

Council – 26 February 2026

Report of Cabinet – [4 February 2026](#)

Part I – Items Resolved by Cabinet

1. Corporate peer challenge feedback visit final report

Portfolio – Leader

Cabinet Resolution:

That the LGA's feedback reported be noted.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Leader introduced the report. She reflected on the positive progress made by the Council given scale of change and uncertainty facing it with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

It was noted that the Peer Team had highlighted the Council's important achievements such as the new waste service rollout, preparations for housing regulation inspections and the adoption of the new People Strategy.

The Leader explained that this report brought the corporate peer challenge process to a close, but reassured Cabinet that the Council would continue to focus on the areas identified within the review where further attention was needed.

The Leader thanked the peer review partners, members and staff for their contribution to and engagement with the process, which made it the review genuinely valuable.

The Assistant Director of Transformation stated that the final report would be published on the Council's website.

A non-executive member acknowledged the positives of the report and requested that the needs of the New Forest's residents be supported going forward into LGR.

2. Local Plan Review – Approval of spatial options and policy direction document

Portfolio – Planning and Economy

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. Approved the Regulation 18 Spatial Options and Policy Direction document for public consultation;
2. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to make any final editorial or formatting changes prior to publication; and
3. Noted that there will be an emerging evidence base published alongside the consultation, as referenced in the Regulation 18 document.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy introduced the report. He explained that the Spatial Options and Policy Direction Document was an important milestone in the overall process of the Local Plan Review. This part of the review builds on the Issues and Scope consultation and the call for sites process of 2025. Since then, Officers had continued to develop the strategy with input from stakeholders, partners and the member working group. It was explained that the Government's ongoing planning reforms included revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and placed a greater emphasis on housing development, economic growth and higher density development. It was important that NFDC developed a plan swiftly, with a focus on local issues and needs, rather than defaulting to the Government's national policy requirements. Officers had been proactive, engaging with statutory consultees and infrastructure providers whilst also working with partners in MHCLG and the Planning Inspectorate. This engagement was invaluable to the process and enabled Officers to understand the implications facing NFDC amidst national reforms. To enable the plan to be examined under the current regulations it must be submitted to the Secretary of State by December 2026.

The Portfolio Holder explained that as part of the Regulation 18 Document, 15 Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGOs) had been identified to test the various elements that the Plan requires, such as housing, economic growth, climate change and infrastructure. It was

stressed that the SDGOs were not confirmed site designations but instead formed the basis of the consultation, which would enable the Council to test the deliverability of housing and gather public and stakeholder views ahead of the draft Regulation 19 Plan, to be submitted by the end of the year.

It was reported that even if every identified SDGO was carried forward to a site allocation, there remained a significant gap between the Government's standardised method of calculation for housing need and the amount of housing that could feasibly be delivered. The Council must now openly engage with its communities on this issue. Cabinet heard that the public consultation would be hosted online and NFDC would be holding numerous in-person events across the district, which would be widely publicised in the local press and on social media. These sessions would enable all stakeholders to participate and provide strong, local focus on the issues and challenges facing the district.

The Planning Policy Infrastructure and Delivery Service Manager listed the ten in-person sessions that were being hosted across the district. They also stated this process of consulting on site options was the same process that was carried out at this stage in the last Local Plan review in 2016. It was confirmed that letters had been sent to all Town and Parish Council clerks who would inform their Councillors of this latest update and of the in-person sessions being held.

The Leader implored all residents and stakeholders to respond to the consultation.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate acknowledged the challenges facing NFDC given the various and significant constraints across the district. For example, the designated land used for backup grazing, the New Forest National Park and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. He explained that there was also the expectation that the Council would provide greenspace to new housing developments too, which was also a significant challenge.

A non-executive member stressed the importance of a strategic approach to the challenges facing the district. He highlighted that infrastructure was limited in many areas of the New Forest and that this would need to be factored into any considered developments.

The Chairman of the Local Plan Review Working Group thanked officers and Members for their time and work on producing the incredible amount of data, research and information that enabled the Council to navigate through both the process of the review and the Government's policy changes. The comprehensively developed

document would not please every person in the New Forest, but it had been developed rigorously and robustly using evidence and local focus. He urged all members of the public to read whole document and to draw their conclusions based on the strategic detail.

A non-executive member also recognised the scale of work that had gone into this latest document. They reiterated their concerns on limited infrastructure and emphasised the need to protect the character of the New Forest's various towns and villages. It was suggested that the information around the document could be made easy to understand, given the level of detail involved.

Some non-executive members were disappointed with the development options proposed in the document and raised concerns over the potential scale of development identified for the Plan Area. Issues with transport and travel were highlighted alongside the disappointment that the current allocation at Fawley Waterside would likely no longer be for housing.

The Assistant Director of Place Development reassured members that the focus had been on creating a robust and evidenced plan that drew upon the local knowledge and expertise of NFDC members and staff, in consultation with local communities, so that they could present a convincing plan the Planning Inspectorate that told the narrative of the New Forest and explained the issues and challenges facing the Council in balancing the needs of both housing and economic development alongside the planning constraints and unique natural elements of the Forest. The specific proposed allocation of strategic sites for development would come at a later point of the year, in the Regulation 19 Document, following public consultation on the Spatial Options and Policy Direction Document.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy reassured Cabinet that all members of NFDC would have the opportunity to make comments at Full Council, following the results of the Regulation 18 consultation.

3. Draft New Forest creative and cultural framework

Portfolio: Community, Safety and Wellbeing

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet approved the draft Creative and Cultural Framework for public consultation.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder Community, Safety and Wellbeing presented the report, explaining that he was very pleased with the draft framework document.

The Service Manager – Environmental and Regulation explained that the document detailed the shared vision for culture across the New Forest for all of its communities, businesses, practitioners and partners. The document identified the strengths in collaboration and partnership through learning and shared knowledge for maximum benefit. Strengths and opportunities within the Forest were identified through consultation and workshops with members, the creative sector, partners, officers and the public, a collection of priority themes were established including health and wellbeing, economic growth, skills, environment and place. Actionable measures would be implemented through the action plan which would be managed by Creative Forest. An impact report would be used to monitor and evaluate the action plan by a stakeholder steering group. The Council was now seeking to consult on the draft framework so that it could continue to shape the future of the New Forest.

A non-executive member stated their support for the document. They wanted more information on how Culture in Common would fit within the document. They raised questions on funding availability for the ambitions and the difficulty in supporting projects across the whole District due to the different needs within the district and how this challenge could be overcome.

It was recognised that creativity and culture had important wellbeing effects and the promotion of this through the LGR was encouraged to ensure that the new organisation would support culture in the Forest going forward.

A non-executive member commented on the framework strengthening the existing relationships and enable culture and creativity to thrive.

The Service Manager – Environmental and Regulation reassured Cabinet that Arts Council England had engaged with the process and had provided funding to Creative Forest to help manage and progress the strategy. The Creative Forest steering group would contain stakeholders who would review and monitor delivery against the ambitions.

All feedback through the consultation was welcomed.

4. Corporate Plan: Key performance data for quarter 2 2025-2026

Portfolio: Leader / All

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. Approved the Q2 2025-2026 dashboard; and
2. Considered any matters arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Leader presented the report and reminded Cabinet that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were an important tool for ensuring the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan commitments. It was explained that the Quarter 2 report had been considered by each of the Council's Scrutiny Panels. Commentary and monitoring of the KPIs that were below target was important, and the Council would keep these measures under review.

The Performance and Insight Manager explained that there were 30 KPIs in the dashboards. He highlighted that the KPIs had undergone extensive discussion by the Scrutiny Panels.

A non-executive member acknowledged the positive data within the dashboards and appreciated that there were many measures that would not be fully understood until the end of the year. He raised concerns over the issue of fly-tipping and it was discussed how work was ongoing with partners and that although the issue affected many residents across the Forest, that NFDC did not have a remit in many of the incidents.

A query was raised on the performance of the number of households in external emergency accommodation. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness explained that positive progress had been made over the past two months as a significant number of new social rent dwellings had been created and that many households had been moved from temporary accommodation into the new social rent dwellings in New Milton and Hythe. This in turn had freed up temporary accommodation which enabled the Council to move some households out of emergency to temporary accommodation. Therefore, the Portfolio Holder reported that the numbers of households in external emergency accommodation had declined dramatically.

5. Community grant funding 2026/27

Portfolio: Leader / All

Cabinet Resolution:

As recommended by the Task & Finish Group and Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet approved the following:

1. Community grants totalling £157,500 in revenue grants and £97,949 in capital grants, as detailed in Appendix 1, be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2026/27;
2. The proposals, as detailed in paragraph 19;
3. The Community Transport grants totalling £44,359, as set out in paragraph 25; and
4. A procedural change to award Band A organisations a rolling 3-year award, if agreed by the Task & Finish Group, and for any further procedural changes brought about by LGR to be considered by the Task & Finish Group and agreed through the PFH for Community, Safety and Wellbeing.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing was pleased to present the report and recognise all of the community groups and charities that the Council supports. He noted the time and work undertaken by Officers and the Community Grants Task and Finish Group in reviewing each application.

The Service Manager of Revenues Benefits and Customer Services provided further information on the report. He explained that this was the annual community grant programme, which this year had received a record number of applications, with 42 revenue grant applications and 24 capital grant applications. The Council already had a 3 year funding agreement with five organisations. They were currently underway in year one of its three-year agreement. The Task and Finish Group received 28 presentations for revenue grants, most of which were in person, and many of whom had applied for the first time. During the process, the Task and Finish Group provided applicants with additional information and advice, for example fundraising, which was well received.

Cabinet heard that the recommendations were for the approval of revenue grants of £85,000 to 23 applications and capital grants of £97,949 to 10 organisations. In total, 38 organisations would benefit from the community grants programme with the total grants awarded of just over £255,000. The community grants programme continued to support a wide range of organisations which supported residents across the New Forest, ranging from organisations focused on mental health, disabilities, carers, arts, culture, sports and environmental issues among others. The report recommended the continued support for two community transport schemes that were run in partnership with Hampshire County Council and Community First Wessex. These supported vulnerable residents, particularly in the Forest's rural areas. Positive feedback had been received from organisations about the grants programme as most of the grants which were currently available were project based and not to support the ongoing running costs.

Part II – Recommendations to Council

6. Financial Monitoring Report (based on performance April – December 2025 inclusive)

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

1. noted the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund, HRA, and Capital; and
2. approved net changes to the Capital Programme totalling £787,000

Recommended:

That the General Fund Corporate Priority Reserve is increased by £1.296 million.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate introduced the report and explained that the third quarter saw fairly minor budget variations and picked up previously resolved additional expenditure on bring-banks which had become more popular during the changes to the waste service. It was expected that the usage of these sites would settle down over time, but as it was currently an important service, additional funding had been allocated to enable its smooth operation. The report provided clarity on the Extended Producer Responsibility and the additional funding received towards the Refuse and Recycling service.

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources and S151 Officer provided some further information on the report. He highlighted that there had been some reduction in the interest charges for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was a positive change and meant that the Council could repay some additional loan principal. The Council was in the final stages of its budget preparations for the 2026/2027 financial year and that it would take into account the variations throughout the planning process.

A non-executive member was pleased that NFDC had seen matched funding become available to support improvement to Hythe Promenade as part of the investment supported by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Appendix 1 – Background report to Cabinet

7. Asset maintenance and replacement programme and General Fund capital programme 2026/27

Portfolio – Finance and Corporate

Cabinet Resolution:

That Cabinet:

- a) endorsed the schedule of projects, as included within the report and summarised via Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, noting that final approval will come through Council consideration of the 2026/27 budget; and
- b) noted that this programme commits the Council to expenditure beyond 2026/27 whereby a project commences in 2026/27 and extends into future years; and

Recommended:

That the Vehicle and Plant replacement programme be approved for a 2-year period, covering purchases due in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate introduced the report and explained that the programmes enabled the Council to maintain and replace assets where needed. He reported that there had been an increase of £210,000 into the overall budget for the year which brought the total to £3.1million, of which £500,000 relates to the HRA.

The programme concerns the assets that enable the Council to deliver their essential services to residents. The Portfolio Holder explained that much of the programme would be unseen by the public but was pleased to report that the Eling Tide Mill major works was an example of a visible project that had recently benefitted from NFDC funding and support to bring it back into use, with further works required and so included within the proposed programme. Much of the programs' efforts were on maintaining the leisure centres and replacing waste carts. The Portfolio Holder explained that despite financial pressures on Local Government, NFDC were still able to secure funding to support these projects.

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources and S151 Officer confirmed that the process had been rigorous and that the report had been considered and discussed by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel. He explained that there was a new Project Management Office in place which would provide oversight of the prioritised programme over next year.

A non-executive member commented on public convenience refurbishment across the district and highlighted the issue of additional facilities for people with disabilities. He reported that he had had productive and positive conversations with Officers and encouraged Cabinet to continue to add these facilities, given that the great benefit to many New Forest residents. The Portfolio Holder recognised the importance of these facilities and explained that the Council had installed additional, specialist pods for disabled residents.

A non-executive member thanked the Council for supporting the industrial heritage asset of the Eling Tide Mill which was deemed unique asset type that had widespread support.

Appendix 2 – Background report to Cabinet

8. Capital Strategy 2026/27

Portfolio: Finance and Corporate

Recommended:

That the Capital Strategy 2026/27 be approved, including the adoption of the Minimum Revenue Payment (MRP) statement.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate introduced the report. He explained that the Council was required to confirm its approach to Minimum Revenue Provision payments on an annual basis to ensure compliance with the regulations.

The Strategic Director Corporate Resources and S151 Officer explained that the report concerned the Council's annual adoption of its Capital Strategy and detailed the proposed program and financing for the next three years. The report explains the combined general fund programme and HRA programme, with a total of over £143million over the three-year period. The report also contains the relevant prudential indicators in accordance with the prudential code to show that the funding was in place and was proportionate for the size of NFDC. He

reported that there was nothing in the indicators that caused him concern. He reaffirmed that it was in NFDC's interest to set a programme that was deliverable.

Appendix 3 – Background report to Cabinet

9. Members' allowances – Scheme to apply from 1 April 2026

Portfolio: Leader

Recommended:

That the current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2026.

Cabinet Discussion:

The Monitoring Officer explained that this was an annual and routine report whereby Council was required to set a members' allowance scheme. The last full review had been implemented in the last financial year. It was heard that no changes could be made unless a fresh set of recommendations was brought forward by an independent panel. The recommendation before Cabinet was to adopt the current scheme for the year ahead.

Appendix 4 – Background report to Cabinet