Minutes of the Finance and Compliance Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at 7pm in the Sportsman Meeting Room, Birchwood Leisure Centre, Longmead, Hatfield.

PRESENT:	Councillor Gareth Aicken (Chair) Councillor Shirley Asare (Vice Chair) Councillor Sandreni Bonfante Councillor Nigel Upson
ALSO IN ATTENDANCE	Councillor Cathy Watson
OFFICERS:	Jonah Anthony (Town Clerk) Samantha Frake (Managing Director and RFO)

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Mick Wise.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

No new declarations were provided.

12. MINUTES

The minutes of the Committee meeting held on the 14th June 2025 were approved as a correct record.

13. QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised.

14. Q1 FINANCIAL REPORT

Report of the Managing Director and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), presenting the financial report from the first quarter (April to June) of the financial year of 2025/26.

Members spent some time discussing the documents presented. The following points were noted:

- With the exception of Q1, which coincides with year end and AGAR reporting, the intention was to provide Members with monthly financial reports
- Whilst the precept money was received in two large payment, for reporting purposes this was split into 12 monthly income entries

- Civic and Democratic expenditure usually referred to election costs or direct cost for the Mayor (e.g. chains of office). Officers explained that election costs were shared with other authorities if elections coincided (such as hall rental for polling stations and polling staff). However any by-elections which were held on their own would be charged completely to the Town Council. Officers estimated the cost of a stand alone by-election as being between £6,000-£7,000.
- Increased National Insurance employer contributions had taken effect from April. This had added around £1,500 per month to the Town Council's staff cost
- Section 106 and grant money was kept separate from operational budgets, but would show up it when it was drawn down and utilised
- Individual budgets, like the Community Engagement and Events budget, were tracked using costs codes in Sage, and Officers kept a track of them to ensure we remained in budget. Members noted that budget allocations were not the same as actual spend
- April's utility costs reflected winter usage and were therefore higher than subsequent months, with some billed monthly and others billed quarterly
- The RFO confirmed that it would be possible to drill down into the financial categories shown in the report, if for example Members wanted to examine the revenue and costs associated with particular community halls. The RFO also reiterated that her willingness to provide more information in response to Members' questions, and it would not be necessary to wait for a Committee meeting to raise and answer those questions.

Members thanked the RFO for preparing the documents and the report was NOTED.

15. CONTRACTOR AND OUTSOURCING FRAMEWORK

Report of the Town Clerk setting out how and why the Town Council uses contractors and external suppliers for certain services. The following points were noted:

- Contractors were used when the Town Council did not have the capacity or expertise in-house, or required/desired third party verification/certification/assurance.
- It would be prohibitively expensive to have all this capability in-house all the time
- Using contractors was cost efficient and helped the Town Council to manage certain operational risks

<u>Capacity</u>

- The Covid pandemic forced the Town Council to streamline its staff significantly. At present the Town Council employed 21 staff with permanent contracted hours. This was supplemented by 29 casual/bank staff who could chose to work evenings and weekend shifts (mainly behind the bar in our halls or in the FunZone) when they were available
- Many of the permanently contracted staff covered multiple areas to help keep the staff numbers (and costs) down. However this meant there was very little slack in the system which created a need to buy-in additional capacity when required or stop doing/pausing existing tasks

Expertise

- Clear examples of when the Town Council needed special expertise included when it was required to meet Health and Safety requirements (e.g. electrical works), statutory obligations and best practice (e.g. HR) and practical and operational knowledge (e.g. IT).

Third Party verification/certification/assurance

- The Town Council used third parties to verify or certify that equipment, processes and/or practices were fit for purpose. Some of this was statutorily mandated, whilst others were considered best practice.
- The use of third parties to verify or certify the Town Council's work provided a level of assurance for senior managers, councillors and members of the public. It also provided important independent assessments which could be used to demonstrate compliance with certain standards in the event of something going wrong

Members were taken through some worked examples which showed how Officers would identify the 'Need' (task or job that needed doing), would make a judgement on whether this could be done in-house or required external contractors, before moving ahead with either assigning the job internally or procuring external contractors.

Members discussed various aspects of the contractor framework in place, with the following points noted:

- No contractor was on a retainer arrangement (paid an upfront fee to secure future service). Either the contractor was paid a subscription fee to provide certain services in a given period or they were paid for specific jobs or tasks
- The old '3 quote' approach did not work as many companies were reluctant to put themselves forward to prepare a bid for low value jobs if they felt they were only being asked to do so by a council looking to demonstrate 'value for money'
- The Town Council's current list of contractors had been developed over years, in response to specific tendering and procurement projects. However the Council intends to do more to invite new and different suppliers to join a list of approved suppliers who would then be able to put themselves forward for new jobs
- The Town Council will seek to do more to review its long term contractors to ensure they were providing a good service and value for money
- Given the complexity of the Town Council's operation, it used a wide range of contractors

Members thanked the Town Clerk for the presentation, which would be circulated. The report was NOTED.

16. STAFF WELL-BEING

Report of the Managing Director explaining the provisions in place to promote staff-wellbeing. The following points were noted:

- The presentation was a response to Members' request at the June Committee meeting

- The Town Council strived to be a flexible employer, for example allowing staff to be there for their families as far as operational constraints allowed. This approach had led to a good level of loyalty and motivation from Town Council staff – contributing to a low level of turnover
- In addition, the Town Council were able to provide an independent wellbeing support service free of charge to its staff. At a cost of circa £1,500 a month, the programme gave staff the opportunity to access advice on physical and mental health, personal finances and legal issues. This advice and support was completely separate from work based support or HR practices
- The opportunity was promoted at staff meetings and in induction programmes
- These services could be accessed via an app, and anecdotally senior management were aware that several staff members had made use of the various services

Members were pleased that the Town Council was able to offer this service to its staff. There was discussion on whether such a service could be provided for Councillors. Officers confirmed that they had not come across any such programme designed for councillors. Whilst support for councillors was provided by the Local Government Association, this did not extend to parish and town councillors. No such programme existed at the Borough Council, or was thought to exist at the County Council either.

The Report was NOTED.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be 7pm on Wednesday 22 October 2025. Suggested future topics to be covered by the Committee included a presentation on how health & safety was managed in the organisation, insurance provisions and an update on the Employment Rights Bill. The Chair asked Members to send any ideas and requests for agenda items for future meetings to the Town Clerks and Chair. The Chair was also keen to review the Committee's terms of reference ahead at the end of the municipal year to see what improvement could be made.

Closure: 20:33

Chair