

MINUTES of a meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on THURSDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2026

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)

Councillors J G Simmons, M Ball, A Barker, C Beck, D Bigby, M Blair-Park, R Blunt, R Boam, M Burke, R Canny, D Cooper, D Everitt, T Eynon, M French, J Geary, T Gillard, K Horn, R Johnson, J Legrys, K Merrie MBE, A Morley, R L Morris, P Moulton, E Parle, G Rogers, N J Rushton, R Sutton, A C Saffell, C A Sewell, S Sheahan, A Wilson, J Windram, L Windram, A C Woodman and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mrs C Hammond, Ms K Hiller, Mr P Stone, Mrs A Thomas and Mrs R Wallace

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Lambeth and N Smith.

60. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor R Johnson declared a registerable interest in item 12, 2026/27 General Fund Budget and Council Tax, as the Chair of Hugglescote Parish Council.

61. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair of the Council provided an update on the events he had attended around the district since the last meeting.

62. LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder made the following announcement:

The Finance Team was thanked for the hard work undertaken in preparing the 2026/27 budget and the statement of accounts, particularly Anna Crouch, Head of Finance for her tireless and diligent work. Thanks were also given to the opposition group for their contributions to the process and the success in working together to achieve the budget proposals.

It was announced that it was the last meeting before retirement for Paul Stone, the Strategic Director of Resources. He was thanked for all the support provided to the Members and the Council, and for revolutionising how the authority conducted its finance.

The comments were echoed by several Members around the Council chamber.

63. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

No questions were received.

64. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions were received.

65. MOTIONS

No motions were received.

66. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

67. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025.

It was moved by Councillor P Lees, seconded by Councillor J Simmons and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025 be approved and signed by the Chair of the Council as a correct record.

68. 2026/27 ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report.

The report was noted.

69. CAPITAL STRATEGY, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS - 2026/27

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

A question was asked regarding the process for approval of the play area grants. It was confirmed that the process for these grants as, well as the Legacy Fund Grant had not yet been agreed. It was noted that reports would be considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in due course.

The financial indicators required under the prudential code detailed in section three of the report were noted.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The authorised limit and operational boundary for external debt as detailed in table 3 of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27 be approved.
- 2) The maturity structure of borrowing as detailed in paragraph 6.6 of the Treasury Management Statement 2026/27 be approved.
- 3) The Capital Strategy 2026/27 be approved.
- 4) The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27 be approved.
- 5) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement 2026/27 be approved.
- 6) The Non-Treasury Investment Strategy 2026/27 be approved.

Chair's initials

- 7) Authority to move a Capital Scheme from the Development Pool to the Active Programme as long as the scheme is within the approved budget, be delegated to Cabinet.
- 8) Authority to make any necessary changes to appendices 1 – 4 if any amendments are agreed to the General Fund Budget and/or Housing Revenue Account budget at this meeting, be delegated to the Section 151 Officer.

70. 2026/27 GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

Several Members across the Chamber spoke in support of the budget proposals and the collaborative approach taken between the political groups which had been a success.

Some comments were made in relation to the lower-than-expected government settlement figure and although disappointing, the focus should now be on the importance of ensuring the communities benefited from the funds. The fair distribution of funds was also mentioned.

Some concerns were raised relating to the ongoing rising costs of the Marlborough Square Project. It was agreed to provide the cost breakdown for this project, outside of the meeting.

The Chair of the Council put the motion to the vote. A recorded vote being required, the voting was as detailed below.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The General Fund Revenue Budget for 2026/27 as summarised in section 2 of the report, including the increase in the District Council's share of Council Tax in 2026/27 by 2.75% be approved.
- 2) The General Fund Revenue indicative budget for 2027/28 and 2028/29 be noted.
- 3) The General Fund Fees and Charges approved by Cabinet on 3 February 2026 be noted.
- 4) The proposed General Fund Capital Programme for 2026/27 and planned financing as set out in section 3 of the report be approved.
- 5) The remaining elements of the General Fund Capital Programme 2027/28 and 2028/29 be noted.
- 6) The Special Expenses Revenue Budget for 2026/27 as summarised in section 4 of the report, including setting the Special Expense Band D Council Tax at the levels detailed in table 4 of the report be approved.
- 7) The drawdown from reserves to fund the one-off budget proposals as detailed in the General Fund budget changes be approved.

Chair's initials

Motion to approve recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Paul Lees	For
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Mike Ball	For
Councillor Anthony Barker	For
Councillor Catherine Beck	For
Councillor Dave Bigby	For
Councillor Murrae Blair-Park	For
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Morgan Burke	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor Doug Cooper	For
Councillor David Everitt	For
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	For
Councillor Marie French	For
Councillor John Geary	For
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Kenny Horn	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	For
Councillor John Legrys	For
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Alison Morley	For
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Peter Mout	For
Councillor Elizabeth Parle	For
Councillor Guy Rogers	For
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Ray Sutton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	For
Councillor Carol Sewell	For
Councillor Sean Sheahan	For
Councillor Avril Wilson	For
Councillor Jake Windram	For
Councillor Lee Windram	For
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Carried	

71. 2026/27 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT SETTING

Councillor A Woodman, Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor K Merrie.

The current direction for new Council homes was acknowledged; however, some felt the number could be increased. Reference was made to the cost-of-living challenges and the growing need for Council homes.

The Chair of the Council put the motion to the vote. A recorded vote being required, the voting was as detailed below.

Chair's initials

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2026.27 as summarised in section 2 of the report, including the increase of rents by 4.8% was approved.
- 2) The HRA Budget for 2027/28 and 2028/29 be noted.
- 3) The Fees and Charges approved by Cabinet on 3 February 2026 be noted.
- 4) The proposed HRA Capital Programme for 2026/27 and planned financing as set out in section 3 of the report be approved.

Motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Paul Lees	For
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Mike Ball	For
Councillor Anthony Barker	For
Councillor Catherine Beck	For
Councillor Dave Bigby	For
Councillor Murrae Blair-Park	For
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Morgan Burke	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor Doug Cooper	For
Councillor David Everitt	For
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	For
Councillor Marie French	For
Councillor John Geary	For
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Kenny Horn	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	For
Councillor John Legrys	For
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Alison Morley	For
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Peter Mout	For
Councillor Elizabeth Parle	For
Councillor Guy Rogers	For
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Ray Sutton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	For
Councillor Carol Sewell	For
Councillor Sean Sheahan	For
Councillor Avril Wilson	For
Councillor Jake Windram	For
Councillor Lee Windram	For
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Carried	

72. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2026/27

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

It was noted that Cabinet agreed on 9 January 2025 to implement the second homes premium at 100% from day one, effective from 1 April 2026.

The Chair of the Council put the motion to the vote. A recorded vote being required, the voting was as detailed below.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Council Tax Resolution 2026/27 as set out in section 2 of the report be agreed.

Motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Paul Lees	For
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Mike Ball	For
Councillor Anthony Barker	For
Councillor Catherine Beck	For
Councillor Dave Bigby	For
Councillor Murrae Blair-Park	For
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Morgan Burke	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor Doug Cooper	For
Councillor David Everitt	For
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	For
Councillor Marie French	For
Councillor John Geary	For
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Kenny Horn	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	For
Councillor John Legrys	For
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Alison Morley	For
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Peter Mout	For
Councillor Elizabeth Parle	For
Councillor Guy Rogers	For
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Ray Sutton	For
Councillor Tony Saffell	For
Councillor Carol Sewell	For
Councillor Sean Sheahan	For
Councillor Avril Wilson	For
Councillor Jake Windram	For
Councillor Lee Windram	For
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Carried	

Chair's initials

73. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY 2025/26 MID-YEAR REPORT

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report.

The report was noted.

74. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

Councillor K Merrie, Corporate and Finance Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor N Rushton.

RESOLVED THAT:

The proposed changes to the Constitution as set out in appendices A to G be adopted with effect from 1 March 2026, except for the amendments to the Appointments Committee which will come into effect from the new civic year in May 2026.

75. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor N Rushton, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor R Blunt.

RESOLVED THAT:

The amendments to the arrangements be adopted with effect from 20 February 2026.

76. INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor N Rushton, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor J Simmons.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which several Members spoke against the proposals, citing lack of evidence to the benefits and raising concerns regarding process and public perception. Other Members spoke in support of the proposals emphasizing the independent objectivity they would bring to the committee and the alignment with good practice.

The Chair of the Council put the motion to the vote. A recorded vote being requested, the voting was as detailed below.

The result of the vote was tied, therefore in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Chair of the Council exercised his second and casting vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The appointment of an Independent Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee be agreed.
- 2) Authority to make any consequential changes to the Council's Constitution be delegated to the Monitoring Officer.

Following a question from a Member regarding the legality of the casting vote, the Monitoring Officer advised that there were no restrictions within the Council's Constitution relating to the use of the Chair's casting vote, therefore, the vote on the item was conducted correctly.

Chair's initials

Motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report (Motion)	
Councillor Paul Lees	For
Councillor Jenny Simmons	For
Councillor Mike Ball	For
Councillor Anthony Barker	Against
Councillor Catherine Beck	Against
Councillor Dave Bigby	Against
Councillor Murrae Blair-Park	Against
Councillor Richard Blunt	For
Councillor Russell Boam	For
Councillor Morgan Burke	For
Councillor Rachel Canny	For
Councillor Doug Cooper	Against
Councillor David Everitt	Against
Councillor Dr Terri Eynon	Against
Councillor Marie French	For
Councillor John Geary	Against
Councillor Tony Gillard	For
Councillor Kenny Horn	For
Councillor Russell Johnson	Against
Councillor John Legrys	Against
Councillor Keith Merrie MBE	For
Councillor Alison Morley	Against
Councillor Ray Morris	For
Councillor Peter Mout	Against
Councillor Elizabeth Parle	Against
Councillor Guy Rogers	Against
Councillor Nicholas Rushton	For
Councillor Ray Sutton	Against
Councillor Tony Saffell	For
Councillor Carol Sewell	Against
Councillor Sean Sheahan	Against
Councillor Avril Wilson	Against
Councillor Jake Windram	For
Councillor Lee Windram	For
Councillor Andrew Woodman	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	For
Councillor Paul Lees	For (Casting Vote)
Carried	

77. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT

Councillor N Rushton, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor J Simmons.

Reference was made to the male dominated job roles as detailed within the report and it was questioned as to what was being done to encourage women to take these roles. Councillor N Rushton agreed to provide a response outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The relevant information outlined in paragraph 1.2 of the report, be reported to government.

Chair's initials

78. PAY POLICY

Councillor N Rushton, Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, presented the report and moved the recommendations. It was seconded by Councillor R Blunt.

The Strategic Director of Resources highlighted an error in paragraph 12.3 of the appendix, the missing figure in the paragraph was £31,067.

During discussion, it was questioned if senior officers were offered any incentives to use electric vehicles. Councillor N Rushton agreed to provide a response outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Council's Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 as attached at appendix 1 of the report be approved.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.16 pm