



EAST PRESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES: of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday, 16th February 2026 at East Preston Infant School, Lashmar Road, East Preston at 18:00

PRESENT: Councillors John Gunston, Elizabeth Linton, Glyn Mathias and Steven Wilkinson

ALSO: Clerk to the Council, Simon Cross

ABSENT: Councillors Rick McElroy and Steve Toney

The following abbreviations may appear in these Minutes:

ADC – Arun District Council;

NALC – National Association of Local Councils

WSCC – West Sussex County Council.

The meeting opened at 18:01.

In the absence of the committee chairman, Cllr McElroy, the vice-chairman, Cllr Gunston, assumed the chair.

119/26 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

An apology and reason for absence were accepted from Cllr Toney (holiday).

A retrospective apology and reason for absence was received from Cllr McElroy (work).

120/26 PERSONAL AND/OR PREJUDICIAL/PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None were declared.

121/26 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

122/26 CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS BUDGET

The following report had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Major Events Committee – Christmas Celebrations

Committee is asked to agree to create an earmarked reserve (EMR) for Major Events – Christmas Celebrations and to agree to vire money from both the 2025/26 Community Engagement and Major Events budgets to the new earmarked reserve.

The Major Events Committee is considering how it can refresh the East Preston Christmas Celebrations event, partly to make it more weatherproof than it has been in recent years. The committee's preferred option at the moment is to provide a marquee to cover the Village Hall car-park, effectively providing an increased amount of "indoor" space at that venue. This will come at some cost and that will be considered by the Major Events Committee directly after this meeting.

Having discussed matters with Cllr Linton, Chairman of both the Community Engagement and Major Events Committee, the council's bookkeeper, Adrian, has provided the following for committee's consideration:

The 25/26 budget for major events was set at £3500 income and £11,650 spend, i.e. a net spend of £8,150. The actual figures with no further expected bills or income is £3,325 income and £8,547 spend, so a net spend of £5,222.

Thus compared to budget, ME is underspent by £2,928 (£8,150-£5,222).

The 25/26 budget for community engagement was set at £1000 income and £39,150 spend, i.e. a net spend of £38,150. To date the income is £1,520 and £23,835 spent. With transfer from the Roundstone Crossing Survey EMR 339 of £2,267 a net spend of £20,049. There are bills to pay for warm space meals (est £2,000) and another newsletter (est £1,700), so the forecast is for a net spend of £23,749.

Thus compared to budget, CE is forecast to underspend by £14,401 (£38,150-£23,749).

The underspends on committee budgets are returned to the General Reserves at the end of the year.

The allocation of £3500 for an ear-marked reserve to be used for Major Events in 26/27 is justifiable from these figures.

Simon Cross – **Clerk to the Council**

11th February 2026

Cllr Linton explained the Major Events Committee's intention to organise a different sort of Christmas event this November. This would involve covering the Village Hall car-park with a marquee. Alison had obtained a supplier recommendation from Angmering Parish Council and an initial quote for approximately £3,500 had been received. As this proposal for a different sort of Christmas event had not been foreseen when the Major Events Committee was considering its budgets for the coming financial year, no provision had been made for such expenditure.

Cllr Gunston added he had spent some time with Adrian and whereas the council had set a budget for 2025/26 which would have resulted in a £40,000 overspend, Adrian was predicting an underspend of up to £60,000 which would go back into the council's reserves.

The committee AGREED unanimously to create an East Preston Christmas Celebrations earmarked reserve containing £3,500.

123/26 LEASES WORKING PARTY: EAST PRESTON & KINGSTON BOWLS CLUB

The following report had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Leases Working Party – East Preston & Kingston Bowls Club

Committee is asked to receive an update on the renewal of the lease to East Preston & Kingston Bowls Club and to consider a new proposal from the council's negotiator.

On 5th February, I received the following email from Mark Deacon, the surveyor negotiating on behalf of the council:

Hello Simon

Please see below from Julian Wilkins. In my opinion he is missing the point. The occupier does not matter it is the use as a sporting club from a valuation perspective. We offered –

£500pa for the first five years, £1,150pa for years 6 to 10, £1,500pa for years 11 to 15. Rent reviews in years 5, 10, 15 and so on, with the reviews for years 5 and 10 pre-set. The reviews could be to OMRV or Index Linked if the latter helps. This was on a 25 year FRI lease.

JW is at – 25 years Plus lease £250 pa with RR every 15 years to I assume RPI as a fixed figure. He is also trying to put undue pressure on the Council that if this isn't agreed the Club could fold. I refute that, especially at the rents we have proposed which is in line with other Bowls Clubs.

My advice is not to agree to JW's offer and he provides no evidence to support it.

My thoughts to try and be fair and conclude would be as follows –

Years 1 – 5 - £375 pa excl.

Years 5-10 - £950 pa excl.

Years 11 – 15 - £1,250 pa excl.

Rent review to RPI in years 15, 20.

In year 25 a reversionary lease could be agreed if the tenant is not in breach of its lease obligations extending the lease by another 15 years with a review to RPI after year 5 and 10. This is a Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 renewal and as such that law applies.

I think that is fair and should be our best & final offer.

I await your thoughts.

Thank you

Kind Regards

Mark

Committee is asked to consider the proposal above so I can instruct Mark accordingly. As a reminder, Year 1 began on 1st May 2025, so we are already almost a year closer to the first increase.

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After some discussion, the committee AGREED unanimously not to back down from its offer stated in the second paragraph of Mark's email, i.e. starting at £500pa for the first five years. The Clerk will refer this back to Mark.

124/26 WARREN RECREATION GROUND - MEDIATION

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Warren Recreation Ground – mediation exercise

Committee is asked to consider further financing of the mediation exercise relating to safety issues on the Warren Recreation Ground.

Committee is aware the council initiated a mediation exercise with East Preston Cricket Club and the Warren Recreation Ground Safety Group. At the Full Council meeting on 6th October 2025, council agreed “to allocate up to £2,000 towards the cost of a mediation exercise, on the understanding this cost may go up once mediation has started.” That sum has now been used up.

There appeared to be some breakthrough made at the most recent session and a follow-on session has been booked for later in February, provisional on the council agreeing to some further expenditure on this. Each session is £330 and I would suggest the council puts aside £1,000 to cover a further three sessions; if the progress made in the most recent session continues, I do not think all three sessions would be needed.

At the most recent session, the mediator did remind all participants the costs of mediation exercises are usually split equally between all participants. That statement was not pursued but hopefully the mediator will pursue that conversation before the next session. However, nothing can be guaranteed.

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Cllr Gunston asked the Clerk and Cllrs Linton and Wilkinson, in their role as council representatives in the mediation exercise, whether they felt the additional expenditure was justified. All three agreed some sort of breakthrough appeared to have been achieved at the most recent session.

The Clerk further reported the mediator had sent a further reminder to the lead representatives of the other two parties mediation costs were usually split equally between all parties.

The committee AGREED unanimously to fund up to an additional three two-hour sessions at a total of no more than £1,000 on the understanding the mediator was suggesting financial contribution from the other parties.

125/26 GRANT AID – THREE-YEAR GRANTS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Grant Aid

Committee is asked to consider a suggestion to promote three-year grants.

This is simply a starting point for a conversation we may wish to have in due course.

As it happens, February is the time of year, the council releases its Grant Aid application form for the coming financial year. During the coming year we may want to have a look at the current form and see whether it needs to be updated.

February also happened to be the month the council received presentation from Vince Mewett, representing Home-Start Arun, Worthing and Adur. In this presentation, he mentioned his organisation receives some grants which guarantee a sum of money for three consecutive years. This helps with the organisations budgeting and suchlike. Probably too late for the coming financial year, but is this something we would like to think about for the future.

We know the organisations to which we make a grant most years. To consider those only once every three years would allow us to spend a bit more time on the ad-hoc and first-time applications, where we may have more questions.

I have asked my counterparts at Angmering, Littlehampton and Rustington whether their councils do anything along these lines. Littlehampton Laura has replied, “We have just

given an award of £500 per year to the Lions who used to apply for our annual grant aid, and they said the same thing, having that amount guaranteed for 3 years is a better operating model for them.” Angmering Katie replied, “We only give out grant funds on application and on a yearly basis. We do have the same organisations year after year and have never looked at a 3-year model, we may well do now 😊” and Rustington Rosie said, “We don’t do this here at RPC but when at LTC we held several Service Funding Agreements (3 year duration) with some of the larger organisations e.g. Bonfire Society, CAB, Shopmobility, ACT. This meant that a separate budget was created and ring fenced aside to the annual grants pot, which enabled smaller groups to get a greater share of the grants budget if that makes sense rather than [one organisation] hoovering up a vast chunk of the £.”

It’s all just a thought.

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Cllr Linton queried whether this would mean the setting up of an additional budget line that would take some funding from the council’s existing Grant Aid budget line. Cllr Gunston said an earmarked reserve could be created. The Clerk said this was perhaps more like the council’s agreement with South Strand Community Toilets: at the beginning of the last year of the last council term, this committee had agreed the sum it would award the organisation for each of the four years of the current term and that sum would be reviewed at the beginning of the last year of the current council term (16th May 2023, Minute 393/23). South Strand Community Toilets had its own line within the council’s budget.

Cllr Wilkinson said organisations which received a set amount over a period of years would, in real terms, actually receive a lesser sum. The Clerk agreed but said it would still help those organisations to plan a bit better knowing they would receive a certain amount at a certain time in the future.

The committee AGREED unanimously to the concept of awarding three-year grants to certain organisations and to give this further consideration at the committee’s next meeting. The Clerk said the committee could identify likely organisations as it considered their 2026/27 Grant Aid applications.

126/26 EARMARKED RESERVES

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

Earmarked reserves

Committee is asked to review the council’s earmarked reserves.

At this time of year, it is a good idea for the committee to review the council’s earmarked reserves to see if any could be closed, the sums returning to the council’s general reserve, or whether the committee wishes to ask any particular committee to review a particular earmarked reserve.

Here is a report Adrian produced on 2nd February:

320	EMR - Greener Buildings Projec	8,700
321	EMR- Parish Shopfront Improvem	21,105
322	EMR - End of Term Party	2,000
323	EMR- EP Youth Provision	10,000
324	EMR - Defib Fund	3,500
325	EMR - WRG Enhancements	3,974
326	EMR - Traffic Calming Measures	8,992
328	EMR - Public Conveniences - Ma	3,704
329	EMR - CIL Income	10,859
330	EMR - Rem. Outdoor Gym Equip.	1,000
331	EMR - Terrorism(Prot. of Prem)	25,000
332	EMR - Sea Rd Bollards renewal	2,782
333	EMR - Election Expenses 4yr	250
334	EMR - Village Bus Service	5,000
335	EMR - Planters	837
336	EMR - Office Air Con renewal	12,000
337	EMR - Public Toilets Improve	7,000
338	EMR - New Christmas Lighting	4,000
339	EMR - Roundstone Xing Traf Con	2,233
341	EMR - Beach Access	1,000
343	EMR - New Cycle Repair Station	1,183
344	EMR - VG SW corner	37,699

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The committee AGREED the following earmarked reserves could be closed and their remaining sums returned to the general reserve: 334, Village Bus Service; 337, Public Toilets Improvements; and 343, New Cycle Repair Station.

Additionally, Cllr Wilkinson and/or the Clerk would clarify with Dawn the need for: 325, WRG Enhancements; and 328, Public Conveniences – Maintenance.

127/26 118-120 SEA ROAD

Cllr Gunston advised the lead councillors on this project would shortly receive advice from the council’s solicitor on whether there was any scope for negotiation over the purchase price. The money for the purchase was now all in the council’s main bank account. Once the purchase was completed, the council would review its bank accounts to see whether any could be closed.

128/26 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8TH DECEMBER 2025

The draft Minutes had been circulated to all councillors on 22nd December asking for suggested amendments by 5th January. None were suggested.

The committee AGREED unanimously the Minutes could be signed as a true record of the meeting held on 8th December and Cllr Gunston duly signed the Minutes.

129/26 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The committee NOTED the following report, which had been circulated ahead of the meeting:

Updates from previous meetings

Minute 962/25 – Budget 2026/27 – council agreed the budget at its meeting on 5th January (Minute 012/26, Resolution 2064).

Minute 963/25 – Precept 2026/27 – typically, the day after the last committee meeting, ADC advised us of the Council Tax Base for the coming year, 2887, a drop of 31 on the current year. This was explained as being a reduction in the number of second properties owned in the village. Council agreed a precept of £104.15 for a Band D property at its meeting on 5th January (Minute 012/26, Resolution 2065). Accordingly, we have asked ADC to collect £300,681.05 for us. An article has been included in the Winter 2026 Newsletter explaining the need to increase the precept by nearly 6% after five years of no increases. To date, only one member of the public has expressed any objections. He said he would attend the February Full Council meeting in order to complain, but did not attend.

Minute 965/25 – Correspondence – East Preston Men in Sheds – I let Christmas and the new year pass and then I contacted the authors of the letter. I invited them to meet me at the office so we could discuss the committee’s response to the letter. They understood and, now knowing the council’s response, agreed they would contact national Men in Sheds. Subsequently, I had a call to say they had made contact and felt confident in the national response.

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Minute 965/25 – Correspondence – East Preston Men in Sheds (EPMiS) – Cllr Linton asked what was happening with the suggestion to invite EPMiS to a future meeting to talk about its achievements and its plans. The Clerk said the committee had said it would invite EPMiS, East Preston in Bloom and East Preston Repair Café – three groups with which the council had been involved right from the start – to attend a meeting for the above purpose.

There was some discussion as to whether the three groups should be invited to attend different meetings or the same meeting, after which the committee AGREED unanimously the three groups should be invited to attend the Full Council meeting on 13th April. Each would have a maximum of 10 minutes – five to present, five to answer any questions.

130/26 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (12TH MAY)

Nothing was raised.

The Meeting closed at 19:04.

Chairman: **Cllr Rick McElroy** Date: **12th May 2026**

(END)