

MINUTES of a meeting of the CABINET held in the Abbey Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on THURSDAY, 9 JANUARY 2025

Present: Councillor R Blunt (Chair)

Councillors M B Wyatt, T Gillard, K Merrie MBE, A C Saffell and A C Woodman

In Attendance: Councillors S Lambeth, J Legrys, A Morley and P Moulton

Officers: Mrs A Thomas, Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mr P Stone, Mrs A Crouch, Ms K Hiller, Mr T Devonshire and Mrs C Ormond

83. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor N Rushton.

84. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors T Gillard and K Merrie declared a registerable interest in item 12, Devolution White Paper Update, as they were both Leicestershire County Council Councillors.

85. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

86. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 were considered.

It was moved by Councillor T Gillard, seconded by Councillor M Wyatt, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings.

87. ADMISSION OF ADDITIONAL ITEM

RESOLVED THAT:

By reason of special circumstance in that an additional item of business needs to be considered before the next meeting of the Cabinet, the item entitled "Devolution White Paper Update" be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(B) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Reason for decision: To enable the consideration of urgent business.

88. 2024/25 QUARTER 2 GENERAL FUND FINANCE UPDATE

Before the report was presented, the Chief Executive made a statement to address some concerns identified within it.

A Member thanked Officers for their hard work and dedication in always working towards the Council maintaining a robust financial position in challenging circumstances.

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

Chair's initials

It was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor T Saffell, and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The forecast overspend on General Fund for 2024/25 of £2,136k based on quarter 2 information be noted.
2. The Special Expenses forecast outturn figures for 2024/25 based on quarter 2 information be noted.
3. The supplementary estimates detailed in appendix 2 which are below £100k and are externally funded be noted.
4. The supplementary estimates detailed on appendix 2 which are above £100k and are externally funded be approved.
5. All supplementary estimates detailed on appendix 2 which require Council funding be approved.
6. The supplementary estimates detailed in appendix 2 which are above £250k and are externally funded be noted.
7. The revised General Fund Capital Programme detailed in appendix 5 be noted.
8. The movement from the development pool to the active programme for the capital scheme detailed in table 5 be approved.

Reason for decision: To update Cabinet on Quarter 2 2024/25 and request approval for supplementary estimates as detailed in the recommendations below.

89. 2024/25 QUARTER 2 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) FINANCE UPDATE

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

The Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder noted the recurring recruitment issues, some progress had been made but there was more to be done. He also welcomed the results of getting empty properties back into use, which had provided extra income for the authority and additional housing for residents.

It was moved by Councillor A Woodman, seconded by Councillor K Merrie and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The forecast underspend on the Housing Revenue Account 2024/25 of £1,028k based on quarter 2 information be noted.
2. The revised housing capital forecast detailed in appendix 2 be noted.

Reason for decision: To update Cabinet on Quarter 2 2024/25 and request approval for supplementary estimates as detailed in the recommendations below.

90. DRAFT 2025/26 ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder. Additionally, he referred to the minutes of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting of 7 January, which had considered the draft Budget, and had been presented to the Cabinet as an additional paper.

The Chair noted that the authority had built up very strong reserves in recent years, which was useful for challenging years like 2024/25.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor K Merrie, and

Chair's initials

RESOLVED THAT:

The S151 Officer's advice set out in section 7 be noted and the content of the report be carefully considered as part of approving the General Fund Budget report 2025/26, the Housing Revenue Account Budget report 2025/26, and the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy report 2025/26.

Reason for decision: To ensure the Council meets its statutory requirements when considering its budget.
Required as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26 to ensure compliance with the Budget Framework as set out in the Council's Constitution.

91. DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

It was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor A Woodman and

RESOLVED THAT:

The following be proposed for statutory consultation:

- The draft 2025/26 Capital Strategy (Appendix 1);
- The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (Appendix 2);
- The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy (Appendix 3);
- The Non-Investment Strategy (Appendix 4).

Reason for decision: Required as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process.

92. DRAFT 2025/26 GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor T Saffell, and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The following be proposed for statutory consultation:
 - The 2025/26 draft General Fund Revenue, Capital and Special Expenses Budget.
 - The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the period 2025/26 to 2029/30.
 - The Budget proposals contained within the report.
 - The proposed fees and charges for 2025/26 .
2. The Council's key risks to the Budget be noted.

Reason for decision: Required as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26 to ensure compliance with the Budget Framework as set out in the Council's Constitution.

93. DRAFT 2025/26 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT SETTING

The Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

Chair's initials

It was moved by Councillor A Woodman, seconded by Councillor M Wyatt, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The following be proposed for statutory consultation:

- Draft 2025/26 Housing Revenue Account Budget
- Rent increase 2025/26
- Draft MTFP for the period 2025/26 To 2029/30
- Draft 2025/26 HRA Budget proposals
- Draft 2025/26 HRA fees and charges

Reason for decision: This report seeks Cabinet approval to consult on the draft Housing Revenue Account budget and Rents for 2025/26 and the proposals contained within. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into future reports to the Cabinet and Council, aiming to secure approval for the final budget in February 2025

94. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report on behalf of the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

A Member strongly welcomed the proposal to deal with the important issue of empty homes within the district.

It was moved by Councillor M Wyatt, seconded by Councillor T Saffell, and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The proposals in respect of Council Tax discounts and premiums as set out in the report be noted.
2. The recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 5 December 2024 be accepted, and the following Officer proposals put to the Committee be approved:
 - Proposal 1 – second home owners to pay double Council Tax (a 100% surcharge) from day one.
 - proposal 2 – the six-month 50% Council Tax discount for major repairs be removed and full Council Tax be charged from the point of ownership.
 - proposal 4 – Properties empty one to five years, be charged twice standard Council Tax (200%), properties empty five-10 years, be charged three times the standard Council Tax (300%), properties empty 10 years or more, be charged four times the standard Council Tax (400%).
3. The recommendation of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee be accepted, and the following Officer proposal put to the Committee be rejected:
 - proposal 3 – to remove the one month 100% Council Tax discount for empty, unoccupied and unfurnished properties and full council tax from the point of ownership be charged.

Reason for decision: The primary objective of the proposed long-term empty and second home premiums is to bring unoccupied property back into use.

Agreeing the proposed changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions would result in the Council generating extra income through the Council Tax. The proposal would mean that the Council and major preceptors would benefit from an increase in Council Tax revenue without Council Tax being increased.

Chair's initials

The discounts and exemptions will affect the Council Taxbase, which forms part of the annual calculation of the Council's council tax requirement in accordance with Section 31A Local Government Finance Act 1992 prior to approval by the Full Council.

95. DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER UPDATE

The Leader of the Council presented the report.

A Member expressed strong disappointment with the proposals contained within the Government's Devolution White Paper.

The Chair said that he had a duty to work with central Government, but he would do so in consultation with Cabinet colleagues, the Alliance, and opposition Members.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor K Merrie, and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Chief Executive, in liaison with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to undertake such work as is considered necessary in response to the White Paper and subsequent approach from Government.
2. It be noted that a further report will be brought to Cabinet for consideration on the implications for the Council of the White Paper and the next steps prior to any specific proposals being submitted to Government.

Reason for decision: To enable the initial engagement and work to commence in response to the White Paper.

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm

The Chair closed the meeting at 5.37 pm