

Council – 15 December 2025

Report of Cabinet – [3 December 2025](#)

Part I – Items Resolved by Cabinet

1. Medium Term Financial Plan – General Fund Update

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. noted the revised MTFP forecasts, as outlined within the report and appendices 1 – 3;
2. endorsed development of further options to close the budget gap for 2026/27 and through to 2029/30; and
3. endorsed the approach taken to set the Asset Maintenance and Capital Programme Budgets for 2026/27, including the proposed approach for an enhanced Public Convenience renovation and maintenance programme over the next 2 years.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the item and explained that the latest changes in the Government's funding calculations would impact on the New Forest District Council's (NFDC) finances, with the four-year deficit expected to rise from £0.5m to £3.8m. The outcome of the Fair Funding Review appeared to favour urban areas and cities rather than rural areas. The additional £1.5m investment into the new waste service would, in the short term, be helped by the Extended Producer Responsibility funding to be received, with a further £1.2m anticipated in 2026/27. On pension costs, following the triannual review of the pension fund and the ongoing successful returns on investments, there would be a reduction in contributions required by the Council of £620,000 per annum, expected over the next 3 years. Overall, the Portfolio Holder reported that the Council remained in a strong financial position despite the various impacts.

The Assistant Director of Finance provided some further information on the report and the impacts on the General Fund over the next four years. He stated that the overall position had worsened due to the

likely changes to Government financing which would be confirmed by the provisional local government financial settlement later in December 2025. He reported on the unfortunate likely removal of separately identified New Burdens funding for food waste collection and commented on the new unfavourable methodology for funding of rural councils.

The Assistant Director for Finance explained that on Waste investment, there would be a likely increase in the Extended Producer Responsibility Funding from £1.75m to £2.4m, however future years cannot be guaranteed. There were some options to close the gap over the 4-year period but emphasis would be on maintaining strong financial management.

A non-Cabinet member referenced the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay and suggested exploring greater use of the Council capital fund to support local development and projects across the District. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained that NFDC had long-term commitments to meet and that there were various costs, such as the acquisition of new waste-trucks, that would take priority in order to remain responsible in handing over a sound financial position to the new authority.

2. Medium Term Financial Plan – Housing Revenue Account Update

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate & Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the revised MTFP forecasts, as outlined within the report and appendix 1; and
2. Endorsed the approach taken to set the Revenue Maintenance and Capital Programme Budgets for 2026/27.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and explained that the Council had a legal requirement to provide an annual, balanced budget demonstrating financial stability over the medium to long term. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would need to be stable in order to facilitate the orderly transition of services as part of LGR.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained how the robust budgeting of the HRA continued to enable the Council to reinvest in its housing stock as well as develop new stock, supported in part through the £11.114m, of HRA reserves.

The Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that the report covered the four-year period up to 2029/2030 and that there was nothing significant to update other than the improvement due to the reduction in pension contributions.

A non-Cabinet member asked whether NFDC housing stock would be maintained to the best condition prior to handover to the new authority post-LGR. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness referred to the ongoing project of keeping stock up to highly maintained standards and that the Stock Condition Survey, currently at 87% completion, would be finalised by March 2026. Those units that were most in need of updating were being prioritised. The Portfolio Holder was confident that the legacy of NFDC's housing service would be overwhelmingly positive

3. Allocation of community infrastructure levy (CIL) to local infrastructure projects

Portfolio – Planning and Economy

Cabinet Resolution:

1. Approved a supplementary budget of £18,365
2. Approved the list of 24 projects at Appendix 1 for inclusion in the capital programme for 2026/27 with a total allocation of £1,018,365;
3. Authorised the Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, to make such amendments as they deem appropriate to the approved project lists within 10% of the total budget. Any such amendments will be reported to Cabinet via the financial monitoring reports; and
4. Approved the opening of the local infrastructure bid windows, for bids up to £100,000, for the 2027/28 financial year for two-months during Spring 2026.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report and explained that 92 bids, totalling £3.8m in funding requests, had been submitted through the Local Infrastructure Projects 26/27 scheme. After assessment using the CIL expenditure framework and review of the bids by the cross-party working group, a total £1m was recommended to various projects. The Portfolio Holder thanked members and officers for their time and work during the process. It was reported that the projects that would be supported by the fund ranged from school facilities, community amenities and environmental enhancements. Providing funding support to these various projects would support the corporate priorities. The Portfolio Holder explained that a supplementary budget of £18,365 was being requested, for the 2026/27 budget to fund the proposed projects with these totalling more than the £1m already approved in the budget.

The Planning Policy Infrastructure and Delivery Service Manager thanked everyone who had submitted bids and for those involved in the process of reviewing. He clarified that the supplementary budget of £18,365 would be part of the next financial year.

Other Cabinet members acknowledged the time and work invested in the process and the significant impact that the funding makes across the District.

There was particular recognition of the Calshot Road crossing point at B3053 Calshot Road adjacent to St George's Church, which had been identified to receive a £100,000 allocation which would enable safe crossing of the road and vital improvement to the area.

A non-Cabinet member asked for clarification on what NFDC can allocate CIL funding on across the Forest. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy responded by explaining that NFDC were allocating funding across various other projects, such as via the Strategic CIL fund and that the Council were keen to allocate funding efficiently to projects that could be delivered and provide positive improvements to the District

4. Half Yearly Update Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate & Housing and Homelessness

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet noted the half yearly update.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the item and explained that the number of complaints had increased since the last half-yearly update and that most of these concerned the new waste service. He was pleased that residents were able to feedback to the Council and raise concerns and acknowledged that complaints were now being processed efficiently and in a timely manner.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness explained that the Council had received some complaints in its capacity as landlord under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman. The Housing service were committed to dealing with complaints swiftly and he was reassured that the best way to measure and monitor performance was through its complaints. This process also allowed the Council to resolve any issues that were brought to its attention.

The Service Manager for Legal and Information Governance provided further detail on the report and explained that the Council was under the jurisdiction of two ombudsman for its handling of complaints. These were: the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman, both of which had complaints handling codes that the Council must meet, in terms of compliance, reporting and scrutiny. The Council had chosen to produce this half-yearly update in addition to the statutory annual report to support ongoing scrutiny of complaints during the financial year. The Council's Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel had considered the report, along with those members of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel who attended.

Within the report, the Service Manager for Legal and Information Governance referred members to section 5, the overview of number of complaints received during this time frame and the general themes, section 6 which concerned tenant complaints and section 8 which covered ombudsman decisions during the half yearly period and confirmed that there were no complaints upheld nor were there any findings of maladministration from the two ombudsmen.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability acknowledged the number of complaints received for the new waste service. However, he did stress that the Council made around 40,000 collections a day and that the Council's waste collection service includes refuse, recycling, food waste, garden waste and glass, all of which demonstrated the scale of the challenge.

The Leader thanked the Council's Customer Services team for their hard work in handling enquiries and complaints. Cabinet acknowledged that complaints were serious and required proper assessment and continual reviews of handling processes.

A non-Cabinet member raised concern over equalities and whether residents with a disability were being served sufficiently and encouraged to feed back to the Council. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness reassured members that supporting those residents with a protected characteristic was of great importance. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Council was undertaking a data-collection exercise for all tenants. A bulk survey had returned results for 35% of the Council's tenants. Each year, the Council gains new data for 400 tenants, and a follow up programme that involves a variety of ways that the Council can collect data which will ultimately feed into a number of plans and projects to improve Council services.

A non-Cabinet member referred to the 120% increase in complaints for the 24/25 financial year. He acknowledged that a bulk of the complaints for the half year period related to the new waste service rollout but wanted reassurance that the Council was handling all its other complaints sufficiently. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that several of the remaining complaints were from tenants and related to housing which were handled separately to other complaints to the Council. He explained that there are several monitoring measures following actions taken to address complaints in the housing service. He stated that the number of housing complaints received by the Council were low when compared to other authorities and he was confident that trust levels were high among Council tenants due to the Council's encouragement for tenants to engage with the service and request action or change where appropriate to resolve any issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate emphasised that all areas were important, and that the Council would continue to address any systemic issues that were brought to its attention through the complaints process.

Part II – Recommendations to Council

5. Council Tax 2026/2027

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Recommended:

That Council approve:

1. the calculation of the tax base for the year 2026/27 of 74,305.8; and
2. pursuant to the report and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by this Council as its council tax base for the year 2026/27 as detailed in paragraph 13.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained that the process of setting the Tax Base was extremely complex. He acknowledged that this year there was a more accurate reflexion of the current position due to the latest actuals obtained by the Council.

The Service Manager - Revenues Benefits and Customer Services provided some further clarity on the item, stating that the report set out the Council Tax base for 2026/2027 which involved detailed calculations on the number of properties in each tax band within each Town and Parish, adjusted to allow estimates of discounts, exemptions, reductions, Council Tax Reduction and premiums. The estimated in year collection rate stood at 98.5%. The overall Band D equivalent net dwellings had increased by 950.80 (1.29%) from 2025/2026 to 2026/2027.

Appendix 1 – Background report to Cabinet

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

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Recommended:

That Council agrees that:

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

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate introduced the report and advised of an update in the recommendations, notifying members that Cabinet were asked to recommend to Council the recommendations contained within the report. He advised that there were no changes from the previous scheme.

The Service Manager - Revenues Benefits and Customer Services provided further detail on the report and stated that there were around 8,000 claimants who received support in paying their Council Tax, roughly totalling £10m a year. The Council had responsibility to determine their own local support schemes for those of working age residents, with support schemes for pension aged claimants set by the Government. There were no proposed changes to the scheme from 1 April 2026.

Council Tax premiums were introduced from 1 April 2025 for properties unoccupied and furnished and for those empty for more than 1 year, with no proposed changes to these premiums. The report further recommended the approval of two policies – the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy which supports households with a shortfall in rent and the Section 13A Policy which supports those with paying Council Tax during hardship. Both policies had been reviewed as part of the Council's cyclical review, with no changes in legislation and only minor amendments made to the policies.

The Council were awaiting details of the recently announced Crisis Resilience Fund.

A non-Cabinet member raised concern over the supporting of residents during the harmonisation of Universal Credit and how they would be impacted in terms of their Council Tax support. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate explained that the complexity of the matter meant there was no one-size fits all scheme but reassured members that where the Council had discretion, it would endeavour to support residents where there may be issues. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that though the Council would always listen to residents that it was inevitable to satisfy every individual and referred anyone that was dissatisfied to the appeals process and the relevant Ombudsman.

The Service Manager - Revenues Benefits and Customer Services reassured members that the Council's scheme aligns itself to the Universal Credit scheme and that the Exceptional Hardship Payments scheme is available to support those who still had a shortfall in their Council Tax and where the shortfall is causing hardship.

A non-Cabinet member highlighted that within the District there were pockets of deprivation and sought assurance that NFDC would continue to support residents throughout the handover to the new authority. The Service Manager - Revenues Benefits and Customer Services reassured members that any new scheme in the new authority would consider these factors, and additional support would be made available to residents who needed assistance. . A holistic approach is currently given to support residents, with advice, information and signposting.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate assured members that an appreciation and understanding of the unique nature of the Forest and the needs of its various communities would be passed on to the new authority.

Appendix 2 – Background report to Cabinet

7. Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Development Plan, Examiner's Report

Portfolio – Planning and Economy

Recommended:

That Council:

1. Note the recommendations made in the Examiner's Report (Appendix 1) into the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 2 shows the submission plan);
2. Agree the Examiner's proposed modifications (including further minor modifications identified by the two planning authorities) and the NFDC responses to them as set out in the Decision Statement (Appendix 3); and
3. Subject to the separate agreement of New Forest National Park Authority, agree for officers to make the necessary arrangements for the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan to proceed to Referendum (the date of the referendum is anticipated to be towards the end January 2026).

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report. He explained that the plan had been 9 years in the making and he hoped that, following all of the hard work that had gone into it and approval of the examiners, suggested modifications, and the approval by the New Forest National Park that this can then proceed to a referendum in January 2026. Once adopted the plan will help serve the residents of Lymington and Pennington in the future.

Appendix 3 – Background report to Cabinet

8. Waste Service Budgetary Position

Portfolio – Environment and Sustainability

Cabinet Resolution

That Cabinet supported the recommendations of the Waste Programme Board to:

1. Make permanent the collections of food waste containers from “behind the gate” in the defined areas open to free roaming livestock;
2. Instruct officers to conduct a whole service review after the completion of the phase 3 roll-out to include consideration of the approach to collection of wheeled bins from areas open to livestock and to also assess overall service productivity and efficiency; and
3. Support additional funding to the current bring-site service, and that a review be conducted upon completion of the phase 3 roll-out.

Recommended:

4. That Council:
 - a) Approves an additional £1.500m of annual budget to be added to the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 onwards to maintain collection service continuity, bring site services and retain the collections of food waste containers from behind gates in areas open to free roaming livestock;
 - b) Approves an additional £967,000 to be added to the Council’s Capital Programme for 2026/27 to accommodate the purchase of the additional vehicles required to support recommendation 1; and
 - c) Approves a supplementary budget of £301,000 to 2025/26 to support the continued bring-site service.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability introduced the report and explained the current position of the new waste service rollout and the steps needed to maintain its success. He highlighted the environmental benefits of the new service and emphasised the imperative of meeting the statutory obligations under the Environment Act 2021.

The report addressed the operational challenges of the new service in areas of the Forest where there was free-roaming livestock and recommended permanent 'behind-the-gate' food waste caddies which proved to be successful in safeguarding livestock and the delivery of the service. The report also sought additional funding to maintain the bring-site provision. The Council was committed to a full review after phase 3 of the rollout was complete, which would allow the Council to consider its approach and wider changes that may need be made. These changes to the service would be informed by data and formal modelling.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the financially significant recommendations, to include a £301,000 supplemental budget in 25/26, a £1.5m annual increase for the service overall from 26/27 and £967,000 of capital funding for additional vehicles to be acquired in 26/27. Council focus was on ensuring that the service remained effective, efficient and resilient alongside being environmental responsible and legally compliant, while also allowing scope for further considerations of long-term options once the service had bedded in.

The Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability provided further detail on the report. He stressed the careful planning and flexible approach required for a service-wide change of this scale. He referred to the partner engagement and necessary advice sought in crafting the recommendations put before Cabinet with a reminder of the recommended further review following phase 3 of the rollout.

A non-Cabinet member asked whether Cabinet were confident that there were enough resources and a sufficient budget in place to reassure residents in areas covered by phase 3 of the rollout. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability responded that the Council had learned many things from phase 1 of the rollout and that despite the scale of the logistical service change he was confident that phase 3 would be delivered to meet the needs and wishes of NFDC residents.

Non-Cabinet members acknowledged the successes of the first two phases and noted that the experience of the new service rollout had been positive for the vast majority of residents.

A non-Cabinet member congratulated officers on their hard work during the rollout and on the lessons that they had taken on board during the first two phases. He noted that phase 2 had benefitted from the lesson learned during phase 1.

On education of waste habits, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that education was a very important factor and that Council officers would continue to reach out to schools and the wider community to promote more sustainable practices.

Appendix 4 – Background report to Cabinet