evaluation criteria set out by the Borough Council. In addition, a 'master plan' is being developed to manage a wider portfolio if assets are transferred. FTC was also looking at justifying why it made a good business case to transfer income generating assets to offset the costs being taken on which for the initial areas would be in the region of £0.75 per sqm.

The Working Group noted that there was a duty on councils to consider the Best Value principles under Section 24 of the Local Government Act for any such transfers but it can be noted that the areas requested supported the main strategic priorities of both the Borough Council and County Council. There was also a capacity issue with WBC taking

initial requests in order and not certain if others could be taken forward in the limited time available.

7. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

The Working Group received an update on the Town Centre Improvement Works and paid credit to the County Councillors for their work in raising awareness and pushing for the extra gangs that were helping the project be ahead of schedule.

The Working Group noted the varying observations on footfall with some businesses saying their takings were down and others observing that the recorded footfall seemed to be holding up and even being slightly higher than some of the other towns in the area. WBC car parking data showed that usage (apart from Waggon Yard) was pretty much unaffected and this despite the free car park that had been operating at Brightwells for six months. It was noted that Waverley were considering a general promotion of buy one hour stay two on one day a week and would be discussing this with the BID Board. It was noted that Waverley were also installing new ticket machines from September and that this would enable more flexibility.

It was noted that the current plan was for two way traffic from Waggon Yard to become effective from 18th August and for up to five gangs working over the period to November when works would stop for Christmas and the permanent traffic lights at the top of Downing Street would be installed. It had been estimated this would shorten the overall programme by 4.5 months.

Councillors expressed concern over the impact on retailers and noted the arrangements for additional delivery bays in Central Car Park and Waggon Yard.

8. Reports of Task Groups

The Working Group received the report of the IPG/Neighbourhood Plan Task Group at Appendix L. Steve Tilbury (FTC Planning Advisor) had given an update on the national position on planning. New National Development Policies (NDPs) will limit local polices and there is likely to be further changes to the Nation Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Neighbourhood Planning funding through Locality had been stopped and Steve Tilbury did not recommend that neighbourhood plans be started or updated at this time due to the uncertainty of their future with more information due to be published in the autumn. NDPS were expected to take over the bulk of planning policies in future, superseding those of Neighbourhood Plans and Local Plans.

The Working Group noted that FTC was still awaiting an update from WBC on Surface Water Flooding and the End to End Water Study. Outcomes from these would influence FTC's focus on infrastructure. Steve Tilbury had scoped an Urban Capacity and Infrastructure Study and would shortlist consultants to carry out this research. It was expected that this might cost in the region of £10k - £20k .

A quotation of £6k has been received from Hankinson Duckett Associates who conducted the 2018 Landscape Character Assessment study.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the updated Landscape Character Assessment be carried out by HDA at a cost of £6k.

The Working Group discussed the fact that the Conservation Areas Advisory Group had not been reappointed. The Town Clerk advised that this was because all Task Groups lapse at the end of the year and with a desire to reduce the number of meetings this one had not been re-established with its work being considered as part of the Neighbourhood Plan discussions as appropriate. The reality was that much of the activity had to be progressed by the Borough Council and it did not have the capacity to do so at the current time. In reality this could mean the CA Advisory Group just became talk and not action.

The Working Group reaffirmed the IPG/Neighbourhood Plan Task Group was the right place for conservation area matters for the time being.

9. Town Clerk update

No matters raised.

10. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 8th September at 2pm.

The meeting ended at 5.34 pm

Notes written by town.clerk@farnham.gov.uk

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