Highcliffe & Walkford Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of **Annual Council** held on Wednesday 13th May 2026 at 18.30 in The Old School, 254 Lymington Road, Highcliffe. BH23 5ET.

Present: Cllrs A Sofianos (Chair), D Martin, R Ede, B Hutchings, S Skinner, S Slatter, S Walter and J Webster.
In attendance: Vanessa Ricketts FSLCC (Clerk and RFO), Nicki France (Assistant Clerk) and six members of the public.

001 Election of the Chair of Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council for the 2026-2027 Municipal Year:

Resolved: Cllr Adam Sofianos was duly elected Chair of the Parish Council for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Cllr Sofianos read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

002 Chair's Statement:

The Chair thanked Members for their support and for the work they had achieved throughout the year. In reflecting on the change from the previous year, he stated that the Council was now in a much better place due to the Member and Officer team. He thanked Cllr John Webster, who had indicated that he was leaving at the end of May to move back to the Northeast, for his hard work. Finally, he stated that the Council had a busy and exciting year ahead with the various projects planned.

003 Election of the Vice Chair of Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council for the 2026-2027 Municipal Year:

Resolved: Cllr Andy Martin was duly elected Chair of the Parish Council for the 2025/26 municipal year.

The Clerk advised that Cllr Martin will sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, in her presence, when he returns.

004 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received and noted from Cllr A Martin, Cllr T Butcher and Cllr W McNeil. It was therefore:

RESOLVED: That the apologies for absence be accepted.

005 Declarations of interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

006 Minutes of meeting 11th March 2026:

A member made an observation in relation to item 355 and asked that the wording "A Councillor requested that the alternative of a CIO remain as a possibility should Option 1 be chosen".

With this amendment it was, therefore:

RESOLVED: The minutes were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chair.

007 Public Representation:

A member of the public raised the issue of the poor state of several piece of equipment in the playground in Highcliffe Recreation Ground which had been fenced off for some time. BCP Ward Cllr D Martin replied and advised that he had been chasing this and had received a response on Monday from BCP advising that the remedial works were being started that week; they were awaiting some replacement parts which had a 6-8 week delivery and some ground work was required which would be fixed within the coming month. All works were scheduled to be completed by the summer holidays.

008 BCP Councillors Reports:

BCP Ward Cllr D Martin addressed the council:

There had been reports of a number of camper vans and the like being used as accommodation and parked within the parish. He was working with BCP to find options available and would continue this work.

He reported that work continued with the school and BCP to address the parking issues around the school. The grass area in the school had been matted and was now available for 6th formers. He was also asking BCP to revisit some of the restrictions in the area.

He stated that there were some concerns regarding the lorry movements from the approved Roeshot Hill Quarry Works and the impact on the road network. He was currently working with the Highways Department and the Environment Portfolio Holder to address these concerns.

009 Resolutions report:

Members received and reviewed the actions against resolutions report, which was noted.

010 Committees of Council:

a) Members considered recommended changes to Committee structure:

RESOLVED that Policy and Resources Committee be formally closed and that Staffing Committee become a Standing Committee of Council.

b) Members reviewed and considered the Terms of Reference of the Council's Committees:

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference be approved.

c) Members considered the appointments to Committees:

RESOLVED that the Committees be comprised as follows:

Amenities: Cllrs Sofianos, Slater, D Martin, A Martin, Ede, Skinner, Mc Neil, Walter.

Planning: Cllrs Butcher, A Martin, Mc Neil, Walter, Hutchings, Skinner, Sofianos, Slater.

Staffing: Cllrs Butcher, Skinner, D Martin, McNeil, Walter.

011 Standing Orders:

Resolved that the Council's Standing Orders be approved.

012 Financial Regulations:

Resolved that the Council's Financial Regulations be approved.

013 Arrangements for Outside Bodies:

a) Members consider the following subscriptions:

1. Society of Local Council Clerks
2. National Association of Allotments
3. Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils

Resolved that the subscriptions be approved.

b) Members reviewed the representation on Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) and arrangements for reporting back.

Resolved that Cllr Hutchings be appointed as the Council's representative on DAPTC.

014 Finance:

Members considered:

a) financial statements, receipts and payments, and bank statements for March and April, together with;

b) bank reconciliations for the same period.

RESOLVED that the schedule of account and bank balances together with the bank reconciliations be approved and signed by the Chair.

c) The precept payment advice from BCP Council was noted.

d) The Year End Budget Summary Report was noted. A Member asked why the insurance costs has risen; the Clerk advised that the Council had resolved to appoint Work Nest as the Health and Safety Advisors and Insurers, and this cost had been allocated to that cost centre. The Member further asked why the Roeshot Hill Allotment maintenance costs had risen; the Clerk advised that she did not have that information to hand but would email it the following day. Finally, the Member asked if the Clerk would chase the dowry promised by BCP Council for Bluebell Close play area, to which she agreed.

e) Members received and noted the year end reserves balance. A Member asked when the surplus from 2025-26 would be considered for allocation to ear marked reserves. The Clerk advised that that this would be considered with the next quarterly budget monitoring report.

f) Members noted and approved the Council's Asset Register.

g) Members noted and approved the year-end Balance Sheet.

015 Council Policies:

Members reviewed the following Council policies:
a) Freedom of Information Policy
b) General Data Protection Policy
c) Complaints procedure

RESOLVED that the policies be approved.

016 Internal Audit Report:

Members received and considered the Year End Internal Audit Report. They were delighted to see that the Council had received a clean and positive audit. The Clerk advised that a Data Audit would be carried out during the coming year and that she would be speaking to the Council's website provider to ensure that it was fully complaint with WCAG 2.2 Guidelines.

RESOLVED that the internal audit report be accepted and the Clerk's action plan be noted.

017 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2025/2026:

Members received Part 1 of the AGAR to approve the Annual Governance Statement. They confirmed that each of the ten points in Section 1 agreed with the Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED that the Annual Governance Statement be approved for signing by the Chairman and Clerk.

Members received Part 2 of the AGAR to approve the Accounting Statement.

RESOLVED that the Accounting Statement be approved for signing by the Chairman and Responsible Financial Officer.

018 Notice for the Exercise of Public Rights:

Members received the notice for the Exercise of Public Rights.

RESOLVED that the Notice for the Exercise of Public Rights be approved and the period prosed be 3 June to 14 July.

019 Risk Register:

Members considered and reviewed the Council's risk register.

RESOLVED that the risk register be approved.

020 Old School – Insurance Reinstatement Valuation:

The Clerk advised Members that in order to obtain an insurance quote, and indeed insurance, for the Old School Community Centre, it was necessary to obtain an insurance reinstatement valuation. There were very few Chartered Surveyors offering this service and the only one who had responded to enquiries had quoted a price of £1130 + VAT.

RESOLVED that the quotation be accepted.

021 Motion received under Standing Order 9

Cllr Hutchings presented his motion: “That this Council now advises BCP Council that the request made by the Parish Council in 2019 to take over responsibility for the Highcliffe Recreation Ground is now withdrawn. We no longer intend to proceed with the transfer. For clarification, this decision does not affect the proposed transfer (with Dowry) of the Highcliffe Play Areas agreed by Christchurch Borough Council.” The motion was seconded by Cllr Ede. Cllr Hutchings explained that BCP Council had conditionalized the transfer to include additional land, trees and a bus shelter and the annual cost of maintaining the recreation ground would add £40,000 to the existing Service Level Agreement.

The Clerk advised that, if the Council proceeded with the transfer of the play area, it would have financial implications. The play area had originally cost £205,000 in 2012 and would need replacing within the next 10 years. Due to inflation, this would likely cost in excess of £300,000 and so Members would have to start a yearly ear marked reserve in the budget. Members noted the Clerk’s advice.

RESOLVED that the motion be approved.

022 Matters for consideration

No matters were raised.

023 Exclusion of the Press and Public:

Resolved that the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the following business. (Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) 1960, s1 (2)).

024 Recommendations from Staffing Committee

Members considered the following recommendations:

a) The Amenities Officer be placed on SCP16 from 1 April 2026
b) The Clerk and RFO be placed on SCP 45 from 1 April 2026
c) The Assistant Clerk’s hours be increased to 22 hours per week

Resolved that the recommendations be approved.

025 Date of the Next Meeting

Wednesday 10th June 2026 at 6.30pm

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 20:10.

Signed …….. Date ……