
CABINET

Wednesday, 18th September, 2024

Present: Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP (in the Chair), Councillors Vanessa Alexander, Noordad Aziz, Scott Brerton, Stewart Eaves, Melissa Fisher, Kate Walsh and Kimberley Whitehead

In Attendance: Councillors Danny Cassidy, Jodi Clements, Zak Khan and Kath Pratt.

Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP, Leader of the Council, announced the following matter prior to the formal business of the meeting.

The Council had now received an offer from Homes England of £30m from the Brownfield, Infrastructure and Land Fund (BIL) to advance the Huncoat Garden Village (HGV) project.

The Cabinet was committed to reviewing all major projects under development to ensure that they met the Borough's needs. Accordingly, a Cabinet Working Group would be established to lead on engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including Homes England.

The Council wished to thank all stakeholders for their contributions to date. Any decisions taken would ultimately need to be in the best interests of Hyndburn.

The Leader had recently been invited to a meeting of the Huncoat Forum by Councillor Dave Parkins, at which residents had posed some challenging questions. One criticism from residents was that their views had not been taken on board so far. However, they did recognise the need for new local housing generally. The community had expressed its thanks that the Leader had taken time to meet with them.

The Cabinet would review this important decision in the very near future.

142 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence submitted on this occasion.

143 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no reported declarations of interest or dispensations granted.

144 Minutes of Cabinet

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 30th July 2024 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Resolved - **That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.**

145 Reports of Cabinet Members

Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities

Councillor Melissa Fisher reported on the following:

Taxi Licensing

The Council was required to review taxi licensing fees on an annual basis. It was not allowed to make a profit from the fees, but could recover its costs. The new administration was proposing not to increase the individual fees for renewal of private hire and hackney carriage licences for next year. This was in recognition of the current financial pressures on drivers.

Deputy Leader of Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Education and Skills

Councillor Noordad Aziz reported on the following:

Leisure Transformation

Members were reminded that the new administration had given a commitment to review all major projects underway. As part of this process the Council was approaching the end of the Leisure Transformation Review. This was a key component of the Council's strategy to ensure that residents were healthier and more active. The report was now in the process of being finalised and should be available in time for the next Cabinet meeting.

Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

Councillor Stewart Eaves reported on the following:

Refuse Collection Vehicles

The Council had recently taken possession of 5 new refuse collection vehicles (RCVs) for Waste Services. Unfortunately, one vehicle had been damaged by a tipper truck at Whinney Hill on its second day of operation.

Food Waste Pod

A demonstration vehicle with a new food pod collection option will be trialled later this year.

Waste Transfer Station

Work was ongoing to find a solution to the issue of a new waste transfer station.

Fixed Penalty Notices

S.46 advice notices (Environmental Protection Act 1990) had been issued to 518 persons for the period May to September 2024. Second warning letters had then been issued to some 97 residents and, ultimately, 13 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued.

National Pest Awards

The Portfolio Holder had been pleased to attend the National Pest Awards 2024, at which Hyndburn Borough Council's Pest Control Team had won the category of Local Authority of the Year against competition from Liverpool City Council and Westminster City Council.

Members noted the excellent service provided by Lee Taylor, Pest Control Manager, and his Team.

Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Arts

Councillor Kimberley Whitehead reported on the following:

Green Flag Award for Memorial Park

Memorial Park had gained the latest Green Flag award, with the Council still holding the record for the highest number of Green Flag awards held by any local authority in Lancashire with 11. This highlighted the Council's on-going investment in green spaces and a commitment to improving community well-being and health.

Thanks were due to various community organisations behind the scenes and dedicated Parks staff. The award was celebrated with a well-attended Picnic in the Park event organised by the Friends of Memorial Park.

In addition, a rededication ceremony for the First World War memorial was due to be held in the park on Saturday 28th September 2024.

Pitch Fees

The fees for sports pitches across the Borough would be frozen for the upcoming year. The Council understood the financial pressures people were under and wanted to remove barriers to accessing sport, which played a key role in uniting communities and improving health. There remained spare capacity for pitch hire and it was hoped that by freezing the fees this would encourage further take up.

Accrington Pals Memorial Garden Project

The Accrington Pals Memorial Garden project had now been completed. This memorial was a vital part of the town's heritage, honouring the sacrifices made by thousands of our residents. The newly transformed garden was a beautiful public space and the sculpture was incredibly moving. Thanks were due to everyone involved, especially the Town Centre Greening Group, whose contributions had been instrumental in the project's success.

The Portfolio Holder had visited several times since the installation of the sculpture last week, and had witnessed first-hand members of the public gathering around and taking a quiet moment for reflection.

The new sculpture had been designed by renowned garden designer and landscaper John Everiss and added a profound touch to the garden. Some of the artist's other work could be seen in Normandy, France, at the D-Day 75 garden in Arromanches.

The memorial garden now stood as an essential open area in the town centre, offering a peaceful haven for relaxation and reflection while honouring the rich heritage of Accrington.

A rededication ceremony for the Pals memorial was due to take place at 10.30am on Saturday 21st September 2024.

Culture and Heritage Strategy

The Council's Culture and Heritage Strategy was close to being finalised and would be presented to a Cabinet meeting in the near future. A new engagement space would be

available in Market Chambers and would be accessible to groups, including local schools. A site visit with the local Member of Parliament, Sarah Smith MP, was due to take place tomorrow.

Enlighten Event

An Enlighten Event was due to take place between Friday 25th October and Saturday 26th October between 5pm and 9pm. Five of the heritage buildings in Accrington Town Centre were set to be transformed by displays of light-art and performance, located both in and around them. The event locations comprised St James' Church, Accrington Town Hall, Accrington Library, Market Chambers and the Victorian Arcade.

Thanks were due to the pupils at St Andrew's Primary School for helping with the promotion of the event.

Ukrainian Delegation

In August, the Council had welcomed a further delegation from Khust. A progress report on town twinning would be provided to the Council at its meeting on 26th September 2024. An invitation had also been extended to Councillor Marlene Haworth to serve on the proposed Working Group.

Town Centre and Market

The Portfolio Holder was in regular contact with the market traders and was working with Steve Riley, Executive Director (Environmental Services) and the Market Manager, to ensure that the Council dealt proactively with any issues and addressed any concerns. However, no negative feedback had been received to date. A briefing was planned next month for the traders and local businesses on current progress of the project.

Events

The summer had been a busy period for events. Some very successful events had taken place, included the Amazing Accrington Soap Box Challenge, Big Transport Weekend and, last weekend, the Heritage Fun Day at the Haworth Art Gallery. The latter event had included local music teacher and musician Joe Bamford on the ukulele, who deserved special thanks.

Accrington Stanley Fireworks Event

The Council were once again pleased to be sponsoring the Accrington Stanley Fireworks Event, due to be held on the 3rd November 2024. The display was now in its 7th year. The Council was keen to show its support for the football club and the great community space and events that they provided.

National Hate Crime Awareness Week

The Council and elected members were currently working with a local community organisation on the Council's communications around National Hate Crime Awareness Week – 12th to 19th October 2024. This was a cross-party initiative and Councillor Cassidy had been involved from the Opposition Group. The aim was to encourage Hate Crime reporting to the Police, councils and third-party organisations.

Equality and Diversity

The Council's Equality and Diversity Policy was due for renewal at the end of 2025, so work on the next strategy would begin at the end of the year.

Portfolio Holder for Business and Growth

Councillor Scott Brerton reported on the following:

Business and Growth

Last week a successful event had taken place arranged by Amazing Accrington, involving Sarah Smith MP and local business leaders. The Portfolio Holder continued to meet regularly with the MP to discuss their shared vision for Hyndburn.

Studio

Unfortunately, the Council had been made aware of more potential redundancies at Studio. This was concerning, given that this firm was a major employer in the Borough. The Portfolio Holder had been in touch with the owners, Frasers Group, for an update, but to date no reply had been received.

East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce

Meetings had recently taken place between East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and various businesses. It was purported that Blackburn with Darwen and Burnley were more welcoming for business. However, this was believed to be a perception rather than the reality. The Council's Economic Development Manager, Salma Chaudhry, had already greatly improved Hyndburn's offer and thanks were accorded to her. The improvements made so far were the first steps on a longer journey of supporting economic development.

Engagement with Accrington Stanley FC

The Portfolio Holder and Councillor Whitehead were already working closely with Accrington Stanley FC and were building a good relationship with the club's new Commercial Director, Warren Eastham.

Business Workshops/Business Drop-In Sessions

Numerous business workshops and drop-in session had been publicised on the Council's social media over the last few months. The events let local business know about funding and other support. Further drop-in sessions were due to be held on the following dates:

- 17th October 2024 – St Johns, Baxenden;
- 14th November 2024 – Great Harwood Library.

Northlight Estates, Brierfield

The Portfolio Holder had visited Northlight Estates, Brierfield, to gain an understanding of the type of development possible in heritage premises. This former mill had been converted into residential apartments and state of the art business facilities. Hyndburn had previously undertaken a similar project at the Globe focused on business accommodation.

Accrington and Rossendale College

The Portfolio Holder was due to meet shortly with Accrington and Rossendale College. It was important for the Council to have a constructive relationship with the further education sector. In particular, the Portfolio Holder noted the provision of a successful rail operatives course at the College, which offered a route into a well-paid career. It was hoped to discuss with the College how to build upon the experience of this type of course to develop further opportunities into employment.

Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Families

Councillor Kate Walsh reported on the following:

Net Zero Working Group

A meeting of the Net Zero Working Group had taken place earlier today. The group had discussed:

- Communications and the website content, including information on warmth and the Cosy Homes in Lancashire scheme; retrofitting advice and concerns about scams;
- The decarbonisation programme. It was hoped to submit a report to the Cabinet in the near future about proposals for works to decarbonise further public buildings; and
- A WARM Matters event, due to be held at Hyndburn Leisure Centre on 15th October 2024 from 10am to 2pm. The event was a drop-in session looking at wellness, advice, resource and money matters, to help tackle the energy and cost of living crisis.

Brookside Restoration Project

The Portfolio Holder and Councillor Whitehead had recently attended the launch of the Brookside Restoration project. The plan was to transform the former industrial site at Stanhill into a haven of biodiversity, habitat recovery, carbon capture and climate action. A programme of events had already been developed for the Autumn, which would include children's activities and some adults only events.

Labour Party Conference

The Portfolio Holder was due to attend the Labour Party Conference next week in Liverpool and would lead sessions around Sustainability in Hyndburn, as well as participating in networking.

Anti-Social Behaviour

At the last meeting the Portfolio Holder had reported on anti-social behaviour by youths in Great Harwood, Clayton-le-Moors, Rishton and Altham and had been working closely with the Police on this matter. Unfortunately, an incident last week had led to the closure of Rishton Library. Given the importance of the library as a community hub, the Portfolio Holder was due to meet with the MP and Lancashire County Council to discuss her concerns.

Councillor Zak Khan, Leader of the Opposition, asked a number of questions and made comments in relation to the verbal reports as outlined below:

- Taxi Licensing – assurance about covering the costs;
- Refuse Collection Vehicles – the extent of the damage to the RCV;

- Fixed Penalty Notices – a communications opportunity;
- National Pest Awards/Green Flag Award/War Memorials – congratulations;
- Culture and Heritage Strategy – Implications of the possible loss of UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant following the change of Government;
- Pitch Fees – support for the freeze in fees, marketing opportunities and a query about maintenance costs;
- Studio – ownership of the building and its availability for rent;
- Business and Growth – progress with the Economic Development Forum meetings and commencement of the Economic Investment Strategy;
- Northlight Estates – the likelihood of a similar project in Hyndburn;
- Net Zero Working Group – updates on plans to decarbonise Haworth Art Gallery, progress on Prospects' Coach Road Solar Meadow Project; and changing to bio-diesel fuel;

Responses were provided by the relevant Portfolio Holders and officers, as appropriate.

146 Performance Management Review

Members considered a report of Councillor Munsif Dad, Leader of the Council, updating the Cabinet on the latest performance management review and seeking approval to the new corporate performance monitoring procedure. The Leader provided a brief introduction to the report.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

After discussions with elected members (Scrutiny Committee September 2022), Service Managers (September 2023) and the Council's Management Team (November 2023), the Policy Team had carried out a review of the current performance mechanism to help identify and understand '*what does good performance management look like?*' The review had been presented to Scrutiny Committee on the 16th July 2024 and had elicited a number of suggestions now included within the Cabinet report.

One of the key aspects of good performance monitoring was being able to identify warning signs of failure. The government was encouraging Local Government to produce performance metrics that focused on efficiency, productivity, sustainability, transparency and accountability, aiming to produce effective and meaningful data.

What was evident was that effective performance management meant collecting measurable effective data with a purpose based on the following points:

1. Measurable - define purpose and targets;
2. Help drive service improvement & delivery;
3. Help the organisation become more efficient and productive;
4. Provide value for money;
5. Easy to compile not labour intensive;
6. Digital transformation;
7. Quality of data not quantity;

8. Accessible either via the website or regular reports;
9. Identifies warning signs of failure (Oflog*); and
10. Transparent and accountable (Oflog*).

*Note: Office for Local Government

Hyndburn's Service Managers were encouraged to review their performance information (KPIs) on a regular basis and identify how they could improve service delivery, efficiency, productivity and value for money (feedback to management team and produce annual service plans). Additionally, performance information should have measurable objectives, be able to track progress effectively, be purposeful, easy to collect and accessible with quantifiable, meaningful targets.

The Council followed a Performance Management Framework (set out in the report at Appendix 2), that helped it to communicate and track progress against its objectives and priorities. The aim was for the key performance indicators to cascade down to service delivery, allowing the Council to report its performance to help individuals understand their contribution to higher-level objectives. It was essential that the authority effectively monitored performance against its objectives, as laid out in the Council's Performance Management Framework. This allowed the Council to:

- understand how it was progressing against its corporate performance measures;
- shape service performance improvement;
- inform decision-making;
- inform its strategies and ensure it focused its resources where they were most needed; and
- empower local people and be accountable and transparent for its performance.

If no real purpose was gained from the collection of performance information, it was considered as an inefficiency and non-productive.

As part of the latest review, the Council had tried to understand how it used data to inform and make better decisions (for example, through service improvement, funding bids, identifying key priorities for the Borough), considering a variety of audiences and looking at what made good performance. As a result, the following recommendations had been put forward comprising three different types of performance information (Tiers 1 to 3):

- **Tier 1** – Council headline key performance indicators (KPIs)
 - Those key Council indicators where the Council had direct involvement within the outcome (such as Council Tax Collection Rates, Number of New Homes);
 - Limited to 40 KPIs to focus on main priorities;
 - Yearly comparisons to identify change;
 - DoT (Direction of Travel) symbol used to indicate performance improvement or decline
 - Benchmarking information to compare performance with peer authorities and national averages;

- Annually updated and displayed on the Council’s website with commentary for context.

(The list of Council KPIs was provided as an Appendix 1a to the report)

- **Tier 2** – Hyndburn wide indicators

- Those Borough wide KPIs where the Council had indirect involvement in the outcome, but which were still significant and important (such as population growth, child poverty, wage levels etc);
- Benchmarking information to compare performance with peer authorities and national averages;
- DoT (Direction of Travel) symbol used to indicate change.

(The list of Hyndburn wide KPIs was provide as Appendix 1b to the report)

- **Tier 3** – Corporate Strategy Outcomes

- Updated annually providing progress on Corporate Strategy actions and outcomes;
- Presented to Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

It was important to note that the Council produced a variety of performance information that accompanied reports and strategies that were submitted to Cabinet and Full Council as part of the evidence gathering process to help inform the decision making process. As highlighted in the Performance Management Framework (Appendix 2), all teams would have annual Service Plans that would include Service Level KPIs to drive efficiency and service improvements.

It was also important that the new mechanism was flexible, so that any changes to local priorities or national data collection requirements could be accommodated.

To assist with accountability and transparency, all 3 Tiers of information would be published on the Council’s website and compiled into an Annual Report (including the Council’s key achievements) and presented to Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

The purpose of the new performance monitoring mechanism was not to achieve a rating or ranking on a Local Authority scoreboard, but to drive improvement and identify warning signs of failure by monitoring performance data through Service Managers updates to CMT and produce an annual performance report for Scrutiny Committee (December 2024) and Cabinet.

There were no alternative options for consideration or reasons

Resolved

- That the Cabinet:

- (1) Supports the proposed new approach to performance management as set out at Section 4.1 of the report;**

(2) Supports the production of an annual performance report for presentation to the Cabinet and the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

147 Exclusion of the Public

This matter was not put, because Item 7 on the agenda, the exempt Item, had been withdrawn prior to the meeting.

148 Disposal of Land at Back Lane, Baxenden

This Item had been withdrawn.

149 National Planning Policy Framework Consultation

The Cabinet considered a report of Councillor Munsif Dad, Leader of the Council, on the Government's consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024. The consultation would set out key issues which might have implications for Hyndburn, including proposed changes to:

- a) The delivery of new homes and the standard methodology for calculating annual housing need;
- b) The approach to brownfield, Green Belt and the new policy definition of "grey belt";
- c) Local Plan preparation intervention criteria; and
- d) Increases to planning application fees.

The Leader noted the particular significance of a potential increase in the number of new homes required, from 194 per year to 313 per year, and the pressure that this might put on Hyndburn's Green Belt, as well as infrastructure and service delivery. He also highlighted the transitional arrangements referred to in Paragraph 4.13 of the report. Given that Hyndburn was at the Regulation 19 stage of the production of its Local Plan it could continue housing development at the lower number of homes. However, if the current Plan was not progressed, the new standard method of calculating annual housing need would apply.

Councillor Zak Khan raised a number of matters in relation to the HGV project, as outlined below:

- The consequences of having to develop new Local Plan, if the HGV project was not progressed;
- Whether a deadline had been attached to acceptance of the grant offer from Homes England, if so, what was the date;
- The consequences for future developments of not accepting the grant funding;
- The potential threat to other Green Belt land if a higher housing requirement was in place;
- A query about the level of support by the MP for a Strategic Rail Freight Terminal.

The Leader replied to the individual points raised and confirmed that the Council was engaged in a dialogue with Homes England about the review and potential outcomes. The review would be completed within the relevant timeframe.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

The Government was consulting on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) until September 24th 2024. The consultation built on Labour's election manifesto by reaffirming the commitment to delivering 1.5million homes in England over the next five years and committing to "get Britain building again". The consultation covered a wide range of issues, but the report focused only on those which were most relevant for Hyndburn.

The report set out the proposed changes, but also indicated some of the potential implications for Hyndburn, including what these changes might mean for the emerging Local Plan.

The key proposed changes to the NPPF were explained in detail in the report under the following headings:

- Planning for the homes we need;
- A new standard method for assessing housing need;
- Brownfield, Green Belt and grey belt proposals;
 - *Green Belt Release through plan-making;*
 - *Green Belt release through Decision Making;*
 - *Expected contributions for Green Belt development;*
- Delivering affordable, well-designed homes and places;
 - *Meeting the needs of looked after children;*
- Changes to planning application fees;
- The future of planning policy and plan making; and
- Changes to local plan intervention criteria.

The potential implications for Hyndburn were as follows:

The new standard method generated an annual housing need figure of 313 dwellings. This was significantly higher than that produced by the previous method, which was around 50 dwellings, and over 60% higher than the proposed Local Plan annual requirement of 194 dwellings. The Plan was considered to be at an advanced stage so, if the Council proceeded to Examination with the current emerging Local Plan housing requirement, it would not have to apply the new standard method and could retain the proposed figure of 194 dwellings per year. This would still be subject to scrutiny as part of the Examination, but it was considered to be a much more realistic figure and the Council could demonstrate that this level of delivery had actually been achieved in recent years.

In the meantime, until an up-to-date housing requirement was adopted, the Housing Delivery Test would use the new standard method as the default target that the Council would be measured against. Any future Plans would also need to use the new standard method as the basis for its housing requirement and identify land to meet this accordingly. Either way, it was likely that the Council would be expected to identify or grant permission for a greater amount of housing land than it has in the past.

This would have significant impacts on the amount of land required for new development in Hyndburn. The Borough's urban areas were tightly constrained by Green Belt, and although the emerging local plan had sought to prioritise previously developed sites, an increase in housing numbers of the magnitude proposed would result in additional land currently in the Green Belt and Countryside having to be released for development.

The development of new housing, was normally associated with the development of land for employment uses. The additional requirement would therefore potentially also increase the amount of land required for employment development. This would need to be the subject of further evidence based work.

Low land values in Hyndburn often meant that it was not always possible to deliver some of the infrastructure improvements through uplifts in land values that would be delivered in other parts of England. This resulted in an inequality of service provision and should be recognised through an increased need to fund the additional infrastructure needed to support the development of new housing on the scale proposed.

The low land values stemmed from a comparatively low level of demand for new housing in the Borough. Whilst it was of course possible for the planning system to allocate land for new housing, it was also necessary to develop that land for housing. Local authorities across Lancashire and the North West faced similar levels of increase in their housing numbers and it was not unreasonable to question whether the house building industry was able to deliver this level of increase or whether it would simply cherry pick the best sites in areas with more buoyant land values. This would need to be subject to further work.

In relation to the proposed new approach to Green Belt, if the Council submitted its current emerging Plan before the transition deadline, it could be examined under the old system which had a stricter approach to Green Belt release and did not include considerations such as “grey belt”. Again, however, any future Plan would be tested against new national policy and was likely to need to consider further Green Belt development.

Members were also asked take note of the proposal to include a requirement to take specific account of looked after children when they were assessing housing needs. The Council were currently undertaking work to investigate the extent of applications for children’s care homes, along with other HMOs, with a view to better regulate them in terms of permitted development rights and planning permissions. The implications of the proposed requirements would need to be explored further.

Officers considered that the proposed changes could have significant implications for Hyndburn and, in particular, they were concerned that new housing targets would be difficult to achieve and would result in the need to allow development on large areas of land which might not otherwise have been considered suitable. Members were asked to give delegated authority to officers to provide a detailed response to Government, setting out these concerns and to make comments on other proposed changes, where relevant.

Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

Responding to the Government consultation was not a mandatory requirement, but it was important that the views of a wide range of local authorities were made clear to Government. Hyndburn had a particular set of circumstances which varied both from local authority areas in other parts of the country and from other parts of Lancashire. Therefore, Officers believed that a response should be made in order to represent the Borough.

Resolved

- That Cabinet:

- (1) Notes the contents of the report and Appendix 1;**
- (2) Gives delegated authority to the Council’s Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) and the Chief Planning and**

Transportation Officer, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Planning, to provide a more detailed consultation response to Government on behalf of Hyndburn Borough Council.

150 Governance Arrangements for the Cabinet Action Fund Grants

Members considered a report of Councillor Munsif Dad, Leader of the Council, updating Cabinet on the Governance arrangements for the £20,000 Cabinet Action Fund. The Leader provided a brief introduction to the report.

Councillor Noordad Aziz indicated the process was more transparent than the previous Community Chest scheme and would lead to a fairer distribution of funding to community groups.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

The Leader of the Council had announced to Cabinet at its meeting on 30th July 2024 that a Cabinet Action Fund of £20,000 would be created to provide vital support to residents and address needs within the community.

A sum of £20,000 had been identified from within the current revenue budget that could be used for this purpose for 2024/2025, and which could also be used in respect of the Cabinet Action Fund in future years' budgets.

Charities and community groups across all wards in the Borough would be invited to request grant funding from the Cabinet Action Fund. They would be asked to complete a short and simple application form to explain how much funding they were requesting and what they wanted to use the money for. These forms could be returned by email or handed to a ward councillor for delivery to the Council.

The intention was that these grants would be awarded to constituted and well-established community organisations and charities across the Borough, with each charity and community group being required to hold their own designated bank account.

The Fund would allow the Cabinet to address issues that might arise across all wards within Hyndburn and the Cabinet would collectively consider how they could use this money to:

- Support voluntary organisations or key service providers that might be under pressure;
- Support the provision of events that benefited the community;
- Address pressing community needs.

The grants might be used for both revenue and capital purposes, but would not be given where funding would create on-costs or future maintenance costs for the Council unless those could be accommodated within existing budgets.

It was proposed that the grant requests would be assessed by a Cabinet Working Group comprising 3 members of the Cabinet and that their recommendations for the award of funding would be presented to the Leader and Executive Director (Resources) for approval and payment.

It was also proposed that a regular update would be made to Cabinet on the level of grants awarded and the community benefits and achievements that had been generated.

The grants awarded under the scheme were not considered to meet the definition of subsidy within the Subsidy Control Act 2022, as the aim was not to subsidise commercial enterprises bringing goods and services to market. Instead, the funding would be directed to voluntary and not for profit organisations to support voluntary, community activities in the Borough.

The request process would enable bids for support to be received throughout the financial year.

The request process would not be too onerous, as the total budget was £20,000. However, each request would be asked to state the community benefit that would be achieved by receiving any funding.

The Cabinet Working Group would consist of the following elected members:

- Cllr Noordad Aziz – Joint Deputy Leader of the Council
- Cllr Vanessa Alexander – Resources & Council Organisation
- Cllr Kimberley Whitehead – Culture, Heritage & Arts

All payments would be made by BACS into the organisation's bank account as requested along with their request for support. Before Payment was made the recipient would be asked to counter-sign a simple offer letter. This would enable the Council to recover the funding should the money not be spent or be misspent by the applicant.

The grant would have to be used for the purpose stated in the request for support and evidence of this might be required, should the Council request it. In the event of the funding not being spent in accordance with its purpose, the Council would require organisations to return any used grant back to the Council.

All organisations would need to agree to the Council undertaking public relation activities in relation to the grant award and progress.

Alternative Options Considered and Reasons for Rejection

Members could decide not to set up the proposed fund.

Resolved

- That Cabinet:

- (1) Agrees the process for approval of any requests to, and payments from, the Cabinet Action Fund, as detailed in the report**
- (2) Forms a Cabinet Working Group (comprising 3 Cabinet members) to evaluate applications for funding from the Cabinet Action Fund and make recommendations to the Leader of the Council and Executive Director (Resources).**

- (3) Notes that Cabinet will receive further reports setting out how the Cabinet Action Fund has been spent and what has been achieved or delivered with the funding.**
- (4) Approves the use of the £20,000 from within existing budgets and any virement that may be required to transfer funds in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules.**

151 Domestic Abuse Statutory Duty Funding: Award of Grant to HARV Outreach Team

The Cabinet considered a report of Councillor Melissa Fisher, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, outlining the revenue grant funding the Council had been awarded by the former Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHG) now Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to continue to provide support in safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse in the Borough. The report also identified how the Council proposed to utilise this funding and sought Cabinet approval to extend the agreement with HARV Outreach Team (HARV) who were a registered charity (CN 1069367) and a registered company (CN 106673278) to enable them to continue their support service to victims of domestic abuse.

Councillor Fisher highlighted some of the key achievements of HARV in 2023/24, which included supporting 54 residents in their homes, receiving 83 referrals to move away and supporting 79 of those to move away to safe accommodation. It was essential to continue to provide this type of support. Councillor Khan also welcome the provision of the support.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (the Act) had come into force on the 1st October 2021. The Act placed a duty on local authorities to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse, including children, had access to safe accommodation and support when they needed it. It included a wide range of provisions intended to raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.

The Act was supported by statutory guidance and required local authorities to have regard to the guidance when carrying out its functions under the Act. The guidance distinguished between what it described as Tier 1 (upper tier local authorities) and Tier 2 local authorities (district councils). The Act and guidance required "Tier 2" authorities to cooperate with the upper tier authority so far as reasonably practicable when requested to do so. Hyndburn Borough Council as a Tier 2 local authority was therefore required to cooperate with Lancashire County Council, the Tier 1 local authority.

The Act and supporting guidance placed the provision of safe accommodation and domestic abuse support as central to the duties. This included advocacy support, preventative advice, and specialist support for victims with protected characteristics, support for children including play therapy and child advocacy, housing related support, and counselling for adult victims and children. Safe accommodation included refuge, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes and move-on accommodation, but did not include generic bed and breakfast homeless units/hostels not dedicated to safe provision for domestic abuse victims.

The Government provided funding to Local Authorities to cover the cost of the duty to provide support in safe accommodation. The funding was allocated in Lancashire to the County Council (Tier 1) and to District Councils (Tier 2).

Hyndburn Council had been awarded £33,184 for 2024-25 to enable it to cooperate with Lancashire County Council in the delivery of this duty.

In line with the duty to cooperate, Hyndburn Council had sought advice from Lancashire County Council on using Hyndburn's grant allocation to enhance HARV's existing services for victims of domestic abuse in the Borough, which comprised:

- Provision of emergency accommodation;
- Support to stay in their own accommodation safely;
- Support to access legal remedies to enable them to remain in their homes; and
- The employment of a weekend emergency safe accommodation worker.

The grant would be used by HARV to continue to employ an additional refuge worker to provide weekend cover for emergencies and also to ring fence an existing accommodation unit for referrals by the Council's Housing Advice and Homelessness Team.

Lancashire County Council had welcomed the proposal to enhance HARV's services and saw this as linking with the outreach support they had commissioned with HARV to provide long-term support for victims.

Hyndburn's grant funding was specifically for Hyndburn and would be used to support local victims of domestic abuse.

HARV had been providing specialist services to vulnerable children and families in Hyndburn and Ribble Valley since 1998. The services they provided were built around the diverse needs and issues of individuals, families and the communities in which they worked. During this time the Council had supported HARV's work to provide a variety of services including access to accommodation, outreach support and sanctuary scheme measures to keep victims safe in their own homes.

Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

The Council could consider awarding the funding to other agencies, however HARV was the only specialist agency in the Borough providing accommodation and support services for victims of domestic abuse and by making the grant award to HARV, it would enable HARV to continue this in the Borough.

Resolved

- That Cabinet:

- (1) Notes that the Council has secured grant in the sum of £33,184 for 2024/25 for the support of victims of domestic abuse across the Borough.**
- (2) Approves the Council entering into a grant funding agreement with HARV Outreach Team to enable support to victims of domestic abuse in the Borough.**
- (3) Notes that the Subsidy Control Act has been considered and the definition of a subsidy has not been met as HARV will not be engaging in**

an economic activity, therefore, it will not be considered as an enterprise for the purpose of the subsidy control regime.

- (4) Delegates authority to the Head of Regeneration and Housing in consultation with the Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) to draw up, finalise and execute agreements to grant HARV funding to provide support to victims of domestic violence.**

152 Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) Grant Funding

Members considered a report of Councillor Melissa Fisher, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, outlining the additional revenue grant funding the Council had been awarded by the former Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), now Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), to continue with the existing Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) project in the Borough which would currently provide 10 units of accommodation and support until 31st March 2025. The report also identified how the Council proposed to utilise this funding and sought approval to enter into agreement with Stepping Stone Projects (SSP) who were a registered charity (CN 1004375) and a company limited by guarantee to enable them to continue their support service to occupants of the RSAP accommodation which was provided to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Councillor Fisher gave a brief introduction to the report. Councillors Whitehead and Walsh also spoke in favour of the decision and applauded the wider support work undertaken by the Council's Housing Team and voluntary groups such as Maundy Relief.

Councillor Brerton declared a general interest in this matter (outside the scope of the Members' Code of Conduct) as a former employee of Onward Homes.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

In 2018 the Government had published a national Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan aiming to reduce rough sleeping and eliminate it by 2027. The Government had committed funding for programmes such as the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) programme and the RSAP to help achieve these aims.

Local authorities had been invited to apply for funds to address rough sleeping. The RSAP and RSI programmes had been designed to fund complementary interventions and activities for this purpose. There had been (and still was) a need in the Borough for accommodation for rough sleepers as a route off the street and to prevent people from sleeping rough. Consequently, the Council had submitted applications and had been successful in securing both RSI and RSAP grant funding.

The Council using this funding had worked successfully with a number of local charitable agencies such as Stepping Stone Projects and Maundy Relief to prevent and relieve rough sleeping. The RSAP accommodation and support project in Hyndburn had been successful in assisting a number of occupants to rebuild their lives and move on into independent housing.

The RSAP Programme provided for both capital and revenue funding to meet the cost of longer term accommodation and support to help rough sleepers rebuild their lives. Local authorities were expected to work with accommodation providers and specialist agencies to end rough sleeping, especially where local authorities were no longer a landlord.

Hyndburn had secured initial funding for 2021/2022 to provide access to accommodation and support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. Cabinet approval had been granted to enter into a grant agreement with Stepping Stone Projects to deliver support to rough sleepers living in five properties.

The former Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had invited Councils including those who had already been awarded grant to submit further proposals and bids for 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 for the RSAP. Proposals could include securing additional grant to support an existing RSAP project.

The Council had been awarded revenue grant to expand the existing RSAP project to provide access to accommodation and support for 5 more people who had been rough sleeping or were at risk of rough sleeping. This additional grant covered the cost of support from Stepping Stone Projects and furnishing additional accommodation. Cabinet approval had been granted to enter into a grant agreement with Stepping Stone Projects.

The former DLUHC had advised the Council earlier this year that funding had been made available to councils to extend the RSAP for another financial year. Hyndburn had been awarded grant of £75,000 until the 31st March 2025 to enable the continuation of Stepping Stone Project's support to 10 RSAP occupants.

Provision of support by SSP to vulnerable people living in RSAP accommodation contributed to the Council's response to preventing and reducing homelessness and rough sleeping. Furthermore, it would help to aid people's recovery, build positive lives, and prevent people from returning to homelessness and rough sleeping.

It also directly contributed towards the Council's corporate health and well-being priority by addressing health inequalities of vulnerable people who lived in RSAP accommodation.

The Grant would enable SSP to extend their existing support services to the RSAP client cohort.

Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

The Council could decide to reject this additional RSAP funding for 2024/25 but this would not maximise the funding available to the Council and potentially put at risk accommodation provision for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

RSAP funded interventions supported Hyndburn's Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It was widely recognised that housing and support for vulnerable people provided a quicker and more effective service to ensure vulnerable residents could move forward with their lives, and in the case of rough sleeping, preventing a cycle of rough sleeping.

Given the success of the RSAP project it was proposed to award the funding by way of grant to Stepping Stone Projects which would allow them to continue to support people they were currently working with until the end of March 2025. Targeting this grant in this way avoided potential disruption for each RSAP occupant and provided sufficient time to develop an exit strategy option over the next six months in the event that funding could not be secured to continue the RSAP project beyond March 2025

Resolved

- That Cabinet:

- (1) Notes that the Council has been awarded additional grant of £75,000 until the 31st March 2025 from the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme.**
- (2) Approves the Council entering into a grant funding agreement with Stepping Stone Projects to support RSAP occupants who have been rough sleeping or who are at risk of rough sleeping.**
- (3) Delegates authority to the Head of Regeneration and Housing in consultation with the Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) to draw up and finalise and execute agreements to grant Stepping Stone Projects funding to continue the support they are currently providing.**

153 Process for the Development of the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2025/2026

The Cabinet considered a joint report of Councillor Noordad Aziz, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Education and Skills, and Councillor Vanessa Alexander, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Council Organisation, providing an update on the process to produce the Council's Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2025/2026 and the impact of the risks and assumptions on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Councillor Noordad Aziz provided brief introduction to the report and highlighted the controlling group's intention to be transparent about decision making and the challenges faced by the Council, such as the provision of a waste disposal site/transfer station. He outlined the timetable for Budget-setting and development the Capital Programme provided in the tables at Paragraphs 7.2 and 8.2 of the report. He also thanked the officer team, led by the Executive Director (Resources), for their hard work.

Councillor Khan enquired about whether critical timelines could be applied to the individual risks identified within the report. Councillor Alexander responded that the various projects and associated risks were currently being reviewed, but it was not possible to give details of key dates at this stage. More information would be available as a when the relevant decisions had been taken. Councillor Aziz commented that the early identification and publication of risks was an improvement on the arrangements under the previous administration.

Approval of the report was not considered to be a key decision.

Reasons for Decision

The Council had approved its Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) at the Full Council meeting on 27th February 2024.

The development of the budget was a key element of the Council's financial governance processes. Starting this work early in the current financial year allowed adequate time to develop a range of options for the Council to consider when setting the budget for 2025/26.

The Council's approach to setting its budget and developing options formed part of the assessment of the Council's Value for Money (VfM) arrangements by the External Auditors.

The Council was expected to have in place a plan to deliver a balanced budget including savings proposals that were robust and deliverable. It was therefore important for the Council to achieve a balanced and sustainable budget over the life of its Medium-Term Financial Strategy to provide assurance to its External Auditors and to avoid any adverse commentary in the Auditor's Value for Money report.

The report included key risks and potential pressure in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The main risks related to the following matters, further details of which were set out in the report:

- Oswaldtwistle Civic Theatre;
- Repurposing of Mercer Hall;
- Crematorium/Cremators;
- Waste Disposal Site/Transfer Station;
- Food Waste Collections
- Hyndburn Leisure/Leisure Service Delivery Model;
- Huncoat Garden Village;
- Pay Award;
- Future Revenue Costs for Levelling Up Fund Projects;
- Posts Funded from Reserves or External Grants;
- Other Potential Revenue Pressures in year; and
- Investment Interest Returns

Funding for Local Government

The current Government's Spending Review period ran to the end of March 2025 (the 2024/25 financial year). This meant that, at this stage, there was no indication of funding levels for Government Departments (including the Department for Communities, Housing and Local Government (DHLCG)) beyond that date. The Government would need to undertake a new Spending Review in the Autumn, prior to implementing any changes for 2025/2026. This might be possible now that there was a new Government in place, and this could inform the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December.

What was clear was that there would be limited scope for the new Government to consider any of the proposed reforms to the Local Government Finance system. So, both the Business Rates Retention Scheme and Council Tax were likely to remain unchanged (although there might well be a review of the Council Tax Referendum thresholds). It was possible that areas such as the New Homes Bonus, the Services Grants and other such grant funding streams might be affected depending on the new Government's assessment of the state of the national finances and what, if any, actions were required, to curb Departmental public spending.

Assumptions for the Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy for Hyndburn Borough Council was set out in 3 scenarios:

- **Standard** – this scenario represented what the Council expected to be the most likely outcome for the year. The Council’s actual budget for the year was set based on this scenario.
- **Pessimistic** – this scenario represented what was expected to be a “worst case”.
- **Optimistic** – this scenario estimated a “best case”.

Given how early the Council was in the budget setting process and the unknowns at this point, (e.g. no indications had been received of changes in Government funding yet) the 3 scenarios could differ significantly at this stage.

There were several assumptions which were used as part of producing the budget. The main factors taken into account during the construction of the budget are as indicated below, with further details set out in the report:

- Pay award;
- Inflation;
- Utilities;
- Sales, fees and charges;
- Government grant income;
- Income from business rates; and
- Income from Council Tax (derived from the Council Tax Base and Council Tax Rate)

The table below shows the overall Council Tax Income which would be assumed under the three scenarios:

	2024/25	Standard	Pessimistic	Optimistic
Hyndburn BC Council Tax Income	£5,931,000	£6,157,300	£5,960,500	£6,177,500
Increase in Council Tax Income from 2024/25		£226,300	£29,500	£246,500

Budget Timetable

The Council had a legal requirement to set a balanced budget for the 2025/26 financial year before 11th March 2025. Hyndburn Borough Council’s budget would also have to be set after the budgets had been approved by the major Council Tax precepting authorities (eg. Lancashire County Council).

The timetable set out below ensured that the Council would meet its legal budget setting deadlines:

Action	Date
Process for the development of the budget report presented to Cabinet	18 Sept 2024
Initial Medium Term Financial Strategy report presented to Cabinet	16 Oct 2024
Cabinet Budget Working Group	14 Nov 2024
Cabinet Budget Working Group	5 Dec 2024
Provisional Finance Settlement expected to be published by Central Government (date to be confirmed)	Dec 2024
Council Tax Base Setting report approved by Cabinet	22 Jan 2025

Cabinet Budget Working Group	23 Jan 2025
Final Finance Settlement expected to be published by Central Government (date to be confirmed)	Feb 2025
Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue and Capital Budget reports presented to Cabinet	12 Feb 2025
Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue and Capital Budget reports presented to Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee	20 Feb 2025
Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue and Capital Budget reports agreed by full Council	27 Feb 2025

Capital Programme 2025/26

At the same Council meeting in February 2025, the Capital Programme for 2025/26 would be approved.

The timetable for the development of the Capital Programme was as set out below:

Action	Date
Process for the development of the budget report presented to Cabinet	18 Sept 2024
Capital Programme bidding process begins	27 Aug 2024
Deadline for submission of Capital Programme bids	30 Sept 2024
Capital Programme bids presented to Capital programme Working Group	15 Oct 2024
Cabinet Budget Working Group	14 Nov 2024
Cabinet Budget Working Group	5 Dec 2024
Cabinet Budget Working Group	23 Jan 2025
Capital Budget report presented to Cabinet	12 Feb 2025
Capital Budget report presented to Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee	20 Feb 2025
Capital Budget report approved by full Council	27 Feb 2025

There were several risks to be considered in the development of the Capital Programme and the key risks related to the following categories, further details of which were included in the report:

- Capital receipts;
- Useable reserves;
- Staffing capacity.

There were no alternative options for consideration or reasons

Resolved

- **That Cabinet:**

- (1) Notes the key risks and pressures to the delivery of the budget in 2024/25 and that these will be subject to consideration as part of the regular Budget Monitoring reports submitted to the Cabinet.**

- (2) Notes the timetable set out in the report for the development of the Council's Budget for 2025/26.**
- (3) Agrees the assumptions in Section 6 of the report, which will be reflected in the revised MTFS 2024/25 to 2026/27 that will be presented to Cabinet in October.**

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed