MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF OF
FOWLMERE PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE
held in the Old Chapel, Chapel Lane, Fowlmere
on **THURSDAY 21st October 2026 at 19:30**

PRESENT: Cllr Baker-Oxley, Cllr Hobro, Cllr Jones, Cllr Mulholland, Cllr Sargeant (chair)
IN ATTENDANCE: The Clerk and 3 members of the public.

Business to be Transacted

In accordance with LGA 1972 schedule 12 10(2) (b) which states that business must be specified.

26/F1 To elect a Chair of the FPC Finance Committee for the civic year 2026-2027
Cllr Sargeant was **Nominated by:** Cllr Hobro **Seconded by:** Cllr Baker-Oxley
There were no other nominations
Cllr Sargeant accepted the nomination and was elected uncontested.

26/F2 Apologies for absence *(LGA 1972 s 85(1))*
There were none.

26/F3 Declarations of interest & requests for dispensations in agenda items *(Localism Act 2011 s 31 s33)*
There were none

26/F4 Minutes of Previous Meeting ***(click here)*** *(in accordance with standing order 12a)*
Proposal: The Finance Committee of Fowlmere Parish Council herewith agree the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2025.
Proposed: Cllr Jones **Seconded:** Cllr Baker-Oxley **motion passed.**

26/F5 Public Participation Session

- A resident raised questions about the following;
  - Why the precept rise was 14%
  - Why the Playgroup were being charged £13600 next year when the PC has never charged the Playgroup money in the past, and how was this figure worked out.
  - Why no other Old Chapel income has been budgeted for.

  The *Percentage increase is seen as high as it is on a small original amount. (On a Band D property an increase of £18.40 per annum or £1.50/month).*
  The building used to be owned by the URC and so the Playgroup have been paying them rent. Now the PC owns the Old Chapel they will pay the PC rent. The pro-rata rate has been agreed with Playgroup, as a long-term hire and is similar to what they paid the URC.

  There is plenty of interest for other hires but until works are complete the room cannot be used as a flexible space. The work needs to be mindful of the conservation of the building and will not be rushed. Additional efficiency savings will be made to PC administration by the purchase of the Old Chapel of approx £2400.
- A resident raised questions about the precept;
  - Since being in the village 12 years, it has more than doubled
  - Whether the council has statutory 6 month reserves.

  The Council can only look at what they are faced with in this current financial year and set a budget accordingly. Some expense is beyond our control such as the by-election which was requested by some residents that accounts for 6% of this increase. Previously a lack of keeping up with inflation had a detrimental affect on the council not being allowed to be a proactive and caused problems with lack of routine maintenance especially with the tree stock. This has had to be addressed in recent years although we are now getting on top of it. The Old Chapel should start to produce an income which can bring future precepts down. Contracts are reviewed regularly (normally 3-5years) with the council always looking to get best value for money.

  Precise reserve figures were not to hand, but there is currently approximately 4 - 5months in reserve. There is no statutory reserve level. The recommendation from CAPALC (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils) is that Councils have between 3 months and 12 months reserve dependant on their size and the size of their budget.

  (In explanation in addition to the meeting for the benefit of the minutes:) CAPALC recommend that a large council would keep a reserve of approx 3 months (for example a £1.2million budget would mean a 3 month reserve of £300,000) where as a small council would keep a reserve of up to 12 months (for example a £6000 budget would 12 months reserve of £6000). Fowlmere sits between these two examples

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with an £84,000 budget) and generally uses 6months as a benchmark but as long as it is between 3 and 12 months we remain within recommended guidelines.
(Additional information further to the meeting) While the purchase of the Old Chapel did drop the reserve level below 6months, the first rental incomes from the Playgroup has already restored the reserve level to above 6 months.)

26/F6 Setting up Standing Order for Salary Payment
Proposal: To agree to set up a Standing Order for the Clerk's salary.
To set up 90% salary standing order, with the remainder (which varies because of Tax&NI) paid by two Cllrs authorising in the normal way. This would guarantee the majority being paid on time even if Cllrs were unavailable to approve payments and not leave employees out of pocket.
Proposed: Cllr Sargeant **Seconded:** Cllr Jones **motion passed.**

26/F7 Virements of Budget lines
Proposal: To agree the virement of the following budget lines.
a) £2000.00 from Street Lighting to Legal & Professional Fees
b) £1000.00 from Grass Cutting to Legal & Professional Fees
Proposed: Cllr Jones **Seconded:** Cllr Baker-Oxley **motion passed**

26/F8 Closing Cambridge Building Society Account
Proposal: To agree the closure of CBS Account.
Proposed: Cllr Jones **Seconded:** Cllr Baker-Oxley **motion passed**

26/F9 Reconciliation of Accounts ***(reconciliation papers)***
Proposal: To note and agree reconciliation of Accounts up to 30/09/2026
Proposed: Cllr Hobro **Seconded:** Cllr Mulholland **motion passed**

26/F10 Review of 2027/2028 draft budget ***(draft budget)***
Proposal: To recommend draft budget to Full Council for approval.
- Income: Discussion on Playgroup Rental Licence and income. Licence to be renewed each year with the academic year. (September-August).
- Draw down from reserves was to manage the increase in the clerks hours to a sensible level over the last three years; 1st Year: £7500, 2nd Year: £5000, 3rd Year; £2500. This would be the final year of this drawdown.
- Cemetery Building repair and maintenance: The 100year old doors are rotting and will need replacing soon starting with the west facing doors which receive the worst of the weather. Cost of repairing doors to be spread over four years. First 2 years for the west doors. Then the next two years to replace the east doors. It is important that the facilities at the cemetery are well maintained to preserve the asset.
- Staffing: yearly NJC contractural pay rise inline with inflation.
- Grounds Maintenance: Grass cutting - 3year contract up for renewal 2027/28, have saved some money this year due dry weather and a reduced number of cuts. The cutting schedule will continue to be looked at alongside the work that the biodiversity group are carrying out.
- Trees: Tree survey has shown that only two trees needed emergency work, the rest of the tree work (dead wooding) can be planned over the next 6 months. After historically many years of no pro-active tree maintenance, the council has been more proactive in the last few years and is now starting to see the benefit of this. The Emergency work budget needs to remain due to climate change causing severe weather events and the severe drought making summer limb drop much more common.
- MAYD (Melbourn Area Youth Development): new line item agreed at last full council meeting giving positive support for the youth/teens of the village.
- Efficiency Savings in PC Administration including Hall Hire, Storage Hire, PO Box, WFH Allowance of around £2400 made possible by the purchase of the Old Chapel.
- Elections: The by-election has cost around £4000-£5000 (still waiting final bill from SCDC). This was on top of the usual 4 year cycle election (£1756.00). While democracy is an important right, it is not without a cost. The by-election was requested by residents (not the council). The election cost accounts for 6% of this years increase.
- Legal and Professional Fees: includes insurance survey for reinstatement costs for building assets needed for accurate rebuild costs to make sure we are not under-insured.
- Careium: users have increased from 9 to 13 (44%) as part of the strategy to help people vulnerable residents stay in their homes safely.
- Estimated increase on Band D bill would be £17.73/year or £1.48/month. (14.35%). *(Numbers adjusted after public participation and councillor discussions on each line item)*
- The total annual bill would be £141.32/year or £11.78/month.

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- Important to try to communicate to residents regarding the increases in the budget, including mentioning which increases are not controlled by the Parish Council.
- The draft budget will be looked at again once the final Taxbase information has been received from SCDC, and recommendations are put forward to Full Council to be agreed in January.

26/F11 Grant Application from MAGPAS ***(application form)***
Proposal: To discuss and agree Grant Application and donation for MAGPAS.
Previous donation being £200.00
Amend Proposal: To agree the Grant application and donation of £200.00
Proposed: Cllr Hobro **Seconded:** Cllr Mulholland **motion passed**

26/F12 Financial Support for Fowlmere, Thriplow & Heathfield News.
Proposal: To discuss and agree additional support of the costs of the magazine.
Fowlmere, Thriplow & Heathfield News have come to both Parish Councils (Fowlmere & Thriplow) asking for a contribution towards the costs or running the magazine (mainly printing costs).
The Costs requested are approx £600.00 per print run, with 6 editions per year that equals £3600, to be divided between the two Parish Councils (£1800 per Council).

The original agreement was for a donation of approximately £700-£800 between the two parish Councils and this current request is a significant increase. It does not take into consideration the income from advertising costs (approx £2-£2500 per annum), reason due to the advertising costs not being guaranteed.

The news enables communication to all residents in the village, with the value being in the support that it gives the community, from articles, to useful information and timetables, and adverts for events and local businesses including pre-school and schools.

Amended Proposal is to fund £800 (£400 from earmarked reserves and £400 from this years budget), and to arrange a further meeting to discuss costs going forward.
Proposed by: Cllr Sargeant **Seconded by:** Cllr Baker-Oxley **motion Passed**

Meeting closed 20:52

Any business to be considered at a Parish Council meeting must be delivered to the clerk for inclusion in accordance with Standing Order 9b.

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