



**Minutes of** **Executive Cabinet**

**Meeting date** **Thursday, 23 January 2025**

**Members present:** Councillor Alistair Bradley, (Chair), Councillor Peter Wilson (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Beverley Murray, Terry Howarth, Alistair Morwood, Margaret France and Adrian Lowe

**Officers:** Chris Sinnott (Chief Executive), Sarah Bullock (Deputy Chief Executive), Tasneem Safdar (Head of Legal and Procurement), Neil Halton (Director of Finance), Caroline Wolfenden (Director of Change and Delivery), Gayle Wootton (Director of Planning and Property), Kieran Leonard (Policy Officer) and Nina Neisser-Burke (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**Other Members:** Councillors Irene Amahwe, Michelle Beach, Aaron Beaver, Julia Berry, Gordon France, Danny Gee, Hasina Khan and June Molyneaux

**51 Declarations of Any Interests**

There were no declarations of any interests.

**52 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 12 December 2024 of Executive Cabinet**

**Resolved: that the minutes of the Executive Cabinet meeting held on 12 December 2024 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Executive Leader.**

**53 Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

**54 Draft 25/26 Budget Update**

Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member for Resources presented the report of the Director of Finance which set out the draft budget position for the council for 2025/26 and the forecast for 2026/27, reflecting the information contained within the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement announced on 18 December 2024, which will be finalised in early February 2025.

In summary, the council would continue to deliver services outlined within the report, address the needs of its residents and achieve its corporate priorities through a

mixture of external funding, revenue and capital budgets. Members recognised that although a balanced budget position could be achieved for 2025/26, this was subject to increasing council tax by 2.99%.

It was acknowledged that there was a budget gap of £1.932m for the year 2026/27 and plans would be refined and developed over coming months to address this. Members recognised the challenges faced and the uncertainty around the council's future funding streams beyond 2025/26 and therefore the projection and assumptions underpinning the MTFS for 2026/27 would be kept under review. It was hoped that the government will deliver a multi-year settlement for 2026/27 to help with forward planning.

Consultation on the proposed budget for 2025/26 would commence following approval of the proposals by the Executive Cabinet.

#### **Decision:**

**That Members agree the contents of this report in order to start the budget consultation process as follows:**

- **A proposed 2.99% increase in council tax in 2025/26;**
- **A forecast balanced budget for 2025/26 (based on a 2.99% increase in council tax, as noted above);**
- **A forecast budget shortfall for 2026/27 of £1.932mill, to be addressed through the development and delivery of the council's Fit for the Future transformation programme, although it is acknowledged that a significant level of uncertainty prevails around this figure following publication of the 'Local Authority Funding Reform: Objectives and Principles' consultation paper, which outlines the government's intent to redistribute funding through a fair funding review and business rates reset;**
- **To note the proposals in the report for investment in the Administration's priority areas.**

#### **Reasons for recommendations**

The council wishes to set out its budget proposals and consult on them with residents and businesses.

#### **Other options considered and rejected**

None - this is the draft budget, and alternative budgets may be considered as part of the final budget proposal.

## **55 Fees and Charges 25/26**

Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member for Resources presented the report of the Director of Finance which set out the current position around fees and charges and proposals for 2025/26. If agreed, the increases would be implemented from 1 April 2025, or the most suitable date after.

Members considered the report which set out the key fees and charges budgets and the income generated from each. It also set out an estimate of the financial impact in 2025/26 of the proposals made, if they were to be adopted.

Members recognised the need to increase the majority of fees and charges in line with inflation rates to avoid them falling below the cost of providing that service. This would allow the council to continue to strive to achieve value for money for residents.

With regards to cemetery fees, Members commended the proposal to not charge for burials of a stillborn baby or a child under the age of 16, and recognised Chorley was the only borough in Lancashire to do this.

**Decision:**

1. To note the current levels of individual budgeted fees and charges, and the issues specific to these.
2. To approve an uplift in the Strawberry Fields service charge of £1 per square foot to better reflect the current costs incurred at the site, as detailed at point 31.
3. To approve an increase in Leisure fees and charges of 1.7% in line with September CPI (rounded up to nearest 5p) as per point 26.
4. To approve an uplift in the rents of all Council owned housing (including Extra Care properties but excluding Cotswold House) of 2.7%. This is the approach agreed by Executive Cabinet in July 2022 of increasing these rents by CPI plus 1%, with CPI based on the published rate for September each year. Service charges were not increased in 2024/25 but a review of the costs incurred has resulted in a recommendation to increase these by £2.60 per week from 2025/26.
5. To approve an increase in the rent charged at Cotswold House of 2.7%, plus an increase in service charge of 0.96% and an increase in personal charge of 4.39% as detailed in point 30.
6. To approve an increase in garden waste collection charges of £2.50 as per point 33.
7. To approve the changes in Astley Hall fees and charges as per point 34.
8. To approve an increase in Legal Charges as per point 32.
9. To approve a general increase of up to 1.7% in the fees for 2025/26 (limited to the services listed in Table 3 of Appendix 1) based on the rate of CPI in September 2024. An increase in costs may necessitate an increase in excess of 1.7% where these relate directly to the cost of products e.g. tea / coffee charges. These will be limited to a maximum increase of £1 per unit.
10. To approve an increase in Market fees of 10% for Covered Market, Cabins and Permanent Street traders as per point 35. A £5 increase is proposed for temporary street traders.
11. To approve increases and changes to car parking charges as per point 36. The proposals around Hallgate and Yarrow to be approved in principle subject to further consideration of any potential displacement of vehicles and action required.
12. To approve the basis for new charging in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain and S.106 Monitoring fee as per point 37.
13. To approve an increase in cemetery fees as per point 38.
14. To approve the full list of fees and charges for upload onto the Council website.

**Reasons for recommendations**

To ensure that fees and charges are set at appropriate levels and are publicly available.

**Other options considered and rejected**

No other options considered as we are required to review fees and charges each year.

## 56 Equality Objectives and Equality Strategy

Councillor Margaret France, Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships presented the report of the Director of Change and Delivery which sought approval of the proposed equality objectives, Equality Strategy and action plan.

The council's equality objectives required a refresh in line with the Equality Act 2010. The new Equality Strategy would help to ensure that equality is considered within decision-making, policy and service delivery. This would help strengthen the council's commitment to addressing inequalities and ensure that its Public Sector Equality Duty is met. Members considered the five proposed equality objectives for 2025 – 2029 as outlined in the report.

Members welcomed the creation of a dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Board, the reinvigoration of the Equality Forum and the relaunch of the staff Equality Champions Network to help promote a diverse, supportive and inclusive workplace. Mandatory training for staff and councillors, as well as the inclusion of health inequalities in the Equality Action Plan for 2025/26 was also supported. Members thanked officers for their work in producing this Strategy.

### **Decision:**

- 1. To review and approve the proposed equality objectives for 2025 – 2029.**
- 2. To review and approve the Equality Strategy 2025 – 2029 and action plan.**

### **Reasons for recommendations**

1. The Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to publish equality objectives every 4 years. The equality objectives were last agreed in 2020, so now require refreshing.
2. The Equality Strategy and action plan will help to provide structure to demonstrate how the Council will achieve the objectives.

### **Other options considered and rejected**

1. No other options have been considered as the Council has a legal duty to undertake the publishing of its objectives.
2. The Equality Strategy and action plan will provide structure that articulates how the Council will ensure it meets its Public Sector Equality Duty which is a legal requirement.

## 57 Exclusion of the Public and Press

**Decision: To exclude the press and public for the following items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**

## 58 Chorley Town Hall Improvement Works – Procurement Strategy

Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Member for Economic Development and Public Service Reform presented the confidential report of the Director of Property and Planning. The report sought approval of the procurement strategy to procure a contractor to undertake Chorley Town Hall improvement works.

Members recognised the need for the improvement works outlined in the report, following the results of the condition survey on the Town Hall.

**Decision:**

- 1. To approve the procurement strategy to procure a contractor to undertake Chorley Town Hall improvement works.**
- 2. To delegate the contract award to the Executive Member of Economic Development and Public Service Reform for sign off.**
- 3. To note, further reports will come forward as part of Town Hall improvements programme.**

**Reasons for recommendations:**

To undertake critical works in line with the condition survey recommendations.

**Other options considered and rejected:**

Do Nothing – lead to further deterioration of the building's fabric and services including deterioration of materials, structural issues, energy efficiency, increased repair costs and compliance issues.

Chair

Date