**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL,
HELD ON TUESDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY, 2026 AT 7.33 PM
IN THE PRINCES THEATRE, AT THE TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-ON-SEA, CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors Davidson (Chairman), Oxley (Vice-Chairman), Alexander, Amos, Baker, Barrett, Barry, Bensilum, Bray (except item 109), Bush, Calver, Casey, Chapman BEM, Codling, A Cossens, M Cossens, Doyle, Fairley, Fowler, Goldman, Griffiths, Guglielmi, I Henderson, J Henderson, P Honeywood, S Honeywood, Keteca, Land, Morrison, Newton, Platt, Scott, Skeels Jnr., Smith, G Stephenson, M Stephenson, Sudra, Talbot, Thompson and Wiggins
In Attendance:	Ian Davidson (Chief Executive), Lisa Hastings (Corporate Director (Law & Governance) & Monitoring Officer), Richard Barrett (Corporate Director (Finance and IT) & Section 151 Officer), Ian Ford (Democratic Services Manager), William Lodge (Corporate Communications Manager), Maddie Adger (Leadership Support Manager), Kai Aberdeen (Theatre General Manager (Technical)), Katie Koppenaal (Democratic Services Officer) and Simon Kedge (Casual Technician (Princes Theatre))

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Davis, Ferguson, Harris, Kotz, Placey, Steady and White.

102. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor I J Henderson and:-

RESOLVED that the minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Council held on 27 January 2026 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

103. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bray declared an Interest in relation to Agenda Item 9 (Report of the Cabinet – A.2 – Executive's Proposals: Housing Revenue Account Budget 2026/2027) insofar as he was a housing tenant of Tendring District Council. He informed Council that he would not take part in the Council's consideration of this item nor the voting thereon.

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that she and the Section 151 Officer had circulated, by email on 9 February 2026, their annual joint guidance and advice on a number of matters relating to interests and voting on the annual budget and setting of Council Tax and, especially, the requirements of section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The Monitoring Officer thereupon read out the following statement:-

"Tendring District Council adopted the LGA Model Members' Code of Conduct which does not include the provisions confirming Members do not have a declarable interest which relates to the function of setting the Council Tax under the ***Local Government***

***Act 1992**. Therefore, to enable you to debate and vote on the budget item to set the Council Tax, the email of 9 February 2026 provides all District Councillors with a dispensation under Section 33(2)(a) to (e) of the Localism Act 2011. Consequently, you will not be required to declare an interest based on the fact you live in the District and therefore have to pay Council Tax.*

*However, Members are importantly reminded of **section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992**, which provides that any Member, who is in arrears by at least 2 months with their Council Tax payments cannot vote on matters concerning either the level of or administration of Council Tax. It is important to note that this also covers Council Tax liabilities outside of the District and property which may not be your main residence. If present at the meeting, a Member to whom this provision applies must disclose the fact and may speak on the item but cannot vote. Non-compliance with this section is a criminal offence. Therefore, should this provision apply to any Member, this should be declared at the Declarations of Interest agenda item.*

*In 2014, the Government passed **The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014** making it mandatory for councils to amend their Standing Orders so as to include provisions requiring recorded votes at budget meetings. I can confirm that the Constitution reflects this requirement and the Council's Procedure Rules state at 19.5:*

"A recorded vote is mandatory on any decision relating to the budget or Council Tax. This includes not only on the substantive budget motions agreeing the budget and setting Council taxes, but also on any amendments proposed at the meeting."

I can inform Members that no budget amendments were submitted to the Council's Section 151 Officer by the deadline set out in Council Procedure Rule 2.

For other types of Interests, which need to be considered, Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs), Other Registerable Interests (ORIs) or Non-Registerable Interests are defined in the Code of Conduct and for DPIs & ORIs, these have been (or should have been) registered in advance, and with the exception of the Council Tax exemption for residing in the District, you should still consider if any other interests do apply. A blanket exemption/dispensation has not been applied for all."

Later on in the meeting, as recorded under Minute 108 below, and given that Councillor P B Honeywood's speech mentioned the lease of Christopher Jones' House in Harwich, Councillors Calver and Fowler declared an Interest insofar as they were both Trustees of the Harwich Society who were the tenants of Christopher Jones' House.

104. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL

There were no announcements made by the Chairman of the Council on this occasion other than to remind Members that the Pride of Tendring Awards evening would be held the following week.

105. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive informed Council that the Secretary of State had written to the affected councils on 16 February 2026 to inform them that the Government was

withdrawing the secondary legislation that would have postponed 2026 local elections in 30 areas in England. Therefore, all local elections in May 2026 would now go ahead.

The Secretary of State's letter had cited legal advice as the reason for reversing the previous decision to postpone local elections.

The Chief Executive contended that any subsequent changes to the LGR process in Greater Essex would not affect TDC's current budget proposals as set forth for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

The Secretary of State had advised that Councils should not assume that their decision had any implications for timescales for Local Government Reorganisation. MHCLG had reiterated that the timetable for LGR remained unchanged unless the Government announced otherwise.

The Chief Executive would provide a further LGR update at next week's All Members' Briefing.

106. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

107. STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

There were no statements made by members of the Cabinet on this occasion.

108. REPORT OF THE CABINET - A.1 - EXECUTIVE'S PROPOSALS - GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2026/2027

Further to Minute 103 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 30 January 2026, the Council considered the Executive's General Fund budget and Council Tax proposals for 2026/27.

It was reported that, at its meeting held on 30 January 2026, Cabinet had considered an updated position, that had remained based on the previously approved approach, which had reflected several changes due to additional information becoming available or where associated work had been finalised for inclusion within the budget. The same report had also acknowledged that there were several outstanding items at that time, including the outcome from the Government's business rate reforms / 'reset'.

Council was informed that the outstanding items referred to above had now been completed with the latest forecast for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cabinet (A.1). The forecast 'gap' for 2026/27 of £0.995m, that had been reported to Cabinet in January, had been revised down to £0.370m. This change was largely due to finalising figures associated with the changes to business rates along with adjustments to the use of the Corporate Investment Fund – Revenue as part of the ongoing approach of balancing the use of this fund with the Forecast Risk Fund.

Members were made aware that Appendices B and C set out the Net Savings and Cost Pressures respectively. Those remained unchanged from the same appendices considered by Cabinet on 30 January 2026.

As recommended by Cabinet on 30 January 2026, the Executive's budget proposals set out a Band D Council Tax of £205.48 in 2026/27, an increase of 2.99% (£5.96), with a Council Tax requirement of £11.244m.

Taking into account the changes to the budget required since Cabinet met on 30 January 2026, the total net General Fund revenue budget for 2026/27 was £25.852m, along with a General Fund capital programme totalling £1.570m.

Members were reminded that the budget recommended by Cabinet for consideration by Full Council included only the District and Parish elements of the Council Tax rather than those from the major precepting authorities. The formal approval of the 'full' Council Tax levy for the year, including the precepts from Essex County Council, Police and Fire, was delegated to the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee which was due to meet on 2 March 2026.

Council was cognisant that, at the time of publishing the agenda for this meeting, the Final Local Government Finance Settlement had been still awaited. A recommendation had therefore been included within report (A.1) to enable the budget to be updated accordingly once confirmation was received.

Council was advised that, as introduced as part of the report to Cabinet on 19 December 2025 and further developed within the report to Cabinet on 30 January 2026, a number of obligations had been placed on the Council and its Statutory Officers as part of the Government's on-going Local Government Reorganisation reforms for Greater Essex. Although subject to further review over the year, the initial in-principal approach proposed was set out within report A.1, which was intended to form the basis of the Council's reasonable and balanced financial response to meet its potential obligations to an incoming Unitary Council.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor M E Stephenson) made the following budget statement:-

"Tonight marks an important moment for this Council. We are two years away from the creation of a new unitary authority, and the decisions we make now will shape the services and support that residents rely on long after this Council has ended. Before I set out our plans and the proposed budget for 2026/27, I want to talk about what we have achieved together and why it matters so much at this point in our journey.

Too often, Tendring is spoken about only in terms of challenges. We all know the headlines about deprivation, health pressures, and the needs of our coastal and rural communities, but those headlines never tell the full story. They miss the hard work of our officers, the partnerships, the innovation, and the clear improvements that have taken place over recent years and they miss the impact this Council has made on people's lives.

So tonight, I want to start with what we have delivered for residents, because it shows who we are, what we stand for, and why our approach to financial management and planning is so important.

I'll start with health. While it is not a recognised function of a district council, last year we helped deliver one of the most significant health projects anywhere in the country: a new diagnostic hospital, created in partnership with our local NHS. This facility now delivers

around 140,000 diagnostic appointments every year, enabling faster access to tests, shorter waiting times, and reduced pressure on our acute hospitals. And we did not stop there. This year, we have gone further by committing £2 million to demolish and rebuild Clacton's Urgent Treatment Centre, with multiple outpatient clinics based above. It is expected to be delivered this April. That is real, meaningful impact.

We continue to invest in our mental health hubs in primary schools across the District recognising how it gives young people the tools they need to cope with modern day pressures. These hubs have been highlighted nationally as an example of innovation and good practice, and they continue to improve the lives of children and families across Tendring.

Our Family Solutions Workers continue to make early interventions that help prevent families from reaching crisis. These roles reduce future reliance on statutory services, but most importantly, they support people at the right time and before things reach breaking point.

We have eliminated the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for families who become homeless. Instead, families get safer and more stable options, helping them rebuild their lives with dignity and support.

Our award-winning Sunspot development in Jaywick continues to deliver. Running at 110%, all thirty-one new business units are fully occupied, supporting local entrepreneurs with some now making the brave move to bigger premises. For a community too often spoken about negatively, it is a sign of confidence, talent, and ambition and how we are helping people build opportunities close to home.

Our focus on health, employment and deprivation has contributed to a 4.7% improvement in Tendring's Health Index—one of the most meaningful long-term indicators of community wellbeing.

One of the things I am proud of is our Sport and Activity Strategy. Through that the strategy the Council has secured more than £3.2m of external investment to deliver five new sport and activity facilities across the District, including four new Playzones and a new Ride and Play facility at Clacton Leisure Centre, giving children, families and communities more opportunities to be active close to home. Alongside this, we have secured over £1.2m from the Government's Salix programme for a new heating system at Clacton Leisure Centre, and £94k from the Swimming Pool Support Fund to support major upgrades at Walton on the Naze Lifestyles. Together, this funding will improve the quality and reliability of local leisure facilities and help ensure they continue to meet the needs of residents now and into the future.

We continue to take forward major regeneration projects, funded through Levelling Up and Capital Regeneration Grants. These projects will support jobs, strengthen our town centres and coastal areas, and help build the local economy for years to come.

All of this shows something important: we do not wait for others to fix problems for us. We face challenges head-on, we work with partners, and we deliver change. And we do all of this with one of the lowest council tax levels in the country, just £199.52 a year for a Band D property. That is £3.84 a week. For many households, that is less than the cost of a takeaway coffee. Yet it pays for the essential services our residents rely on

every single day such as waste collection, street cleaning, grass cutting, carparks, public toilets, housing services and leisure centres to name a few.

As we look ahead to the next two years, it is vital that we continue this approach. We must continue to protect frontline services, support vulnerable households, and maintain the stability that residents and businesses need, especially at a time when many are finding life difficult.

Our financial context is not simple. We face the same pressures felt by other councils across the country, but coastal areas like ours face added challenges. Jaywick remains the most deprived neighbourhood in England. Several areas across Clacton, Harwich, Walton and our rural communities are among the most deprived nationally. That reality should have been reflected in the Government's Fair Funding Review.

But it wasn't. Despite deprivation being highlighted as a key factor in how local government funding should be allocated, the outcome leaves us with reduced funding in real terms. We also received a late change to the settlement for 2026/27 and 2027/28, making us worse off. The Government will provide a one-off grant to cover the gap in 2026/27, but currently there is no guarantee for 2027/28. That could leave us £280,000 short.

However, because of the strong financial stewardship of this Council, we are not blown off course. Our two-year plan and 2026/27 budget maintain stability, protect services, and put us in the right position for Local Government Reorganisation.

Our approach is backed by the assurance of our Section 151 Officer and by our External Auditor, whose independent findings are being considered by the Audit Committee this week. That independent assurance matters. It gives our residents confidence that their Council is well-run, financially responsible, and planning ahead.

As we move into the transition to a new Unitary Council, our responsibility is clear. Government guidance states that existing councils must not take decisions that disadvantage or limit the choices of the new authority. We take that seriously. Our two-year plan provides transparency, stability and a strong financial position for the new organisation that will take responsibility for our District from April 2028.

For residents, this plan means:

- *no sudden changes to essential services*
- *continued support for vulnerable households*
- *investment in leisure, green spaces and community facilities*

For businesses, it means:

- *stability in planning, environmental health and other core services*
- *continued regeneration of town centres and coastal areas*
- *improvements to the infrastructure that supports the local economy*

To strengthen our financial resilience further, we have created two new Corporate Investment Funds—one for revenue and one for capital. These funds will allow us to respond flexibly to pressures and invest where needed, without putting day-to-day services at risk.

Our savings plan totals £1.956 million, all of which can be found in Appendix B of the report, and most importantly, these savings do not cut essential services. This sets us apart from authorities that rely on speculative savings that may never materialise, a practice that often leads to deeper problems later.

We have faced rising costs in areas such as homelessness, inflation, and contract pressures, but we have acted early and decisively. We have put extra funding into homelessness support, including preventative work and temporary, safe accommodation. We are investing in our assets based on clear condition surveys, making sure our buildings remain safe and functional and we continue to invest in our wider priorities and in the capacity, we need to deliver reliable services.

As I mentioned before, we face unique responsibilities as a coastal district, from port-health duties to coastal protection. These are essential services, and they add pressure that inland areas simply do not face.

On council tax, we are continuing our long-standing approach by proposing a 2.99% increase. The new Band D charge will be £205.48, an increase of just £5.96 for the year or 11p a week, a small amount for what residents receive in return. It helps us protect services now, while avoiding deeper problems in the future.

Our capital programme continues to focus on what matters most:

- *upgrading leisure centres and community buildings*
- *maintaining safe, welcoming public buildings*
- *modernising IT so services stay reliable*

Recent changes to how we deliver disabled facilities grants will mean more money reaches residents more quickly, a clear example of us leading the way and doing the right thing for local people.

Our regeneration and investment projects are also part of a bigger picture. They support residents, attract visitors, encourage business growth and send a clear message that Tendring is a place with potential and ambition.

To summarise, our two-year plan and proposed budget strengthen our commitment to:

- *protecting frontline services*
- *supporting vulnerable households*
- *regenerating towns and coastal areas*
- *improving health and tackling inequalities*
- *supporting skills, jobs and business growth*
- *providing the stability needed for Local Government Reorganisation*

Our achievements over recent years show what is possible when partnership working, financial discipline and a focus on residents come together. The diagnostic hub, Sunspot, mental health hubs, regeneration projects, and improvements in health outcomes all demonstrate the positive difference we can make.

With this budget, we continue that work. We protect services, support local people, and prepare a strong foundation for the new Unitary Council. We leave behind a legacy of

good stewardship, responsible planning, and a culture that puts residents and businesses first.

I commend this budget to Full Council."

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, and seconded by Councillor I J Henderson, that the recommendations, as set out on pages 18 and 19 of the Council Book, be approved.

In addition to Councillor Stephenson, Councillors P B Honeywood and I J Henderson addressed the Council on the subject matter of Councillor Stephenson's motion.

Given that Councillor P B Honeywood's speech had mentioned the lease of Christopher Jones' House in Harwich, Councillors Calver and Fowler declared an Interest insofar as they were both Trustees of the Harwich Society who were the tenants of Christopher Jones' House.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor M E Stephenson, undertook to give a written response to Councillor P B Honeywood as there were commercially sensitive matters pertaining to the lease of Christopher Jones' House.

In relation to the Carnarvon Terrace regeneration project which Councillor P B Honeywood had also mentioned in his speech, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration and Tourism, Councillor I J Henderson, responded that a report on this matter was due to be submitted to the next formal meeting of the Cabinet.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, as reflected within Council Procedure Rule 19.5 of the Council's Constitution, a named vote on Councillor Stephenson's motion was taken.

That vote resulted as follows:

Councillors For	Councillors Against	Councillors Abstaining	Councillors Not Present
Baker	None	Alexander	Davis
Barrett		Amos	Everett
Barry		A I Cossens	Ferguson
Bensilum		M A Cossens	Harris
Bray		Griffiths	Kotz
Bush		P B Honeywood	Placey
Calver		S A Honeywood	Steady
Casey		Land	White
Chapman BEM		Platt	
Codling		Skeels	
Davidson			
Doyle			
Fairley			
Fowler			
Goldman			
Guglielmi			
I J Henderson			

J Henderson
Keteca
Morrison
Newton
Oxley
Scott
Smith
G L Stephenson
M E Stephenson
Sudra
Talbot
Thompson
Wiggins

Councillor Stephenson's motion was declared **CARRIED** and it was therefore:-

RESOLVED that, having had regard to the Chief Finance Officer's (Section 151 Officer) report on the Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves in accordance with the requirements under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, and having taken account of any responses to the budget consultation process, the Council approves the 2026/27 budget proposals (based on a 2.99% (£5.96) Band D council tax increase for district services) and agrees that:

i) the total General Fund net revenue budget for 2026/27 be set at £25.852m (a council tax requirement of £11.244m excluding parish precepts);

ii) the General Fund capital programme be approved totalling £1.570m in 2026/27;

iii) the detailed General Fund budget for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix E to report A.1;

iv) the calculation of the Council's Council Tax requirement, Special Expenses and Parish/Town Council precepts, as set out at Appendix G to report A.1;

v) the Council Tax for District and Parish/Town Councils' services, as at Appendix J to report A.1 and that these are the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of the categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

vi) subject to the above, if budget adjustments are required such as those necessary to reflect the Final Local Government Finance Settlement and the late notification of other external / grant funding, then in consultation with the Corporate Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder, the Council's Section 151 Officer be authorised to adjust the base budgets accordingly with no net impact on the overall budget or capital programme set out above; and

vii) the Council's and Statutory Officers' obligations to a successor Unitary Council as part of the current LGR proposals, including those that are expected to emerge within legislation / associated structural orders along with the Council's proposed in-principle response as set out within the main body of this report A.1, be acknowledged.

109. REPORT OF THE CABINET - A.2 - EXECUTIVE'S PROPOSALS - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2026/2027

Earlier on in the meeting, as detailed under Minute 103 above, Councillor Bray had declared an Interest in relation to this item insofar as he was a housing tenant of Tendring District Council. He thereupon withdrew from the meeting whilst Council considered this item and reached its decision thereon.

Further to Minute 104 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 30 January 2026, the Council considered the Executive's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals for 2026/27 (including fees and charges, capital programme and movement in HRA balances).

It was reported that there had only been a very limited number of changes since Cabinet met on 30 January 2026, which had been reflected in Appendices A to E to report A.2, as necessary. The outcome of the changes required was a reduced deficit of £0.540m in 2026/27 compared with the figure of £0.650m reported to Cabinet in January. It was proposed to fund this estimated deficit by calling money from HRA balances as an alternative to potentially reducing expenditure.

Members were reminded that this approach continued to form part of a managed approach with the use of reserves seeking to maintain the necessary balance of 'protecting' the investment in tenants' homes whilst recognising the need to use reserves to respond to the on-going financial challenges that the HRA continued to face. It was however recognised that this was not a sustainable long-term solution, but it enabled the Council to continue to meet its key priorities in the immediate term whilst acknowledging that future years of the forecast were expected to deliver offsetting annual surpluses from as early as 2028/29. Those future forecast surpluses were primarily achievable via the planned reduction in debt and interest costs, as outstanding loans were repaid and the longer-term certainty provided by the Government's commitment to a ten-year rent setting policy of CPI + 1%.

Council was informed that, for 2026/27, the Executive's budget proposals set out an increase in dwelling rents of 4.8% along with a total HRA expenditure budget of £18.883m (net of indirect income / expenditure) and a capital programme totalling £6.900m. The 4.8% increase in dwelling rents resulted in an average weekly rent of £108.46 in 2026/27 *(£103.49 in 2025/26).*

Appendix C to report A.2 set out the proposed fees and charges for 2026/27, which broadly reflected inflationary uplifts of 4.8% where relevant, or other inflationary changes to better reflect the cost of providing the associated service.

Members were cognisant that the proposed budget reflected the continued repayment of debt, with the total level of existing debt falling from £31.120m to £29.706m at the end of 2026/27.

The HRA general balance was forecast to total £2.234m at the end of 2026/27, which retained a strong financial position against which the associated HRA 30 Year Business Plan could continue to be delivered / developed.

Members were aware that the HRA balances, together with the proposed rent increase for 2026/27 were important elements of delivering a financially sustainable HRA in the

longer term. The HRA Business Plan and proposed budget played a significant role in the delivery of affordable and decent housing in the District and the Council's responsibilities as a landlord had direct implications for the Council's ability to deliver on its objectives and wider priorities, along with a focus on housing standards and the on-going impact from the Government / Regulator. It also provided some flexibility to add to our existing stock.

Council recalled that, as highlighted within the associated budget reports to Cabinet in December and January, the approach to the development of the HRA Business Plan would also enable the continuation of a relatively strong financial position and provide flexibility to respond to statutory obligations that were expected to emerge in respect of any incoming new Unitary Council from as early as April 2028, as part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and their current timetable for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Greater Essex.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor M E Stephenson) made the following budget statement:-

"We now turn to the Housing Revenue Account. Like the General Fund, this budget is about decisions taken today that will shape outcomes well beyond the lifetime of this Council. But the HRA is also different, because it speaks directly to our responsibilities as a landlord and to the everyday lives of more than 3,000 households across Tendring who rely on us for a safe, secure place to live.

For those residents, their council home is not an abstract asset or a financial line. It is where families settle, where children grow up, and where people should feel safe, warm and supported. That is why everything we do through the HRA is grounded in a clear and consistent principle: putting tenants first and managing their homes responsibly.

As with the wider budget, this HRA is being set against a challenging backdrop. Over the past year, tenants have faced rising household bills and cost-of-living pressures, while expectations of us as a landlord rightly remain high, particularly around repairs, safety and standards. At the same time, councils face increased regulatory requirements under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and continued inflation in construction and materials costs.

Despite those pressures, Tendring's Housing Revenue Account remains strong, stable and well-managed. Through regular engagement with tenants, including our Tenants' Panel, we have been open about the financial context we face and the need to make decisions that protect services and homes in the long term. That engagement matters, because it builds understanding and confidence that tenants' interests are at the heart of our plans.

For 2026/27, this has resulted in a 4.8% rent increase, taking the average weekly rent to £108.46. This remains significantly below much of the wider rented sector. Like the Council Tax decision in the General Fund, this increase is modest, proportionate and necessary. It enables us to maintain homes properly, meet higher safety standards and avoid the deeper problems that arise when investment is delayed.

The Government's 10-year rent setting policy of CPI plus 1% provides welcome certainty and underpins our longer-term planning. That stability is important for residents

because it supports consistent services, avoids sudden shocks, and allows us to focus on prevention and maintenance rather than crisis response.

Residents expect their homes to be safe, warm and well maintained, and this budget reflects those priorities. The proposed HRA capital programme continues to focus on:

- *major repairs and refurbishments to keep homes in good condition*
- *disabled adaptations that help tenants live independently and with dignity*
- *upgrades to heating, electrical and wider building safety systems*
- *new build and acquisition opportunities, supported by Right to Buy receipts and Section 106 funding*

These investments directly improve residents' quality of life. They reduce disrepair, improve comfort and safety, and help increase the supply of good-quality, affordable homes for local people. They also align with our wider Housing Strategy and our commitment to doing the right thing for tenants.

As with the General Fund, this level of investment must be supported by sound financial stewardship. Our long-term HRA approach for 2026/27 therefore includes:

- *careful and deliberate use of reserves, rather than cutting repairs or services*
- *reducing void losses so homes are available more quickly to those who need them*
- *reviewing contracts to secure better value for money on behalf of tenants*
- *continuing stock condition surveys so investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact*

Based on current plans, HRA reserves are forecast to total £7.152 million at the end of 2026/27, including £2.234 million in general balances. This provides resilience and the ability to respond to unforeseen issues affecting tenants' homes, without compromising day-to-day services.

HRA debt is forecast to reduce to £29.706 million. Through refinancing historic loans and making greater use of internal borrowing rather than more expensive external lending, we are ensuring that more money is directed into homes and services, rather than interest payments. This is prudent financial management, and it delivers clear benefits for residents.

From 2028/29, the HRA is forecast to move into surplus. This creates additional flexibility to invest in repairs, improvements and new housing; while also ensuring we meet our responsibilities as we transition to a new Unitary Council from 1 April 2028.

With two years remaining before that transition, our HRA plans provide a legacy that mirrors the wider financial approach of this Council. That legacy is one of:

- *continuity and stability for tenants*
- *a strong and sustainable 30-year Business Plan*
- *a funded and deliverable investment programme*
- *regulatory compliance that protects tenants' rights and safety*
- *a clear and transparent financial position for the new authority to build on*

For residents, this means confidence that their homes are being managed responsibly now and that the future is being planned carefully. It also provides the new Council with the flexibility to grow and improve the housing offer over time, increasing access to decent homes for local people.

In closing, this HRA budget reflects the same principles that underpin the wider budget before Council tonight. It is about responsible stewardship, long-term planning and putting people first. It protects tenants' homes and services, invests in safety and quality, and prepares Tendring for a smooth transition into a new Unitary Council.

It is a budget that supports residents today and safeguards the future of our housing stock.

I commend this HRA budget to Full Council."

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson and seconded by Councillor Baker that the recommendations, as set out on page 132 of the Council Book, be approved.

In addition to Councillor Stephenson, Councillor Baker spoke on the subject matter of this item.

Pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 19.5, Councillor M E Stephenson, supported by nine other Members present at the meeting, demanded a recorded vote on his motion.

That vote resulted as follows:

Councillors For	Councillors Against	Councillors Abstaining	Councillors Not Present
Baker	None	Alexander	Bray
Barrett		Amos	Davis
Barry		A I Cossens	Everett
Bensilum		M A Cossens	Ferguson
Bush		Griffiths	Harris
Calver		P B Honeywood	Kotz
Casey		S A Honeywood	Placey
Chapman BEM		Land	Steady
Codling		Platt	White
Davidson		Skeels	
Doyle			
Fairley			
Fowler			
Goldman			
Guglielmi			
I J Henderson			
J Henderson			
Keteca			
Morrison			
Newton			
Oxley			
Scott			

Smith
G L Stephenson
M E Stephenson
Sudra
Talbot
Thompson
Wiggins

Councillor Stephenson's motion was declared **CARRIED** and it was therefore:-

RESOLVED that -

(a) a 4.8% increase in dwelling rents in 2026/27 be approved;

(b) the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix B to item A.2 of the Report of the Cabinet, along with the Fees and Charges, HRA Capital Programme and the movement in HRA Balances / Reserves, as set out respectively in Appendices C to E to report A.2 be approved; and

(c) the Statutory Officer's and Council's obligations to a successor Unitary Council as part of the current LGR proposals, including those that are expected to emerge within legislation / associated structural orders, as set out within the main body of report A.2, be acknowledged.

110. URGENT MATTERS FOR DEBATE

No urgent matters had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2(viii) for this meeting.

The Meeting was declared closed at 8.18 pm

Chairman