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WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 22 January 2026

Attendance:

Councillors

Westwood (Chairperson)

Eve
Aron
Batho
Becker
Learney
Morris

Murphy
Reach
Tippett-Cooper
Tod
Wise

[Full video recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Scott and Thompson.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Tod declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of Item 7 on the agenda due to his role as a Hampshire County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Audit and Governance Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements made at this meeting.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2025**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 November 2025 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Two members of the public addressed the Forum during public participation. A summary of their comments are set out below:

Fred White

He raised concerns regarding the clearance of fallen leaves, noting that they become dangerous slipping hazards, particularly during periods of frost, and also reported issues in relation to overgrown vegetation. Mr White reported that this was a particular issue in areas such as Sussex Street, College Street and Gladstone Street and he sought the forum's support in encouraging the council to clear these areas of fallen leaves and weed debris on a regular basis.

In response, the challenges of leaf clearance were acknowledged. Leaf clearance schedules were in place for priority roads, covering approximately 176 roads across the district. The difficulty of timing these clearances perfectly due to changing seasonal patterns was noted. Large sweeping crews were managing roads during the sweeping season, with pavements swept year-round in the town centre.

The forum advised that a spreadsheet was available on the website detailing the specific dates when various roads were scheduled for clearance and encouraged use of the "Clean My Street" app for areas not on the priority list. It was recommended that residents contact their local ward councillor with a reference number if the council was unresponsive to an initial report.

Ian Tait

- He expressed that while many councils across the country have ceased providing public lavatories, he considered this a retrograde step and one that should not be considered for Winchester, but emphasised that if the council does provide facilities, they must be maintained to a high standard.
- Reference was made to the baby changing facilities in Market Lane which had been locked for several years due to anti-social behaviour, drug paraphernalia, and safety concerns for both parents and staff.
- He suggested that existing external CCTV and facial recognition technology should be used to monitor and identify the small number of individuals responsible for vandalising the Market Lane facilities.
- He raised concern that the three new lavatories built in River Park have been out of action due to vandalism for longer than they have been available.
- In conclusion, he expressed concern that the Middle Brook Street lavatories in the base of the Brooks Centre have been locked for approximately ten years due to anti-social behaviour, despite previous officer assurances that they would be brought back into use and stated that if the council aimed to be inclusive, it must find a way to bring these facilities back into use for the wider community.

In response, it was noted that significant investment had recently been made into Market Lane, Abbey Gardens, and the Chesil public car park within the city centre, to ensure these toilet facilities were in excellent condition. The long-standing issues with anti-social behaviour at the Market Lane baby changing facility were acknowledged which was difficult to secure due to being a large, lockable room with no permanent staffing, lacking the security of a radar key. The forum confirmed that the baby changing table had now been moved into the ladies' toilet in Market Lane, with no suitable space for a similar facility in the men's toilet.

The upcoming refurbishment of the toilets in the Brooks Centre was announced, which would include baby changing facilities and the first "Changing Places" toilet in that part of the city. The Chair agreed to investigate the specific background regarding the problems at River Park and ask the relevant questions after the meeting.

6. **UPDATE ON POLICING IN WINCHESTER (VERBAL UPDATE)**

The Chairperson welcomed Chief Inspector Korine Bishop of Hampshire Constabulary to the meeting who provided a verbal update on the latest position regarding policing in the Winchester town area, as summarised below:

It was reported that the Police Crime Commissioner had permitted Hampshire Constabulary to increase as a force from 99 to 114 'local bobbies' during the current financial year to increase visibility in rural communities. Winchester, Hart, East Hants, New Forest, Basingstoke and the Isle Wight Districts were highlighted as locations that would see investment. Winchester district had received an increase of three rural local police officers which had been placed in Alresford and Bishops Waltham. It was noted that Bishops Waltham Police Station would be reopening in March with a newly renovated front office.

Chief Inspector Bishop provided detail surrounding recent crime statistics reported since April 2025 and formal action taken in respect of current district priorities, such as anti-social behaviour and shoplifting in the town centre outlining the continued work with the community safety partnership and the BID rangers to patrol the high street, crime within Winchester prison system, drug supply and usage and the action taken to disrupt and stop drug supply, and robbery and shoplifting.

Several members of the forum had submitted questions for response by Chief Inspector Bishop at the meeting. In addition, the forum proceeded to ask further questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by Chief Inspector Bishop, as summarised below:

1. A question was asked regarding the theft of pedal bikes and electric bikes, specifically concerning prosecution rates. Chief Inspector Bishop stated that 35 pedal bike theft offences were recorded since April, though data for the railway station was held by the British Transport Police. It was noted that no convictions were achieved to date because of identification issues and the poor quality of available CCTV footage. Further clarification was sought regarding the rapid closure of these cases and the expectations for recovering stolen items. In response, it was explained that crimes were triaged for viable lines of inquiry and that local spikes in theft were treated as priorities.
2. Information was requested about antisocial behaviour involving children kicking doors. It was reported that police community support officers and police officers identified a group of children responsible for repeated issues, including egg throwing. The meeting was informed that these individuals would be processed through a community court or requested to sign acceptable behaviour contracts.

3. An enquiry was made about the security of the River Park building. It was confirmed that a partnership plan was established between the police, the council, and the fire service to address break-ins and arson. Measures included extra patrols and the installation of internal motion sensors and cameras to provide immediate notification of intruders.
4. A question was raised regarding a series of parcel thefts reported during the summer months. It was noted that over 100 reports were received in September, leading to a significant spike in theft figures. Although one individual was arrested, they were released without further action due to insufficient evidence for prosecution. It was stated that the police pushed back on the delivery company to address internal accountability and audit trails.
5. Concerns were expressed regarding road traffic collisions and speeding on various roads, including Badger Farm Road and Hyde Street. Chief Inspector Bishop noted that police data showed five incidents on Middle Brook Street and that a review of Badger Farm Road was ongoing. Further clarification was sought on whether speed indicator devices could address vehicle speeds. The response suggested that community-led speed watch schemes provided necessary evidence for police deployments.
6. A question was asked about the types of drugs involved in possession offences and current trends. It was stated that most offences related to cocaine and cannabis. Further clarification was sought on how public reports of drug activity were utilised as intelligence. It was explained that such information helped build a broader picture for investigations, even when immediate updates to the reporter were not possible.
7. An enquiry was made as to whether individuals found inside the River Park building could be prosecuted for a criminal offence. It was noted that prosecution for burglary or damage required specific points of proof and that simple entry might be considered civil trespass.
8. A question was asked regarding drug use hotspots and the safest methods for residents to report activity. It was confirmed that hotspots were monitored through patrols. Reporting methods included 999 for emergencies, 101, online platforms, or anonymous reports via Crimestoppers.
9. Information was sought regarding the police response to vehicles parking on pavements and blocking roads. It was stated that such matters were typically referred back to the council.
10. A question was raised about the appropriate use of 999 versus 101 for reporting concerns. It was advised that 999 was the correct choice when individuals were in danger or when a caller felt concerned for the wellbeing of others.

11. An enquiry was made regarding the rise in cybercrime and smartphone use among school children. It was noted that cybercrime was a growing crime type and that officers worked with schools to educate children on online safety and identifying risks.
12. A question was asked about addressing graffiti and tagging on public property, such as cabinets and bridges. It was suggested that these incidents be reported to the council for removal to prevent the "broken window effect". The response also mentioned that work within schools aimed to educate children on the consequences of crime.

At the conclusion of questions and debate, the Chairperson thanked Chief Inspector Bishop for attending the meeting to provide an informative update on the latest police position for the area.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received, and the comments raised by the committee and the responses provided, as summarised above, be noted.

7. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT BUDGET FOR 2026/27 (TO BE RECOMMENDED TO CABINET) (WTF342)**

Councillor Learney introduced the report as Chairperson of the Town Account Informal Group who reviewed the current financial projections for the period 2025/26 to 2029/30, noting the need to recommend a budget and town charge to Cabinet. Changes to the budget this year included savings from the night bus service, which was now entirely commercial and responsibility for bus shelters had been transferred to Hampshire County Council.

It was proposed that cuts to community grants that had been previously planned would be reversed, keeping them at the current level for 2026/27 onwards and the continued support proposed to those in need, local cultural activities and small community organisations operating within the town was emphasised. In addition, reference was made to the towns share of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding, the proposed use of remaining s106 sport contributions, capital expenditure and reserves.

The forum noted that financial projections reflected a core precept increase of 5% for 2026/27 which, if proposed, would be recommended to Cabinet in February. The town precept charge for council tax continued to remain lower than that of market towns across the district.

In addition, the Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) reported an omission to the recommendations set out in the report, that it was proposed that delegated authority be granted to the Corporate Head of Economy and Community to accept circa £11,000 of grant funding towards the installation of an artificial cricket wicket at the River Park Pavilion. Furthermore, it was noted that resurfacing works of circa £5,000 would be required in 8-10 years and funding would need to be sourced should the wicket continue to be used.

The forum proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by Councillor Learney and the Finance Manager (Strategic Finance).

- (a) A question was raised regarding areas of the town that were under served by buses, notably Teg Down, but it was recognised that the sums needed to close these gaps would require further investigation.
- (b) The exploratory work for the implementation of speed indicator devices was welcomed. A request was raised that given resident demand, and the need to anticipate the budget for installation, that the work be timetabled for the initial stages of the new municipal year. In response, the Strategic Director emphasised that no commitment to timescales could be provided at this stage as resources would need to be scheduled and looked at within officers existing work and service plans. However, the Strategic Director agreed to progress this matter to ensure it was added into the business plan, with the request of the forum that the work take place during 2026/27 noted.
- (c) Members welcomed the investment in the provision of sport facilities in the area. In addition, the forum fully supported the retention of the grants budget and urged any community organisations in the town area to come forward and apply for the grants that are available.

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft budget for 2026/27 and the indicative projections for the strategy period as shown in Appendix 1, be agreed;
2. That an increase to the council tax precept for the town area of 5% for 2026/27 be recommended to cabinet, noting the requirements for the council to keep within overall referendum requirements;
3. That the Corporate Head of Economy and Community be granted delegated authority to approve the grant criteria and allocations, in consultation with the Winchester Town Forum (Grants and Community Empowerment) Informal Group and the Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities;
4. That the £60,000 grant budget for 2026/27 be allocated: £20,000 to Citizens Advice, £20,000 to Play to the Crowd and £20,000 to the Winchester City Community grant scheme, be approved;
5. That a £57,000 capital budget and authority to spend, funded from S106 sport contributions, to be allocated: £7,000 for electronic scoreboards for cricket at KGV, and up to £50,000 for cricket nets at North Walls, be approved;
6. That a one-off revenue budget of £15,000 for a speed indicators feasibility study, be approved; and

7. That the Corporate Head of Economy and Community be granted delegated authority to accept circa £11,000 of grant funding towards the installation of an artificial cricket wicket at the River Park Pavilion. Resurfacing works of circa £5,000 would be required in 8-10 years and funding would need to be sourced should the wicket continue to be used.

8. **INFORMAL GROUPS - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Chairperson announced a proposal to combine two of the existing informal groups, namely Town Accounts Informal Group and the Community Governance Review (CGR) Informal Group, due to a significant overlap of their work, with the town forum budget process making forecasts for the period after a potential new Town Council would be established, and the CGR Informal Group being required to look at possible service and delivery costs.

It was emphasised that at this time, no formal decision had been taken for a town council to be formed and that these suggested changes were preparatory only, should any decision be made in the future. As a result, it was suggested that the new combined Informal Group be named 'Transition to Town Council Informal Group' which would provide a joint approach on finance and operational structure and service areas for the transitional period.

It was noted that the Informal Group would comprise of the existing membership from both Informal Groups. Councillor Batho would lead as Chair, with Councillor Learney retaining leadership for the town account financial activities within the new informal group going forward.

The Forum received individual updates from the Chairpersons of various Town Informal Groups, where available. Each summarised the work that had been carried out by the respective groups over the previous two-month period.

Councillor Batho – CGR Informal Group

Progress updates from the group were as follows:

Councillor Batho made the following announcement:

'On Monday 3 November last year, we launched our stage one consultation, asking residents and organisations whether they would support the creation of a parish council for the Winchester town area, and if so, which area it should cover.

During the 7-week consultation period we held four public engagement events, which saw over 100 people given the opportunity to meet the project team and ask their questions.

The consultation closed on Monday 22 December. We are grateful to everyone who responded. Initial data shows that we received over 1400 responses. The team at Public Perspectives, the independent research organisation who are supporting us with this consultation, are now reviewing and analysing what people have told us.

The consultation results will be published prior to Licensing & Regulatory Committee in March, and subsequent to the necessary approvals, the next stage of public consultation in this community governance review is expected to begin in May 2026.

For the most up to date information on this review, please visit

www.winchester.gov.uk/CGR

It was noted that the Informal Group were in discussion with similar sized towns who have been through the CGR process, who have, or are in the process of forming a new town council.

Councillor Tippet-Cooper – Culture Informal Group

Progress update from the group included:

- a) The Buttercross – restoration works were due to commence at the end of February/early March. Scaffolding would be erected around the Buttercross during the works, with full details available online for the public to access.
- b) Hyde Gate – Historic England and officers were liaising regarding the landscaping scheme report which was progressing. Progress on archaeological reports for the Hyde housing wall were ongoing and was a key stage before the rebuild could take place. A start date for works was expected shortly.

Councillor Batho (on behalf of Cllr Eve) - Climate and Open Space Informal Group

Progress updates from the group as follows:

The forum were reminded that, at its last meeting, they had supported and endorsed a MUGA at St Matthew's Field. Councillor Batho had been asked to explore CIL funding. Councillor Batho reported that it had since been suggested that a split bid to district and town forum CIL funding would be advisable. An application has been submitted to district CIL for £110k (referred to as the north Winchester MUGA) and there was a suggestion that the 'make space for girls' initiative was considered so that a wider audience could be addressed. Advice has been discussed with youth options, and a second CIL application has been submitted to town forum for CIL funds for £40k (youth provision in north Winchester). Recommendations from the town accounts informal group in respect of CIL applications would come forward to the next meeting of the forum on 9 March 2026 for approval. In response, members of the forum indicated their support of a MUGA and the wider youth provision in north Winchester.

Councillor Aron - Grants and Community Empowerment Informal Group

Progress update from the group including:

- a) All charities who may or may not have applied for grants before were encouraged to submit their applications ahead of the 31 March 2026 deadline. Of the 19 grants made so far; only 4 were new charities. Where a charity was applying for a grant, ward members were encouraged to attend the application process to support their charities.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Town Accounts Informal Group and the Community Governance Review Informal Group be combined and renamed 'Transition to Town Council Informal Group', comprising of the existing membership of both informal groups, with Councillor Batho to Chair and Councillor Learney to retain leadership for the town account, budgets and financial activities of the group for the remainder of the 2025/26 municipal year; and
2. That the updates received from the Town Informal Groups as set out above, be noted.

9. **WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26**

It was noted that the Chair would discuss work plan items for consideration at the next meeting of the forum on 9 March 2026 with the Strategic Director in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2025/26 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.10 pm

Chairperson

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