EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD AT EXMOUTH TOWN HALL ON
MONDAY 9TH MARCH 2026 AT 7.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillors: Graham Deasy (Chair)
D Conduit
A Bailey
B Bailey
S Gazzard
M Hall
N Hookway
S Isaacs
N Nicholls
P Stott
M Williamson
A Woodward
T Dumper

Lisa Bowman, Town Clerk and approximately ten electors of the Town of Exmouth.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs O Davey, D. Poor, L. Venables, J Whibley.

1. **Welcome and Opening of the Meeting**
   The meeting was opened by the Chairman of Exmouth Town Council, Cllr Graham Deasy, who welcomed all attendees to the 2026 Annual Town Meeting.

2. **Minutes**

   Cllr Pauline Scott proposed that the minutes of the previous year's meeting be approved as a true and accurate record. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Steve Gazzard and approved unanimously.

3. **Mayor's Report**

   The Mayor, Cllr Graham Deasy, delivered his annual report, expressing what an honour it had been to represent both the Council and the town during his term of office. He described his aspiration from the outset was to raise the profile of the Town Council across Exmouth, particularly in view of the impending local government reorganisation.
   He outlined the many engagements he had attended throughout the year, including Remembrance Sunday, the Civic Service, and the King's Troop Passing-Out Parade. His tenure also saw the reinstatement of the Mayor's Cadet, and the inauguration of HMS Exmouth Day on 20th January, commemorating the hands lost when HMS Exmouth was sunk in January 1940. Cllr Deasy acknowledged that the town's lifeboat now carries the names of those who perished. It seemed appropriate for the Town Council to continue this initiative of an annual commemoration.
   Looking forward, the Mayor highlighted key areas of focus for the Town, including planning and infrastructure pressures, affordable housing, and water quality. The Council awaited with anticipation the completion of the Dinan Way Link Road and was preparing for the acquisition of Exmouth Town Hall, due to complete on 27 March 2026.

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He also referenced the work of the Council's Community Engagement Task and Finish Forum, whose report would be presented to Full Council in due course. Given the financial climate, the Mayor stressed the importance of ensuring that residents remain at the heart of all council decision-making. He concluded by thanking his wife Elizabeth, his wider family, Deputy Chairman Cllr Diane Conduit, Town Councillors, Town Council staff, and the wider community for their support.

4. Acknowledgement of the Coordinated Response to the Unexploded Ordnance Incident

The Chairman introduced the item, recognising the coordinated response of numerous organisations during the unexploded ordnance incident on 14 January 2026. He noted that the Council's Civic Service later in the year would offer a fuller opportunity to reflect on the event. He then invited key individuals to provide brief accounts of their involvement.

Inspector Mat Helm provided context for the major incident, emphasising the complexity and significant coordination required from the Local Resilience Forum and both Category 1 and Category 2 responders. He highlighted the extensive involvement of Coastguard teams and the unified approach of all partners. Pre-established guidance from ordnance disposal specialists determined the phased evacuation zones of 100, 400 and 600 metres during the event, with the very real possibility of a 1,600-metre cordon being considered at one point, which would have required military assistance. Ultimately however, The Royal Navy's decision to lower the device underwater reduced the incendiary impact and enabled a reduction in the cordon area. During the final hours of the incident, Police and Navy dive teams operated from the Viking Warrior, creating a maritime exclusion zone whilst the device was towed out to sea for detonation. Although the final controlled detonation appeared anticlimactic, Inspector Helm stressed the extraordinary scale of the operation and the unique challenges presented. Lessons learned would inform future planning.

Jacob Pearcey, Deputy Manager, LED Leisure Centre, outlined the role of the LED Leisure Centre, which served as an evacuation point. Upon learning that evacuees were arriving, LED established two operational teams: one supporting the evacuation and one maintaining normal services. Initially, the focus was on providing refreshments and reassurance with the centre staff providing a meet-and-greet service along with a comfortable holding area for those displaced, but this extended to overnight accommodation capacity for those who could not be accommodated elsewhere. The centre was closed to the public for ordinary leisure operations on day two and reopened at 10:00 a.m. on day three.

The Chairman expressed his admiration and thanks to the staff at the centre for their compassionate response.

Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager for East Devon District Council, outlined his role in coordinating emergency accommodation for the District Council. Noting that the last comparable incident was the 2018 Seaton fire, he described how he had coincidentally been on site at the Leisure Centre as the event unfolded. He continued by describing how he and two colleagues had then block-booked the last two hotels in Exmouth, accommodating around 40 evacuees.
Once the second cordon was introduced, Devon County Council assumed responsibility for overnight accommodation and arranged coach transport to Exeter. Mr Mitchell and colleagues continued to support both into the early hours of, and of day two. He praised the strong community spirit and good humour of evacuees and noted that while feedback highlighted areas for improvement—such as reliance on goodwill and some ambiguity in roles—the experience would inform future service development.

Cllr Conduit acknowledged the important role for Town Councils during such events. She thanked the police officers stationed at the leisure centre, who acted as communicators and

points of reassurance. She emphasised the dynamic nature of the incident and noted that future responses might benefit from greater medical support on-site.

During the subsequent Q&A session, a member of the public asked about news coverage. Inspector Helm explained that East Devon District Council managed communications and maintained a dedicated FAQ page throughout. It was acknowledged that the media had acted respectfully.
A question was also raised about responsibility for maintaining lists of vulnerable people. The meeting recognised shared responsibilities across power companies, East Devon District Council (Housing Authority), and Devon County Council Social Services. Additional vulnerable residents were identified through door-knocking during the evacuation.
County Cllr Jeff Trail highlighted the contribution of Devon County Council Highways Officers, who implemented road closures within cordon zones. He praised all involved.

The efforts of Cllr Diane Conduit, Chair of the Community Resilience Working Party, were acknowledged for strengthening emergency response planning.

6. Mayor's Fundraising Initiative

Cllr Deasy provided an update on his 2025–26 fundraising initiative, supporting aspiring musicians in Exmouth. He announced a Mayoral Garden Party to be held on Sunday, 10 May, at the Imperial Hotel, and encouraged all present to support the event.

7. Public Forum

A question was raised regarding the purchase of Exmouth Town Hall and its impact on the precept. Cllr Deasy responded by explaining that there will be no increase in the precept for 26/27 as a result of purchasing the Town Hall. The capital costs of the purchase will be fully funded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts from housing developers, meaning no cost to local taxpayers. It was anticipated that the running costs would be met through income and savings:

Benefits for Exmouth include securing a key public asset, reducing long term costs, and supporting community services and several councillors spoke about the opportunities the acquisition presents for future community use and strategic development.

A second member of the public expressed concerns about communication from the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group, emphasising the need for in-person consultation, and conveyed frustration with progress at Queen's Drive.
Cllr Nick Hookway, Chair of the Group, responded that the Group would be asked to endorse the Exmouth Placemaking Plan at its next meeting. He explained that adoption of the plan is essential for attracting grant funding and inward investment, especially given uncertainty surrounding local government reorganisation. The lengthy process ensures the plan is robust and able to withstand scrutiny.

8. Close of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting**.**

The meeting concluded at 8.36pm.

Signed …… Date …….
(Chairman)

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