

Haverhill Town Council

Minutes of Haverhill Town Council's

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Held remotely on Tuesday 20th January 2026 at 7.30pm



Present: Councillor L Smith (Vice Chair)
Councillor J Burns
Councillor B Davidson
Councillor P Hanlon
Councillor A Luccarini

Apologies: Mayor Q Cox (Chair)
Councillor James Teixeira

Absent: Councillor J Crooks

In Attendance: Councillor T Brown
Colin Poole, Responsible Financial Officer
Kerry Wallis, Finance Administrator
Vicky Phillips, Deputy Clerk

No members of the public were present.

Welcome:

Councillor L Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel.

Action

F26 /001 Apologies for Absence
The above apologies were noted.

F26 /002 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests and requests for Dispensations
None.

F26 /003 Minutes of the Last Meeting
It was proposed by Councillor J Burns, seconded by Councillor P Hanlon, that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2026 be agreed as a true record.
RESOLVED

F26 /004 Actions Arising
F25/036v.1. – Zone menu – CP reported that nothing much has changed on the menu.
F25/036v.3. – A review of the house rules has taken place, the height limit has been removed and replaced with an age limited, this is line with what is happening elsewhere. If someone 'can pass for' an acceptable age then they won't be challenged.
F25/038 – Tax Base – CP reported that he hasn't contacted the portfolio holder but has had a discussion with the elections manager on this. There are lines and boundaries that officers have to adhere to and they are unable by law to use electoral register information to cross-check occupants of properties for tax.

F26 **Public Forum**

/005 There were no members of the public present.

F26 **Report from Responsible Financial Officer – Part 1**

/005

a) Haverhill Town Council Budget Report to 30th November 2025

- Figures were presented excluding internal financial support to show the true financial position of services.
- Expected deficits are therefore planned and funded.
- Overall spending is on track, with minor variances due to timing and reserve transfers, which will be corrected before year end.

b) Balances and Bank Reconciliation

- Treasury balances are slightly higher year-on-year.
- Funds are held in the 32-day account for as long as prudent, to maximise interest income.
- Investments remain stable, and short-term movements will be reconciled before year end.

c) Debtors

- Debtors are well controlled with no concerns raised.
- Older balances are minimal and explained by timing issues.

CCLA remains stable.

F26 **Report from Responsible Financial Officer – Part 2**

/006

a) Haverhill Community Trust Budget Report

- There is little of concern to report for the charity.
- The £55,000 nominal grant from the council and the Haverhill in Bloom grant are still to be received and will correct the current year-to-date variance, which presently appears worse than the final outturn will be.
- At year end, the RFO and finance officer will calculate the final grant to pay from the Town Council to the Community Trust to ensure the Trust finishes marginally in surplus.
- This approach avoids the Community Trust holding excess funds, which could negatively affect future grant applications, and ensures no more taxpayer funding is transferred than strictly necessary.

b) Balances and Bank Reconciliation

- The bank reconciliation is straightforward with no issues identified.

c) Debtors

- Debtors present no concerns.
- Apart from a small balance of £128, all items relate internally and require no further action.

F26 **Budget 2026/2027 Update (appendix i)**

/007

The budget position has not changed much, while minor differences appear in the final figures, these are not significant enough to alter the overall outcome, which remains a 2.5% uplift on the precept. This equates to approximately 9p per week for a Band D property and 7p per week for a Band B property.

It was proposed by Councillor J Burns and seconded by Councillor B Davidson that the budget be recommended to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED

F26 **Date of next Meeting**

/008

Monday 27th April 2026

F26
/009

Closure

The meeting closed at 7.29pm.



Signed
Chairman

Date.....

Appendix i)

Item 9 Budget briefing 2026/27

Councillors are reminded of legal principles:

Principles:

This working document has been compiled on the following basis

1. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires all local councils in England and Wales set a lawful budget. Estimates of expenditure and income must be 'best estimates' made in good faith. The budget must balance, with the balancing sum being the precept.
2. Take into account comments by Councillors on 29th September 2025 (Full Council minute C25/132):
 - a. Council resolved that the direction of the Budget should be to focus on the effective delivery and completion of current initiatives, rather than start new projects, notwithstanding any windfall opportunities caused by LGR
3. Take into account the effect of inflation (estimate 3%) and salary uplift (NJC= guess 3%, RLW/NMW = known 6.75%) on existing budget lines.
4. Zero-based budgeting recalculating costs each year, using inflation-uplift basis only where no other information is available, inflation rate used = 3%.
5. Take into account revisions to the tax-base – West Suffolk have estimated the new tax base as 8167.71, an increase of just 89 dwellings.

Detailed Commentary

There are no significant changes to report. We are working off actuals for November 2025, month 8. The previous budget forecast used data from month 7, so there is not any significant change in financial circumstances that would indicate any budget changes. As a reminder as to what was reported to Full Council in December:

1. **Pay generally:** The staffing budgets have come down due to a reduction in the employer's pension contribution rate dropping from 20% to 17%. In addition, the reduction in activity at the Zone presents a further reduction.
2. **Payroll Charges:** This has been set to reflect current costs.
3. **Training:** I have changed the basis of calculation on this as we have entered into a new online training contract to reduce costs. This has reduced training costs by £2000.
4. **Insurance:** the insurance for the Community Trust has doubled, apparently as Aviva no longer apply a multi-business discount – we were not even aware we were getting a discount and no such leap occurred for the town council. We only got notice of this a couple of weeks before renewal so it was not possible to carry out a robust review, but we will be looking to find a less expensive provider from November 2026.
5. **Stationery/photocopying/postage:** Reduced further to reflect lower usage of postal.
6. **Telephones:** Increased further to reflect charges.
7. **Bank Charges:** Unchanged. Whilst we've been under-budget in 2025/26 the bank has notified that charges will rise. There is also a cost to depositing cash, which whilst cash use is far lower than in previous years, we still need to provide for cash sales.
8. **Contribution to Haverhill In Bloom:** This has been kept the same – I hope our marketing department will be able to run a sponsorship campaign this year.
9. **Arts Centre:** Continues to perform well in terms of sales. The marketing costs have increased notably and I have asked for an explanation, but as this has translated into higher sales it still looks like there can be a very modest reduction on the financial support from the precept.

10. **Bar and coffee bar:** Bar income is down, unexpectedly, but coffee bar cost of sales has improved greatly, allowing for a slight reduction in support needed from the precept.
11. **Zone:** We have changed the entry criteria to allow for anyone 12 and under to access the soft play, and from January the opening days reduced from five to four, to reduce the cost of operating on days which historically have low footfall, similar to the successful changes at the Kiosk.
12. **Arts Development:** I have applied an uplift here as we are more involved in tackling antisocial behaviour and grants for arts-based projects to engage the community often require match-funding. The public have responded positively to recent interventions, e.g. Post Office poppy wall.
13. **Events:** I have allowed for increased costs as it has not been possible to keep within the tight budget on the very small events. I am talking to our soft play insurers about potentially operating the bouncy castles ourselves, which would be a gamechanger for the event finances, with that one item taking half the budget for the small events.
14. **Splashpad and kiosk:** Amending the opening period made a huge difference to the sustainability of the kiosk and, coupled with the cleaning regime for the splashpad made a big difference to the cost of running the splashpad and reduced the number of complaints on cleanliness.
15. **Contribution to Haverhill Community Trust:** This is funding for maintaining the Old Town Hall and Clements Community Centre (£75,000) and the youth work delivered out of the Zone (44,000). Both are slightly lower than last year.
16. **Contribution to Haverhill Arts Centre:** £569,000 is the subsidy for the operation of the Arts Centre (2025=£574,000)
17. **Income Deficit Support:** This is the additional subsidy paid to offset the income needed but not generated by the Zone. £166,500 in 2026/27 compared to £172,000 this year. It is lower because of the reduced operating times for the Zone, from January 1st 2026. There is not enough data on the impact of reducing Wednesday operations and changing the height restrictions to make any bold predictions, but common sense is that these are positive contributions.
18. **Projects:** £35k from precept 2025=£40,000) Notwithstanding the requirement to consolidate, I can reassure councillors that I have allowed for projects already in the pipeline. For clarity these are:
 - i. 2026 is national year of reading, and Haverhill has low literacy levels. We know that there is a National Literacy Trust initiative for Haverhill next year, so funds are set aside to support it.
 - ii. A fund to cover to cover any costs that might arise for Vision 2030, or contribute to a reserve for the project.
 - iii. An allowance for a project the Mayor asked me to initiate, which is match-funding to leverage West Suffolk funds into Haverhill, to bring back the town centre manager. West Suffolk gives annual funding to the Newmarket and Bury BIDS, and would have given annual funding to a Haverhill BID if it had not been torpedoed. Councillors are constantly buttonholed by town centre businesses to do more to help the High Street and business generally. We had a town centre manager in 2022 and it made a huge difference. I am awaiting WSDC confirmation of funding.
 - iv. Energy & Sustainability Working Party have identified a maze project for the Chalkstone Open Space, but that has a reserve so we do not need to fund that separately.

19. Impact on precept

The overall impact on the budget is set out below. The figures are for

- 1 the last financial year (2024/25),
- 2 the current financial year's budget (2025/26),
- 3 the 2026/27 budget in the right-hand column
- 4 the percentage change

The disappointingly low increase in the taxbase means there is only £17,000 (1.1%) of additional precept gained through growth. Therefore, the rest of the money needed to fund the work of the council has to come from operational savings, reserves and increases in council tax.

The lower pension costs, reduction in some operations and better income generation by the Arts Centre means that overall costs are down by 1.29%. Unfortunately, income is predicted to be lower by 11.25%, so the actual gap to balance has grown.

	1	2	3	4
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	%
Net Expenditure	£2,109,435	£2,423,937	£2,392,598	-1.29%
Net Income	£645,143	£827,923	£734,755	-11.25%
From Reserves	£20,000	£38,000.00	£46,000	
Balance	£1,444,292	£1,558,014	£1,611,843	+3.45%
Precept	£1,445,072	£1,561,365	£1,618,023	+2.50%
Band D	£182.33	£193.27	£198.10	+2.50%
Increase/week	13p	21p	9p	
%age	3.99%	6%	2.5%	
Band B	£141.81	£150.32	£154.08	

Band B is the CT band for 48.23% of dwellings in Haverhill and the increase is 7p per week for this band.

As per the previous version, this is not necessarily the final version. It is not to make any final decisions, which will happen on January 27th.

Colin Poole
Responsible Financial Officer 16th January 2025