



RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE:	Monday, 13 January 2025
TIME:	7.00 pm
VENUE:	Town Hall, Station Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 1SE

MEMBERSHIP:

Councillor P Honeywood (Chairman)
Councillor M Cossens (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Bensilum
Councillor Doyle
Councillor Goldman

Councillor Harris
Councillor S Honeywood
Councillor Newton
Councillor Steady

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DATE OF PUBLICATION: Monday, 20 January 2025

AGENDA

5 Reference from the Cabinet - A.1 - Executive's initial budget proposals for 2025/26 (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account) (Pages 5 - 24)

To set out the Executive's initial budget proposals for 2025/26 in respect of both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for scrutiny by the Committee in accordance with the provisions of Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rule 3 of the Council's Constitution.

Date of the Next Scheduled Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to be held in the Town Hall, Station Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 1SE at 7.30 pm on Tuesday, 11 March 2025.

Information for Visitors

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Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of the RSOSC held on 13 January 2025

Questions and Answers – A.1 - GF/HRA Budget proposals 2025/26

Question	Committee Member's Question	Cabinet Member's Answer	Answer
<p>1. What is Cabinet going to do and when about ending its reliance on reserves to fund HRA deficits which is unsustainable i.e. does Cabinet have a plan?</p> <p>That sounds to me like the Cabinet does not have a Plan. Am I correct in that?</p> <p>If we continue as we are, when will the Reserves be depleted?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p> <p>Paul Honeywood</p> <p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p> <p>Andy Baker</p> <p>Andy Baker</p> <p>Richard Barrett (Director of Finance & IT and</p>	<p>As set out within the report to Cabinet on 20 December 2024, as has been the case in previous years, the use of reserves forms part of a wider managed approach that strikes the necessary balance of 'protecting' the investment in tenants' homes whilst recognising the need to use reserves to respond to the on-going financial challenges that the Council continues to face. It is however recognised that this is not a sustainable long-term solution, but it enables the Council to meet its key priorities in the immediate term, which can be revisited as part of the HRA Business Plan in future years. It will be important that the Council explores opportunities to balance the various competing issues during 2025/26, to inform the business plan and budget from 2026/27.</p> <p>There is no written down Plan per se. However, it will be monitored by the Cabinet through the quarterly periodic reports. In addition, any sale by the Council of its Council houses will have an impact on the deficit.</p> <p>I would not be able to guess or estimate. That would be impossible to answer as demand can not be gauged in advance.</p> <p>Hypothetically, based on the information provided to Cabinet in December 2024 and no change, the reserves will be depleted in approximately four years.</p>

<p>What is the Plan for the next 12 months? Is the strategy given the likelihood of local government re-organisation to kick the can down the road?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer) Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>Nothing is definite though there is a distinct possibility that this Council will disappear in three years' time. However, there is still a job to do. The Council still needs to maintain its pride and its commitment to providing high quality housing. There is a duty to the residents to perform.</p>
<p>Will the Council go for a 'spend, spend, spend' approach on maintaining its stock before handing over to the successor Council?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>The Housing Improvement Plan is considered quarterly and in two weeks' time I will be meeting with Officers to look at the budgets for 2025/26 and beyond. Any decision to stop expenditure on the housing stock would have to take serious account of the attitude and expectations of the Social Housing Regulator. The Council's ongoing housing stock condition survey will indicate where expenditure is needed and whether the Council needs to dispose of poor standard, high maintenance, high-cost properties.</p>
<p>Will the money from property sales be re-invested in the housing stock?</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>I refer you to my answer to Question 17 below. Such monies will go to either increasing housing stock numbers or improving the existing stock. Decisions will be made when required. At the moment there are four properties that could be sold at this time.</p>
<p>2. Will Cabinet be keeping an eye on this plan through the quarterly budget / financial forecast reports?</p>	<p>Bernie Goldman</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Yes – there will be opportunities to provide updates during the year as part of the quarterly financial performance reports.</p>
<p>When can we expect to see this Plan emerging i.e. Q1, Q2</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>This is the subject of a proposed Highlight Priority for 2025/26 and I would be more than happy to return to discuss this further at a later date.</p>

<p>or Q3?</p>		<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>The Highlight Priorities Milestones report due to be submitted to Cabinet in February will also give an answer as to the timescales.</p>
<p>What would be the disposal process for these four properties?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy White (Assistant Director (Buildings & Public Realm))</p>	<p>They could be disposed off either by Auction or by sale on the open market.</p>
<p>Would there be a minimum, reserve price at Auction?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy White</p>	<p>Yes, the property would be independently valued and also valued by the Auctioneer and a reserve price would then be set by Officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.</p>
<p>3. Does the Portfolio Holder agree that the HRA Maintenance and Capital Programme needs to be reduced in expenditure terms? What are underlying factors behind the expenditure increase in these areas?</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Please can I refer you to my response to Question 1 above in terms of the investment in the housing stock within the context of the wider HRA financial position.</p> <p>In terms of the underlying factors, a number of issues were highlighted within the report considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2024 and included increases in costs being experienced by suppliers / contractors, underlying inflationary pressures, and meeting regulatory and asset management plan requirements.</p> <p>In terms of additional details, the nature and age of the Council’s Housing Stock, has become costlier to maintain, as we know with our own homes. Costs of materials and labour have also increased, and no doubt the government’s decision to increase employers National Insurance Contributions may also have an impact, in the costs of any contractors this Council may use, and charge.</p>

			<p>The Council must ensure that the homes it lets to tenants meet the Decent Home Standard and are free from significant disrepair and hazards to health. The cost of undertaking this maintenance continues to rise due to inflationary pressures. The Council is also required to meet a set of tenant satisfaction measures and is subject to an enhanced programme of regulation from the Regular for Social Housing. In light of this it is not necessarily possible to reduce expenditure but it is possible to seek efficiencies and re-prioritise work where this does not jeopardise the safety of our tenants or lead to the Council failing to meet regulatory requirements. Many Councils with retained housing stock are experiencing an increasing pressure on their Housing Revenue Accounts with annual deficits forecast for the short term.</p>
<p>Have we ever looked at Selective Licensing Schemes as a way to raise money in the private sector?</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Tim Clarke (Assistant Director (Housing & Environment))</p>	<p>This falls outside of the HRA. The private sector SLS would fall within the General Fund (GF).</p>
<p>Could we use the money from the SLS to subsidise the HRA?</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Tim Clarke</p>	<p>Any money raised would have to stay within the GF. The Council is not allowed to transfer monies between the GF and the HRA.</p>
<p>Do you have any idea as to the percentage of contract price increases that will be as a result of the Government's decision to raise the National Insurance levy on businesses? Is this an inevitable impact?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>No, not at this time but I will be discussing with my Officers the potential impact of this. I have no such figures at this moment, but I will happily share them when I do. This is an inevitable impact, but it is one that can not be quantified at this time.</p>

<p>When will we see reflected within the quarterly Financial Performance reports the seeking of efficiencies and the re-prioritisation of work?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>The Council does need to use its current resources more efficiently and ensure that the budget does not need to be ‘topped up’ by the use of reserves whilst bearing in mind the stringent requirements of the Regulator who will take no account of the financial cost to local authorities.</p>
<p>Are we now asking questions that can not be answered at this time because we do not have quantified figures?</p>	<p>Carrie Doyle</p>	<p>Richard Barrett (Director of Finance & IT and Section 151 Officer)</p>	<p>Yes. The HRA is about balancing and managing the risks within the HRA business plan</p>
<p>4. Does the Portfolio Holder intend to lobby the Government to agree to an increase in the annual amount that Councils can increase housing rents?</p>	<p>Matthew Bensilum</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Yes, it is the intention to continue to lobby Government for the necessary flexibilities as the opportunities arise.</p>
<p>Will this lobbying involve the District’s two MPs?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Yes, I would very much hope and expect that they would support the Council in this.</p>
<p>5. Does the Council intend to seek feedback from businesses on whether they are likely to survive or go under in the current economic climate so it can gauge the likely impact on</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>The Council does engage with local business on a regular basis via the Economic Growth Team and receives feedback on various issues such as impacts from the economy / market etc.</p>

<p>business rates collection amounts?</p>			
<p>6. In relation to the General Fund budget – what measures will be taken by the Cabinet to avoid using up all of TDC’s reserves?</p>	<p>Bernie Goldman</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>As set out in the report to Cabinet in December 2024, in terms of supporting the underlying context to the development of the budget for 2025/26, it is worth highlighted the following comments that were set out in earlier financial performance reports: <i>In terms of the later years of the forecast, it is important to highlight the significant challenges arising from inflationary increases, which are expected to exceed our ability to raise income from council tax and business rates. Therefore, at some reasonable point in the future, the Council must be able to put itself in the position of balancing its annual budget, otherwise the position is not sustainable. Based on the current forecast position, the expected annual imbalance between expenditure and income [from 2027/28 onwards] is approximately £0.700m. This would therefore require corresponding annual on-going savings to be realised over the full forecast period to enable a balanced budget to be set each year.</i></p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, the Council’s long-term plan and Forecast Risk Fund provide flexibility and support against which the development of the Council’s forecast can be considered and it continues to provide the time and opportunity to respond to the structural annual budget deficit that is still estimated to remain at the end of 2026/27.</p> <p>The report also acknowledged that further savings will therefore need to be to be identified to deliver a sustainable financial position.</p>

Can you be more specific?	Bernie Goldman	Mark Stephenson	<p>Within the Highlight Priorities Report that was also considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2024, a number of items were set out to support the Council's financial sustainability, including further developing the savings plan along with a transformational strategy to help actively manage the Council's costs and liabilities.</p> <p>Similarly to the point highlighted within the response to Q2 above, there will be opportunities to provide updates during the year as part of the quarterly financial performance reports along with the highlight priority progress reports.</p>
When will the Reserves disappear?	Paul Honeywood	Mark Stephenson	<p>£1 million has already been saved with a further £2.5million planned. This will give TDC some breathing space and an opportunity to smooth out the 'bumps' in the financial forecast and avoid having to take 'knee jerk' decisions to cut services wholesale. However, this may all be overtaken by LGR.</p>
So when will we see the Cabinet's plans?	Paul Honeywood	Mark Stephenson	<p>The Highlight Priorities Milestones report to Cabinet will set this out.</p>
7. Once the Forecast Risk Fund and the Corporate Investment Fund are gone, what will be the plan to achieve the required savings/lower expenditure?	Paul Honeywood	Mark Stephenson	<p>Can I please refer you to the response to Q6 above, which I hope addresses this point. It is worth adding that identifying savings and lowering costs will always be activities that need to be undertaken by Local Authorities as part of its best value duties and financial planning processes and there will always be a balance in terms of how they use their resources. For example, it will be important to use</p>

<p>8. What is the Council’s Strategy to attract businesses to the District in order to increase Business Rates income plus ensuring Housing Growth to increase Council Tax income?</p> <p>Are there any Government incentivised programmes of grants that could be used to attract businesses to the District?</p>	<p>Carrie Doyle</p> <p>Carrie Doyle</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p> <p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>funds such as the Corporate Investment Fund to invest in areas that can help save the Council money wherever possible and therefore go hand in hand with supporting a financially viable future.</p> <p>In terms of attracting businesses, the Council works with inward investors when they come forward and includes work being undertaken within the Freeport East project, where such investment is coming forward. It is also important to highlight the growth that is also currently being seen across the District, which is supported by the Council’s Economic Growth and Planning Teams and via various activities and initiatives such as Tendring 4 Growth.</p> <p>In terms of housing growth, the Council has a strong track record of housing delivery with the main driver being the Local Plan.</p> <p>There are various initiatives such as Business Rates Relief though in truth the Government could do more.</p>
<p>9. In Appendix B, which is the Savings Plan Forecast for 2025/26 and beyond, there is an amount of £250,000 listed as ‘Initial PFH Savings ‘Allowance’. How was this figure arrived at? What is the current progress towards achieving</p>	<p>Sarah Newton</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>This was an initial sum agreed in consultation with my Portfolio Holders. As highlighted in the report to Cabinet in December 2024, this is a target for delivery in 2026/27, so there are no specific savings arising to date.</p> <p>Similarly to a point made earlier, there will be opportunities to provide updates during the year as part of the quarterly financial performance reports along with the highlight priority progress reports.</p>

<p>this saving? What are the specific savings arising from these Portfolio Holder reviews?</p> <p>Can you give some examples?</p> <p>At the last meeting of the Committee you stated that it will take three months to produce the list of projects currently being undertaken by the Council. Why so?</p>	<p>Carrie Doyle</p> <p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p> <p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>I have asked my Cabinet Members to work with Officers to come up with areas within their respective portfolios whereby 10% can be cut from existing budgets.</p> <p>No such list has ever previously been compiled and so it will take time to produce it and to ensure that it is comprehensive and complete. The previous information provided by the Portfolio Holders was verbal and this is now being turned into a written document complete with risk assessments.</p>
<p>10. Also, within the aforementioned Appendix there are IT Savings of £200,000 arising over the next two years. What are these savings? How will these initiatives be delivered?</p>	<p>Matthew Bensilum</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>The programme of IT savings comprises a number of project deliverables over a two-year period and include multi-partner Essex-wide IT procurement initiatives, software license reduction savings, a major IT technology telephone line replacement project, in-house developed application (supporting software) replacement of legacy systems, data-science (AI) to optimise income collection efficiency.</p>
<p>11. An Energy Cost correction in the February 2024 budget amounted to an extra £300,000. Will something similar be needed this year and if</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>Based on current forecasts, there is no need to increase the current underlying - base budgets at this time. This approach is supported by a one-off contingency sum of £410k that was carried forward from 2023/24.</p>

<p>so, where will this money come from?</p> <p>Was there a contingency fund in existence before 2023/24? Will the £410,000 be used elsewhere if it is not needed? What is the exit plan given the spectre of LGR?</p> <p>Will the Council be investing in ideas such as 'heat pumps' in order to reduce energy costs?</p>	<p>Graham Steady</p> <p>Graham Steady</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p> <p>Richard Barrett (Director of Finance & IT and Section 151 Officer)</p> <p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>However, it is recognised that this area of the budget remains relatively volatile and will be subject to on-going review as part of the financial planning process and financial performance reports during the year.</p> <p>LGR will only follow Devolution if that goes ahead so we are in the very early stages of that process so no exit plans are being considered at this time. It is worth noting that LGR will take up a massive amount of Officer time. Yes, the contingency fund was in place before 2023/24 and is now being 'run down'.</p> <p>Yes, the Council is prepared to look at any and all ideas to reduce energy costs. The contingency fund is needed at this time to react to any future energy cost spikes caused by weather and/or global events similar to the war in the Ukraine.</p>
<p>12. In the Savings Plan Forecast for 2025/26 and beyond, it lists expected savings over the next two years of £220,000 arising from an Asset Review. How will these savings be in fact delivered?</p>	<p>Mark Cossens</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>As set out in the report considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2024, the planned delivery is split over 2025/26 and 2026/27. (£120k and £100k respectively)</p> <p>The 2025/26 amount reflects the removal of the on-going base budget associated with the Joint Use Sports Centre Review from previous years, which was held pending the development of the Sports and Activity Strategy.</p>

<p>For 2026/27, will this Committee have sight of the asset rationalisation opportunities before Cabinet makes any decisions?</p>	<p>Mark Cossens</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>Activities to support the delivery of the amount for 2026/27 will be developed during 2025/26 which will include the review of the Council's operational estate to identify potential asset rationalisation opportunities.</p> <p>I would be happy to share that with this Committee in due course.</p>
<p>13. The unused former Council Offices at Weeley are still producing on costs for TDC of £65k per annum. How will this be resolved and how soon? Does the disposal process for these former offices need to be restarted? Is TDC properly holding Rose Builders to account? What are these former Council Offices at Weeley worth now given that it is three years on from the initial disposal decision? Do the agreed Heads of</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>A number of similar questions were raised at the Committee's meeting on 17 December 2024, with answers provided to Members of the Committee separately on 7 January 2025.</p> <p>Within the answers provided, it was noted that enquiries will form part of the work being undertaken by the Resources and Services Committee Task and Finish Group and it was also confirmed that the project is being reviewed to explore other options to accelerate the disposal of the Weeley Site. The outcome from this review will be presented to Cabinet shortly.</p> <p>Local authorities have a duty when disposing of an interest in land / assets to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable. The associated review will therefore identify / confirm the most up to date value of the site to inform any decisions made and subject to the proposed way forward, consideration could be given to the introduction of a 'twilight clause' as necessary. (there is no 'twilight clause' within the existing arrangements)</p>

Terms have a twilight clause? If not, why not?			
<p>14. Homelessness – Why is the Portfolio Holder not pursuing with his counterparts at other Councils (e.g. Colchester City Council) their policy of placing their homeless within the Tendring District? Is TDC block booking beds for the homeless as a way of keeping costs down? What are the Cabinet’s strategies for keeping homelessness costs down? Are we risking damaging the availability of tourist accommodation?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>The question appears to imply that other Councils have a definite policy of placing their homeless within our District. I am sure that is not what is meant.</p> <p>Given the increasing level of homelessness presentations experienced by all councils and the consequent shortage of suitable temporary accommodation it is inevitable that some councils are forced to place homeless individuals and in some cases families outside of their Council’s geographic boundary. Whilst we are aware that some councils do place homeless households in our district those placements appear to be correctly notified to us and are not, in the grand scheme of things, considered to be unreasonable or excessive.</p> <p>Officers are continually in contact with their counterparts at other Councils, and I am sure have robust conversations about this, and other issues surrounding homelessness.</p> <p>In terms of ‘block booking’, as was the case under the previous administration, the Council does block book bedrooms in some hotels, B&B and similar accommodation as a means of securing that accommodation. In some instances the block booking of that accommodation means it can be secured at a better price than would otherwise be the case.</p> <p>In terms of Cabinet’s strategy for keeping homelessness costs down, we have a Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping</p>

			<p>Strategy 2020-2024 which is due to be revised, and renewed, in the coming months, alongside the Housing Strategy. Unfortunately due to the exponential rise in people and families presenting as homeless, the Homelessness Prevention Grant provided by Government has meant that this Council, alongside most Councils across the country, has had to find funds to finance temporary accommodation. A Homeless Prevention Policy was also adopted, by Cabinet, in January 2024.</p> <p>It is highly probable that the measures proposed in the recently introduced Rent Reform Bill 2024, if passed, may have a positive impact in reducing homelessness.</p> <p>Officers are currently working on a Temporary Accommodation Policy, which I am hopeful will be before Cabinet in February.</p> <p>In terms of the point made about tourist accommodation, it is possible that booking a large number of B&B and hotels may restrict the choice that prospective visitors may have when seeking accommodation. Mindful of this, and the fact that B&B accommodation is not the most suitable form of temporary accommodation, officers have been working to source other suppliers of temporary accommodation and in the last year have seen some of this accommodation become available meaning that B&B bookings can be reduced.</p> <p>As requested by Cabinet, a detailed report setting out the background and potential options to address the associated challenges is planned to be presented to Cabinet as soon as</p>
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<p>Why has your response changed compared to the response you gave at Cabinet in December in relation to other Councils placing their homeless within the Tendring District?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>possible in 2025, which will also revisit in more detail the various points highlighted above.</p> <p>I was not aware of that matter (i.e. the 72 families from outside the District) at that time. I have since spoken with Officers. As it is essentially an operational matter, I would not have needed to have known about it unless it became ‘politicised’.</p>
<p>In the first six months of 2024 (January to June), Colchester City Council made a total of 72 placements from 66 households in the Tendring District area. How many have been placed in the District within the last six months i.e. July to December 2024?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>I’ll have to answer that outside of this meeting in writing as I do not have those figures to hand.</p>
<p>You also say that you do not consider the figures of external families being placed here to be unreasonable or excessive. How many would you say would be?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Personally, I would say that if my Officers were unable to find any temporary accommodation in Tendring for our residents then that would be excessive.</p>
<p>The previous Administration acted writing to London</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>That’s a conversation that I will need to have with Officers and then decide if I need to.</p>

<p>Borough Councils and publicly holding them to account. Are you going to do anything similar about the current situation?</p> <p>Does TDC place its residents outside of this District? What will be the positive impacts of the Rent Reform Bill 2024?</p> <p>Do you agree that a negative impact could be landlords selling up their properties and as a result of the laws of supply and demand private sector rents then increase and that the Council will need to keep this under review?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p> <p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p> <p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Yes, though not many. At any one time it's less than a dozen people. It's usually done at the resident's request or in the interests of their personal safety. In terms of the Bill, the reduction in 'no fault' evictions will mean more protection for tenants which would be a positive impact on homelessness.</p> <p>Yes, I agree.</p>
<p>15. How many vehicles in the Council's fleet are leased and how many are electric energy vehicles?</p>	<p>Sue Honeywood</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>Some key information relating to the Council's vehicles was set out within the Climate Action Plan that was considered by Cabinet at its 15 November, with some key highlights as follows:</p> <p><i>Four percent of the Council's carbon emissions come from our fleet of 61 vehicles. [Leased]</i></p> <p><i>The vehicles are required by services including Open Spaces, Building Services, and Beach Patrol.</i></p>

<p>Is this making a big impact towards TDC being 'net zero' or is just a gesture? Are these electric vehicles more expensive? Is there a cost comparison undertaken?</p>	<p>Peter Harris</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p><i>The Council has already purchased four electric vehicles, making 2% of our fleet electric, which exceeds national standards.</i></p> <p>It is not a token gesture, but the Council does take a practical approach. TDC will purchase electric vehicles if they are suitable for the task in hand and good value for money. A cost comparison is undertaken by the Council's Transport Manager who then makes recommendations to Portfolio Holders who will either approve or refuse.</p>
<p>16. What is the Cabinet's view on the savings plan in the longer term, especially in the light of potential devolution and local government re-organisation?</p>	<p>Mark Cossens</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>The potential future of Local Government as set out in the Government's recent white paper will undoubtedly have an impact on the Council's plans and priorities.</p> <p>This will need to remain under on-going review alongside the development of the Government's associated plans and arrangements.</p> <p>As highlighted earlier, identifying savings and lowering costs will always be activities that need to be undertaken by Local Authorities as part of its best value duties and financial planning processes.</p> <p>Therefore, I think our savings plans need to be developed with this in mind with a priority on identifying where there are opportunities to reduce costs via efficiencies and actively managing our liabilities and cost pressures. We touched on homelessness earlier and the review that I have requested is a good example of how we are actively managing our costs that in turn will support our overall financial position.</p>

<p>Are there any threats to TDC from making savings in the light of LGR i.e. could TDC's finances be used to 'prop up' other Councils' finances?</p>	<p>Mark Cossens</p>	<p>Mark Stephenson</p>	<p>As my Administration and previous Administrations have stated, we would always look to protect our services wherever we can and as the wider devolution and local reorganisation plans develop over the coming months, it is acknowledged that it may present opportunities that support this underlying aim.</p> <p>This will therefore be a key feature as we develop our savings plan during 2025/26 which will also need to reflect any reforms to how local government is funded that are introduced by the Government in future years.</p> <p>I can't predict at this stage the impact of LGR. TDC must manage the process and play an active role or LGR will just be imposed on TDC. It will also be largely down to which other Councils TDC is merged with.</p>
<p>17. Has Cabinet considered or will it consider selling off its housing stock? Either in total or just the worst 'money pits'?</p>	<p>Sarah Newton</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>At the present time there have been no conversations around selling off this Council's Housing Stock and it is not something I intend to start looking at doing.</p> <p>I am not sure what is meant by the term 'worst money pits' and have therefore interpreted it as meaning those properties, within the Council's Housing stock, which are becoming either costly to maintain/repair using a disproportionate amount of resources.</p> <p>As I stated last year, in answer to a very similar question, the disposal of any dwelling requires careful evaluation. There are a number of properties within the current housing stock that take a</p>

<p>Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the Council is not considering selling off its housing stock nor will it consider doing so?</p>	<p>Mark Cossens</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>disproportionate amount of resource to maintain/repair, and therefore it is considered that it would be better for those to be disposed of, in order that resources can be focussed on the remaining stock.</p> <p>A number of proposals are currently being prepared for formal consideration. It is highly likely that further properties will be identified and a framework to deal with this, in the form of a Housing Asset Management Plan, together with an Acquisitions and Disposal Policy, is currently being prepared for formal consideration at Cabinet in February. At the current time there are a total of four such properties.</p> <p>I have not discussed that option with my Cabinet colleagues, nor do I intend to as I do not believe that it would be a good idea or advisable given the possibility of LGR. I am prepared however to look at disposing of the “worst” properties.</p>
<p>18. What is the Council’s current position vis-a-vis looking into “Joint Ventures” e.g. with pension fund companies as a way of increasing its housing stock?</p>	<p>Carrie Doyle</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>There are various examples of successes and failures across the country where authorities have taken such an approach, and it is therefore important to acknowledge the significant associated financial risks on both the GF and HRA.</p> <p>Such approaches therefore can significantly change the underlying financial landscape / structure and risks to Local Authorities which would need careful consideration within the context of the recent white paper on devolution and local government reorganisation.</p>

<p>Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the previous discussions with pension fund companies are no longer on the table?</p>	<p>Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>With the above in mind, a pragmatic way forward would be to allow the wider devolution / LGR work to evolve during 2025/26 and then revisit such matters in light of the associated outcomes.</p> <p>At this point in time, yes, I can confirm that.</p>
<p>19. Has this Council considered following South Norfolk Council's example of setting up a private company to acquire / build properties and then sell or rent them out at the full market rate in order to increase its income?</p>	<p>Matthew Bensilum</p>	<p>Andy Baker</p>	<p>Please can I refer to my response to question 18 where the same issues would apply.</p>

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