

To receive a report on the Town Council committee structure and consider any actions and associated expenditure

1. Introduction

This report sets out a draft proposal for reforming Saltash Town Council's (STC) committee structure. The objective is to establish a more efficient, democratic, and functional governance model that strengthens decision-making, empowers committees, and aligns with sector best practice. The revised structure is intended for implementation in the municipal year beginning 7 May 2026, subject to approval at the April 2026 Full Town Council (FTC) meeting.

At the Council Forum meeting, there was strong support for the governance of the Town Council to be reviewed, but retaining a membership level of 16 for the Planning and Licensing, Services, and Policy and Finance Committees, with no changes proposed for the Personnel Committee, Burial Authority, or Joint Burial Board. The Town Clerk informed members that, although this arrangement differs from sector best practice, it remains a governance decision for the Town Council, not recommended by the Town Clerk.

The Town Council may, if it wishes, appoint an external organisation to carry out an independent governance review and produce a comprehensive report with findings and recommendations. This approach ensures that any decisions are informed and considered, recognising the importance of having effective governance arrangements that support both the Town Council and its staff.

2. Rationale for reform

STC currently operates a meeting pattern that relies heavily on themed FTC meetings, plus a number of sub committees, working groups, and a general FTC meeting, rather than a traditional structure of FTC supported by fully empowered committees, and working groups when necessary. This approach is considered poor practice, places unnecessary pressure on FTC, individual members, and inhibits efficient decision-making.

A revised committee structure is required to:

- Improve the Town Council's effectiveness as a decision-making authority.
- Ensure committees have the delegated powers necessary to carry out the operational work of the Town Council.
- Reduce unnecessary referrals to FTC and streamline governance.
- Create a structure that is democratic, functional, and proportionate to STC's administrative capacity.

- Reduces pressure on members of the Town Council.
- Improves attendance levels by ensuring members are aware of and accountable for their attendance.

3. Proposed principles underpinning the structure

The new committee structure should be designed around the following principles:

- Fit for purpose for STC tailored to the Town Council's size, workload, and strategic direction.
- Committees hold sufficient authority to deliver work without frequent escalation to FTC.
- Administrative workload is proportionate to available officer and resources.
- Democratic representation ensuring all members participate meaningfully in committee work.
- Using members' skills and subject knowledge in the appropriate areas.
- Clear, transparent, and effective decision-making.

4. Overview of committees and sub committees

Committees will be fully empowered and operate in accordance with their Terms of Reference (ToR). The consensus is the membership level is to remain unchanged as to what we know today x16:

- Policy and Finance
- Personnel
- Planning and Licensing
- Services
- Burial Authority
- Joint Burial Board (in accordance with the constitution)

Committees comprising 16 councillors shall be empowered to make decisions, with only statutory matters being referred to FTC.

Sub Committees to be disbanded:

- Station Property: all matters to be reported directly to the Services Committee.
- Property Maintenance: all matters to be reported directly to the Services Committee.

- Library: to be disbanded upon completion of the Phase 2 internal refurbishment. All matters to be reported directly to the Services Committee.
- Devolution: to be considered through the Town Council Forum as a supportive mechanism, with matters then reported directly to the relevant Committee and for final sign off FTC (Working Groups to be established as required).
- Town Vision: to be considered through the Town Council Forum as a supportive mechanism, with matters then reported directly to the relevant Committee and for final sign off FTC (Working Groups to be established as required).

5. Working Groups: purpose, operation, and governance

5.1 Role and importance of working groups:

Working groups are an important mechanism to support committees by undertaking detailed, time-limited tasks or exploring specific issues. While they have no decision-making powers, they provide significant value by:

- Gathering evidence or conducting research.
- Developing proposals or scoping projects.
- Supporting initiatives that require focused member involvement.
- Reporting findings and recommendations back to their parent committee.
- Eases pressure on available resources where officer time is not necessary.

5.2 Committee authority to establish working groups:

Committees should have the explicit authority, within their ToR, to:

- Create working groups as needed.
- Define each group's purpose, membership, objectives, and reporting arrangements.
- Set clear deliverables and timescales to ensure focused and effective operation.

5.3 Governance and operation:

- Working groups operate strictly under the authority of their parent committee.
- They cannot make decisions or commit resources independently.
- Their findings must return to the parent committee for approval, amendment, or escalation.

- Upon completing their assigned work, or delivering their final report, the working group should be dissolved automatically.

This ensures transparency, accountability, and efficient use of member and officer time.

6. Empowering committees: Decision-making authority

6.1 To improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary escalation:

- Committees should be granted maximum delegated authority to make decisions within their remit through their ToR.
- Committees must operate as decision-making bodies, not advisory groups.
- Only statutory matters should return to FTC, such as:
 - Precept setting
 - AGAR
 - Internal audit recommendations
 - Policy adoption or major policy amendments
 - Certain finance matters governed by law
 - Any other business advised by the Town Clerk

This shift will enable committees to complete work effectively, remove duplication, reduce FTC workload and resources.

7. Role and function of FTC

FTC meetings should last no longer than a maximum of 1-hour. The remit should focus on matters that committees cannot legally or practically determine. This includes:

- Statutory responsibilities as outlined above.
- Oversight of major strategic issues (devolution, business plan, acquisition or sale of land and property etc).
- Matters explicitly reserved to FTC under Standing Orders or legislation.

Committees will undertake the substantive day-to-day business of STC. Their meetings are expected to be longer than those of FTC, typically lasting up to 2.5 hours (Standing Orders).

Reports will need to be comprehensive and issued with the agenda.

Members are expected to read all papers in advance and, where necessary, seek clarification or guidance from the Town Clerk or officers prior to the meeting. This will help ensure the meeting runs efficiently and avoids the need to suspend Standing Orders.

8. Frequency of committee meetings

To remain as currently set:

- Policy and Finance – bi-monthly
- Services – bi-monthly
- Planning and Licensing - monthly
- Personnel – quarterly
- Burial Authority – twice a year
- Joint Burial Board – twice a year (in accordance with the constitution)

9. Frequency of FTC Meetings

It is proposed that FTC is reduced to 10 meetings per year, omitting:

- August – traditionally a period of reduced business and member availability due to holiday season.
- January – limited business following the Christmas period and potential weather-related disruption.

This aligns with sector norms and complies with legislation, which requires Town Councils to meet a minimum of four times per year including the Annual meeting of the Town Council.

10. Supporting governance documents

To support the new structure:

10.1 Scheme of Delegation

- A full review would need to be conducted to improve clarity and increase the Town Clerk and officer delegation where appropriate, including budgets.
- Benchmarking would need to be undertaken against other Town Councils.

10.2 Terms of Reference

- All committee ToRs would need to be reviewed and strengthened where required.

10.3 Policies

- All Town Council policies and procedures within the governance framework would need to be subcontracted to the relevant organisation for a comprehensive review and recommendations, ensuring they are fit for purpose in supporting the new committee structure – this has been actioned through Policy and Finance committee meeting minute 325/25/26.

11. Culture, conduct, and governance

All members sign up to the Code of Conduct, which emphasises respect, integrity, and accountability. The default culture within STC should be one of trust, not distrust, reflecting the core principles of ethical public life and supporting positive governance.

The Town Clerk is, open, and transparent, and operates an open-door policy for Members and staff who wish to discuss any matters.

Saltash Town Council is part of the Civility and Respect Pledge.

12. Implementation timeline

- April 2026: FTC approval of the new structure by way of receiving Town Clerks report.
- 7 May 2026 (Municipal Year): Implementation begins at the Annual meeting of the Town Council. Committees appointed in accordance with the new structure approved by FTC in April.
- No re-adoption is required at the May Annual Meeting of the Town Council; however, committee appointments will be updated in line with the approved framework.
- STC would retain the ability to make further changes should it consider them necessary, as it works through its new governance.

13. Conclusion

The proposed committee structure is intended to strengthen STC's democratic decision-making and enhance operational efficiency. However, the current membership levels mean it does not fully align with sector best practice. By empowering committees, reducing unnecessary burdens on FTC, and establishing a clear and consistent governance framework, STC will be better equipped to deliver effective services and maintain high standards of public administration.

End of Report
Town Clerk/RFO