

## **CABINET**

**Thursday, 12 February 2026**

Attendance:

Councillors  
Tod (Chairperson)

Cutler  
Cramoysan  
Becker  
Learney

Porter  
Reach  
Thompson

Members in attendance who spoke at the meeting

Councillors Batho, Godfrey and Horrill

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

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1. **APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

2. **MEMBERSHIP OF CABINET BODIES ETC.**

There were no changes to be made.

3. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Tod and Porter declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of various items on the agenda due to their roles as Hampshire County Councillors. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Audit and Governance Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

Councillor Becker declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of the Housing Revenue Account Budget (HRA) 2026/27 (CAB3540) as a property owner with a connection to a council sewage treatment works for which she paid an annual fee. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, she remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted by the Monitoring Officer to participate and vote on the matters in the report.

Councillor Batho declared an other registrable interest in respect of report CAB3542(H) as he was a council appointed director to the Venta Living Ltd board. He spoke as a member of the public on this item and then left the room prior to any debate or decision.

4. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke regarding reports CAB3540 and CAB3542(H) as summarised under the relevant minutes below.

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2026, LESS EXEMPT MINUTE.**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 January 2026, less exempt minute, be agreed as a correct record.

6. **LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Becker announced that the Council in partnership with ActiveMe would be offering the usual football activities during the February half term week.

Councillor Learney provided an update on the recent river management and flood prevention measures being undertaken by the council in response to the heavy rain falls and rising groundwater levels.

Councillor Tod announced that the works on The Buttercross in Winchester were due to start at the end of the month.

Councillor Tod also announced that the council had agreed a plan with Southwestern Railway to improve the appearance of the front approach to Winchester train station by removing the concrete blocks and the fencing.

7. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET 26/27**  
**(CAB3541)**

Councillor Cutler introduced the report and drew attention to the notification earlier that week that the Government had made a calculation error regarding business rate pooling which had resulted in a reduction in the settlement by just under £1.4 million per annum. The government had agreed one-off Adjustment Support Grants for 26/27 to cover this loss for the current year, however the annual £1.4 million reduction would impact subsequent years. Appendices A (General Fund Medium Term Financial Projections) and C (Reserves) of the report had been updated and circulated to Cabinet and other members present.

Councillor Cutler advised that the government error had been reported to Scrutiny Committee on 10 February and noted that the draft minutes of that committee had been circulated to Cabinet and other members present.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillors Godfrey and Batho addressed Cabinet as summarised briefly below.

Councillor Godfrey

Councillor Godfrey criticised the budget as unambitious, arguing that it prioritised retaining millions in reserves over the immediate interests of Winchester taxpayers. He believed that a maximum council tax increase was unnecessary given the generous government settlement and opposed allocating funds for local government reorganisation rather than providing direct services. He urged the council to use its reserves for tangible community benefits, such as home insulation and support for small businesses. Finally, he questioned the high expenditure on the Guildhall, noting that the building would remain largely closed to the public despite the investment

#### Councillor Batho

Councillor Batho, acting as the coordinator of community speed watch in Winchester, highlighted the prevalence of motorists exceeding speed limits on residential roads and the resulting concerns expressed by local residents. He supported the proposed budget for 2026/27 regarding feasibility work on speed indicator devices, asserting that these tools effectively remind motorists of speed limits and facilitate the council's active travel objectives. He requested that Cabinet prioritise this feasibility study as soon as possible.

Councillors Cutler, Learney and Tod responded to the comments made, including emphasising the importance of council reserves in the current national climate of high levels of uncertainty.

Councillor Tod also made reference to a question received from Councillor Lee who was unable to attend the meeting.

Councillor Cutler proposed an amendment to the report's first recommendation to reflect the amendment to Appendix A of the report due to the late change in the Government's local government financial settlement referred to above. This was agreed and it was noted that an amended report and appendices would be submitted to Council.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

#### **RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):**

**1. That the level of General Fund Budget for 2026/27 be agreed and the summary be recommended as shown in Appendix A of CAB3541, as amended, due to the late change in the Government's local government financial settlement announced by MHCLG on 10 February 2026.**

**2. That in relation to the Greener Faster Council Plan priority:**

**a. a growth of £30,000 be approved to increase the annual Town Account tree maintenance budget as a result of risks associated with the effects of climate change and associated tree disease.**

- 3. That in relation to the Healthy Communities priority of the new Council Plan:**
  - a. the revised income bands for the Council Tax Reduction scheme for working age applicants (set out in Appendix E of the report) be approved, that ensure claimants continue to receive the appropriate level of support after the DWPs increase in Universal Credit rates with effect from 1 April 2026.**
  
- 4. That in relation to the Efficient and Effective priority:**
  - a. a growth to the annual expenditure budget of £89,000 be approved for improvements to make the way our residents' contact us is easier and faster.**
  
- 5. That other service expenditure annual budgets be amended as follows, in response to revised estimates:**
  - a. Utility budget increased by £150,000 in order to cover the additional forecast utility costs from 2026/27.**
  - b. An additional budget of £115,000 per annum from 2026/27 for the Corporate Head of Resources.**
  - c. A growth of £130,000 to reflect the net budget pressure of the migration of the Land Charges service to HM Land Registry.**
  - d. A net budget saving of £215,000 per annum to reflect changes to forecast employers' pension contributions and rates.**
  
- 6. That one-off service expenditure budgets be approved as follows:**
  - a. A £470,000 digital transformation budget, relating to the implementation of improvements to make our residents' digital contact with us easier and faster, with £400,000 funded from the digital transformation reserve and £70,000 funded from the transitional reserve.**
  - b. A Town Account budget of £15,000 for feasibility work related to speed indicators within the town area, funded by the town reserve.**
  - c. £1.7m for essential structural and repair works to the Guildhall to maintain this listed civic building (and required prior to further decision making on the future operating model of the Guildhall and Abbey House) funded from Property - Asset Management Reserve, and delegates authority to:**
    - i. the Strategic Director to appoint, in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs), all necessary consultants to prepare design work for the works required to the Guildhall through a competitive bid process or framework;**
    - ii. the Strategic Director to undertake a procurement exercise to obtain bids or use of a framework to appoint a contractor(s) for the works required to the Guildhall, in accordance with the council's CPRs;**

- iii. the Strategic Director to appoint the relevant contractors and to negotiate and agree contractual heads of terms with the contract appointment; and
- iv. the Service Lead: Legal to prepare and enter into all relevant agreements, negotiate the contractual agreements and see them to completion to enable the Guildhall works.

7. That following a review of earmarked reserves they be amended as follows:

- a. £2m of the Major Investment Reserve be re-allocated to the Property Reserve to fund maintenance requirements of corporate properties.
- b. £1m from the Major Investment Reserve be re-allocated to the Car Parks Property Reserve to fund maintenance of and investment in parking.
- c. An additional £500,000 per annum be set aside into the Property Reserve, for the maintenance of and investment in operational assets.

8. That the sum of £1,434,779 be treated as Special Expenses under Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 in respect of the Winchester Town area as set out in section 17 and Appendix D of the report.

9. That the Council Tax for the Special Expenses in the Winchester Town area at Band D for 2026/27 be increased by 5% (£4.50) to £94.58.

10. That the surplus balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund for distribution to this Council, calculated in January 2026 of £107,910, be approved.

11. That the level of Council Tax at Band D for City Council services for 2026/27 be increased to £168.49, an increase of £4.83 reflecting an average Council tax increase of 2.95% (the maximum allowed under the referendum limit of 2.99% when combined with the increase to the Special Expenses for the town area).

12. That the carry forward of the balance of the Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund in 2025/26 to 2026/27 be approved in order to extend this vital support for those on low income.

**RESOLVED:**

13. That authority be delegated to the Director (Finance), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, to procure, award and enter into any necessary contract(s) required to progress the Customer Experience Digital Project, within the approved budget envelope.

14. That the proposal to write-off the three individual outstanding Non-Domestic Rate debts totalling £228,435.25, listed in Appendix F of the report be approved, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 12.7(f).

15. That the proposal to write-off the debt of £53,649.94 owed by Provident Asset Management in connection with rent arrears of £27,649.94 and dilapidation liabilities for external repairs of £26,000 be approved.

8. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET 26/27**  
(CAB3540)

Councillor Reach introduced the report which had been produced following consultation with tenants, including the TACT board on 4 February. The report had also been considered at Scrutiny Committee on 10 February, the draft minutes of which had been circulated to Cabinet and other members present. Councillor Reach provided further response to a number of the corrections and clarifications sought at Scrutiny Committee and it was noted that an amended report would be submitted to Council.

Ian Tait spoke in public participation as summarised briefly below.

Mr Tait referenced the council's previous acquisition of the Corner House, Winchester and subsequent decision to dispose of the asset. He estimated that the pending sale would result in a loss of approximately £500,000 and emphasised that this was HRA monies. Consequently, he queried the report's description of the sale as providing a "valuable capital receipt", highlighting that he had raised concerns on this matter at several previous meetings.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor Horrill addressed Cabinet as summarised briefly below.

Councillor Horrill welcomed the additional budget savings identified since the November budget options report, but expressed disappointment that the lack of a timely government decision on rent convergence would defer its implementation until the following financial year. She raised concerns regarding the fairness of cost recovery from leaseholders via the section 20 process and also the imbalance in fees for sewage treatment works. She queried why the new maintenance and repairs contract was omitted from the risk register and queried whether there were sufficient skilled resources to complete the energy enhancement works. Finally she expressed concern that the long-standing commitment to building new affordable homes appeared to end in 2032.

Councillors Reach, Cutler and Tod, together with the Director (Finance) responded to the comments made. Councillor Reach highlighted that the future of the HRA policy including the new homes programme was scheduled for discussion at Economy and Housing Policy Committee on 23 February 2026.

Councillor Tod also made reference to a question received from Councillor Lee who was unable to attend the meeting.

Councillor Reach proposed that Appendix 7 of the report would be amended to reflect feedback from the TACT Board that the £52,000 neighbourhood budgets saving be replaced with the £50,000 frequency of external decoration saving. This was agreed and it was noted that an amended Appendix 7 would be prepared for submission to Council.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

**RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):**

- 1. That the HRA Financial Plan operating account, including annual working balances be noted, as detailed in Appendix 6 of the report.**
- 2. That the 2026/27 Housing Revenue Account budget be approved, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report.**
- 3. That the proposed capital programme for maintenance, improvements and renewals totalling £162.7m be approved.**
- 4. That capital expenditure be approved and authority be delegated to the Strategic Director with responsibility for housing to enter into necessary contracts for the 2026/27 capital programme of £22.8m, as detailed in Appendix 3 of the report in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 7.4.**
- 5. That a change in approach to delivery of retrofit installation of solar panels and batteries to achieve best value for money following the decision by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to withhold Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund grant on battery installations be approved, as outlined at paragraphs 11.56 to 11.63 of the report.**
- 6. That the proposed 10 year capital programme for new homes totalling £202.8m, and expenditure of £21.8m in 2026/27 be approved, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 7.4.**
- 7. That the financing of the HRA Capital Programme be approved as detailed in Appendix 5 of the report, (noting the planned repayment of borrowing following the 1000 homes programme).**
- 8. That the revenue savings target of £1.13m at Appendix 7 of the report as amended be approved, which was outlined to Cabinet in November 2025 (CAB3523) and includes additional savings as outlined at paragraphs 11.32-11.38 of the report.**
- 9. That the Section 151 Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Strategic Director with responsibility for**

**Housing to approve buybacks of individual former HRA properties sold under the Right to Buy during 2026/27, following positive financial appraisal, utilising the unallocated New Homes budget (see paragraph 11.26 of the report).**

- 10. That subject to the acceptance of the expression of interest to the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) round 4:
  - a. the Strategic Director with responsibility for Housing be authorised to enter into a revised Memorandum of Understanding with Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to secure additional LAHF funding.**
  - b. Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer to approve capital expenditure (subject to financial appraisal, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 7.4) of up to £12m to purchase up to 30 properties between 2026/27 and 2029/30 using the approved HRA unallocated new build budget, to be part-financed by LAHF grant with any balance via prudential borrowing.**
  - c. The Corporate Head – Asset Management and the Strategic Director with responsibility for Housing be authorised to purchase up to 30 properties. (Paragraphs 11.74-11.78 of the report).****

**11. That the average rent increase for 2026/27 for all affordable, Shared Ownership and social housing of 4.8% be approved, based on the September 2025 CPI figure of 3.8% +1% (Paragraphs 11.6-11.8 of the report).**

**12. That amendments to HRA tenant service charges in 2026/27 be approved to reflect cost recovery based on 2024/25 actual costs (see paragraphs 11.41 to 11.45 of the report).**

**13. That it be noted that the draft HRA Business 30-year Plan is viable and sustainable and has the capacity to support the delivery of 1,000 new affordable homes.**

**9. CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 26-36  
(CAB3539)**

Councillor Cutler introduced the report noting that it had been considered at Scrutiny Committee on 10 February, the draft minutes of which had been circulated to Cabinet and other members present.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

**RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):**

- 1. The Capital Investment Strategy be approved including:
  - a) the Capital Programme and Capital Programme Financing (Appendices A and B to the report);**
  - b) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement (Appendix E of the report);****

- c) **the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (Appendix G of the report); and**
- d) **the prudential indicators detailed in the report and Appendix F of the report.**

RESOLVED:

2. Subject to Council approval of the capital programme, the following capital expenditure be approved:

- a) IMT equipment in 2026/27 (£154,000) as detailed in paragraph 11.8.6 of the report;
  - b) Repairs to the Guildhall clocktower in 2026/27 (£250,000);
- and
- c) Capital improvements to the Guildhall in 2026/27 and 2027/28 (£3,300,000)

3. That the requirement to ensure Members have the right knowledge and skills to undertake their governance role be noted and that the ongoing support and training offered to members is continued and enhanced as required.

10. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 26/27**  
(CAB3538)

Councillor Cutler introduced the report noting that it had been considered at Scrutiny Committee on 10 February, the draft minutes of which had been circulated to Cabinet and other members present. Councillor Cutler advised that a replacement Appendix D of the report had been circulated to members present and would be included in the updated report to Council. The amendment did not impact on the report's recommendations.

Councillor Tod made reference to a question received from Councillor Lee who was unable to attend the meeting.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

**RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):**

1. **That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement which includes the Annual Treasury Investment Strategy for 2026/27 (and the remainder of 2025/26) is approved.**

2. **That authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer to manage the council's pooled property investment and long-term borrowing according to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement as appropriate; and**

3. **That authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, who in turn discharges this function to Hampshire County Council's Director of Corporate Operations, as agreed in the Service Level**

**Agreement, to manage all council investments (other than the high yield portfolio) and short-term borrowing according to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement as appropriate.**

11. **VENTA LIVING - BUSINESS PLAN 26/27 (LESS EXEMPT APPENDIX)**  
(CAB3542(H))

Councillor Reach introduced the report. The report had been considered at Cabinet Committee: Housing on 2 February 2026 which had approved the recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below.

Mr Tait questioned the viability of the company's business model, arguing that recent economic and regulatory changes would likely prevent the venture from trading with an acceptable surplus. He suggested the council should wind up the company and outsource the management of the 41 Winnall flats to an independent provider rather than persevering with an unproven model.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor Horrill addressed Cabinet as summarised briefly below.

Councillor Horrill reiterated her support for a separate housing company to provide diverse tenures and affordable homes, while acknowledging the progress made with residents settling at the Winnall development. She expressed disappointment regarding the lack of proposals to expand the company's remit for 2026/27 and queried what specific criteria would be used to initiate future market acquisitions. She queried whether the company was being underutilised and also whether it would resource itself independently rather than continuing to purchase administrative support from the council.

Councillor Batho also spoke during public participation as a council appointed director to the Venta Living board. His comments are summarised briefly below and he left the meeting following his address to Cabinet.

Councillor Batho described Venta Living as a success for both residents and the council, emphasising its role in providing energy-efficient housing and offering the authority valuable visibility into the private rental market. He detailed the proposed 5.26% rent increase for the flats at Foxglove House and noted that the company was currently focused on consolidation and preparing for the implementation of the Renters' Rights Bill. Finally, he confirmed that while there are no immediate plans to expand the company's remit, the directors remained open to evaluating future business cases as new opportunities arise.

Councillor Reach responded to the comments made, including advising that the exempt appendix confirmed that the company was sustainable in the long term.

Cabinet and other members present confirmed they did not wish to go into exempt session to consider further the contents of the exempt appendix.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updated financial business plan be approved, as recommended by Cabinet Committee: Housing.
2. That the proposed rent increase for 2026/27 of 5.26% to £1100 per month be approved.
3. That the move to a dynamic renting model following the implementation of the renters rights Bill in May 2026 be approved, allowing for prevailing market rents to apply to individual units at the point of relet.

12. **FUTURE ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET**

RESOLVED:

That the list of future items as set out in the Forward Plan for March 2026 be noted.

13. **EXEMPT BUSINESS:**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.
2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

<u>Minute Number</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description of Exempt Information</u>
14	Exempt minute of previous meeting held 21 January 2026	) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)
15	Venta Living Ltd business plan (exempt appendix)	)

) 12A refers)

14. **EXEMPT MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2026**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minute of the previous meeting held 21 January 2026 be agreed as a correct record.

15. **VENTA LIVING - BUSINESS PLAN 26/27 (EXEMPT APPENDIX)**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt appendix be noted.

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and concluded at 11.30 am

Chairperson