

**BUDGET AND  
PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**6.00 P.M.**

**14TH JANUARY 2026**

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Chris Hanna (Chair), Ross Hunter (Vice-Chair), Keith Budden, Ruth Colbridge, Hamish Mills, Sue Penney, James Sommerville and Jackson Stubbs

Apologies for Absence:-

Councillor Isabella Metcalf-Riener and Councillor Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member.

At this point the Chair welcomed back Councillor Keith Budden as a Member of the Panel.

Officers in attendance:-

Alex Kinch	Chief Officer - People and Policy
Paul Thompson	Chief Officer - Resources and Section 151 Officer
Claire Dubelbeis	Projects and Performance Manager
Andrew Kipling	Accountancy Manager
Stephen Metcalfe	Principal Democratic Support Officer

**32 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 were approved as a correct record.

**33 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair advised that there were no items of urgent business.

**34 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations were made at this point.

**35 STAFF VACANCIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF COUNCIL STAFF**

The Chief Officer – People and Policy submitted a report to provide members with an update on staff vacancies, the well-being of Council staff and how the Council are to fill vacancies.

Councillor Sally Maddocks, Cabinet Member with Responsibility and Councillor Jason Wood, Chair of People and Organisational Development Committee, were both invited and in attendance to report and answer any questions raised by the Panel.

The purpose of the report was to present information relating to a. staff vacancies and the approach to managing these and b. staff well-being.

It was reported at the meeting that the Council now had 56 vacant funded posts, the additional 12 since December were in Building Control/Planning Service. The Panel was also informed of recruitment and wellbeing of staff.

In conclusion it was reported that the People and OD team continue to proactively work with the senior leadership team, Members, staff, managers and Trade Unions to ensure that recruitment challenges are addresses and the wellbeing of our workforce remains a priority.

Members of the Panel asked a number of questions at the meeting' including the possible impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on recruitment, discussion of processes already in place to mitigate risks; joint working already in place, the workforce planning programme and outcomes, apprenticeships and relationships with LGR workstreams.

**Resolved: -**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Chief Officer – People and Policy be thanked for his report and that Councillors Sally Maddocks and Jason Wood be thanked for their attendance for this item.

**36 PROJECTS AND PERFORMANCE: Q2 2025-26**

The Panel received a report from the Chief Executive that provided members with an update on corporate performance and strategic projects during quarter two of 2025 - 26 (July - September 2025). The Projects and Performance Manager reported at the meeting.

Members of the Panel asked a number of questions at the meeting and requested further information on the following:

<b>Performance</b>	<b>Query</b>	<b>Measure provided by</b>
A Co-operative, Kind and Responsible Council (Governance). Occupancy Rates for Commercial Properties (%).	To understand more about the actions being taken to improve the occupancy rates for commercial properties as they have clearly declined in recent years.	Stephen Morris (CO: Jo Wilkinson)

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Query</b>	<b>Measure provided by</b>
A Sustainable District (Environmental). Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 3c.	As a result of planning consent not being granted at the Story for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 3c, are there any steps which can	Project Lead: Elliot Grimshaw (CO: Mark Cassidy)

	be taken to improve the carbon efficiency of the building?	
Healthy and Happy Communities (Social). My Mainway (part of Homes Programme).	To understand how the My Mainway project can have a green indicator for cost and plan, when other reports suggest otherwise.	Project Lead: Andrew Whittaker (CO: Jo Wilkinson)
An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy (Economy). Williamson Park (Café and Play Development).	Would like to know more about the next steps for Williamson Park café.	Project Lead: Will Griffith.
An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy (Economy). Frontierland.	Would like a more detailed update on Frontierland.	Project Lead: Tom Brown (CO: Jonathan Noad).

This to enable the Panel to scrutinise in more detail information provided on performance and projects.

Following discussion at the meeting it was agreed that the Chair of the Panel discuss with the Chief Executive the introduction of a process for the Chief Executive and/or the relevant Chief Officers be invited to attend meetings of the Panel to either the next meeting, or a subsequent meeting, to answer the above questions and future queries the Panel may have on performance and projects.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the Projects and Performance Manager be thanked for her report.
- (2) That the report be noted and that the Chair of the Panel discuss with the Chief Executive the introduction of a process for the Chief Executive and/or the relevant Chief Officers be invited to attend meetings of the Panel to either the next meeting, or a subsequent meeting, to answer the above questions and future queries the Panel may have on performance and Projects.

**37 BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK UPDATE 2026/27 TO 2030/31**

The Panel received a report to Cabinet from the Chief Finance Officer that provided an update on the Council’s budget strategy for 2025/26 and financial outlook up to 2030/31. Specifically, the report considered the budget and Council Tax proposals for 2026/27.

The options, options analysis, including risk assessment and officer preferred option for Cabinet to consider, were set out in the report as follows:

It is essential that the Council Tax rate is set in line with the Council Tax billing timetable. Any delay would put the Council at risk of not being able to collect the tax which would have serious cash flow implications. In terms of the actual budget position, work is ongoing to provide a balanced budget. Public consultation/stakeholder meetings will be held over the coming weeks (including Budget and Performance Panel). The feedback from these meetings will be considered by Cabinet and incorporated into a final budget proposal which will be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 10 February 2026 and recommended to Council on 25 February 2026.

The latest budget position does not produce a balanced budget for 2025/26 and further intervention is necessary before Cabinet can be presented with a balanced budget.

Whilst the longer-term financial forecasts contain numerous estimates and assumptions, which will change over time, the forecasts clearly highlight potential annual and cumulative budget deficits over the next 5 years and the position the Council faces. Although this position is not unique to this Council, it is reflected nationally across many public sector bodies. The gaps identified for 2026/27, although are lower than previously forecasted, are still present. Members and Officers recognise the size of the challenge ahead including that of LGR and will look to manage the transitional change to ensure the Council delivers both its statutory and non-statutory services across the district.

Members of the Panel asked a number of questions at the meeting the Council's settlement, green energy disregard, savings/growth, Council Tax, impacts regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), transitional costs and the MTFS.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Chief Finance Officer be thanked for his report.

**38 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel was provided with a report that contained updates for consideration.

Prior to the meeting a Workshop had been arranged for scrutiny members for Fit for the Future, with all other Councillors invited to attend. The Panel was asked for feedback. Members of the Panel advised that, despite the delay in providing the information, the Workshop had shown that the process was transparent, had shown that there was a great deal to celebrate and that there will be a cut-off point due to Local Government Reorganisation.

It was reported that, at the last meeting, the Panel agreed to hold an additional meeting on 3rd February 2026 for the purposes of budget/stakeholder consultation. Dates and venues of the next two meetings of the Panel are timetabled as follows:

- 3rd February 2026 – Budget/stakeholder meeting of the Panel to be in the Council Chamber, Morecambe Town Hall, commencing at 6.00pm. All Members of Council to be invited to attend. The meeting to be livestreamed.
- 11th February 2026 – meeting of the Panel to be in the Council Chamber, Morecambe Town Hall, commencing at 6.00pm.

The Panel was also advised that reports on Strategic Risk Management and Projects and Performance would be submitted for scrutiny on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

***Resolved: -***

That the report and updates be noted.

---

Chair

(The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Stephen Metcalfe, Democratic Support - email [sjmetcalfe@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:sjmetcalfe@lancaster.gov.uk)**