

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Thursday, 23 January 2025
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor M. Brown (Chair)

Councillors

A. Thwaites (Vice-Chair)	S. Atherton
R. Child	D. Chubb
H. Cliff	M. Gordon
S. Lumley	R. Sharp

In Attendance

Leader of the Council, Councillor P. Allnatt
 Portfolio Holder for Governance, Environment and Regulatory Services (Deputy Leader), Councillor M. Glancy
 Portfolio Holder for Town Centre, Growth and Prosperity, Councillor S. Butcher
 Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance, Property and Resources, Councillor S. Cox
 Councillor J. Adcock

Officers

Chief Executive
 Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
 Director for Corporate Services
 Assistant Director for Governance and Democracy (Monitoring Officer)
 Director for Place & Prosperity
 Assistant Director for Housing Quality, Development and Landlord Services
 Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer

Minute No.	Minute
32	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE An apology for absence was received from Councillor Pritchett.</p>
33	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the meetings held on 28 November 2024 and 3 December 2024 were confirmed.</p>
34	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Councillor Gordon declared an other registerable interest in relation to Minute Number 38 as she is a member of the Waterfield Leisure Centre. She confirmed that she would stay and participate.</p> <p>Councillor Gordon declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to Minute Number 39 as the item covers rent increases on Council properties and she is a Council tenant. She advised that she would leave the meeting at that point.</p> <p>Councillor Gordon declared an other registerable interest in relation to Minute Number 39 as it concerns new bathrooms, kitchens and heating equipment but she advised that she was advised that she could stay and participate.</p>
35	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chair introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited Members to comment.</p> <p>In doing so, it was noted that there were changes to the Forward Plan however it was explained that the Forward Plan is a live working document which would be updated when things change.</p>
36	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25 The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/25 and invited Members to comment.</p> <p>It was noted that the item, developing a cyber security strategy would be a workshop item and a date is being sought.</p> <p>It was confirmed that Officers are identifying a date for the Waste Strategy and Contract Delivery workshop. The modelling has held up the date of the workshop.</p>
37	<p>CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26 The Director for Corporate Services, Dawn Garton, introduced the report with a presentation.</p> <p>Concern was raised that with the state of the finances and the use of reserves, that the Council could be panicked into selling off assets. In response it was confirmed that the Council has a strategy and there is a plan to maximise opportunities. There</p>

is an approved asset development programme and that decisions would be made to either maximise assets for the Council's benefit or dispose of assets.

The comment was made that it would be preferable to see assets that aren't used (e.g. garages) sold off instead of assets that are used. In response, it was noted that garages are covered under the Asset Management Plan for the Housing Revenue Account and the plan outlines the improvement of some garages sites and the decision to dispose of sites that aren't used.

Members noted that the Stockyard project relies on match funding from the Council and as it is increasingly rare for construction projects to stay on budget, concern was raised regarding the liability for the Council if it goes over budget. Members were reassured that Officers are keeping a tight rein on spending and that if costs overrun, then the project would be reengineered, in order to bring down costs. Reference was made to a recent positive internal audit report on this project.

Concern was raised regarding the policy of patch and mend in the short term, which could lead to extra costs in the long term. It was clarified that the Council doesn't have funding to do everything it would like to or needs to, and that Officers do the best they can where they can but recognise that this area is a risk.

RESOLVED

That the report is **NOTED** and Members' comments are presented to Cabinet at the next Cabinet meeting.

38

GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27 TO 2028/29

The Director for Corporate Services, Dawn Garton, introduced the report with a presentation.

In relation to the special expenses budget, the comment was raised as to whether there are the funds available to purchase land to expand the cemetery. In response it was noted that although expansion works would take place, there currently isn't a funded business case or definitive plan.

Concern was raised that by 2027/28, reserves would be exhausted and that service reductions would need to be considered.

Concern was raised in relation to the outstanding property service charge recharges. It was noted by Officers that there are currently negotiations with tenants of Phoenix House regarding this matter. Members asked that the updated position be provided to all Members of the committee outside the meeting.

A query was raised as to whether the Council could stick to the £306k budget for homelessness temporary accommodation, considering that the current year spend is £348k. It was noted that it is highlighted as a risk, however the Council has a duty to house people. There has been increased demand, which has created a

difficult situation. Officers would review how assets could be utilised to support the Council in delivering its statutory duty and Officers are confident that the service would be delivered within budget.

A query was raised as to whether the Council could afford the Community Coordinator role and the role in the Health and Active Communities Team. It was clarified that both are growth items and it is proposed to be funded by UKSPF funding. There would be an overview of outputs and an assessment of whether the roles meet outcomes.

The question was raised as to whether it is worth taking on a Funding Co-ordinator when, potentially, there is only two years left before Melton Borough Council ceases to exist. In response, it was clarified that nothing has yet been decided and the Council still has a duty to deliver services until a time it doesn't exist. The aim is that the post would be fixed term for two years and would have to deliver within that time. It was noted that the Funding Co-ordinator would have different focus from the previous Funding Co-ordinator role.

Following a concern raised regarding the MMDR South, it was confirmed that the Council are continuing to work with Leicestershire County Council (LCC) but that LCC doesn't see the project going ahead in either the short, medium or long term. Despite this, there is still a commitment towards delivering it and the local plan depends on the southern section of the road being delivered.

A query was raised regarding the one-off planning expenditure in relation to the solar farm inquiry. In response, Officers confirmed that the expense is expected but that they are unsure what the exact figure would be. An estimate had been included in the forecast reserves.

RESOLVED

That the report is **NOTED** and Members' comments are presented to Cabinet at the next Cabinet meeting.

39

REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2025/26 FOR HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Director for Corporate Services, Dawn Garton, introduced the report with a presentation.

A concern was raised that Independent Living Charge would be increased by 5%, however the decision hasn't been justified and the report refers to a Council policy. Members asked that clarity be provided outside of the meeting.

Concerns were raised regarding errors in billing for extra charges and the possibility that there are other errors yet to be uncovered. Members were reassured that there are checks and balances and steps have been taken to mitigate the errors.

A discussion ensued regarding the energy efficiency scheme that the Council have put in a bid for funding. The comment was raised that flats require insulation too, however it was explained that the funding, if the bid is successful, would address issues in 80 of the worst properties in the housing stock. If the flats are one of the 80 worst, then they would be improved with the funding.

A query was raised regarding void repairs, however in response it was clarified that costs are not initially known when a property becomes void. Occasionally an amount is budgeted which in hindsight is not sufficient.

RESOLVED

That the report is **NOTED** and Members' comments are presented to Cabinet at the next Cabinet meeting.

40

URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at: 8.13 pm

Chair