

Council – 24 February 2025

Report of Cabinet – [5 February 2025](#)

Part I – Items Resolved by Cabinet

1. Draft Air Quality Strategy

Portfolio - Community, Safety and Wellbeing

Cabinet Resolution:

That the process for implementing the Air Quality Strategy be supported and that the draft Strategy be approved for public consultation.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing introduced the report highlighting that the District Council no longer had any Air Quality Management Areas, and that as directed by the Environment Act 2021, it was necessary for the Council to produce an Air Quality Strategy to ensure that air quality remained a high priority. It was proposed that following a public consultation exercise, approval would formally be sought to adopt the Air Quality Strategy.

Non-Cabinet members welcomed the draft Air Quality Strategy, recognising the desire to go beyond the air quality objectives set by Government. It was noted that the draft Strategy had been robustly considered at the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and that officers should be commended for their hard work in its production.

It was highlighted by a non-Cabinet Member that statistics had been presented in the strategy in relation to people over the age of 30, but that there was no mention of infants and young children. The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing responded, noting that the public health statistical data reported on air quality impacts with data provided from the Department for Health and Social Care. He would seek clarification on why data was only provided for the over 30s. He did however confirm that young children were considered vulnerable in terms of the impact of air pollution impacts within the draft Strategy.

Some non-Cabinet members spoke about the lack of provision of accessible public transport, recognising that Hampshire County Council would not be prioritising rural public transport. One of the main pollutants in the District was from vehicle emissions. It was suggested that efforts be made to enhance public transport where the District Council was able to.

2. Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy

Portfolio - Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet support the process for implementing the ASB Strategy and approve the draft strategy for public consultation.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report, highlighting that the last ASB Strategy had been adopted in 2013. A new Strategy was proposed which took into consideration good practice and guidance as well as the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) which places an additional focus on housing landlords to prevent and tackle ASB. The draft Strategy had been considered and supported by the Tenant Involvement Group as well as the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. There were four clearly defined strategic priorities.

A number of non-Cabinet members welcomed and supported the draft Strategy, recognising the importance of partnership working and that the local community needed to be encouraged to live together harmoniously. The issue of deprivation and child poverty was raised noting that a fifth of New Forest children were in receipt of free school meals. It was suggested that this had not been reflected sufficiently in the strategy. In response, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness acknowledged this point and reported that there had been a restructure of the estate management team to create a new neighbourhood team in order to respond to and resolve any issues before they escalate further. The other part of the team would focus on tenancy sustainment and support, which would link vulnerable people to any necessary support, and therefore this had been considered.

3. Local Plan Review – Issues and Scope Consultation Document

Portfolio - Planning and Economy

Cabinet Resolution:

1. that the Local Plan Issues and Scope document be approved for public consultation, attached at Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report; and
2. that any final editorial changes to the document prior to publication for consultation be agreed by the Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report which set out the progress on the Local Plan Review ahead of the first stage of public consultation with the issues and scope document. The importance of having an up to date Local Plan was highlighted. The Government had given a strong directive emphasising that Council's should have up to date Local Plans and any reviews should continue and not be delayed in light of any devolution or Local Government Reorganisation.

Extensive consultation had taken place with officers and an elected member group which had led to the broad range of issues, set out in the issues and scope document. It was proposed that following approval, consultation would commence in mid February and be widely publicised inviting as much engagement as possible. The planning policy team would host drop in sessions across the district to give people the opportunity to express their views. A list of locations would be published in due course. There would also be engagement with local town and parish councils and key stakeholders. Specialist engagement tools would be used for the consultation and the Portfolio Holder recommended that people respond to the consultation to help shape the future of the District.

Non-Cabinet members spoke in support of the report. The intention for a comprehensive engagement exercise, in particular involving the local towns and parish councils was welcomed. The Leader reiterated the importance of the consultation and invited members to publicise this in their local area and to encourage people to respond in order to achieve the best outcomes for the local community.

Non-Cabinet members also highlighted that the Member Task and Finish Group had considered the proposed consultation questions within the document very carefully, reviewing the wording to remove any planning related jargon wherever possible, to make the questions easier to understand. It was also acknowledged that respondents did not need to provide a response to every question within the consultation document. The hard work of officers in the production of the document was commended.

4. Community Grant Funding 2025/2026

Portfolio – Community, Safety and Wellbeing

Cabinet Resolution:

Part A

That Cabinet approve:

1. The proposal to increase Councillor Community Engagement Grants from £600 to £1,000 a year from 1 April 2025;
2. Community grants totalling £152,500 in revenue grants and £77,871 in capital grants, as detailed in Appendix 1, be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2025/26; and
3. The Community Transport grants totalling £44,359, as set out in paragraph 25 of the Cabinet report.

Part B

4. That officers be requested to produce a detailed report on how a community lottery scheme could be successfully run in the district, and the short to long-term implications for the Council, and for the report to progress through the Council's decision-making process.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing reported he was delighted to present the community grants report which proposed to award funding to support the local community. In light of the number of grant applications received in the previous year, the process for community grants had been reviewed and a more streamlined approach had been introduced. As part of this, the Town and Parish Councils had been directed towards applying for CIL funding which had

reduced the number of applications received. The Portfolio Holder reported he supported the new approach and recommendations within the report.

A non-Cabinet member spoke of the financial difficulty of Hampshire County Council and that there was no longer a community grant process. It was also highlighted that a review was being carried out of the County member grants and that no funding would be available until September 2025, if at all. Therefore, any funding the District Council could give to support local community organisations was welcomed.

Other non-Cabinet members spoke in support of the report, recognising that the new streamlined approach to consider the grant applications had reduced both officer and member time when reviewing the grant applications. The recommendations proposed would support a range of organisations across the forest, and consideration had been given to signposting the organisations to other sources of funding. The proposal to increase member engagement grants was welcomed in order to enable councillors to support local organisations and charities in their local area.

Part II – Recommendations to Council

5. Financial Monitoring Report (based on Performance April to December 2024 inclusive)

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Cabinet Resolution:

1. that the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund, HRA, and Capital be noted

Recommended:

2. That Council approve the reallocation of the net residual 2024/25 Pay Award contingency (£496,000) to create a new £150,000 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) reserve, with the remaining £346,000 being applied to the Council's existing Corporate Priority Reserve.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate presented the third quarter financial monitoring report. He noted there were a number of variations of the general fund but the most significant change was to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which was currently presenting a £207,000 surplus.

The following general fund variations were highlighted:

- Waste transition costs – an increase of £39,000, however given this was a major project, it was not to be unexpected.
- Additional business rate costs plus loss of income due to voids, of £248,000 in relation to Jubilee Business Park and Queensway.
- A reduction in public lighting costs of £50,000 due to lower than expected electricity costs.
- There was some remaining contingency funds held following the pay award. It was proposed that the remaining funds be reallocated to create a new £150,000 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Reserve. This was a significant change and had been an unforeseen requirement when the budget had been set last year and to top up the Corporate Priority reserve by £346,000.

In relation to the HRA, £248,000 was required to prioritise works to void properties to bring them back into use, however this pressure was offset against the additional rental income of £400,000 exceeding that which

had been budgeted for. There was also an additional benefit of £277,000 to reflect the outcome of the pay award costs.

A non-Cabinet Member questioned the waste transition costs and the reason for £12,000 falling within the remit of the Finance and Corporate Services rather than the Environment and Sustainability Portfolio. The Assistant Director – Finance reported that the waste project was cross cutting, and that this cost was in relation to customer services which was within the Finance and Corporate Portfolio.

Appendix 1 – Background report to Cabinet

6. Adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement

Portfolio – Planning and Economy

Recommended:

1. That the outcomes of the public consultation that took place for 6 weeks on the proposed amendments to the SCI be noted and that the draft responses to the representations received be agreed (set out in Appendix 2);
2. That the changes to the SCI set out in Appendix 1 be agreed and the amended SCI documents be formally adopted; and
3. That any final editorial changes to the document prior to publication be agreed by the Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report highlighting that the Statement of Community Involvement was a comprehensive planning document which set out how the council would engage with local communities on planning matters, including the preparation of the Local Plan, determining planning applications, planning guidance and how to allocate CIL. It detailed the minimum commitment of the Council to consult on such matters, however, it was expected that this would be exceeded at times in order to seek as much engagement as possible within the community.

A six week consultation had been carried out on the proposed amendments to the SCI and during this time there had been engagement with the local town and parish councils and key

stakeholders. Specialist engagement tools had been used to encourage as much engagement as possible. Whilst there had not been a significant response to the consultation, the responses received were valuable. The SCI had been updated and the revised document was presented to Cabinet seeking that it be recommended for approval to adopt at Full Council.

Appendix 2 – Background Report to Cabinet

7. Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme and General Fund Capital Programme 2025/2026

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Cabinet Resolution:

That the intention to create an Asset Management Strategy be noted.

Recommended:

1. That the schedule of projects, as included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 be approved within the 2025/26 budget, noting that this commits the Council to expenditure beyond 2025/26 whereby a project commences in 2025/26 and extends into future years;
2. That the Vehicle and Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2025/26 and 2026/27;
3. That the Appletree Court scheme previously approved in August 2024 be removed from the Capital Programme, updating the Council's MTFP accordingly and note the new £200,000 allocation for a reduced scope of work in the revised Capital Programme under recommendation 1; and

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report highlighting that revenue budget allowance to cover the AMP programme represented £2.5 million for the general fund and a further £390,000 for HRA.

The following key points were highlighted:

- Investment was proposed to continue to maintain the buildings of the health and leisure centres
- Depot improvements at Marsh Lane, Lymington

- ICT replacement programme and infrastructure works
- £1.65m was proposed as part of the revenue implications of the vehicle and plant replacement programme.
- £60,000 had been awarded to the Council from the UK shared prosperity fund and a separate report would be presented on how this grant would be spent
- Continued support to the community grant programme with a maximum budget of £100,000 towards capital grants.

The proposed General Fund Capital programme for 2025/26 represented £19.411 million. Within this, the majority of the scope of the work at Appletree Court had been removed in light of the Local Government Review. The new vehicle and plant programme proposed £2.463 million, with an additional £3.709 million to support the new waste strategy vehicles. The procurement of the new containers for the new waste strategy would cost £4.550 million. Finally, £1.5 million was proposed towards the disabled facilities grants, through the Better Care Fund.

The Assistance Director – Finance reported that almost 50% of the programme would be funded from external sources.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability spoke in relation to paragraph 20 of the report regarding the renovation of public conveniences. He felt that they were often undervalued, however they provided a critical role on providing facilities for all residents and visitors to the area. Modern and well-maintained public conveniences could attract and boost the local economy by making towns and villages, as well as open spaces more welcome and accessible. He understood and supported the work undertaken to prioritise projects with the funding available, however devolution and the Local Government Reorganisation landscape had shifted things. As the Portfolio Holder for this important service, he was pleased to note that a separate piece of work would be undertaken as part of a wider asset management strategy and welcomed investment in public conveniences over the next 2-3 years to provide high quality facilities to facilities and transfer to any a new authority or to the local towns and parishes. This was supported by the Leader, and she reported the approach should be applied to the other asset holdings the Council had. It was agreed with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate that this would be considered and taken forward as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Appendix 3 – Background Report to Cabinet

8. Capital Strategy 2025/2026

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Recommended:

That Council approve the Capital Strategy 2025/2026, including the adoption of the Minimum Revenue Payment (MRP) statement.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report which detailed the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 and how expenditure would be financed in line with financial regulations. It was proposed that the Council continue to maintain £10 million in reserves, in order remain in a stable and sound financial position. It was highlighted that there had been a change in position regarding the future of Lymington Town Hall and this had been reflected in the report.

The Assistant Director – Finance, in addition reported that the Capital programme was extensive over the period and that as a consequence, there was an increasing reliance on debt to fund the programme, having already exhausted most of the cash and internal resources.

Appendix 4 – Background Report to Cabinet

9. Scheme of Members' Allowances – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and Scheme to Apply from 1 April 2025

Portfolio – Leader

Recommended:

That the full recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and the scheme of members allowances to apply from 1 April 2025 be approved.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Service Manager – Democratic and Support Services reported that this was the second of two reviews commissioned by the Cabinet for an IRP of members allowances. This review was discretionary and reflected on the electoral review of the District which had seen a reduction in the number of elected members and the changes to the governance arrangements.

Appendix 1 detailed the considerations and recommendations of the IRP and a revised draft Scheme of Members allowances (Appendix 2), reflected on these recommendations. Minimal changes had been proposed by the Panel, but it was acknowledged that each councillor had an additional number of electors within their ward with the reduction in the number of councillors. The proposals sought to tidy up the basic allowance and the Leader's Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) multiplier, which in turn would make minor changes to the range of SRA's payable. It was proposed to continue with indexation to the national pay award for staff.

It was noted that in relation to financial implications, the conclusion of the process of the electoral review, meant there was an ongoing saving in the Medium Term Financial Plan. The IRP recommended continuing with the parental leave policy and the dependent carers allowance, which would help to remove any barriers for prospective councillor candidates from standing for election as a councillor and that this should be promoted by the council and political groups.

Appendix 5 – Background Report to Cabinet