**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET,
HELD ON FRIDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER, 2026 AT 10.30 AM
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 I J Henderson	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism
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 G I Scott	Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Heritage

Group Leaders Present by Standing Invitation: Councillors M Bush (Leader of the Reform UK Group), P B Honeywood (Leader of the Conservative Group) and G D Steady (Deputy Leader of the Independent Group)

Also Present: None

In Attendance: Chief Executive (Ian Davidson), Corporate Director (Economy and Wellbeing) & Deputy Chief Executive (Lee Heley), Corporate Director (Law & Governance) & Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings), Corporate Director (Finance and IT) & Section 151 Officer (Richard Barrett), Corporate Director (Planning and Community) (Gary Guiver), Director (People) (Katie Wilkins), Assistant Director (Housing & Environment) (Tim R Clarke), Assistant Director (Corporate Policy & Support) (Keith Simmons), Assistant Director (Housing and Environment) (Tim R Clarke), Democratic Services Manager (Ian Ford), Corporate Communications Manager (Will Lodge), Leadership Support Officer (Rebecca Catchpole), Apprentice (Law & Governance – Leadership Support & Elections) (Rosie Reynolds) and Apprentice (Law & Governance – Communications) (Molly Choat)

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G R Placey (Portfolio Holder for Partnerships), A Smith (Portfolio Holder for the Environment & ICT) and J B Chapman BEM (Leader of the Independent Group).

53. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was moved by Councillor Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Henderson and:-

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet, held on Friday 23 October 2026, be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members on this occasion.

55. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

56. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY CABINET MEMBERS

Launch of the new Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community website

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning made the following announcement:-

"Leader, I would just like to say a few words about the recent launch of the new Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community website and is now live.

The new website incorporates updated branding and supports the move from the planning policy process to the planning application process, bringing the story of the Garden Community together in one easy-to-use place.

Residents, businesses and community groups can explore the vision, catch up on progress, find key documents and discover how to stay involved as plans move forward.

I would also like to publicly thank officers for their hard work on this aspect of the Garden Community."

57. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CABINET BY THE COUNCIL

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

58. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CABINET BY A COMMITTEE

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

59. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S ITEMS

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

60. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE & GOVERNANCE - A.1 - FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2026/27 - GENERAL UPDATE AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER 2026

Cabinet considered a report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance & Governance (A.1) that provided it with a general update and overview of the Council's financial position against the 2026/27 budget as at the end of September 2026 and looking ahead to 2027/28 and beyond.

SECTION 1 - In-year financial position at the end of September 2026:

It was reported that several adjustments had been made to the 2026/27 budget as part of developing the detailed estimates that had been agreed by Full Council in February 2026. This had been complemented by further budget amendments as part of the Outturn Position for 2025/26 that had been reported to Cabinet in July 2026 and the Quarter 1 position reported to Cabinet in October 2026.

With the above approach in mind, the in-year position at the end of September 2026 was broadly performing to the underlying budgetary position with no new major issues emerging so far to date.

However, it still remained timely to address a limited number of items that had been identified, which were set out in Appendix 1H. Any longer-term impact would be considered as part of developing the forecast as discussed in more detail in Section 2 of the report (A.1). Recommendations had been included that proposed associated delegations as necessary.

Members were informed that the position to the end of September 2026, as set out in more detail within the appendices, showed that overall, the General Fund (GF) Revenue Account was underspent against the profiled budget by £3.918m. However, it was highlighted that this position continued to primarily reflect the timing of expenditure and income across a number of budgets.

It was acknowledged that other expenditure or income trends might still emerge / develop over the remainder of the year, which would be included in future financial performance reports as necessary.

In respect of other areas of the budget such as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), capital programme, collection performance and treasury activity, apart from additional details set out elsewhere in the report (A.1), there were no other major issues that had been identified to date.

SECTION 2 - Updated long-term financial forecast:

Cabinet was made aware that, as set out in the Quarter 1 Report presented to Cabinet on 23 October 2026, with the outcome of the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) remaining unknown at that time, it had been proposed to refresh the forecast over an initial period of four years that reflected the possibility that this Council would remain in existence beyond April 2028.

Since the Cabinet meeting referred to above, the Government had made further announcements relating to their LGR programme. Although the impact on Essex remained unknown at the present time, the Government had confirmed that the decision withdrawn in September 2026 remained withdrawn and that Greater Essex would now form part of a wider review of LGR proposals.

Notwithstanding the above, the Government had reiterated its commitment to LGR, and all proposals submitted for Greater Essex previously remained under consideration and the Government was expected to provide an update on the future LGR in Greater Essex by early 2027.

As discussed within the Quarter 1 report highlighted above, the approach of developing a four year forecast provided a prudent position for the Council to work to whilst the Government completed their LGR review. If the LGR programme continued, albeit with a potential delay to the original timetable, the forecast could readily be refocused back into the in-principle / notional approach previously proposed. Based on the proposed continuation of this approach, a forecast covering the period up to, and including, 2029/30 had been developed which was attached as Appendix 2A**,** with some key headlines set out in Section 2 of the report (A.1).

Following the LGR related motion that had been agreed by Full Council on 13 October 2026, the Leader of the Council's response was set out within a separate table within the report (A.1), along with an associated recommendation.

In terms of HRA budgets and the long-term Business Plan, as previously reported, one significant factor that had been repeatedly acknowledged related to the on-going budgetary impact from the new era of social housing regulation emerging from the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The HRA Business Plan and budget remained under on-going development for presenting to Cabinet later in the year as part of the budget 'cycle' for 2027/28 and would continue to reflect the impact still emerging from that new era of social housing regulation. As in previous years, it would also continue to be 'built' on the basis of balancing optimism and caution across the various lines of the plan. Similarly to the GF, the HRA budget setting / forecasting process remained broadly unaffected by the Government's recent LGR announcement given the long term HRA Business Plan approach, which would continue regardless of the outcome from the Government's current LGR review.

At its meeting held on 13 October 2026 (minute 63 referred), Full Council had resolved to:

1. *Note the Leader's agreement that Cabinet receives information from the Leader, in his capacity as the Corporate Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder, within his next financial budget performance report, supported by the Chief Executive and the Section 151 Officer, that establishes the financial and resource implications total to TDC in responding to the Government's Local Government Reorganisation programme to date.*
2. *Note all financial budget performance reports are available to the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to perform its role in relation to scrutinising the effective use of the Council's resources, on behalf of the Council;*
3. *Note that the above-mentioned report to Cabinet will cover the following points, before the Leader of the Council will determine the content of any written communication to the Secretary of State and our local Members of Parliament to –*

    i) *that local taxpayers should not be expected to pay for the changes made to the LGR programme and timetable by the Government;*
    ii) *the Government reimburse this Councils for all costs incurred as a direct result of the Local Government Reorganisation process depending upon the outcome of its 'rapid review;*
    iii) *the Government to provide clear answers about the future of Local Government Reorganisation before councils are expected to spend any more taxpayers' money and/or resources on the process; and*
    iv) *this Council's view that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England must be involved in reviewing any local government boundary, ward and council size proposals submitted to the Secretary of State, as part of any LGR related process, by councils in due course.*

In response to the above, the table below sets out the Corporate Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder's formal comments:

Resolution Point	Formal Comments of the Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder
	Before considering comments below, it is important to highlight that the Government have not made any decisions yet and are still working their way through the various stages of their review following a pause in the process. The Government made a further announcement on 29 October, where they confirmed that the decision withdrawn in September remains withdrawn and that Greater Essex will now form part of a wider review of LGR proposals. The Government did however reiterate its commitment to LGR, and all proposals submitted for Greater Essex previously remain under consideration and they are expected to provide an update on the future LGR in Greater Essex by early 2027. At this stage, and given the above, we cannot rule anything in or out, albeit the Government's intention appears to be that LGR will continue but pushed back to a later date than the original proposals that would have seen new Unitary Councils established from 1 April 2028. ***This provides an important context to discussions and comments we may have in the interim period as no decisions have yet been made by the Government.***
1. Establish the financial and resource implications total to TDC in responding to the Government's Local Government Reorganisation programme to date.	The Council has captured direct costs within its financial systems, but it has consciously not set out to identify indirect / opportunity costs such as Officer time. The context behind this thinking was seeking to balance pragmatism, proportionality alongside staff capacity, which is already constrained due to the on-going delivery of a number of projects and priorities across the Council. Ahead of the more specific actions and activities that would follow the introduction of the associated LGR legislation creating

	new Unitary Councils, applying the above approach has avoided an unnecessary burden on Officers across the Council. Such costs would become more relevant as part of the transitional actions and activities that would be undertaken as part of the successful establishment of a new Unitary Council but are less relevant to date during the interim period. It is also important to highlight that a significant element of Officer time spent to date on LGR activities is still likely to be advantageous irrespective of the outcome from the Government's current LGR review. For example, partnership working across a range of activities over the last 12 to 18 months has created potential opportunities that can be explored further with neighbouring Councils as we all face similar challenges in the years ahead and we can look towards practical activities that aim to support service sustainability, resilience and value for money. Therefore, even if indirect / opportunity costs had been captured, it would have been misleading to have assumed that they have all been abortive or avoidable costs and have no value within such a context. Therefore, given the above and the administrative burden involved, I believe that a proportionate approach focused on the additional direct financial impact of reorganisation whilst avoiding potentially disproportionate time-recording arrangements has been taken, which has allowed Officers to spend more time on delivering for our residents and communities rather than unnecessary administration. Notwithstanding the above, the following sets out the direct costs incurred / committed to date: • £27k – primarily contributions to other Local Authorities representing this Council's share of costs associated with the Greater Essex LGR Programme. • £120k - Additional officer capacity,

	with the work undertaken across a range of associated activities supporting the LGR programme but not necessarily exclusively.
3(i) That local taxpayers should not be expected to pay for the changes made to the LGR programme and timetable by the Government.	I cannot disagree with the intention behind the general comment that local taxpayers should not be expected to pay for the changes made to the LGR programme by the Government.
3(ii) the Government reimburse this Councils for all costs incurred as a direct result of the Local Government Reorganisation process depending upon the outcome of its 'rapid review';	As mentioned directly at Full Council on 13 October 2026, it was highlighted that the Government have already acknowledged their acceptance of the same point via their following recent statement within a Q&A paper: ***Q. Will areas with withdrawn decisions still receive the transition funding? Will areas be compensated for costs incurred to date?*** ***A*** *We recognise and appreciate the significant work that councils and partners have undertaken to date. As part of the pause, Government will consider council costs and how to support areas through the next stage of the process.* Although the Government have provided the above response, I cannot at this stage provide any additional comment on whether costs incurred to date will be met in full or in part, which will also depend on any revised LGR timetable that may emerge. Once I know the answer to such questions, I will consider my response accordingly, but I can provide the assurance that it will certainly be based on the Council's expectation that costs should be reimbursed in full, albeit dependent on the outcome of the review, which could include a revised timetable being set by the Government rather than an indeterminate delay. In consultation with the Council's S151 Officer, if there are opportunities to seek the reimbursement of indirect costs, then I

	would expect that a reasonable estimate could be made as part of any associated process and therefore irrespective of whether the costs have been captured as discussed in point 1 above.
3(iii) the Government to provide clear answers about the future of Local Government Reorganisation before councils are expected to spend any more taxpayers' money and/or resources on the process;	This provides a reasonable starting point if Councils were asked to restart any LGR activities and processes following the outcome of the Government's review. With this in mind, I sense the feeling across those Councils affected by the current review will be looking to the Government to provide much more certainty and commitment behind the programme. At its highest threshold, this commitment could involve waiting for the enactment of associated legislation ahead of any further activities being undertaken by Councils. However, in recognition that this could potentially have pragmatic and practical implications for the process, a lower commitment threshold might be required, but it is hoped that this would be achieved via a partnership approach with the Government.
3(iv) this Council's view that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England must be involved in reviewing any local government boundary, ward and council size proposals submitted to the Secretary of State, as part of any LGR related process, by councils in due course.	It is understood that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) does review the proposals and was a consultee to the LGR proposals submitted to government. Proposals for North (East) Essex were shared with the LGBCE, and we are not aware that any objections were raised.

The Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder (Councillor M E Stephenson) read out the following statement:-

"As I have mentioned before, these reports are ultimately about ensuring that the Council remains in a strong enough financial position to continue delivering the services our residents rely upon, investing in our District and responding to the financial pressures that inevitably emerge during the year.

At the halfway point of 2026/27, the overall financial position remains broadly in line with our underlying budget and, importantly, no new major financial issues have emerged.

Income from areas including parking, beach huts, planning and leisure is performing favourably, while pressures such as utility costs, fuel and homelessness are currently being managed within existing resources.

Our underlying and sound financial management matters because it gives us the capacity to continue investing in the things that residents value and rely on.

Our capital programme is continuing to support investment across the District, including our regeneration projects and the four PlayZone schemes, while within the Housing Revenue Account we continue to invest in repairs and improvements to tenants' homes.

Treasury performance remains strong, which enables us to 'bank' the additional income that in turn can support investment back into services and projects.

Looking further ahead to 2027/28 and beyond, the report sets out a revised forecast.

We know there will continue to be pressures on Council finances, and there remains uncertainty around Local Government Reorganisation.

The important point is that we are planning ahead rather than waiting for those challenges to arrive.

The Forecast Risk Fund is currently sufficient to support the forecast through to the end of 2029/30, giving us time to continue identifying efficiencies, securing value for money and protecting the sustainability of local services and helping us effectively meet any obligations to a potentially new Unitary Council which we could see established from 1 April 2028.

Keeping with the topic of LGR, the report also sets out a response to the motion agreed by Full Council concerning its cost to date.

We have so far spent money on essential additional officer capacity, although that capacity has supported a range of activities and is not necessarily exclusively attributable to LGR.

We have deliberately taken a proportionate approach rather than asking officers to spend significant time recording every hour associated with the programme.

However, subject to the outcome from the Government's LGR review, we will continue to pursue reimbursement of costs if and where appropriate.

In summary, I think this report provides the message that our finances remain stable, we are certainly not complacent and we will continue to manage taxpayers' money carefully, invest in our residents and communities, and maintain the financial resilience needed to protect services through what remains an uncertain period ahead."

The Chief Executive (Ian Davidson) addressed Cabinet on the Government's latest indicative timetable for LGR (i.e. elections to Shadow Unitary Authorities in May 2028 with the "vesting day" set for 1 April 2029), this Council's funding arrangements for LGR work and the Government's willingness to refund 50% of Councils' LGR costs.

The Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings) then responded to a question by the Leader of the Reform UK Group (Councillor Bush) by confirming that Tendring District Council and parish council elections would proceed in May 2027 with Councillors elected for a four year term unless subsequently amended by a Structural Changes Order (SCO) (i.e. the statutory creation of a Unitary Authority). Once the Government's "minded to" decision on the configuration of the new Unitary Authorities in Greater Essex was announced in due course there would follow a three week consultation period. The Government would then confirm its final decision by way of a draft SCO.

To set out the latest financial position for the Council and to respond to emerging issues in 2026/27 and to develop the budget and forecast from 2027/28:-

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

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

(a) notes the Council's in-year financial position as at the end of September 2026;

(b) approves the proposed budget adjustments covering the periods 2026/27 and 2027/28, as set out in Appendix 1H and requests Officers to review the potential on-going impact from 2027/28 and beyond where necessary as part of developing the forecast and detailed estimates for further consideration by Cabinet later in the year;

(c) notes the updated financial forecast to 2029/30 as set out in this report and its appendices and requests Officers, in consultation with Portfolio Holders, to further its development alongside the Council's priorities;

(d) considers and notes the Leader of the Council's response to the motion associated with the LGR process that was agreed by Full Council on 13 October 2026, as set out in Section 1(a) within the main body of this report (A.1); and

(e) invites the views of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the information set out in this report, including the Leader's response to the Full Council motion of 13 October 2026 regarding LGR, along with the Council's wider financial position as part of its work programme for the year.

61. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE CORPORATE FINANCE & GOVERNANCE PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.2 - THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME, DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTIONS / DISCOUNTS / PREMIUMS FOR 2027/28 AND ANNUAL MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY STATEMENT 2027/28

Cabinet considered a report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance & Governance (A.2) that enabled Cabinet to consider and agree for recommending to Full Council where relevant, the following:

- Proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2027/28
- Exceptional Hardship Policy
- Discretionary Council Tax Exemptions, Discounts and Premiums for 2027/28
- Annual MRP Policy Statement for 2027/28

- Housing Benefit War Pension Disregard Policy (Modified Scheme)

Cabinet noted that this report (A.2) outlined proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme along with proposed council tax exemptions, discounts and premiums for 2027/28.

In terms of the LCTS scheme, although it was proposed to make changes to the scheme to provide additional financial support to those who might need it, the underlying principle of providing financial stability wherever possible to Tendring residents remained the same. Although a draft LCTS scheme would be considered by Cabinet at its December 2026 meeting that took account of the proposed changes, the underlying elements of the scheme would be the same as this year, which provided for a maximum discount of 80% for working age claimants.

In terms of the changes mentioned above, it was proposed to allow the backdating of claims for financial support made under the LCTS scheme by working age claimants. Previously, the scheme had only provided this flexibility to pension age claimants with a backdating period of three months provided. There had been a limited number of recent cases where such flexibility to provide similar support to working age households would have been advantageous where there had been 'good cause' to do so, such as clear evidence of eligibility prior to the date that the application forms had been submitted.

Due to this proposed change to the LCTS scheme, a short period of consultation was required. In line with legislation / regulations, it was a requirement to consult with the Major Preceptors first before drafting a scheme to include the proposed change. Therefore, a recommendation had been included within this report (A.2) that would enable this to be undertaken along with a request to present a draft LCTS scheme to Cabinet at its December 2026 meeting.

It was reported that the associated exceptional hardship policy had also been subject to annual review, and it was proposed to only make one change compared to last year that provided for the opportunity to consider cases relating to council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties.

In respect of existing discretionary council tax discounts, exemptions and premiums (including discounts for young people leaving care), it was not proposed to make any changes for 2027/28, with the same levels applying as in 2026/27.

In respect of existing council tax premiums on long term empty properties, it was not proposed to make any changes for 2027/28, with the same levels applying as in 2026/27.

In respect of the existing council tax premium of 100% on properties used as a second home, it was not proposed to make any changes for 2027/28, with the same levels applying as in 2026/27.
As part of the extension to council tax premiums on long term empty properties and the introduction of council tax premiums on second homes last year, the Government had stated that their intention was not to penalise property owners where they were making genuine efforts to make use of their properties. The Government had therefore introduced mandatory exceptions where the council tax premium on long term empty properties and/or second homes was not chargeable and those remained in place for

2027/28, with no locally determined extensions to those mandatory exceptions proposed.

Members were cognisant that the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement had also been reviewed for 2027/28, and that no changes were proposed to the existing approach adopted from 2026/27.

Given the proposed recommendation to change the LCTS scheme in 2027/28, it would be presented to the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration as part of the required consultation process before recommendations were made to Full Council in January 2027.

A timely opportunity had also been taken to 'refresh' a local modified housing benefit scheme relating to the disregard of income relating to war widows / widowers. The scheme was set out within Appendix G which reflected the continuation of the historic approach with no impact on existing or future applicants.

The Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder (Councillor M E Stephenson) read out the following statement:-

"The proposals set out within this report form part of the Council's wider approach of providing a fair and sustainable approach to council tax, while continuing to provide financial support to residents who need it.

In terms of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme, it is proposed that the main structure of the scheme should continue for 2027/28, including the maximum support of 80 per cent for working-age claimants. This provides residents with stability and avoids any potential reduction in the level of support available at a time when many households continue to face cost-of-living pressures.

However, a change is proposed that gives the flexibility to provide further support to eligible households who may need that little extra help. The report proposes extending a current flexibility provided to pension aged people to working-age claimants as well.

This flexibility relates to allowing claims to be backdated by up to three months where there is good cause and where eligibility can be demonstrated. This would help residents who were entitled to support but, for good reason may have delayed the submission of their applications to us.

Because this represents a change to the scheme, the Council must undertake the required consultation, starting with the major precepting authorities.

A draft scheme will then return to Cabinet in December, followed by wider consultation, including consideration by the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, before the final proposals are presented to Full Council in January.

The associated Exceptional Hardship Policy has also been reviewed. A limited amendment is proposed so that applications relating to council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties may be considered where appropriate. Any such application would be assessed on individual circumstances and against a suitable qualifying threshold.

For 2027/28, no changes are proposed to the existing locally determined council tax discounts, the support provided to young people leaving care, or the premiums charged on long-term empty properties and second homes.

The statutory exceptions introduced by the Government will continue to apply, while the Council's hardship arrangements provide a route through which particularly difficult circumstances faced by individuals can be considered.

On second homes, I think it is also worth highlighting the emerging evidence since the Council introduced the 100 per cent premium from 1 April, with the number of properties attracting a second-home premium falling over the subsequent period.

While there will inevitably be a number of factors behind individual changes, the overall direction reflects the intention behind its introduction which is to bring properties back into use as someone's sole or main residence.

That is particularly important in Tendring, where making the best use of the existing housing stock supports our wider housing and economic objectives. The intention was never simply to raise additional income, but to encourage the effective use of properties within the district.

The report also sets out a refreshed Housing Benefit War Pension Disregard Policy. This continues the existing approach of disregarding relevant income for war widows and widowers, with no adverse effect on current or future applicants.

Finally, the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement has been reviewed. No change is proposed to the existing approach, which continues to provide prudently for the repayment of borrowing used to finance capital investment.

Taken together, the recommendations seek to provide stability, maintain appropriate support for residents along with introducing an additional flexibility for working-age claimants."

To enable the implementation of an LCTS Scheme in 2027/28 along with the required council tax discounts, exemptions and premiums, an MRP Policy Statement and a Housing Benefit War Pension Disregard Policy (Modified Scheme):-

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

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

a) agrees that the underlying LCTS scheme for 2027/28 remains the same as the current year, as set out as Appendix A, along with approving the following proposed change to the scheme for consultation with the Major Preceptors:

   "that the LCTS scheme be amended to enable the backdating of claims made by working age claimants by up to a maximum of 3 months."

b) requests Officers, following consultation with the Major Preceptors, to present a draft LCTS Scheme for 2027/28 to the next formal meeting of Cabinet on 11 December 2026;

c) agrees the Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy, as set out in Appendix B;

d) agrees the Housing Benefit War Pension Disregard Policy (Modified Scheme), as set out in Appendix G, in the determination of Housing Benefit until such time as the scheme is required to be amended or revoked.

e) agrees the discretionary Council Tax exemptions, discounts and premiums for 2027/28, as set out in the appendices and recommends to full Council:

i) that the locally determined council tax discounts, as set out in Appendix C be approved;

ii) that the council tax discount policy for young people leaving care, as set out in Appendix D be approved;

iii) that the discretionary council tax premiums, as set out in Appendix E be approved;

iv) that the Corporate Director (Finance and IT) be authorised, in consultation with the Corporate Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder, to undertake the necessary steps to implement the council tax exemptions, discounts and premiums from 1 April 2027; and

f) further recommends to Council that the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement for 2027/28, as set out in Appendix F, be approved.

62. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE HOUSING & PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.3 - ANNUAL HOUSING IMPROVEMENT, PERFORMANCE & ASSURANCE REPORT 2025/26

Cabinet considered a report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning (A.3) that presented the first Annual Housing Improvement, Performance & Assurance Report 2025/26 for its consideration and endorsement; and which provided consolidated assurance on performance, improvement, risk and compliance with the Consumer Standards; and established a developing annual reporting approach supported by an accessible public-facing snapshot.

Cabinet was reminded that Tenant Satisfaction Measures provided the golden thread throughout the report, connecting tenants' experience with operational performance, complaints, service improvement, governance and the evidence required by the Regulator of Social Housing. The report was therefore intended to serve three connected audiences: tenants, who required clear and accessible information with which to scrutinise their landlord; Cabinet, which required consolidated evidence to support oversight, challenge and decision-making; and the Regulator of Social Housing, which required robust evidence of compliance with the Consumer Standards.

It was considered that significant progress had been made during the year to strengthen governance, assurance and regulatory compliance through completion of the Consumer Standards self-assessment, implementation of the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan, enhanced performance monitoring arrangements and increased opportunities for tenant scrutiny and influence.

The report highlighted positive progress in areas including tenant engagement, governance, assurance, tenancy sustainment, workforce development and understanding diverse tenant needs.

It also identified areas requiring continued improvement, including repairs satisfaction, complaint handling, data quality, implementation of new systems and the continued embedding of the revised Housing Service structure.

Members were informed that the report provided assurance to the Regulator, Cabinet and tenants that the Housing Service had strengthened the foundations required to demonstrate compliance with the Consumer Standards. It was deliberately balanced, presenting both positive progress and areas of weakness or risk, whilst recognising that this first report was a work in progress and would evolve as data quality, benchmarking and reporting arrangements matured.

The priorities identified for 2026/27 focused on strengthening data quality and assurance arrangements, improving customer satisfaction, implementing key transformation programmes, embedding workforce changes and continuing delivery of the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan. The additional capacity arising from the recently approved Housing Service restructure would support stronger performance management, service improvement and delivery of those priorities as posts were implemented.

The Housing & Planning Portfolio Holder (Councillor Baker) read out the following statement:-

“Leader, I am pleased to present the first Annual Housing Improvement, Performance & Assurance Report for 2025/26. Cabinet is being asked to consider, note the contents, acknowledge the assurance position, and support the continued delivery of the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan.

It brings together evidence of how the Housing Service is performing, what has improved, the risks it faces and how it meets the Consumer Standards, set out by the Regulator of Social Housing. It also establishes an annual reporting approach that will develop over time.

As Cabinet is well aware, several housing reports have been presented to it during the year. This report brings their evidence and data together in one place. It gives an overall picture of performance, improvements, risks and evidence of compliance with regulatory requirements.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures are central to the report. They link tenants’ experiences with the service’s performance, complaints, improvements and how the service is managed and overseen. They also help provide the robust evidence required by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The report is intended for three audiences. Tenants need clear, accessible information so they can question and hold their landlord to account. Cabinet needs evidence to oversee the service, challenge its performance and make decisions. The Regulator of Social Housing needs reliable evidence that the service meets the Consumer Standards.

Significant progress has been made this year in how the service is managed and overseen, how it checks its performance and how it meets regulatory requirements. The service has completed its self-assessment against the Consumer Standards, implemented the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan, improved performance monitoring and given tenants more opportunities to scrutinise and influence the service, through the Tenants Panel and the sub-groups.

The report shows progress in involving tenants, managing and overseeing the service, checking performance, helping tenants keep their homes, developing staff and understanding tenants' different needs.

Further improvement is required in satisfaction with repairs, complaint handling, data quality and the introduction of new systems. Work is also continuing in order to make the revised Housing Service structure fully effective.

This report provides the Regulator, Cabinet and tenants with assurance that the Housing Service is better placed to demonstrate compliance with the Consumer Standards. It presents a balanced picture of progress, identifies areas of weakness or risk.

As I have said, this is the first annual report and future reports will develop as data quality improves, comparisons with other landlords become more established and reporting arrangements improve.

The continuing priorities for 2026/27 are:

- *to improve data quality;*
- *improve the checks used to confirm performance and compliance;*
- *increase customer satisfaction;*
- *introduce key programmes to change and improve the service; and*
- *make the workforce changes work effectively and continue delivering the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan.*

The additional capacity arising from the recently approved Housing Service restructure will support stronger performance management, service improvement and delivery of these priorities as posts are implemented."

The Leader of the Reform UK Group (Councillor Bush) drew attention to a few textual errors within the Assurance Report, which were acknowledged by the Housing & Planning Portfolio Holder.

To ensure that Cabinet received evidence-based assurance regarding housing service performance, improvement activity and regulatory readiness, whilst supporting continued oversight of the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan and compliance with the Consumer Standards and that the public-facing snapshot provided a proportionate account for tenants and the wider public, presenting both good performance and areas of concern without obscuring the underlying evidence:-

It was moved by Councillor Baker, seconded by Councillor Henderson and:-

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

(a) notes the contents of the Annual Housing Improvement, Performance & Assurance Report 2025/26 as a draft, being the first report of this type for Tendring District Council, attached as Appendix A and recognises that the reporting framework will continue to evolve as data quality, benchmarking and assurance arrangements mature;

(b) acknowledges the overall assurance position set out within the report (A.3);

(c) supports the continued delivery of the Housing Improvement and Delivery Plan and associated improvement priorities identified for 2026/27; and

(d) authorises the Corporate Director (Operations & Delivery), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning, to produce and publish in the public domain the final version of the Annual Housing Improvement, Performance & Assurance Report 2025/26.

63. CABINET MEMBERS' ITEMS - REPORT OF THE HOUSING & PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER - A.4 - ADOPTION OF THE CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISALS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR ST OSYTH AND MANNINGTREE & MISTLEY

Cabinet considered a report of the Housing & Planning Portfolio Holder (A.4) which:-

- presented the final St Osyth and Manningtree & Mistley Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plans, following consultation and amendment;
- sought Cabinet's approval for the adoption of those documents as material planning considerations for the purposes of informing planning decisions and the future management of the conservation areas; and
- completed the Council's programme of reviewing Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans for all twenty conservation areas in the District, in accordance with the objectives of the Tendring Heritage Strategy.

Cabinet recalled that the Council's adopted Tendring Heritage Strategy (2020) had identified the preparation and adoption of updated Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans for all 20 conservation areas within the District as a key priority, including the five conservation areas identified on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

Members were advised that this report (A.4) presented the final two appraisals and management plans within that programme, covering St Osyth and Manningtree & Mistley. Both documents had been prepared and refined through extensive engagement with local communities and stakeholders, including a series of public consultations undertaken between 2022 and 2026. Consultation responses had informed revisions to the appraisal documents and, where appropriate, proposed changes to the conservation area boundaries.

It was reported that the updated appraisals provided an evidence-based assessment of the significance, character and appearance of the conservation areas and identified opportunities to preserve and enhance their special interest. Once adopted, they would become material planning considerations, helping to inform planning decisions and guide future management of those important heritage assets.

Cabinet acknowledged that adoption of those documents marked the completion of a key objective of the Heritage Strategy, with all 20 of Tendring's conservation areas benefitting from updated character appraisals and management guidance.

The Housing & Planning Portfolio Holder (Councillor Baker) read out the following statement:-

"Leader, I am pleased to present this report which introduces the final two Conservation Area Character Appraisals for St Osyth and Manningtree & Mistley and Management Plans, following consultation and amendment, for approval and adoption by Cabinet and which will mean that they become material planning considerations for the purposes of informing planning decisions and the future management of the conservation areas, and also identify opportunities to preserve and enhance their special interest.

The approval and adoption of these completes the Council's programme of reviewing Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans for all twenty conservation areas in the District, in accordance with the key objectives of the Tendring Heritage Strategy.

Both documents have been prepared and refined through extensive engagement with local communities and stakeholders, including a series of public consultations undertaken between 2022 and 2026.

Consultation responses have informed revisions to the appraisal documents and, where appropriate, proposed changes to the conservation area boundaries.

As I have said these are the last two of twenty such appraisals and management plans that have been approved and adopted since July 2024, and I would like to express my thanks on behalf of Cabinet to the extremely hard work that officers, together with our partners, have put in to get us to this stage."

To progress to a successful conclusion projects specifically identified in the Council's Heritage Strategy:-

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

RESOLVED that –

(a) the outcome of the public consultation exercises summarised in this report (A.4) be noted; and

(b) the St Osyth Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan and the Manningtree & Mistley Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (including revised conservation area boundaries where applicable) be formally adopted.

64. MANAGEMENT TEAM ITEMS

There were no formal items submitted to the Cabinet by the Management Team on this occasion.

The meeting was declared closed at 11.17 am

Chairman