

## CABINET

6.00 P.M.

14TH JANUARY 2025

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Caroline Jackson (Chair), Peter Jackson, Martin Bottoms, Gina Dowding, Tim Hamilton-Cox, Paul Hart, Sally Maddocks, Sue Tyldesley and Nick Wilkinson

Officers in attendance:-

Mark Davies	Chief Executive
Luke Gorst	Chief Officer - Governance and Monitoring Officer
Paul Thompson	Chief Officer - Resources and Section 151 Officer
Mark Cassidy	Chief Officer - Planning and Climate Change
Jonathan Noad	Chief Officer - Sustainable Growth
Joanne Wilkinson	Chief Officer - Housing and Property
Liz Bateson	Principal Democratic Support Officer

### 53 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3 December 2024 were approved as a correct record.

### 54 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE LEADER

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

### 55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made at this point.

### 56 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Members were advised that there had been no requests to speak at the meeting in accordance with Cabinet's agreed procedure.

The Leader confirmed that any non-Cabinet members in attendance would be permitted to ask questions on the various reports as they were presented (Cabinet Procedure Rule 17 refers).

### 57 EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

#### **Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Caroline Jackson)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Officer Sustainable Growth to approve the submission of the Empty Homes Strategy for its consideration, approval, and adoption into the council's Policy Framework.

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

	Option 1: The final version of the Empty Homes Strategy is approved for adoption into the council's Policy Framework.	Option 2: The final version of the Empty Homes Strategy is not adopted as corporate council policy.
Advantages	Enables the council to progress its empty homes work to an agreed framework, objectives, and action plan.  While having some flexibility the Strategy defines the council's objectives and approach and the future targeting of empty homes priorities.	No advantages identified unless Members require substantive amendments to the document or seek further consultation on the final document.
Disadvantages	A delay in the adoption of the Strategy may create further uncertainty around the council's intentions for this area of policy and work.	Ongoing work of the Empty Homes Officer takes place outside of an agreed priority framework and Action Plan.
Risks/ Mitigation	Risks are around reputational risk to the council of approving an approach which does not meet the objectives and/or does not find favour with the wider community.  However, it is considered that the Strategy reflects the stakeholder and community aspirations (as expressed through consultation) and the council's overarching and current corporate policy framework.	Work proceeds ad hoc and outside of an agreed policy framework.

The officer preferred option is Option 1. The Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030 is a comprehensive plan to address long-term vacancies in Lancaster District's housing stock. It combines proactive and reactive measures, aiming to balance supportive interventions with necessary enforcement actions. By bringing empty homes back into use, the council aims to reduce housing shortages, improve neighbourhood conditions, and contribute to Lancaster's broader goals of community sustainability and well-being. Regular monitoring, effective partnerships, and targeted resource use are essential to achieving the strategy's objectives and making a positive impact on Lancaster's housing landscape.

Councillor Caroline Jackson proposed, seconded by Councillor Hamilton-Cox:-

"That the recommendation, as set out in the report, be approved."

Councillors then voted:-

***Resolved unanimously:***

- (1) That the Empty Homes Strategy 2025 - 2030 is adopted into the Council's Corporate Policy Framework.

**Officer responsible for effecting the decision:**

Chief Officer Sustainable Growth

**Reasons for making the decision:**

The decision is consistent with the Council Plan: Access to Quality Housing plays a fundamental role in health and well-being by ensuring that communities have access to homes for people of all incomes which are comfortable, warm and allows them to maintain their independence. The collective actions of the council in making an active contribution to the provision of new homes, achieving its housing regeneration ambitions, and making the best use of Lancaster district's existing housing stock, including empty homes will positively contribute to meeting its corporate objectives.

**58 ADOPTION OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY REVIEW OF THE LANCASTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN****Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Dowding)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Officer – Planning and Climate Change Service to advise Cabinet Members of the receipt and publication of the Inspector's Report of the Examination of the Climate Emergency Review of the Lancaster District Local Plan and seek an endorsement of the intention that a report is presented to Council, provisionally on 22 January 2025, recommending that the Council adopts the updated Local Plan Development Plan Documents as elements of its statutory development plan.

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

Members are advised that there is only one realistic course of action in response to the recommendations of this report; that is to acknowledge the receipt and publication of the Inspector's report and endorse the intention that a report is presented to Council, provisionally on 22 January 2025, with the recommendation that Council adopts the Climate Emergency Review of the Strategic Policies & Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) and the Climate Emergency Review of the Development Management.

The officer preferred option was to support the recommendations and have the adoption process proceed to Full Council. Given the resource that the Council has deployed between 2020 and 2024 to update its Local Plan to better respond to the Climate Emergency and the very public commitment it made to the community to be pro-active in addressing Climate Change including though the formal submission of the revised documents to the Government, to then subsequently decide not to proceed to the conclusion of that process by supporting an adoption recommendation to full Council would likely have immediate consequences for the reputation of the Council and potentially cause the Secretary of State to intervene in the adoption process.

It was noted that this had received a lot of publicity both locally and nationally and Cabinet recognised the determination, resilience and tenacity of all those involved in the process of placing the council in a leading position in this area.

Councillor Dowding proposed, seconded by Councillor Tyldesley:-

“That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved.”

Councillors then voted:-

***Resolved unanimously:***

- (1) That Cabinet acknowledge the receipt and publication of the Inspector’s report of the Examination of the Climate Emergency Review of the Lancaster District Local Plan, which concludes that the reviewed planning documents provide an appropriate basis for the planning of the district, subject to compliance with her binding recommendations.
- (2) That Cabinet endorse the intention that a report is presented to Council, provisionally on 22 January 2025, with the recommendation that Council adopts the Climate Emergency Review of the Strategic Policies & Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) and the Climate Emergency Review of the Development Management Policies DPD.

**Officers responsible for effecting the decision:**

Chief Officer – Planning and Climate Change

**Reasons for making the decision:**

The decision is consistent with the Council Plan which is underpinned by four principles:

- A Sustainable District
- An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy
- Healthy and Happy Communities
- A Co-operative, Kind and Responsible Council,

and four themes:

- The Climate Emergency
- Community Wealth Building
- Increasing Wellbeing. Reducing Inequality
- Deliver Effective Services, Take Responsibility.

Work to update the Local Plan through the preparation of a Climate Emergency Review addresses all these principles and themes as development outcomes that better address the Climate Emergency will bring benefits to the community, the environment and the economy.

The City Council is legally obligated to maintain a Policy Framework and the Local Development Plan and Development Plan Documents are components of that Framework. The constitution states that decisions made about documents on the Policy Framework must be made by Full Council, usually on the recommendation of Cabinet. This report enables the expectations of the processes described in the constitution and

facilitates decision making.

**59 CORPORATE FEES & CHARGES 2025/26**

**Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Officer Resources which asked Members to endorse the Fees and Charges Policy for 2025/26 and also to consider a range of charging options as deemed appropriate to the service area.

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

	Option 1: To support the inflationary increases/freezes as outlined in the report.	Option 2: To not support the inflationary increases/freezes as outlined in the report.
Advantages	Fees and charges contribute further to the general fund net position.  Costs of delivering Council services have increased as has demand in some areas. Not increasing costs means that further pressure is created on the Council's ability to deliver its core services.	Maintains the cost of services at 24/25 levels or at less than proposed in this report.
Disadvantages	The draft revenue budget has been prepared with the inclusion of the items raised in this report. Any further proposals would require further consideration prior to being fed into the budget process.	Costs of delivering Council services have increased as has demand in some areas. Not increasing costs means that further pressure is created on the Council's ability to deliver its core services.
Risks	Increasing fees to higher than suggested levels would most likely result in further resistance and potentially not achieve the targets originally set.	Cost of living increases and the return from the pandemic have reshaped people's habits. The income targets already set may not achieve projected levels in 24/25, resulting in a shortfall within the accounts.

The officer preferred option is Option 1. Fees and Charges are reviewed on an annual basis and as outlined within the report, significant factors have become apparent as to why differing treatment is required within a couple of areas. It is felt that the recommendations made are of a fair nature and in-line with the attached policy.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox proposed, seconded by Councillor Bottoms:-

"That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved."

Councillors then voted:-

***Resolved unanimously:***

- (1) That Cabinet endorses the Fees and Charges Policy as set out at Appendix A to the report, and during 2025/26 as part of the mid-year budget strategy review determines whether any other areas of income generation be explored further for 2025/26 onwards.
- (2) That for 2025/26, Cabinet endorses the freezing of selected fees and charges as detailed within section 3 of the report with particular reference to Car Parking charges, Salt Ayre Sports Centre, Markets and Rodent Control.
- (3) That Cabinet endorses the application of inflationary increases to fees and charges across all remaining areas as appropriate, as reported as part of the current 2025/26 budget setting process.
- (4) That Cabinet endorses a £1 per bin increase (2.2%) in contribution towards households using the opt-in garden waste collection service, thus making the annual cost of the service £46 per bin.
- (5) That Cabinet endorses the introduction of new fees and charges within Planning & Climate Change as detailed in section 3.7 of the report.

**Officer responsible for effecting the decision:**

Chief Officer Resources

**Reasons for making the decision:**

Fees and charges form an integral part of the budget setting process, which in turn relates to the Council's priorities. Under the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), income generation is a specific initiative for helping to balance the budget. The proposed increases are considered to be fair and reasonable.

**60 BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK UPDATE 2025/26 TO 2029/30**

**Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Finance Officer to provide an update on the Council's budget strategy for 2025/26 and financial outlook up to 2029/30. Specifically, the report considered the budget and Council Tax proposals for 2025/26.

The options, options analysis, including risk assessment and officer preferred option, 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.

Regarding the budget strategy, Cabinet may approve the proposals as set out, or ask for changes to be made to the suggested approach. The overriding aim of any budget

setting process is to approve a balanced budget by statutory deadlines, allocating resources to help ensure delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and service outcomes. The proposed approach is in line with that broad aim and any changes that Cabinet puts forward should also be framed in that context.

In terms of the actual budget position, this report puts forward a balanced budget. If Cabinet agrees the budget, then it will form their proposal to be presented for scrutiny on 15 January prior to public consultation/stakeholder meeting on 29 January (both by 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 11 February 2025 and recommended to Council on 26 February 2025.

The current budget proposal produces a balanced budget for 2025/26 without the need to call on reserves.

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 and beyond are of a level that both Members and Officers need to recognise the size of the challenge ahead and manage the transitional change to the way that the Council delivers both its statutory and non-statutory services across the district

Councillor Hamilton-Cox proposed, seconded by Councillor Dowding:-

"That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved."

Councillors then voted:-

***Resolved unanimously:***

- (1) That Cabinet make recommendations to Council regarding the Lancaster City Council element of the Council Tax as set out in paragraph 3.3 (option one) of this report which is a 2.99% increase to the Band D Council Tax (from £256.63 to £264.30).
- (2) That Cabinet makes recommendations regarding its initial budget proposals as set out in section 5 and Appendix A of the report.
- (3) That the recommendations and proposals in the report be referred to Council on 22 January for initial consideration as well as being presented for scrutiny on 15 January prior to public consultation/stakeholder meeting on 29 January (both by Budget and Performance Panel), in order that any feedback can be provided to Cabinet at its 11 February meeting.

**Officer responsible for effecting the decision:**

Chief Finance Officer

**Reasons for making the decision:**

The budget framework in general sets out a financial plan for achieving the Council’s corporate priorities and outcomes which incorporate the above cross cutting themes. Equalities impact assessments are undertaken for the relevant activities which are reflected in the budget.

The decision enables the proposals to be considered by the Budget and Performance Panel and at January Council allowing Cabinet to make further recommendations back to Council to complete the budget setting process for 2025/26.

**61 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

**Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Caroline Jackson)**

Cabinet received a joint report from the Chief Officer for Housing & Property and the Chief Officer Resources which sought Cabinet decisions on Council Housing rent setting proposals and the consideration of HRA revenue and capital budget proposals.

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

The options with regards to rent setting are set out under section 4, the maximum permitted increase being CPI+1%. By applying this increase, it allows for a budget that can deliver on the Council’s ambitions on improving housing standards and addressing the climate change emergency, whilst adhering to the Rent Standard and wider legislative requirements.

In relation to garage rents, it is recommended that following recent rent freezes an increase in line with dwelling rent increases is appropriate and will support maintenance requirements without adversely impacting occupancy levels.

The provision, reserves and balances position (and their use); Revenue budgets; Capital Programme; and other wider budget considerations referred to in this report will be presented fully to Cabinet on 11th February 2025.

	Option 1: Set housing and garage rent levels as set out in this report	Option 2: To propose alternatives to those outlined in Section 11 above.
Advantages	Increased rental income supports the Council to deliver against its Regulatory requirements and ensuring homes are safe and decent	Unknown
Disadvantages	Increased rent levels for tenants.	Would require further options analysis
Risks/ Mitigation	The HRA budget outlined in this report and to be presented to Cabinet in February 2025 is sustainable in the long term. The risks associated with Option 1 are outlined in Appendix F –	Impact on housing service and council housing tenants unknown. Potential for housing service to fall foul of legislative and regulatory requirements, leading to unlimited fines and being ‘named and shamed’ by



	<p>Risks and Assumptions.</p> <p>In addition, the contents of this report have not yet been presented to tenants for consultation. This consultation will take place later in January 2025 and details will be included in February 2025 report.</p>	<p>government.</p>
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The officer preferred option is Option 1 : Set housing and garage rent levels as set out in this report in advance of consideration of wider HRA budget at February 11th 2025 Cabinet.

The report highlights challenges faced within the current economic climate, particularly in the context of the increased regulatory and legislative requirements being placed on the social housing sector.

The longer-term financial forecasts contain numerous estimates and assumptions, and the service remains attuned to the risks contained within Appendix F, and in particular the impacts of further legislative and regulatory change which could affect business planning within the HRA.

Lancaster City Council's Housing Service remains ambitious, while continuing to operate a sensible but forward-looking approach, seeking to meet Regulatory requirements and deliver safe and decent homes.

In response to a question regarding the installation of gas boilers the Leader advised the meeting that she would request a report to a future Cabinet meeting on how the Housing Service was progressing towards net zero.

Councillor Caroline Jackson proposed, seconded by Councillor Hamilton-Cox:-

"That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved."

Councillors then voted:-

***Resolved unanimously:***

- (1) That council housing rents be set in accordance with statutory requirements as follows (subject to tenant consultation and ratification at February 11th 2025 Cabinet):
  - for existing tenancies, rents will increase by 2.7% from 7th April 2025
  - for new tenancies within 2025/26, rents will be set at 'formula rent' 1
- (2) That garage rents be increased at CPI +1% in line with dwelling rents
- (3) That subject to the above, the resulting Housing Revenue Account budget for 2025/26 onwards, as set out at Appendix A to the report, together with the resulting Capital Programme as set out at Appendix C to the report, be considered by Cabinet, ahead of final presentation on 11th February 2025 and pending tenant consultation.

**Officer responsible for effecting the decision:**

Chief Officer for Housing & Property

**Reasons for making the decision:**

The budget represents, in financial terms, what the Council is seeking to achieve through its approved Housing Strategy in relation to council housing.

The proposals set out in the report will have positive impacts residents within Council Housing dwellings specifically climate change, wellbeing / social value, health and safety and community safety.

**62 REPORTING IN OF URGENT DECISION - WORKWELL**

In accordance with the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (Part 2, Section 7 – Delegations to the Chief Executive Matters of Urgency) the Chief Executive submitted a report to Cabinet with details of an urgent decisions taken under Rule 15 following consultation with the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny. The Urgent Decision related to the Workwell Vanguard and the acceptance of allocated funding (UB137 refers).

***Resolved unanimously:***

That the Urgent Decision taken by the Chief Executive on 25 November 2024 be noted.

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Chair

(The meeting ended at 7.36 p.m.)

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

**MINUTES PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY 16 JANUARY, 2025.**

**EFFECTIVE DATE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS (SUBJECT TO CALL-IN)  
CONTAINED IN THESE MINUTES: FRIDAY 24 JANUARY, 2025**