

Cabinet

Monday 10 November 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Laing (Vice Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors: Aspinall, Briars-Delve, Cresswell, Dann, Haydon, Lowry, Penberthy and Stephens.

Also in attendance: Chris Avent (Green Estate Manager), Si Bellamy (Chief Operating Officer (virtual)), Liz Bryant (Head of Legal Services), Glenn Caplin-Grey (Strategic Director for Growth), Amanda Davis (Service Director, Education, Participation and Skills), Kat Deeney (Head of Environmental Planning), Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections), Tracey Lee (Chief Executive), Professor Steve Maddern (Director of Public Health), Jamie Sheldon (Senior Democratic Advisor) and Ian Trisk-Grove (Service Director for Finance).

The meeting started at 3.30 pm and finished at 3.59 pm.

Note: The full discussion can be viewed on the webcast of the City Council meeting at www.plymouth.gov.uk. At a future meeting, the Council will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

49. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

50. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

51. **Questions from the Public**

There were no questions from members of the public.

52. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

53. **Finance Monitoring Report Month 6**

Councillor Mark Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced the Finance Monitoring Report Month 6 and discussed:

- a) The report set out the revenue monitoring position of the Council at the end of September 2025, forecasting an adverse variance of £8.754 million;

- b) This variance reflected ongoing financial pressures across several key service areas, despite significant efforts by members and officers to deliver cost savings against delivery plans;
- c) Adult Social Care continued to experience increased demand, particularly in home placements, resulting in a reported budget pressure of £2.2 million;
- d) Children's Services faced rising placement costs, with residential and unregistered placements exceeding budget, creating a pressure of £3.7 million;
- e) Community Connections remained under strain due to rising costs of temporary accommodation and increasing demand, maintaining a pressure of £0.91 million;
- f) Customer and Corporate Services reported a budget pressure of £1.2 million, largely due to unbudgeted facility surveys, resulting repairs, and associated maintenance costs;
- g) Costs associated with the directly elected Mayor referendum exceeded expectations by £169,000;
- h) The Growth Directorate was unable to realise a £1.3 million income target from the Energy to Waste Plant profit share arrangement due to scheduled maintenance downtime;
- i) £6.5 million of savings had been achieved in-year against target, with a further £3.7 million in progress;
- j) Opportunities to reprofile available reserves existed but would not fully address the shortfall;
- k) Work would continue with the Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive's team to maintain focus on in-year delivery and address high placement costs across children's, adults, homelessness and SEND;
- l) The five-year capital programme stood at £372 million, with a revised forecast of £161 million for the current financial year, reflecting prudent reprofiling of £17 million and offset by £12 million of new expected spend;
- m) 76.8% of the capital programme was funded through grant contributions and in-service supported borrowing;
- n) All prudential indicators remained within approved limits, confirming that borrowing was managed within prudent boundaries;
- o) For the first time, the impact of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit on the revenue budget was reported;
- p) The capital monitoring and indicators demonstrated that the investment plan was affordable and sustainable, operating within a robust financial framework;

- q) Officers across all directorates were acknowledged for their continued work in maintaining mitigation actions in a challenging financial environment.

Ian Trisk-Grove (Service Director for Finance) added:

- r) The Month 6 report represented a full half-year review and clearly set out the challenges facing the Council into the second half of the year;
- s) Officers remained focused on delivering in-year savings and addressing the financial tasks ahead.

In response to questions, the Cabinet discussed:

- t) The pressures in Children's Services were not unique to Plymouth, with other councils reporting similar overspends, including one projecting an £8.2 million overspend and another facing a £5 million pressure;
- u) Robust workstreams were in place to address the challenges in residential placements, which were a national issue.

The Cabinet agreed:

1. To note the forecast revenue monitoring position at Month 6 as an adverse variance of £8.754 million, with further risks highlighted;
2. To note that the overall Capital Budget 2025–2030 was revised to £372.311 million, as shown in Table 18, with reconciliation and detail of the movements in the quarter set out in Tables 18 and 21, and to recommend these amendments to City Council for approval;
3. To note the performance against prudential indicators for Quarter 2 2025–2026, detailed in Section 13 of the report.

54. **Plan for Nature and People**

Councillor Tom Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) introduced the Plymouth Plan for Nature and People and discussed:

- a) Historically, there had been a perceived disconnect between the Council's respect for nature and the excellent work already being delivered by the Environmental Planning Department;
- b) There was a need to rebuild trust, rethink engagement, raise the prominence of nature in decision-making, and develop an ambitious long-term vision for nature recovery across the city;
- c) A new strategy was commissioned with the vision of co-creating the plan with communities and environmental groups;

- d) Hundreds of residents were engaged through public events, focus groups, and a steering group with external partners, with further changes made following final consultation to demonstrate responsiveness;
- e) The plan focused not only on enhancing nature but also on the relationship between nature and communities, including health and wellbeing benefits, sustainable skills and jobs, social cohesion, volunteering, and children's personal development;
- f) The title of the plan was amended to reflect the equal importance of people and nature;
- g) The plan included a five-year action plan detailing delivery commitments and measurement frameworks, including:
 - i. Planting 1,000 street trees in low canopy urban areas;
 - ii. Co-producing neighbourhood-level landscape masterplans;
 - iii. Achieving Green Flag status for 12 sites;
 - iv. Establishing new community orchards and free culinary herbs in major parks;
 - v. Expanding ecotherapy and green social prescribing;
 - vi. Creating Plymouth's first natural capital investment prospectus and aiming to raise £50 million of external green investment by 2030;
- h) The plan reflected and connected existing work in Plymouth, including:
 - i. The UK's first National Marine Park;
 - ii. The Ocean City Nature habitat bank;
 - iii. The Green Communities Team partnership with the National Trust;
 - iv. The BRIC project for flood resilience;
 - v. Plymouth Natural Grid, which improved 50 hectares of habitat and supported apprenticeships and Kickstarters;
 - vi. The planting of 50,000 trees by the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest;
 - vii. Initiatives at Derriford Community Park including beaver reintroduction, youth work, and ecotherapy at Poole Farm;
- i) Most of the initiatives were grant-funded, and special thanks were given to Kat Deeney and Chris Avent for their decade of work, as well as to officers for coordinating feedback and incorporating extensive revisions;
- j) The Cabinet and wider Council departments were thanked for their constructive input over the past year, and the public's engagement was acknowledged as central to the plan's development;
- k) The plan was described as Plymouth's plan for nature and people, co-created and owned by the city, with a public launch scheduled for the following day at Saltram.

Kat Deeney (Head of Environmental Planning and Chris Avent (Green Estate Manager) added:

- l) Communities, stakeholders, and partners had engaged constructively throughout the process, offering challenge and solutions;
- m) The plan had strong join-up across Council departments, including Children's Services and Public Health, and would deliver across multiple agendas.

In response to questions, the Cabinet discussed:

- n) The plan was a strategic framework that narrated Plymouth's relationship with nature, particularly for younger generations;
- o) The plan aligned with recent curriculum developments, including the review led by Becky Francis, which emphasised climate and nature in education;
- p) Nature experiences were important for young people's mental health and wellbeing, and the plan supported social prescribing and curriculum enrichment;
- q) The plan marked a significant shift in the city's approach, complementing existing blue, grey, and green strategies and supporting Plymouth's branding as a "life of adventure" destination;
- r) The integration of branding elements into the plan was noted and welcomed.

The Cabinet agreed:

- 1. To endorse the final version of the Plymouth Plan for Nature and People to act as a strategic delivery framework integrating nature and natural spaces into the city's growth;
- 2. To approve the creation of a Year One Action Plan for delivery in 2026.

55. **Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2029/30**

Councillor Mark Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30 and discussed:

- a) The strategy set out the Council's expected expenditure and income over a five-year period and was produced annually;
- b) The Council had previously received only one-year funding settlements from Government, but now had a three-year settlement, which provided greater transparency. Challenges remained due to the ongoing Fairer Funding Review, Business Rate Reset, and the treatment of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit;
- c) The Council faced ongoing financial pressures in Adult and Children's Social Care, homelessness, and SEND provision. These figures represented real people with complex needs and required unwavering support;

- d) These pressures could not be resolved through short-term fixes, and the strategy proposed a bold shift to a prevention-first approach, involving investment in early help, smarter service design, and integrated community-based models;
- e) The approach aimed to reduce reliance on high-cost crisis-driven interventions and move towards a more sustainable public service delivery model;
- f) Progress was already being made, including:
 - i. Expansion of enablement in Adult Social Care;
 - ii. Strengthening placement sufficiency in Children's Services;
 - iii. Investment in new temporary accommodation to meet homelessness demand;
- g) Transformation alone would not close the financial gap, and the strategy identified a savings requirement of £13.7 million for 2026/27, with all directorates engaged in developing proposals to meet this challenge;
- h) Plymouth was well placed to benefit from national investment programmes, including its designation as a National Defence Growth Area and inclusion in the New Towns Task Force programme, which supported housing delivery, infrastructure investment, and economic growth;
- i) The strategy was not just a financial document but provided the fiscal backdrop for setting a balanced budget for 2026 and outlined the roadmap for navigating the next five years;
- j) The Council remained committed to delivering for Plymouth residents and would continue to work with members, partners, and communities throughout the budget-setting process;
- k) A public engagement exercise had been launched alongside the strategy to gather feedback from residents and businesses on priorities, financial challenges, and ideas for savings or income generation;
- l) The survey was accessible via the Council's website, social media, and email bulletins, and residents were encouraged to participate;
- m) The provisional settlement in December 2025 would provide further clarity, and the strategy would be updated and brought back to Cabinet and Scrutiny before going to Full Council and Budget Scrutiny in January;
- n) Councillor Lowry thanked all officers involved in producing the strategy, with particular thanks to Ian Trisk-Grove for his work during a period of significant change.

Ian Trisk-Grove (Service Director for Finance) added:

- o) The upcoming policy statement, expected the following week, would provide greater visibility on funding formula changes and the outcome of the Fair Funding Review;

- p) The multi-year settlement would support improved financial planning, and work would continue with members and directors over the coming months to finalise the full budget;
- q) Gratitude was expressed to all involved for their engagement and efforts to date.

In response to questions, the Cabinet discussed:

- r) The importance of public engagement in the budget-setting process, with feedback informing Budget Scrutiny and subsequent Council decisions;
- s) Clarification was provided on the apparent increase in the net revenue figure from approximately £250 million to £325 million, which reflected the inclusion of previously uncertain grant funding into the net revenue position, offering greater maturity and stability.

The Cabinet agreed:

- I. To approve and recommend the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2029/30 to City Council at its meeting on 24 November 2025.

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