

Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel

20 November 2025

Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group – Outcome Report

Purpose	To review the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group’s recommendations and endorse them for carrying through to officer actions, other overview and scrutiny panels, or Cabinet or other committees as appropriate.
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	The Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group has reviewed the Council’s financial strategy and has sought to understand how the plans and assumptions made by the Portfolio Holders marry up with the overarching financial planning of the Council. This report presents the findings of the Group.
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the contents of the report and endorse the follow up items to be considered by Portfolio Holders; for carrying through to officer actions, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Cabinet or other committees as appropriate.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	To provide assurance on the soundness of the overall financial strategy of each portfolio in supporting various workstreams, including maximisation of resources and delivery of corporate plan priorities.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Jeremy Heron – Finance and Corporate
Strategic Director(s)	Alan Bethune – Corporate Resources S151
Officer Contact	Paul Whittles, Assistant Director – Finance 02380 285 766; paul.whittles@nfdc.gov.uk

Introduction and background

1. Further to the creation of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish group as endorsed at the 26 June 2025 Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel, this report sets out the purpose and work of the Group and presents a set of conclusions and recommendations. The Group met seven times over September, October, and November 2025.

Terms of Reference

2. The terms of reference for the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group were:

'To gather an understanding of how the Council's overall financial strategy brings together various financial workstreams. This includes income maximisation and prioritisation of resources to ensure the delivery of the Council's priorities, and to challenge how the plans and assumptions made by the Portfolio Holders fit with the overall strategy.'

Membership of Group

3. The Group consisted of the following members:

Cllr Malcolm Wade (Chair)
Cllr John Adams
Cllr Kate Crisell
Cllr Philip Dowd
Cllr Alan Glass
Cllr David Hawkins
Cllr Joe Reilly
Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine
Cllr Phil Woods

Scope of Review

4. The Group received an overview of the Council's financial position, including the latest Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget for 2025/26, for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.
5. Following a review of the data a suite of questions was determined with a series of generic questions for each Portfolio Holder, supplemented with additional portfolio specific questions.
6. Each Portfolio Holder was then invited to present their responses to the group with further questions and challenge provided by the group members as part of the interview.

7. The generic questions asked to each Portfolio Holder were as follows:
- a. Briefly reflecting on the past 12 months through a financial lens, what have been your biggest achievements and challenges?
 - b. Looking ahead, taking into account the Local Government Reorganisation timetable, what does the Portfolio Holder consider to be the main:
 - i. Pressures (and how can the portfolio mitigate the resultant negative financial impacts)?
 - ii. Opportunities (and how can the portfolio realise the connected financial benefits)?
 - iii. Objectives (in terms of significant projects / service delivery aspirations) over the next 12 months?
 - c. How is the Portfolio Holder supporting the corporate plan priorities and associated portfolio objectives over the medium-term financial plan period?

In particular, how do you see your role evolving over the next couple of years, and how will you ensure the important aspects of your portfolio will continue to be resourced in the new council?

Findings / Issues Raised

8. All Portfolio Holders provided comprehensive presentations and answers to all questions posed. The Group welcomed the level of detail presented and subsequently reflected on key issues within each portfolio. This resulted in the following item for Portfolio Holders to consider.

Leaders Portfolio

9. Items to consider:
- a. Staffing budgets
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to ensure sufficient resources are available to support teams during the transition to the new unitary council. This should include ensuring sufficient budget is allocated to staff training, market supplements, pay award and temporary resources to manage any existing or emerging vacancies whilst

recognising the cost of incentives to retain versus costs of recruitment.

b. LGR

- i. The Portfolio Holder to confirm the communication budget is able to support maintaining regular updates with the public, town and parish councils and community groups.

c. Transformation

- i. To ensure resources are allocated prudently, can the Portfolio Holder (in liaison with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate) confirm investment in digital developments and delivery of the Strategic Asset Management Plan will provide long-term sustainable benefits to the district.

Finance and Corporate Portfolio

10. Items to consider:

a. Eling tide funding

- i. The Portfolio Holder to explore alternative funding from external bodies for the long-term sustainability of the heritage asset.

b. Reserves

- i. The Portfolio Holder to ensure all reserves are appropriately and specifically earmarked to deliver the council's priorities within the District, whilst maintaining the current unearmarked level to safeguard the council against unforeseen issues.

c. Freeport

- i. The Portfolio Holder to ensure Freeport benefits will be safeguarded for the benefit of the NFDC geography.

d. Contingency

- i. The Portfolio Holder to consider that future projects contain sufficient levels of contingency to be able to manage matters as they arise before they stabilise and transition to business as usual.

Planning and Economy Portfolio

11. Items to consider:

- a. The Portfolio Holder to ensure that CIL (and similar) funding is being invested swiftly across the district to avoid the continued accumulation of resources, mindful of the ability to deliver requires appropriately resourced teams.
- b. High Street Support
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider the level of resources required to invest in our high street quality and attractiveness, particularly supporting empty shop management.
 - ii. The Portfolio Holder to explore expanding the town centre master planning to all urban hubs in the district, building on the ongoing work regarding Totton.
 - iii. Note: Environment and Sustainability action below regarding consideration of car parking incentives such as 1-hour free parking may also provide support to High Street

Community & Safety Portfolio

12. Items to consider:

- a. Arts
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider continuing the seed funding approach across whole of the district currently in place, whilst championing grant funding opportunities, especially if existing external funding ends.
- b. Leisure
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to investigate what more our partners can do to support improving leisure access for low-income households.
- c. Emergency planning
 - i. To improve our collective preparedness and understanding, the Portfolio Holder to consider the channels used to communicate with partners and the frequency of our interactions with them, in order to express our unique challenges.

Housing and Homelessness Portfolio

13. Items to consider:
 - a. Homelessness/Emergency accommodation
 - i. The Portfolio Holder ensures that adequate resources are in place to support our most vulnerable.
 - b. Acquisitions
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider how we are targeting our finite resources appropriately, in turn ensuring we are content with our acquisition success rate and in turn our levels of aborted costs.
 - c. Maintenance of Existing Housing Stock
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider the level of investment required (including due regard to environmental requirements and standards) in our housing stock to support tenants, ensuring we continue to hold high quality assets.

Environment and Sustainability Portfolio

14. Items to consider:
 - a. New Waste Service
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to ensure the new waste service has adequate resources fully funded from 2026/27 following the roll out and learning from phases 1 to 3.
 - b. Fly Tipping
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider what improvements to fly tipping deterrents and enforcement are possible including working with partner organisations, in turn supporting our new service delivery model and protecting our environment (private/public land challenges).
 - c. Parking
 - i. The Portfolio Holder to consider car parking incentives such as 1-hour free parking in town centres across the district and the impact this would have on finances.
 - d. Coastal funding

- i. The Portfolio Holder to continue to progress developing a financial plan to deliver our Coastal strategy, including recognising the role and contributions required from external partners in addition to our own commitments as a first responder and minority landowner.

Corporate plan priorities

15. This report and its contents support all of the council's corporate plan priorities through the recommendations made regarding the budget setting process.

Financial and resource implications

16. The financial and resource implications from this report will filter through to future MTFP and budget setting reports, as required. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific finance and resource comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Legal implications

17. There are no direct legal implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific legal comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Risk assessment

18. There are no direct risk implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific risk comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

19. There are no direct environmental, climate or nature implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific environmental, climate or nature comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Equalities implications

20. There are no direct equalities implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific equalities comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Crime and disorder implications

21. There are no direct crime and disorder implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific crime and disorder comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

22. There are no direct data protection, information governance and ICT implications from this report. Subject to the actions recommended and any decisions that may follow as a consequence, specific data protection, information governance and ICT comments may need to be provided at that stage in the relevant report.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None