

# **HOUSING, GROWTH AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

9 December 2025

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

### **Present:**

Councillor Karen Oliver (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors Fiona Cook, Jim Lindridge, Amanda Napper and Corinne Male

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2, Councillor Rachel Creevy was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Martin Scarborough

Parish Council representatives:

Liz Hurst (Wynyard Parish Council)

Stephen Smith (Greatham Parish Council)

Also present: Kirsty Winders, MAX Associates

Officers:

Denise McGuckin, Chief Executive

Ian Gardiner, Head Service (Active and Creative Hartlepool)

Gemma Jones, Scrutiny and Legal Support Officer

Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Dodds and Martin Scarborough.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2025**

Received.

#### **4. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026/27 to 2029/30** *(Director of Finance, IT and Digital and Director of Housing, Growth and Communities)*

##### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework

##### **Purpose of report**

To provide an update on the MTFP and to enable the Committee to scrutinise/comment on the savings proposals referred from the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee.

##### **Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee**

The Chief Executive presented the report which reiterated that all councils across the country were facing significant financial challenges owing to the impact of inflation and demand on services along with historic inadequate increases in government funding to meet these challenges. As outlined at Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in November, the Council had a forecast budget deficit of £8.572m for 2026/27 and £20.591m over the full MTFP period. The Chief Executive added that the Government announcement of the financial settlement for local authorities should be made around mid-December and it would be a 3-year settlement which would enable to forward plan the provision of services.

As in previous years, addressing the deficit needed to be managed through budget saving actions which sought to minimise the impact on services where possible and limited use of reserves. With regard to savings, proposals totalling £4.117m had been proposed for 2026/27. Pending publication of the local government finance settlement in late December, the acceptance of the proposals for 2026/27 would leave a remaining budget gap of £4.300m. This would mean the budget could not be signed off as robust without significant increased Government funding, further significant budget cuts or savings and/or an increase in Council Tax for 2026/27.

An outline of individual departmental savings was provided with further details provided in Appendix B. The proposals within the remit of this Committee related to fees and charges.

A Member raised a number of concerns at the potential of a budget that was not signed off as robust. This included the possible increase in costs from Children's Services in relation to children in care. The Chief Executive recognised that costs for children in care were significant and added that it was a challenging task but all departments had savings targets, including Children's Services. In response to a request for clarification, the Chief Executive outlined the process for out of area placements that were placed within Hartlepool and it was highlighted that discussions were ongoing with the Local Government Association with regard to this. Members were informed that a significant amount of work was being undertaken on early

help, prevention and intervention and changes were being identified although it was important to acknowledge that these changes will not happen over night. The Chair added that housing was an important part of supporting people who were disadvantaged and it was imperative that appropriate solutions were in place. A Member highlighted that Government funding was being provided to support early intervention and preventative work and it was important to get the deployment of these resources effectively.

The Chief Executive concluded by requesting that any additional comments be forwarded before the Christmas break to ensure they were included within the budgetary considerations going forward.

### **Decision**

The savings proposals detailed in Appendix B relating to the services within this Committee portfolio were approved to be reported back to Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee on 19 January 2026.

## **5. Indoor Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy** *(Director of Housing, Growth and Communities)*

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision – HGC 176/25)

### **Purpose of report**

To present to Members the findings and recommendations of the Indoor Facility Strategy and to receive an update regarding progress in the revision of the Council's Outdoor Playing Pitch Strategy.

To provide background detail in support of a presentation to be made at the Committee by the Consultants commissioned to develop the strategies.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee**

The Head of Service presented the report that informed Members that following a robust procurement process, Max Associates were appointed in early 2025 to develop a new, current and refreshed indoor facilities and playing pitch strategy. The strategy was set in the context of the Council's Local Plan which ran until 2033 and also took into account provision in neighbouring authority areas.

A detailed and comprehensive presentation was provided to Members by the representative from Max Associates. The presentation detailed the evidence based data against the current leisure portfolio across Hartlepool and this had informed the strategy. Engagement had been undertaken across a number of National Governing Bodies, Sports Clubs and Schools.

During the development of the strategies the current provision of a number of sporting activities and facilities had been assessed. The presentation concluded with several key recommendations.

In response to a question from the Chair, the representative from Max Associates indicated that an outline of the responses received as part of the engagement process from the most disadvantaged wards could be provided. The Head of Service confirmed that as part of the planning process for housing developments, the Department would be included within the consultation process and be engaged in all discussions regarding the provision of community sports facilities.

A discussion ensued on the provision of indoor bowling facilities at the Bowls Club on the site adjacent to the Mill House Leisure Centre. It was acknowledged that this was a vital provision to support the local community through indoor bowls from the perspective of physical activity, mental health and wider social outcomes. The Chair highlighted that this facility was within the Hartlepool Development Corporation development area and the importance of working closely with the HDC was imperative to the future of that facility.

Clarification was sought on the reference within the presentation to the provision of a community centre as part of the Wynyard development. The Head of Service indicated that this was a complex piece of work being undertaken alongside Stockton Borough Council as part of the Wynyard development was within its jurisdiction. Consultation had been linked to the potential for the provision of community facilities within a multi-use hall within the school, alongside other potential facilities and that these discussions were ongoing.

Members were informed that an Archery Club was being ran within Greatham Village and it was suggested that this provision could be included within any future strategy. The representative from Max Associates confirmed that the evidence to support the strategy had been gathered from community and sports centres where physical activity was currently taking place.

The Chair concluded that this was a very comprehensive and useful piece of work, including the key recommendations, the presentation would be forwarded to Members for future reference. It was noted that as a coastal town, the importance of the provision of swimming facilities for the local community was crucial and requested a future report on progress regarding the development and delivery of swimming, following the opening of Highlight.

## **Decision**

- (i) The Indoor Facility Strategy and associated recommendations were adopted.

- (ii) The presentation to be forwarded to Members of the Committee for future reference.
- (iii) The progress made in relation to the Outdoor Playing Pitch Strategy would be shared at a future meeting of the Committee.
- (iv) That progress regarding the development and delivery of swimming, following the opening of Highlight be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

## **6. Highlight Active Wellbeing Hub** *(Director of Housing, Growth and Communities)*

### **Type of decision**

For information.

### **Purpose of report**

To provide Members with a update on the progress regarding the development of Highlight Active Wellbeing Hub (HAWH).

### **Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee**

The Head of Service confirmed that the construction and completion of HAWH was entering its final phase with the anticipated hand over from Wates Group Ltd to the Council expected in spring 2026. Following this, there will be an 8 week transition and operationalisation plan to ensure that the building can be fully opened to the public and details of this plan were included within the report. An outline of the construction process since January 2024 was provided in the report.

Members were informed that the HAWH would continue to offer the wide range of services and activities already established at the Mill House Leisure Centre and will also provide a wide range of exciting new opportunities for local people, including the use of open water for activities such as paddle boarding, with a focus on inter-generational programming to cater for grandchildren, parents and grandparents/guardians. After the handover the operation/customer service experience will be trialled and tested with local community groups, Elected Members and local authority employees will be invited to take part.

It was noted that work had been undertaken with the North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation Trust to operate clinics from within Highlight. The introduction of a café facility was of paramount importance from a social perspective and was an integral part of the leisure offer.

The Head of Service presented a short video of Highlight in its current form which showed a tour of the building including the swimming pools, gymnasium, café and other community spaces.

A discussion ensued on the pricing strategy for the use of the facilities and the Head of Service indicated that the local authority concessionary policy would be applied to activities and programmes delivered on-site and that 3 hours free parking would be available to anyone using the facilities within Highlight. Initially prices would be held at the Mill House Leisure Centre level to support access and usage from across the community. Any increase in charges from a business perspective may be necessary, however, the business model would remain focussed on being competitive and on increasing participation and access to opportunities for local people. In addition, discussions were ongoing with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and local providers with regard to the provision of public transport to support residents to visit Highlight. In relation to the affordability of Highlight it was suggested that consideration be given to the potential of a referral system with a subsidised use for families accessing the local food banks. It was suggested that local businesses may wish to sponsor individual families to undertake such an initiative.

In response to a request for clarification from a Member, the Head of Service indicated that every space within Highlight had been designed to optimise flexible use, including parties, health clinics and meetings.

The Chair concluded by congratulating everyone involved in the development of Highlight which was such an exciting opportunity for the residents of Hartlepool. This was a fantastic development that would provide an holistic approach to tackling obesity and a range of mental health and wellbeing issues.

The Head of Service indicated that Highlight was unique in terms of its location and there was no other facility within the north east area that offered the same provision on one site.

### **Decision**

- (i) The progress of Highlight Active and Wellbeing Hub was noted.
- (ii) The detail of the emerging project and available activities was noted and the profile of these opportunities for the benefit of local people and visitors was supported
- (iii) That the potential to offer a referral system for families to participate in Highlight activities be explored alongside a possible sponsorship provision from local businesses.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 am

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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