

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
CABINET

Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 February 2026 at 2.30 pm

Present:-

Cllr M Earl – Chairman

Cllr M Cox – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr D Brown, Cllr R Burton, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr J Hanna,
Cllr R Herrett, Cllr A Martin, Cllr S Moore and Cllr K Wilson

Also in attendance: Councillor John Beesley, Councillor Patrick Canavan (Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee), Councillor Eleanor Connolly, Councillor George Farquhar, Councillor Jamie Martin and Councillor Kate Salmon (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board)

128. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

129. Confirmation of Minutes

The Leader advised that given the short period since the last meeting of the Cabinet which was held on the 4 February 2026 that the minutes would be deferred for approval at the next meeting on the 4 March 2026.

130. Public Issues

Public Question from Alex McKinstry on Agenda Item 6 (Budget 2026/27 and Medium-Term Financial Plan)

On 28 December 2025, an article appeared in the local organ of media, stating that the Council "has applied to Government to increase the council tax by 7.4%". This reportedly followed some kind of solicitation from Government concerning council tax flexibility.

According to the budget papers however, the Council applied to Government for "exceptional financial support" on 6 January 2026, and a bullet-point on page 7 suggests this included a request to increase council tax by more than 4.99%.

Given the disparity between the two dates, were these two separate letters / applications?

Can you also furnish us with the substance (and the dates) of any replies received from Government to this correspondence; and finally, will you publish this correspondence as an addendum to the papers for the Budget Council, which meets on 24 February?

Response by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Mike Cox

As part of the 2026/27 budget setting process and following the November 2025 Local Government Finance Settlement and Chancellors National Budget, MHCLG wrote on the 1st December to offer EFS.

The council wrote to government accepting the offer on the 5 December 2025. This request, which was just a request to be given the option at that stage, was communicated to all members as part of a budget presentation on 10 December 2025.

The application as part of the formal Exceptional Financial Support process was submitted on 6 January 2026.

A copy of both these documents has been included in the addendum to the Budget report as presented.

Public Question from Ben Smith on Agenda Item 7 (Pokesdown Railway Station)

Will Cabinet honour their obligation and avoid letting down the disabled, residents, tourists and businesses to find a solution and consult before losing this huge investment in Pokesdown?”

Response by the Portfolio Holder for Climate Response, Environment and Energy, Councillor Andy Hadley

Ben, I have personally been very keen to see the lifts in place at Pokesdown, and have met several times with relevant parties at the station, and indeed as you know, with campaigners, hosted at your house.

I am very keen to see better access for all across public transport. The obligation to provide a lift is with the rail operator.

The SWR Franchise of 2017 was explicit that this was to be provided by 2020. MTR/First failed that commitment, and continued to defer, prevaricate and fail, despite interventions from both the previous and current MPs, and the Council.

I looked back at the Overview and Scrutiny and Full Council meetings from 2022. In supporting the need for lifts at this and other stations, I strongly opposed the idea that the then Conservative administration commit this Council to a 50 year debt for us all to bail out the private rail operator, particularly as this does nothing for accessibility at the other 7 stations that serve the BCP area which lack step-free access.

All they had committed to do, dressed up as a “Green Futures fund” was to take out a loan for local taxpayers to pay off. Interest rates are now far higher than they were then, but more importantly, the crisis in SEND Funding has grown enormously. Although we had at face value good news this week, the reality is a further £38M debt from SEND, due to come onto our balance sheets.

There is still significant uncertainty about large further costs in the period from now until 2028. We do not have the money for this project, it was a folly from an administration who were reckless with all of our money.

I wrote to Lord Hendy, Rail minister, and we met with Lawrence Bowman of SWR and his team yesterday.

We have done what we can to get those who are responsible for the railways to continue this important project, and I’m very keen to continue to press for it. We will continue to work with parties to seek an appropriate way to fund the project, but taking out additional loans at Council taxpayers expense is not achievable at this time.

Public Statement from Ben Smith on Agenda Item 7 (Pokesdown Railway Station)

In 2022 you gave a cast iron guarantee. Many of you were there and part of the unanimous vote. Money was meant to be drawn down and ring-fenced. If a mistake happened, why are we being made to pay? Why wasn't this money ring-fenced with work to start soon?

For disabled residents, visitors with luggage or pushchairs it is a nonsense that we are not welcoming in Boscombe and Southbourne to all. For me it is hard to understand why I still cannot access such an important public service.

A golden opportunity for a partnership project delivering huge investment is being thrown away. Nobody doubts the financial pressures but with £7m of investment at stake, can you find a solution in this room so everyone can hold their head up and say their actions match their words? Please honour your commitment to the disabled and all residents and businesses.

Public Statement from David Redgewell on Agenda Item 7 (Pokesdown Railway Station)

As a passenger with reduced mobility and a member of Arriva cross country train access panel for equalities and diversity.

With Train services from Bournemouth Central to Manchester and the North.

Many passengers travel on to local stations and Poole by southwestern Railway.

In 2022 a lift was planned to be provide by Network Rail Pokesdown Station

With the Department for Transport and BCP Council.

We understand BCP Council is proposing to withdraw the £ 10 million pounds grant in part funding access for all fund

With Dorset Council is now taking forward Dorchester South station, lifts are required at Parkstone and Branksome Hamworthy

As a wheelchair user I ask the council to Talk to the Department for Transport Lord Peter Hendy Railways minister local MP Tom Hayes and md Lawrence Bowman southwestern railway to find a way forward and not cut the budget today.

131. Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Cabinet was advised that there were no additional recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on items not otherwise indicated on the Cabinet agenda on this occasion.

132. Budget 2026/27 and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report and addendum papers, copies of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Cabinet was advised that the report set out for Cabinet's consideration and recommendation to Council the proposed 2026/27 budget and council tax based on.

- Increasing council tax by 4.99% in 2026/27 in line with the government's annual referendum threshold which can be broken down into a 2.99% basic increase and a 2% uplift by way of the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept.
- Implementation of the approved financial strategy including £14m of further savings, efficiencies, and additional income generation.
- Borrowing a further £95.7m to fund the Special Educational Needs and Disability services revenue expenditure above the level of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs grant.
- Recognition that the council has technically been insolvent from the 1 April 2025 onwards as the accumulated deficit on the DSG is now greater than the total reserves held by the council, with a negative overall general fund position and is only protected by the legislative statutory override that allows the council to ignore this issue to 31 March 2028.

Further to this Cabinet was informed that the report also provided the latest Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the 3-year period to 31 March 2029.

In addition Cabinet was advised that it was also important to recognise that in the absence of government support for historic and accruing DSG deficits, the proposed 2026/27 budget has been drawn up based on the use of £4.8m of previously unearmarked reserves to present a legally balanced budget, and that this reduced unearmarked to be around 6% which is still above 5% which is widely regarded as a statutory minimum.

Cabinet was informed that the Council's Director of Finance advised that although the estimates used for the purposes of this budget are robust, subject to the list assumptions, the reserves should be considered inadequate based on the level of the DSG deficit and the ongoing risks faced by the council.

In relation to this Cabinet was advised that his advice is to apply any resources announced by government as part of the final 2026/27 local government finance settlement to improve the financial health and sustainability of the council, and that specifically, this may or may not include any of the following matters all designed to support the councils forecast £379m DSG deficit on the 31 March 2028.

- In response to a 6 January 2026 application by the Council for Exceptional Financial Support from the government.
 - Government permission to increase council tax by more than the 4.99% threshold limit.
 - Government permission to capitalise the £10.5m cost of borrowing to finance the DSG deficit in 2026/27.
- Any government support for historic or accruing DSG deficits.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Kate Salmon addressed the Cabinet advising that the Board at their recent meeting had thoroughly debated the item following which the Board had agreed the following recommendation: -

O&S Board agenda item 7 – Scrutiny of the 2026/27 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan

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.

Cabinet members comprehensively debated the item with thanks expressed to officers and the Portfolio Holder for all their hard work.

In addition, Cabinet members highlighted their concerns with regards to the lateness of the financial settlement, emphasised the responsibility of the council to deliver a balanced budget and stressed the importance of protecting key and vulnerable services.

The Leader reminded members of the budget process and urged other groups to put forward alternative budgets for consideration should they have other ideas.

RECOMMENDED that Council: -

- (a) **Undertakes a recorded vote in relation to the following items as required by the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendments) Regulations 2014;**
- i) **Agrees that a net budget requirement of £452m, resulting in a total council tax requirement of £297.033m, is set for 2026/27 based on the draft local government financial settlement figures published by government in December 2025.**
 - ii) **Agrees an increase in council tax of 2.99% for 2026/27 in respect of the basic annual threshold and the collection of the additional social care precept of 2%.**
 - iii) **Confirms the key assumptions and provisions made in the budget as proposed and as set out in Appendix 3.**
 - iv) **Agrees the allocations to service areas in the budget as set out in Appendix 5.**
 - v) **Agrees the implementation of £14m of savings as set out in Appendix 5a.**
 - vi) **Approve that the current Council Tax discount for Beach Chalets on Mudeford Sandspit and Hengistbury Head is removed from 1 April 2026 onwards see appendix 5b.**
 - vii) **Approves the flexible use of capital receipts efficiency strategy as the mechanism for funding the council's transformation related and invest to save expenditure as set out in Appendix 6 and potentially a capitalisation**

- direction from government to cover the 2026/27 DSG borrowing costs should it be granted.
- viii) Approves the capital investment programme (CIP) as set out in paragraphs 66 to 82 and Appendix 7.
 - ix) Approves the asset management plan as set out in Appendix 8.
 - x) Agrees the treasury management strategy (TMS) and prudential indicators as set out in paragraphs 84 to 87 and Appendix 9.
 - xi) Accepts and supports the formal advice of the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of the reserves as set out in paragraphs 102 to 109 and Appendix 10.
- (b) Agree to borrow £95.7m to fund the 2026/27 excess Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) High Needs DSG revenue expenditure above the government grant being made available. This is also based on previous assurance from government that the council can exceed its borrowing thresholds temporarily based on their commitment to return the SEND system to financial sustainability;
 - (c) Delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Director of Finance, Leader, and Portfolio Holder for Finance, the allocation of any additional resources that become available through the final 2026/27 local government finance settlement or any other means;
 - (d) Approves the chief officers' pay policy statement 2026/2027 for consideration and approval by the council in accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 as set out in paragraphs 111 to 113 and Appendix 12; and
 - (e) Note amendments to the Council's Shared Vision (Appendix 1b), updated to reflect changes to political and officer leadership, the list of milestones to reflect progress made in the last two years and areas of focus for 2025 to 27. The vision, ambitions and priorities remain unchanged.

Voting: Unanimous

Portfolio Holder: Finance

Reason

The council is required to set an annual balanced budget presenting how its financial resources, both income and expenditure, are to be allocated and utilised.

Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Cabinet acknowledged the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Board and in relation to this the Leader confirmed that the Cabinet accepted the recommendation and advised that they would collaborate with

the Chair and the Board to explore ways in which the questions could be improved for the following year.

133. Pokesdown Railway Station

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Response, Environment and Energy 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.

Cabinet was advised that on 11 January 2022, the Council approved a contribution of up to £2.6m towards the Pokesdown Railway Station Improvement Project.

In relation to this Cabinet was informed that the original scope was expected to include replacement, or upgrade of the station building, a new forecourt with interchange facilities, CCTV and help point improvements, seating and shelter improvements in addition to converting the existing lift shafts to passenger use and repairing and painting the footbridge and canopies (all subject to available budget).

Cabinet was advised that the project had not been delivered, that detailed timescales and costs were undetermined, and that the expected scope had been reduced to the lifts and canopies over the platforms only, and that in addition at the same time, the cost of borrowing has increased.

In relation to this Cabinet was advised that Cabinet consideration of the above and a recommendation was sought from Cabinet regarding the council commitment to the project.

In presenting the report the Portfolio Holder detailed the history of the project and expressed disappointment that the Council was unable to continue with this at this time. Further to this the Portfolio Holder advised that he hoped that funding could still be found in some other form, but highlighted that this wouldn't be by way of a loan.

Councillor Patrick Canavan addressed the Cabinet as a Ward Member stressing the importance of the project, highlighting that contractors were due to commence work in the summer and urging Cabinet members to reconsider the recommendation and to continue to fund the project.

Councillor Eleanor Connolly addressed the Cabinet as a Ward Member highlighting the benefits of the scheme for BCP residents and the local economy.

Councillor George Farquhar addressed the Cabinet as a Ward Member supporting the comments of the other ward members and appealing to the Cabinet to not pull the funding at this stage and to look for other sources of funding. Further to this Councillor Farquhar expressed thanks to the Portfolio Holder for his continued engagement.

Cabinet discussed the report in detail acknowledging the frustrations expressed by ward members but emphasising the pressures on the budget.

In addition, Cabinet highlighted that the station was not a council asset, and that there were competing pressures on the budget to fund the councils core responsibilities.

Further to this Cabinet highlighted that the plan had changed multiple times, and that whilst this was a difficult position that DDA compliance was the responsibility of the provider.

RECOMMENDED that Cabinet recommends to Council withdrawal of the offer of a £2.6m contribution to the Pokesdown Railway Station Improvements project.

Voting: Unanimous

Portfolio Holder: Climate Response, Environment and Energy

Reason

1. Approval for the contribution was 4 years ago. The annual repayment for borrowing the contribution has increased from £140k per year in 2022 to over £195k per year in 2026. This means that a total of £9.75m would now be paid by the council across the next 50 years if it continues to part fund the project.
2. Supporting the project would create a £55k per year additional pressure for the cost of borrowing. Withdrawing the council's financial contribution to this project would therefore in-effect create a £195k per year saving helping the council to safeguard statutory (essential) services.
3. The proposed scope of the project has reduced.
4. As of January 2026, whilst there has been email correspondence stating that the total budget has been increased there is no firm assurance from partners that the project is deliverable within the available budget.

134. Urgent Decisions taken by the Chief Executive in accordance with the Constitution

Cabinet was advised that no urgent decisions had been taken in accordance with the Constitution since the last meeting of the Cabinet.

135. Cabinet Forward Plan

The Leader advised that the latest Cabinet Forward Plan had been published on the Council's website.

The meeting ended at 4.33 pm

CHAIRMAN