

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 09 February 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr K Salmon – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr J Beesley, Cllr P Canavan, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall,
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr L Northover, Cllr O Walters, Cllr C Weight and
Cllr G Wright

Present
Virtually: Cllr F Rice (part meeting)

Also in attendance: Cllr M Earl, Cllr A Martin, Cllr R Burton, Cllr D Brown and Cllr M Cox

89. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr T Trent

90. Substitute Members

Cllr M Tarling substituted for Cllr T Trent.

91. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

92. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January were approved as a correct record.

93. Recommendation Tracker

The Board considered the existing recommendation tracker. Cabinet Members provided responses on two outstanding issues at clause 56 and clause 57.

The Cabinet Member for Finance responded to the Board's earlier recommendation that capital receipts be considered to support repairs and maintenance of publicly accessible assets. It was explained that due to severe financial pressures and competing demands, this recommendation had not been accepted. Limited resources meant priority had been given to statutory and unavoidable pressures.

In response to the recommendation the Cabinet Member for Customer, Communications and Culture confirmed that the technology was intended

to increase access hours, not to reduce staffed hours. Staffing reductions in libraries were described as unsustainable, and assurance was given that the technology would not be used to justify further reductions. A list of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) applications relating to library improvements was read out, including projects across multiple library branches (e.g., replacement equipment, children's area improvements, facility upgrades). The service was actively maintaining a rolling list of potential projects to support councillor awareness and future applications.

94. Public Issues

There were no public issues submitted for this meeting.

95. Scrutiny of the 2026/27 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

The Chair outlined the format for consideration of this item. The Board considered 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 Chair advised that the Board would be focussing on the budget with a resident impact lens and as such Directors had been invited to the meeting to address savings and budget pressures within their Directorate area.

Wellbeing Directorate – The Corporate Director for Wellbeing outlined the savings pressures within the directorate and potential impacts to services:

- **Public Health and Communities** - The budget was challenging but remained manageable and no direct reductions to current service provision were anticipated. Savings were expected to be achieved through the removal of the Ward Improvement Fund, increased fees and charges for services such as community centre use, and a higher Public Health Grant contribution to corporate overheads. These measures were not expected to result in any observable impact on residents.
- **Adult Social Care** - Adult Social Care continued to experience rising and increasingly complex demand. Significant transformation programmes, including *Fulfilled Lives*, *Future Care*, and the *Prevention Strategy*, would be critical in delivering budget savings and maintaining service levels. It was confirmed that statutory services would continue to be delivered, although the position remained extremely challenging.
- **Commissioning** - The Service continued to face pressures driven by inflation, workforce shortages and escalating demand. Efforts would focus on supporting sustainability and managing the wider care market. Although the financial position was difficult it was expected that the proposed budget could be delivered.
- **Housing and Public Protection** - significant pressures were reported, particularly in relation to homelessness, temporary accommodation and bed-and-breakfast use. Savings were expected from income generation and service efficiencies. It was noted that several were non-statutory but remained critical to community safety and wellbeing. Services were operating at capacity, and further savings would be extremely difficult to achieve without affecting service delivery.

Board Members asked whether any proposed savings carried a risk of noticeable impact on residents. Clarification was sought on the distinction between statutory and non-statutory responsibilities, particularly in Adult Social Care and Housing. Officers and Cabinet Members provided examples of non-statutory but preventative services, such as the handy-van initiative and community support work, which helped to reduce future statutory costs. Members also queried whether additional income from client contributions implied higher charges; the Director confirmed that increased income would arise from a greater number of eligible clients. It was clarified that fees would also rise inline with inflation.

Children’s Services Directorate – An update on savings was provided by the Director of Education & Skills and Director of Children’s Social Care:

- **Education and Skills** - The Director of Education and Skills explained that the High Needs Block remained under significant pressure despite the recent Government announcement. Savings were expected through the reallocation of posts into grant-funded streams and by strengthening early intervention in line with upcoming Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms. The Director highlighted that developing more local SEND provision would reduce reliance on costly external placements and help manage home-to-school transport pressures.
- **Children’s Social Care Pressures** - The Director of Children’s Social Care reported sustained high levels of demand, which remained above national averages.
- **Savings proposals** – It was anticipated that these would be achieved through replacing agency social workers with alternatively qualified practitioners under the Families First model, improving commissioning practices, strengthening in-house foster care and kinship care arrangements, relocating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to reduce accommodation costs, and expanding the use of AI enabled translation services. Early intervention programmes, including Family Hubs and the reunification team, had already demonstrated significant cost avoidance.

Board Members requested clarification on several areas, including the reallocation of funding to supported internships, the restructuring of care-leaver services under a locality model, and the deliverability of agency staff reductions. Members also questioned whether the level of commissioning savings was ambitious enough, and whether AI-based translation tools were sufficiently accurate and appropriate for sensitive interactions. Further questions were raised regarding the scale and deliverability of home-to-school transport savings.

Operations - The Chief Operating Officer outlined the pressures and savings for the Operations Directorate:

- **Commercial Operations** - The Chief Operating Officer reported that commercial fees and charges had been aligned with market comparators and overall demand. Parking charges would increase by an

average of 4%, supported by efficiency improvements in enforcement. Cultural and leisure assets would continue to be protected.

- **Environment and Infrastructure** - The Directorate intended to maintain existing service levels despite significant pressures. The expansion of food waste collections would be delivered within current resources. The ongoing spending freeze had resulted in a growing backlog of non-safety-critical maintenance, although strategic initiatives such as the Plan for Play aimed to mitigate long-term deterioration.
- **Customer Services and Property** - Savings would be achieved through increased use of digital tools, streamlining of telephony operations, and more efficient facilities management arrangements. Work was continuing to review options for the future use of the Bournemouth Tourist Information Centre site.
- **Saving Measures** - Members requested clarification on “rebalancing” savings. Officers explained this meant restructuring teams, reallocating duties, and removing inefficiencies—not reducing frontline services.
- **Cultural Festival Funding** - Members asked whether festival support would continue. Officers confirmed Council cash funding had always been time-limited, but future events would proceed using Arts Council funding and officer time as match funding.
- **Pay-and-Display Machines** - Members expressed concern for residents without smartphones. Officers confirmed cash-based options would remain; machines would be removed only when broken or surplus.
- **Parking Operational Savings** - Members asked what drove the large savings. Officers explained savings came from tariff increases, improved enforcement efficiency, and better permit management.
- **Maintenance Backlogs** - Members raised concerns over growing maintenance backlogs. Officers stated that only non-safety-critical works were delayed, and strategic investment programmes would mitigate long-term deterioration.

Resources - The Chief Executive outlined the savings and pressures within the Resources Directorate, but it was noted that these would not have any impact on residents if delivered correctly. Savings totalling approx. £1m, mainly through staffing efficiencies, contract reviews, and system decommissioning were explained. A vacancy freeze and non-essential expenditure freeze were continuing to mitigate wider organisational pressures.

- **Self-Insurance** - Members questioned the increased self-insurance risk. Officers confirmed that modelling with brokers showed this approach was cost-effective, and essential repairs or replacements would remain funded.
- **Residents Card Scheme** - Members asked where the scheme sat within the budget. Officers stated it was funded through Operations and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with future funding dependent on evaluation of scheme outcomes.
- **Budget Consultation** - Members highlighted that consultation questions should reflect real financial choices. Officers agreed, and the Leader

accepted that future consultations could be improved within any legal limitations.

Whole-Budget Consideration

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Finance Officer, and Leader to address the full Budget position. The Cabinet member for Finance advised that the Budget had been extremely challenging due to a significantly poorer-than-expected national settlement, rising demand, especially for SEND and Social Care and the projected SEND deficit which could have reached in excess of £400million by 2028. The Board was advised that the Council had applied for exceptional financial support including a Council Tax flexibility request and a capitalisation direction.

Government communications on the day of the meeting indicated that it would allow a 1.75 percent additional Council Tax rise above 4.99 percent. The Government also announced that it would be writing off 90 percent of the SEND deficit in 2026, this was conditional on producing an approved SEND Reform Plan. The statutory override for the deficit would be ending in 2028, leaving the Council responsible for approximately £38m of residual SEND deficit, which would necessitate significant reserve growth if it was to be addressed.

The Leader highlighted political choices made to protect community-valued services such as public toilets, lifeguards, and community safety officers. Points raised by the Board included:

- **Reserve Requirement Feasibility** - Members asked how the Council could build reserves to meet future SEND liabilities. Officers explained that a reserves strategy would be developed, potentially supported by a capitalisation direction.
- **Conditions of SEND Reform Plan** - Members sought clarity on the conditions attached to SEND deficit write-off. Officers confirmed an approved SEND Reform Plan would be required, with a collaborative focus across education, health and post-16 sectors, as this information had only just been received the details still needed to be looked at further.
- **National vs Local Funding Messaging** - Members queried the apparent inconsistency between public political statements and financial reality. Officers clarified that national statements referenced “core spending power”, which assumed year-on-year Council Tax increases; when removed, the settlement represented a real-terms reduction.
- **Use of Capital Receipts** – The Board questioned whether capital receipts could fund essential building repairs, particularly in light of the situation with Charminster Library roof. Officers confirmed receipts were currently earmarked for transformation and may be required for future SEND-related capitalisation, and that wider asset strategy work would be the appropriate forum for scrutiny.

RESOLVED that The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that the questions asked in the budget consultation be reviewed to ensure that they are relevant to the choices which need to be made in the 2027/28 budget setting.

Voting: Unanimous

The Board placed on record its thanks to Adam Richens, Chief Finance Officer noting that this was potentially his final appearance before the Board. The Board acknowledged his diligence, professionalism and resilience in guiding the authority through an exceptionally challenging financial environment.

96. 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 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan. The items for the forthcoming meetings in February and March were confirmed. The Chair advised the Board that work was ongoing to consolidate and analyse the findings from the work planning workshop to place into a work plan for the Board. The Chair assured the Board, in response to a comment regarding the need to have a robust schedule for regeneration items to enable meaningful scrutiny in advance of the next election cycle, that regeneration would be a clear priority.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

Voting: Nem. Con.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN