
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET,
HELD ON FRIDAY, 27TH JUNE, 2025 AT 2.35 PM
IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, AT THE TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-
ON-SEA, CO15 1SE**

PRESENT:**PORTFOLIO:**

Councillor M E Stephenson	Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Governance (Chairman)
Councillor A P H Baker	Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning
Councillor M Barry	Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Public Realm
Councillor P Kotz	Portfolio Holder for Assets & Community Safety
Councillor G R Placey	Portfolio Holder for Partnerships
Councillor G G I Scott	Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Heritage
Councillor A Smith	Portfolio Holder for the Environment & ICT

Group Leaders Present by Standing Invitation: Councillors J D Bray (Leader of the Reform UK Group), J B Chapman BEM (Leader of the Independent Group) and P B Honeywood (Leader of the Conservative Group)

In Attendance: Chief Executive (Ian Davidson), Corporate Director (Finance & IT) & Section 151 Officer (Richard Barrett), Corporate Director (Operations and Delivery) (Damian Williams), Assistant Director (People) (Katie Wilkins), Assistant Director (Corporate Policy & Support) (Keith Simmons), Assistant Director (Environment & Housing) (Tim Clarke), Democratic Services Manager (Ian Ford), Democratic Services Officer (Bethany Jones) and Communications Officer (James Dwan)

Also in Attendance: People Development Manager (Marcia Fuller) and Work Based Learning Manager (Debianne Messenger)

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor I J Henderson (the Deputy Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism).

16. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Baker and:-

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet, held on Friday 23 May 2025, be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members at this time.

18. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

There were no announcements made by the Leader of the Council on this occasion.

19. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY CABINET MEMBERS**Memorandum of Understanding – Tackling Heritage Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour**

The Assets and Community Safety Portfolio Holder informed Cabinet that, on 30 May 2025, he had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the prevention, investigation, enforcement and prosecution of crime and anti-social behaviour with local Police colleagues and Historic England. The MoU stated: *“I am authorised on behalf of Tendring District Council and the Community Safety Partnership to become a member of the alliance to reduce heritage crime (ARCH) and signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding on the prevention, investigation, enforcement and prosecution of heritage and cultural property crime and anti-social behaviour.”*

The Portfolio Holder was delighted to work with Historic England to undertake the heritage crime officer training for our enforcement teams to make a positive impact on heritage crime locally. He also looked forward to working with and being engaged with all partners to tackle heritage and cultural property crime and anti-social behaviour.

Community Sport and Activity Manager – Appointment

The Leisure and Public Realm Portfolio Holder was pleased to announce that, in with the Council's adopted Sport and Activity Strategy, the Council had now appointed a Community Sport and Activity Manager, Charlie Colwell.

20. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CABINET BY THE COUNCIL

There were no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Council on this occasion.

21. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CABINET BY A COMMITTEE

There were no matters referred to the Cabinet by a Committee on this occasion.

22. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S ITEMS - A.1 - ADOPTION OF THE FREEPORT EAST RETAINED BUSINESS RATES AGREEMENT AND ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2025/26

Cabinet considered a report of the Leader of the Council (A.1) which: -

- (1) sought Cabinet's, in principle, approval of the Freeport East Retained Business Rates Agreement, acting as the Billing Authority, in line with the Council's 'Freeport East Policy for Managing Retained Business Rates', and to set out the next steps to finalise the Agreement; and
- (2) requested Cabinet, acting as a Founding Member, to approve the Freeport East Ltd. Annual Business Plan for 2025/26, as required by the Members' Agreement.

Freeport East Retained Business Rates Agreement

Cabinet was aware that Freeport East was a Government backed hub for investment, trade and innovation. It was central to the Government's agenda for driving clean growth, promoting regeneration and job creation. Freeport East included the Port of Felixstowe, Harwich International Port, and the Gateway 14 business park in

Stowmarket, Suffolk. It comprised 275 hectares of space and facilities across three sites eligible for tax relief ("Tax Sites") at Felixstowe dock, Bathside Bay in Harwich, and Gateway 14 in Stowmarket.

Members recalled that Freeport East Ltd had been incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in December 2022. It had been established by a range of local public and private partners, including Tendring District Council, to act as the main counterpart to Government for delivery of the freeport policy for Freeport East.

Cabinet was reminded that Freeport East, in consultation with partners, had developed a 'Local Growth & Investment Strategy' (formerly the Retained Business Rates Strategy) that set out how Freeport East would pool, allocate, spend and monitor the retained business rate income that was collected on the freeport tax sites over the next 25 years. This included the company's operational costs.

That Strategy had been approved by the Board in March 2024 and fully reflected decisions made by Tendring District Council in relation to Business Rates usage. To achieve the site developments envisaged in the Full Business Case, 70 per cent of the total retained Business Rates from the Harwich tax site were planned to be allocated to support the further development of the Harwich tax site to achieve the outcomes of the Green Energy Hub. As a result, the Freeport East's 'Local Growth & Investment Strategy' aimed to align with the Council's 'Freeport East Policy for Managing Retained Business Rates', approved by Cabinet in January 2023.

Members were advised that, separately, the Billing Authorities, which included Tendring District Council, had decided a 'Retained Business Rates Agreement' was required to be put in place to ensure there was clarity around forecasting, collection and management of Business Rates funds in a manner that was consistent with the Local Growth & Investment Strategy.

It was reported that the Freeport East Accountable Body, East Suffolk Council, had instructed legal firm Browne Jacobson to prepare the Retained Business Rates Agreement for Freeport East (Appendix A to the Leader's report) on their behalf. On 14 March 2025 Browne Jacobson had circulated a draft document for partners building on the Local Growth & Investment Strategy.

It was noted that this document was not designed to override the Local Growth & Investment Strategy and was primarily aimed at dealing with the "mechanics" of the relationships between the Billing Authorities, Accountable Body and Freeport East Limited, to ensure the timely sharing of relevant information and movement of funds, where applicable, between the parties. The agreement recognised that it might need to change from time to time to reflect any amendments to the Local Growth & Investment Strategy, as may be determined by a decision of the Governing Body (i.e. through a decision of the Directors of Freeport East Limited).

Cabinet was informed that this document had been reviewed by this Council's Section 151 Officer and the Deputy Chief Executive and some minor changes were required to the current draft to ensure it aligned fully with the: -

- Tendring Council's *Freeport East Policy for Managing Retained Business Rates*;
- Tendring Council's *Freeport East Policy for Granting Non-Discretionary Domestic Rates Relief*; and

- Freeport East Ltd's *Freeport East Local Growth and Investment Strategy (formerly the Retained Business Rates Strategy): Using retained business rates on freeport tax sites*

Those comments would be supplied to Browne Jacobson for inclusion prior to completion and adoption of the document by the Billing Authorities and Freeport East Ltd.

Freeport East Ltd. Business Plan 2025/26

Cabinet recalled that, on 24 May 2024, it had approved the Freeport East Ltd. Annual Business plan for 2024/25 and had delegated authority to the Leader of the Council to approve future annual business plans on behalf of Tendring District Council as a Founding Member of Freeport East Ltd. The Leader now brought the business plan to Cabinet for its approval in the context of this wider update on Freeport East.

Members were made aware that Freeport East Ltd had produced a draft Annual Business Plan 2025/26 (Appendix B to the Leader's report). The Business Plan set out their vision and purpose and key priorities for the year, namely: -

- *developing a high performing organisation;*
- *delivering on ambitious vision for Freeport East;*
- *delivering investment; and*
- *making the most of its visibility and voice.*

The Business Plan also set out how Freeport East Ltd would deliver those priorities, including the types of activities they would pursue, and the resources needed. It also set out a high-level summary of key achievements for 2023/24, its first year of operation and the Company would present their second Annual Report at the Annual General Meeting in September 2025 to be published thereafter, which would showcase achievements against the 2024/25 Business Plan.

Cabinet was aware that the Business Plan needed to be approved by the Founding Members as set out in the Members' Agreement. Once the Business Plan had been approved, Freeport East intended to publish the final version on its website as an important means to convey to the wider public the scope of what they were delivering.

As well as setting the direction for the organisation, the Business Plan also created a framework for expenditure that could be followed internally. Freeport East Ltd cost in the region of £1.25m per year, funded originally through Government grant but now through the business rate income as set out in the Local Growth & Investment Strategy and elsewhere in the Leader's report (A.1).

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

"I'm pleased to propose this update on Freeport East, which is driving investment, innovation, and clean growth across our region. The Freeport includes three strategic sites: Felixstowe, Harwich, and Gateway 14 in Stowmarket, covering 275 hectares of tax-relieved development space.

A central part of Freeport East's work is the Local Growth & Investment Strategy, which sets out how retained business rates from these sites will be used over the next 25

years. This includes funding for site development to bring forward businesses and jobs on the site, include the port in Harwich. 70% of the retained business rates from the Harwich site are allocated to support the development of the Green Energy Hub, regeneration and job creation, a major opportunity for our District.

To support this strategy, a Retained Business Rates Agreement has been drafted to provide clarity in how business rates are forecasted, collected, and managed, and aligns with our council's policies. It has been reviewed by our Section 151 Officer, with minor amendments underway to ensure full consistency.

In addition, the Freeport East Business Plan for 2025/26 outlines the organisation's priorities for the year ahead.

This plan, will require approval by founding members, including this Council, it will be published to ensure transparency and accountability."

Having duly considered the Leader's report (A.1) and having recognised that the recommendation to complete the approval of the Freeport East Retained Business Rate Agreement would provide a signed agreement that protected the Council and put into legal effect the relevant parts of the Freeport East Local Growth and Investment Strategy and documented the underlying mechanisms to support its implementation and that the Freeport East Business Plan provided clarity on the plans for 2025/26 and this Council's approval followed the requirements of the Members' Agreement and good governance:-

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Kotz and:-

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) in its role as Billing Authority, notes the progress made to date to complete the Freeport East Retained Business Rates Agreement, and agrees the approach as proposed in Appendix A to the Leader of the Council's report (A.1);
- (b) authorises the Deputy Chief Executive and the Section 151 Officer to approve and sign the final Freeport East Retained Business Rates Agreement in line with the Council's Freeport East Policy for Managing Retained Business Rates and Freeport East Policy for Granting Non-Discretionary Domestic Rates Relief; and
- (c) in its role as a Founding Member, and in accordance with the Members' Agreement, approves the 2025/26 Freeport East Ltd. Annual Business Plan.

23. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGENERATION & TOURISM PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.2 - LEVELLING UP FUND - APPROPRIATION OF SITE FOR PLANNING PURPOSES

Cabinet considered a report of the Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism Portfolio Holder (A.2) which sought its approval to: -

1. appropriate Council-owned land at High Street Car Park, Carnarvon Road, Clacton-on-Sea for the purposes of the Carnarvon Terrace Development; and

2. delegate authority to grant a unilateral undertaking to the Planning Authority, to secure -
 - (a) obligations relating to the Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS); and
 - (b) a commitment to use the appropriated land solely for the delivery of affordable housing as part of the Carnarvon Terrace Development.

Members were aware that the Council's bid to Round Two of the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for Clacton Town Centre, the 'Clacton Civic Quarter', had been successful and had been awarded £19.960m. The programme included two schemes aimed at improving wellbeing and access to jobs & skills, namely: -

- Carnarvon Terrace, delivered by this Council which would provide 28 residential flats, with 40 percent designated as affordable housing; and
- Clacton Hub, delivered by Essex County Council.

Cabinet was reminded that the Carnarvon Terrace Development site had historically been used as a car park and healthcare facility. The proposed development would introduce mixed-use commercial spaces and repurpose the site for housing. Timely appropriation of the site was critical to avoid delays and mitigate legal risks, particularly those related to third-party rights such as rights of light and access. Appropriation at this stage was necessary to accompany the planning consent and ensure legal certainty for the procurement process.

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

"We are making good progress delivering with the Levelling Up Fund projects in Clacton. We have planning permission for the impressive new homes and modern multistorey carpark in Carnarvon Road. We have outstanding designs for a new public space at the centre of the development, and new space for business and community groups too.

This report takes the project forward to the next stage. It seeks Cabinet approval to appropriate Council-owned land at High Street Car Park, Carnarvon Road, Clacton-on-Sea for the Carnarvon Terrace Development. The recommendations include granting a Unilateral Undertaking to the Planning Authority to secure obligations related to Affordable Housing, and the Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS). These actions are necessary to meet funding deadlines, avoid legal risks, and ensure the timely delivery of the development."

Having duly considered the Portfolio Holder's report (A.2) and having recognised that:-

Appropriation was required to ensure timely delivery of the development in accordance with funding deadlines set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and to mitigate the risk of delays arising from potential third-party claims and ensure that the procurement process could proceed without legal challenges; and further that: -

Unilateral Undertaking – the Council's Planning Committee had approved the Carnarvon Terrace development on 4th March 2025, requiring the Council to enter into a Section 106 Legal Agreement for Affordable Housing, RAMS payments, and Biodiversity Net

Gain (BNG). However, the Council could not enforce this agreement against itself. Therefore, a further report would be presented to the Planning Committee to address BNG as a condition and to cover affordable housing and RAMS payments through a Unilateral Undertaking (UU), as opposed to a Section 106 Agreement.

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Smith and: -

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) agrees to the appropriation of the site including the High Street Car Park and the former Carnarvon House site, Carnarvon Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 6QF, for the purposes of the Carnarvon Terrace Development incorporating planning purposes, housing and commercial uses, as indicated in the plan at Appendix A to the Portfolio Holder's report (A.2);
- (b) approves that the Council, in its capacity as landowner and developer, grants an Unilateral Undertaking (UU) to the Planning Authority to discharge both the Affordable Housing and RAMS payment conditions in lieu of a Section 106 agreement for obligations in relation to planning permission 24/01890/FUL ("the Carnarvon Terrace Development");
- (c) authorises the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Place and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Corporate Director (Finance and IT) & Section 151 Officer and Legal Services, to undertake the necessary legal steps to complete the appropriation process including, but not limited to, notification of those who may be affected, publication of the relevant appropriation decision notices, and executing memorandums as required by the relevant legislation;
- (d) authorises the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Place and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Corporate Director (Finance and IT) & Section 151 Officer and Legal Services to approve the final terms of the necessary legal instrument required for the purposes of the unilateral undertaking to be given to the planning authority by the Council in its capacity as the owner and developer of land; and
- (e) notes that further decisions will be required following the outcome of the procurement exercises and on-going use of the land for different purposes to ensure the Council is fulfilling its various legal duties.

24. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.3 - ANNUAL HOUSING COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT INCLUDING SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

Cabinet considered a report of the Housing and Planning Portfolio Holder (A.3) which presented to it the Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for scrutiny and challenge, which included a self-assessment carried out against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code for 2024/25 prior to its publication and submission.

Members were reminded that, in July 2020, the Housing Ombudsman had published a new Complaint Handling Code ("the Code") that provided a framework for high-quality complaint handling and greater consistency across landlord's complaint procedures. Its

aim was to enable landlords to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements. That Code had been subsequently revised in 2022 to make it explicit about what was mandatory and where it was appropriate for landlords to use their discretion to achieve best practice in complaint handling.

Cabinet recalled that, prior to the implementation of those revisions, complaints against the Council, as a landlord, had been dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy. However, the revision of the Code and self-assessment at the time had resulted in a stand-alone policy being developed for handling complaints received regarding the Council in its capacity as a landlord to ensure that it met all of the requirements of the Code.

Following the implementation of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code had become statutory on 1 April 2024. This had been accompanied by a further revision of the Code and the Council's Housing Complaints Policy had been reviewed and amended in April 2024 to take account of those changes.

It was reported that the Complaint Handling Code 2024 required landlords to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge and that this information should be presented to the landlord's governing body. As part of this, landlords were required to look beyond the circumstances of individual complaints and consider whether any service improvements could be made as a result of learning from complaints and those were outlined in Appendix A to the Portfolio Holder's report (A.3).

The annual complaints performance and service improvement report also included a self-assessment against the Code and that was set out in Appendix B to that report (A.3).

Cabinet was aware that the Complaint Handling Code required one member of the governing body to have lead responsibility for housing complaints. The role was responsible for ensuring the governing body received regular information on complaints that provided insight and learning on the landlord's complaint handling performance. To that end, in May 2024, Cabinet had endorsed the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning performing the role of the Member Responsible for Complaints for the purposes of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

Members recalled that the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) was responsible for ensuring that the self-assessment was scrutinised and challenged and for ensuring that complaint handling drove service improvement for residents and learning and business improvement for the organisation. This accorded with the report to Cabinet being in the name of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning. This formed part of their role in embedding a positive complaint handling culture across housing services.

Cabinet was informed that both the self-assessment and the performance report had been presented to the MRC and, since April 2024, the MRC had had an ongoing monitoring role chairing the Council's Housing Board with complaints information being presented and reviewed by the MRC on a quarterly basis. This ensured that data was scrutinised and challenged and provided an assurance that the service was handling complaints effectively and using the insights gained to drive service improvement.

Members were advised that the report submitted to the Housing Ombudsman service in 2024 had been made in time and had been acknowledged by the Ombudsman as having been received. No queries had been received in respect of the information submitted.

Cabinet was reminded that, as the governing body, it was required to provide scrutiny and challenge to the Annual Report and the self-assessment and to provide a response prior to its publication and submission to the Housing Ombudsman by the deadline of 30 September 2025.

Members were aware that the purpose of publishing the governing body's response to the self-assessment was to provide an assurance that the self-assessment was a true reflection of the landlord's complaint handling. The response should set out how the MRC had scrutinised and challenged the self-assessment and how any risks identified as part of the review had been addressed.

Cabinet further recalled that, in 2023, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman services had consulted on a single complaints code across both of their areas of responsibilities. In recognition of the different legal powers the organisations held, the conclusion reached was to produce instead two closely aligned Codes for complaint handling.

In view of this, the Council was looking to harmonise the Corporate and Housing Complaints procedures to deliver the expectations of the closely aligned Ombudsman Codes and it was anticipated that a revised combined complaints policy would be adopted in July 2025.

Members were informed that the Council's housing service had received a greater number of complaints in 2024/25 than in 2023/24. Although the number of complaints had increased, the speed of response to those complaints, as measured against the published response timescales, had improved. The MRC had been a key driver behind that improvement in performance, with complaint handling performance discussed at monthly meetings with senior officers from the housing service.

The Housing and Planning Portfolio Holder made the following statement:-

"Leader, I introduce to Cabinet the Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, which as Cabinet is well aware, is required under the Housing Ombudsman's regime.

The Complaint Handling Code 2024 requires landlords to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge and this information should be presented to the landlord's governing body.

The Complaint Handling Code requires one member of the governing body to have lead responsibility for housing complaints. The role is responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight and learning on the landlords complaint handling performance. You will recall, Leader, that at our Cabinet meeting in May 2024, I was endorsed, by Cabinet, to perform the role of Member Responsible for Complaints for the purposes of the Code.

In that respect I am responsible for ensuring that the Self-Assessment (Appendix A to this report) is scrutinised and challenged and for ensuring that complaint handling drives improvement. Since April 2024 I have also undertaken an ongoing monitoring role, and Chair the internal Housing Improvement Board, and have information regarding complaints, provided to me on a quarterly basis.

As can be seen from the report, in the period from April 2024 to March 2025, there were a total of 90 complaints, and of those Stage 1 complaints were 78, and at Stage 2, 12.

You will see within Appendix B to this report, the Housing Complaints Report, from page 189 onwards, the numbers of complaints by month, service area, and outcomes.

I am also pleased to bring to Cabinet's attention the response times to complaints, with 93.6% of Stage 1 complaints being responded to within the 10 working days set within the Code, and 91.7% of Stage 2 complaints being responded to within the 20 working days set within the Code. At the top of Page 198 of the Agenda, Cabinet will see the comparison against last year's figures, where there has been a significant increase in performance, which is good to see.

On Tuesday of this week, the Complaints report was provided to the Tenants Panel, as part of their scrutiny, and for comment. They agreed that there had been improvement, especially around the figures I have just mentioned. They have also agreed to set up various sub-committees to look deeper into various issues, one of those to include enquiries into complaints made, and I look forward to their findings in due course.

Finally, Leader, I would also like to inform Cabinet that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman have recently consulted on having a single Code across both their areas of responsibility. As a result, and in recognition of the different legal powers each hold, they have agreed to produce two closely aligned Codes.

In view of this, the Council looked to harmonise both the Corporate and Housing Complaints Policies to deliver the expectations of the closely aligned Ombudsman Codes and I am pleased to say that such a Policy was presented to the Audit Committee yesterday, who agreed to recommend to Cabinet that it be adopted. I am hopeful that this will be on the Agenda for our July meeting."

The Leader of the Council read out the Governing Body's formal response as set out hereunder: -

"Cabinet welcomes the Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, including self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code presented by Councillor Baker in his role as Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning and member responsible for Housing related complaints.

We would like to thank Councillor Baker for taking on this role and his commitment to it over the past year. We know that he has an eye for detail and is keen to deliver the best services for our tenants. His drive, scrutiny of data and chairmanship of the Housing Improvement Board has, we are sure, led to some of the improvements presented in the report. The service has also introduced a raft of new policies, with more to come. Complaints are an important part of the delivery of our housing landlord function.

Genuine complaints, constructively made, can highlight areas where our services can be improved and provide opportunities to question our approach.

Cabinet is pleased to see an improvement in complaint response times. If we are to take complaints seriously, we must ensure that we respond within published timescales. It would be good to see a year-on-year improvement in response times. Satisfaction with our approach to complaint handling, as measured through the annual tenant satisfaction survey, has also improved when compared to the 2023/24 survey response. We feel this is a good indication that the service is getting things right but, along with Councillor Baker, we would like to see a further improvement on this satisfaction rate and would like Councillor Baker to explore how this can be improved with representatives of the Tenants Panel and officers.

With involvement from the Tenants Panel we would like to hear more about service improvement and learning from complaints. The setting up of a Tenants Panel sub-group to explore this in more detail is welcomed. In particular, are there particular themes to complaints that we can understand better?

The self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is an important document that Councillor Baker has had input to. Overall Cabinet endorses the self-assessment but would like to see more detail on complaint themes and trends in future reports."

In order to approve the self-assessment carried out and to provide the Governing Body's response before its submission to the Housing Ombudsman: -

It was moved by Councillor Baker, seconded by Councillor M E Stephenson and: -

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and in compliance with Cabinet's scrutiny and oversight requirements, formally receives and notes the Council's Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, which includes the Annual Self-Assessment against the Code, as set out in Appendices A and B to the Portfolio Holder's report (A.3);
- (b) formally approves its response, as submitted by the Leader of the Council at this meeting and recorded above, to the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report, for publication; and
- (c) authorises Officers to publish both the Service Improvement Report and the Cabinet's response thereto on the Council's website within the section relating to complaints and to submit the self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman by no later than 30 September 2025.

25. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.4 - OUTTURN PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING'S TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES FOR 2024/25

Cabinet considered a report of the Housing and Planning Portfolio Holder (A.4) which advised it of the Council's outturn performance against the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2024/25.

Members were cognisant that Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) were metrics that all social housing landlords in England were required to collect and report on to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

Cabinet was aware that the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 had enacted a set of measures intended to improve standards for people living in social housing. It had set out a new regulatory framework for the consumer regulation of social housing to strengthen the accountability of landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect. The introduction of TSMs had formed part of this framework.

Since 1 April 2023, all social housing providers had been required by the RSH to collect data to inform TSMs and those were aimed at helping improve standards for people living in social housing by:

- *providing visibility by allowing tenants to see how well their landlord is doing and enabling tenants to hold their landlords to account;*
- *letting tenants see how well their landlord is performing in comparison with other landlords; and*
- *giving the RSH insight into which landlords might need to improve things for their tenants.*

There were 22 TSMs and those were grouped into the following five themes:

- *Keeping properties in good repair;*
- *Maintaining building safety;*
- *Respectful and helpful engagement;*
- *Complaints handling; and*
- *Neighbourhood management.*

It was reported that ten of the TSMs were measured by landlords through their performance indicators and 12 were measured by an annual tenant perception survey. The RSH also set out its requirements (including mandatory questions and methodology) for data collection and reporting. Landlords with 1,000 or more homes were required to send their data to the RSH by 30 June 2025 and the data for all landlords would be published by RSH in Autumn 2025.

Cabinet was informed that this Council's Outturn Performance Report against the TSMs had indicated a general improvement in performance and tenant satisfaction with the proportion of respondents who reported that they were satisfied with the overall service from their landlord increasing from 80.1% in 2023/24 to 81.3% in 2024/25.

Satisfaction with repairs, both overall satisfaction with repairs and satisfaction with the time taken to complete a repair, had however decreased. The reasons for this decrease would be explored in more detail with the members of the Tenants Panel. Conversely, the proportion of non-emergency and emergency repairs completed within the Council's target timescale had increased.

It was notable that the number of complaints, both at Stage 1 and 2, that had been responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Compliant Handling Code timescales had improved significantly when compared to the 2023/24 figures.

The Housing and Planning Portfolio Holder made the following statement:-

"Leader, I am pleased to introduce this report to Cabinet reporting on the Council's performance of the Regulator for Social Housing's (RSH) Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) for 2024/2025.

As Cabinet is aware, all Social Housing Providers are required by the Regulator to collect data to inform the TSMs which are aimed at improving standards for those living in social housing.

There are 22 TSMs, grouped into five themes, these being Keeping properties in good repair, Maintaining building safety, Respectful and helpful engagement, Complaints handling, and Neighbourhood management .

Twelve of the measures, are measured by an annual tenant perception survey, with the other ten measured by landlords through performance indicators.

The RSH sets out its requirements for data collection and reporting (including mandatory questions and methodology). Landlords with over 1,000 or more homes are required to submit their data to the RSH by 30th June.

As can be seen from the report, this council's performance, against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, indicates a general improvement in performance and tenant satisfaction, although there are areas where there has been a decrease, in relation to repairs and satisfaction in the time taken to complete a repair.

I would draw Cabinet's attention to the data, which is shown in Appendix A to this report (Pages 211-212), as well as the comparison between the previous year's data to this in Appendix B to this report (Pages 213-215). There is, Leader, a slight amendment to the date shown for NM01 (Page 212), the number of ASB cases per 1,000. Within the Agenda it shows 98.5, this should in fact read as 98.8.

As I mentioned in the previous report, there was a Tenants Panel meeting this week (Tuesday) and these TSM's were discussed with them, together with the setting up of sub-committees to look into various issues, including the detail of the data provided around TSMs."

Having duly considered the Portfolio Holder's report and receiving formally the outturn performance report before its submission to the Regulator of Social Housing and publication on the Council's website:-

It was moved by Councillor Baker, seconded by Councillor M E Stephenson and: -

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) notes the Council's Outturn Performance Report against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, for publication on the Council's website and submission to the Regulator of Social Housing by 30 June 2025; and
- (b) requests the Corporate Director (Operations and Delivery) to ensure that the Council's Tenants Panel examines the data presented in this report and to develop an action plan for continuous improvement.

26. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE LEISURE AND PUBLIC REALM PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.5 - DELIVERY OF FOUR NEW PLAYZONE ACTIVITY HUBS FOR THE DISTRICT

Cabinet considered a report of the Leisure and Public Realm Portfolio Holder (A.5) which, following a successful funding bid by the Council to contribute towards the delivery of four new Football Foundation (FF) Playzones in the District, requested Cabinet's permission to accept the grant, agree the Council's financial contribution and subject to the outcome of final business plans, continue the project through to completion.

It was reported that the four Playzone locations listed below were proposed as the development sites, following deliberation by a consortium of partners and subsequently through community consultation: -

1. Clacton Leisure Centre;
2. Bathhouse Meadow, Walton-on-the-Naze;
3. Cliff Park, Harwich; and
4. Crossways, Jaywick Sands.

It was considered that Playzones supported the provision of a balanced activity programme and would include a well thought out mix of formal and informal sessions, which met the needs of local people and impacted on rates of participation in physical activity. The Council would need to work with a variety of local organisations in advance of project completion, to develop the Playzones programme. This process would be led by the Council's Community Sport and Activity Manager, who would be taking forward delivery of the new strategy.

The total breakdown for the cost of delivering the project was as set out below, together with the grant funding offered and match funding required by the Council: -

Playzone Location	FF Funding Offered (£)	Match Funding Required (£)	Total Cost (£)
Clacton on Sea	200,653	66,884	267,537
Jaywick Sands	192,167	64,054	256,221,
Harwich	249,824	83,274	333,098
Walton on the Naze	196,801	65,600	262,401,
Total Project Cost	839,445	279,812	1,119,257

Cabinet was informed that the proposed facilities had been costed through the FF framework process and included design fees, project management, construction, project contingencies and risk mitigation costs. The FF had confirmed that all Playzone

projects around the country to date had completed within the budget allocated. It was noted however that any additional cost would be at this Council's risk, so strong project management would be required throughout the process. The Council would need to formally accept the FF funding offered and enter into a funding agreement. Furthermore, the 25% match funding would need to be agreed and it was proposed to finance that from a mix of section 106 funding with the balance funded from the Corporate Investment Fund. Consideration would also need to be given to the ongoing maintenance costs for the pitches and the risk of any income derived from the facility, not being sufficient to fund that amount. To progress the project through its detailed designs and planning permission, £40,000 of the Council's match funding contribution would need to be formally committed.

To progress the project, the Council was required to enter into a 'Joining Agreement' with the FF, which was a formal document that allowed an organisation to become part of the FF's Framework Alliance Contract for the duration of a project. The framework promoted collaboration among all parties involved, ensuring best value and quality for grant-funded projects. It was also designed to provide services including contract administration, cost management, Health & Safety compliance, and independent testing to international quality standards. This would reduce the risk of increased capital costs and manage quality control of the project. Importantly, this would also provide the Council with sufficient resources to progress the project and utilise specialist and professional expertise. Without engaging the professional teams, it was unlikely that the Council could progress such a project within the scope of its other workstreams and existing 'in year' projects. It was estimated that construction would be commenced in February 2026 and with a 12 week build period, they would be open in the spring of 2026.

Members were made aware that, following approval of this stage of the project, the Council would be engaging with local organisations to discuss future management and operation of Playzones. It was noted that although the Council was leading on this project to provide evidence-based activity opportunities for local communities, other organisations could operate/manage Playzones following their construction through a licence agreement. This would be key in advance of Local Government Reorganisation, to understand how the facilities would be managed into the future. This would need to be established prior to submission of the funding bid. This process would also include detailed programming of the facilities to ensure there was a balance struck between free to use sessions for local people and hired sessions for organisations (although some of those were likely to be free at the point of use). The programme balance would ensure there was enough income derived from the facilities to cover the cost of annual maintenance. A high-level business plan had been appended to the Portfolio Holder's report (A.5), but following Cabinet agreement, Officers would work with local organisations to finalise that process and develop a final business plan for approval prior to progressing to the construction phase.

To progress the delivery of four new Playzone facilities in the District, which was a project set out in the action plan of the Council's approved Sport and Activity Strategy, through to completion: -

It was moved by Councillor Barry, seconded by Councillor Smith and: -

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

-
- (a) formally agrees to accept Football Foundation funding of £839,355 towards the development of four new Playzones at Clacton Leisure Centre, Dovercourt (Cliff Park), Jaywick Sands (Crossways) and Walton-on-the-Naze (Bathhouse Meadow), with a total project cost of £1,119,257; and furthermore, authorises the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health), in consultation with the Corporate Director (Law and Governance) to enter into a funding agreement on behalf of the Council;
 - (b) agrees to contribute £204,643.88 from Section 106 monies and £75,168.12 from the Corporate Investment Fund, making a total of £279,812 as match funding towards this project;
 - (c) authorises the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health), in consultation with Legal Services, to enter into a Joining Agreement with the Football Foundation, to become part of the Football Foundation's Framework Alliance Contract for the duration of the project;
 - (d) authorises the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health), in consultation with Legal Services, to enter into a Pre-Construction Services Agreement with McArdle Sport, Edge Public Solutions and Sportslab UK, to undertake the detailed design proposals and to submit planning applications for the new Playzones, under the pre-procured Football Foundation Framework;
 - (e) agrees for £40,000 of the Council's agreed match funding contribution set out in resolution (b) above to be committed towards the Playzones design phase and costs of submitting the planning applications;
 - (f) authorises the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Public Realm, to submit planning applications where applicable, for the four facilities listed in the executive summary of the Portfolio Holder's report (A.5);
 - (g) agrees that, following consultation with local organisations, decision making for the future management options for the Playzone facilities be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Public Realm, in consultation with the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health), the Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and the Corporate Director (Finance & IT);
 - (h) agrees that the approval of the final business plans and associated actions, including the decision to enter into a JCT agreement with McArdle Sport for the construction phase of the Playzone Project, be delegated to the Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance and the Leisure and Public Realm Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Corporate Director (Finance & IT), the Assistant Director (Sport, Culture and Health) and Legal Services; and
 - (i) agrees the inclusion of four new Playzone facilities within the Capital Programme in 2025/26, with a total budget of £1,119,257.

27. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.6 - TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAREER TRACK) APPRENTICESHIPS

Cabinet considered a report of the Partnerships Portfolio Holder (A.6) which updated the Cabinet on the activities of Career Track, the Council's apprenticeship training provider. Furthermore, this report satisfied the requirements of the Governors' framework, which aimed to implement and provide a quality experience for apprentices and employers and meet the expectations of funders and regulators, whereby the Board would undertake to provide the Cabinet with a yearly update.

Members were aware that Career Track had been offering apprenticeship opportunities since its inception in 1983, both within the Council and to external employers, particularly other public sector bodies. This programme was a key component of the Council's strategy to develop a skilled workforce and create job opportunities for Tendring residents, which was crucial given the socio-demographic challenges of the area.

Tendring District, with a population of around 146,500, faced significant educational and employment challenges. It had the lowest job opportunities per working-age resident in Essex, and 34.3% of residents aged 16 and over had no formal qualifications, compared to the national average of 22.5%. Additionally, only 21.78% of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades 4-9 in 2023, below the national average of 30.01%. Those statistics highlighted the need for targeted interventions to improve educational and employment outcomes.

It was reported that, as part of its commitment to providing work and learning opportunities, Career Track had consistently received strong support from the Council. Over the past decade, 500 individuals had participated in the Career Track apprenticeship programme. It was regarded as a key mechanism for young people across the District to pursue careers within Tendring. Career Track directly impacted the "Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities" theme in the Council's current Corporate Plan, which emphasised supporting residents in reaching their potential by collaborating with businesses and enhancing access to skills, learning, and training.

Cabinet was informed that the Government-set maximum funding band levels for the delivery of apprenticeships, which formed the basis of fees and charges, had not been increased since 2017. Career Track operated on a non-profit basis and received funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver apprenticeships. However, this funding did not cover the full costs incurred by the service. The shortfall was primarily due to increased costs since 2017, with no adjustments made to the allowable fees set by the Government when the current apprenticeship system was established eight years ago.

Members were made aware that to assist with mitigating the revenue shortfall, Career Track provided apprenticeships for other local authorities, creating an additional revenue stream to further support the provision of the service. Career Track had a total of 54 apprentices currently enrolled on the programme. Of those, 29 were employed within Tendring District Council, whilst the remaining apprentices were placed in local authorities across Essex, including Braintree and Colchester, and Suffolk, Kent, and two London Boroughs.

Cabinet was advised that current data indicated a 32% increase in the number of apprentices participating in the Career Track programme since it had been last reported to Cabinet. As a result of that growth, the net direct cost of the service was projected to decrease by 13% in the 2025/26 financial year compared to the previous year. In

addition, the Council's workforce profile revealed that approximately one-fifth of current employees, circa 100 employees, had begun their careers at Tendring District Council as Career Track apprentices. This highlighted the programme's continued importance as a strategic recruitment pathway for the organisation

It was reported that, in line with the Cabinet's decision at its meeting on 19 April 2024, Officers had evaluated several alternative solutions to reducing the overall subsidy required, which addressed the specific request of Cabinet to undertake a review of the service. However, it was strongly considered that Career Track was fundamental in supporting the Authority's Corporate Plan, e.g. upskilling local residents, and enhancing Council services. Therefore, the Cabinet was asked to acknowledge those efforts and the team's success in delivering the forecast subsidy as outlined in the long-term financial plan. This therefore formed the basis of the proposals moving forward. Finally, Career Track was particularly important in the context of Local Government Reorganisation, as effective apprenticeship programs were essential for building a resilient workforce and addressing employment challenges for the future of local government.

Having duly considered the Portfolio Holder's report (A.6): -

It was moved by Councillor Placey, seconded by Councillor Scott and: -

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) notes the annual review undertaken by the Career Track team, including the proposed actions to deliver the forecast subsidy reflected in the long-term financial plans; and
- (b) requests financial updates on Career Track to be included as part of the quarterly financial reports, as deemed necessary.

28. MANAGEMENT TEAM ITEMS

There were no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Management Team on this occasion.

29. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Scott and:-

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Agenda Item 16 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act.

30. EXEMPT MINUTE OF THE LAST MEETING

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Scott and:-

RESOLVED that the exempt minute of the meeting of the Cabinet, held on Friday 23 May 2025, be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

The Meeting was declared closed at 3.23 pm

Chairman