

5 NOVEMBER 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 5 November 2025

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Chairman)

* Cllr Steve Davies (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Geoffrey Blunden

* Jeremy Heron

*Present

Councillors:

* Dan Poole

* Derek Tipp

In attendance:

Councillors:

Alan Alvey

Peter Armstrong

Steve Clarke

Alan O'Sullivan

Councillors:

Steve Rippon-Swaine

John Sleep

Malcolm Wade

Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Alan Bethune, James Carpenter, Rebecca Drummond, Richard Knott, Sarah Rushby, Karen Wardle, Paul Whittles and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received from any Cabinet Members.

44 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader reported that the new waste and recycling service had started in the Phase 2 area, to another 15,000 homes. Staff at the Ringwood depot had been trained on new collection methods, the in-cab technology, new routes, and new safety procedures. The introduction of weekly food waste recycling had been well received by residents, and the crews had been praised for their professionalism and approachability.

Moving onto the housing service, the council had recently responded to the changes brought about by new legal protections for tenants, commonly known as Awaab's Law. These new rules require social landlords to act quickly when residents report serious hazards such as damp and mould, excess cold or heat, unsafe electrics, gas supply or other serious hazards, helping to ensure homes were safe and healthy to live in. The district council had always taken its responsibility to tenants seriously, but this is an important additional step in making sure hazards like damp and mould be treated with the urgency they deserve.

The council's website had achieved a top ranking for digital sustainability across the UK, placing us 55 out of the 359 assessed.

And finally, the Leader reported that the District Council had paused the next stage of the Local Plan review consultation to ensure the government's Local Government Reorganisation consultation, expected to be launched in the coming weeks, be given the necessary focus it deserved. She asked members to do all they could to encourage strong stakeholder and public participation in this extremely significant consultation.

45 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Special meeting held on 26 September 2025 and the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2025, be confirmed and signed.

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr S Davies declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6, as he was a Council appointed Director of Appletree Property Group. He reported he would not participate or vote on this item.

47 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

48 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT (BASED ON PERFORMANCE APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2025 INCLUSIVE)

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. noted the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund, HRA, and Capital;
2. approved the list of roles as outlined in the report to support the commencement of phase 1 LGR activity;
3. approved the budget virements within the HRA to utilise a forecast underspend on Major repairs and external gutter/render cleaning to increase spend on condition surveying and decarbonisation; and
4. approved net changes to the Capital Programme totalling £154,000.

That Cabinet recommend to Council:

1. that £1.5 million is transferred from the Budget Equalisation Reserve to the Local Government Reorganisation Reserve, with the previously approved delegation extended to cover this increased balance.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Council

PORTFOLIO:

Finance and Corporate

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate reported that the report had been prepared based on the financial performance for the first half of the year and showed that the council was on target with a balanced budget. There had been a change to the capital programme with a net increase of £154,000, which would enable the acquisition of new vehicles. The updated capital programme budget was therefore £52.478 million.

The most significant movement was the recommendation that £1.5 million be transferred from the Budget Equalisation Reserve to a Local Government Reorganisation Reserve. This would enable the council to fund changes in light of LGR.

The Portfolio Holder finally highlighted that the HRA budget had a balanced position. Additional revenue funding was required in relation to the stock condition surveys and that this corresponded with a reduction in capital expenditure.

The Assistant Director – Finance further confirmed that the General Fund and HRA presented a balanced budget position. This was due to the additional interest earnings which had offset the additional budget requirements. There had been an increase in the capital programme.

The most significant recommendation related to the proposal that £1.5 million be added to the LGR reserve. This would be used to bolster the workforce capacity and resources over the next 2.5 years in order to prepare the authority as much as possible for vesting day of a new Unitary authority.

There were a number of uncertainties in the report around clarity over the waste rollout budget, senior staffing changes and the homelessness temporary accommodation budget which remained under review.

A non-Cabinet member referred to the car parking income which was forecast to be lower than that budgeted for, and recognising that the proposed new charges were expected to address some of this shortfall in the budget. It was felt that increasing car parking charges would reduce usage and that it has been seen over the last few years where the income received had been lower than the budget. Concern was expressed that increasing the charges would not make up the loss of income and that a different approach should be considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded to this and explained that income from the car parks had increased just not quite as high as initially forecast. Reference was made to the competition and highlighted that there were no national parking companies operating in the district, indicating that they could not provide car parking services for less than the council. He referred to the short stay car parking clock as the cheapest and most effective method of parking in the

district. The Portfolio Holder felt that those people who did not have a car should be supported. The car parking charges were insignificant compared to the cost of owning a car, they were reasonable and fair and had been raised by the cost of inflation.

49 APPLETREE PROPERTY GROUP AGM 2025

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the contents of the report and appendix summarising the position of Appletree Housing as at March 2025; and
2. Endorsed the Immediate to Medium Term Objectives.

KEY DECISION:

No

PORTFOLIO:

Finance and Corporate

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Cllr S Davies declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Council appointed Director of Appletree Property Group. He reported he would not participate or vote on this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate clarified that Appletree Holdings was a separate independent company, providing properties to rent and had no connection to the HRA. An AGM had recently been held and this showed that the company was doing well with its property holdings. Additional properties were not currently being purchased. It was noted that rental income continued to increase.

The Assistant Director of Finance confirmed there had been no further properties purchased over the last year. The market value of the properties had increased by £0.5 million and a loss had been made of £29,000 over the last financial year. However, the performance against all the KPIs was positive, properties were compliant in terms of maintenance, there was a low level of rent arrears and that following a tenant survey it was noted that the responses received showed that tenants were very satisfied.

A recommendation in the report sought to endorse the eight objectives, which were included in the appendix. These included, for example considering the implications of LGR and reviewing rents in 2026 to maximise rental income and keep in line with market rent.

A non-Cabinet member, who had been appointed as a board member to Appletree Property Holdings reported that preference for these properties was to let to people in the district with a local connection and to be a landlord of choice. It was highlighted that a survey had been carried out with tenants and there was nearly a 100% level of satisfaction with the tenants.

In response to a question regarding LGR and whether it would be transferred to the new authority, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate confirmed that it would be transferred across to the new unitary authority as an asset.

50 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED:

That the appointments to the New Forest National Park Authority, be agreed as follows for the remainder of the four year term ending in May 2027:

Conservative (2): Barry Rickman and Derek Tipp

Liberal Democrats (1): Caroline Rackham

Independent (1): Joe Reilly

KEY DECISION:

No

PORTFOLIO:

Leader

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None

DISCUSSION:

The Leader highlighted the recommendation, specifically the two conservative members, Cllr Barry Rickman and Cllr Derek Tipp to be appointed to the National Park Authority for the remainder of the four year term.

CHAIRMAN