

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Full Council

Time and date

Monday 26 October 2026 at 18:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland
TD15 1BN

TO: **ALL MEMBERS OF THE Full Council**

Dear Councillor

The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

Iain McCready

Proper Officer

21 October 2026

Agendas and papers for all meetings can be accessed on <https://www.berwick-tc.gov.uk/meetings>

Members' Apologies

Members are requested to submit their apologies and any Declarations of Interest on the relevant form attached to this agenda to Chief.Officer@Berwick-tc.gov.uk by 5pm on the day before the meeting.

Recording of Council Meetings

This meeting is digitally recorded, broadcasted and retained until the minutes are signed.

Questions by the Public

At the discretion of the Town Mayor, those members of the public, residing or working within the Council's boundary, will be invited to make representations or ask questions in respect of the business on the agenda, or other matters not on the agenda, for a maximum of 3 minutes per person or 15 minutes overall.

Members of the Public are welcome and have a right to attend this Meeting.
Please note that there is a maximum capacity of 10 in the public gallery.

INDEX

	Page Nos.
80.26 - Members of the Council	4
81.26 - Apologies for Absence	4
82.26 - Disclosure of Interests	4
Disclosures of Interest	7
83.26 - Open Session	4
84.26 - Minutes	4
2026-09-28 - Full Council - Minutes	8
85.26 - Part 1- Items for Decisions	4
86.26 - Appointment of Cllr Stephen Scott to Working and Task Groups	4
87.26 - Planning Committee Membership	4
88.26 - Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group	4
2026-10-07 - Environment and Communities Working Group - Notes	14
89.26 - Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group.	5
BTC Budget and Administration Notes 9 October 2026	20
90.26 - Recognition of Berwick Bandits Speedway Team	5
91.26 - Date of Next Meeting	5
92.26 - Part 2 - Confidential Items - Resolution	5
93.26 - Part 3 - Confidential Matters	5

AGENDA

80.26.Members of the Council

Members of the Council: Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor), Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor) Cllr Janice Bowden, Cllr Graham Brown, Cllr Rachel Driver, Cllr Mike Greener, Cllr Laura Hawken, Cllr Paul Hillier, Cllr Ayrin Khan, Cllr John Robertson, Cllr Stephen Scott, Cllr Catherine Seymour, Cllr Gary Smith and Cllr Thomas Stewart

81.26.Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence and, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, to consider and approve the reasons given for absence.

82.26.Disclosure of Interests

To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and/or other interests in respect of any item on the agenda, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Council's Code of Conduct, and to consider any requests for dispensations. Members are requested to complete the attached Declaration of Interests form where applicable.

83.26.Open Session

To provide an opportunity for members of the public to make representations, ask questions or give evidence in respect of business on the agenda. The period for public participation shall not exceed 15 minutes in total, with each person permitted to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes, in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.

84.26.Minutes

To sign as a correct record the minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 28th September 2026.

85.26.Part 1- Items for Decisions

Working Group Updates and Recommendations

To receive and review the notes of the Council's Working Groups and to consider any recommendations requiring a decision by Full Council.

86.26.Appointment of Cllr Stephen Scott to Working and Task Groups

To consider appointing newly elected Cllr Stephen Scott as a voting member of his chosen Working and Task Groups.

Proposed resolution:

That Cllr Stephen Scott be appointed as a voting member of the Working and Task Groups identified by him and confirmed at this meeting, for the remainder of the 2026/27 council year.

87.26.Planning Committee Membership

To consider appointing additional Councillors to the Planning Committee to strengthen its membership and support regular attendance and effective consideration of planning applications.

Recommendation: That Councillors be invited to put themselves forward for appointment to the Planning Committee and that Council agrees any additional appointments

88.26.Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group

To consider the recommendations arising from the Environment and Communities Working Group meeting held on 7 October 2026. Full notes of the meeting are included within the agenda pack.

Council is requested to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Berwick Beer and Food Festival grant application — item 5**
Support the forthcoming festival grant application in principle, subject to the formal application and supporting paperwork being submitted through the December grants process.
2. **Berwick Beer and Food Festival officer support — item 5**
Allow officer support during the initial setup stages of the festival.

3. **Mural art sites — item 10**

Allow officers to investigate funding and seek building owners' permission for potential mural art sites in Berwick.

4. **Northumbrian Water social values submission — item 11**

Request community green spaces that educate and inform residents and visitors about local history and biodiversity as part of the Council's social values submission.

89.26. Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group.

To consider the recommendations arising from the Budget and Administration Working Group meeting held on 9 October 2026. Full notes of the meeting are included within the agenda pack. Council is requested to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Town Hall project risk management — item 24.26**

Approve the project risk-management arrangements and initial risk register; designate the Chief Officer as accountable project lead; require the evidence and approvals identified for each project stage; and receive updated risk and affordability information before further commitments are made.

2. **Town Hall office refit — item 25.26**

Proceed with the simpler initial office refit, deferring installation of the accessible WC while reserving its space and incorporating the partition needed for future installation.

3. **Town Hall professional services — item 25.26**

Seek a revised scope to reflect the simplified scheme, consider work that could appropriately be managed in house while retaining the necessary conservation expertise.

4. **Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation — item 26.26**

Adopt the revised Financial Regulations and corresponding Scheme of Delegation provisions reflecting the procurement, commitment, internal-transfer, payment-approval, publication, contract-variation and asset-disposal changes set out in the Working Group notes. The incidental emergency staff spending limit would be £50.

5. **Freemen admission fees — item 28.26**

Increase the Freemen admission fee immediately from £25 to £100 per applicant.

90.26. Recognition of Berwick Bandits Speedway Team

To receive congratulations from the Mayor on behalf of the Council to Berwick Bandits Speedway Team on their recent success, recognising their achievements and the pride they bring to the town, and to consider holding a civic event in their honour.

Proposed resolution:

That the Council congratulate Berwick Bandits Speedway Team on their recent success and agree to hold a civic event to celebrate their achievements and express the thanks of the people of Berwick-upon-Tweed, with arrangements to be agreed by the Mayor and Chief Officer in consultation with the team.

91.26. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Monday 23rd November 2026 at 18:00.

92.26. Part 2 - Confidential Items - Resolution

To consider and, if appropriate, **PASS A RESOLUTION** pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to exclude the press and public from Part 3 of the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Part 3 may include matters relating to staffing, contractual negotiations or commercially sensitive information, where the Council determines that the circumstances justify exclusion.

93.26. Part 3 - Confidential Matters

Any confidential matters (if required) arising from discussions of the Working Group notes.



Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council

Disclosure of Interests Form

(Localism Act 2011)

Notification by a Member of a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interest in a Matter under Consideration at a Meeting

Please complete the form below to indicate any agenda items in which you have an interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary or other interest in an item, please also indicate whether you wish to speak (refer to the Council's Code of Conduct for details).

As required by the Localism Act 2011, I declare that I have a disclosable pecuniary or personal interest in the following matter(s):

MEETING: _____

DATE: _____

NAME OF COUNCILLOR: _____

Agenda Item No.	Type of Interest (Disclosable Pecuniary / Other)	Reason for Interest	Wish to Speak (Yes/No)

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please return this form to the Chief Officer before the meeting begins.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Full Council

Time and date

Monday 28 September 2026 at 18:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council, Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland.
TD15 1BN

MINUTES

Members of the Council

Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Graham Brown
Cllr Rachel Driver
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Laura Hawken
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Ayrin Khan
Cllr John Robertson
Cllr Stephen Scott
Cllr Catherine Seymour
Cllr Gary Smith
Cllr Thomas Stewart

Members Present

Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Graham Brown
Cllr Rachel Driver
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Laura Hawken
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Ayrin Khan
Cllr Stephen Scott
Cllr Catherine Seymour
Cllr Gary Smith
Cllr Thomas Stewart

In attendance (Officers):

Iain McCready, Chief Officer / Proper Officer
Stephen Robinson, Operations Manager

49.26. Members of the Council

The members of the Council are listed above. Councillor Stephen Scott was welcomed under item 50.26.

50.26. Newly Elected Councillor

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Stephen Scott following his election. It was confirmed that his declaration of acceptance of office had been signed, and he took his place as a member of the Council.

51.26. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Robertson.

52.26. Disclosure of Interests

An interest was declared in relation to the Budget and Administration Working Group business. During consideration of the Town Hall heads of terms at item 57.26, the vote was retaken without the Freeman Trustees participating. Councillor Stewart also stated that he would not participate in the vote concerning the proposed fit-out because of the potential appointment of architects.

53.26. Open Session

The Mayor opened the public participation period, reminding those present of the overall limit of 15 minutes and the limit of three minutes per speaker. Following a request from Councillor Brown, speakers were asked to raise their voices so that those present could hear proceedings.

A written question from Mr Blackburn concerning coach parking provision in Berwick-upon-Tweed was referred to the Planning Committee for further consideration.

Councillor Seymour relayed residents' concerns about the reference to the Ice House in the Council's Bulletin, given the pending licensing hearing. The Operations Manager explained that the item was a community update reporting on the inaugural Berwick Fringe Festival, during which the venue had opened its doors. It was not an advertisement for the venue or its licensing application.

At Councillor Smith's request, a minute's silence was observed following the death of a former chief executive of Berwick Council.

Council noted Berwick Bandits' progress in the Knockout Cup final. Members were advised that more than 2,000 people had attended the home leg and that the away leg was due on 10 October. It was suggested that recognition should be considered if the team won the competition.

A member of the public raised concerns about a reported application to increase the proposed housing behind the former grammar school from two dwellings to four. While supporting refurbishment of the listed building, he highlighted the sensitivity of the site near the medieval walls and neighbouring listed buildings, and the potential loss of privacy from first-floor windows overlooking nearby homes and gardens. He asked that the proposal receive appropriate consideration by the Town Council and county councillors.

Decision: The written question concerning coach parking was referred to the Planning Committee for consideration.

54.26. Minutes

Council considered the minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2026. Councillor Bowden asked for a copy of the Biodiversity and Sustainability report, which she had been unable to locate. Officers explained that it had accompanied the Environment and Communities Working Group papers and undertook to check its circulation and forward a copy.

Decision: The minutes of the Council meeting held on 27 July 2026 were approved as a correct record.

55.26. Part I- Items for Decisions

Council proceeded to the Working Group updates and recommendations and the remaining items for decision.

56.26. Notes of the Environment and Communities Group

Members agreed to move directly to the recommendations from the Environment and Communities Working Group, with the Chair noting that the written report had already set out the background in detail. Councillors were invited to raise questions where needed.

On market and town centre improvement expenditure, the council noted the current position and accepted that a more detailed breakdown would come through the Budget and Administration Working Group, with clearer market budget presentation in the next financial year.

The biodiversity and sustainability recommendation was then discussed in more depth. Members were advised that green-roof bus shelters had not been treated as a spending priority because they would create an additional maintenance burden for staff already watering planters and baskets, and because water availability could become more difficult in future. Councillor Mackenzie added that solar panels on bus shelters had been seen as a more practical priority where lighting or other benefits could follow.

The Operations Manager update was noted without further amendment. On the pump track, the council reaffirmed its support in principle but accepted that the scheme should remain at feasibility stage for now, with no additional financial commitment until a viable route forward could be identified with Berwick Youth Project.

For Tide Time Books, members supported continued production in principle, while requiring confirmation of print quantity, final cost and any external support before printing was commissioned. On Tweedmouth planters, the proposal for three rectangular timber planters on Main Street at an indicative cost of £4,418.87 including delivery prompted discussion about planting content, relative size, and budget treatment. It was clarified that the units would be comparable in standard to those elsewhere in the town centre, would include appropriately sized trees during the later planting season, and were smaller than the Marygate units, giving a lower per-unit cost. It was clarified that the quoted sum covered the planters, rather than the trees and compost. One councillor commented that they had previously assumed this work sat under a separate budget rather than the market budget and welcomed the move towards clearer future budget separation. The recommendation was carried.

The exploratory work on additional shop-front vinyls was noted on the basis that no expenditure would be committed until permissions, occupancy status and detailed costs were established. Members then approved resurfacing at Newfields Play Park as the immediate priority, excluding the PCC edging option. Officers explained that omitting the concrete edging would both save money and avoid a repeat of the current shrinkage gap problem, where the rubber surface has pulled away by around an inch; the grass could instead grow to meet any future movement. In response to a question, the expected lifespan of the resurfacing was given as around 10 years. The council also supported resurfacing at Osborne Play Park in principle, authorising a tender exercise within the current financial year, with the resulting tender and funding requirement to return before any contract award.

Members asked that the heading of the Working Group notes be corrected, as it referred to Council.

Decision: The current position on market and town centre improvement expenditure was noted, with a detailed breakdown to come through the Budget and Administration Working Group and clearer market budget presentation to be introduced in the next financial year.

Decision: The updated Biodiversity and Sustainability report was endorsed, and green-roof bus shelters were not progressed as a spending priority.

Decision: The Operations Manager update and the follow-up actions agreed by the Working Group were noted.

Decision: Support in principle for a pump track in Berwick was reaffirmed, with feasibility discussions to continue with Berwick Youth Project and no further financial commitment to be made at this stage.

Decision: Continued production of Tide Time Books was supported in principle, subject to confirmation of print quantity, final cost and any external support before printing is commissioned.

Decision: Purchase of three rectangular timber planters for Tweedmouth Main Street at an indicative cost of £4,418.87 including delivery was approved, subject to final confirmation of land ownership and positioning.

Decision: Exploratory work on additional shop-front vinyls was noted, with no expenditure to be committed until permissions, occupancy status and detailed costs are established.

Decision: Resurfacing at Newfields Play Park was approved as the immediate priority, without the PCC edging option, with £20,000 to be met from the play equipment replacement budget and the balance from play park reserves, subject to procurement requirements.

Decision: Osborne Play Park resurfacing was supported in principle as a single future project, and officers were authorised to commence a tender exercise during the current financial year, with the tender result and funding requirement to return before any contract is awarded.

57.26. Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group

The Mayor led consideration of the Town Hall proposals because Councillor Stewart, Chair of the Working Group, was also a Freeman Trustee. She explained that the Town Hall proposals had previously been discussed in confidential session because they concerned potential lease terms. She added that the item was now being presented publicly so residents could understand the proposal and the decisions being sought. The current office lease was said to end next July, with existing rent at £12,500 per year and utilities in the region of £10,000 to £12,000 because of electric heating. By comparison, the proposed Town Hall lease would run for 50 years, with a 25-year break clause and an initial rent of £10,000 per year made up of £6,000 for office space and £4,000 for a small internal meeting room. Rent reviews would take place every five years using CPI. The Mayor advised that, under the Schedule 3 arrangements, half of the rent paid would return to the Council, making the effective annual cost £5,000 at the starting rent, compared with the current £12,500, and potentially £3,000 if the meeting room were later reclaimed by the Freeman Trustees.

Questions focused on the eventual business case, comparison costs, and utility assumptions. Members asked for all fit-out, reinstatement and comparative occupancy costs to be laid out before any final commitment was made. Officers responded that the current building is expensive to heat because the heating system is not well suited to the rooms, the insulation is poor for a modern build, and the entrance suffers from significant heat loss. By contrast, the Town Hall space is smaller, has already been retrofitted with internal double glazing, and would receive a more modern heating system as part of any fit-out. It was confirmed that the current decision was only to progress the heads of terms to legal drafting and that the fit-out specification and costings would come back separately. The vote on the heads of terms was retaken without the Freeman Trustees participating. Councillor Stewart also declined to participate in the fit-out vote because it concerned the potential appointment of architects. Officers advised that quotations had been sought from two architectural practices and were being reviewed before returning to the Budget and Administration Working Group.

The council approved further exploratory work on potential street licensing, including legal and financial advice and information from other authorities, after hearing that the issue had arisen from market management concerns and concerns about the positioning of licensed traders on non-market days. Members also agreed that detailed market income and expenditure information would be brought back separately, noting that while the legal transfer arrangements with Northumberland County Council were still being completed, operational management had already transferred. On festive lighting, the Working Group emphasised that any decisions taken now would affect 2027 onwards rather than the coming Christmas because lead times were already too short. Members supported development of costed future options, including leasing and purchase models, alternative infrastructure, switching arrangements and electrical works. They also approved transfer of the unspent £1,759 from the Armed Forces Day budget to support the current year's Festive Lights switch-on activity, with one vote recorded against.

The council noted the start of external bookkeeping and accountancy support from 1 October 2026, heard that this had already been previously agreed, and accepted the rationale of improving resilience in financial processes while releasing internal capacity for other core work. Progress on the review of Financial Regulations was also noted. In response to a question, it was explained that delegation provisions were being removed from the Financial Regulations so that the Scheme of Delegation could be maintained as a separate policy, with cross-references between the documents.

On investment strategy, members were advised that the Council had not previously adopted a strategy and that a draft should be prepared to support the management of reserves and potential investment returns. The half-year financial position was then noted, with expenditure or commitments standing at approximately 52.5 per cent of the annual budget at the midpoint of the year, broadly in line with expectation. The nationally agreed NJC pay award of 3.3 per cent, retrospective to 1 April 2026, was also noted together with its budget implications.

Finally, the council agreed to discontinue the volunteer database subscription. Members heard that the database had been created several years earlier on a voluntary basis by a councillor, but had never been used to anything like its potential and had largely been overtaken by other community information channels, including those linked to the Community Development Trust. Future volunteering opportunities and community information will instead be signposted through the council's existing communications.

Decision: Further exploratory work on possible street licensing was supported, including legal and financial advice and information from other authorities, with a further report to return before any commitment is made.

Decision: Development of costed options for future festive lighting provision from 2027 onwards was supported, including leasing and purchasing models, alternative infrastructure, switching arrangements and electrical works.

Decision: Transfer of the remaining £1,759 from the Armed Forces Day budget to support the Festive Lights switch-on activity was approved.

Decision: The Town Hall heads of terms were progressed to the legal stage, and officers were authorised to instruct the appropriate legal advisers to prepare the lease documentation on that basis.

Decision: The proposed Town Hall fit-out, including scope of works, professional support and associated costs, will be brought back to members once the specification and costings have been completed.

Decision: The council noted that the Town Hall fit-out brief and costings are being refined and that a substantive proposal will return before any significant professional appointment or capital expenditure is committed.

Decision: The update on the introduction of external bookkeeping and accountancy support from 1 October 2026 was noted.

Decision: Progress on the review of the Financial Regulations was noted, with the revised regulations to return for adoption after final Budget and Administration Working Group review.

Decision: The requirement for an Investment Strategy was noted, and preparation of a draft for subsequent consideration and approval was supported.

Decision: The half-year financial position was noted, with individual budget pressures to continue to be monitored through regular financial reporting.

Decision: The nationally agreed 3.3 per cent NJC pay award for 2026 to 2027, effective retrospectively from 1 April 2026, and its budget implications were noted.

Decision: The volunteer database subscription was discontinued, and volunteering opportunities and community information will instead be signposted through existing council communication channels.

58.26. Proposal for the Twinning of Berwick-upon-Tweed and Zeewolde

Council considered a proposal to investigate a formal twinning relationship with Zeewolde in the Netherlands, building on the 34-year relationship between Berwick Rangers Juniors and VV Zeewolde.

Members discussed potential benefits in education, youth engagement, cultural exchange and economic development. Councillor Bowden questioned the purpose and benefits of twinning and indicated her opposition to the four recommendations. Members emphasised the need for clear objectives and an assessment of the resources required. At the Operations Manager's request, officer-time implications were added to the matters to be addressed in the further report.

Council was advised that Berwick already had four twinning arrangements. Members considered that some links may have lapsed, particularly since the pandemic, and agreed that their current status should be investigated alongside the proposed new relationship. No commitment to formal twinning or expenditure arose from the recommendations agreed at this meeting.

Decision: Further investigation into the possibility of establishing a twinning relationship between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Zeewolde was supported in principle.

Decision: The Chief Officer, in consultation with the Mayor, was authorised to make initial contact with representatives of Zeewolde, facilitated where appropriate by Berwick Rangers Juniors.

Decision: Representatives of Berwick Rangers Juniors would be invited to contribute to discussions and provide further information on the existing relationship with VV Zeewolde.

Decision: A further report would be brought to Full Council setting out the outcome of discussions, potential objectives and benefits, governance arrangements, officer-time requirements and financial implications before any decision on formal twinning.

Decision: Officers would investigate the current status of the Council's four existing twinning arrangements.

Before this item, the Mayor drew attention to the invitation for councillors to attend a local event on 7 October marking the first National Cadet Week.

59.26. Representatives on Outside Bodies

Council considered the appointment of a representative to the Berwick Youth Project Board. Discussion identified uncertainty about the Council's existing representation and whether an additional appointment was required. Councillors referred to previous and current involvement on the Board, and Councillor Seymour reported that clarification had been sought about proposed trustee appointments.

Members agreed that officers should establish the current position with the Youth Project before a further appointment was considered.

A vacancy on the Planning Committee was also raised. Councillor Scott indicated that he intended to attend committee and group meetings to identify where he could best contribute. It was explained that appointment to the Planning Committee as a voting member would require a Council decision. No appointment was made at this meeting.

Decision: Appointment of a Council representative to the Youth Project Board was deferred pending clarification of the current representation and the Board's requirements, with the matter to return to the next Council meeting.

60.26. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council was confirmed for Monday 26 October 2026 at 18:00.

61.26. Part 3 - Confidential Items

Council resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting for consideration of the following items, owing to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Environment and Communities Working Group

Time and date

Wednesday 7 October 2026 at 12:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council, Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland.
TD15 1BN

Group Members

Cllr Graham Brown – Chair
Cllr Jane Turton – Mayor
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie – Deputy Mayor
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Ayrin Kahn
Cllr Gary Smith
Cllr Thomas Stewart

In Attendance

Cllr Graham Brown – Chair
Cllr Jane Turton – Mayor
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie – Deputy Mayor
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Thomas Stewart
Cllr Laura Hawken
Cllr Stephen Scott

Notes

1. **Elect a Chair for the Meeting**
Cllr Brown, despite previously giving apologies was in attendance to chair the meeting.
2. **Apologies for Absence**
None received.
3. **Disclosures of Interest.**
No disclosures of interest were received.

4. Notes of the Previous Meeting

Consideration of the previous meeting notes was initially deferred so that visiting representatives for the festival item could be heard promptly.

Later in the meeting, members returned to the notes and raised no issues. A brief link was made to biodiversity and sustainability matters, with the view that those points would be addressed more fully under the dedicated later agenda item.

5. Berwick Beer and Food Festival.

Members heard from a group of volunteers with a proposal to continue the Berwick Beer and Food Festival through a new Community Interest Company (CIC). They explained that a volunteer group had stepped in to prevent the event from folding after Berwick Slow Food's withdrawal from the event management, and that the aim was to secure the festival's long-term future while managing it through a CIC structure. The proposal also included introducing advanced ticket sales and moving the main event space to The Stanks to address capacity pressure. The new layout was presented as a way to reduce noise impacts near the Parade, ease town-centre closures, and create a more workable footprint, subject to permissions.

The organisers set out their experience base, including large-event work at Glastonbury, and said they were already engaging with the Safety Advisory Group. They also described a structured handover with the outgoing festival directors, including work through data protection issues and early operational involvement from Berwick Slow Food. The group strongly welcomed the proposal, stressing the festival's importance to the towns festival calendar and positive impact on local trade and describing it as one of the events that visibly lifts business across the town.

Questions then focused on practical delivery. Infrastructure at The Stanks remained a live issue: there was some sewer access, but no standing water or electrical connection, so further discussions were needed with the bowling club and other land interests. Members flagged that the site is owned by the Freeman trustees and advised early contact with Andrew Hamilton at Edwin Thompson. The proposed date was confirmed as the third weekend in August, likely 20 to 22 August, and the group had already checked for clashes with bowling club use. English Heritage and other relevant bodies had also been contacted because of possible rights and heritage constraints.

A substantial part of the discussion concerned governance and finance. Members welcomed the use of a community interest company because it would create clearer accountability, annual reporting, and an asset lock preventing profits from being diverted away from community purposes. Questions were raised about membership, elections of directors, openness of annual general meetings, and whether founding documents would be published online. The organisers confirmed that the company would be transparent, that directors would be elected and re-elected through annual meetings, and that articles of association would provide for wider advisory involvement. The initial setup cost was noted as £115.

Members also discussed the financial pressures of running the event. The organisers believe these can be met by advanced ticket sales, sponsorship and grant funding. A suggestion was made that Berwick Slow Food could be approached to discuss potential financial support.

The committee then turned to council support. Officers clarified that a £2.5k grant could not be approved by the working group at this stage because grants are considered through the Budget and Administration Working Group and the Full Council with the next round being done in December. Members nevertheless wanted to show clear early backing. After discussion, the group separated moral support, officer support, and future grant consideration into distinct recommendations. A further public comment was relayed about affordability, with concern that a £10 day ticket or £20 for three days could leave some local families feeling excluded. The organisers said they wanted to build the family side of the event further and would look at that point.

The applicant group asked about timing for the formal council paperwork, and officers indicated that the grant form and related information would be sent over, with the application needing to be in by late November.

Decision: To recommend to full council to support the forthcoming festival grant application in principle, subject to the formal application and paperwork being submitted through the December grants process.

Decision: To recommend to full council to allow officer support during the initial setup stages of the festival.

Task: Send the council grant form and related submission information to the festival organisers.
@Stephen Robinson

6. **Spend vs Budget to date.**

The Operations Manager introduced the spend-versus-budget report as largely consistent with earlier discussions, highlighting a small number of lines that were over profile for explainable operational reasons. The uniform budget had overspent because two new staff members required full issue of clothing and protective equipment. The budget line for public bins and floral displays was also high because stock had been purchased in advance to avoid repeated delivery charges later in the year.

Members asked for clarification on several specific headings. Cllrs queried the CCTV internet cost and were told that, although the original maintenance contract had once been stopped, full council had later reinstated support after public concern following a serious New Year's Day incident. The system remained live and was considered by the police to be a network of suitable size even if coverage in some areas was imperfect.

Further questions covered Section 106 spending, market income, and other overspent lines. Officers explained that the Section 106 figure shown represented expenditure only, because this paper extracted the environment-related section rather than the whole council income and expenditure report.

Market performance drew particular interest. Members noted that income had already reached around 92.5% of the annual projected income only partway through the financial year, which meant the market was performing better than expected. Some non-wage overspend was attributed to stalls, awnings, and other operating items that had not originally been separated out in the budget in enough detail. Questions were also raised about unit price increases affecting electricity at the splash park, neighbourhood plan costs linked to the planning consultant's work, and whether future market reporting would continue to be broken out more clearly through Budget and Administration.

7. **Biodiversity and Sustainability**

Members welcomed the biodiversity and sustainability report and thanked officers for the work involved in preparing it. Discussion quickly moved from broad support to how the paper should now be strengthened and translated into deliverable priorities. One immediate issue was tree planting. Members argued that the proposed objectives should refer to trees more explicitly, given recent loss of mature trees along the Riverside Walk and wider concern that replacement planting had not followed. It was also recognised that some locations might need to wait because of other works, including Northumbrian Water activity, but the group still wanted the principle of increased planting across the parish to be reflected now.

The discussion then widened to future evidence and implementation. Questions were raised about whether the eventual strategy should include clearer timescales and indicative costs so that projects such as wildlife meadows could be linked properly to future budget decisions. Officers and members drew a distinction between the current report, which was treated as a priority-setting document, and a fuller strategy that would come later. The shared view became that the report should continue to operate as an action plan, with individual projects selected and worked up, rather than trying to cost and programme every item immediately through existing officer capacity.

Cllr Hawken argued that meaningful long-term assessment would require baseline ecological evidence.

She suggested using a professional ecological assessor, or possibly exploring support through a university, so that biodiversity improvements could later be measured against a known starting point. Members accepted the value of that point but were cautious about cost, timescale, and the risk of delaying practical progress. The concluding direction was to investigate what data already existed, including any material from Northumberland County Council or development-related ecological work, and to consider whether university links or a lighter-touch exercise might establish a usable baseline before a fuller strategy was developed.

Decision: The working group agreed that the biodiversity and sustainability report should be updated to include clearer reference to additional tree planting across the parish.

Task: Liaise with Northumberland County Council to identify opportunities for increased tree planting across the parish. @Stephen Robinson

Task: Investigate existing biodiversity baseline data and possible university support to help establish an evidence base for future strategy work. @Stephen Robinson

8. Operations Manager Report

The Operations Managers report covered staffing, grounds work, infrastructure, memorial ownership, allotments, play areas, and several live operational projects. It was reported the new horticulture apprentice had settled in extremely well, arriving with useful prior volunteering experience and fitting quickly into the team. The trainee Warden, recruited through Northumberland's Connect to Work scheme, was still developing into the role.

Seasonal displays have received the accolades they deserve through Northumbria in Bloom and continue to be praised by residents and visitors. Public seating repairs were reported as broadly on track, with the team having recovered some earlier delay due to winter storm damage. The bus shelter survey report is being prepared. It will highlight what can be repaired and what will require a full replacement. There was discussion focused on bin capacity. Officers had compiled QR-code reporting data from bins and shared this with Northumberland County Council, identifying a small number of high-footfall problem locations. The new area manager had suggested replacing some current 90 litre bins with larger 240 litre heritage-style units. Indicative cost was put at around £1,200 per bin, and members discussed practical points such as locking systems, vandal resistance, and whether the larger units could reduce overflow.

There was a substantial update on capital and land projects. Work at the woodland walk was described as well underway, with the pathway now opened through the site. Waste removal was still underway, and some features such as bluebells or other suppressed plants might only become visible after the area had been left to recover. About 1000 metres of hedging from the Woodland Trust was being explored, and the walk was estimated at roughly 800 metres in length. The Operations Manager said an opening event was being targeted for November or early December. At Five Arches, paperwork for land matters was being checked before submission to Northumberland County Council.

Members also received updates on war memorial ownership and cemetery transfer. Two memorial sites remained on unregistered land, which meant Northumberland County Council (NCC) first had to register the land to themselves as they can prove twelve years of maintenance before transfer could proceed. Officers have pressed NCC for a written timescale for progress, while officers cautioned that the county council's legal capacity and Land Registry delays were major constraints. The agreed approach was to keep pressing for a clearer timetable. Cemetery transfer remained under discussion as a separate matter, with a model being explored that would let the town council take responsibility without losing income and while still allowing the county council some continuing financial benefit.

Further operational matters included allotment expansion, replacement map artwork for a damaged monolith at the Parade, the stalled community garden discussions with Bernicia, and possible future play equipment at Five Arches in light of the Seton Gardens development. Members were cautious about duplicating provision too close to the Osborne Road play area and saw that as a question for later, once the Five Arches transfer position became clearer.

Task: Write again to NCC requesting a timescale for completion of the war memorial and cemeteries transfer process. @Iain McCready

9. Reports from Outside Bodies

Members used this item to discuss how outside-body reporting could be made more purposeful rather than relying on ad hoc updates. Suggestions included periodic input from the police, Greener Berwick, youth-focused organisations such as Berwick Youth Project, Berwick Community Trust/Visit Berwick, SENRUG and RAGES and Northumbria Water and other water-related bodies. The underlying aim was to improve the working group's understanding of local issues such as youth activity, environmental conditions, and community partnerships, without overloading formal meetings.

Greener Berwick offered a practical starting point. Cllr Hawken explained that the organisation already prepares an annual presentation, covering work completed and planned activity and said this could be delivered to the council in around 10 to 15 minutes. Members were supportive of that option and saw it as an efficient first example of how outside-body reporting could be structured. They also discussed whether some updates might sit better with the working group than with full council, depending on the subject matter and the need for open or more operational discussion.

There was interest in eventually hearing from the police on a periodic basis, particularly to inform the council's wider work on outcomes for younger people and local community safety. Members also mentioned water quality, the Berwick Youth Project, and other local bodies, but accepted that a broader plan would need to be developed rather than trying to schedule every organisation immediately.

Task: Arrange for Greener Berwick to present its annual update to the working group or council at a suitable meeting. @Iain McCready

Task: Officers to develop a plan/calendar of outside body reports. @Iain McCready, Stephen Robinson

10. Mural Artist

The item prompted a wider discussion about the potential for murals in Berwick rather than a simple response to the email received from an external artist. Members reflected on several possible locations, including a blank wall near Bridge Street, a site at the top of West Street, and the under-bridge area where previous anti-social behaviour issues had already been discussed. The broad ambition was to use artwork to animate neglected spaces, celebrate independent trading areas, and, where possible, involve local people in shaping the result.

Members agreed that any mural proposal would first need site-by-site feasibility work. Questions were raised about ownership, listed-building status, and whether listed building consent might be needed. There was also a clear preference for connecting any future project to local artists, local schools, or community participation rather than simply commissioning a non-local artist without wider engagement. Some members felt strongly that school and youth involvement would reduce the risk of public resistance and would help build local ownership of the outcome.

The possibility of support through the Create Berwick programme was considered important rather than relying on funding through council budgets. Members wanted to keep the idea live, pursue permission checks, and explore whether it could fit future place-making funding. There was no appetite to commit to a design or commission at this stage; instead, the emphasis was on groundwork, permissions, and testing whether the proposal could develop into a funded community-based scheme.

Decision: To recommend to Full Council to allow officers to investigate and building owners permission for mural art sites in Berwick.

Task: Approach Create Berwick to explore whether future funding could support a mural project in the town. @Stephen Robinson

Task: Contact building owners to seek permission for install @Stephen Robinson

11. NWL Social Values

Members discussed how the council should respond to Northumbrian Water's request for ideas under its social values programme, particularly in relation to land associated with drainage and flood-management works. The conversation centred on how any land acquired or reshaped through the project should provide visible community and environmental benefit rather than reverting simply to mown grass around fenced infrastructure.

Several locations were mentioned. One was land near the quayside car park, where members suggested a green public space with interpretation boards around estuary wildlife, seabirds, and local biodiversity. Another was land near the railway station and other areas likely to be affected by attenuation works, where the emphasis was on combining ecological value with usable community green space. Tweedmouth Main Street was also mentioned as an example of existing Northumbrian Water land that could be managed more imaginatively than plain grass cutting.

The group also noted that rain gardens and tree pits already being considered through separate operational discussions would require ongoing maintenance, and members wanted the council involved early enough to influence design. A longer-term suggestion about whether one future site might have park-and-ride value was acknowledged but was seen as outside the likely scale of the social values budget and better suited to a separate strategic discussion. The immediate consensus was that the council's response should stress biodiversity, education, and community use together.

Decision: To recommend to Full Council that its social values submission should ask for community green spaces that educate and inform residents and visitors about local history and biodiversity.

12. Shop Front Vinyl's

The Operations Manager reported progress on the proposal to install vinyl displays on vacant shopfronts. Four units had been identified initially: the former Santander branch, the former Mountain Warehouse premises, the neighbouring former shoe shop, and the former salon next to Iceland. One of those, the former salon, was now close to being re-let, so that property was likely to fall out of the scheme.

The main challenge remained landlord contact. Santander had proved especially difficult to reach despite repeated attempts, and officers had reached the point of planning a formal letter to head office because no workable property contact had been identified. Other enquiries were being pursued through letting agents, auction records and a known keyholder contact. Alongside that, officers had met a local printer and were expecting prices for both internal and external vinyl options, with external fitting likely to be cheaper because of easier installation and lower ink costs. Visit Berwick had also agreed to assist with artwork design.

Members accepted that progress had been slower than hoped because of the practical work involved in tracing ownership and permissions. Even so, the project was described as moving forward, and officers explained that some related timing decisions had been taken to avoid unnecessary delay where linked public-realm works were already being planned.

Task: Continue to progress the project @Stephen Robinson

13. Items for Future Agendas

No items were added.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting to be held on Wednesday 4 November at 12pm.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Budget and Administration Working Group

Time and date

Friday 9 October 2026 at 14:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland
TD15 1BN

Budget and Administration Working Group members present

Cllr Thomas Stewart (Chair)

Cllr John Robertson

Cllr Racheal Driver

Cllr Janice Bowden

Also present

Cllr Laura Hawken

Cllr Stephen Scott

Notes

18.26. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jane Turton and Cllr Mike Greener.

19.26. Disclosures of interest

Cllr John Robertson declared an interest as a Freeman. Cllr Thomas Stewart and Cllr Laura Hawken declared interests as Freeman Trustees.

All remained present, as no agenda item was considered to affect those interests.

20.26. Notes of previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 17 September 2026 were received for information, having already been considered by Full Council. No corrections were raised.

Members discussed the practical time available to check Working Group notes before their inclusion in Full Council papers. The Chief Officer would circulate the present draft notes early the following week, and members were asked to return corrections promptly. Once approved by Full Council, the notes would not return to the next Working Group for further approval.

21.26. Notes of the Market Task Group

Members received the Market Task Group notes and requested a consolidated account of market income and expenditure. The location of the Market Manager's costs within the budget was not clear. Direct costs, staff time and other attributable indirect costs should be brought together so that members could assess the market's performance and any subsidy or investment required.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the new financial support arrangements would enable this breakdown to be prepared. It would be circulated initially to councillors on the Market Task Group and reported onward to this Working Group. The initial circulation would not include the external market representatives.

The proposed budget for Christmas decorations in the Buttermarket was discussed. A detailed proposal and cost had not yet been received from the Market Manager. Figures of £100 and £150 were suggested, but no budget was agreed. Members wanted to see the design and expected appearance before committing funds. They noted the need for timely consideration ahead of the Christmas markets and that existing officer delegations remained available where appropriate.

Members also discussed the inadequacy of temporary windproofing and the potential for a more permanent solution to improve winter markets and community use. Glazing or other alterations would require early engagement with the Freeman Trustees and consideration of the building's heritage and consent requirements. Any costs would need to be considered in future budgets. The Trustees' recent expenditure on gates and the relationship with their plans for the wider Town Hall also needed to be taken into account.

AGREED: The Market Task Group should take forward investigation of windproofing, including an initial approach to the Trustees about support for a permanent solution. This investigation should remain separate from the immediate office refit so that it did not delay that project. No expenditure on windproofing was authorised.

ACTIONS: Prepare consolidated market financial information; obtain the decoration proposal and costs; and progress initial discussions with the Trustees on windproofing.

22.26. Notes of the Festive Lights Task Group

No notes were available from the Festive Lights Task Group, as its meeting had taken place the previous day.

Members agreed that festive lighting in the Buttermarket should be co-ordinated through the Festive Lights Task Group to maintain consistency with the wider Christmas arrangements. No separate spending recommendation was agreed under this item.

23.26. Town Hall Heads of Terms

The Chief Officer gave a verbal update and confirmed that Adam Douglas had been instructed to act for the Council. A fuller update on the lease arrangements would be brought to the next meeting. The Heads of Terms themselves were not before the Working Group for approval.

The two proposed leases were explained. The main lease would cover the internal office accommodation. A separate lease, at £4,000 per annum, would cover the additional meeting-room section, which could be terminated on three months' notice if required for the Trustees' refurbishment. Only modest works, principally decoration and lighting improvements, were envisaged in that temporary meeting space.

The relevant date for leaving the current accommodation was clarified as 18 May 2027 rather than July. Members expressed concern about the feasibility of completing the move within that period. The Chief Officer had approached the current landlord about a possible month-by-month arrangement and requested a site visit to establish reinstatement requirements. Members noted the need to clarify apparently differing lease provisions about the condition in which the premises must be left.

NOTED: The verbal update. No recommendation approving the Heads of Terms or leases was made.

ACTION: Continue legal work on the proposed leases and clarify current-premises exit requirements and contingency arrangements.

24.26. Town Hall Project Risk Management and Assessment

Members reviewed the proposed project risk-management arrangements and initial risk register. The principal concern was the timetable leading to 18 May 2027, including lease completion, design, listed-building processes, construction and arrangements for leaving the current office. Members considered that this risk required clear emphasis in the register.

The potential loss of capacity if the Chief Officer or Operations Manager became seriously ill or unavailable was raised. Members discussed the extent to which professional project or client-management support could mitigate dependence on individual officers. It was clarified that the Chief Officer would remain accountable for the project, with operational support, and that responsibilities should be clearly expressed.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: Approve the Town Hall project risk-management arrangements and initial risk register; designate the Chief Officer as accountable project lead; require the evidence and approvals identified for each project stage; and receive updated risk and affordability information before further commitments are made.

The recommendation did not itself approve the Heads of Terms, construction expenditure or delegated variation limits that had not yet been agreed.

ACTION: Ensure the register and project arrangements explicitly address the timetable, officer dependency and continuity of delivery.

25.26. Town Hall Architectural and Professional Services

Members considered whether an accessible WC should form part of the initial office refit. The Chief Officer confirmed that the Trustees would not provide the additional WC serving the Council's ground-floor accommodation if the Council chose not to proceed. The Trustees' proposed accessible provision for the wider Town Hall was a separate scheme.

The discussion recognised the benefit of accessible facilities for staff, councillors and visitors over a long occupation of the building. A view was expressed that installation at the outset would be more efficient and could also provide space for baby changing. Other members emphasised the initial cost, the Council's position as tenant and the need to complete a practical scheme within the available programme. These were members' views; no definitive legal assessment of accessibility obligations was made at the meeting.

The Operations Manager proposed retaining the future WC space and installing the dividing partition during the initial works, with the area available for storage meanwhile. This would preserve the option and limit future disruption. Deferral would simplify the immediate works by avoiding the drainage and associated archaeological work. Members noted that listed-building consent would still be needed for the remaining scheme.

It was clarified that the approximately £26,000 discussed related to CSY's professional-services quotation for the wider scheme, rather than the cost of the WC alone. A cheaper proposal from a Duns firm was discussed, but the conservation qualifications required by the existing consent conditions meant the quotations were not directly comparable without allowing for additional specialist input.

Members asked officers to review CSY's scope against the simplified works. Potential adjustments included listed-building submission work discussed at approximately £1,500 and contract-management services discussed at approximately £6,000. These were indicative adjustments to be explored, not agreed savings or a final fee. Any retained services would need to meet the conservation requirements.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: Proceed with the simpler initial office refit, deferring installation of the accessible WC while reserving its space and incorporating the partition needed to enable a future installation. One Member of the Working Group gave a contrary preference for installing the WC immediately was expressed.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: Seek a revised professional-services scope and fee from CSY reflecting the simplified scheme, considering work that could appropriately be managed in house while retaining the necessary conservation expertise.

ACTION: Meet CSY and prepare a revised scope, fee and updated cost information for the Full Council Town Hall report. No final professional appointment or expenditure amount was settled under this item.

26.26. Review of Financial Regulations

Members reviewed the highlighted provisions of the draft Financial Regulations, together with the Scheme of Delegation and Annual Investment Strategy. The changes below were recommendations for Council adoption and did not take effect simply through the Working Group discussion.

Procurement: Members identified inconsistent references to £25,000 and £30,000 and differing VAT treatment in paragraphs 5.6 and 5.7. They supported using £30,000 excluding VAT consistently, with the related upper reference in paragraph 5.8 amended accordingly. The Chief Officer would confirm the correct drafting with the accountant. Members expected three quotations to be sought where required; difficulty obtaining quotations should be referred for consideration rather than treated as automatic permission to bypass the requirements.

Commitment limits: Members supported £7,500 excluding VAT as the RFO's commitment limit within approved budgets. The Operations Manager's £2,500 level was discussed separately and no change to it was agreed. The generic £500 staff allowance was considered excessive for incidental emergency purchases; Members agreed to recommend reducing this limit to £50.

Internal transfers: Members discussed payroll transfers and the complexity of the existing accounts. They supported an interim increase to £30,000 in the relevant transfer limits in paragraph 6.8.2, pending the accountant's review of account arrangements. Larger reserve or investment movements should continue to receive the necessary member approval.

Payment controls: Members distinguished authority to commit expenditure from the checks required before releasing payment. The bookkeeper would assemble invoices, signed purchase orders, coding and the payment schedule; the RFO would check the information before member scrutiny. All payments would remain visible to councillors. Members supported retaining two-councillor online banking approval for individual transactions above £7,500, with the RFO and bookkeeper processing those at or below that threshold. Appropriate cover during the RFO's absence was required, and both the Mayor and the Working Group Chair should be bank signatories. The revised documents would need to state clearly the checks, authorisations and absence-cover arrangements.

Transparency: Members supported publishing expenditure over £100 rather than £500. Information should be drawn from the accounting system and provide understandable descriptions. A public expenditure report would be separate from the detailed invoice and purchase-order pack used for councillor scrutiny.

Contract variations: Written variations should remain within the approved budget and both a cumulative 10% limit and a £7,500 cap, with the lower limit applying. Variations should not be split to avoid those controls.

Asset disposals: Members supported a £1,000 threshold for referring disposals of tangible movable property through the Working Group to Full Council. They discussed the need to remove replaced or disposed assets from the register so that historic entries were not simply accumulated.

Investment strategy: Members requested a statement of Council values, with arms and oil mentioned as examples for consideration rather than adopted exclusions. They emphasised low risk, access to funds when needed and a mix of deposit terms appropriate to expenditure plans. The relationship between the strategy, current-account balances, reserves and limits per banking group required clarification. The figures of £85,000 for deposit protection and £100,000 for a suggested holding limit were discussed, but no final banking-group limit was settled.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: Adopt revised Financial Regulations and corresponding Scheme of Delegation provisions reflecting the procurement, commitment, internal-transfer, payment-approval, publication, contract-variation and disposal changes recorded above, following the accountant's confirmation of the procurement drafting. The incidental emergency staff limit would be £50.

ACTIONS: Redraft the Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation, including explicit absence cover and signatory arrangements; confirm procurement wording and VAT treatment with the accountant; and revise the Investment Strategy for further member consideration. The strategy's deposit-protection figures and proposed holding limits should be checked before adoption.

27.26. Expenditure vs Budget Year to Date

Members considered the half-year budget-monitoring information and reserves schedule. The RFO reported that the overall position appeared manageable, but coding corrections and clearer grouping of expenditure were needed. The new bookkeeper and accountant were familiar with Rialtas and local council accounts and were reviewing the records.

The RFO reported that an employer National Insurance allowance had been claimed although the Council was not eligible. He had raised this with the payroll provider following the accountant's query. An initial potential exposure of approximately £20,000 was discussed; later discussion suggested nearer £10,000, but the period and total remained unconfirmed. The RFO explained that employer National Insurance expenditure had been budgeted, so the issue should not be treated automatically as an entirely unbudgeted cost. The actual liability, correction arrangements and cash-flow effect required confirmation. Members questioned why previous internal audits had not identified the matter and noted the need for a new internal auditor for the coming year. No repayment arrangement was approved by the Working Group.

Members sought a reconciliation of bank holdings with the reserves schedule. Approximately £315,000 in accounts and £239,000 on the reserves list were mentioned, with a possible difference described as roughly £80,000. These were provisional discussion figures and did not establish an available surplus. The accountant would check balances, commitments and earmarking and explain the relationship between current-account funds, savings and reserves.

Schedule III income was recognised as uncertain. An earlier estimate of about £156,000 had produced approximately £199,000, while the current indication discussed was about £158,000. Members noted that farm income, investments and Trustees' expenditure could affect the distribution, and that the effect of proposed Town Hall works was not settled. The budget and precept should therefore be prepared on a prudent basis rather than assume a fixed receipt.

Training expenditure was discussed, including the Chief Officer's two-year governance course at £3,000 per year. Sponsorship receipts of £150 were shown against a £7,500 target, with invoices recently issued. The Chief Officer did not expect the full sponsorship target to be met and welcomed assistance with a more organised approach to businesses. Rainwater collection for watering Summer Bedding was discussed briefly as a potential matter for environmental work; no scheme or expenditure was agreed.

NOTED: The monitoring report and the need for further accounting clarification before the next budget review.

ACTIONS: Confirm the National Insurance position with the accountant and payroll provider; reconcile bank balances and reserves; check variances and pension entries; invoice NCC for the relevant Section 106 funding; and follow up sponsorship, rent collection, reserve transfers, insurance premiums, project funding and outstanding orders. Bring a fuller financial breakdown to the next meeting to support preparation of the 2027/28 budget.

28.26. Freedom Admission Fees

Members considered the £25 fee paid by applicants for admission as Freeman, distinguishing this process from an honorary grant of the Freedom. The Council's cost of facilitating an admission meeting was reported to exceed approximately £200. Members considered that the existing fee did not adequately recover the costs of administration and the ceremony.

Members discussed the Council's role in facilitating admissions and the need to clarify the arrangements with the Guild. The Working Group supported an immediate increase in the admission fee, with the Chief Officer to meet Michael Herriot to discuss the arrangements.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: Increase the Freeman admission fee immediately from £25 to £100 per applicant.

ACTION: The Chief Officer to meet Michael Herriot to discuss the Freeman admission arrangements and the Council's role and costs in facilitating admission meetings.

29.26. Items for Next Agenda and Actions Arising

The next meeting would begin consideration of the 2027/28 budget, supported by clearer financial information, reserves reconciliation and an assessment of Schedule III income.

A late request received through Visit Berwick was raised for £1,500 towards an exhibition involving approximately 2,000 local photographs, with images subsequently offered for business use. Members questioned prior consultation, the expected benefit to businesses and whether an application from an individual professional photographer fitted the Council's grants arrangements. Members took papers away for consideration. No grant or recommendation to fund the proposal was agreed.

The Chief Officer would circulate the draft meeting notes early the following week. Members were asked to return amendments promptly so that the record and recommendations could be finalised for Full Council.

ACTIONS: Include budget preparation and the outstanding financial and Town Hall updates in the next agenda; clarify the photographic exhibition request before any further consideration; and circulate these draft notes for checking.

30.26. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 12 November 2026 at 4.00 pm.