

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 October 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr K Salmon – Chairman

– Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr J Beesley, Cllr P Canavan, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall,
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr L Northover, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters and
Cllr C Weight
Present virtually: Cllr F Rice and Cllr G Wright
Also in attendance: Cllr A Martin and Cllr M Cox

49. Apologies

Apologies were received from Vice-Chair Cllr S Aitkenhead.

50. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

51. Declarations of Interests

Cllr J Beesley declared an other registerable interest in the Draft Library Strategy item as he was a member of the Board of the Arts Council South West.

52. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 and 30 September 2025 were approved as a correct record.

53. Recommendation Tracker

The current recommendation tracker was noted.

54. Work Plan

The Chair presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that an updated work plan had been circulated with the agenda and the following updates were noted:

Carter's Quay - Due to delays in housing-related Cabinet this item would need to be rescheduled from the November meeting. A new date would be confirmed once further information was available.

Parking Enforcement Outside Schools – It was hoped to add this as a verbal update to the next meeting dependent upon rapporteur availability, with the full report to January.

Consultation Working Group - Two further meetings were scheduled to complete the group's work. It was hoped to bring the final report to the Board in January.

Domestic Abuse Strategies – These were listed on the Cabinet Forward Plan but without a confirmed date. These would be added to the Work Plan.

Community Governance Review – The Chair of the Task and Finish Group suggested that the next report from the Group be brought to the Board prior to Council. It was agreed that the Board would be interested in this and the timings would be considered.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board confirm the work plan with the above updates.

Voting: Nem. Con.

55. Public Issues

There were no public issues on this occasion.

56. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that the report was being taken to Cabinet to comply with accounting codes of practice and best practice which requires councils to have a rolling multi-year medium term financial plan. The report provided the latest high-level overview of the 2026/27 Budget and 3-year medium-term financial plan. The report also provided an update on the Leader of the Council and Director of Finance's letters submitted to MHCLG in July 2025 to seek assurance around the council's ability to continue to cashflow the significant and growing Dedicated Schools Grants deficit within the statutory framework. Details of the council's responses to two government consultation documents namely the Local Government Fair Funding Review and Modernising and Improving the administration of council tax were also included. The Board raised a number of issues in discussion on this item including:

- **National Living Wage** – It was reported that the increase in this would need to be taken into account for contracted services for social care.
- **Escalation of DSG Deficit** - The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit was highlighted as a major financial risk. It was noted that the deficit was projected to reach an accumulated total of over £180 million by March 2026. Members expressed concern about the scale of this increase and the lack of clarity on how the deficit would be resolved.

- **Interest Costs on DSG Deficit** - The cost of servicing the debt associated with the DSG deficit was confirmed as £9.9 million for the next financial year. Members requested that future reports include graphical representations of these projections, alongside tabular data, to make the financial implications clearer for all members. It was explained that the Council could face a critical point during 2025/26 when cash resources may become insufficient to service debt obligations. Members expressed frustration at the delay in government announcements, which were now expected close to Christmas.
- **Council Tax** - Questions were raised about the assumptions underpinning council tax increases. Members sought clarification on whether the projected rises were sustainable and what impact they would have on residents, particularly given ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
- **Unearmarked Reserves** - The level of this was discussed, currently standing at £27.3 million, concerns were expressed that holding reserves above this level could potentially lead to risks of clawback.
- **Use of Capital Receipts** - Clarification was sought on this to fund transformation projects and whether this would remain viable beyond the current financial year. It was confirmed that the flexible use of capital receipts had been extended nationally until 2030, providing scope for future investment in transformation and service improvement.

During consideration of this item the Board also considered any comments and recommendations arising from Budget conversations. The key issues which were discussed included:

- The need to prioritise repairs and maintenance for public-facing assets, particularly libraries, was considered
- Concerns were expressed about reputational risk if essential services such as libraries were not maintained.
- The potential use of capital receipts from asset disposals to address maintenance backlogs.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that as part of the Budget setting process, consideration be given to utilising receipts from the existing surplus asset disposal programme for 2026/27 to address some of the repairs and maintenance of publicly facing assets.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against, 2 abstentions

The meeting was adjourned at 7.19pm and reconvened at 7:27pm

57. BCP Council Libraries – Draft Library Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communications and Culture presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The

report provided an update on the progress which had been made with the future library strategy following two previous reports in February and December 2024. It set out the key drivers for the library strategy, detailing the suggested future focus of the library service, the priorities for investment, and the action plan required to ensure the Council could continue to deliver an efficient and comprehensive service for the future. The work to underpin the strategy has given a clearer understanding of where to target investment to bring improvements for communities, increasing access, and modelling provision within clusters. The vision is an ambitious one, focussed on delivering improvements and cementing the value of libraries within communities. The Board was informed that whilst there is undoubtedly a resource challenge, as there is in delivering all council services, the strategy remains an ambitious statement of intent. Working with partners, the community, and internal teams, the Council will develop preparedness for funding opportunities and focus on greater collaboration to ensure libraries deliver in a time of financial stress and even greater societal challenge. The Board raised a number of points during discussion of this item including:

- **Commitment to retain Libraries** – The Board welcomed the clear commitment to maintain all 24 libraries across the area. It was noted that this was a significant achievement given financial pressures and the condition of some buildings.
- **Open Access Technology** - The introduction of this was supported as a means to extend opening hours without increasing staffing costs. Members sought clarification on how security and safeguarding would be managed during unstaffed hours. It was explained that access would be controlled through library cards, induction processes and CCTV monitoring. Concerns were raised about ensuring that vulnerable groups, including young people, could still access staffed support when needed.
- **Community Hubs** - The strategy proposed creating four community hubs in Hamworthy, Rossmore, Southbourne, and Charminster, each serving a cluster of libraries. These hubs would offer extended services and space for community activities. Members suggested that more hubs should be considered in future phases if funding allowed.
- **Funding** – Concern was expressed that the strategy was ambitious but lacked dedicated funding. The initial phase relied on an Arts Council funding. It was noted that if the bid was unsuccessful, alternative funding sources would need to be identified. Members highlighted the importance of exploring neighbourhood CIL funding and other grants to support improvements.
- **Friends Groups** - The strategy included plans to encourage Friends Groups and expand volunteering opportunities. Members supported this approach but noted that the framework for establishing Friends Groups appeared complex and could deter participation. It was suggested that processes be simplified to enable community involvement more easily.

- **Income Generation** – The Board discussed the need for libraries to develop sustainable revenue streams and explore partnerships with commercial operators for café facilities. While some supported commercialisation, others stressed that libraries should remain primarily a public service.

The Board also made several creative suggestions for further enhancements to library services including:

- Establishing a “Library of Things” to allow residents to borrow household items.
- Creating repair workshops and skills-sharing sessions.
- Introducing quiet hours for study alongside more vibrant community activities.
- Using libraries as warm spaces and hubs for social connection.
- Out of hours access to services, similar to parcel drops.

RESOLVED that:

1. **The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that as part of the Library Strategy it looks to maintain staffed hours in libraries, especially in the afternoon period, as open access is rolled out further in the future.**

Voting: 8 in favour, 1 abstention (Majority Decision)

2. **The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that the Library Service put together a list of smaller neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Bids to put to Councillors and Neighbourhood Forums immediately upon the opening of future CIL rounds.**

Voting: Unanimous

3. **That the O&S Board support the recommendations as set out in the Cabinet report.**

Voting: Nem. Con.

4. **A potential item be included on its work programme a review of income generation opportunities within the library service, including commercialisation options and partnership models.**

Voting Nem. Con.

(Cllr Beesley left the meeting during consideration of this item)

The meeting ended at 8.36 pm

CHAIRMAN