MARKET LAVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of a Finance Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 28th July 2026 at 7.15pm in the Old School, Market Lavington

Present:
Councillors: Fred Davis; Di Fraser; Duncan Poole (Chair); Chloe Stevens.

Officers: Tanya West – Parish Clerk & RFO

Public: No members of the public were in attendance.

This meeting was recorded by the Parish Clerk for administrative purposes only, in accordance with Standing Orders and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014; this recording will be deleted once these minutes are approved. Councillors were reminded of the Council's commitment to the NALC Civility & Respect Pledge.

26/27-094-FINC2807 Attendance and Apologies for Absence
Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Laura Turner-Scott [work commitments]. This was duly noted.

26/27-095-FINC2807 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations to Participate
a) No further interests to those already disclosed to the Monitoring Officer were declared.
b) No dispensation requests had been received.

26/27-096-FINC2807 Adjournment for Public Participation
No members of the public were present, and no questions or comments had been submitted in advance. Therefore the meeting was not adjourned and the Chair moved directly to the next item of business.

26/27-097-FINC2807 Minutes of Council Meetings
The draft minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on the 9th April 2026 had been circulated in advance of the meeting; it was **resolved** that they be accepted as a true and correct record of that meeting and were signed by the Chair accordingly.

26/27-098-FINC2807 Committee Membership and Terms of Reference
The Clerk presented a revised draft of the Finance Committee Terms of Reference, cross-referenced against the proposed new Financial Regulations. Amendments were shown as tracked changes: text highlighted in blue reflected the inclusion of the Staffing Committee (agreed by Council in January 2026 and previously omitted from the document); text highlighted in yellow reflected additional oversight responsibilities arising from the proposed new Financial Regulations, including review of payroll reports and review of the investment strategy and policy. The Chair confirmed that he had reviewed the draft Terms of Reference alongside the proposed Financial Regulations and was satisfied the two documents were consistent. No objections or amendments were raised by the Committee.
Resolved: That the revised Finance Committee Terms of Reference be approved and recommended to Full Council for adoption at the September 2026 meeting.

26/27-099-FINC2807 Finance Committee Related Strategic Documents
a) It was reported that a number of MLPC Strategic Documents apply across all standing committees. It was agreed at the recent HRAF Committee meeting that these would be uploaded to the Council's Teams site in batches of two at a time to allow all councillors the opportunity to review and comment before consideration by the relevant committee.

b) **Draft Financial Regulations (NALC model)** – The Chair explained that the draft had been rebased onto the current NALC model Financial Regulations, which will make future updates from NALC easier to identify and incorporate. The Chair and Clerk had reviewed the full document in detail the previous day, adapting model wording to the Council's own arrangements (for example in relation to petty cash and designation of authorising officers).
The Committee discussed model clause 5.6 (procurement/tendering), which in the NALC template proposes a choice between (a) seeking formal quotations from at least three suppliers, or (b) advertising an open invitation to tender. It was agreed that the Regulations should retain both options, with the appropriate route to be decided on a project-by-project basis by Council at the point a project is approved, according to its scale and nature.
The Committee also noted a proposed change to the payment authorisation process: rather than signatories authorising payments in person against paper invoices, payments will in future be raised electronically by the Clerk on the Council's banking platform, with supporting invoices uploaded to Teams, and signatories authorising payments electronically. It was agreed this would improve transparency and strengthen internal financial controls.
Resolved: That the draft Financial Regulations, incorporating the amendments discussed, be approved and recommended to Full Council for adoption, together with the associated changes to the bank mandate/payment authorisation process.

c) **Investment Strategy and Policy** – The Clerk presented a draft Investment Policy based on the SLCC model template, prepared in response to a recommendation from the Internal Auditor following periods where the Council's bank balances have exceeded £100,000. The Committee agreed that the policy should note that such balances are transient rather than sustained, and should reflect that reserve levels are expected to rise over time as the Council builds reserves for future projects.
Resolved: That the draft Investment Policy (based on the SLCC model, amended to note the transient nature of balances above £100,000) be approved and recommended to Full Council for adoption in September 2026.

26/27-100-FINC2807 Review of Finances and Budget Planning

a) **Budget Monitoring Report 2026/27** – The Clerk presented the Budget Monitoring Report for the year to date. It was noted that the Clerk's salary and associated tax and National Insurance costs had not yet been posted to the accounting system (Alpha), and that this does not affect reported budget performance as the corresponding budget provision remains unspent.

b) **Subscription for AI-assisted administrative software** – The Clerk explained that although the IT budget was 70% spent, certain costs (including software subscriptions such as Teams) are paid annually in advance, accounting for the variance between budgeted and actual spend to date. The Clerk went on to request that this particular budget be increased to accommodate a request for approval to subscribe to an AI-based software package to support minute-taking and administrative time efficiency, noting the free-tier usage limits were regularly being reached. Cllr Stevens confirmed the package had been recommended by the County Officer at WALC as a sensible and productive application of AI for clerking purposes. The annual subscription cost is £150, representing a saving of approximately 17% compared with a monthly subscription.
Resolved: That an annual subscription to the AI software package, at a cost of £150, be approved, to be met from unearmarked general reserves.

c) **Reserves** – The Committee reviewed the updated Reserves report. It was agreed that one earmarked reserve required renaming, which the Clerk agreed to action. Following a recommendation from the Internal Auditor that the Council maintain a contingency equivalent to three months' operational costs, and noting that this sum is currently held within General Reserve without being separately identified, the Committee agreed in principle that a new earmarked reserve be created to make this contingency visible in reporting.

Agreed Actions: That an earmarked reserve be established to represent three months' operational running costs, to be reviewed on a quarterly basis, and that the Clerk incorporate this into the standard monthly Reserves report, along with the balance of the General Reserve.

d) **Future Projects** – The Committee noted that the Highways, Recreation, Amenity & Footpaths (HRAF) Committee had recently reviewed and reprioritised the HRAF related Future Projects list using agreed scoring criteria (including accessibility and value for money). High-priority projects identified were replacement of amenity land steps (near the Community Hall car park); replacement of ageing public-access defibrillators; MLAV16 drainage improvements (subject to LHFIG funding and the outcome of the Drove Lane planning application); and operational play area repairs, treated as a maintenance matter. It was agreed that a financial summary from the HRAF meeting be made available to councillors via Teams, once the HRAF minutes have been finalised.
An update was also given on the Pavilion project; no progress had yet been made, and it was agreed that, after this meeting, a date would be set for a further meeting with the Scouts.

e) **Budget for MLNP2 (Neighbourhood Plan)** – The Committee discussed funding for the Neighbourhood Plan. Approximately £3,000 remains earmarked within the current year's project budget, with a further sum of approximately £1,100 potentially available from General Reserve (in place of an equivalent draw on the Will Legacy fund) should it be required. No formal quotation has yet been received; costs were previously estimated in the region of £10,000–£15,000, and it was noted that existing evidence-gathering work already undertaken with the MLNP2 Steering Group may reduce the cost of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, the largest single cost element. It was agreed that no reallocation of reserves would be made at this stage, pending receipt of firm quotations.

f) **Budget Planning for the 2027/28 Financial Year** – It was agreed that the usual process be followed, whereby each standing committee reviews its own budget requirements and submits recommendations to the Finance Committee for consolidation, ahead of recommendations being brought to the January 2027 Full Council meeting.

26/27-101-FINC2807 Internal & External Audits

The Clerk reported that no response had yet been received from the External Auditor, who has until the end of September 2026 to report. The Clerk had discussed the Internal Audit with the Chair; the current Internal Auditor had confirmed availability to act again for the year ending 31st March 2027 . It was noted that capacity among internal auditors nationally is currently constrained following a wave of retirements.
Resolved: That the current Internal Auditor be reappointed for the financial year ending 31st March 2027, subject to recommendation to Full Council.

The Clerk also reported that Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd (SAAA) had written to advise that the external audit process is moving to an online portal, with an incentive scheme available to early adopters that may result in a reduced audit fee.
Resolved: That the Council opt in to early adoption of the SAAA online external audit portal.

26/27-102-FINC2807 Financial Reporting and Accounting Software

a) The Committee confirmed it was content with the current format of monthly and quarterly financial reports, generated directly from the accounting software to improve efficiency.

b) The Clerk updated the Committee on the ongoing review of alternative accounting software packages. A demonstration of Scribe Accounts has been booked for 10.00am on Thursday 20th August 2026 (online), which the Chair will also attend. Findings, including sample reports and

details of Scribe's integrated online booking/invoicing functionality, will be shared with the Committee following the demonstration.
Rialtas had also been contacted requesting a demonstration of their booking system to link into the current accounting system. A reply was awaiting.

26/27-103-FINC2807 Other Finance Matters

a) A councillor raised concerns, on an informal basis, regarding the financial sustainability of the **Tuesday Club**, a village social group providing companionship and a weekly hot meal, following reports that it may be at risk of closing due to lack of funds and attendees. It was noted that the Club's accounts for the year ended 31st December 2025 showed total income of £6,608 against total expenditure of £9,079. It was noted the Parish Council had recently agreed to award a Community Grant to the Club and the concerns regarding the future of the Club had not been relayed at this time.
The Committee discussed how the Parish Council may be able to assist to secure the Club's future, including the formation of a working group, and/or establishment of a new charitable trust structure, and agreed that sight of the Club's accounts should be sought. It was agreed this is a matter for further work outside the Committee before any funding recommendation is brought forward.
Agreed Actions: That the Clerk make further enquiries of the Tuesday Club (including as to its accounts and any closure date) and that a simple business plan, addressing income, running costs and sustainability, be brought back to a future meeting (targeted for September 2026) prior to any proposal being put to Full Council.

b) The Committee separately noted ongoing issues with the **audio-visual equipment** (projector, screen and microphones) at the Old School. It was agreed that, rather than responding reactively to further faults, a suitably qualified technician be engaged to inspect, service and, if necessary, recommend repair or replacement of the equipment, with costs to be met from existing reserves if required.
Agreed Actions: The Clerk to arrange for a suitably qualified technician to attend to the AV equipment at the Old School as soon as possible.

26/27-104-FINC2807 Adjournment for Public Participation

No members of the public were present and no matters were raised, so the meeting was not adjourned.

26/27-105-FINC2807 Items for Next Agenda

- Budget planning for the 2027/28 financial year
- Update on the review of accounting software, including outcome of the Scribe Accounts demonstration.
- Tuesday Club business plan and funding options.
- Update on Neighbourhood Plan (MLNP2) costs and budget.

26/27-106-FINC2807 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance Committee was confirmed as Tuesday 5th January 2027 at 7.15pm at the Old School, unless another meeting is deemed necessary beforehand.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 8.17pm.

Signed………………………………………………………. Date…………………………………………