

Minutes of the Cabinet
Thursday 18th September, 2025 at 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber at the Council House, Dudley

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor P Harley (Leader - Chair)

Councillor P Bradley (Deputy Leader - Vice-Chair)

Councillors P Atkins, I Bevan, S Clark, D Corfield, A Goddard, E Lawrence, W Little and S Phipps.

Opposition Group Members nominated to attend the Cabinet

Labour Group: Councillors S Ali, C Bayton, E Cobb, J Cowell, Q Mughal and S Ridley.

Observers

Councillor B Collins and Councillor S Mughal (via MS Teams).

Officers

B Heran (Chief Executive), K Jones (Group Director - Housing and Assets), A Razzaq (Director of Legal, Compliance and Assurance - Monitoring Officer) (via MS Teams), C Williams (Interim Head of Finance - Deputy Section 151 Officer) (via MS Teams), and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Together with other officers and members of the public.

20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Aston, R Priest and P Sahota.

21 **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

22 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th July, 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

23 **2025/26 Capital and Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 1 30th June 2025**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Interim Director of Finance detailing the Council's financial position as at quarter 1 of the 2025/26 financial year.

An overspend of £2.5 million against the approved budget was reported for this period, with variances identified across Directorates, as set out in the report. The key overspends were within Finance and Legal Services, resulting from interim and locum staffing costs; and within Children's Services, due to increased demand and cost of placements.

It was reported that these overspends were predominately offset by underspends in utilities and staff vacancies.

The Cabinet noted the continued increase in the deficit within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which was forecast to reach a cumulative deficit £59.6 million by year-end. This deficit remained on the Council's balance sheet under a statutory override and funded through cash balances.

Despite the reported pressures, the planned increase of £5 million to the General Fund Reserves remained on track. Additionally, £2.5 million had been released from the contingency fund, which was no longer required, and transferred to the reserves.

The report also proposed an increase to the Capital Programme to be funded through grants.

The Cabinet acknowledged that while spending controls continued to drive savings to support managing budgets, the financial outlook remained challenging due to ongoing cost pressures, particular in social care.

The recommendations set out in paragraph 2 of the report were moved by Councillor S Clark and seconded by Councillor P Bradley.

The Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members and the Chief Executive responded to questions raised by Opposition Group Members concerning several matters, including the use of one-off contingencies to manage budget pressures and the implications once these contingencies had been exhausted; the impact to service delivery resulting from savings achieved through unfilled vacancies and staff reductions, which were identified as one-off savings; whether the corporate risk register rating of 15 would be reduced and if a legal budget could be set for 2026/27; delays in procurement leading to an underspend within the housing capital programme, and whether the Council remained on track to commence from period 4; the perception of inconsistencies in Appendix B of the report, regarding the delivery of savings and associated Red, Amber, Green (RAG) ratings.

Resolved

- (1) That the quarter 1 (June 2025) forecast overspend of £2.5m be noted.
- (2) That the draft General Fund, Dedicated School Grant (DSG), Public Health Grant, and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) forecast outturns for 2025/26 as at the end of Quarter 1, be noted.
- (3) That the forecast deficit on the DSG of £53.2m (High Needs Block £59.6m), the statutory override and the impact on Council resources, be noted.
- (4) That the progress to date on delivering £61.1m of savings, be noted.

- (5) That the current and forecast level of general fund unearmarked reserves, be noted.
- (6) That the Council be recommended to note the current forecast against capital budget and to approve the increase in the Capital Programme.

24 **Progress update on Council Improvement Plan**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive providing a high-level summary of progress made in its improvement and sustainability journey.

The recommendation set out in paragraph 2 of the report was moved by Councillor P Harley and seconded by Councillor P Bradley.

Opposition Group Members requested data to support claims of reduced staff stress and improved morale, along with evidence of community engagement, which the Chief Executive confirmed was available and would be provided.

The Leader, Cabinet Members and the Chief Executive responded to questions and comments from Opposition Group Members regarding the status of the Regulator of Social Housing Notice; where and how peer assessor feedback on Scrutiny Committees was being provided; the location of the scrutiny handbook; whether the senior management restructure was on track to deliver the proposed savings and how much of the £9.3 million set aside for wider Council improvement projects had been drawn down.

Resolved

That the progress made since the Dudley Council Improvement Plan was set up, the future actions and priorities and the continued good progress and journey towards long-term sustainability and improvement, be noted.

25 **Issues arising from Scrutiny Committees**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

26 **Questions from Members to the Leader (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.5)**

No questions were raised under this agenda item.

The meeting ended at 6.34pm

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL