

Cabinet – 18 February 2026

Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2026/27

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The report sets out a proposed balanced HRA budget for 2026/27, including decisions to be taken on dwelling rents, garage rents, shared ownership rents and service charges.</p> <p>The proposed budget includes uplifted maintenance budgets, meaning that a total of £19.293 million will be spent on maintaining tenants’ properties in 2026/27. This proposal supports the Council’s Corporate Plan commitments and responsibilities to its tenants.</p> <p>Budgets of £1.300 million and £3.000 million are proposed for Fire Safety & Statutory compliance, and Home Energy Improvement programmes respectively.</p> <p>The proposed Capital Programme totals £31.550 million, including spend of £15.200 million on the continued development and acquisition of new Council dwellings. The Capital programme requires external loan finance of £14.045 million, with the cost of this borrowing covered in the medium-long term through the rents’ payable.</p> <p>The budget is supported by a 30-year business plan forecast and spending decisions taken within this proposed budget support the financial sustainability of the HRA over this longer-term period through the protection of the minimum reserve balance and an appropriate level of interest cover.</p>
Recommendations	That Cabinet recommend approval of the following to Council:

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in dwelling rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed; 2. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in garage rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed; 3. that from 06 April 2026, shared ownership property rents be increased in line with the applicable rent review provisions within each lease. For the eight properties held under leases allowing RPI+0.5%, an increase of 5.00% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed, for all properties which are subject to CPI+1% under the current model lease, an increase of 4.8% be agreed and the weekly rent of one property sold under previous legislation be agreed to increase by 4.8%; 4. that from 06 April 2026 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges; 5. that the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be agreed; and 6. that a Housing Capital Programme to 2028/29, as set out in Appendix 4, be agreed.
<p>Reasons for recommendation(s)</p>	<p>The Current National agreed Rent Settlement allows for social housing rents to be increased by up to CPI +1%.</p> <p>To maximise rental income to continue to afford and provide energy efficient, safe and quality housing to our tenants, and to continue to provide new affordable housing it is recommended to set the rent increase to the maximum allowable and to confirm the capital programme to comply with statutory compliance regulations, the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the Council's Corporate Plan commitments.</p>

Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Steve Davies – Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Director(s)	Richard Knott – Chief Operations Officer (Deputy Chief Executive)
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Introduction and background

1. This report sets out the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, the proposed rent levels and other charges, the maintenance programme and a proposed Housing Public Sector Capital Programme for 2026/27 – 2028/29.
2. The proposed budgets for 2026/27 were considered by tenants on the Tenants' Involvement Group on 15 January 2026 and by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 21 January 2026. Their comments are included in paragraphs 73-78 of this report.
3. The proposed HRA budget is attached as **Appendix 1**, the detailed maintenance programme at **Appendix 2**, the 3-year forecast medium term financial position at **Appendix 3**, the proposed Capital programme at **Appendix 4** and a 30-year business plan briefing document at **Appendix 5**.

Key Issues

4. Housing Authorities and Registered Providers face on-going challenges to maintain the continuation of high-quality services to their tenants, ensuring that buildings are safe and free from hazards and delivering greater energy efficiency measures in the retrofitting of their stock, as well as delivering more affordable homes. Tenants, too, are facing challenges over rises in the cost of living. The proposal set out below to increase rents in line with the Government's current recommendation is considered to strike the right balance to ensure that the Council continues to provide high quality services to tenants and that the necessary programmes of maintenance and repairs to council housing stock are undertaken, as well as delivering Home Energy Improvement targets (EPC C and above) and new affordable council homes in the district.
5. Members are asked to consider a number of financial issues for 2026/27.

Housing Rents

6. The proposed budget identifies a social rent increase of 4.8%, in line with the Government's policy rent increase guidelines. It is the seventh increase, following a previous four-year social rent reduction programme.
7. Following the rent increase, average weekly rents will be £133.36 for 2026/27. The actual increase will vary by property but will amount to an average increase of £6.10 per week. Approximately two thirds of tenants are in receipt of benefits to help pay rent costs.
8. In 2023/24 the Government restricted rent increases to 7% rather than the 11.1% that would have applied under the policy of CPI+1%. This meant that actual rents have since that time been lower than formula rent levels, and income fell behind the inflationary costs to the service. The formula rent is still calculated per property and is a guideline figure to show what the rent would have been had there been no rent restrictions in place.
9. The Government has been considering allowing Councils to increase rents by an amount greater than the standard 4.8%, in order to move back towards formula rent levels, using rent convergence – the act of closing the gap between actual rents and formula rents over a period of time. The Housing Minister has now announced that convergence will not be implemented for the 2026/27 financial year but that 2027/28 weekly rents will be permitted to rise by £1 over and above CPI+1% and then by £2 above CPI+1% from 2028, until formula rent is reached.

10. This approach to rent setting enables the council to continue to provide homes that are safe, warm, and attractive places to live for our tenants. For example, the extra rental income allows stable long-term investment in our housing stock to deliver our ambition of improving the energy efficiency of over 3,200 homes to at least EPC C or above by 2030 (Corporate plan 2024 to 2028).
11. The recognised benefits to tenants and their households include better health outcomes, and homes that are cheaper to keep warm. Warmer homes are also better for the environment and for the council in meeting its housing energy efficiency targets.
12. We have a total housing stock of 5,275 well-maintained homes with 98.8% meeting the current Decent Homes Standard. Whilst we do not have any high-rise building, included in our housing stock and requiring on-going capital investment to ensure specific health and safety requirements such as enhanced fire remediation works are met due to vulnerabilities are:
 - 3 Extra Care Schemes
 - 81 units of HRA owned Temporary Accommodation comprising 101 bedrooms
 - 1 Scheme for ex-rough sleepers
13. The previous, current and proposed HRA budget allows for around 20,000 responsive repairs each year and the works to relet 250 empty properties per year. This has been reflective of demand, though it continues to increase and tenant expectations continue to rise. From the 01 April – 31 December 2025 the housing landlord service has attended 26,063 repairs which demonstrates a demand increase of 30.3%, with the potential to rise by the end of the financial year 2025-26. In addition, social mobility is increasing with over 400 empty properties requiring relet works.
14. It is worth noting that 1,185 of these repairs were classed as Emergency repairs requiring 3 hours attendance anywhere within the large geography of the New Forest, in turn creating operational delivery pressures for the teams involved to meet the response times.
15. Despite this spike in demand, performance in November 2025 against SLA timeframes is recorded as:

Urgent Jobs	Priority Jobs	Routine Jobs	Programmes works
97.89%	96.28%	93.89%	98.72%

16. Our tenant data and insight reports demonstrate that complaints have clustered around damp/mould and repeated access arrangements; and expectation of scope of repairs continue to rise locally and nationally. The introduction of the Hazards in Social Housing (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2025 which came into force 27 October 2025 commonly known as "Awaab's Law"; plus, the national publicity campaigns are seen as a contributing factor around the surge in repairs demand and associated complaints regarding damp and mould. This should not by proxy be taken that properties are in poor condition, more so that tenants are more aware of their responsibilities, of the implications on their health for not reporting repairs and the ease of reporting repairs to the council.
17. NFDC prepared well for the new legislation and went a step further in planning to address all the 28 hazards contained within the legislation (currently with different implementation dates through 2026) in its current operating procedures, not just damp and mould. This has included faster triage and better resident liaison reduce re visits, speed access, and to cut avoidable costs. It also means maintaining uplifted responsive repairs budgets including funding new Resident Liaison Compliance Officer capacity to unblock access and meet statutory health and safety compliance cycles including gas, electrical, and water hygiene etc.
18. A key driver therefore of HRA costs remains cyclical/responsive repairs, where there is less opportunity to control the increasing demand pressures as indicated. It is also the priority landlord service needed and requested by our tenants and leaseholders to keep them safe and satisfied within their own homes and communities.
19. The Major Repairs programme is also a significant proposed programme which includes an increase in gas boiler replacements, and a replacement windows and doors programme to keep on track for the Council's ambition to have all its homes certified EPC C by 2030.
20. This ambition has been demonstrated in our housing service always seeking to pro-actively achieve excellence in how we have supported our tenants and their homes. The results of 81% tenant satisfaction for this service, and the high performing service KPIs which demonstrate that despite the increasing service pressures, including costs of employees and materials that continue to rise above inflation, we can demonstrate and provide assurance of our good performance through our performance data and governance.

21. This includes working with our housing tenants to understand their needs and provide high quality service standards in line with the government's regulatory regime.
22. Whilst we welcome the opportunities and challenges provided by new legislation and improved standards the proposal to rent setting enables the council to continue to deliver to required standards and maintain its current high levels of regulatory compliance, health and safety, and tenant satisfaction over the medium term.
23. The additional rental income will also fund significant Home Energy Improvement programmes and carbon reduction impacts as costs are likely to be higher at the outset of the programme.
24. Improvements targeted in specific areas, where more challenging to improve property types are difficult to improve, such as non-traditional properties given our generally aged housing stock which puts pressure on the HRA in the medium term and longer term. Due to the geographical spread and type of housing stock with mixed fuel types including oil burning technologies where certain rural areas are off-gas and in a few cases off-grid adding complexity and cost to planned improvements
25. There are on-going cost pressures in labour and materials which outstrip inflation targets and remain volatile within the economy. The continued support for the funding of Disabled Facilities Grants in the Council Owned stock to support vulnerable and disabled tenants to remain in their own homes is one example where the service has reported an average of 30% cost increases over the last year by specialist contractors and the price of equipment and building works etc. The council nevertheless remains committed to providing this service for the reasons mentioned.

Service Charges – Hostels & Flat Accommodation

26. Service Charges are currently used by the Council as a method to recover Council Tax and domestic and communal energy costs from tenants where their personal usage costs are charged directly to the Council by the respective billing organisations. Service Charges are also used to recover some aspects of equipment provision, cleaning and communal heating and lighting costs from tenants, which are also incurred in their respective properties.
27. Around 1,300 tenants and leaseholders pay service charges to the Council and a review of costs and rates commences at the end of each calendar year. All service charges are revised and disaggregated each year to reflect accurate charges for tenants and leaseholders based on actual costs, and this year's exercise has been used to

inform this report, and service charges are then adjusted flexibly each year in line with these changes.

28. For 2026/27 total service charge income will increase by £69,000, largely reflecting additional properties arising from the Development Programme.

Garage Rents

29. It is proposed that garage rent charges are increased in 2026/27 by 4.8% (£0.68 per week) to £14.93 per week, plus VAT where applicable.

Planned Maintenance & Improvement Works

30. The report proposes total budgetary provision of £13.657 million for planned maintenance and improvement works to houses and estates. This, together with budgetary provision of £5.636 million for reactive maintenance works means that, in total, £19.293 million will be spent on tenants' properties in 2026/27. Details of the proposed works for 2026/27 and an indication of proposals for the following two years are set out in **Appendix 2**.

Fire Risk Assessment Works

31. Between 2022/23 and 2025/26 the Council will have spent £6.8 million on fire safety and statutory compliance matters. Funding of £1.3 million has been allocated for 2026/27, including £850,000 rephased from 2025/26, to continue the requirements to address identified actions from Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) in flat blocks.
32. Rephasing includes two existing buildings covered within the scope of project work which met the requirements of Building Regulations at the time of construction. These buildings have been assessed by our commissioned fire engineer with new fire safety strategies devised to support the continuation of 'defend in place'. The scope of work is intended to support fire safety improvements as a betterment to those in place at the time of construction, alongside wider modernisation improvements to common space, external façade and roof covering replacement which have come to the end of their serviceable life. More urgent work to deal with risk mitigation has already taken place. These buildings are inspected weekly by our building safety officers.

Home Energy Improvement Programme

33. In 2023/24 work to establish the future upgrade programmes to deliver all homes to EPC C by 2030, and net zero carbon by 2050 were established. Measures required to each home within the Council stock to meet these targets is known and estimated costs applied up to 2050. 2024/25 was considered a transition year where planning the upgrade strategy began to be overtaken by the delivery of increased retrofit activity. Funding of £3 million is proposed for 2026/27, but total expenditure up to 2030 is likely to be £15 million, with a further £115 million required to meet net zero targets by 2050.
34. Expenditure in the next 3 years will likely be offset by securing a grant of up to £824,000 from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF).

HRA Income 2026/27

35. Estimated total income for 2026/27 is £1.851 million higher than the original budget for 2025/26. The income variations from the 2025/26 approved budget are set out below:

	Change £000	Paragraph
Dwelling Rents	(1,929)	36
Non – Dwelling Rents	10	37
Service Charges	(69)	38
Contributions to Expenditure	51	39
Other Income	86	40
Total	<u>(1,851)</u>	

36. **Dwelling Rents (£1.929 million increase)** – The proposed budget for 2026/27 includes the benefits of £1.640 million arising from the proposed 4.8% rent increase, £267,000 from a net increase in property numbers from the development programme, including new shared ownership properties, offset by Right to Buy Sales and £22,000 from flexible rent and capped rent changes.
37. **Non - Dwelling Rents (£10,000 reduction)** – This income is derived from garages and rents of other housing land. The overall reduction reflects a £74,000 impact of reduced lettings due to voids and an ongoing project to provide a full options appraisal of all sites, offset by a £34,000 benefit arising from the proposed 4.8% increase in charges and increased non garage rent income of £30,000.
38. **Service Charges (£69,000 increase)** – The service charges proposals detailed in paragraphs 26 to 28 will result in increased

income of £69,000 largely due to additional properties arising from the Development Programme.

39. **Contributions to Expenditure (£51,000 reduction)** – This reduced income reflects the removal of specific Government grant that was provided in 2025/26 as a contribution towards the estimated £200,000 additional costs arising from the National Insurance changes announced in the 2025/26 Budget.
40. **Other Income (£86,000 reduction)** – Interest earnings are anticipated to reduce by £114,000 due to lower interest rates and the use of capital receipts to fund the capital programme. Administration income has reduced by £20,000 due to lower predicted numbers of Right to Buy Sales. These reductions are offset by an increase of £48,000 in the Shared Amenities contribution from the General Fund, to cover inflationary increases in costs and increases in expenditure on grounds maintenance budgets, as detailed in paragraph 43.

HRA Expenditure 2026/27

41. Budgeted operating expenditure for 2026/27 is £957,000 higher than the approved budget for 2025/26. After allowing for depreciation charges and the removal of the non-recurring 2025/26 transfer of £150,000 from reserves for specific earmarked projects, surplus resources available for making principal repayments on borrowing have increased by £744,000 to maintain a balanced Housing Revenue Account for the year. The major variations are set out below:

	Change £000	Paragraph
Cyclical/Reactive Maintenance	554	42
General Management	179	43
Grounds Maintenance and Trees	176	44
Housing Schemes and Temporary Accommodation	106	45
Capital Financing Costs - Interest	<u>(58)</u>	46
Operating Expenditure	957	
Contribution to Capital – Supporting Housing Strategy	<u>0</u>	47
	957	
Capital Financing Costs – Principal	<u>744</u>	48
Total	<u>1,701</u>	

42. **Cyclical/Reactive Maintenance (£554,000 increase)**– Increased maintenance budgets are principally due to pay and prices increases of £225,000 and an increase of £211,000 on cyclical

maintenance, due to the expansion of lead/legionella testing (£131,000), increased stock condition surveys (£45,000) and additional window cleaning costs (£35,000). In addition, a review of the Vehicles programme has increased allocations by £123,000.

43. **General Management (£179,000 increase)**- Supervision and Management budgets will increase due to pay and prices increases of £85,000. Budget provision has been added for a Waste Advisor to support the waste roll out to tenants (£21,000), for additional cleaners for new properties provided by the Development Programme (£30,000) and for additional resources to deal with the impact of increased housing regulations (£120,000). These increases have been offset by various other net reductions, mainly staff allocations, of £77,000.
44. **Grounds Maintenance and Trees (£176,000 increase)** – An increase in budgets is due to pay and prices increases of £23,000 and an increase of £153,000 in charges from the Grounds Maintenance team, principally due to the outcome of a review of vehicle cost allocations. These increases are partially offset by an increase in the Shared Amenities Contribution from the General Fund.
45. **Housing Schemes and Temporary Accommodation (£106,000 increase)** – Additional costs are principally due to inflation of £15,000, an increase of £65,000 in the cleaning budget for additional properties arising from the Development Programme and increased allocations charges of £28,000, principally following a review of the Vehicle allocation methodology.
46. **Capital Financing Costs Interest (£58,000 reduction)** – Capital financing costs have reduced by £58,000. This is principally due to a reduction of £116,000 following the repayment of the next instalment of the settlement borrowing in March 2026. Additional interest costs of £337,000 are expected on forecast new borrowing for the proposed 2026/27 capital programme but these are largely offset by reduced costs due to less borrowing than expected in 2024/25 and 2025/26 and due to lower interest rates than budgeted on actual borrowing taken out during 2025/26.
47. **Contribution to Capital - Supporting Housing Strategy (£0 increase)**– This budget is the prescribed calculation of dwellings depreciation that needs to be charged to the Housing Revenue Account and is used to part fund the capital programme. The figure is based on a combination of factors including property valuation, component costs and remaining component life. While materials costs have increased this impact has been offset by a reduction in the property valuation element. The budget will remain at £10.2 million.

48. **Capital Financing Costs – Principal (£744,000 increase)**– After allowing for transfers from reserves of £150,000, the Council is required to set a balanced budget for the year. Increased operating income of £1.851 million exceeds estimated increased operating expenditure of £957,000, increasing the annual amount available for repaying principal on borrowing by £744,000. This results in a total repayment amount available of £3.769 million, which means that there will not be sufficient resources to enable the maturing loan of £4.1 million to be repaid in full during 2026/27 and therefore additional replacement borrowing of £331,000 will be required.

HRA Reserve Balance

49. The HRA Reserve balance as at 1 April 2025 was £1 million. This is a prudent level and meets with good governance practice.
50. The original 2025/26 HRA budget showed a break-even operating position, with no proposed reserves transfers. A financial update report for the year was presented to Cabinet on 4 February 2026, which included forecast variations to the year end. In accordance with current policy, any surplus or deficit for the year will be balanced by a transfer to or from the Acquisitions and Development Reserve, but assuming a break-even HRA position for the year 2025/26, this will result in a year-end balance of c£4.8 million as at 31 March 2026, after funding the capital programme.
51. The proposed HRA budget for 2026/27 currently shows a break-even position and therefore the estimated Housing Revenue Account balance (cash reserve) as at 31 March 2026 and 31 March 2027 will be £1 million.

30 Year Business Plan

52. In 2024/25 the Council, with the assistance of an external consultant produced an initial 30-year HRA business plan projection, a summary of which was included in the budget report last year. This projection was further refined during the last year which will inform a formal plan with an agreed strategic direction for stock investment and new housing development. A Briefing document is attached at **Appendix 5**.

Capital Programme

53. The proposed Housing Public Sector capital expenditure programme for 2026/27 totals £31.550 million. The detailed programme and anticipated funding are set out over the page with indicative details for future years in **Appendix 4**.

	Original 2025/26 £000	Latest 2025/26 £000	Original 2026/27 £000
Proposed Expenditure			
Fire Risk Assessment Works	1,500	650	1,300
Major Structural Refurbishments	0	921	0
Planned Maintenance & Improvements	11,100	10,752	10,700
Home Energy Improvement programmes	1,870	2,070	3,000
Estate Improvements	200	200	400
Disabled Facilities Adaptations	950	950	950
Development Strategy	15,200	15,200	15,200
TOTAL	30,820	30,743	31,550
Funded by			
Revenue	10,200	10,000	10,200
Capital Receipts	4,000	7,200	6,080
Acquisitions and Dev. Reserve	950	950	950
Government Grant	2,805	4,326	275
External Borrowing	12,865	8,267	14,045
TOTAL	30,820	30,743	31,550

54. Significant works to properties, including mandatory compartmentation and new fire doors, are being carried out following detailed Fire Risk Assessment surveys. Funding of £1.3 million is proposed for 2026/27, but this includes £850,000 rephased from 2025/26.
55. The Major Repairs budget has been set at £10.7 million. Details of the proposed programme are set out in Appendix 2 but include an increase in gas boiler replacements, and a catch-up programme of new window and door replacements which are required for the Council's drive to have all its homes certified EPC C by 2030.

56. Funding of £3.000 million is proposed in 2026/27 to continue works for Home Energy Improvements to the Council's housing stock and take advantage of any government grant funding available, as covered in more detail in paragraphs 33 and 34. Insulation programmes will be continued in 2026/27 to enhance the energy rating of properties and reduce fuel bills.
57. The Council's current Housing Strategy and Corporate Plan prioritise the delivery of new affordable housing homes covering the period 2018 - 2026. The proposed capital programme for 2026/27 includes £15.200 million to be invested in additional homes. Expenditure is also expected over the period post 2026/27 through to the end of 2029, which has been accounted for in Appendix 3 with similar levels of proposed expenditure.
58. In summary, significant financial commitments are needed to deliver the Council's priorities including our capability to deliver the HRA Business Plan:
- More affordable and sustainable homes
 - Stronger and more resilient communities
 - Changes to realise opportunities including IT Transformation and new asset management/repairs system (MARS)
 - Maintaining high quality and value for money services, monitoring, scrutiny, and collaboration
 - Mitigate Increasing Challenges and Risk in delivering Landlord services to vulnerable tenants with increased legislative requirements including building safety hazards and housing stock improvements with a focus on health and safety.

HRA Medium Term Financial Position

59. Attached at **Appendix 3** is an indication of HRA budgets for two years post 2026/27 and is included to enable decisions for 2026/27 to be made in the context of affordability for the medium term. With the continuation of a significant Home Energy Improvement programme and the increasing expenditure required to maintain the aging stock the HRA is placed under continuing significant pressure.
60. Based on continuing rent increases of CPI+1% alone, it currently shows an estimated operating deficit of c£1.1 million in 2027/28 and £0.6 million in 2028/29. These figures exclude the impact of additional income from implementing rent convergence to close the gap over the medium term, whilst concurrently expenditure and income budgets will be reviewed for those years with a view to further reducing the gap, but any remaining deficit will be closed by reducing the loan principal amount repaid to the externally borrowed commitment level of £4.1 million. Significant future costs of the

Major Repairs Programme and the Home Energy Improvement requirements will require both revenue and capital programme spend priorities to be reconsidered in accordance with the Corporate Plan priorities.

Section 25 Statement: Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves

61. There are a range of safeguards in place to help prevent local authorities overcommitting themselves financially. These include the Chief Finance Officer's duty to report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves (under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003) when the authority is considering its budget requirement 41 (England and Wales).

Section 25 Statement from the Section 151 Officer

62. The 2026/27 budget has been constructed based on all latest information and considers all factors that will have an implication to 2026/27 that are in the council's control. Budget variations in relation to levels of inflation have been considered and included within the budget where appropriate. Income projections are sensible and not overinflated, and the full cost of the council's staffing establishment is based on latest pay assumptions and is calculated in an appropriate level of detail. Senior Housing Management across the council engage with the council's central finance team on the preparation of the detailed budgets, and only budgets that have the backing of senior management make it through to this budget setting report for consideration by members of the Cabinet and ultimately Council.
63. There are areas of uncertainty that the council needs to be particularly mindful of, affecting the budget assumptions over the medium-term. These include (but are not entirely limited to) the following:
 - a. impact of resources required to support LGR preparations
 - b. pay award increases
 - c. materials and suppliers' costs
64. In setting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2026/27, the council is contributing to the financing of the capital programme. Use of reserves is supplemented where appropriate with borrowing, and an assessment is made on the affordability and proportionality of financing charges to the revenue budget.

65. The Housing Revenue Account reserve at £1 million and Acquisitions and Development Reserve, estimated at £4.8 million as at 31 March 2026, are considered to be adequate for 2026/27 considering the overall size of the council's capital and revenue budgets. Variations in actual performance as compared to budget assumptions are inevitable in an organisation with a Housing turnover as large as the council's, especially when also considering the diverse range and complexities of Housing services and differing levels of demand on those services throughout a fiscal period. Reserves exist to provide a cushion for these variations.
66. The proposal to use £950,000 of the Acquisitions and Development Reserve balance to support the delivery of the 2026/27 capital programme is considered appropriate and acceptable, both in the context of Local Government Reorganisation and the overall HRA business plan.
67. The council maintains a suitable level of liquidity regarding its overall cash balances in order to service the day-to-day requirements of the council. In order to maintain its professional investor status a minimum of £10 million must be available. Full details on how the council manages its borrowing, investments and risks can be found in the council's Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 report.
68. As the council's Chief Finance Officer, I am satisfied on the robustness of the estimates as included in the budget for 2026/27 and MTFP to 2028/29 and I am able to provide assurance on the adequacy of reserves held by the council.

Corporate plan priorities

69. People Priority 1: Helping those in our community with the greatest need: Provide more quality, temporary accommodation for single people and families and work with our partners to tackle homelessness.
70. People Priority 3: Meeting housing needs: Provide increased numbers of affordable homes by 2026. Improve the energy efficiency of over 3,200 council houses by 2030. Work with our housing tenants to understand their needs and provide high quality service standards in line with the government's new Social Housing Charter and regulatory regime.

Options appraisal

71. All spending options were considered, including postponing required capital works, but there is a risk that revenue spending will increase fixing end of life components.
72. Due to the age of a significant number of gas boilers, where parts are no longer available, there are very few alternative options to consider. Phasing of boiler replacements over a number of years has already taken place, following the obsolescence of major parts in October 2024.

Consultation undertaken

Tenants' Views

73. The Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) recognise the Council are in a strong position with an appropriately considered and prudent Housing Revenue Account (HRA) report and budget for 2026/27. It's important that the HRA is considered with tenants needs, desires and expectations in mind, and the TIG have been satisfied that the budget and associated report has given due consideration to this fact, having had the ability to review and scrutinise the report alongside senior officers of the Council.
74. The tenant's view is that the proposed rent increase is reasonable, alongside the anticipated and proposed rent convergence levels that are being considered by Government. The TIG also support the continued service charge recommendations, with service charges apportioned to tenants based on actual charges incurred by the Council.
75. Tenants appreciate the Council's commitment to our homes, specifically repairs and maintenance budgets, ensuring the safety and quality of homes, alongside the programme of improvements to homes including warmer, more energy efficient homes.
76. The TIG recognise the diverse tenant population and that the proposed rent increase will affect all tenants in different ways. Whilst the Council have given due consideration to this and are looking to ensure a balanced approach to tenants needs, communities and homes, the TIG noted concern about the impact of increased rents on those tenants affected by pressures on the cost of living. This is especially true for those whose income is not increasing in line with the proposed rent increase. The TIG noted that the council already offer a wide range of support and pointed to the Council's publicised 'cost of living' help and support. However, the TIG also recommended a review of support that can be provided to our Housing Tenants, and consideration of a specific Poverty Strategy.

77. As a result of the TIGs scrutiny of the proposed budget, the TIG are able to agree with the proposals, and support the recommendations within this report.

Housing & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Comments

78. The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the proposed HRA budget and housing public sector capital programme for 2026/27 and supported the recommendations.

Financial and resource implications

79. Attached at **Appendix 3** is an indication of HRA budgets for two years post 2026/27 and is included to enable decisions for 2026/27 to be made in the context of affordability for the medium term. With the onset of a significant Home Energy Improvement programme and the increasing expenditure required to maintain the aging stock the HRA is placed under continuing significant pressure. Whilst these budgets will be amended in future years, it shows an estimated operating deficit of c£1.1 million, before the calculation of any additional income achieved through rent convergence. Significant future costs of the Major Repairs Programme and the Home Energy Improvement requirements will require both revenue and capital programme spend priorities to be reconsidered in accordance with the Corporate Plan priorities.

Legal implications

80. The recommended capital and revenue funding levels for 2026/27 ensure ongoing compliance with legislation and guidance set by central government. Maintaining good quality and safe housing mitigates housing disrepair claims and other health and safety related claims.

Risk assessment

81. Risks related to safety compliance, maintaining the decent homes standard and maintaining the momentum toward achieving EPC C and net zero have been addressed by the recommended revenue and capital programmes.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

82. The capital works programme continues to provide more sustainable measures to improve the thermal efficiency of Council housing stock, through more efficient window replacement programmes, insulation, boiler replacements and air source heat pumps. Following the previous work of the Greener Housing Task and Finish Group and the Greener Housing Strategy, the Council is committed to undertaking

more sustainable measures year on year to reach the target of all properties having a minimum energy efficiency rating of EPC C, which will require in excess of £6 million over the next 3 years to fund the initial phases of the work, and up to a further £9 million by 2030.

83. In the long-term, should decarbonisation of the entire stock still remain a priority it will require the HRA to fund an additional £115 million of expenditure. This will present significant challenges to the HRA, and future priorities and strategic choices will need to be carefully considered. Whilst meeting net zero will require some carbon off-setting in due course the programme will remove several thousand tonnes of carbon emissions each year.
84. Initially, we remain focussed on Home Energy Improvement programmes across the stock, targeting the worst performing properties, which are often off the gas network and in rural areas.
85. All products used in the repair, maintenance and improvement of Council homes are selected to ensure the minimum impact upon the environment, are sourced from recycled materials where possible and at the same time balance the need to improve the energy efficiency of tenants' homes in order to meet the requirement for thermal efficiency under the Decent Homes Standard and meet specified and legal safety standards.

Equalities implications

86. All equality and diversity implications will be considered at every stage of the process of commissioning and carrying out planned maintenance, improvement and cyclical maintenance works. In addition, any contractor used for works will have been assessed, as part of the process in becoming an approved NFDC contractor, in respect of their adherence to equality and diversity principles.
87. The HRA funding priorities support the funding and commissioning of necessary works with a view to improving building quality and safety, and the energy efficiency performance of the council stock, which supports vulnerable people reduce household bills at a time of cost-of-living pressures, and which reduces disrepair and the exposure to damp and mould tackling health and housing inequalities.
88. The Tenancy Account Team, which incorporates a dedicated support worker, will continue to support and signpost tenants experiencing difficulties paying their rent, working collaboratively with community support networks.
89. The continued support for the development and acquisitions programme in 2026/27 addresses housing need issues and increases the supply of properties in areas where there is high demand for

social housing, and which supports the Council's aims of tackling homelessness in vulnerable communities.

90. The continued funding of Disabled Facilities Grants in the Council Owned stock supports vulnerable and disabled tenants to remain in their own homes or provides suitable alternative housing options for applicants and existing tenants whose needs cannot be met by their existing accommodation.

Crime and disorder implications

91. Many aspects of work identified within this report will improve the security of tenants' homes and improve the condition and aesthetics of neighbourhoods.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

92. There are significant IT systems and change projects to fund and implement in 2026-27 for housing services, including a new council wide customer service IT system as a part of the Transformation programme, and a new asset management/repairs system (MARS) project for housing fully funded by the HRA.

Conclusion

93. The proposed uplifted rent (in line with government guidelines) and service charges, as well as partial re-financing of the HRA settlement loan enable expenditure levels on housing maintenance and capital programmes to be maintained. This increased expenditure ensures compliance with Housing Regulatory Standards. The proposed budget is supported with 30-year projections and potential for fiscal borrowing and debt increases to accommodate the programme.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Summary HRA
Appendix 2 – Maintenance Programme
Appendix 3 – 3 Year HRA MTFP
Appendix 4 – Capital Programme
Appendix 5 – 30 Year Business Plan
Briefing Document.

Background Papers:

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET

	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	Variation £'000	Para
INCOME				
Dwelling Rents	-34,230	-36,159	-1,929	36
Non Dwelling Rents	-735	-725	10	37
Service Charges	-1,142	-1,211	-69	38
Contributions towards Expenditure	-128	-77	51	39
Interest Receivable	-418	-304	114	40
Sales Administration Recharge	-33	-13	20	40
Shared Amenities Contribution	-361	-409	-48	40
TOTAL INCOME	-37,047	-38,898	-1,851	
EXPENDITURE				
Repairs & Maintenance				
Cyclical Maintenance	2,234	2,557	323	42
Reactive Maintenance - General	3,520	3,569	49	42
Reactive Maintenance - Voids	1,885	2,067	182	42
General Management	8,288	8,467	179	43
Grounds Maintenance and Trees	1,087	1,263	176	44
Housing Schemes and Temporary Accommodation	1,200	1,306	106	45
Provision for Bad Debt	150	150	0	
Capital Financing Costs - Interest/Debt Management	5,608	5,550	-58	46
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	23,972	24,929	957	
HRA OPERATING SURPLUS(-)	-13,075	-13,969	-894	
Contribution to Capital - Supporting Housing Strategy	10,200	10,200	0	47
Capital Financing Costs - Principal	3,025	3,769	744	48
HRA Total Annual Surplus(-) / Deficit	150	0	-150	
Use of Reserves for Major Projects	-150	0	150	
HRA TOTAL ANNUAL SURPLUS(-) / DEFICIT	0	0	0	

2026/27 - 2028/29 MAINTENANCE BUDGETS

CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
External Cleaning and Decoration	630,500		
Appliance servicing (including gas, oil, solid fuel)	1,171,850		
Lift Servicing	103,000		
Fire Alarm Servicing	78,500		
Portable Appliance Testing	4,500		
Fire Risk Assessments	29,000		
Air Source Heat Pump Servicing	17,500		
CCTV, Laundry & Door Entry Servicing	64,000		
Legionella/Lead Testing	165,000		
Emergency Lighting	110,230		
Automatic Door Servicing	32,000		
Window Cleaning	55,000		
Alarms & Telecommunications	51,500		
Stock Condition Surveys	45,000		
TOTAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET	2,557,580	2,634,310	2,713,340

PLANNED MAINTENANCE & IMPROVEMENTS	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Heating Replacement Gas	1,915,160		
Electrical Rewiring	711,400		
Sheltered Schemes Minor Works	227,900		
Low Maintenance Eaves	460,000		
External Door Replacements	710,000		
Pitched Roofing	1,045,000		
Repointing	10,000		
Window Replacements	1,000,000		
Kitchen Refurbishments	1,250,000		
Drainage	100,000		
Structural Works	300,000		
Asbestos surveys and removal	100,000		
Garages	200,000		
Bathroom Refurbishments	350,000		
Insurance Work	10,000		
Water Main Renewals	40,000		
Miscellaneous	2,270,540		
TOTAL PLANNED MAINTENANCE & IMPROVEMENT BUDGET	10,700,000	11,021,000	11,351,630

ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Provision of estates works and paving	400,000		
TOTAL ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS BUDGET	400,000	400,000	400,000

TOTAL FORECAST MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	13,657,580	14,055,310	14,464,970

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

	Budget 2026/27 £'000	Forecast 2027/28 £'000	Forecast 2028/29 £'000
INCOME			
Dwelling Rents	-36,159	-38,121	-40,365
Non Dwelling Rents	-725	-747	-769
Service Charges	-1,211	-1,247	-1,285
Contributions towards Expenditure	-77	-77	-77
Interest Receivable	-304	-200	-141
Sales Administration Recharge	-13	-13	-13
Shared Amenities Contribution	-409	-421	-434
TOTAL INCOME	-38,898	-40,827	-43,084
EXPENDITURE			
Repairs & Maintenance			
Cyclical Maintenance	2,557	2,634	2,713
Reactive Maintenance - General	3,569	3,676	3,786
Reactive Maintenance - Voids	2,067	2,129	2,193
General Management	8,467	8,721	8,983
Grounds Maintenance and Trees	1,263	1,301	1,340
Housing Schemes and Temporary Accommodation	1,306	1,345	1,386
Provision for Bad Debt	150	150	150
Capital Financing Costs - Interest/Debt Management	5,550	6,171	6,880
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	24,929	26,127	27,430
HRA OPERATING SURPLUS(-)	-13,969	-14,700	-15,654
Contribution to Capital - supporting Housing Strategy	10,200	10,500	10,800
* Capital Financing Costs - Principal	3,769	5,301	5,469
HRA Total Annual Surplus(-) / Deficit	0	1,101	615
Use of Reserves for Major Projects	0	0	0
HRA TOTAL ANNUAL SURPLUS(-) / DEFICIT	0	1,101	615
OPTIONS IDENTIFIED TO CLOSE THE DEFICIT			
General Efficiency and Channel Shift/Rent Convergence	200k-500k	200k-500k	
* Loan Re-financing	upto £4.1m	upto £4.1m	

CAPITAL PROJECTS REQUIREMENTS WITH FINANCING

PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

		PROJECT REQUIREMENTS £			2026/27 PROJECT FINANCING £				
		2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Grants & Conts.	Cap Receipts / DC's	Internal/External Borrowing	HRA	HRA Reserves
Fire Risk Assessment Works	HRA	1,300,000	0				1,300,000	0	
HRA - Major Repairs	HRA	10,700,000	10,980,000	11,350,000			500,000	10,200,000	
Home Energy Improvements	HRA	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	275,000		2,725,000		
Estate Improvements	HRA	400,000	400,000	400,000			400,000	0	
Council Dwellings - Strategy Delivery	HRA	15,200,000	15,200,000	15,200,000	0	6,080,000	9,120,000		
Disabled Facilities Grants	HRA	950,000	950,000	950,000					950,000
		31,550,000	30,530,000	30,900,000	275,000	6,080,000	14,045,000	10,200,000	950,000
									31,550,000

HRA 30 year business plan briefing document

1. Introduction

This note has been prepared by Housing Finance Associates, using information supplied by officers at New Forest District Council about the authority's housing revenue account (HRA). It presents an updated baseline position, which has been prepared using working papers and assumptions agreed with the authority following its budget-setting process.

The projections summarise expenditure, investment, capital financing and borrowing in respect of council housing over a 30 year period, starting in 2024/25 and the authority's best available data and assumptions. They allow for inflationary pressures to impact on budgets and programmes from 2026/27 onwards. The projections also assume that National rent policy will permit maximum rent increases of CPI +1% until 2035/36, which is in line with a recent announcement by government.

The government has recently consulted on reintroducing rent convergence for existing social rent tenancies. Alongside the baseline we have included an indication of the potential effects of two scenarios for reintroducing rent convergence from 2026/27.

We recommend that the authority reviews the risks facing its HRA regularly, with a view to identify the effects of emerging situations at an early stage, testing its response and taking appropriate action to eliminate or mitigate the risk.

2. Baseline projections

2.1. Baseline assumptions

The baseline assumptions reflect the projected 2024/25 revenue outturn, 2025/26 budget and medium term projections for capital and revenue prepared by the authority's finance team. These update the draft budgets that were reported to Cabinet in the annual budget-setting report from February 2025. Other information and assumptions we have used in preparing this baseline projection include:

- Updated information on the authority's programme for developing and acquiring new dwellings over the medium term.
- An expectation that growth in General Management budgets in 2025/26 to support the authority's transformation programme will be removed from 2027/28 onwards.
- Data from the right to buy pooling returns that the authority submits to MHCLG
- We have assumed that the authority sold 25 homes under the right to buy in 2024/25 and sells 40 homes in 2025/26, while it processes an influx of applications that followed publication in October 2024 of the government's plans to reform the Right to Buy and reduce discount levels. From 2026/27 onwards we have allowed for 10 to 11 sales pa.
- The authority aims to maintain a minimum HRA balance of £1.000m, adjusted for inflation
- Any sums generated by the HRA that exceed the minimum balance are made available to finance the capital programme or to repay debt
- Actual rents increase at the maximum rate currently permitted by the rent standard. The maximum rent increase for existing tenants in 2025/26 has been set at 2.7%. Under a recent announcement by government, increases of CPI +1% are expected to apply until 2035/36. We have made the prudent assumption that rent increases will be limited to a CPI uplift from April 2036.
- Formula rents increase at CPI +1% until 2035/36, in line with the government's announcement. From 2036/37 onwards we have assumed that formula rents increase in line with CPI.
- In 2024/25 the authority re-let 5.5% of its social rent stock (282 units) at formula rent, with future relets in the same proportion. A small number of these dwellings (6 pa) are also re-let with an additional 5% rent flexibility charge, which is permitted under the rent standard.
- Depreciation costs have been estimated in line with the authority's budget, uplifted for inflation at CPI.
- Inflation assumptions have been updated to reflect the May 2025 Monetary Policy report from the Bank of England and applied as follows:
 - CPI at 3.25% in the final quarter of 2025 and 2.0% in the final quarters of 2026 and 2027. These rates have been used to reflect underlying inflation for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 respectively. From 2028/29 onwards we have assumed CPI runs at 2% pa.
 - RPI tracks at CPI +1%
 - General management and special management costs increase by underlying CPI.
 - Building costs increase at RPI. This affects spending projections for day to day repairs and maintenance, major works to existing homes and the provision or acquisition of new homes.
 - Other costs in the capital programme have been inflated by CPI.
- The baseline allows for the HRA to develop or acquire 445 new homes between 2024/25 and 2034/35.

- Major works and component replacements are treated as 100% variable from 2027/28. These costs have an element that flexes to reflect increases and reductions in the housing stock.
- At the start of the planning period HRA debt includes internal borrowing from the Council of £9.812m.
- The projections assume a pooled interest rate of 4.8% would apply to new loans in 2024/25 and 2025/25, reducing to 4.2% for 2026+/27 and 2027/28, then a rate of 3.8% from 2028/29 onwards.

In preparing this projection we have assumed that the HRA would attempt to repay any additional external borrowing that it undertakes as quickly as possible. Our reason for making this assumption is that it gives a clearer indication of how well the HRA can service and repay any borrowing that is required to deliver its long term capital programme. Any actual borrowing undertaken by the authority would be subject to the prevailing market conditions and guidance received from the authority's treasury advisors.

2.2. Gaps in the data and potential risks

Note that there are gaps in the data available to the authority, which have required us to make assumptions about future expenditure in key areas. The two principal gaps we have identified relate to:

- The cost of unforeseen works that may be required when investing in the authority's existing housing stock. We have included a contingency to allow for such works
- Lack of certainty around future National policies impacting on the Right to Buy, decarbonisation of the housing stock and associated funding. We have made prudent assumptions to accommodate these risks.

The profile of component replacements required for the existing stock is generated from the authority's stock condition data. We recommend continuing to update the modelling assumptions to accommodate new information from the stock condition data, as soon as it becomes available.

Other key risks include:

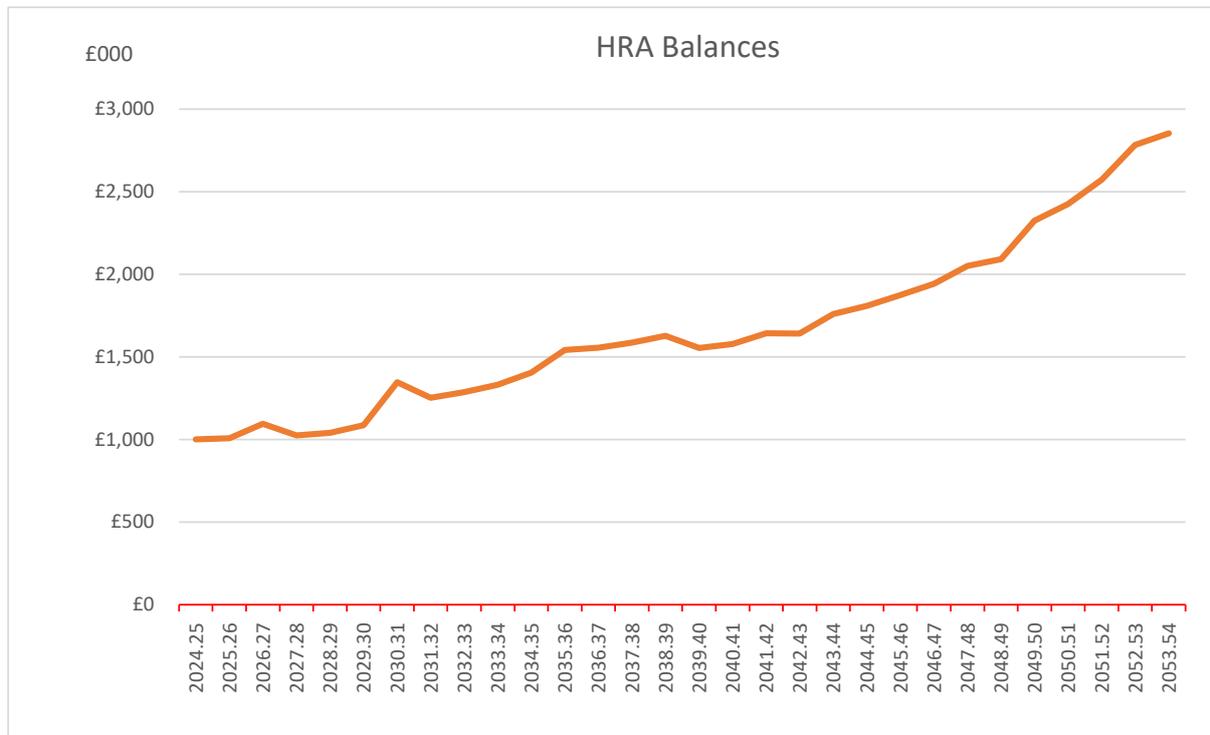
- fluctuations in the underlying rate of inflation, which can impact on both costs and income
- further constraint imposed on rent increases, whether by government or the authority itself
- increases in the costs of works and services that are not matched by increases in income
- changes to underlying interest rates

We recommend that the authority reviews the potential HRA impact of these risks regularly, as part of its early warning system. This will enable it to identify the effects of emerging situations at an early stage, test its response and take appropriate action to eliminate or mitigate the risk.

The effects of the baseline assumptions are shown in the following sections.

2.3. Baseline - revenue position

The chart below shows the authority's ability to maintain a minimum level of balances during the 30 year period covered by the baseline projection:

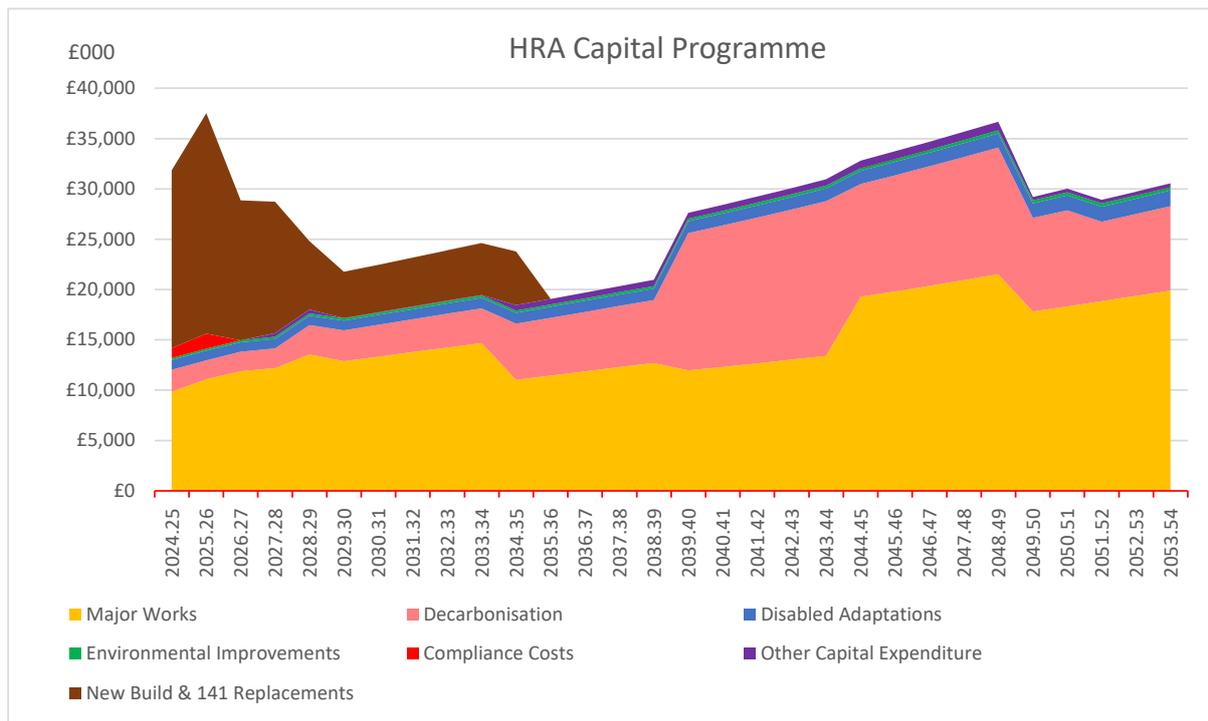


In this chart the orange line projects the cumulative HRA balance at the end of each year.

The authority maintains its minimum HRA balance of £1.000m (plus inflation) throughout the projections. During this period, any "spare" rents generated are used to pay for capital projects or to repay debt.

2.4. Baseline -capital programme

The next chart shows the scale and composition of the authority's projected capital programme:



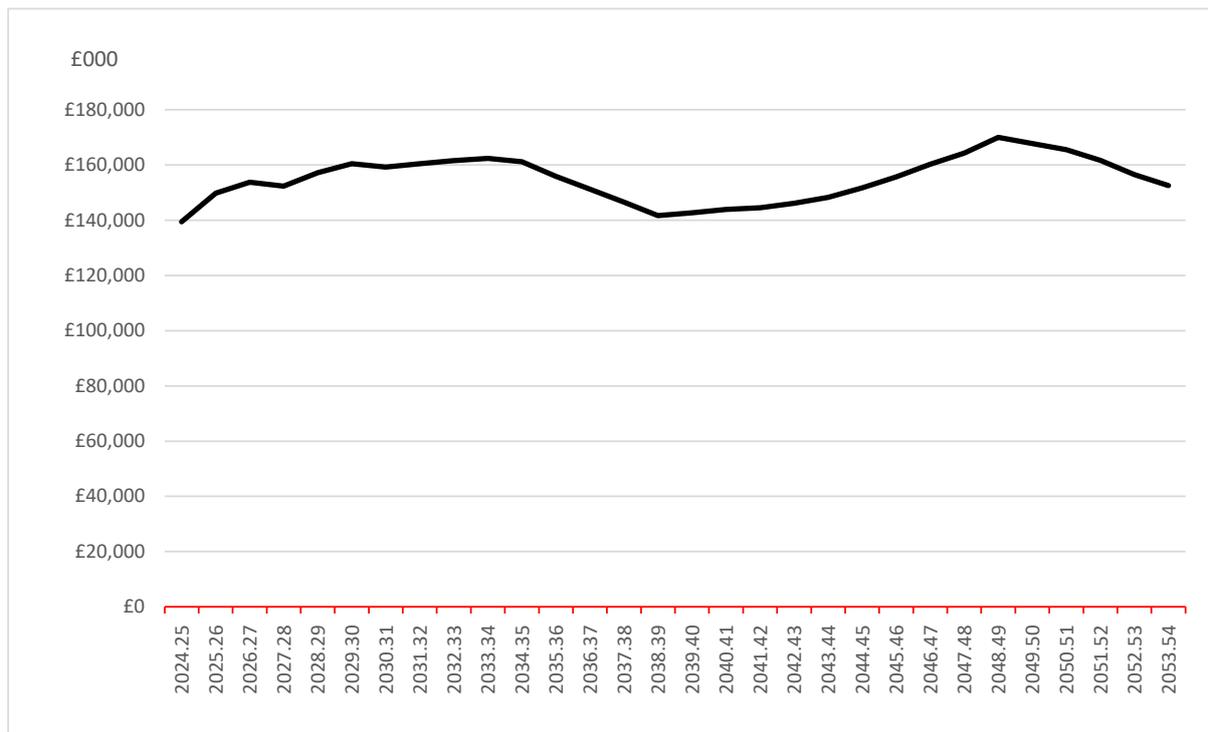
This projection includes a cautious 10 year programme for new build and stock purchase that produces 445 new properties between 2024/25 and 2034/35 (brown area). This reasonably represents the authority's commitment to increasing its housing stock, including a buyback programme, over the medium term.

The amber area allows for investment required on stock condition, based on the existing capital programme and stock condition data, with a contingency for (as yet) unidentified additional stock investment. The pink area shows an allowance for improving energy efficiency of existing homes to EPC level C standard by 2030, plus wider decarbonisation works. This allowance is based on the existing capital programme and stock condition data, with a contingency for additional decarbonisation works. The total amount of decarbonisation investment in the above chart is consistent with representative levels assumed by other local authorities.

The average cost of major works at current prices, £51,316 per dwelling (excluding decarbonisation works). The allowance for decarbonisation comes to £24,859 per dwelling at current prices over the same period. These allowances remain consistent with representative levels of investment in other authorities.

2.5. Baseline – debt

The next chart projects movements in the level of HRA debt during the planning period:



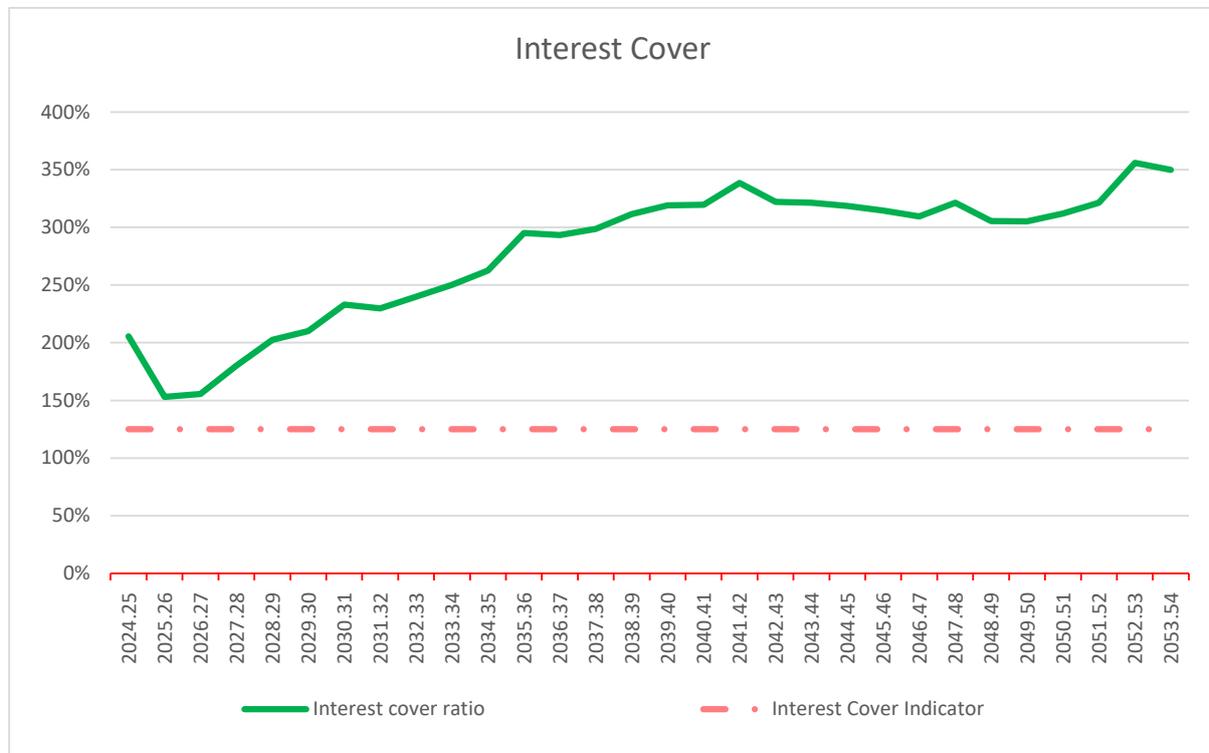
On these assumptions, the authority is unable to finance its capital programme entirely from its Major Repairs Reserve, revenue surpluses generated by the HRA and projected right to buy receipts. This causes the HRA to rely on borrowing to part-finance its HRA capital programme throughout the thirty year period.

HRA-related debt is projected to rise gradually over the medium term, reaching £162.384m in 2033/34. This coincides with a cyclical drop in major works investment. Debt then falls gradually until 2038/39 as the HRA takes the opportunity to repay debt. It then rises again, reaching a peak of £169.977m in 2048/49, when there is a further dip in the capital investment requirement and the authority is able to resume net debt repayments. It is noticeable that the authority is able to repay more debt than under previous projections. This is as a result of it generating additional rent, in line with the government announcement on rent increases.

Debt reaches its peak level in 2048/49, which is towards the end of the period covered. This means that the authority would be exposed to potential fluctuations in interest rates over the long term. It will therefore be important to continue reviewing the authority's options as the underlying economic circumstances evolve.

2.6. Baseline – affordability

Alongside our projection of the ability of the HRA to repay the debt required to finance the assumed capital programme, the chart below compares the level of operational surplus it generates with a standard indicator used by other landlords:



The green line in this chart shows the number of times the revenue HRA surplus is able to cover the assumed interest charges. When the green line goes down the authority's HRA is either making smaller surpluses or paying more in interest charges and the reverse is true when the green line goes up. The static dashed pink line suggests a minimum level of 125%, below which the authority would be at risk of being unable to cover its interest costs from its operating surplus.

This chart shows good levels of interest cover throughout the projections, which implies that the authority would be able to afford the level of borrowing required under the baseline assumptions. It is noticeable that performance against this metric levels off towards the end of the planning period. This reflects an expectation that some costs will rise at a faster rate than income over the long term, along with increases in borrowing to deliver the 30 year capital investment requirement.

Any increase in costs or loss of income would cause performance under this metric to deteriorate, unless the authority is able to make cost savings or generate additional income to compensate. The types of additional cost that the authority could encounter might result from higher inflation, increases in interest charges, commitments to spend more on providing additional or improved services, or additional costs to secure compliance with regulatory requirements. Any constraint on rent levels (whether imposed by government, or by a local decision to set rents at a lower level) would have a similar negative impact on interest cover performance.

Note that the requirement for borrowing is very sensitive to assumptions relating to cost levels, income from rents and other sources, plus interest rates. Initial sensitivity testing of these assumptions indicates that the authority should continuously seek to minimise costs and maximise income as a way of keeping debt levels down and minimising the associated risks.

2.7. Baseline – summary

The baseline assumptions produce a position that looks affordable but starts to weaken over the long term. The HRA can use borrowing to increase the number of council homes over the medium term, but to protect the long term financial health of the HRA the authority needs to be cautious about future commitments. It will be important to continue to minimise costs, while maximising income and resources. Where possible, spending pressures should be contained within the levels of income growth the authority can achieve from rents and other charges.

3. Rent convergence scenarios

3.1. Scenarios and assumptions

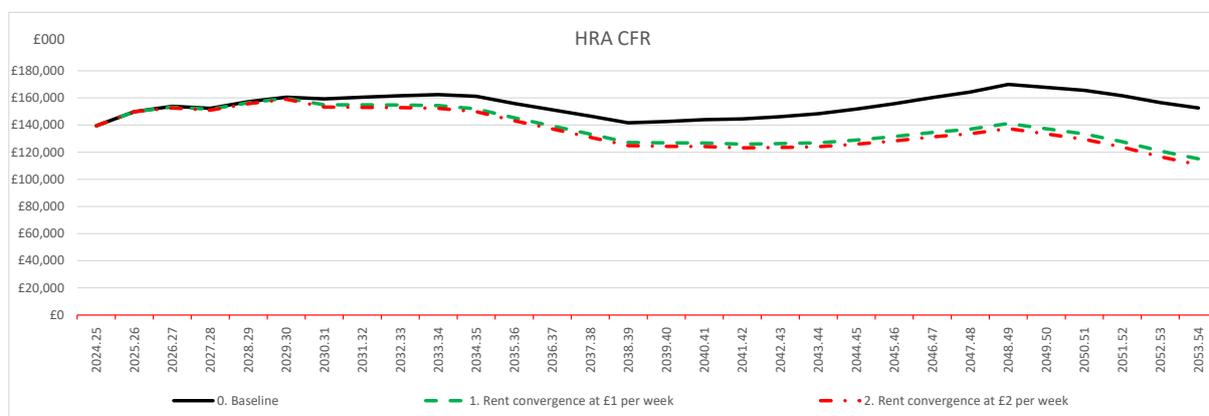
Rent convergence would enable the authority to close any gap between the rent a tenant pays and the formula rent for their property. This would be done by permitting rent increases that are higher than the maximum increase currently set under the rent standard until the actual rent and formula rent for the dwelling reach parity.

The government’s consultation on rent convergence considers an uplift of £1 or £2 per week to achieve this alignment. Accordingly, we have prepared one scenario for each of these alternatives:

- Rent convergence at £1 per week
 - The maximum weekly rent increase £1 per week higher for social rent dwellings where actual rents have yet to converge with the formula rent.
 - For dwellings where the rents have already converged, the maximum rent increase is the same as assumed for the baseline
- Rent convergence at £2 per week
 - The maximum weekly rent increase £2 per week higher for social rent dwellings where actual rents have yet to converge with the formula rent.
 - For dwellings where the rents have already converged, the maximum rent increase is the same as assumed for the baseline

3.2. Rent convergence scenarios – debt

The chart below projects movements in the level of HRA debt under each scenario, compared with the baseline position:

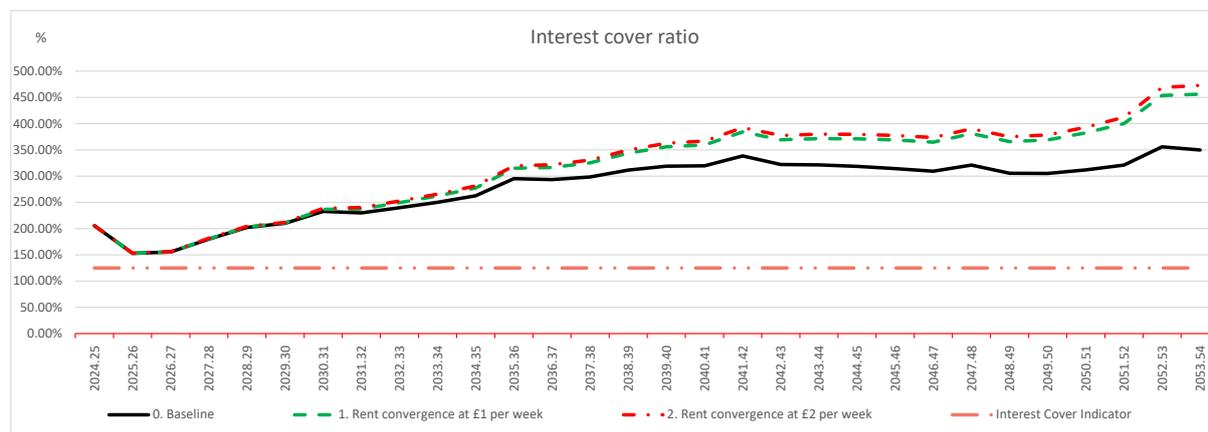


In this chart the black line shows projected HRA-related debt for the baseline. The green dashed line shows the effects of allowing for rent convergence at £1 per week. The red dashed line reflects rent convergence at £2 per week.

Both of the scenarios permit the authority to charge additional rent from 2026/27. This generates additional surpluses for the HRA, which enables it to repay more debt. As a result, debt drops noticeably after the medium term and continues to lower significantly by the end of the projections.

3.3. Rent convergence scenarios – affordability

We can expect rising rents and falling debt levels to have an impact on interest cover, which is a key measure of affordability for HRA-related debt. The impact is shown in the following chart:



The black line in this chart presents the baseline position, with the green line showing the effects of rent convergence at £1 per week and the red line showing rent convergence at £2 per week.

HRA-related debt becomes more affordable as debt levels fall and rents rise. This happens because there is more income available to the HRA, while interest charges on reduced debt levels are also lower. As a result, more income generated from rents is available to be used for other purposes.

3.4. Rent convergence scenarios – summary

Rent convergence clearly has a beneficial impact on the financial health of the HRA, as it permits the authority to increase income from rents while reducing debt.

As an indication, we anticipate that it would take six years for a general needs rent to converge at a rate of £1 per week for New Forest District Council. If rent convergence is permitted at £2 per week, these times reduce to three years for rents to reach parity. This means that rents converge quickly under both options, with similar financial benefits, although the gains are slightly higher for the authority if convergence is permitted at £2 per week.

Alongside any use of rent convergence, we expect the authority would also need to consider the affordability of the resulting rents to its tenants.