

FINANCE AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Thursday, 4th September 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor David Bennett in the Chair

Councillors Duncan McGregor (Vice-Chair), Rowan Clarke, Steve Fritchley, Sally Renshaw and Janet Tait.

Officers:- Theresa Fletcher (Section 151 Officer) (from Minute No. FCO9-25/26), Fiona Herrington (Deputy Section 151 Officer), Lesley Botham (Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager), Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director (Housing and Enforcement)), Natalie Etches (Head of Business Growth, Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Limited), Cheryl Staples (Corporate Policy and Programme Officer), Thomas Dunne-Wragg (Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting, observing, were Councillors Clive Moesby (Portfolio Holder for Resources), Sandra Peak, Catherine Tite, Rita Turner and Deborah Watson.

FCO3-25/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Chris Kane and Lisa Powell.

FCO4-25/26 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to be considered at the meeting.

FCO5-25/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

FCO6-25/26 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Steve Fritchley and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th May 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

Moved by Councillor David Bennett and seconded by Councillor Duncan McGregor

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th July 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

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FCO7-25/26 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the updated List of Key Decisions and Items to be Considered in Private in the document provided at the meeting.

Moved by Councillor David Bennett and seconded by Councillor Duncan McGregor
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in the Private document be noted.

FCO8-25/26 ANNUAL CORPORATE DEBT MONITORING PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25

The Deputy Section 151 Officer presented the report to the Committee.

The main sources of income for the Council's General Fund (GF) were Business Rates, Council Tax, a small number of government grants, and service-related income. The main source of income for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was dwelling rent, often referred to as 'housing rents'.

Examples of types of income included housing benefit overpayment, trade refuse, industrial unit rent, garage site rent, wardens service and alarms, and leisure hire of facilities.

This income was reported in two amounts with housing benefit overpayments identified separately from the rest.

Table 1 of the report detailed the sources of income for the Council at 31st March for the two financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25 for comparison:

	2023/24	2024/25	
position at end of	Q4	Q4	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
National Non-Domestic Rates	(30,709)	(35,770)	(5,061) *
Council Tax	(51,148)	(54,667)	(3,519) **
Housing Rents	(22,852)	(25,027)	2,175
Overpaid housing benefits	(1,324)	(1,139)	185
Sundry Debtors	(18,980)	(14,428)	(4,552)
	(125,013)	(131,031)	(6,018)

* This was 100%, the Council's share of this was 40%

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** This was 100%, the Council's share of this was 17.28% 2023/24 + 17.62% 2024/25

The figures in Table 1 showed an increase in income billed in the year for most sources. The reduction in income from housing benefit overpayments was good news – less claimants had received too much benefit, resulting in the Council having less income to reclaim.

The decrease in the sundry debtor's income was almost certainly due to the Dragonfly Companies' invoices raised being less in 2024/25 now that the arrangements with both companies were established.

Debt management was how the Council managed its arrears and debtors. Table 2 of the report detailed the level of arrears for the Council at 31st March for the two financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25:

	2023/24	2024/25	
position at end of	Q4	Q4	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
National Non-Domestic Rates	951,932	1,298,027	346,095 *
Council Tax	5,574,252	5,931,170	356,918 **
Housing Rents	1,736,048	1,669,853	(66,195)
Overpaid housing benefits	1,324,478	1,153,141	(171,337)
Sundry Debtors	1,026,101	1,135,776	109,675
	10,612,811	11,187,967	575,156

The figures in Table 2 showed arrears had increased in 2024/25 for National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR), Council Tax and sundry debtors. Individuals and businesses were still struggling to pay, depending on their individual circumstances – payment plans had been agreed to help debtors not get into arrears if possible.

The current levels of arrears for NNDR and Council Tax were the highest they had been in recent years, and sundry debtor arrears fluctuated depending on if large invoices were raised close to the 31st of March of the financial year but not paid until the April of the following financial year.

For the last 4 years when the impairment allowance levels had been assessed at year's end, the Council had increased them by over £3m in total (as a result of the financial effect of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic (the 'Pandemic') and Cost of Living Crisis (for both businesses and individuals)).

Table 3 of the report detailed the provision for impairment for each class of debtor at 31st March for the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25:

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	2023/24	2024/25	
position at end of	Q4 £'000	Q4 £'000	Variance £'000
National Non-Domestic Rates	(888,561)	(1,252,282)	(363,721) *
Council Tax	(3,164,608)	(3,467,101)	(302,493) **
Housing Rents	(1,312,962)	(1,322,045)	(9,083)
Overpaid housing benefits	(1,251,391)	(1,132,913)	118,478
Sundry Debtors	(399,337)	(504,914)	(105,577)
	(7,016,859)	(7,679,255)	(662,396)

As a local authority, it was necessary to have a debt collection process that adhered to legislation but ensured the maximum amount of income was collected.

The Council's debt collection processes had operated as normal for 2023/24 and 2024/25, but it was clear the Pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis had influenced businesses and individuals' abilities to pay (as the arrears levels still demonstrated).

For 2024/25, indicators for debt collection were monitored through the 'Perform' system and reported at the quarterly performance meetings where any areas of concern were raised. Targets for collecting income and reducing arrears for each class of debt were set and monitored. The performance data on debt collection was also reported quarterly to the Executive for information where any areas of concern.

Table 4 of the report detailed the movement since the financial year 2024/25 in the value of each source of income, the amount that was outstanding as arrears, and the impairment allowance which related to that source of income:

	Income £'000	Arrears £'000	Provision £'000
National Non-Domestic Rates	(5,061,000)	346,095	(363,721) *
Council Tax	(3,519,000)	356,918	(302,493) **
Housing Rents	(2,175,000)	(66,195)	(9,083)
Overpaid housing benefits	185,000	(171,337)	118,478
Sundry Debtors	4,552,000	109,675	(105,577)
	(6,018,000)	575,156	(662,396)

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Overall, in 2024/25 the Council had raised £6.018m (net) more in income. The arrears had increased by £0.575m but if excluded any reductions in arrears, the increase was £0.813m. Impairment allowances had increased by £0.662m (net).

The Council was required to write-off debt as soon as it was deemed uncollectable – this was to ensure the correct value of arrears was included on the Council's balance sheet at 31st March of each financial year. The Council's Constitution allowed the Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer, *'after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to authorise the write-off of bad debts up to an approval limit of £2,500'*.

The Executive approved the write-off of bad debts which were individually over £2,500 on receipt of a report, during the financial year. Table 5 of the report showed the value of bad debts written off over the previous financial year 2024/25:

	Write-offs more £2,500 £'000	than Write-offs less £2,500 £'000	than Total £'000
National Non-Domestic Rates	150,208	9,866	160,074
Council Tax	107,720	121,939	229,659
Housing Rents	18,621	30,814	49,435
Overpaid housing benefits	14,940	3,658	18,598
Sundry Debtors	0	5,070	5,070
	291,489	171,347	462,836

In all cases, every attempt was to be made by the Council (and agencies working with the Council) to collect the outstanding debt before a write-off was proposed.

Compared to the previous financial year, the Council had written off £0.087m more during 2024/25 – this was mainly for Business Rates and Council Tax arrears.

This debt was proving more difficult to collect as some businesses and individuals changed location and country more so than in previous years, making them harder to trace.

To a question on the impairment allowance levels increasing to over £3m in total, the Portfolio Holder for Resources reiterated that the Council pursued all debts when possible, though the aftermath of the Pandemic was still being felt. Numerous companies had also liquidated in that time, though the Council made all attempts to trace existing companies.

In conclusion, many individuals still struggled to pay Council Tax and companies Business Rates – it was important to be considerate on individual circumstances and work cooperatively to collect arrears, but it was equally important to continue chasing

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arrears.

A Member noted that in previous years the Council could be very successful in collecting arrears and in other years not as much. The Pandemic was also historically behind the Council and it was important to reduce the Council's £3m impairment allowance levels when possible. The Portfolio Holder was thanked for efforts made on this work.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources did not want the Council to lose capital and sought to reassure the Committee it was important to reduce debt and bring in all available income. The Council was also open to any / all ideas in the collection of debts from the Committee and Members.

Moved by Councillor Sally Renshaw and seconded by Councillor Janet Tait

RESOLVED that the Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee note the report concerning the Council's Corporate Debt as at 31st March 2025.

FCO9-25/26 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2024/25

The Deputy Section 151 Officer presented the report to the Committee. A Microsoft PowerPoint was also shown to the Committee that provided additional details.

It was stated the report had been provided to the previous inquorate meeting and had been submitted and approved by Executive on 28th July 2025.

The report detailed the 2024/25 outturn position with regard to the General Fund (GF), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Capital Programme (CP), the Treasury Management (TM) activities, and the earmarked reserves position.

Summarised at the attached Appendix 1 was the GF outturn position – this showed the Current Budget compared to the final Outturn position. Attached at Appendix 2 were the variances at service level.

The main variances against the current budget were shown in Table 1 of the report:

	£'000
Rent rebates and allowances	184
GoActive!	(320)
Year-end capital admin allowance	(100)
Pleasley Vale Business Park	(88)
Street scene services	(142)
Planning Development Control	(53)
Revenues and Benefits extra income	(69)
Salaries variances	(683)
Non-staff miscellaneous variances	(146)
Net cost of services	(1,417)
Debt Charges / Investment Interest	(91)
Extra contributions to GF from reserves / holding a/c's	(34)
Additional general government grants	(46)
Total Outturn Variance	(1,588)
Changes to GF balance since revised budget – until outturn	13
Contribution to Reserves – 2024/25 Outturn	(1,575)

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The use of earmarked reserves in 2024/25 was £2.119m. This reflected the expenditure incurred on projects at 31st March 2025, which had approval to use earmarked reserves.

At the end of the financial year, it had been necessary to agree transfers into reserves in preparation for future expenditure commitments, some from income received 2024/25.

Transfers to reserves totalled £5.773m – £1.575m higher than originally forecast (reflecting the outturn in Table 1). These consisted of:

- £0.200m contribution to the IT Reserve to fund future expenditure requirements;
- £0.200m contribution to the Legal Costs Reserve in preparation to fund future specialist legal advice, on matters such as the APSE case or planning applications;
- £0.100m contribution to the 3G Pitch Carpet Replacement Reserve, as a requirement of the grant conditions from an external funder;
- £0.350m contribution to the Building, Repair and Renewal Reserve to fund future unexpected works on the Council's buildings, for repairs such as at Pleasley Vale Business Park or security such as the post room changes – this was included within the General Reserve;
- £0.300m transfer to the Vehicle Replacement Reserve to finance new vehicles instead of borrowing and incurring interest costs;
- £0.170m transfer to the National Non-Domestic Rates Growth Protection Reserve to mitigate against future changes to the funding of the Council and help balance the final year of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP);
- £0.200m contribution to the General Reserve in anticipation of any Local Government Reorganisation costs incurred by the Council; and,
- £0.055m transfer to the Transformation Reserve as the remainder of the in-year surplus.

Attached at Appendix 7 was a table showing the Council's earmarked reserves position for both the GF and HRA. After the transfers to reserves had been made as part of the report, the GF had total earmarked reserves of £24.673m and the HRA had £3.396m – both at 31st of March 2025 (the total of £28.069m was shown in the Council's 2024/25 Accounts).

If this total figure was already an element of reserves committed to be spent. This was from previous reports to the Committee or delegated decisions which were approved prior to 2025/26 (in most cases).

The amount committed was £20.718m for the GF and £1.572m for the HRA. A brief description of the reserve and the unallocated balances of £3.955m and £1.824m respectively were provided at Appendix 7. Should any of these reserves prove unnecessary in the future, they would be moved back into unallocated GF or HRA resources (whichever was most appropriate).

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government could not yet inform where future losses in local authority budgets would occur – the Committee would be informed once known.

Attached at Appendix 3 and 4 was the HRA. The HRA position showed a number of variances during 2025/26. The main expenditure underspends were in relation to:

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- staff related budgets £0.178m within various sections of the HRA;
- £0.401 increased income from services; and,
- a combined saving of £0.275m against the stores-issues and sub-contractor cost budget.

A Member noted the HRA was performing better than expected. The Deputy Section 151 Officer reaffirmed the HRA had brought in a surplus of £0.810m. The report detailed this surplus and had been used to fund a contribution to the HRA Development Reserve – this would be available to fund future expenditure requirements.

Attached at Appendix 5 of the report were details of the CP expenditure incurred by the Council in 2024/25 on a scheme-by-scheme basis. The CP was summarised as follows:

General Fund:	Current Programme £'000	Outturn £'000	Variance £'000
GF Building Assets	9,990	4,225	(5,765)
GF ICT Schemes	788	243	(545)
Leisure Schemes	789	654	(135)
Disabled Facilities Grants	950	654	(296)
Investment Activities	533	533	0
GF Vehicle / Plant Replacements	3,598	1,804	(1,794)
General Fund Total:	16,648	8,113	(8,535)
HRA:	Current Programme £'000	Outturn £'000	Variance £'000
HRA New Build Properties	11,965	6,521	(5,444)
HRA Vehicle Replacements	1,399	1,027	(372)
Public Sector Housing Schemes	7,429	5,997	(1,432)
HRA ICT Schemes	42	4	(38)
HRA Total	20,835	13,549	(7,286)
Programme Total	37,483	21,662	(15,821)

In relation to the GF element of the CP during 2024/25, £8.535m was not undertaken. The Roseland Park and Crematorium at Shirebrook, ICT infrastructure and Vehicle replacements were the main variances.

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Additional details of the proposed carry forward amounts to 2025/26 were attached at Appendix 5 of the report were. These requests had related to individual schemes that were still in progress, where there were outstanding commitments, or where the scheme had been delayed. The carry forward amount was £13.822m with the impact on the 2025/26 capital programme.

A brief report on the TM activity of the Council for 2024/25 was attached at Appendix 6 – the Council had operated throughout 2024/25 within the Authorised and Operational Boundary limits approved in the TM Strategy (as approved by the Council January 2024).

Highlighted key points from the summary report were:

- The overall borrowing requirement of the Council (the Capital Financing Requirement) – £129.960m at 31st March 2025;
- Effective internal borrowing – £51.160m;
- The Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) debt – £78.8m;
- £7.2m repayments of PWLB debt in year;
- No new PWLB borrowing was undertaken in 2024/25;
- PWLB interest paid in 2024/25 – £2.837m; and,
- Interest received on investments – £1.272m.

The Council had operated in line with its agreed TM Strategy during the 2024/25 financial year. This ensured lending and borrowing arrangements had been prudent and sustainable, minimising the risk of financial loss to the Council. Effective management of these arrangements ensured that interest costs during 2024/25 were minimised in order to assist the Council's revenue position whilst interest had receivable risen.

The ongoing work and investment required for Pleasley Vale Business Park were raised. The Deputy Section 151 Officer informed the Council was aware of increasing costs and would continue reviewing the situation.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources understood the concern and stated more information on Pleasley Vale Business Park could be provided to a future meeting – there was a tremendous amount of work ongoing and still to organise, but all financial issues were closely monitored.

Moved by Councillor David Bennett and seconded by Councillor Duncan McGregor

RESOLVED that: 1) Members note the outturn position in respect of the 2024/25 financial year;

- 2) Members note the transfers to general fund earmarked reserves of £1.575m as outlined in detail in paragraph 2.3;
- 3) Members note the transfers to HRA earmarked reserves of £0.810m as outlined in detail in paragraph 2.14; and,
- 4) Members note the proposed carry forward of capital budgets detailed in Appendix 5 totalling £13.822m.

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FCO10-25/26 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q1

The Deputy Section 151 Officer presented the report to the Committee on the financial position of the Council following Quarter 1 2025/26's budget monitoring exercise for the General Fund (GF), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Capital Programme (CP) and Treasury Management (TM) activity.

The GF Revenue Account summary was attached at Appendix 1. The original budget for 2025/26 showed a contribution from the National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) Growth Protection Reserve of £0.049m, a deficit in effect. The current budget showed this to be a transfer to the reserve after adjustments had been made to the business rates figures for the actual 2025/26 NNDR1 return, and the estimated business rates surplus of £2.454m.

After the Council Tax increase, and after other small movements were included, the current budget overall showed a surplus of £0.139m. As savings were identified and secured, they were moved into the relevant cost centres within the main GF Directorates. Details of the net cost of each cost centre within the Directorates Attached was attached at Appendix 2.

Table 1 of the report showed the latest position of all years in the current Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP):

	2025/26 Budget £'000	2026/27 Budget £'000	2027/28 Budget £'000	2028/29 Budget £'000
Net Cost of Services	15,609	15,733	16,349	16,904
Net debt charges + investment interest	(1,635)	(2,068)	(2,415)	(2,619)
Net t/f to/(from) reserves + balances	1,209	568	524	471
Net t/f to/(from) NNDR Growth Protection Reserve	(49)	(4,964)	(5,017)	(4,180)
Parish precept	4,583	4,583	4,583	4,583
Funding from council tax, business rates and government grants	(19,717)	(13,852)	(14,024)	(14,206)
Use of GF balance	0	0	0	953

The Council had made the strategy to save extra income earned in years when more than estimated was received (to use these savings in future years' when income was reduced).

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Once work that began in August 2025 on the revised budgets had been completed, the revised position would be presented to Committee in late 2025. The work on the MTFP update and the new year would begin in Quarter 3 2025/26 and would be presented to Members January 2026.

The estimate of the reserve position was as follows:

	£
Opening Balance at 01/10/2024	(1,000,000)
Insurance claims settled during 2024/25	6,478
Closing Balance at 31/03/2025	(993,522)
Cost of settling current claims*	145,337
Estimated Balance at 30/06/2025	(848,185)

*This related to 2 live claims and leaves an estimated balance of £848,185.

The HRA summary for Quarter 1 2025/26 was attached at Appendix 3.

Details of the net cost of each cost centre within the HRA and some details for the larger variances was attached at Appendix 4.

The CP summary for Quarter 1 2025/26 was attached at Appendix 5.

The undertaken activity of the TM undertaken during Quarter 1 2025/26 was attached at Appendix 6.

A Member requested the work by Dragonfly Development Ltd., the profits it had generated, and the £0.300m profit brought in by Leisure Services be noted.

A Member requested the work by Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. and the income lost from void properties being below originally estimate (following more properties having been demolished than anticipated) also be noted. It was requested the staff be congratulated on their performance.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated the number of void properties was decreasing and that it was important to get vacant properties up and running at the earliest opportunity.

The report would be presented to Executive in the week after the Committee's meeting.

A Member requested the implications of Local Government Reorganisation on the District be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

Moved by Councillor Steve Fritchley and seconded by Councillor Duncan McGregor

RESOLVED that: 1) the Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee notes the monitoring position of the General Fund at the end of the first quarter as detailed on Appendix 1 (A net favourable variance of £0.903m against the profiled budget) and the key issues highlighted within this report; and,

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- 2) Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee notes the position on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Capital Programme and Treasury Management at the end of the first quarter (Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

FCO11-25/26 COUNCIL PLAN TARGETS PERFORMANCE UPDATE - APRIL TO JUNE 2025 (Q1)

The Corporate Policy and Programme Officer presented the report to the Committee.

For Quarter 1 2025/26, out of the 33 targets:

- 25 (76%) targets were on track;
- 1 (3%) extended;
- 3 (9%) not on track;
- 3 (9%) achieved; and
- 1 (3%) Quarter 1 2025/26 Update had yet to be received.

Out of the 58 key performance indicators:

- 37 (64%) indicators had a positive outturn;
- 10 (17%) indicators had a negative outturn;
- 7 (12%) indicators were within target; and,
- 4 (7%) were to be withdrawn / were no longer valid.

The Performance Summary for the Council's Customers was attached at Appendix 1.

The Committee was informed for CUS.05, the March 2025 target date was extended to March 2028 to match other existing target dates.

CSP.08 and CSP.09 had been agreed by Committee in April 2025 to remove from the data – they had been retained in the report to confirm this.

The average wait time for calls to be answered not exceeding 30 seconds was not met for Quarter 1 2025/26 (35 seconds). The Chair noted this had been an improvement on Quarter 1 2024/25 (43 seconds) – improvements were being made.

Stage 2 Complaints being answered within 20 working days was not met for Quarter 1 2025/26, with 2 Complaints received in June 2025 having little to no time to handle before the quarter had ended. A Member noted that while these 2 Complaints could have been removed from the figures, they remained accurate and the situation easy to explain.

Sundry Debtors arrears collected (quarterly) performed consistently off target. The Deputy Section 151 Officer reiterated from the previous items on the agenda that the Council continued to pursue all Council Tax and Business Rates arrears. It was also important to move as many customers as possible onto payments by Direct Debit to prevent forgotten / missed payments.

To a question on days of sickness per full-time employee not meeting set targets, and if any available details on long-term sickness could be provided, it was recommended Members review the agendas and minutes of the Safety Committee where such

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information was reported to.

The Head of Business growth left the meeting at 10:55 hours.

Current and former tenants' arrears as a percentage of rent due in the financial year were not met for Quarter 1 2025/26.

The Chair noted, for the Dragonfly Companies' key performance indicators, these targets had been negatively affected by external contractor performance, not the Companies.

Moved by Councillor Duncan McGregor and seconded by Councillor David Bennett
RESOLVED that the quarterly outturns against the Council Plan 2024-2028 targets be noted.

FCO12-25/26 **FINANCE & CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Work Programme 2025/26 to the Committee, which was attached at Appendix 1.

It was noted the 2 items for the 24th July 2025 meeting were crossed out due to those items being presented at the meeting.

The Chief Executive would be contacted on, if possible, providing an update on the implications of Local Government Reorganisation on the District to the Committee's meeting in November 2025.

Moved by Councillor Sally Renshaw and seconded by Councillor Duncan McGregor
RESOLVED that Members review this report and the Programme attached at Appendix 1 for approval and amendment as required. All Members are advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer should they have any queries regarding future meetings.

The meeting concluded at 11:06 hours.