LEEK TOWN COUNCIL Finance Committee
Tuesday 13th October 2026
5:30pm in Town Council office

MINUTES

D. Wheat Town Clerk

Present:	Chair: Cllr Derek Hilyer	Cllr. Matt Swindlehurst
	Cllr. Keith Hoptroff	Cllr. Sue Webster
	Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst	Cllr. Kate Nicholls

1. **Welcome** and announcements: The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

2. **Apologies:** Cllr. Paul Powner

3. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**, other interests and consideration for the granting of dispensations. **None declared.**

4. **Minutes were approved** from the 8th September 2026 Finance Committee meeting.

5. **Matters arising** from the minutes not on the agenda:
   a. Allotment Boundary correspondence has been received from the Town Councils solicitor to progress the solution of that item.
   b. A letter has been received from RT Hon Dame Karen Bradely MP encouraging Leek Town Council to apply for a grant from the Let's Celebrate Towns fund. The deadline to apply is 25th October. Cllrs Hilyer and Swindlehurst will compose and check the application and to supply images.
   c. An invoice for £1411.20 including vat was approved for payment to Starboard Systems Ltd for the Accounting and Allotment software.
   d. The retest was approved at £652.20 including vat for the annual legionella test for Bank House by SAS Water. The RFO advised that other compliance tests are booked for the gas boilers. The electrical safety test is still valid for one more year. The Committee agreed that a list of maintenance needs to be more visual so that all staff and the council are aware when dates are due to safeguard the council in the case of staff absence or illness.

6. **Financial Report** up to 30th September 2026

   a. **Leek Town Council Bank Reconciliation at 30/09/2026**

Cash in Hand 01/04/2026	42,160.41
ADD Receipts 01/04/2026 - 30/09/2026	309,980.86
	352,141.27
SUBTRACT	
Payments 01/04/2026 - 30/09/2026 119,820.51	
A Cash in Hand 30/09/2026	**232,320.76**
(per Cash Book)	
Cash in hand per Bank Statements	
Petty Cash 30/09/2026	0.00
Current Account 30/09/2026	0.00
Business Reserve Account (Current 2)30/09/2026	227,767.89
Leek Events (Mayors Charity Account)30/09/2026	4,506.87
	232,274.76
B	
Less unpresented payments	
Plus unpresented receipts	46.00
	232,274.76
Adjusted Bank Balance	**232,320.76**

A = B Checks out OK

b. **Budget Cost Centre report: ½ Year (Month 6) 1st April - 30th September 2026**
The following points were observed:

i. **Allotments:** stay in minus until Allotment rent is received in January.
ii. **Assets:** Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst asked for the Ball Hye Gren Play Equipment youth shelter to be checked for decay of the wooden posts.
iii. **Events:** Cllr. M. Swindlehurst suggested a proposal for the Town Council to support to underwite the costs of the event application (approx. £500) for 2027 Leek Club Day following the cancellation this year.
Day of the Dead has also been cancelled this year due to lack of funding. The Committee resolved for the RFO to write to the organiser to ask for a refund of the grant, but that the Council would earmark this grant fund for the event for 2027. ***All in favour***
iv. **Governance: By-Election costs:** It was suggested now that Local Government Re-organisation has been put on hold it may be possible to spread the cost of the March 26 By-election over two years. RFO to enquire with the elections office.
v. **Grants:** Cllr Hilyer reminded the committee that the Community Grant publicity will start earlier in 2027 when the budget has been approved so that grants can be awarded at the Town Councils' Annual Meeting and Mayor Making at the start of the 2027-28 financial year which will give community groups the summer to plan their events and activities
vi. **Groundwork and maintenance:** The new Lengthsman is performing well, and the budget looks to be in a healthy balance. The RFO reminded the council that AES will submit an invoice for the watering the summer flowers soon.
vii. **Markets:** currently in a minus. Market income is affected by weather.
viii. **Neighbourhood Plan:** It was agreed that the Council would pay the Neighbourhood Plan invoice at the September Town Council meeting. The RFO was asked to change the budget so that this reflected the overspend rather than the deduction from reserves at this stage. RFO to ask for the final quotation from Urban Vision to see the Plan through to completion.
ix. **Seasonal Street Decorations:** RFO to action the advertisement of the Flags and Bunting Tender and the Christmas Lights Tender.

7. **External Audit Report** noting that "except for the matters reported" in the report "on the basis of the auditors review of the annual return, in their opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no other matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met". The RFO explained each item that had been noted in the External Auditor's report. The full explanation will be minuted when the audit report is ratified at the October Town Council meeting.

8. **Internal Controls:** the Chair an/or Vice-Chair were asked to check financial documents on a monthly basis with the Responsible Financial Officer. A regular day of the month to be scheduled for the internal controls to be carried out by nominated councillors.
A new policy is in draft form following training received by the RFO by SPCA on Internal Control.

9. **Budget and Forecast Report:** estimated to Year end 31 March 2027
   A draft budget and forecast report prepared by Cllr. Powner was circulated. The RFO will fine tune this with Cllr. Powner as information starts to be received from each committee. The forecast report will be brought to the next Finance Committee meeting where recommendations of items for possible inclusion in the budget will be considered.

10. **General Reserve report:**
    Particular measures to address reserves are required to meet audit recommendations.
    Leek Town Council precept is currently £273,950.00
    The audit requirement for Local Authorities is that a council should have 25% (£68,487.50) to 100% of its precept in general reserve. The Committee decided that they must aim to meet the minimum general reserve balance of 25% of the total precept at the year end 31st March 2027, and if not achievable the council must consider increasing the reserve in the budget.

11. **Budget and Precept setting 2027-2028**

    a. It was noted that Committee Chairs had been asked to identify exceptional items of expenditure that could be considered for inclusion in the budget and to note potential bids. Each committee must consider its position and predict its outturn by the end of 31st March 2027. Estimated forecasts to be reported to the RFO and Cllr. Powner so that the report can be as accurate as possible by the November Finance committee meeting.

    b. The timetable of committee meetings on preparation for the Budget and setting the Precept, is as follows:

       Finance Committee – 10 Nov – to consider committee proposals (Town Council Office)
       Finance Committee – 8th Dec– to consider committee proposals (Town Council Office)
       Full Council (Budget Setting) – **15th Dec** (Dove Room, SMDC)
       Full Council (Budget & Precept request) – 19th Jan 2027 (SMDC Chamber)

12. **Maintenance of Assets**

    a. **Ball Haye Green:** Enquiries are being made as to the ownership of the site and particularly the toilet block (the toilet block is on the SDC asset list)
       It was agreed to recommend to the full Town Council that an application to register the land with the Land Registry should be pursued.

    b. **St Stephens Square:** report from SMDC asset officer about the state of the planters. The understanding is that as neither the Town Council nor the District have this area on their asset list, it is maybe the responsibility of the County Council. (LTC owns the black and gold hanging basket post). An AES officer is following this up with the County Council to determine ownership responsibility.

Cllr. Kate Nicholls arrived 6:30pm

Planters: The RFO reported meetings onsite with Alliance Environmental Services Officers to look at the watering contract locations. It has arisen from this site visit that a weeding and plant care maintenance service contract is required in addition. A quotation has been requested for each area of work inspected. Cllr. Nichols suggested that Leekbrook maintenance should also be included in the quotation from AES.

Ball Haye Green Playing Field: The RFO was asked to find out the schedule of mowing for the Ball Haye Green playing field area.

Nicholson War Memorial feature to replace the Sensory Garden: Cllr. Hilyer reported on the quotations being sought for the proposed plans to renovate the Sensory Garden area behind the Nicholson War Memorial including a framework to attach designed artwork and panel production. The reported anti-social behaviour was mentioned with good reports coming from Leek Neighbourhood Watch team, who now have a designated community volunteer monitoring the bus station and the War Memorial area. It was suggested that some public engagement work should be done to ask the community about the new development ideas for the memorial area. Cllrs. Young and Nichols were asked if they could help to set up some engagement opportunities. It was noted that the secret garden off Derby Street does suffer vandalism regularly. Cllr Hoptroff reported that the SMDC contract for CCTV is progressing and is going digital. He will report further when more information is released.

c. **Replacement of the Clerk's Laptop:** the Finance committee approved the purchase of a refurbished laptop with a 1T hard drive with 3 months warranty. £260 plus a new battery and cable.

d. **Quotation to illuminate a tree in Sparrow Park**: This was brought to the attention of the council following 2025 Christmas Lights that the area at Sparrow Park was dim compared to the rest of the town. The quotation was not available at the meeting. The RFO was asked to report on the Seasonal Street decorations cost centre for the next General Purposes meeting to see if any budget is available for further improvements. A complaint has also been received from a business owner on St. Edward St. who would like St. Edward Street to be illuminated. The Clerk to respond to the resident, and consideration of both locations to be on the November TEC agenda.

13. Items for publicity in the press, on the website and social media.
No specific items were raised.

14. To report from contract tender working group meeting:

a. Christmas lights: Suppliers are being researched for business viability and contacted for information.
b. Flags and bunting: This can be a separate contract. Storage needs to be considered as the bunting fills several large water butt size containers and is heavy. The flags and poles are now at the office to be dismantled.
It was decided that the Clerk is to check Financial Regulations on contracts, then to send out a tender document to potential suppliers and to set a deadline date for receipt of tenders. SMDC Business development to be used to promote the opportunity to potential suppliers. Site visits may be required during the Christmas lights season to look at the towns displays.

15. Items for the October Town Council/GP Agenda
Notification has been received from SMDC assets that SMDC intend to paint the whole of the front façade of 15 Stockwell Street office including the front door and the upper floor and to make any repairs to drainpipes and air vents. Several service officers have visited the property on 12th and 13th October to inspect the property.

16. **Exclusion of the Public:**
    The Chairman moved: “That in accordance with section 19 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by reason of the confidential nature of the business next to be transacted, the public and press be excluded from the Meeting”.

17. **Bank House**: Progress has been made to complete the lease agreements. The Finance Committee recommend to full council to make a definitive decision on Tuesday 20th October.

18. **Nicholson War Memorial:** awaiting a response from Leek Town Lands. Assistant Victoria Johnson was thanked for helping to clear rubbish from the storeroom inside the Monument.

19. **Other items:**
    a. The Clerk was asked to aim to go paper free for committee meetings unless papers are requested by committee members.
    b. The Clerk was asked to rearrange a meeting with SMDC assets officers to discuss the office service charge, so that Councillors could be present.

20. **Meeting Ended 7.10pm**

Next Meetings:

Town Council & General Purposes: Tuesday 20th October 2026, 7pm, Council Chamber at Moorlands House, SMDC, ST13 6HQ

Finance Committee: Tuesday 10th November 2026 – 5.30pm Town Council Office, 15 Stockwell St. Leek, ST13 6DH