

20 NOVEMBER 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 20 November 2025

* Cllr Alan O'Sullivan (Chairman)

Councillors:

* Alan Alvey
* Jack Davies
Jacqui England
* Barry Rickman

Councillors:

* John Sleep
* Alex Wade
* Christine Ward
* Phil Woods

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Geoffrey Blunden
Steve Clarke

Councillors:

Jill Cleary
Jeremy Heron

Also In Attendance:

Melvyn Uttley – Co-optee Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Officers Attending:

Ingrid Archer, Alan Bethune, Rebecca Drummond, Ryan Stevens, Paul Whittles, Amanda Wilson and Lee Ellis

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Jacqui England.

30 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Sleep be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

31 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

33 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

34 HALF YEAR UPDATE COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT

The Panel received an overview of the Half Year Update on Complaints Performance and Service Improvement.

A Panel member asked if there would be clarity regarding the differences with waste collection in the annual and future reports. It was confirmed that following feedback from members there was a further breakdown in waste complaints which provided a clearer overview of the change in the waste service. Whilst the waste service change continued, additional complaints information would be provided to members.

A member asked whether the ICT upgrades had reduced the number of complaints received. In response, it was confirmed that there was no specific data on that. An update on the implementation of Netcall would be presented to members in due course, and it was expected that it would provide significant changes and benefits to the customer experience. Work had been undertaken to review the complaints process and the design of the forms for reporting. When the new systems were implemented efficiencies would be monitored to ensure that significant benefits were being delivered to residents and whether there were capacity savings. The Corporate Plan Key Performance Data – Quarter 2 would include the priorities for improving performance and complaints handling, which would be presented to the Panel in January 2026.

The Co-Opted member raised concern that there was an upward trend in tenant complaints including poor communications, the behaviour of Council staff towards tenants and information on areas of failure. It was requested that redacted copies of complaints that had been raised against Council employees be forwarded to the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) to consider. In response, it was confirmed that the Complaints Team would continue to support the Housing Service to utilise and learn from complaints, along with service improvement. The Information Governance and Complaints Manager would give consideration to redacted copies of complaints being considered by the TIG.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the half yearly update.

35 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Panel received an update of the Transformation Programme.

A Panel member noted that the monthly achievements included officer recommendations for public convenience improvements and felt that they should also include member recommendations. It was confirmed that a decision making report was being prepared to coincide with the budget preparation timetable, which would be published for consideration in the new year. Ward Councillor views would be sought.

A member asked whether there were plans to include in future reports to the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel regarding work undertaken to devolve Council assets to Parish and Town Councils. In response, it was intended that the Asset Management Strategy would set a level of expectation of where the Council would prioritise its time and resource. Following a data collection exercise, the public convenience maintenance programme would be prioritised. It was unlikely that assets would be transferred prior to local government reorganisation. However, there could be a small number of specific opportunities for Parish and Town Councils.

A Panel member asked a number of technical questions on Netcall and it was confirmed that a separate data project had been undertaken which had looked at the master data required to create the customer journey. The Council had also partnered with a specialist integration company which would work on the Council's legacy systems. Voice testing had been undertaken. Netcall would deliver a knowledge base system which would mean that operators did not have to be experts in all subjects but would be able to answer at the first point of contact due to artificial intelligence (AI) undertaking the research and providing an answer for the customer.

Concern was raised from a Panel member regarding the accuracy of the information used by Netcall due to it being collected via AI. It was confirmed that there would be narrow constraints regarding a search as it would look at the Council's internal information and website, which was different from a generative search engine and was not opinion based.

The Assistant Director – Transformation reported that a Member Briefing be arranged to provide a demonstration of Netcall in the new year.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation was noted.

36 FINANCIAL STRATEGY TASK & FINISH GROUP REPORT

The Panel considered the report from the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group.

The Chairman of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group addressed the Panel and presented the report. He highlighted that the 2026/27 financial year would be the last year where the Council had full control over its budget before the potential restrictions of local government reorganisation (LGR) commenced. Therefore, engagement with the Portfolio Holders regarding their performance over the year and thoughts on the future was important. The Task and Finish Group had asked astute, focused questions which had produced a balanced, informative report.

A Panel Member felt that the report had highlighted the priorities and challenges faced by the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the contents of the report and endorsed the follow up items to be considered by

Portfolio Holders for carrying through to Officer actions, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Cabinet or other committees, as appropriate.

37 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME, COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS, S13A POLICY, DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY AND CRISIS RESILIENCE FUND

The Panel considered Council Tax Support Scheme, Council Tax Premiums, S13A Policy, Discretionary Housing Payments Policy and Crisis Resilience Fund.

A Panel member asked what affect the 100% reduction from two years to one year as part of the Council Tax Premiums had been. It was confirmed that additional properties were now subject to the premium as the period was shorter. There was also additional Council Tax income as a result.

A panel member reminded other panel members that recommendations of the previous years' task and finish group were not all adopted by the council in the current Council Tax Support scheme.

When questioned on the flood relief scheme, it was confirmed by the Service Manager – Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services that central government mandated a discount, where there was a flood. However, it did not apply to second homes and a flood was the only scenario legislated for. For other scenarios a Section 13A policy could be used, under specific circumstances. There was no specific definition of 'periodically occupied' and a judgement would need to be made on the sole or main residence of someone, taking into consideration all the factors, circumstances and case law. To date, there were no details regarding the crisis resilience fund and when details were known the Council would work proactively with its partners to administer the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommend to Cabinet that the:

1. Current Council Tax Reduction scheme continues from 1 April 2026 with no proposed changes
2. Current application of Council Tax Premiums continues from 1 April 2026 with no proposed changes
3. S13A (1) (C) Policy be approved
4. Discretionary Housing Payments Policy be approved

38 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Panel received updates from the Portfolio Holders.

Cllr Jill Cleary – Leader

The Leader reported that the corporate peer challenge progress visit had been undertaken and their report was awaited. Feedback had been positive, against the background of LGR, with substantial progress being made against the

recommendations. Achievements which had been highlighted included the rollout of the waste service, preparing for the housing regulation inspection and the adoption of the People Strategy. It was also identified that staff remained committed and enthusiastic in working for the Council. The report would be reflected upon and would determine any further actions, which would be shared with the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel in January 2026.

The latest LGR consultation had gone live and would remain open until 11 January 2026. The Council would proactively publicise the consultation to enable residents and partners had their say on the option which they thought would be the best fit for the Forest. Lead Officers had been identified in each of the main work stream areas including HR and ICT. Work had taken place to scope the detail of their activities. A new Programme Manager would start on 8 December 2025.

Progress had made on the delivery of new technology, which would make it easier for customers to contact the Council. Significant work had been undertaken to deliver the People Strategy, with the launch of a new approach to performance reviews and personal development through the growth and goals framework.

Preparation was underway for the deferred Hampshire County Council and Mayoral elections in May 2026. A member briefing would be held in December 2025 to highlight the work of the Elections Team and members were encouraged to attend.

Cllr Jeremy Heron, Finance and Corporate

The portfolio holder reported work had progressed at pace at Eling Tide Mill. It was hoped that the mill would be back in service soon.

The Council was awaiting news from central government on the budget and work was being undertaken on the changing priorities which the Council faced as it moved towards LGR.

Revisions within the waste service were being undertaken and the Council was moving towards phase three of the rollout.

Some of the recent complaints and ICT improvements had been small, such as a change of coding and the rectifying of this had led to improvements.

The rollout of Netcall would now be January 2026.

Toilet upgrades were important, and a maintenance list had been developed. Members needed to remember that there were capacity issues and the need for any works to be done correctly.

A Panel Member raised whether there had been any recent investment in Appletree Property Lettings and if there was scope for partnership working to fill vacant units at Jubilee Business Park. In response, the portfolio holder confirmed that Appletree Property Holdings had stopped purchasing properties as it was not currently viable. The letting of properties at Appletree Holdings had gone well with just one vacancy. Letting had gone well at commercial properties. However, the letting of office space was challenging.

39 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved with the addition of reports to the January meeting covering the proposed capital programme and strategy

CHAIRMAN