

Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting



Location: The Council Chamber, The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, LE16 7AG

Date: 20th January 2025 commencing at 18:30

Present:

Councillors: Knowles (Chair) – Leader of the Council
Asher - Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy, and Tourism
Beadle - Portfolio Holder for Corporate
Galton – Portfolio Holder for Planning
Graves – Portfolio Holder for Finance
Knight – Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing
Woodiwiss – Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change
Anderson - Young Persons' Champion

Guest Councillor: King (items 4 & 5)

Officers: J. Richardson – Chief Executive
L. Elliott – Deputy Chief Executive
C. Mason – Director of Finance & S.151 Officer
D. Atkinson – Director of Planning
N. Barnard – Head of Democratic Services and Elections & Monitoring Officer
E. Bird – Head of Regulatory Services
S. Hamilton – Senior Democratic Services Officer

The meeting commenced with introductions from Cabinet members and officers.

Information Exchange from Portfolio Holders

Finance

The Portfolio Holder for Finance provided the following update.

The draft Budget 2025/26 proposals are due for consideration at this meeting. Consultation on the Budget and on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is due to start on 21st January 2025.

The Harborough Innovation Centre occupancy rate is extremely healthy, at 98%. The solar panels are performing well and the batteries have been installed and commissioned. The Ground-up café is proving very popular. Harborough Enterprise Centre occupancy rate is now at 94%.

Footfall at the Market Hall was 68,000, 2,000 or so less than in 2023. However, annually there has been a 6.5% increase on the previous year.

The property development of Plowman's Yard was substantially completed, snagging is taking place at the moment. The expectation is that the remaining flats will be let over the next few weeks.

Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism provided the following update.

The £1m Community Grants fund continues to be well received; the second grant window closes on 9th February 2025. Provision has been made within the Council's draft budget for two further £1m funds over the next two years.

The Lutterworth Market Square project and the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplans UKSPF funded projects are all progressing well. The Council has been notified of a further year of UKSPF funding for 2025/26, and officers and Members are currently working together to plan and agree a programme of further projects.

The refurbishments of both Market Harborough and Lutterworth Leisure Centres have now been completed and have been very well received. The Council has received funding to install solar panels to the Market Harborough centre, and this work will be progressing over the next few months.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025/26 Programme will be considered by Cabinet on the 10 February. The date of the meeting of the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants for consideration of s106 and Community Grant applications is to be confirmed.

Environmental and Climate Change

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change provided the following update.

The council has been responding to the most recent flooding experienced on the 7th January, with a range of actions including:

- Targeted support to residents through door-knocking, delivery of sandbags, clean-up and distribution of Government funding.
- Working with local flood resilience groups and statutory agencies to investigate the causes of flooding and work up plans for mitigation.
- Pushing for, and participating in, formal flood investigations.
- Drop-in events and other information dissemination,
- Working with parishes on local resilience plans.

In total, there were 73 internal floodings, and 37 external floodings, in Harborough District. The Council is continuing to work with other agencies to establish the full extent of the impact of the previous Storm Bert.

Work continues in relation to the new car parking machines, which are expected to be installed within the next few months. The team are also looking at a programme of refurbishment of some of the council-owned car parks which may include new signage, markings, and surface repairs.

The procurement of the new fleet of environmental services vehicles is progressing well, and the formal tender process is expected to go live within the next two weeks.

This includes purchasing new refuse, recycling and food waste vehicles, and other vehicles such as mechanical sweepers. Ongoing work is also being completed on the new Environmental Services contract, including soft market testing for future contactors.

As part of the 2025/26 budget, we have been able to reach a position whereby there will be no increase to green bin charges which will come as welcome news to subscribers.

The Friendship Park is moving forward. Grass seed has been spread, bulbs and trees planted, and a new pathway constructed. The Park is expected to be fully complete by the end of March.

Planning

The Portfolio Holder for Planning provided the following update.

Publication of the new NPPF took place shortly before Christmas. Confirmation has been received that the Council can continue to prepare its local plan under the provisions in the former (December 2023) NPPF under transitional arrangements, as it is proposing to deliver more than 80% of the housing requirements of the District when calculated under the new standard method. This is good news for the District because the Council will be able to put a new local plan in place as soon as possible to protect the District from unwanted speculative development.

The Council has received confirmation that the previous Government's deadline for submission of local plans for examination (30 June 2025) has been replaced by the new date of 31 December 2026. Subject to decisions being made by Council it should be possible to submit a new draft local plan for examination around September 2025.

The draft Regulation 19 consultation Local Plan remains on track for the next meeting of Cabinet to recommend the Plan to Council to consider publishing the Plan for a minimum period of 8-weeks' public consultation, commencing between the 10th and 12th March 2025.

The draft Local Plan will be accompanied by various technical evidence studies. These will be made available to Members, linked to the publication of the new Local Plan for consideration of Cabinet.

Development Management: the new NPPF means that the new, higher, standard method housing need figures apply to the Council with immediate effect. This means that the Council can no longer demonstrate a minimum 5-year supply of land that is available for housing development. This will affect the weight that can be placed on the Council's current policies and more speculative planning applications can be expected.

This situation is solely due to the government changing the 5-year housing land supply calculation and increasing the quantum required to demonstrate that minimum 5-year housing land supply. It is important to note that if we had been calculating the 5-year land supply under the previous, December 2023 NPPF, the likelihood is that the Council would still have been able to demonstrate a minimum 5-year housing land supply. So, it is due to Government Changes to the NPPF that has resulted in the Council being in the position of no longer being able to demonstrate that minimum 5-year housing land supply. It is nothing to do with anything the Council has done or not done.

This scenario means that it is even more important that the Council adopts its new Local Plan, which is to be considered by Cabinet and Full Council in the next couple of months, to re-establish full protection for our District from unwanted, and potentially unsustainable, speculative development.

However, due to the length of time it takes to put new and adopted Local Plan in place this undesirable scenario, of not having an up-to-date Local Plan and therefore not being able to demonstrate a minimum 5-year housing land supply, will be with us for probably around 18 months to 2 years.

It is the case however, from a positive viewpoint that any development delivered on a speculative basis during those possible 2 years will count towards the re-establishing of the minimum 5-year housing land supply and would be taken off the number of new homes to be provided in the new Local Plan when it is adopted. Members should be

aware that, in the light of the up-to-date calculation, the Council is currently able to demonstrate around 3.55 years of available housing land supply.

The above scenario means that it is likely that the Development Management Service will be dealing with a number of potentially significant speculative planning applications for new homes in the 18 months to 2 years ahead. For this reason, it is important that the new expanded growth team of professional planning officers is put in place as soon as possible to ensure there is robust capacity in the Development Management Service to effectively manage this workload.

It is also important that the Council liaise with our Town and Parish councils across the District concerning this scenario. Officers will be doing this in the coming weeks so that these councils can understand the position in which the provisions of the new NPPF has placed the Council with regard to its minimum 5-year land supply and how it can work positively and proactively in partnership with our town and parish councils to ensure all parties achieve the best possible outcome over the upcoming 18 months to 2 years. There will be an impact on Neighbourhood Plans, and Officers will be working closely with other councils over this.

The next meeting of the Planning Committee is on 18th February and the draft agenda is not looking too heavy at present. The publication date for the agenda is Monday 10th February.

Building Control: officers are putting in place an improved and more transparent Performance Management dashboard for the HDC element of the Leicestershire Building Control Partnership. This will be incorporated into the council's Pentana performance management system and will be updated following each of the biannual Leicestershire Building Control Partnership Executive Board meetings that our Director of Planning attends on behalf of the Council. This will enable members to access performance management data relating to the HDC part of the Partnership more easily and enable members to self-serve when doing this.

By far the most important ongoing work area for the Planning Portfolio in the next few weeks is to finalise the new draft Regulation 19 Local Plan to enable it to be considered by Cabinet for it to be recommended to Council to consider approving the public

consultation. If Council approves doing that, the period of public consultation would commence no later than 12th March 2025. The Council will be seeking to extend the length of the public consultation to longer than the minimum six-week period.

To progress planning applications to Planning Committee to boost the Council's housing land supply and to secure the additional investment into the service to enable recruitment to the expanded Growth Team to enable the service and the council to have sufficient operational robustness and resilience to be able to process potentially large-scale planning applications for residential development over the upcoming two years and beyond.

The Leader indicated that it was important to share this information with Members as soon as possible.

Corporate

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate provided the following update.

Neighbourhood Planning Referendums in Arnesby and High Leicestershire are being held on Thursday. The count will be held in the Symington Building immediately after close of poll. Successful interviews were held for Business Administration Apprentice to be based in Elections; appointment is likely to be offered this week. The Council is awaiting a decision on whether the County elections will be proceeding or not. We are continuing to prepare, all polling stations are booked and staff are at the ready.

We have successfully recruited to the vacant Democratic Services Officer Post. Subject to pre-employment checks, the successful candidate should start in April. We are looking to appoint an apprentice in this area to further support the team. Work is underway on the Constitution following a review for legal compliance and this will be reported to the next Constitutional Review Committee meeting. Government is consulting on the Standards Framework for Local Authorities in England; a report is being brought to Audit and Standards Committee and all members have been invited to submit individual responses.

Human Resources and Learning and Development had one new starter in January, the Assistant Housing Advisor. There has been one internal mover; in January 2025

the Grants Administrator was appointed to Senior Grants Administrator. There was one leaver in January 2025 from the Accountancy team.

A number of new officer Health & Safety meetings have been put into place, such as a Buildings User Group, to discuss issues that staff may have with Health and Safety and improve communications and awareness in the organisation. A Health and Safety site inspection was undertaken of the set-up of Harborough Christmas Fayre event in December 2024 with a report of findings compiled. A further review of Events procedures will be undertaken to look at improving processes and working with other stakeholders. The Fire Evacuation Procedure is in the process of being reviewed and updated, in line with the Fire Risk Assessment.

Customer contacts fell in December, mainly due to the Christmas break which reduced the number of working days the service was available. There were still over five thousand interactions: including 3205 calls and 1479 emails. The number of issues resolved first time remained stable at 98.6%.

Wellbeing

The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing provided the following update.

The new Community Development Team go from strength to strength, with the first ever Community Awards in December a huge success. The Community Safety Partnership continues to deliver a range of initiatives to keep our communities safe and well, and has recently reviewed and refreshed the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

In relation to Housing, I am delighted to report that from a starting point of five units of temporary accommodation a number of years ago, the Council now has 14 units, either delivered or in the pipeline. This is due to a mixture of Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) and Capital funding, and will make a huge difference to our ability to provide good quality housing to homeless and vulnerable families. These properties are situated across the district, including Market Harborough, Lutterworth, Broughton Astley and Fleckney. A further round of LAHF funding has been announced and officers are working on an expression of interest, further details will follow.

The Renters Rights Bill is making its way through Parliament, and the team are preparing for its introduction. Proposals include the abolition of section 21, 'no fault' evictions, a new Decent Homes Standard for private rented accommodation, and strengthening council enforcement powers.

The Council has completed a further acquisition of temporary accommodation within the District. This is particularly good news, however with our projected numbers of affordable homes falling it is of concern when we see that as of the end of September there were 703 Live applications of which there were 132 new applications. It is clear we must not lose sight and that we must carefully consider the numbers of affordable homes required moving forward.

A new Empty Property Strategy has been prepared which will shortly be considered by Cabinet. The Strategy sets out a range of proposed interventions and incentives to bring more empty properties back into use across the district.

The Parish Liaison meeting which was due to be held in November was rescheduled to 13th January to enable consultation with parishes on the Corporate Plan. The meeting was delivered via Teams due to the very cold and icy weather conditions, and there was a good turnout and lively discussion. Topics covered included the Corporate Plan, local government reorganisation, the budget, flooding, community grants and the Local Plan.

The refreshed Anti-Social Behaviour Policy will be considered by Cabinet on 10th February. The draft Empty Property Strategy will be considered by Scrutiny on 23rd January, and by Cabinet on 10th February following consultation.

Strategy

The Leader provided the following update and started by expressing his sympathies towards those affected by flooding events in the District. Support has been given to the agencies calling for Government support through the national flood recovery framework. The Leader will be considering, with the Cabinet, how best the Council can support residents itself if the Government does not itself provide assistance. However, the Council has responded already in a number of ways, including giving free waste

collections to those affected. It is proposed to create a new post concerned solely with climate weather events. The Leader gave his thanks to all of the Council's staff who supported residents.

The Government's White Paper on the English Devolution is being considered on the agenda of tonight's meeting, although the Leader's personal view was that it is unnecessary. He stated that he was appalled by the County Council's decision to seek the cancellation of May's County Councillor elections and felt that this would mean that County Councillors would have no mandate from the general public.

The Leader thanked his Labour coalition members for highlighting the need for improvements in relations with Lutterworth Town Council. The coalition wishes to serve all of the District. The Leader and the Chief Executive have a programme of meetings with Parish Councils. A one-million pound grant scheme has been developed which is available for all parishes to benefit from. The Leader has also met with the Mayor of Lutterworth and their lead on finance; it was an extremely productive meeting which has progressed a number of issues.

Councillor Champion Update

As Young Persons' Champion, Councillor Anderson gave the following update.

The last six months have seen a number of positive developments. The Youth Engagement Officer has been in post since August 2024 and her role is to foster relationships between the Council, young residents and key stakeholders, with the aim of young people being actively engaged in the decision-making process. One way this can be achieved is by the establishment of a Youth Council which will provide a platform for young people to express their views, with these views being fed back through the Councillor Champion. The first meeting of the Youth Council will be held here on 30th January and it is intended that future meetings will be held throughout the District. So far, seven schools across the District have been visited and four young-people's groups, including the Young Carers Group. Seventeen people have signed up for the first Youth Council meeting so far and excellent nominations have been received for the Annual Community Awards under the Young Person of the Year category. In future meetings will be held with SEND groups and there will be further engagement with parish councils and Guide and Scout Groups.

Topical Issues

Two questions had been received:

1. Councillor Sarfas asked: “when is the Open Space and Green Spaces Strategy going to Scrutiny?”. The Leader noted that the Scrutiny Panels shape their own programmes of work, but was able to confirm that the Strategy was currently at the procurement stage and will be taken to Scrutiny once drafted for comment and involvement of all Members.
2. Councillor Mrs Page asked: “I understand from the recent presentation to Lutterworth Town Council that £790,000 was identified for the adopted town centre master plan project. This showed that £130,000 had been spent on consultants’ fees and another £55,000 on design developments, which equals £185,000, which is over 23% and equates to almost a quarter of the whole budget of £790,000 (24/25) as identified without seeing anything for it on the ground. Could you please confirm that spending this amount was necessary? However, on confirmation I was assured that the budget for the project is just over £1 million and a further £230,000 is allocated to spend in 2025/26. Could I please have full details of the completed project as this doesn’t match up and what this £230,000 is going to be spent on.”

The Leader answered that the total currently estimated cost of the Lutterworth Market Square project budget is £1.03 million. This is to be funded as follows: £500,000 UK ESPF Investment Plan, £130,000 HDC own capital resources, £400,000 Leicester & Leicestershire Business and Skills Partnership (formerly known as the Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership). In early November 2024, the delivery team presented a concept design to Lutterworth Town Council that included estimated costs for the elements of the project. The intention of these estimates was to provide LTC with outline assurance on the affordability of the concept design itself before progressing it to a detailed technical design stage. The costs do not represent spend to date and are not final costs. They were caveated with a statement that a full costing exercise will be undertaken once the design had been finalised. Final costs will be presented at the end of the project. The design is currently in the final stages of being

finalised, but we can confirm that all spend will be necessary for the successful delivery of the project.

There were no petitions or notices of motion.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were none.

2. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were none.

3. Draft Minutes of Cabinet – 25.11.24

The minutes of the meeting on 25th November 2024 were accepted as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. Draft Empty Property Strategy and Council Tax Premiums

The Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holders for Wellbeing and Finance introduced the report. The last Strategy had been produced in 2015 and the Government has a clear wish to increase the number of residential properties. The Portfolio Holder for Finance drew attention to the procedures included within the flowchart at Appendix 1 to the report which indicated the elements of encouragement and cooperation that were included within the Council's proposed approach.

The Head of Regulatory Services explained the prioritisation categories within the proposed Strategy that would target the worst properties. The Strategy would be backed up by the proposal for additional resources for this area of work that were included within the draft budget.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor King addressed Cabinet on the proposed draft Strategy. He acknowledged that in principle the Council wanted empty properties to come back into use, but noted that in cases where a property formed part of the estate of a deceased person, it can take considerable length of time to resolve. How

would the Strategy, if adopted, work in cases like this? Also, in cases of second homes, what evidence is there to support the suggestion in the report that the new Strategy will encourage these properties to be reoccupied? In relation to second homes, the Director of Finance responded that the proposal was an incentive to manage the number of second homes and to seek to make properties available to be lived in, rather than stand empty.

It was proposed by Councillor Knight, seconded by Councillor Graves and **RESOLVED** to:

- Agree the Draft Empty Homes Strategy
- Agree the Draft Council Tax Premiums, Discounts and Exemptions
- Agree the consultation questions to go out for consultation.

Reasons: the updated empty homes strategy and the changes to council tax premiums, discounts and exemptions should help to incentivise the owners of respective empty or second homes to bring them back into residential use.

5. Draft Budget 2025/26 & Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report. In relation to the Revenue Budget, the Council has been faced with a range of inflationary and service demand impacts and costs are significantly higher than 24 months ago, although the Council has benefited from increased investment income. The increase in direct cost of services is £3m, with £1.4m (47%) being related to one-off special projects, including a further £1m community grant scheme and a £370k allocation to support various service reviews/priorities. The Government provisional financial settlement has awarded the Council: £895k for New Homes Bonus, £1.6m for Minimum Funding Guarantee, and £126k for other grants. The settlement abolished the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the Services Delivery Grant (2024/25, £194k) and confirmed the Council Tax Referendum threshold as in preceding years (with 2.99% being applied).

In summary the Council has a surplus revenue budget of £2.1m (before the application of earmarked reserves). In 2026/27 there is a surplus budget (£533k), but for subsequent years the council has a cumulative gap over the 4-years of £10.5m. The main reasons for this gap are the removal of New Homes Bonus and Minimum Funding Guarantee, the introduction of the business rates reset (which is expected to show a

significant reduction in business rate), and additional service pressures relating to new statutory regulation in housing and waste collection. For each year from 2026/27 the budget assumes a notional 2.99% annual increase in Council Tax.

In relation to Reserves, it is currently forecast that by the end of 2024/25 the Council will have revenue reserves of circa £23.8m, and by the end of 2025/26 circa £24.8m. This is forecast to decrease to £14m by the end of 2029/30. The reasons for this change are detailed within this report.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the five-year programme totals £32.4m by 2029/30, £18.3m for schemes previously approved and £12.6m of new capital schemes; there is also a capital contingency of £1.5m over the MTFS period.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor King addressed Cabinet on the draft Budget. In relation to the Community Grants, will the Council be reviewing the equitability and distribution of allocations? The Portfolio Holder Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy, and Tourism responded that this seems to be working well at the moment, but would be reviewed. Councillor King also asked whether there is anything that the Council can do to support heritage assets across the District, perhaps through a specific fund stream? The Portfolio Holder for Planning responded that the budget was too advanced for this to be included this year, but it would be considered for next year. Councillor King asked whether any of the current issues relating to car parking would be addressed through the budget? The Head of Regulatory Services responded that the enforcement side of car parking was being looked at through the Car Parking Strategy, which has been considered by Scrutiny and would soon go out for public consultation.

It was proposed by Councillor Graves, seconded by Councillor Woodiwiss and **RESOLVED** to:

- Approve the following to be included in the Draft “Revenue” 2025/26 Budget and MTFS (2026/27 to 2029/30), as detailed in the report:
 - various service-related budget changes noted in paragraphs 3.5 to 3.13
 - various non-service funding budget changes noted in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.23

- Council Tax, Business Rates and Collection Fund related budget changes noted in paragraphs 3.24 to 3.28
- Draft 2025/26 Budget and MTF5 (2026/27 to 2029/30) summarised at Table 4. The detailed service budgets are shown at Appendix 1 and 2
- Reserves allocations summarised at Table 5, Appendix 4.
- Capital Programme for 2025/26 and for the MTF5 (2026/27 to 2029/30) as shown at Appendix 5.
- Delegation of authority to the Director, Resources, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, in respect of capital projects that are impacted by inflation, as shown in paragraph 3.36
- Endorse the continuation of the transformation programme and continuous improvement, thereby ensuring that the Council remains “Committed to Financial Sustainability & Resilience to enable Community Investment”.

Reasons: To provide the opportunity for consultation on the emerging budget position for 2025/26 and the MTF5, with a focus on the revenue budget, reserve allocations and proposals for the capital programme.

6. Devolution White Paper Update

The Leader introduced the report and stated that a further report would be brought to Cabinet/Council for consideration before any proposals being submitted to the Government. If required, a special meeting of Cabinet/Council be called to consider any draft proposals being submitted. The Portfolio Holder for Finance stated that it was proposed in the Budget that a fund of £150K be set aside, if required, to address the implications contained within the White Paper.

It was proposed by Councillor Knowles, seconded by Councillor Graves, and **RESOLVED** to:

- Authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the leader of the Council, to undertake any such work as is considered necessary to prepare the Council’s response to the White Paper and any Ministerial Letters.

- Note that a further report will be brought to Cabinet/Council for consideration prior to any specific proposals being submitted to government.
- Note that if required a special meeting of Cabinet /Council be called to consider any draft proposal being submitted to government.

7. Any Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 20:14

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