



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL



Notes Strategy & Resources

Time and date

2.00 pm on Thursday 11th December, 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 George Murray (ex-Officio)
Councillor Graham White (Lead Member)
Councillor Kika Mirylees (via Zoom)

Officers: Iain Lynch (Town Clerk), Jenny de Quervain (Planning & Civic Officer) – part.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Martin.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th October were agreed.

4. Finance and Budget 2026-27

In introducing the budget report, Cllr White said this was now the third year of the administration and the Strategy & Resources Working Group must decide and recommend to Council the 26/27 Budget. The budget needed to demonstrate prudence but also contain realistic targets to continue and grow the services that Farnham's 42,000 inhabitants deserved.

The budget was, as discussed at the two recent two Strategy workshops, likely to be the most challenging of this administration and the recent history of Farnham Town Council.

Cllr White said the impact of the Local Government review meant it was difficult to determine the financial provision required to support asset transfers that Farnham may receive from the principal authorities; the FIP programme was at its height and to keep the new hard and soft landscaping in good condition into the future would require an enhanced cleaning and servicing programme. In addition, the demand to support the magnificent voluntary organisations and youth support partners who do so much for the quality of life in Farnham would continue to grow. Cllr White also advised that Council would need to confront head on and budget for, the post-covid extraordinary rise in the cost of living, with a significant increase in labour costs, national insurance and business rate increases.

Cllr White commended the annexes attached to the budget report which set out the detailed explanations for variations in the draft budget and the individual budget codes.

In a wide ranging and detailed discussion, the Working Group considered the different elements of the budget and whether the income targets were too ambitious or whether the expenditure proposed was too cautious despite the increases in some areas. The Town Clerk advised that this was not an easy budget but colleagues had agreed that the new sponsorship and service income targets were achievable despite being challenging. The increase in interest and dividends were helped by the recent large CIL receipt but would reduce as projects were implemented. In terms of the increase in staffing costs, these had been raised at the last budget and it was no longer realistic to manage vacancies to produce savings with a significant increase in workload resulting from Council aspirations, local government reorganisation and service changes.

There was a proposal to be more cautious and add an additional £50,000 of costs to the gap between income and expenditure to retain flexibility for supporting new community and environmental projects going forward, but the Working Group was mindful of the impact on residents who were facing large increases in costs from utilities and other public services. The Town Clerk advised that there was an opportunity to draw down earmarked reserves or seek additional grant funding during the uncertainties of the year ahead and make funding decisions for 2027/28 with greater clarity of what was required once the new West Surrey shadow authority came into being.

The Working Group noted that the budget was based on similar levels of fees and charges to 2025/26 but the January meeting would review the opportunity to reduce the identified gap between income and expenditure further through increased service costs. In recommending a budget of £2,205,030 and a shortfall of income of £152,853 the Working Group noted that (if applied through the precept alone) this could represent an increase of 69 pence per week per Band D property but that the Farnham level was significantly below the average for the sector as a whole.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the gross expenditure budget for 2026/27 be set at £2,205,030.

5. Contracts & Assets update

The Working Group received a verbal update on contracts and assets.

Gostrey Meadow

The most significant item was the receipt of tenders for the new amenity block in Gostrey Meadow. There had been 11 submissions and these had been opened in the presence of Cllrs White and Fairclough and Plan A architects at 1pm on 11th December.

The Working Group noted the similarities in the quotations received which had an average cost of average cost of just over £1m, at the higher range of what had been expected but reflecting the advice received over high material and labour cost increases in the construction sector. A detailed analysis of the tenders would be undertaken by the Council's appointed Quantity Surveyor for the January Strategy & Resources meeting.

In response to questions, the Working Group was advised that an application for Strategic CIL had been prepared and would be updated with the cost information received. If there were a shortfall from Strategic CIL, and funding from FTC CIL/reserves and other grants, there was the opportunity to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board with rates currently running at between five and six percent for a loan over 10 or 20 years.

Community Asset Transfers

The Working Group also discussed the current position with the Community Asset Transfers requested of Waverley Borough Council noting that the first for Morley Road Recreation Ground had been agreed at Waverley Executive on 10th December, and that the remaining spaces were scheduled for consideration at the February 2026 Executive. Waverley were now also reviewing the cumulative impact of the transfers on its recent decision to take the grounds maintenance contract in-house and any consequent TUPE implications. There was surprise expressed over this latest position as the applications for transfers had been made prior to the Waverley decision to take back the grounds contract.

A further report would be made to the next meeting.

Christmas Parking and Lights

The Working Group received an update on the Christmas Parking Initiative that Council had agreed to support between 24th November and 24th December (£1 after 1pm). In the end Waverley had not been able to start the scheme as planned because of advertising requirements for changes to car park charges and the arrangement did not start until 9th December. As a result, Waverley had unilaterally agreed to extend it until 31st December and believed that this would be at a lower cost than had been agreed by FTC.

The Town Clerk advised that as the dates FTC had agreed to support were very specific (and FTC had unsuccessfully asked that the scheme be extended for longer into the period when the Borough would be closed for the FIP works) a recommendation to fund the longer period would need Council approval. He also advised that FTC had still not received any details of what constituted the amount being requested.

Cllr Fairclough advised that (in his WBC position) he had requested a weekly update on how the scheme was going, and that the data would be shared with all participating partners. He also advised that in November, after the FIP works had stopped for the Christmas period, car park ticket sales were up 5.5%.

Recommendation (proposed by Cllr Hesse seconded by Cllr Brown and agreed *nem con*):
It is recommended that FTC agree to continue its contribution to the £1 after 1pm Christmas Parking Scheme to the 31st December provided the cost was not greater than previously agreed.

The Working Group welcomed the positive responses received for the new Christmas lights in Farnham and the contribution towards the costs from the Farnham BID. The team, led by Lucy Dorkins was congratulated for getting the first year of the new contract implemented on time. A review would take place with the contractor for any adjustments that may be required.

Members noted the several incidences of vandalism that had occurred causing both frustration and additional costs.

6. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

The Working Group received an update on the Farnham Infrastructure Programme works. Cllr Hesse drew attention to problems the Council had raised with Surrey County Council over the poor construction of the 'rain gardens' which had not been implemented as designed and were subject to flooding, water/soil run off, and damage by vehicles. A site meeting had been held with Neil White (the Surrey Lead Officer) and a number of changes agreed which included an improved drainage arrangement and suitable bollards to prevent vehicles parking on the rain gardens and the implementation of missing elements such as seating and cycle parking.

FTC had expressed concern over the introduction over additional unexpected street signage in inappropriate places and the issue of the proliferation of new cabinets by the traffic lights in West Street which were an eyesore. Officers had also advised SCC that as the raingardens were not as expected, without adequate drainage or water retention capabilities, the ongoing maintenance costs, including watering would be significantly higher than anticipated and FTC may not be able to take on the ongoing maintenance without remuneration.

Cllr Hesse advised that the issue had also been discussed at the Environment Working Group with a recommendation to Council, but he remained concerned about the amount of space taken up by the rain gardens as they were reducing space for pedestrians outside Boots (in particular). However, he was pleased to report that the proposed planting area in the Borough (outside Toni & Guy) was not now going ahead and would be better served by appropriate high quality planters. He felt that as the rain gardens were not as promised or fit-for-purpose they should be removed because of the negative impacts and that the designers of the scheme should be required to put right what had been implemented and include tree pits in appropriate locations.

The Working Group noted the concerns raised by the Infrastructure Planning Task Group about the plastic bins introduced as part of the scheme which were further reducing the quality of the Conservation Area.

The Working Group noted that the Borelli Walk footpath and lighting had been mostly completed (awaiting the traditional lamp fittings) and trunking laid for the connecting lighting between the new Brightwells Bridge and the old wooden bridge by the Youth Shelter. This work had been undertaken with a price being provided and officers would be discussing the overall costs with Surrey.

It was agreed to recommend to Council that:

- 1) FTC pays for upgraded bins more suited to the Conservation Area from the earmarked reserve for the Infrastructure Programme;**
- 2) The ongoing concerns over the poor construction of the rain gardens be raised with the Surrey County Council project team and Cllr Oliver.**

7. Reports of Task Groups

The Working group received the report of the Infrastructure, Neighbourhood Plan and CIL Task Group at Appendix C to its agenda.

The Working Group received the proposed response to the Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation (attached at Annex 1) and recommended its adoption by Council although noting that with the new NPPF requirements due to come into force Waverley would need to start the whole process again.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the FTC response to Waverley's Local Plan Issues and options Consultation be endorsed.

In terms of the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and the proposed Urban Capacity and Infrastructure Study FTC had agreed to commission, nothing had been able to progress as Waverley had still not reviewed and comment on the draft despite further prompts on 1 December.

The Working Group welcomed the letter from WBC setting out its motion (attached at Annex 2) to write to the Secretary of State expressing concern on the doubling of the housing targets for the Borough from 710 homes per annum to 1450. The motion highlighted the lack of recognition of the exceptional constraints which would see intense development pressure on the 20% of the Borough (including Farnham) which did not have the benefit of the Green Belt or Surrey Hills landscape protections and sought a review of the revised housing target; that development be proportionate and phased; and that suitable and timely infrastructure be tied in with housing delivery growth.

Recommendation to Council

It is recommended that FTC support the WBC motion and also raise its concerns with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

The Task Group had also discussed the problems of safety in Waverley owned car parks with potholes and inadequate lighting following a question raised at Full Council. The Leader had also done a personal review of all the car parks and shared his findings with officers at WBC. He had been advised this was a long term issue and WBC was reviewing options and costs but the Working Group emphasised something needed to be done in the short term in view of the danger to users of the car parks.

8. Review of Council Policies

In view of time pressures on the agenda the draft revised policies would be submitted to forthcoming meetings of the Working Group.

9. Town Clerk update

There were no additional updates from the Town Clerk.

10. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 19th January at 2pm.

The meeting ended at 5.40 pm

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