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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams, Donna Wright and Daniel Allen.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Director - Regulatory), Jo Dufficy (Director - Customers), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Frank Harrison (Environmental Health Manager), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place), Sohanna Srinivasan (Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer) and Louise Symes (Strategic Infrastructure and Projects Manager).*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present.*

Councillor Claire Winchester was present as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 19 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Amy Allen.

19 MINUTES - 20 JANUARY 2026

Audio recording – 2 minutes 26 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 January 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

20 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 10 seconds

There was no other business notified.

21 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 15 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

22 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 32 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

23 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective items on the agenda.

24 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW UP

Audio recording – 5 minutes 16 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Claire Winchester, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Winchester advised that there had been discussions around:

- How steps had been taken to address the points raised in the Corporate Peer Challenge review, and that good progress had been made to address these.
- How this was a significant piece of work which had the potential to be of lasting benefit for everyone involved.
- Agreement that this was a pragmatic response to reflect on and the need to prioritise the last few decision points in the report.
- Officer and Member relations and what could be done to improve them.
- The advantages of providing questions in advance of meetings where possible and the importance of Member briefing sessions to increase communication.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up' and advised that the peer team had undertaken a one day follow up visit in December 2025 and they had recognised the good progress the Council was making.

Following a question from Councillor Donna Wright, Councillor Val Bryant explained that Recommendation 4 – Partnerships, would be followed up by Councillor Daniel Allen as he was Leader of the Council at the time of the Corporate Peer Challenge.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- Thanks for all the work undertaken by Officers, Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the Corporate Peer Challenge.
- Staff were a key resource for the Council and therefore additional resources had been set aside for the next two financial years to support staff during the Local Government Reorganisation.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the findings of the CPC follow up report.
- (2) Noted the progress against the CPC action plan.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC follow up report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

25 BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT 2026

Audio recording – 12 minutes 28 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, presented the report entitled 'Biodiversity Duty Report 2026' and advised that:

- In accordance with the Biodiversity Duty (Environment Act of 2021), local authorities and local planning authorities must publish a biodiversity report.
- The strengthened Biodiversity Duty required public authorities to consider what could be done to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- To ensure that the Council was compliant it needed to publish a Biodiversity Duty Report within 12 weeks of the reporting period end date.
- The end of the first reporting period could be no later than 1 January 2026. The first Biodiversity Duty Report was attached in Appendix A.
- Under the Biodiversity Duty, the Council was required to reconsider the biodiversity actions every five years.

In response to a question from Councillor Laura Williams, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that:

- Reporting would be provided by monitoring and feedback however some actions were more measurable than others.
- Member would be kept updated by the quarterly report presented to the Political Liaison Board.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- As the Council had declared both an ecological and climate emergency, the Biodiversity Duty would help to ensure a fairer, greener North Hertfordshire.
- It was good to see in the report the many biodiversity actions the Council had been working on, including the bee corridor project.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Donna Wright seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the contents of the Biodiversity Duty Report 2026 at Appendix A and approve its publication on the council's website.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the council is compliant with the Biodiversity Duty (Environment Act 2021) and its requirement to publish a biodiversity duty report within twelve weeks of the reporting period end date. The end date of the first reporting period must be no later than 1 January 2026.

26 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT ALLOCATIONS AND UPDATE

Audio recording – 19 minutes 43 seconds

N.B. Councillor Ian Albert declared an interest in the item due to his membership of the Black Squirrel Credit Union. Following advice from the Director – Governance, Cllr Albert remained in the Chamber but did not take part in the debate or vote on the item.

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocations and Update' and advised that this report was seeking approval for the proposed allocations of the remainder of the 2025/26 award of homelessness grants of up to £365k, as outlined in Table 3 in paragraph 8.2 of the report.

Following a question from Councillor Donna Wright, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that if there was any overspend on the budget allocation for temporary accommodation costs, the Council would be responsible for these costs.

Following a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that a decision had been made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to combine the homelessness and rough sleeping grants into a new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grants for 2026/27 with provisional allocations for the next three financial years.

Following a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that the government was looking to simplify the funding formula for local governments by merging existing grants into the general funding provided and for the Council to then decide itself where to allocate those funds.

Councillor Daniel Allen praised the work of the Black Squirrel Credit Union with assistance with homelessness prevention and relief for North Hertfordshire clients.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the funding proposals for the allocation of the remainder of the 2025/26 award of homelessness grants as outlined in Table 3 in paragraph 8.2.

REASON FOR DECISION: There is a need to secure additional services for homeless households in the district. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need, which is also consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029).

27 NORTH HERTS COUNCIL STRAY DOGS POLICY

Audio recording – 25 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'North Herts Council Stray Dogs Policy' and advised that:

- The purpose of this report was to provide key information to enable North Herts Council to adopt a Stray Dogs Policy in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act of 1990.
- This Act required the Council to have a suitable policy to collect stray dogs and to hold them for a statutory 7-day period.
- If the dog was not collected by the end of this period, the dog would be passed to the owners of a boarding kennel and for them to seek to re-home the dog if possible.
- The draft Stray Dogs Policy could be found at the end of the report.
- Cabinet were being asked to adopt the policy and to note the recommendations.

Following a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Environmental Health Manager advised that:

- The limit of the £300 which had been deemed a reasonable amount to accommodate treatment for illness or injury to a seized dog and had also been comparable to the local fee for a Veterinary Surgeon to euthanise a dog, as details in paragraph 5.2.1 of the policy, had been set to limit potential excess use of public money.
- The Council was aware that any treatment decided necessary by the Veterinary Surgeon during the 7-day holding period could cost more than this amount and the health and welfare of the dog would always be considered.
- This policy would be periodically reviewed by the Council, and this amount could always be altered as necessary.

Following a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Val Bryant highlighted that there was a delegation to the Executive Member and Director to make future amendments to the policy, and therefore the exact amount provided for treatment could be reviewed at a later stage.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Adopted the Policy as presented.
- (2) Noted the following, in considering this policy:
 - (a) The Policy, at point 1.2, states the accepted definition of a Stray Dog, which the Act does not provide.
 - (b) The Act requires the appointment of a Responsible Officer for the purpose of discharging these duties and the Policy, at point 1.3 accommodates this.
 - (c) The Policy sets out in section 2, the conditions whereupon a stray dog will and will not be collected or seized, as this is not fully defined in the Act.
 - (d) The Policy also sets out at point 2.4 how the Council will manage stray dogs which are or are believed to be a Prohibited Breed, as defined under the Dangerous Dogs Act, 1991.

- (e) The Policy, in section 4, states the legal requirement under the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations, 2015, that all qualifying dogs be microchipped and how this will be accommodated.
- (f) The Act requires the Council to ensure the health and welfare of any collected stray dog during the 7-day retention period. The Policy states how the Council will accommodate this requirement, including the scope and limitations of this obligation at points 5.2 and 5.3.
- (g) The Policy, in section 6 states the conditions required for returning the collected stray dog to the owner, including at point 6.3 the requirement for all accrued costs to be paid in full with no option of any instalments or discount (except that offered when micro-chipping unchipped stray dogs).
- (h) The Policy states, in section 7, states how the Council will dispose of the stray dog either at the end of the 7-day retention period or before in necessary for humane reasons. Part 7.5 outlines how dangerous dogs will controlled and should be considered in conjunction with point d, above.
- (i) The Policy, at section 9 seeks to delegate future amendments of this Policy to the Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Regulatory in accordance with the provisions of the Council’s Constitution.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable the Council to clearly state how it intends to meet its obligations under the Act, whilst putting in place limitations against the unreasonable use of public funds and to protect the Responsible Officer against undue criticism or challenges which could in turn risk the perception and reputation of the Council.

28 DESIGN CODE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT - APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 36 minutes 37 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled ‘Design Code Supplementary Planning Document – Approval for Public Consultation’ and advised that:

- This report presented a new district wide draft Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide additional information and clarity to Local Plan Policies SP9 and D1 along with other relevant policies in the Plan.
- The Urban Design Team had been working for two years on this design code.
- The purpose of the SPD was to provide information on the design expectations and requirements for development in North Hertfordshire.
- This SPD would offer good policy advice to decisions-makers when determining planning applications.
- The SPD adopted seven place objectives for design across the district, which should all be clear, practical and measurable expectations.
- The working draft Design Code SPD was set out in Appendix A.
- Part 1 of the draft was set around the vision objectives of the Design Code.
- Part 2 contained details of the 42 codes arranged into five chapters.
- The Council was required to adopt the SPD by 30 June 2026 and if not done, it would result in the existing design code which was fifteen years out of date being the fall-back policy.
- Subject to approval by Cabinet, the draft SPD would be made available for public consultation for a four-week period commencing early March 2026.
- Any comments would be included in the final version of the SPD to be adopted which would then be re-presented to Cabinet ahead of the 30 June deadline.
- This SPD stated that the number of detached houses must be kept to under 30% of the total number of dwellings in town and urban locations and 50% in rural locations, as set out in SS02.01 on page 25 of Appendix A.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was an excellent piece of work which would help to protect the towns and villages in the district ahead of the Local Government Reorganisation.
- Thanks to the Principal Urban Design Planning Officer and the rest of the design team for producing this SPD.
- That there had been good interaction with residents at meetings which had help with understanding of the needs of the district.
- This was an exciting and interesting process which would create environments that people wanted to live in.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Endorsed the scope, structure and detailed codes drafted to date for the draft Design Code SPD, attached as Appendix A for the purpose of the consultation only.
- (2) Approved the draft Design Code SPD for a period of public consultation in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- (3) Delegated authority was granted to the Director: Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to finalise the consultation draft, including the approval of any outstanding technical, illustrative or presentational elements, provided that no changes are made which would materially alter the policy intent, scope or effect of the draft SPD endorsed by Cabinet.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To allow the draft Design Code SPD to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted to support the Local Plan and decisions on planning applications.
- (2) To support a common standard for design quality across North Herts.
- (3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's pledges and ambitions as set out in the Climate and Ecological Emergency declarations through design.
- (4) To ensure the best prospects of the Design Code SPD being finalised and approved before the Government's recently announced 'cut off' date of 30 June 2026 for planning documents of this nature to be adopted.

29 PROPOSED CAR PARKING TARIFFS FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 45 minutes 52 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Proposed Car Parking Tariffs for 2026/27' and advised that:

- This report presented recommendations for off-street and on-street car park tariff increases for 2026/27.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by the Council, required a 2% annual uplift in parking income.
- This year the Council had investigated three options, and the recommended approach was Option 3 as the most viable option which offered a 2% uplift with a revised option for Royston.
- Meetings had been held with Royston Town Council and the Royston BID to produce a simplified tariff structure for Royston.
- Both Royston Town Council and Royston BID had indicated they could not continue to subsidise free parking after 3pm and would like to offer a December free parking scheme which was under early discussions.
- The proposed car parking tariff increases have been considered by all the other BIDs and positive feedback had been received.
- Knebworth Parish Council had no comment on the proposed increases and would continue with their subsidy of the 30-minute car parking tariff.
- The Council would continue discussions with the Royston BID and the Royston Town Council regarding a preferred subsidy for 2026/27, with the possibility of free parking in December as requested.
- Option 3 offered a balanced approach to car parking tariff increases and would resolve operational issues.

Following a question from Councillor Sean Nolan, the Strategic Infrastructure and Projects Manager advised that the Council would require three months notice to publicise and to also put in effect changes to parking machines for a December free parking scheme to be implemented.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- How impressed Members were with the number of consultations that had taken place.
- This report demonstrated that the Council had listened to communities and where funding from the budget was possible would implement some of the proposals from the town centre BIDs.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Adopted the proposed off-street and on-street car park tariff increases for 2026/27 referred to as Option 3 in paragraphs 8.2.14 of this Report and as set out in: (i) Tables 1, 2 and 4 for Hitchin, Letchworth and Knebworth at Appendix A, and (ii) Tables 5a for Royston off-street car parks and 6a for Royston on-street parking bays in Market Hill at Appendix B.
- (2) Increased the proposed charges for season tickets for each of its long stay car parks in Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston and business permits at St. Martins Road car park in Knebworth for 2026/27 as set out in Tables 7 and 8 at Appendix A.
- (3) Increased the charges for resident permits, visitor permits, business permits and visitor tickets for resident parking zones for 2026/27 as set out in Section 8.4 of this report.
- (4) Delegated to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport all decisions necessary to give effect to the recommendations including the issuing of the Notice of Variation to the 2024 Off-Street Parking Traffic Regulation Orders and the 2023 On-Street Consolidation Order.
- (5) Noted the 'direction of travel' with regard possible subsidy schemes arising from the proposed programme of tariffs and charges.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To implement an increase in car parking tariffs, season tickets and permits within resident parking zones in order to effectively manage their use and in accordance with the Council's fees and charges policy as set out in its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To set car parking tariffs that support the achievement of modal shift away from private car use and to help support the vitality of town centres.

30 BUDGET 2026/27 (REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS)

Audio recording – 55 minutes 38 seconds

In the absence of the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, the Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member of Resources, to present the referral and report entitled 'Budget 2026/27 (Revenue and Capital Budgets)'. Councillor Albert advised that:

- No concerns had been raised at Finance, Audit and Risk Committee concerning the budget from their prospective.
- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had noted that the Council was having to borrow to fund capital projects but were aware that management of the budget and the general fund was good.
- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee were keen to support the allocation to investigate the provision of allotments in Great Ashby, as this was a long-standing issue.
- The budget being proposed was in line with the Council Plan.
- There had been engagement with Members during the budget setting process and budget workshops had been held.
- The Council knew how important resources were to enable the delivery of strategic services.
- The provisional settlement from the government was positive alongside the changes to pension contributions.
- The General Fund balance was strong and was more than £10m above the minimum balance recommended of £3.5M.
- The Council could therefore look to fund some projects by transferring some of the revenue reserves into a capital programme to benefit communities across the district.

- The final settlement from government included an extra £70K in homelessness grants for 2026/27.
- The provision of the three-year settlement provided additional security, however the Council needed to bear in mind that the allocations for years 2 and 3 were provisional.
- Details of uncertainties on future costs and incomes were set out in the Section 25 report of the Chief Financial Officer which was included in Appendix D.
- Council Tax was proposed to increase by 2.99% which would generate over £400K of extra funding and was in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- The Council provided a good Council Tax Reduction Scheme for those residents in most need.
- The overall position meant that there would be a balanced budget in 2028/29.
- £2M across the next two years had been set aside to cover any costs associated with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Some of the new capital investment proposals for 2026/27 included £4.7M for a learner pool at the Royston Leisure Centre, £200K for digital and other signage at Hitchin car parks and £200K for additional water play features at North Herts Leisure Centre.
- There were already many existing projects the Council had committed to, such as the museum storage project, which would protect vital archives to be of benefit to communities for many years to come.
- The Council was working with the Great Ashby Community Council and residents to provide additional allotment provision if possible.
- Recommendation 2.8 was to allow the spend on pool covers to be brought forward to this financial year to enable the work to be carried out before the pools opened.
- A Council Tax premium on second homes would be applied from April 2026, which had been previously approved by Council.
- To achieve a final budget proposal, he was requesting to add the following items to the budget to be incorporated into the final budget report to Council on 26 February 2026. An allocation for 2026/27 of £70k to the Hertfordshire Futures, £194k to North Herts Citizens Advice, £30k to the North Herts Centre for Voluntary Services, £15k to North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum. These amounts would all be subject to inflationary increases for the following 2 years.
- There would also be a £7k allocation included to provide security at evening Committee meetings.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, requested that another addition be made to the budget to extend the funding for the additional Executive Member for LGR for an additional 2 years. The work of the Executive Member had proved to be vital and there was still much work to be done in the approach to LGR.

Councillor Ian Albert therefore proposed that an additional budget line of £9K revenue was allocated in the budget to secure additional funding for the Executive Member for LGR for 2026/27 and 2027/2028.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- The Council recognised the importance of understanding its capacity to deliver projects and the time required by staff to deliver what was asked of them.
- The budget was kept closely under review to see whether any projects needed to be reprioritised.
- The Council liaised with other local authorities to see if there were any opportunities to work together to save costs.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- £1M had been allocated in the budget each year for the next two years for costs associated with LGR and this would cover the Council contribution to any LGR costs, staff back-filling cover as required and also to support staff with any training that may be required.
- If the funds set aside in the budget for Ransomware costs were too low, the Council would have to fund any extra costs from the reserves, but this was not considered a significant risk to the overall budget.
- The Council Delivery Plan contained details of any risks and the impact of the LGR would be monitored closely.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- The museum storage was a vital piece of work, and it was welcomed to see provision for this in the budget.
- The allotments at Great Ashby enhanced the green space and to provide additional allotment areas would demonstrate that the Council had listened to the residents.
- The Council was fortunate to have enough reserves in the budget to implement positive projects for the community.
- Benefits from this budget would be seen over the coming decades for the Council and the new unitary authority.
- The proposals outlined demonstrated a sensible and strategic use of reserves.
- Prudent investments had given the Council resilience in preparing for the LGR.
- The change to refuse and waste collection service to a three weekly collection had not only been significant in managing costs for North Herts Council but had also had a wider beneficial impact on Hertfordshire County Council.

The Director – Resources advised that the amended figure for recommendation 2.4 was likely to be £27.524M, but that this would be confirmed at Council on 26 February 2026.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Notes the position on the Collection Fund and how it will be funded.
- (2) Notes the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risks identified a minimum balance of £3.5 million is recommended.
- (3) Notes the Chief Finance Officer's section 25 report (Appendix D) which provides a commentary on the risks and reliability of estimates contained in the budget.
- (4) Approves the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B to be amended.
- (5) Approves the capital programme as detailed in Appendix C.
- (6) Approves a net expenditure budget of £27.323m, as detailed in Appendix E with amount and detail to be amended.
- (7) Approves a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which is in line with the provisions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- (8) Approves bringing forward the capital budget for pool covers at the outdoor pools to 2025/26.
- (9) Notes that a Council Tax premium on Second Homes will be implemented from 1st April 2026, which is adopting the decision taken by Council on 29 February 2024.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget (revenue and capital) and Council Tax level for 2026/27.
- (2) To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2024-28 as set out in the Council Plan.

31 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hour 34 minutes 31 seconds

In the absence of the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, the Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member of Resources, to present the referral and report entitled 'Investment Strategy 2026/27'. Councillor Albert advised that:

- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had expressed thanks and recognition of the swift implementation of the motion from Council on responsible investment.
- There had been some comments around the specific definition of the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) fund metrics being utilised.
- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had noted the strong capital assets and the increased level of £5M for deposits placed with other local authorities to maximise returns was supported.
- The additional clauses were considered sensible to be adopted.
- This Investment Strategy set out the assets owned by the Council, how they were maintained and plans for any new assets.

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- The Investment Strategy determined how the Council would fund capital spend, including the approach to borrowing and the minimum revenue provision.
- All of this combined with the revenue forecasts identified the surplus cash available for investment.
- The main change to this Investment Strategy related to addressing the motion 'The Local Government Pension Scheme & Responsible Investment' which was passed at Council on 4 December 2025.
- A meeting had taken place with the treasury advisors to the Council to see how the requirements of the motion could be addressed, whilst minimising risk to the Council.
- Following this meeting, a change had been made to the Investment Strategy for the Council to invest with banks offering ESG investments, as outlined in Table 8.8 in the report.
- It was proposed to increase the amount allowed to be invested in other local authorities to £5M, as local authorities were seen as secure investments. This also reflected a number of local authorities were now seeking minimum investments of £5M.
- It was proposed to reduce the longer-term investments, in light of the Local Government Reorganisation process where shorter term investments would be more appropriate.
- This Investment Strategy offered a sensible, pragmatic and appropriate approach both on management of investments and moving the motion passed at Council on 4 December 2025.

Councillor Sean Nolan expressed thanks to everyone involved with implementing the motion from Council so quickly. Cllr Nolan added that the Investment Strategy had been a positive form of income for the Council over the past few years.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the adoption of the Investment Strategy (as attached at Appendix A).
- (2) Approves the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in paragraphs 8.10 to 8.16).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To ensure the Council's compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management, the Local Government Act 2003, statutory guidance from Government, and the CIPFA Prudential Code. As well as determining and managing the Councils risk appetite in respect of investments.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chair

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