



## AGENDA FOR THE MEETING OF TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL

MONDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2026 IN THE GUILDHALL

Please note that public question time will be held prior to Full Council from 6.30pm. There are stairs to the Council Chamber but if any member of the public has mobility issues the Council can relocate to the Main Chamber.

You are hereby **SUMMONED** to attend a meeting of the Town Council, on **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026** at **7.00pm** for a maximum of 120 minutes the purpose of transacting the following business:

### 1. WELCOME TO ALL ATTENDING AND OBSERVING

The Chair will read out the following statement:

Welcome to everyone attending and observing the meeting.

A reminder that open proceedings of this meeting will be video recorded. If members of the public make presentations, they will be deemed to have consented to being recorded. By entering the Council Chamber attendees are also consenting to being recorded.

This meeting is limited to 120 minutes and therefore members are asked to raise their points succinctly and not repeat the same view expressed by colleagues if it does not add to the debate.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

To receive apologies and to confirm that any absence has the approval of the Council. The Mayor will request confirmation that all Members have completed or made any necessary amendments to their Declaration of Interests.

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*The Committee will adjourn for the following items:*

Reports from County and District Councillors:

- a. County Cllr Hodgson – no document.
- b. District Cllr Allen – no document.
- c. District Cllr Birch – document attached [page 3].
- d. District Cllr Presswell – document attached [page 6].

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*The Council will convene to consider the following items:*

### 3. CLERK'S REPORT

To note the Clerk's Report for November and December October 2025 and January 2026 (general updates and correspondence). Document to follow.

### 4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

To approve and sign the minutes of the following meeting:

*(Please note confidential minutes can be agreed but any discussion must be held in the Confidential session)*

- a. Full Council 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026 – document attached [page 8].

To note the following minutes:

- b. Council Matters Committee 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026 – document attached [page 12].
- c. Planning Committee 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026 – document attached [page 15].
- d. Town Matters Committee 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026 – document attached [page 18].

## **5. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS ARISING REQUIRING A DECISION**

To consider any matters arising from the Minutes and to approve any recommendations from Committees (document enclosed, page 22):

*(Please note confidential minutes can be agreed but any discussion must be held in the Confidential session)*

- a. Full Council 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026.
- b. Council Matters Committee 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026.
- c. Planning Committee 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026.
- d. Town Matters Committee 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

## **6. STRATEGY DELIVERY WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

To receive an update from the Chairs of the Strategy Delivery Working Group Chairs. Verbal update.

## **7. LIST OF MEETING DATES, COMMUNICATIONS POINTS AND LINK COUNCILLOR UPDATES**

To note a list of upcoming meeting dates, Council communications points and link Councillor/Councillor representatives on outside bodies updates. Document attached [page 36].

## **8. NEXT MEETING**

To note the next meeting date of Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2026 for Full Council, 6.30pm public session, 7.00pm formal meeting in the Guildhall.

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*The Council will be asked to RESOLVE to exclude the press and public "by reason of the confidential nature of the business" to be discussed and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.*

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## **9. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS FROM COMMITTEE (Standing Item)**

To consider any recommendations or matters arising that are considered confidential in nature. No document.

## **10. GUILDHALL WALL**

To note an update on the structural survey carried out on the Guildhall Wall and the remedial works required (commercial). Verbal update.

## **11. COMMUNITY ECONOMIC PLAN PROJECTS**

To note a report on the Community Economic Plan's proposed projects and how this aligns with the Town Council's strategic objectives (staffing). Document attached.

Agenda produced by:

Catherine Marlton

Town Clerk

28<sup>th</sup> January 2026

### **USE OF SOUND RECORDINGS AT COUNCIL & COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

**The open proceedings of this Meeting will be audio and video recorded. If members of the public make a representation, they will be deemed to have consented to being recorded. By entering the Council Chamber or Zoom meeting, attendees are also consenting to being recorded.**

**Televised, vision and sound recordings or live broadcastings by members of the press or public at Council or Committee debates are permitted and anyone wishing to do so is asked to inform the Chairman of the respective Committee of their intention to record proceedings.**

**John Birch**  
**SHDC Member for Totnes**  
**Report to the meeting to be held on**  
**Monday 2 February 2026**

I report on the following.

**The financial position at SHDC**

The three year local government finance settlement for 2026/27 to 2028/29 was announced in Parliament on 17th December 2025. This has seen the introduction of the “Fair” Funding Review 2.0, alongside a reset of the business rates baseline and the cessation of the New Homes Bonus scheme.

There have been some late adjustments to the new “fair” funding system which has now seen **South Hams District Council fall into the category of being amongst the worse affected Councils in the country by the new finance settlement.**

The Council falls into the category where only 95% of its previous levels of funding have been guaranteed by the Government in 2027/28 and 2028/29 – this is the category most impacted by the “Fair” Funding Review. This is a real terms decrease and means the Council will receive no additional funding for inflationary pressures or higher levels of service demand.

The reduction in funding is from £6.482m in 25/26 to £3.811m (£3.352m plus £0.459m transitional protection in other grants) in 28/29. **This is a reduction of £2.671m in the three year settlement (a 41% reduction).** This is a substantial reduction and is the real impact of the “Fair” Funding Review in terms of loss of Government funding.

**The SHDC Budget gap for 2026/27 onwards**

The Executive Committee of SHDC received a report setting out proposals for the Council to achieve a balanced budget for 2026/27. The Council is currently forecasting a £2.65m budget gap by the following year, 2027/28. The cumulative aggregated Budget Gap by 2028/29 is £6.9m, if no action is taken in each individual year to close the budget gap annually.

Analysis carried out by Rural Services Network (RSN) shows that between 2024/25 to 2028/29, Government Funded spending power for the most urban authorities will have increased by 21%. For the most rural Councils in the same period, it will have only increased by 1%. In 2026/27, residents in the most rural areas will pay on average 20% (£127) more per head of population in Council Tax than the most urban residents. The most urban Councils will receive 41% more per head of population in Government Funded spending power than the most rural Councils in 2026/27.

**Waste and recycling at SHDC**

The Council’s waste and recycling service has been through significant changes both strategically and operationally over the last five years.

The Council outsourced its waste and recycling services in 2019 but subsequently took the decision to bring the service back in house in October 2022 following significant challenges with the contractor's ability to deliver an expansion of its recycling services to a kerbside collection method.

Since regaining direct control, the Council has undertaken a programme of service consolidation, operational planning and investment in fleet and staffing to address inherited service challenges.

In the last three years the Council has made significant investment in infrastructure at both of its depots and transfer stations. It has also upgraded its recycling fleet and, carried out a number of major service reviews and changes to address the long-standing issues.

The Council has continued to align its recycling services with the requirements as set out in the Devon wide strategy and national strategy, aiming to improve recycling rates, reduce residual waste and increase public engagement.

Alongside these major services changes, Members and Officers continue to drive other strategic work streams to align with the Councils carbon reduction targets. These include working with Sustainable South Hams on expanding the community composting offering and electrification of the Councils fleet where it is viable to do so.

This work continues to progress, with a new initiative implemented in April 2025 to trial four of the Council's waste and recycling collection vehicles on hydronated vegetable oil (HVO).

The Council introduced and has been operating the kerbside collection recycling service for almost 2 years. During this time the performance of the service has been generally good when compared with the volume of collections carried out.

The local management team has been working hard to drive out inconsistencies and deliver efficient, consistent performance across all rounds.

To ensure an unrelenting focus on service performance, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer Service Delivery receive a detailed (every collection round) weekly report on the previous weeks performance and any remedial actions taken to rectify service issues. This ensures that there is immediate visibility at the most senior level in the organisation to focus on performance outcomes, accountability and highlights the strategic importance of continuous improvement across the organisation.

### **Sustainable South Hams nature campaign secures funding boost**

Sustainable South Hams has secured seed funding from SHDC to support the development of a new campaign to take collective community action for climate and nature.

The campaign will connect existing events, groups, and places across the South Hams into a shared programme that helps people deepen their relationship with nature, build community resilience and support nature recovery at a local level.

The campaign will be delivered through a core partnership between Sustainable South Hams and SHDC, supported by an advisory group of regional organisations. The partners will co-create the campaign with residents, parishes and local groups, ensuring it reflects local priorities and builds long-term community leadership.

The £20,000 seed funding will support the campaign's development phase, with plans to seek match funding in early 2026 to expand delivery and impact across the district.

“This campaign really is about harnessing the power of community, from streets and parishes to whole towns, to create meaningful, joined-up action for nature,” **said Jane Nichols at Sustainable South Hams.** “We are so grateful to South Hams District Council for this seed funding which will enable us to co-design a campaign that puts local people at the heart of nature recovery.”

**SHDC Executive Members, Cllrs John McKay and Nadine Dommett, leading on Climate Change and Decarbonisation, said:** “We’re delighted to support this community-led nature campaign with £20,000 seed funding. Working in partnership with Sustainable South Hams and local groups to co-create a programme that reflects local priorities, builds long-term community leadership, and strengthens resilience across the South Hams. This development phase will help Sustainable South Hams find other external funding sources in 2026 and supports our net zero ambitions for the organisation by 2030 and the wider district by 2050.

Cllr John Birch  
27 January 2026.

**District Councillor Report for Totnes Town Council**

from Cllr Anna Presswell

27/01/2026

**Homelessness – Response and Procedure**

I am setting up a meeting of representatives of Devon County Council, South Hams, Police, Civil Society groups, SSAFA or Royal British Legion and interested Councillors. I believe the potential of mixed messages might be detrimental to individuals finding themselves in this position and Councillors are one of the parties on the front line who may well be asked to advise on help and next steps.

Both Totnes Town Council and South Hams have information on their respective websites. But clarity of the process is not always obvious, where trespassing and legalities come into play. It is a meeting to share processes, an invitation to share where a system might be vulnerable and how parties might be able to respond in a timely fashion.

**Bridgetown Alive**

The meeting this week will identify 2 or 3 further sites for Catbikes nearer the top of Bridgetown, and for these to be assessed by SHDC; to offer the resource to those living further away from the existing ones at St Johns church and the Steamer Quay.

**South Hams Community Awards**

For those who are not aware – South Hams are on the lookout for local heroes in their annual South Hams Community Awards. The third year to celebrate organisations and people who go above and beyond to help those living in the South Hams every day.

**Messages for the public:**

- You can now shine a spotlight on the hard work of a community hero by nominating them for a South Hams Community Award.
- The Chairman of the Council along with a panel of judges, are looking for nominations in the following categories:
  - Young Persons Award (for under 18s)
  - Community Champion Award (for over 18s)
  - Community Organisation Award
  - Climate and Biodiversity Champion Award
- Nominations for the South Hams Community Awards close at 11.59 p.m. on Saturday 31 January.
- Find out more and nominate at [www.southhams.gov.uk/community-awards](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/community-awards)

**Corporate Assets Refurbishment Project**

**Phase 1 Works**

**Car Park Refurbishments**

The following car parks are scheduled for refurbishment:

- Leonards Road, Ivybridge – Completion before end of March 2026, partial closure will be in operation
- Glanvilles Mill, Ivybridge – Completion before end of March 2026
- Harford Road, Ivybridge – Completion before end of March 2026
- The Square, Chagford – Completion before end of March 2026

### Public Toilet Refurbishments

Refurbishment works to public toilet facilities are planned or underway as follows:

- *Coronation Road – Works completed on Wednesday 13 January (partial closure during works)*
- Steamer Quay – Works scheduled from 12 January to 2 February (partial closure)
- Civic Hall, Totnes – Works scheduled from 19 January to 31 March
  - o Two portable toilets will be provided for Totnes market traders only.
  - o Signage will be displayed advising members of the public to use Coronation Road toilets.
- Yealmpton – Works pending, subject to a meeting

### Benches: Installation of new benches is scheduled as follows:

- Ivybridge – 12 January to 30 January
- Totnes – 16 February to 6 March

### Bins

Installation of new bins is scheduled as follows:

- Ivybridge – 2 February to 13 February
- Totnes – 9 March to 27 March



**DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL**  
**MONDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026 IN THE GUILDHALL**

Present: Councillors T Bennett (Chair), L Auletta, C Beavis, S Collinson, T Cooper, J Cummings, J Hodgson, D Peters, A Presswell, N Roberts, T Robshaw, L Smallridge and M Trant.

Apologies: Cllrs Chinnock, Hannam and Price, and District Cllr Allen.

In Attendance: District Councillor Birch, C Marlton (Town Clerk) and P Bethel (Town Sergeant).

**1. WELCOME TO ALL ATTENDING AND OBSERVING**

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

**To receive apologies and to confirm that any absence has the approval of the Council. The Mayor will request confirmation that all Members have completed or made any necessary amendments to their Declaration of Interests.**

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the apologies. There were no amendments to Declarations of Interest. Cllr Bennett declared an interest reference item 10 as one of the creators of the Pegasus sculpture is his employer.

***The Committee will adjourn for the following items:***

**Reports from County and District Councillors.**

- e. County Cllr Hodgson**
- f. District Cllr Allen**
- g. District Cllr Birch**
- h. District Cllr Presswell**

***It was RESOLVED to suspend standing orders.***

- a. County Cllr (C Cllr) Hodgson had not submitted a report and gave a verbal update on: an update on Local Government Reform is expected in March 2026; pedestrian safety in icy weather including snow wardens and a proposal for Devon County Council (DCC) to inspect grit bins in October; promotion of fostering; and the financial settlement at DCC.
- b. District Cllr Allen had not submitted a report and was not present.
- c. District Cllr Birch (DCllr) had submitted a report. Cllrs asked questions on: the upgrade to the public toilets, specifically arrangements during the Civic Square toilets closure; the former Dairy Crest site; the Pavilion leisure centre; the caravan on the verge near the roundabout; and the Climate

National Emergency Briefing motion at South Hams District Council (SHDC) set out in DCllr Birch's report which Cllrs ask goes to the Town Matters Committee for consideration.

d. District Cllr Presswell had not submitted a report and gave a verbal update on: an extension to the Longmarsh boardwalk to make it wheelchair accessible; working with Bridgetown Alive! on Cat Bike locations at the top of Bridgetown; and a GWR grant opportunity. Cllrs asked about the effectiveness of the SHDC process for out of hours assistance for homeless people in extreme cold weather, which DCllr Presswell will investigate and update with the necessary information for the Town Council to share publicly.

*The Council reconvened.*

### **3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

**To approve and sign the minutes of the following Meeting:**

***(Please note confidential minutes can be agreed but any discussion must be held in the Confidential session)***

**a. Full Council 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025.**

It was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve and sign the minutes.

**To note the following minutes:**

**b. Council Matters Committee 8<sup>th</sup> December 2025.**

Noted.

**c. Planning Committee 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025.**

Noted.

### **4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS ARISING**

**To consider any matters arising from the Minutes and to approve any recommendations from Committees:**

***(Please note confidential minutes can be agreed but any discussion must be held in the Confidential session)***

**a. Full Council 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025.**

No matters arising.

**b. Council Matters Committee 8<sup>th</sup> December 2025**

Item 5. Draft 2026/27 Budget. These were considered under items 8 and 9 on the agenda.

Item 6. Payments to Councillors Policy. It was **RESOLVED** that the revised Payments to Councillors Policy is adopted.

**c. Planning Committee 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025**

Item 6. Torbay Local Plan 2025-2045 – Regulation 18 Draft Plan Consultation. It was **RESOLVED** that the Council responds to the Torbay Local Plan 2025-45 Regulation 18 Draft Plan Consultation with the following comments:

- Policy TA2. No reference is made about the impact of traffic and congestion caused by vehicles coming out of Torbay through adjoining settlements. Whilst the route northwards towards Newton Abbot and Exeter has had significant investment to improve capacity, this is not the case

with the southern route towards Plymouth. The impact on Totnes is already substantial with junctions beyond capacity during rush hours. Altered driver behaviour results in vehicles increasingly taking routes through the town to avoid congestion on the A385. Investment in this route is required to mitigate these effects and to improve economic outcomes for Torbay.

- Page 173 paragraph 6.7 – there is no mention of improvements beyond the Torbay boundary, but the impact of traffic will extend beyond the bay area.
- Acknowledge that Torbay is an employment hub for the area.
- Torbay has important wildlife corridors that link to the River Dart and Totnes which the plan should be mindful of retaining to best preserve biodiversity in the region.
- Would refer you to the 2018 South Hams District Council Landscape Character Assessment and the importance of green spaces between communities on the outer regions of the bay area.

Item 8. Totnes Neighbourhood Plan Review. It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a. The Council proceeds with the commissioning of the health check; and
- b. A named consultant is used (Intelligent Plans and Examinations) rather than going to tender and as such seeks Full Council approval for this appointment as a provider of a specialist service and as an agreed exemption to Financial Regulations.
- c. As well as the health check, advice on these specific questions is included: principle residence policy; licencing of holiday rental properties; feed in of potential site allocations from South Hams District Council Local Plan; and extension of the national landscape area up the River Dart to include Totnes (proposed to Buckfastleigh).
- d. The Landscape Character Assessment and Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan are provided to be viewed alongside the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan.

## **5. STRATEGY DELIVERY WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

**To receive an update from the Chairs of the Strategy Delivery Working Group Chairs.**

Informal updates were given by the Chairs which were noted. In summary:

Community Working Group – Cllr Bennett outlined the positive feedback from the community to the from the Christmas events (lights switch on, Tuesday late night markets and the lantern procession).

Economy Working Group – Cllr Roberts reminded Councillors of the Business Forum event on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

Environment and Public Realm Working Group – no updates.

## **6. COMMUNITY AUDIT**

**To consider a revised cost for the Community Audit exercise.**

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the increase in cost to £6500 for the Community Audit.

## **7. TAX BASE FOR 2026/27**

**To note the tax base for financial year 2026/27.**

Noted.

## **8. BUDGET SETTING FOR 2026/27**

**To consider the Council Matters Committee recommendations for the budget for financial year 2026/27.**

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the 2026/27 budget as presented.

## **9. PRECEPT SETTING**

**To consider the Council Matters Committee recommendation for the precept for financial year**

## **2026/27.**

The Clerk spoke to the detail in the budget report and recommended an increase of 7.5 percent on the precept (4.55 percent per band D property), with a view to reviewing ear marked reserves to protect minimum general reserve levels as needed in the future.

It was **RESOLVED** by majority to request an increase of 10 percent to the precept (£744541) which equates to 6.98 percent per band D property, an increase of £15.63 per annum or £0.30p per week.

### **10. TOTNES LANTERN PARADE - TOWN COUNCIL LANTERN**

**To consider whether to retire the Town Council's current lantern, Pegasus, after three years of it featuring in the Lantern Procession in December.**

It was **RESOLVED** to: retire the Town Council's current lantern, Pegasus; and to give the Community Working Group delegated authority to discuss where Pegasus should go and the Town Council's role in the lantern procession from 2026 onwards.

### **11. LIST OF MEETING DATES AND COMMUNICATIONS POINTS**

**To note a list of upcoming meeting dates and annual meetings calendar, Council communications points and link Councillor/ Councillor representatives on outside bodies updates.**

Noted.

### **12. NEXT MEETING**

**To note the next meeting dates of Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026 for Full Council, 6.30pm public session, 7.00pm formal meeting in the Guildhall.**

Noted.

*The Council **RESOLVED** to exclude the press and public "by reason of the confidential nature of the business" to be discussed and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. (CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council)*

### **13. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS FROM COMMITTEE (Standing Item)**

**To consider any recommendations or matters arising that are considered confidential in nature.**

None.

### **14. GUILDHALL COTTAGE SURVEY**

**To consider a building survey of the Guildhall Cottage (commercial).**

It was **RESOLVED** to proceed with the conditions survey for the Guildhall Cottage. Given the specialist nature of the heritage service needed, and work already completed on the Elizabethan House, it was **AGREED** that a single quote was acceptable as an exception to usual financial regulation.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Cllr Tim Bennett  
Chair



## **DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF COUNCIL MATTERS MONDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026 AT 7.00PM IN THE GUILDHALL**

**Present:** Councillors D Peters (Chair), L Auletta, C Beavis, T Bennett and J Chinnock.

**Apologies:** Cllrs J Hannam, E Price and M Trant.

**In Attendance:** Cllr Cummings, C Marlton (Town Clerk).

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair read a statement about how the meeting would be conducted and recorded. The apologies were accepted.

*The Committee adjourned for the following item:*

### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

*The Committee reconvened.*

### **2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

**To approve the minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and update on any matters arising.**

The minutes were **AGREED** unanimously as an accurate record of the proceedings.

### **3. BUDGET MONITOR**

**To consider the Budget Monitor.**

The budget monitor was **AGREED** unanimously.

### **4. MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND BUDGET**

**To consider the Mayor's engagements since October 2025 and the current budget.**

The Mayor's engagements and budget was **AGREED** unanimously.

### **5. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT**

**To consider the executive summary and recommendations from the Marketing and Communications Audit.**

It was **AGREED** that:

- The Clerk will present a report to the February Council Matters Committee that outlines the next steps and costings required to implement the recommendations set out in the report;
- The Executive Summary will be sent to Full Council in February to note at this time; and

- A meeting of members and relevant members of staff will be arranged to discuss the formation of a Communications Strategy.

## 6. SAFEGUARDING POLICY

**To review the Safeguarding Policy.**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the revised Safeguarding Policy is adopted.

## 7. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE POLICY

**To consider an Artificial Intelligence Use Policy for the Council to adopt.**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Responsible and Safe Use of AI policy is adopted.

## 8. MEMBERS IT AND DATA PROTECTION POLICY

**To consider a Members IT and Data Protection Policy.**

Subject to a minor amendment, to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Members IT and Data Protection Policy is adopted. A training session will be provided for members on the policy at 6pm prior to Full Council in February 2026.

## 9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

**To note the date of the next meeting of the Council Matters Committee – Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at 6.30pm in the Guildhall.**

Noted.

*The Committee **RESOLVED** to exclude the press and public “by reason of the confidential nature of the business” to be discussed and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. (CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council)*

## 10. BANK STATEMENTS AND RECONCILIATIONS (Standing Item)

**To consider the bank statements and reconciliations for December (financial).**

These were reviewed and **AGREED** unanimously.

## 11. ELIZABETHAN HOUSE SURVEY [TOTNES MUSEUM]

**To consider a survey of the Elizabethan House (commercial).**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Clerk proceeds as outlined, engaging with the Museum Trust to plan stage one works. It was noted that detailed financial implications will come back through this Committee in due course.

## 12. INVOICE FOR TOWN COUNCIL LANTERN

**To consider an invoice received for work on Totnes Town Council’s lantern, Pegasus, prior to the Lantern Procession in December 2026 (financial).**

Cllr Bennett declared a personal interest and abstained from the vote. The retrospective invoice for works was considered. It was **AGREED** by majority that the invoice should not be paid given it is outside of Financial Regulations and would be Ultra Vires. However, an email of thanks, outlining the return of the hardware and offering the gifting of the lantern sculpture, and a personal gift would be given with no use of public funds.

## 13. STAFF ATTENDANCE

**To note sickness and overtime balances (staffing).**

Noted.

**14. STAFFING UPDATE**

**For any general or urgent updates that required confidential sharing with Councillors (staffing).**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that an adjustment be made to the use of paid staff for the administration of Full Council meetings, from April 2026 onwards.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Catherine Marlton

Town Clerk

January 2026



## DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

### MONDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026 IN THE GUILDHALL

Present: Councillors L Auletta (Chair), T Bennett, S Collinson (from 1835hrs), T Cooper, J Cummings, J Hodgson (from 1835hrs) and L Smallridge.

Apologies: None.

Not Present: Cllr Trant.

In Attendance: Cllr Beavis and S Halliday (Governance and Projects Manager).

#### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**To receive apologies and to confirm that any absence has the approval of the Council.**

Cllr Auletta read out a statement about how the meeting would be conducted and recorded.

There were no apologies received.

The Committee adjourned for the following item:

#### PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

The Committee reconvened.

#### 2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**To approve the minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and update on any matters arising.**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

#### 3. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

**To make recommendations on the following planning applications:**

*Note: Cllr Hodgson observes and does not vote on any applications which would potentially be discussed at a Development Management Committee meeting at South Hams District Council (SHDC).*

3a. 1926/25/FUL - READVERTISEMENT (Revised proposal & revised plans) Proposed extension to petrol filling station sales building, installation of jet wash facilities & erection of bin store. Morrisons Service Station, Station Road, Totnes, TQ9 5JR.

Comment – the latest plans submitted are contradictory preventing comment (the visibility splays plan shows customer parking in the location of the existing bin store and storage container, but the more recent drainage strategy does not show these parking spaces and has the storage area retained).

However, the Totnes Town Council Planning Committee comments made in August and September 2025 still stand. The Committee remains concerned about:

- the lack of a clearly marked safe pedestrian route through the site, and
- the ongoing problem with slate chippings near the existing bin store that frequently spilling onto the footway which creates a hazard to those with accessibility issues.

The Committee **AGREED** to send this comment to the town's District Councillors to request them to call in this application given the importance of this site in the town.

3b. 3354/25/FUL – Proposed new access and siting of storage containers for Class B8 use. Land at Sx 806 609, Totnes Industrial Estate, Wills Road, Totnes.

Support. Any lighting on the site should be in agreement with the planning officer and have no effect on the wildlife corridor.

3c. 3718/25/ADV – Advertisement consent for 5 x non-illuminated sponsorship signs: 1000mm x 550mm. Street Record (A381 Station Road/Coronation Road/Morrisons Roundabout, Babbage Road, Totnes.

Object. Objection on the grounds of safety. This is a busy and complex roundabout, and these additions will decrease visibility through the roundabout and cause a distraction. In addition, such advertising is detrimental to the public realm and is unsuitable in an historic town.

3d. 0039/26/LBC – Listed Building Consent for internal “like-for-like” repairs and general maintenance to ground floor commercial unit. New signage (part retrospective). 73 Fore Street, Totnes, TQ9 5NJ.

Object. There is insufficient information provided in the application and on the plans showing the proposed extraction system for a commercial kitchen, for example:

- no details on entry and exit points from the building,
- no details on noise attenuation measures, vibration and air pollution which is a concern given the potential impacts on neighbouring residents.

It is also unclear if the proposed bin store in the courtyard is under cover or in the open, or separated from access to neighbouring properties.

The views of Environmental Health on the waste storage and kitchen extractor would be welcome.

3e. 3767/25/FUL - Proposed replacement of existing timber framed windows and entrance doors with white UPVC. Home Meadow, Totnes, TQ9 5XY.

Object. The Committee objects to the proposed use of white frames and UPVC windows. It would request that a dark colour is used with the same sight lines as the existing windows, given that this building is visible from various footpaths.

3f. 0051/26/ARC – Application for approval of details reserved by condition 3 (Glazing Panel) of planning consent 3101/25/LBC. 31 – 33 Fore Street, Totnes, TQ9 5HH.

Support.

#### **4. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL COMMUNITY PROTOCOL**

**To consider the recently approved Devon County Council ‘Community Protocol’ and make any recommendation to Full Council to be passed to the County Councillor.**

The Committee discussed the Devon County Council (DCC) Community Protocol and have concerns about one document covering two very different schemes - volunteer wardens and traffic measures. It was **AGREED** that the Officer will circulate the draft comments by email for Committee agreement,

which will then be shared with the Traffic and Transport Forum for their views. Subject to any additions by the Traffic and Transport Forum, to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the following points are passed to the County Councillor:

- Document content – lacking in detail, with embedded links not working or reference to documents that cannot be found on the DCC website.
- Training – inadequate training is currently offered for the voluntary warden roles.
- Insurance – concerns about the personal liability of volunteer wardens. For example, snow wardens who may spread grit - if an accident/injury occurs, are they personally liable?
- Emergency Planning – little cross-reference to the warden roles in emergency planning situations.
- No mention of vehicle activated sign installation, which would be of use to many parishes and towns.
- Concern that if a town/parish were to sign up to this document for warden scheme, does this then mean that they accept liability to self-fund road schemes and traffic calming? The introduction of a box check system to say which elements of the protocol a town/parish wishes to sign up to (rather than an assumption that it is all elements) would be beneficial and clearer.
- More support is required from Highways Neighbourhood Officers. The most reliable way for towns and parishes to undertake road safety/traffic measures would be to commission DCC on a payment basis to draw up feasible schemes and costs for programmes/proposals. Using external contractors is no guarantee that they will be acceptable to DCC Highways and this approach could help alleviate this problem.

## **5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**To note the date of the next meeting of the Planning Committee – Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at 6.30pm in the Guildhall.**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 7.53pm.

Sara Halliday  
Governance and Projects Manager  
January 2026



## DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE TOWN MATTERS COMMITTEE

### MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026 IN THE GUILDHALL

Present: Councillors N Roberts (Chair), L Auletta, C Beavis, J Chinnock (from 1834), S Collinson (from 1834), J Cummings (from 1840), D Peters, A Presswell, E Price and T Robshaw (from 1840).

Apologies: None.

In Attendance: Members of the public, and S Halliday (Governance and Projects Manager).

#### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**To receive apologies and to confirm that any absence has the approval of the Council.**

Cllr Roberts read out a statement about how the meeting would be conducted and recorded.

The apologies were accepted.

*The Committee adjourned for the following item:*

#### PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A member of the public (who is a market trader) raised concerns about: the closure of the toilets on the Civic Square for refurbishment, the costs and the length of time that this will take; and the lack of advertising for markets, particularly the Sunday market.

A second member of the public (also a market trader) spoke about the surface of the Civic Square and concerns about the repairs that have been made and the trip hazards that remain. The Committee agreed with the concerns raised about the Civic Square surface which have been raised with the district council, but that the Civic Square surface, toilets and markets are all matters that come under the control of South Hams District Council (SHDC), not the Town Council.

Councillor Presswell spoke about bike racks and the hope to find new locations for the CAT bikes in Bridgetown. It was confirmed that the Town Council has suggested a location for an additional bike rack in Totnes (Civic Square) but that this has been rejected by SHDC.

*The Committee reconvened.*

#### 2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**To approve the minutes of 24<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and update on any matters arising.**

The minutes were **AGREED** unanimously as an accurate record of proceedings. Matters arising:

Item 3a. Notice Board. It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that the larger notice board is installed under the Civic Hall on the wall and that the smaller notice board currently on the Civic Hall fire door is relocated to the outer red door to the Council Offices.

Item 3c. Railway Bridge. It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that Town Council officer time is allocated to obtain quotes for painting the railway bridge in two colours (framework in one colour, panels another) which will need to include a pavement/footway closure application.

Item 4. William Wills Project. It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that the Council:

- Supports the proposed update to the Burke and Wills display space, led by the Heritage Trust;
- Cllr Bennett works closely with the Heritage Trust on how the display will look and its content, updating Council to ensure that it is in keeping with the building; and
- Cllr Bennett works with the Heritage Trust to liaise with the First Nation people in Australia.

Item 5. Vire Committee President. It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that the Mayor becomes the ex officio President of the Vire Twinning Association.

### **3. STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP AND WORKING GROUP**

**To consider any recommendations and note the minutes from the following:**

#### **a. Economy Working Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025.**

Noted. No recommendations to consider. Cllrs Roberts gave a quick update on the Community Economic Plan projects which will be considered by the Working Groups and be discussed at a meeting open to all Councillors to attend.

#### **b. Environment and Public Realm Working Group, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026.**

Noted. To make the following recommendations from the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026 meeting:

#### **Item 3a - SHDC Asset Refurbishment Plan (car parks, bins and benches) (PRD2.F & PRD2.Q).**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Town Council:

- Bins - writes to South Hams District Council (SHDC) to request the return of the XL heritage style bins purchased by Totnes Town Council when the new bins are installed; and registers its concern about the proposal to remove four of the existing bins on Vire Island as it will increase littering, increasing river pollution and increase the litter picking burden for the SHDC street cleansing operative, and request the retention of two bins at least.
- Benches – writes to SHDC to request that all the replacement benches are in the same style to have conformity – Highland rather than Tivoli design - with the Town Council content to pay the difference in purchase cost; and that the Town Council funds the bench proposed for removal on Vire Island and a new bench to be installed in Heath Gardens along the footway/hedge.
- Benches – to request permission from Devon Highways to install two new benches on The Plains near the taxi rank and on Fore Street (see images below).



Item 3b - **Borough Park Vision (PRD2.I)**. To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Council's priority for SHDC and S106 investment in Borough Park is resurfacing and enhancement of the multi-use games area (MUGA); and that other areas to be considered for investment are: the Station Road entrances to the park; and solar lighting for the skate park and MUGA.

Item 3c - **Vire Island (PRD2.P)**. To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it makes a request to South Hams District Council to begin a programme of laurel removal on Vire Island and planting of hazel in its place.

Item 6 – **Community Economic Plan Projects, Water Quality**. It was **AGREED** to invite the Friends of the Dart to give a report to the Committee on an annual basis. The Officer will email Friends of the Dart to determine the optimum time for such a report.

#### **4. DEVON LIBRARIES CONSULTATION**

To consider the Devon County Council consultation on 'Shaping the Future of Devon's Library Service' and make a recommendation to Full Council on signing a joint letter with other towns or making a separate response (deadlines 22nd February 2026).

Committee members made a number of comments about the proposals set out in the consultation around possible operating practices, reduction in opening hours in Totnes and neighbouring towns, Totnes' role as a hub library, and the role of the library being broader than the basic services provided.

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it submits its own letter to Devon County Council as part of the consultation (not as a signatory to the Dartmouth Town Council letter). It was **AGREED** that the Officer will draft a letter and email to Committee members for their comments by midday Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026 so that this can be circulated to members before Full Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026.

#### **5. SHDC CLIMATE NATIONAL EMERGENCY BRIEFING MOTION**

To consider the South Hams District Council Climate National Emergency Briefing motion and make any recommendation to Full Council.

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the points in the SHDC motion are adopted by Totnes Town Council; and that the Town Council puts out its own communications on support for the Climate National Emergency Briefing.

1. It supports the work and message of the National Emergency Briefing and calls on the government, politicians, businesses and organisations to heed its call for effective and urgent action.
2. It recognises and thanks Nick and Simon Oldridge for all the hard work they are putting into raising awareness of the real and imminent threats of climate change.
3. It will ask that all members of the UK100 network of Local Authorities consider passing similar motions that support the National Emergency Briefing initiative.

4. It reaffirms the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency it declared in 2020 and recognises that with the passage of 5 years the climate crisis has deepened and it is more important than ever to be guided by that declaration in everything the Council does.

**6. EMERGENCY PLAN UPDATE**

**To consider an update on the timing for review of the Totnes Emergency Plan.**

It was **AGREED** to defer the Emergency Plan review until other meetings have concluded, and to consider setting up a Task and Finish Group to carry out the task.

**7. COMMUNITY AWARDS TIMELINE**

**To note the timeline for the 2026 Community Awards.**

Noted.

**8. OPEN SPACES, SPORTS, RECREATION AND WELLBEING PLAN UPDATE**

**To update on any general matters linked to the Open Spaces, Sport Recreation and Wellbeing Plan including an update on the greenways map (standing item).**

Cllr Auletta presented the updated greenways map and the Committee thanked her for her work.

**9. LINK COUNCILLOR REPORTS**

**To consider link councillor reports from Committee members.**

No points were raised.

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**To note the date of the next meeting of the Town Matters Committee – Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026 at 6.30pm.**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

Sara Halliday  
Governance and Projects Manager  
January 2026

## ITEM 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEE

### **5a. Full Council 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

No recommendations.

### **5b. Council Matters 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

Item 5. Communications Audit - It was **AGREED** that: the Executive Summary will be sent to Full Council in February to note at this time. [See document below, page 24.]

Item 6. Safeguarding Policy - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the revised Safeguarding Policy is adopted.

Item 7. Artificial Intelligence Use Policy - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Responsible and Safe Use of AI policy is adopted. [See document below, page 29.]

Item 8. Members IT and Data Protection Policy - Subject to a minor amendment, to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Members IT and Data Protection Policy is adopted. A training session will be provided for members on the policy at 6pm prior to Full Council in February 2026. [See document below, page 33.]

### **5c. Planning Committee 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

Item 4. Devon County Council Community Protocol - Subject to any additions by the Traffic and Transport Forum, to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the following points are passed to the County Councillor:

- Document content – lacking in detail, with embedded links not working or reference to documents that cannot be found on the DCC website.
- Training – inadequate training is currently offered for the voluntary warden roles.
- Insurance – concerns about the personal liability of volunteer wardens. For example, snow wardens who may spread grit - if an accident/injury occurs, are they personally liable?
- Emergency Planning – little cross-reference to the warden roles in emergency planning situations.
- No mention of vehicle activated sign installation, which would be of use to many parishes and towns.
- Concern that if a town/parish were to sign up to this document for warden scheme, does this then mean that they accept liability to self-fund road schemes and traffic calming? The introduction of a box check system to say which elements of the protocol a town/parish wishes to sign up to (rather than an assumption that it is all elements) would be beneficial and clearer.
- More support is required from Highways Neighbourhood Officers. The most reliable way for towns and parishes to undertake road safety/traffic measures would be to commission DCC on a payment basis to draw up feasible schemes and costs for programmes/proposals. Using external contractors is no guarantee that they will be acceptable to DCC Highways and this approach could help alleviate this problem.

### **5d. Town Matters Committee 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

Item 3b. Environment and Public Realm Working Group.

i. SHDC Asset Refurbishment Plan - bins and benches - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Town Council:

- Bins - writes to South Hams District Council (SHDC) to request the return of the XL heritage style bins purchased by Totnes Town Council when the new bins are installed; and registers its concern about the proposal to remove four of the existing bins on Vire Island as it will increase littering, increasing river pollution and increase the litter picking burden for the SHDC street cleansing operative, and request the retention of two bins at least.
- Benches – writes to SHDC to request that all the replacement benches are in the same style to have conformity – Highland rather than Tivoli design - with the Town Council content to pay the difference in purchase cost; and that the Town Council funds the bench proposed for removal on Vire Island and a new bench to be installed in Heath Gardens along the footway/hedge.
- Benches – to request permission from Devon Highways to install two new benches on The Plains near the taxi rank and on Fore Street [see minutes for images of the proposed locations].

ii. Borough Park Vision - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the Council’s priority for SHDC and S106 investment in Borough Park is resurfacing and enhancement of the multi-use games area (MUGA); and that other areas to be considered for investment are: the Station Road entrances to the park; and solar lighting for the skate park and MUGA.

iii. Vire Island - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it makes a request to South Hams District Council to begin a programme of laurel removal on Vire Island and planting of hazel in its place.

Item 4. Devon Libraries Consultation. To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it submits its own letter to Devon County Council as part of the consultation (not as a signatory to the Dartmouth Town Council letter). It was **AGREED** that the Officer will draft a letter and email to Committee to members for their comments by midday Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026 so that this can be circulated to members before Full Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026.

Item 5. South Hams District Council Climate National Emergency Briefing Motion - To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the points in the SHDC motion are adopted by Totnes Town Council; and that the Town Council puts out its own communications on support for the Climate National Emergency Briefing.

1. It supports the work and message of the National Emergency Briefing and calls on the government, politicians, businesses and organisations to heed its call for effective and urgent action.
2. It recognises and thanks Nick and Simon Oldridge for all the hard work they are putting into raising awareness of the real and imminent threats of climate change.
3. It will ask that all members of the UK100 network of Local Authorities consider passing similar motions that support the National Emergency Briefing initiative.
4. It reaffirms the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency it declared in 2020 and recognises that with the passage of 5 years the climate crisis has deepened and it is more important than ever to be guided by that declaration in everything the Council does.

### Introduction and context

Totnes Town Council commissioned a consultant to review its marketing, communications, business support, and tourism functions.

The review was designed to evaluate effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability, while aligning with civic leadership, community trust, and economic resilience.

The report finds that visitor spend contributes an estimated £33 million (excluding accommodation) to the local Totnes economy annually, sustaining independent shops, markets and cultural venues.

The Visit Totnes brand is an important asset in this ecosystem, ensuring the town remains visible, competitive, and attractive in a crowded tourism marketplace.

The brand is managed by a small part-time communications team, who are primarily employed to undertake civic communications and community engagement.

The council does not have any statutory duties towards Visit Totnes. But it does for civic communications and community engagement and it is this emphasis on Visit Totnes that means the council is neither engaging nor informing its community as well as some other similar councils.

If the recommendations in this report are implemented in full the council should expect:

- ✓ Rebalanced focus towards town council (civic) communications while continuing valuable town council support for Visit Totnes
- ✓ More consistent and planned town council civic communications including greater media and social media presence with better post-meeting information about decisions made and impact in communities.
- ✓ Clear, evidence-based communication strategy embedded.
- ✓ Communications manager role established and delivering.
- ✓ Visit Totnes brand preserved in-house, with time-consuming non-statutory duties outsourced
- ✓ Modernised digital platforms with measurable conversion tracking.
- ✓ Stronger visibility, persuasion, and accountability across council communications
- ✓ Demonstrable value to advertisers and residents, reinforcing Totnes' authenticity and reputation.

### Key Findings

#### Communications Function

- **Strengths:** Strong public information delivery, positive organisational culture, and high confidence in the day-to-day running of the council.
- **Weaknesses:** No strategy. Councillor perceptions/understanding of capability; limited persuasion and negotiation capacity; absence of a defined communications manager role; limited community engagement.

#### Tourism and Visit Totnes

- **Key economic driver.** Tourism contributes an estimated £33 million annually to Totnes, sustaining hundreds of jobs and underpinning the resilience of independent businesses.

- **Trusted brand.** Visit Totnes is a strong, distinctive brand rooted in local identity, but increasingly dependent on council subsidy.
- **Digital takeover.** Visitor information point footfall has declined while digital engagement has surged (330,000 website hits annually).
- **Non-statutory Visit Totnes brand prioritised over statutory civic communications and community engagement.** Much of the Visit Totnes work is resource-intensive and it could be more effectively managed by a trusted third-party supplier, ensuring increased breadth, reduced council workload and potentially a bigger income stream. It would also free up capacity for civic communications.

### **Organisational culture, models and civic responsibilities**

- Current communications model is predominantly public information, consistent with public sector norms, but lacks capacity for two-way symmetrical communication (negotiation, persuasion).
- Positive internal culture provides fertile ground for communications excellence.
- Greater focus on town council civic communications needed (in line with civic responsibilities) with no loss of focus on Visit Totnes

### **Analysis**

Totnes Town Council has a strong foundation of cultural goodwill and delivery skills, but faces capacity and consistency challenges.

The research found that Totnes Town Council's communications align with the public information model (the model favoured by Local Authorities). But lack systematic capacity for two-way symmetrical communication (negotiation, persuasion) and this is hampering its ability to communicate effectively.

Communications staff are skilled in delivery but under-resourced for strategic leadership – and reliance on the town clerk for communications leadership is unsustainable given other responsibilities.

The council lacks a communication strategy – both for its civic duties and for Visit Totnes and this is likely undermining public support for the council's work in and for the community.

This is compounded by councillors' concerns that not enough communication effort is given to communications and engagement on civic matters; local democracy and "bread and butter" issues that are the mainstay of the council's business. This is in stark contrast to the effort that is seen to be put into Visit Totnes.

The qualitative evidence shows a confident, capable communications function that is constrained by capacity and a lack of a single civic narrative and agreed priorities. Councillors consistently report that civic communications are crowded out by Visit Totnes activity; councillors say residents report poor narrative around council priorities, precept value and "you said / we did" accountability.

It is the researcher's view that they are right in this and that day-to-day communications activity leans more towards marketing the town.

The council *is* meeting its statutory duties to engage its communities and keep them informed – but it is at the expense of community engagement and involvement.

Some, more advanced community engagement activities used to take place under previous communications managers but this has tailed off in recent times. Clear improvements need to be made.

Part of the issue is leadership.

Marketing *can* (and arguably should be) be a function of a town council but it should only be so if councillors set this direction. Councillors don't appear to have explicitly set this direction for the team or if they have, they no longer support this view. At the very least there is a lack of consensus.

Much more effort needs to go into civic communications to systematise and embed good communication practices. These should be informed by the council's strategy and underpinned by the values and priorities of councillors.

Media relationships have weakened in recent months by inconsistent engagement; both of the town's main media outlets want to improve this, presenting an open opportunity for increased civic engagement.

The council's digital channels (Visit Totnes website, social media) need modernising. The relatively low level of listings on the Visit Totnes website (when compared to Totnes Pulse for example) could be improved through links with other listings sites - bringing opportunities to increase website traffic and bring in additional income.

Visit Totnes is a recognisable and well-used asset.

Tourism is robust, with overnight stays driving majority of spend; individuality of shops and heritage assets remain core draws.

Estimated income from visitors and tourism is in the region of £33 million annually (excluding accommodation) and Totnes Town Council should be congratulated for its support of local business in encouraging this through investment in the Visit Totnes brand.

Costs to the council to maintain and promote the brand have risen in recent years but the still relatively modest investment should be seen in the context of the potential benefit to the local economy it brings. Evidence suggests that Visit Totnes is contributing to people's experience – and encouraging people from both inside and outside the town to spend.

Any increase in the responsibilities for Totnes Town Council as a result of the local government reorganisation will mean additional communications activities – and given this it may be unwise to reduce communications capacity when more may well be needed in future.

The core question from this study is how to deliver an upgraded communications and tourism service without unduly increasing costs.

The answer to this question is to outsource some of the time-consuming non-statutory Visit Totnes work and bring the increase the role of the economic support officer in business-related communications. This will create a ring-fenced and enhanced Visit Totnes role while at the same time, freeing up the capacity of the communications officer to concentrate entirely on civic communications.

Work should also begin on a communications strategy aligning communications team objectives with those of the council.

The recommendations below reflect this insight.

#### **4. Recommendations**

##### **Civic communications and Visit Totnes marketing**

Clearly any decisions will be subject to councillor debate and public scrutiny. Such a decision should be based on the merits and demerits of each option, taking account of the strategic considerations outlined in the report.

However, it is the researcher's recommendation, taking account of the various options, the arguments for and against – and the findings of this report, that the following represents the best option\*:

**Main recommendation 1: Maintain Visit Totnes management inhouse but outsource time intensive tasks to free up capacity to increase focus and resource on civic communications (see suggested activities in main report).** This would include outsourcing the design, production and circulation of the Totnes Guide, outsourcing some content design and replacing the What's On listings with signposting to other sites to remove local duplication/competition.

**Main recommendation 2: Move Visit Totnes management to the economic support officer to create additional capacity for civic communications.** Consider small investment to increase economic support officer availability and support for Visit Totnes and broader business engagement.

In addition, the council should ensure clear contract management and maintain strategic oversight to preserve local authenticity and responsiveness.

#### **Further recommendations**

##### **Recommendations from the councillor and officer section**

- 1 Develop a council communication strategy** – this should be based on quantitative and qualitative evidence from the stakeholders the council engages with a particular focus on meeting the communication needs of communities who are currently under-represented.
- 2 (Re-) establish a communications manager role** – ensuring appropriate knowledge, skills and experience in public sector/publication administration duties as well as experience in managing communication-related contracts/marketing.
- 3 Build two-way/persuasion capability** — this can be done inhouse using the expertise of an experienced communications manager or specialist. If this is not possible then further training of existing should be considered.
- 4 Embed excellence** - Shift from reactive information provision to proactive negotiation and persuasion, ensuring the council can shape debate and defend reputation.
- 5 Make the communications/marketing team more visible internally** — regular showcases to council, a short skills matrix for councillors, and simple role briefs so capabilities and accountabilities are understood.
- 6 Redesign channels and measurement** — In line with a new strategy, refresh the town council website, develop a channel mix for hard-to-reach groups, and implement outcome metrics.

### **Recommendations from the digital engagement section**

- 7 Website(s) review and upgrade measurement** - Review the town council and Visit Totnes websites to modernise their look and feel and improve engagement with community.

### **Recommendations from the tourism and Visit Totnes section**

- 8 Maintain Visit Totnes management inhouse, but rebalance resources** - Keep the brand under council management to preserve local authenticity and responsiveness (see main recommendation 1 and 2 above)
- 9 Demonstrate value of Visit Totnes to advertisers** - by showing conversion rates and improving business liaison.
- 10 Exploit the Visit Totnes brand** - as part of a wider communication strategy - consider Visit Totnes merchandise (window stickers, large banners) for advertisers and events (festivals, Christmas lights switch on, gigs) to maximise identity and offline recommendation networks (guides, coach drivers and local press)

Nick Pearson, Pearson & Pearson (communications) Ltd 18/12/25



# DRAFT Responsible and Safe Use of AI Policy

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TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL

FOR CONSIDERATION – Council Matters Jan 26

FOR REVIEW – March/April 26

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## 1. Purpose

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools now play an increasing role in helping local authorities work more efficiently, support decision-making, and improve the quality of written information. When used properly, AI is a helpful assistant as it supports the work of officers and members, but it does not replace human judgement.

This policy sets out how Totnes Town Council will use AI safely, lawfully, and responsibly, ensuring that:

- Sensitive or confidential data is protected
- AI outputs are used with care and verification
- Only secure, approved systems are used
- Officers and members understand both the benefits and the risks

This policy applies to **all staff, officers, contractors, volunteers, and Councillors** when carrying out any Council business, whether on Council-owned devices or personal devices.

## 2. Approved AI Systems

The Council currently approves **two AI systems** for internal use:

### Microsoft 365 Copilot

Where a Council licence is provided, Copilot may be used because:

- All data remains within the Council's Microsoft 365 tenant
- It uses the same secure permissions as Outlook, Teams, and SharePoint
- No data is used to train public AI models

- Microsoft meets UK GDPR and public sector security standards (ISO 27001; National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) guidance)

### **Gov Assist (Cloudy IT)**

Currently **used only by the Town Clerk**, this system:

- Operates within UK-based, GDPR-compliant data centres
- Retains all data as the Council's property
- Does not send information to OpenAI's public systems
- Provides an auditable, sealed environment designed for local government

### **AI Note-Taking in Meetings**

The Council uses AI-supported transcription or summarisation tools through paid Zoom and Microsoft Teams accounts.

To maintain confidentiality:

- No confidential Full Council or committee sessions are recorded or summarised using AI.
- Any informal meetings dealing with sensitive matters must use Teams, which meets the same security standard as Copilot.

## **3. Permitted Uses of AI**

AI is a practical tool to save time and improve clarity. Officers and members may use approved AI tools only to:

- Draft reports, letters, agendas, or meeting summaries
- Reformat or improve the tone and readability of written work
- Summarise long reports or transcripts
- Generate ideas, options, or structures for consultations or public engagement
- Clarify technical information in plain English

AI should be treated as a **thinking partner**, not an author or decision-maker.

All outputs must be checked and edited before use by the officer or member.

## **4. Prohibited Uses of AI**

To protect data, reputation, and legal compliance, the following uses are strictly prohibited.

### **4.1 Shadow AI – Absolutely Forbidden**

"Shadow AI" means any AI tool outside the Council's approved systems, including:

- Public ChatGPT
- Google Gemini / Bard
- AI features on personal Microsoft, Google, Apple accounts
- Free online writing, note-taking, translation, or image-generation tools
- Smartphone apps with embedded AI features
- Any AI product not licensed or approved by the Council or its IT providers

**No officer or member may use shadow AI for any Council-related task whatsoever.**

This includes copying or pasting text, uploading documents, or using personal accounts to draft or summarise material.

## 4.2 Handling of Sensitive or Confidential Information

You must **not** enter into AI systems:

- Personal data (names, addresses, HR information, staff matters, salaries, phone numbers, email addresses)
- Legally sensitive or confidential documents (staffing, legal disputes, tenders, disciplinary matters)
- Any unredacted data relating to individuals or commercially confidential material

If in doubt, **do not use AI**.

## 4.3 Prohibition on AI-Generated Images

To protect artistic integrity, avoid copyright risks, and support local creative professionals, the Council will not use AI to generate:

- Photographs
- Branding
- Logos
- Graphics or illustrations

## 5. Safeguards and Required Practices

To ensure safe and responsible AI use:

### **Use only approved tools**

Copilot (with a Council licence), Teams, Zoom AI (as described), and Gov Assist (Clerk only).

### **Redact or anonymise sensitive information**

If a document contains personal or confidential information, remove identifiers before using AI or do not use AI at all.

### **Maintain human oversight**

AI is advisory. Officers and members remain fully responsible for decisions, reports, and published material.

### **Verify all outputs**

Check for accuracy, tone, relevance, and potential bias. AI may make errors or produce outdated or misleading information.

### **Store documents correctly**

Misplaced SharePoint or Teams files can be surfaced by Copilot.

Always save documents in the correct Council folders and report any inappropriate access immediately.

### **Transparency**

Where relevant, note that AI supported the drafting process (internal comment or note).

### **Report concerns**

Raise any uncertainty with the Clerk or Data Protection Officer before proceeding.

## 6. Why This Approach Is Responsible

This policy ensures:

- **Compliance** with UK GDPR
- **Security**, as all information stays within approved, encrypted systems
- **Transparency and accountability** for all AI-generated content
- **Proportionate use**, supporting efficiency without handling sensitive data

- **Support for local creative industry**, by avoiding AI image generation
- **Confident, safe working practices**, reducing risk to the Council, its staff, and the public

AI assists our work, it does not drive it. Human judgement remains at the centre of Council operations.

## 7. Training and Building Confidence

The Council recognises that AI is a developing area. Confidence grows through practice and understanding.

To support this:

- Further training for staff and members will be sought on request.
- Officers and members will be able to ask questions and see practical examples
- Training will emphasise safe use, accuracy, and professional responsibility
- The aim is to empower users — *“You control it; it doesn’t control you.”*

## 8. Future Changes and Review of This Policy

The Council is actively considering:

- Upgrading all staff to Microsoft 365 Copilot licences, operating within a sealed and secure tenant
- Ending the Gov Assist contract, once Copilot is fully adopted
- Strengthening tenant security with Business Premium and Enforcer licences
- A trial of one Copilot licence prior to full rollout before the Gov Assist contract ends

If these changes are approved:

- All staff AI use will move to a single, secure Copilot environment
- Confidential information will remain protected under tenant permissions
- A full revised AI Policy will be brought to members March/April 2026

Until then, this interim policy remains in force in full.

This AI policy will be reviewed every 3–6 months, or sooner if required by legislative or technical change, to reflect the speed of change in this developing technology.



# **DRAFT Members IT and Data Protection Policy**

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TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL

FOR CONSIDERATION FEBRUARY 2026

NEXT REVIEW JULY 2027

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*This policy sets out the responsibilities of all elected and co-opted Councillors of Totnes Town Council in relation to their use of IT systems, handling of personal data, and compliance with data protection legislation.*

*It sits under and supports the Council's Information & Data Protection Policy (2024) and ensures Councillors meet the requirements of UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Council's Internal Audit Assertion 10 obligations.*

## Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors when carrying out their duties, including:

- Use of **Council-provided email addresses and IT systems**
- Handling of **personal data of residents, staff, contractors, or partners**
- Storage, sharing, and deletion of **Council-related information** on personal or Council devices

## Key Principles

### Use of Council Email & Domain

- Councillors must use their Council-owned email address for all Council business.
- Personal email accounts (e.g. Gmail, Hotmail) must not be used for Council work.
- Councillors must not set up auto-forwarding of Council emails to personal accounts.

### Use of Devices

- Where possible, Council-owned devices should be used for Council business.
- If personal devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones) are used, they must:
  - Be password-protected or secured with biometrics
  - Have up-to-date antivirus protection
  - Be locked when unattended
- Councillors must always log out of Council accounts when not in use.

### Handling of Personal Data

- Councillors must treat all personal data received in their role as confidential.
- Personal data must not be downloaded or stored permanently on personal devices.
- If temporary access is required (e.g. opening an email attachment), it must be deleted as soon as no longer required.
- Hard copies of personal data must be stored securely and destroyed via shredding or the Council's confidential waste system.

### Data Sharing

- Personal data must only be shared where it is lawful and necessary for Council business.
- Data must not be shared informally (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, personal social media).
- Any request for information should be referred to the Governance and Projects Manager for advice.

### Data Retention & Deletion

- Councillors must ensure personal data is not kept longer than necessary.
- Emails and documents containing personal data must be deleted when no longer required for Council business.
- On leaving office, Councillors must ensure all Council-related data is handed back to the Clerk and removed from personal devices.

## Security & Breach Reporting

- Any loss, theft, or suspected breach of Council-related data (digital or paper) must be reported to the Governance and Projects Manager or the Town Clerk immediately.
- Councillors must co-operate fully with the Clerk in investigating and addressing breaches.

## Confidential Papers Issued for Meetings

- All confidential (or 'pink') papers issued for meetings are to be collected from the Council Offices by the named Councillor only and Councillors should ensure that they cannot be viewed by members of their wider household.
- At the end of the meeting, these papers should be handed to the Clerk of the meeting for secure disposal. If a member doesn't have the papers with them, they should be returned to the Council Offices for booking in and secure disposal.
- Each paper copy is numbered and recorded to ensure that all copies can be accounted for.

## Training & Compliance

- Councillors must undertake basic GDPR and data protection training at least once per term of office.
- All Councillors must confirm in writing by signing below, that they have read, understood, and will comply with this Policy. [Note: there is a separate 'Confidentiality, Data Protection and IT Usage Policy' that applies to Council officers.]
- The Information Commissioner's Office has a number of useful modules providing guidance on topics such as: data protection principles; security (data protection and cyber); online security and data protection; what is personal information; data sharing. See <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/>

## Enforcement

Failure to comply with this Policy may result in:

- Referral to the **Monitoring Officer** for a potential breach of the Members' Code of Conduct
  - Referral to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** if a serious data protection breach occurs
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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Councillor)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEM 7 – LIST OF MEETING DATES, COMMUNICATIONS POINTS AND LINK COUNCILLOR UPDATES

Month	Full Council, 7pm	Council Matters Committee, 6.30pm	Planning Committee, 6.30pm	Town Matters Committee, 6.30pm
<b>February 2026</b>	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Monday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 16 <sup>th</sup>	None
<b>March 2026</b>	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Monday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 23 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>April 2026</b>	Monday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 20 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 27 <sup>th</sup>	None

**February**

Full Council – 2<sup>nd</sup> February at 6.30pm

Economy Working Group – 4<sup>th</sup> February at 6.00pm

Council Matters Committee – 9<sup>th</sup> February at 6.30pm

Community Working Group – 10<sup>th</sup> February at 6.00pm

Civic Service – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February at 11am (St Mary’s Church)

Planning Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> February at 6.30pm

**March**

Full Council – 2<sup>nd</sup> March at 6.30pm

Council Matters Committee – 9<sup>th</sup> March at 6.30pm

Planning Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> March at 6.30pm

Environment and Public Realm Working Group – 18<sup>th</sup> March at 4.30pm

Town Matters Committee – 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 6.30pm

**April**

Full Council – 13<sup>th</sup> April at 6.30pm

Council Matters Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> April at 6.30pm

Planning Committee – 27<sup>th</sup> April at 6.30pm

**May 2026**

21<sup>st</sup> May – Mayor Making (morning)

28<sup>th</sup> May - Annual Town Meeting, 6pm in the Civic Hall.

**Communications Points – please check the Totnes Town Council ‘News’ page** Further verbal updates to be given by the Clerk at the meeting.