

Council– 15 September 2025

Report of Cabinet – [6 August 2025](#)

Part I – Items Resolved by Cabinet

1. Proposed draft Housing Landlord Strategy (2025-2030) with Reference to the HRA Business Plan

Portfolio – Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That the draft Housing Landlord Strategy be approved for public consultation.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report welcoming the draft Housing Landlord Strategy to help the Council in meeting the regulator’s consumer standards and addressing the regulatory changes in the housing sector. The Portfolio Holder recognised the consultation that had taken place on the strategy, in particular with the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG), ensuring tenants had a voice and the value of the tenant representative on the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Assistant Director – Housing reported that the Housing Landlord Strategy was not a legal requirement for the Council. However, the Strategy encapsulated the ambitions of the housing service to achieve a high compliance score with the housing regulator for the benefit of tenants. The Strategy also detailed the offer to tenants and stakeholders, which was broader than bricks and mortar, and included partnership working in order to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants. In addition, the strategy reflected on the HRA and business approach, which was the largest income source for the council, and it was recognised that this income came from tenants’ rents which needed to be spent in a responsible way. It was essential to improve existing housing and to make homes more energy efficient as well as being able to provide more affordable housing. The draft strategy had reviewed all the work carried out to date and detailed what the Council would do in the future.

A non-Cabinet member broadly welcomed the Strategy but felt that the reference to the HRA being a long-term capital business should be

reviewed due to how it could resonate with tenants. It was also felt that the requirement for housing to meet a minimum EPC level should be featured within the Strategy. The engagement exercises were welcomed, in particular in relation to the Hythe area of the district, recognising that this was one of the largest areas of rental accommodation. It was suggested that the spread of available accommodation be reviewed across the district.

The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities addressed the points raised, recognising that the council had a fiscal responsibility to manage £35m of income and £50m of expenditure on service delivery. Therefore, the Council must act business like and offer value for money for the service. Housing tenants were able to hold the council as housing landlord to account. This approach however, did not take away the empathetic and listening approach through engagement with tenants, the TIG, complaint learning, learning on a day-to-day basis as well as the Tenancy Sustainment Team to support housing tenants.

The Strategic Director highlighted that the council was working under the Government guidance in relation to the EPC C target by 2030. Consultation was currently being carried out on the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards within the social housing sector and that this will formalise the legal requirement for all social housing homes to meet EPC C standard. Regarding, accommodation, it highlighted the council had a key strategic aim for the provision of accommodation across all areas the district. In particular, one area has been overlooked as it was felt there was now sufficient accommodation there already. The forthcoming development at Hythe hospital would provide more accommodation and further accommodation opportunities were arising in the Waterside and the council was bidding for this accommodation.

The Chairman of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel further highlighted the tenant representative who had been co-opted onto the Panel and recognised the importance of this member to help engagement with tenants. This representative had also attended a successful community engagement event recognising that their involvement was greater than that of the Scrutiny Panel and that there had been a good level of engagement with tenants at this event.

2. Housing Annual Compliance Report

Portfolio – Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That the Housing Annual Compliance report be noted.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness presented the Housing Compliance report which covered a full financial year. The report had been considered by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in June. It detailed the statutory compliance measures to demonstrate effective scrutiny of the housing function. Work would continue to ensure that damp and mould awareness and prevention would remain a priority.

The Service Manager, Housing Maintenance, Programmes and Servicing highlighted that there had been a positive level of housing compliance across council owned housing stock as well as transparency of reporting through governance structures. The efforts the team supported the readiness for Awaab's Law which would come into effect in October 2025 as well as any future inspections by the Social Housing Regulator.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate was pleased to see the positive compliance rates and that the team continued to strive to improve the housing compliance rate year on year.

A non-Cabinet Member reported he would welcome the reporting of equalities information, in particular those with disabilities to be collated separately, recognising that this group of people were more likely to spend a greater amount of time in their homes and could be more impacted with, for example, delays to repairs and maintenance.

The Assistant Director of Housing recognised that this was at the heart of what the housing service was trying to achieve. There had been criticism of the housing sector in general with a one size fits all approach often being taken. The housing service improvement plan would consider a more individualised approach. It was essential to get to know the housing tenants and their households better to greater understand what things might impact them and it was recognised that more vulnerable people were more likely to be living in social housing.

3. Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2024/25

Portfolio – Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That the TSM results be reviewed and the performance reported for 2024/25 be noted.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness was pleased to present the report which demonstrated continued improvement against key measures. The tables detailed in paragraphs 7 and 10 of the report illustrated areas which had been improved as well as those which required further improvement. The Portfolio Holder was delighted that there was an 84% overall satisfaction level amongst housing tenants. He was confident that the team would continue to put in place further improvement measures.

The Assistant Director of Housing reported that the survey had been carried out by an independent agency with 500-600 housing tenants. There was a high level of consistency overall but there were some variances in relation to matters such as housing repairs, which was not unexpected. The council as a housing landlord was performing well and within the top 25% of all social housing landlords. The District Council was one of the few authorities which had achieved a 3% rise in satisfaction rates since the previous year, which was very positive news.

4. Update on Local Plan Review and revised Local Development Scheme

Portfolio – Planning and Economy

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the summary of comments and endorsed the recommended responses to the issues and scope consultation;
2. Approved the revised Local Development Scheme for preparing the Local Plan review;
3. Approved the scope of the Conservation Area Appraisal reviews;
and

4. Noted the updates on the associated evidence base work.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report which provided an update on the Local Plan Review and sought Cabinet approval for a revised Local Development Scheme. The report set out the updated timetable and the approach for the Local Plan review. Since the last report, a call for sites consultation had been undertaken as well as an issues and scope consultation, which included public exhibitions. This saw an increase in the number of comments received and they had been summarised in the report. The key themes resulting from the consultation included the urgent need for affordable housing, improved infrastructure, climate resilience and protection of the unique character of the New Forest. The respondents to the consultation had also emphasised the importance of town centre regeneration, prioritising brownfield development and ensuring new housing was well connected to employment and services.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the revised programme proposed a consultation on a draft Local Plan in late 2025, focusing on spatial growth options and emerging policies. This would be followed by a full Local Plan consultation in Autumn 2026, with submission to the Secretary of State by the end of 2026. The report also proposed reviews of Conservation Areas to ensure alignment with current policy and guidance and this work would take approximately eight months to complete. The work programme would be kept under review in light of the LGR context.

Finally, the Portfolio Holder congratulated the planning team on the comprehensive report presented and the wide range of consultation responses which had been received. It was recognised that conflicting views had been expressed and that it would not be possible to please everyone. It was important to produce a plan which was right for the district, looking at all sites, seeking the views of all members, in particular the member working group. Some compromises would need to be made in order to balance the many policies coming from central government.

The Service Manager – Planning Policy, Infrastructure and Delivery expressed thanks to those who had engaged in the consultation and to members through the working group for their input in work to date.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate highlighted that when a new Local Plan was being produced there were constraints from national government and that this was not always in line with the

views of local residents. However, the council would look to deliver a plan with the best outcomes for residents within those constraints. It was recognised, that in the context of LGR, it would be the last chance to influence planning policy for local residents. The Portfolio Holder was very supportive of a new Local Plan and was pleased to see a good level of engagement in the consultation. The team were congratulated on the work carried out on the plan development to date.

A non-Cabinet Member spoke about the member task and finish group involved in this work and thanks was expressed to all officers who were involved in this extensive piece of work. The challenges were recognised, and in particular the large volume of information and evidence being produced for analysis. Any future plan would need to be evidence based

Part II – Recommendations to Council

5. Revised Transformation Strategy

Portfolio – Leaders

Recommended:

That Council:

1. note the revised business case position; and
2. approve the revised transformation strategy

Cabinet Discussion:

The Leader reported she was happy to support the direction of the report and the new revised Transformation Strategy. The council was committed to delivering services to meet the needs of residents and make it as easy as possible for them to engage with the council, in a way that suited their needs. It was necessary to invest in the right systems to do this. The Leader reported she was passionate about supporting staff and that it was more important than ever to support staff, ensuring they had the right skills and capability to navigate the next few years and to thrive in any new authority. The revised strategy would deliver this.

The Leader reported it was also appropriate to reflect on the scope of the transformation programme to ensure it delivered meaningful benefits and to support the key objectives. Investment in systems and staff was required to improve the delivery of services to customers as well as the ability of the authority to respond to the uncertainty of LGR by positioning itself well in any transition to a new unitary authority.

The Transformation and Improvement Manager reported that LGR had significantly changed the context for the way the council approached transformation, and it was appropriate in this context to revise the transformation objectives and revisit the business case approved in 2024. The report presented a revised transformation strategy, and it considered the impact on the approved business case. The revised Transformation Strategy (Appendix 1) evaluated the original drivers for transformation in light of LGR and updated the Strategic Objectives. It also considered the scope of transformation activities, excluding those no longer feasible or practical in a shorter timeframe, considering the long-term future of the council. Whilst the original transformation strategy had aimed to deliver financial savings and modernised services, the focus for the revised strategy had a shift in approach to non-financial

benefits, including ensuring a smooth transition to a new authority, maintaining service quality and preparing staff and systems for future integration. Most importantly the new strategy had removed changes to staff roles, responsibilities and staffing structures but sought to continue to deliver improvements in the digital capability and support to customers and staff.

The three main digital projects being undertaken was the implementation of a new Customer Relationship Management system, replacement of the Housing Maintenance system and the replacement of the existing Regulatory Services software. These were necessary for the continuity and quality of service delivery.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate spoke in support of the review in light of LGR, recognising that the responsibility of the council did not end with LGR. It was important to continue to deliver services in the best way possible for local residents and that this would put the council in a good position for any new authority.

Appendix 1 – Background report to Cabinet

6. Principal Risk Register Review

Portfolio – Leaders

Recommended:

That Council adopt the Principal Risk Register updates.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Leader presented the Principal Risk Register which was presented in a new format. The Risk Register (Appendix 1) detailed all 19 principal risks. Updates were provided on the register every 6 months to the Cabinet, which enabled oversight of all risks and mitigation plans in place to ensure that members were informed about risk management and the implications. Following a quarterly review, two risks had been removed and one had been added. The two risks which had been removed related to the political environment due to the HCC elections planned for May 2025 being postponed and Hardley depot, which had been completed. The new risk related to recruitment and retention of staff due to the uncertainty of LGR and devolution. It was highlighted that the Audit Committee had reviewed the Principal Risk Register and the feedback had been considered by officers and included within the report.

The Assistant Director of Finance confirmed that Cabinet were presented with an update on the Risk Register every six months and that two risks had been removed and a new one added. Feedback from the Audit Committee was highlighted within paragraphs 16-18 of the report, in particular that unmitigated (inherent) and mitigated (residual) risk scores had been included within the risk register.

A non-Cabinet member referred to paragraph 17, of the report and was pleased to see highlighted that the council would work with partner agencies where there were risks. The example of the disruption of the water supply in the District was provided and the importance of good communication was essential.

Appendix 2 – Background report to Cabinet