

Cabinet

Monday 12 January 2026

PRESENT:

Councillor Evans OBE, in the Chair.

Councillor Laing, Vice Chair.

Councillors Aspinall, Briars-Delve, Cresswell, Haydon, Lowry, Penberthy and Taylor.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Stephens.

Also in attendance: Si Bellamy (Chief Operating Officer), Julia Brown (Service Director for Adult Social Care), Liz Bryant (Service Director for Legal Services), Glenn Caplin-Grey (Strategic Director of Place), Tom Cleverly (Plymouth Argyle), Martin Daw (Operations Director, JEM Scaffolding), Michelle Dawson (Plymouth Community Homes), David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development), Rebecca Filmore (Newly Qualified Social Worker), Louise Ford (Head of Commissioning), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Hannah Harris (CEO, Plymouth Culture), Emma Hewitt (Skills Lead), Professor Steve Maddern (Director of Public Health), Sam Morcumb (Business Development Bid Manager SW, BuildX), Kevin Nancekivell (Plymouth Argyle), Gill Nicholson (Head of Innovation and Delivery), David Northey (Interim Service Director for Finance), Jamie Sheldon (Democratic, Governance and Scrutiny Service Manager), Helen Slater (Assistant Head of Finance), Kadus Smith (Theatre Royal Plymouth), Chris Squire (Service Director for HR & OD), Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director for Adults, Health and Communities) and Helen Wilde-Archibald (Devon Chamber of Commerce).

The meeting started at 2.12 pm and finished at 5.01 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.

75. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

76. **Minutes**

The Cabinet agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 08 December 2025 as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

1. Councillor Tudor Evans OBE to be recorded as 'apologies';
2. Councillor Jemima Laing to be recorded as 'Chair'.

77. **Questions from the Public**

There were no questions from members of the public.

78. **Commemorations and Celebrations Policy**

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities) introduced the report and discussed:

- a) The Council had a long-standing tradition of marking significant days through events, lighting buildings, and flying flags, as well as civic duties such as opening books of condolence and organising moments of silence;
- b) The existing flags protocol dated back to 2016 and was the only written guidance used internally to navigate government advice on flag flying. It was not a published policy and lacked a clear process for officers when requests were made regarding flags, lighting, or commemorations;
- c) A review was initiated approximately a year ago to ensure the system was open, clear, and accessible to the public, avoiding ad hoc arrangements and ensuring fairness and equity for residents and communities;
- d) The draft policy had been widely consulted upon, including engagement with the Home, Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Committee in December, and updates were made following feedback. Public comments were also considered to clarify and improve the policy;
- e) Flying flags was governed by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007, which applied nationally, including to the Council. Most Council flags were pre-approved under government guidance, but some required express consent. A planning application had been submitted to ensure compliance and allow flexibility for flags such as the Progress Pride flag or Holocaust Memorial Day flag;
- f) The policy established two core principles: political neutrality (no party-political or campaigning flags) and inclusivity, fostering community cohesion by reflecting all parts of Plymouth's community;
- g) The policy summarised government guidance, listed permitted flags, and set out local criteria for requests to fly flags, light buildings, hold moments of silence, or open books of condolence. It included clear processes and notice requirements, while allowing discretion for exceptional circumstances such as sudden tragedies or major sporting achievements;
- h) The overarching aim was to improve accountability, transparency, and resource management, creating a single comprehensive document for the first time. Thanks were extended to Caroline Marr and the team for coordinating work across multiple departments and portfolio holders;

- i) The Council predominantly flew the Union Flag, St George's Cross, and the Plymouth City Council flag, reflecting pride in Plymouth, England, and the United Kingdom, alongside other community flags. The policy was not about diminishing patriotism but celebrating diversity and unity.

The Cabinet agreed:

- I. To approve the Commemorations and Celebrations Policy for implementation.

79. **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader welcomed representatives from Plymouth Culture, Plymouth Community Homes, Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, Theatre Royal Plymouth, and Plymouth Argyle Football Club, and discussed:

- a) Plymouth would be bidding for UK City of Culture status for 2029, which represented a major opportunity for the city given Plymouth's cultural heritage and ambition;
- b) The bid would be led by Plymouth Culture, with support from partners across the city. It was emphasised that this would be a whole-city endeavour, not just a Council initiative;
- c) The benefits of City of Culture status were highlighted, including national and international profile, economic growth, civic pride, and community cohesion. The Leader referenced the transformative impact on previous winners such as Bradford, Hull, Coventry, and Derry;
- d) Plymouth's cultural credentials were outlined, including the Theatre Royal, The Box, TR2, Market Hall, National Marine Park, and three universities, alongside its rich heritage and creative sector. The Leader stressed that culture was central to Plymouth's identity and future growth;
- e) The bid would build on recent achievements such as Mayflower 400, British Art Show, and major housing and regeneration deals. The bid would act as a catalyst for Plymouth's ambitions, complementing investments in housing, jobs, and infrastructure;
- f) The Leader called for city-wide support, urging partners and residents to 'be loud and proud' and to share Plymouth's story confidently. The bid was seen as an opportunity to unite communities and showcase Plymouth as Britain's Ocean City.

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) added:

- g) The bid represented an exciting opportunity to celebrate Plymouth's strong cultural assets and creative leadership;

- h) Outlined the scope of the UK City of Culture programme, which included arts, heritage, sport, design, gaming, and natural environment, and confirmed Plymouth had a compelling story of ambition and transformation;
- i) Highlighted the role of culture in driving economic growth, innovation, and community engagement, and stressed the importance of involving residents and young people in shaping the bid;
- j) Confirmed that Plymouth Culture, led by Victoria Pomery and Hannah Harris, would coordinate the bid process and engagement activities.

Victoria Pomery (CEO, The Box) added:

- k) Welcomed the announcement and emphasised culture as a vital ingredient for civic pride, health, education, and economic development;
- l) Outlined the bid process and timeline: Expressions of interests were required by 08 February 2026, and would be longlisted by March 2026 and would be shortlisted and visited later in 2026;
- m) Confirmed £10 million funding for the winning city and opportunities to leverage further investment;
- n) Stressed the importance of community input and collaboration to make the bid inclusive and representative of Plymouth.

Hannah Harris (Chief Executive Officer, Plymouth Culture) added:

- o) Reinforced that the bid was part of a long-term cultural strategy published in 2021;
- p) Highlighted opportunities to address gaps in cultural provision and improve accessibility;
- q) Confirmed plans for sector and community engagement sessions and described culture as 'who we are and what we do';
- r) Positioned Plymouth 2029 as a chance to showcase the city's identity and ambition nationally.

Michelle Dawson (Executive Director, Plymouth Community Homes) added:

- s) Supported the bid as a way to strengthen pride, partnership, and place;
- t) Emphasised opportunities to involve residents and celebrate regeneration projects;
- u) Highlighted Plymouth's strong partnership culture and the role of housing in shaping communities.

Helen Wild-Archibald (CEO, Devon & Plymouth Chamber of Commerce) added:

- v) Presented the economic case for the bid, citing examples from Hull and Coventry where City of Culture status generated hundreds of millions in investment and thousands of jobs;
- w) Stressed benefits for business visibility, inward investment, and cross-sector collaboration;
- x) Highlighted the creative economy multiplier effect and its potential to boost hospitality, retail, and transport sectors.

Kadus Smith (Director of Public Engagement, Theatre Royal Plymouth) added:

- y) Focused on sustainability, accessibility, and youth voice as priorities for the cultural programme;
- z) Emphasised the importance of empowering grassroots organisations and showcasing local talent;
- aa) Highlighted opportunities to engage young people and platform their ideas.

Tom Cleverly (Manager, Plymouth Argyle) and Freeman Kevin Nancekivell (First Team Plymouth Argyle) added:

- bb) Expressed strong support for the bid, citing Plymouth's passion and pride;
- cc) Highlighted the role of sport in cultural identity and community cohesion;
- dd) Stressed the importance of creating opportunities for young people and attracting visitors to Plymouth.

In response to discussion, the Leader concluded:

- ee) The bid would enhance Plymouth's reputation and unlock further potential for growth and investment;
- ff) The Council had continued to invest in culture despite financial pressures because of its belief in local talent and creativity;
- gg) The bid was described as "our time to shine" and an opportunity to make Plymouth's cultural strengths nationally recognised.

80. **Chair's Urgent Business**

The Leader welcomed Councillor Kate Taylor to the Cabinet. Councillor Taylor now held the portfolio for Customer Experience, Sport, Leisure & HR, and OD, and had last served in the Cabinet in 2021.

81. **Draft Budget Report 2026/27**

The item was presented by Councillor Mark Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) who highlighted the following key items:

- a) The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 was presented, totalling £318.075 million, which represented a significant increase on previous years. The increase was primarily due to the Government's decision to roll several former standalone grants into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The RSG was expected to rise from approximately £12 million to around £69 million;
- b) It was highlighted that the introduction of a three-year financial settlement allowed for more effective long-term planning. Previously, annual settlements had severely limited planning capability across services. The new approach would strengthen the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy;
- c) Pressures within four major statutory service areas were outlined as continuing to rise significantly. These areas were Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Homelessness, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Demand within these service areas continued to grow at a rate that exceeded increases in government funding and council tax;
- d) The budget identified approximately £25.8 million of financial pressures arising from these statutory areas. To help mitigate this, the Council had identified £17.4 million in savings and efficiencies, with further work continuing to reduce projected overspends;
- e) A number of strategic programmes were noted as essential to addressing long-term demand pressures, including proposals to develop Council-owned residential property for children's placements, strengthening of prevention programmes, implementation of a "No Wrong Door" approach to reduce adolescent entries to care, and an increased focus on reablement within Adult Social Care. Further national guidance was awaited through the forthcoming SEND White Paper;
- f) Alongside the revenue budget, a five-year Capital Programme of £319.725 million was presented;
- g) The document remained a draft budget, subject to amendments pending receipt of the final Local Government Settlement. Ongoing discussions were being held with government ministers to address irregularities within the settlement figures. The draft would be submitted to Budget Scrutiny for detailed examination over two days before returning to Cabinet;

David Northey (Service Director for Finance) added:

- h) The draft budget demonstrated a balanced position, although significant and difficult decisions were required to reach this stage;

Helen Slater (Assistant Head of Finance) added:

- i) The importance of using the new multi-year settlement to drive long-term sustainability rather than short-term decision-making was emphasised. It was noted that many officers had become accustomed to working within 12-month financial horizons and that practice would need to evolve;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- j) Broader economic developments and regeneration activity within the city were highlighted. Footfall in the city centre had increased by 6%, significantly above the national average, and vacant retail units had reduced substantially. Plymouth was increasingly attracting attention for investment, including through emerging sectors such as marine autonomy and cultural initiatives;
- k) It was noted that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was expected within the next two years. While this was unlikely to fundamentally change the Council's financial envelope, it was anticipated to strengthen the city's influence within the wider region;
- l) The issue of council tax was considered. It was noted that Plymouth remained one of the lowest-charging authorities in the South West, with the average council tax bill approximately £250 lower than Cornwall. The priority remained to keep council tax as low as practicably possible while maintaining high-quality services;
- m) The statutory pressures faced by top-tier local authorities nationally were discussed, particularly in relation to the growing proportion of the budget being directed towards statutory services. It was noted that discretionary services continued to shrink as a proportion of overall spending;
- n) The forthcoming scrutiny sessions were expected to provide detailed challenge, with the associated papers to be made publicly available;
- o) Cabinet acknowledged the substantial work undertaken by officers and members to produce the draft budget under complex and demanding circumstances. The draft remained subject to change pending the final settlement and the outcome of scrutiny.

Cabinet agreed to:

1. Note the report and acknowledged that it is subject to change in line with any Final Settlement adjustments and further changes required as proposals are developed;
2. Endorsed the recommended 5-year Capital Programme of £319.725m;
3. Agreed to present the draft budget report to the Budget Scrutiny Select Committee for consideration when full savings proposals highlighted in the report had been developed further.

82. **Care Quality Commission Inspection update**

Councillor Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) introduced the item to Cabinet and highlighted the following key point:

- a) It was reported that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection process had begun in January 2025, with an on-site inspection taking place over three and a half days in June 2025. The final report was published in December 2025. The overall rating awarded to Plymouth was Good, which was described as a significant achievement and a reflection of the sustained effort of staff across the service, partner organisations including Livewell Southwest, voluntary sector colleagues, and those delivering care in the community;

Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director for Adults, Health and Communities), Julia Brown (Service Director for Adult Social Care) and Louise Ford (Head of Commissioning) gave a presentation to Cabinet and highlighted the following key points:

- b) The Committee heard that over 300 documents and submissions had been provided to the CQC during the inspection process, together with 50 anonymised case files. During the on-site visit, inspectors undertook 45 formal interviews, involving over 180 individuals from across the system, including frontline staff, partners, voluntary sector representatives and service users;
- c) In addition to the overall Good rating, Plymouth achieved an Outstanding rating for Equity of Experience and Outcomes, placing it among only a small number of authorities nationally to do so. This was regarded as a major success and reflected the authority's proactive approach in engaging seldom-heard groups, tackling inequalities and tailoring support to individuals' needs;
- d) In relation to access to services, the inspection acknowledged strong performance, including the resolving of around 90% of calls at first contact. Improvements were also highlighted in waiting list management, and frontline teams had been supported through work led by the Principal Social Worker to embed strength-based practice;
- e) Under the theme of supporting people to live healthier lives, the inspection recognised strong partnership working across the prevention and early-intervention landscape, particularly with VCSE partners and Public Health. Improvements since inspection were reported, including better outcomes and ongoing work to improve the occupational therapy offer and waiting times;
- f) With regard to equity and experience, it was noted that Plymouth had achieved its highest scoring in this area. Strong engagement with seldom-heard communities and a clear commitment to addressing inequalities were highlighted. Future improvements included expanding cultural competency work and developing improved recording of diversity within care management systems;
- g) Under care provision, integration and continuity, the inspection recognised the strength of joint work with Public Health on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the use of intelligence to inform commissioning priorities. Positive use of lived experience and engagement with the voluntary sector were highlighted as strengths.

Members were updated on the publication of the city's Carers Strategy, ongoing development of the market, and work to launch the extra care framework on 01 May 2026 to support improved transparency and innovation in care provision;

- h) In relation to partnerships and communities, the work of Plymouth's Local Care Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board was commended. The meeting was informed that Plymouth had recently been selected as one of 45 health and wellbeing board areas nationally to participate in Better Care Fund work on Integrated Neighbourhood Teams;
- i) Under the theme of safe systems, pathways and transitions, strengths were recognised in crisis support, mental health contingency planning, and multidisciplinary work for people with learning disabilities. Improvement work continued in relation to transitions from children's to adults' services, supported by collaboration between service areas;
- j) The theme of safeguarding was discussed. While the overall score was lower than desired, strengths were identified including strong partnership working and above-average training compliance in the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. Work continued to improve compliance levels and ensure all legal requirements were met;
- k) The inspection highlighted governance arrangements, acknowledging stable leadership, clear roles, and a positive learning and improvement culture. The effectiveness of performance management and the use of data to drive decision-making were noted. Workforce capacity challenges within adult social care were recognised, and work continued with the Caring for Plymouth partnership to support recruitment and retention;
- l) The Learning, Improvement and Innovation theme highlighted strong collaboration with Livewell Southwest and the Principal Social Worker, including support for newly qualified social workers through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). Continued work was planned to further upskill the workforce, including in areas such as Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards;
- m) The Committee was informed that, although the outcome was very positive, the service would continue to maintain a formal Improvement Plan to ensure progress continued.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- n) Members expressed the need to focus not only on the areas of high performance but also on those that required strengthening. It was requested that the action plan be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting;
- o) The meeting reflected on the journey undertaken by the service in the previous 18 months, noting challenges such as the reablement crisis and industrial action, and recognised the substantial progress achieved collectively since then. Congratulations were extended to all staff involved, and it was noted that such outcomes were hard-earned and should be publicly celebrated;

- p) It was suggested that the Council should do more to highlight the positive outcome publicly, including through photography and by displaying the inspection banner outside the Council House. It was agreed that public recognition was important given the scale of improvement in adult social care, children's services and SEND over recent years;
- q) It was noted that adult social care activity continued to generate substantial benefits for the wider health and social care system, including reducing pressures on the NHS. The need for strengthened financial contribution and partnership support from NHS partners was highlighted, with a view to ensuring shared responsibilities were met fairly;
- r) The Committee formally noted the positive outcome and reiterated the importance of maintaining improvement momentum, ensuring that areas requiring development continued to be progressed at pace.

Cabinet agreed to

- 1. Note the report;
- 2. Request that an Adult Social Care CQC Inspection Action Plan be submitted to the next Cabinet meeting for consideration.

83. **Building Plymouth 10 Year Anniversary**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) Building Plymouth had been established in 2015 and was celebrating its 10th anniversary as an award-winning council-led sector skills partnership with the construction and built environment community;
- b) The partnership had driven skills, training and employment, facilitated social value, acted as a united industry voice, and underpinned delivery of the city's ambitious capital build programme and the transition to a net-zero carbon economy;
- c) The initiative had inspired the next generation (e.g., Mission Mammoth/Steamfest at The Box with Arts University Plymouth), celebrated construction apprentices, and made strong progress with the Adopt-a-School programme, with extensive voluntary time from industry partners;
- d) Building Plymouth had a substantial and a breadth of cross-city support;

Emma Hewitt (Skills Lead), Martin Daw (Operations Director, JEM Scaffolding) and Sam Morcumb (Business Development Bid Manager SW, BuildX) added:

- e) Over the past decade the partnership had delivered a coordinated action plan to build a skilled workforce aligned to a growing construction pipeline with more than 70 partners now contributing annually;

- f) The programme had attracted additional resources (including two full-time construction coordinators funded via the Department of Work and Pensions) and established a trusted cross-system infrastructure spanning clients, consultants, main contractors, the supply chain, training providers and Jobcentre Plus;
- g) The partner base included major clients such as University Hospitals Plymouth, Babcock, University of Plymouth, Plymouth Community Homes and Plymouth City Council (PCC);
- h) Building Plymouth had received multiple awards for corporate social responsibility (CSR), apprenticeships, and people & culture, and had informed the Council's wider skills approach;
- i) Workstreams covered:
 - i. demand forecasting (forward programme, risks/opportunities, transparency for local firms);
 - ii. supply (attracting/retaining/progressing the workforce);
 - iii. provision (ensuring local training aligned to employer needs);
 - iv. pipeline (early inspiration with children and young people);
- j) Employment & skills plans were enforced on major sites, maximising those sites for careers engagement;
- k) A client group improved visibility of the forward workload;
- l) Economic Development had asked Building Plymouth to lead a new Construction Task Force;
- m) The partnership coordinated in-kind support to resolve the Keyham garden recovery (following the discovery and extraction of a World War II bomb), leveraging relationships to deliver £40,000 of works without direct funding;
- n) The programme aligned with Skills Launchpad Plymouth and "Connect to Work" to reach jobseekers and economically inactive residents, service leavers (with the Career Transition Partnership at HMS Drake), and those in the criminal justice system, offering coordinated attraction, training, retention and in-work progression;
- o) JEM Scaffolding had experienced historic challenges retaining new labourers, and how a Launchpad "hard-hat ready" event transformed outcomes. Of 18-20 candidates, 11 were hired and seven retained;
- p) Recruitment of prison leavers had been a major success; one former prisoner had progressed to a trusted supervisor running a large contract;
- q) Further sessions were planned (including apprentices on 20 January and outreach at HMP Channings Wood). The company had upskilled its entire workforce (c. 50

courses in two years), feeding talent bottom-up and preparing for the city's pipeline;

- r) There was an explore, encourage, empower, equip, employ pathway from Key Stage I to sustained employment;
- s) Evidence showed visible role models strongly influenced career choice, and employer encounters/work experience improved attainment;
- t) Activities included: Key Stage I literacy/bug-house builds (with Kier), a spring community project to renovate a PCC garden at zero cost, Mission Mammoth, careers fairs, work experience weeks, expanded;
- u) Adopt-a-School had 21 schools matched to industry partners;
- v) There had been an increase in nominations for the Ron Simmons Apprentice of the Year Award;
- w) Inclusion efforts included the Learning Support Fund, Disability Confident awareness and Connect to Work.

During the discussion, the following was covered:

- x) Praise for the collaborative Team Plymouth ethos, noting the projected high number of jobs in the city over the next decade and the need to raise awareness of modern construction careers, to grow talent and encourage people to learn, live and work in Plymouth;
- y) Skills Launchpad Plymouth provided weekly impartial information, advice and guidance, with drop-ins, booked appointments, remote access advice, training mailers, and route-planning for all ages and circumstances, acting as a one-stop shop for construction skills, training, education and jobs;
- z) It was noted that Building Plymouth was engaged with the Growth Board and had contractor/consultant representation on the Employment & Skills Board;
- aa) Cabinet members urged further public communications beyond the sector to share the partnership's success and opportunities.

84. **Cabinet Member Updates**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) gave the following updates:

- a) The launch of the fourth Mockingbird constellation, replicating an extended family model with a highly experienced hub home carer supporting eight fostering/kinship households, improving resilience and outcomes;
 - i. The transformative impact of Mockingbird over the last 12 months and its contribution to stabilising placement costs by growing in-city foster care;

- ii. The value of Mockingbird was reiterated as a key enabler for foster carer recruitment and retention, complementing an active “Foster for Plymouth” campaign;
 - iii. The small-home residential model was designed to support step-down to family settings where possible, keeping children close to communities and services in Plymouth;
- b) Acquisition of the Council’s first council-owned, council-run children’s home for decades; a small family home model that would receive minor improvements, provide better value for money, recruit staff, register with Ofsted, and open in summer 2026;
- c) The inaugural kinship Christmas party, generously sponsored by Wales & West Utilities, with 19 kinship families (25 carers; 34 children) attending; the donation also enabled ongoing social activities, including a new kinship youth group at Poole Farm;
- d) Beryl Cook: Pride and Joy exhibition at The Box was opening 24 January 2026; extensive national coverage; free but ticketed entry, with a call for residents to book.

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Co-operative Development and Communities) highlighted:

- e) North Prospect had won Best Regeneration Project of over 500 homes at the Inside Housing Awards, with judges praising long-term community engagement, partnership delivery and tangible impacts on safety, education and wellbeing, reflecting the strong partnership working of Plymouth City Council (PCC) and Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) over many years;
- f) Stirling House, a veterans’ self-build project, a Plan for Homes project with LiveWest had won Best Development (Less than 50 homes) at the RTPi (Royal Town Planning Institute) Awards, recognised for collaborative planning, resilience, benefits to people and nature, and social capital;
- g) The continuing role of Plan for Homes in convening partners and deploying gap funding to maximise delivery of high-quality, affordable homes that met diverse needs;
- h) Expressed thanks to all involved in these projects.

Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) gave the following updates in Councillors Stephens’ (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport) absence:

- i) The Royal Parade bus improvement scheme was near completion;
 - i. Overnight closures in January–February 2026 for resurfacing with diversions via Western Approach and Coburg Street;
 - ii. Courtney Street car park to remain open but motorists might experience delays—drivers were advised to consider parking elsewhere during works;

- iii. Project was running to schedule and to budget;
- iv. Full re-opening, including bus stops, was expected on Monday 23 February 2026;
- v. Safety and accessibility improvements were central to the design;
- vi. An official opening was discussed, subject to schedules and weather conditions;
- vii. The scheme was contextualised within the wider city-centre improvements (e.g. The Civic, Armada Way), with a further update to follow at the next meeting.

85. **LGA Update**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) The LGA's cross-party success in securing three-year funding settlements to support medium-term financial planning in local government;
- b) Noted the significance of the appointment of Shama Tatler (Head of the LGA Labour Office) had been elevated to the House of Lords as a Baroness in the New Year Honours;
- c) The retirement of Dennis Skinner from the LGA after decades of service; the Leader proposed sending a letter of thanks from the Council.