MINUTE of SPECIAL MEETING of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within Council Chambers, West Lothian Civic Centre, Livingston, EH54 6FF, on 19 FEBRUARY 2026.

Present – Provost Cathy Muldoon (Chair), Depute Provost Peter Heggie (Vice-Chair); Councillors Alison Adamson, Tony Boyle, William Boyle, Janet Campbell, Harry Cartmill, Pauline Clark, Tom Conn, Robert De Bold, Jim Dickson, Mary Dickson, Angela Doran-Timson, Damian Doran-Timson, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Carl John, Lynda Kenna, Danny Logue, Maria MacAulay, Andrew McGuire, Moira McKee Shemilt, David McLennan, Anne McMillan, Susan Manion, Craig Meek, Andrew Miller, Pauline Orr, Sally Pattle, George Paul, Tony Pearson, David Russell, Veronica Smith; and Pauline Stafford

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McMillan stated that she was employed by Kirsteen Sullivan MP

2. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2026/27 TO 2027/28 AND RENT LEVEL 2026/27

The Council considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Depute Chief Executive seeking approval for the updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financial plan for 2026/27 to 2027/28, as well as the proposed HRA budget, rent and service charges for 2026/27.

It was recommended that Council :-

1. Approves the proposed 3.5% per annum rent strategy and financial plan for the period 2026/27 to 2027/28, which will fund service needs and the Housing Capital Investment Programme;

2. Approves the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for 2026/27 and the associated HRA budgets for 2026/27, as set out in the report; and

3. Approves the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for Sheltered Housing and Homelessness properties, as well as related service and support charges, for 2026/27.

Motion

"West Lothian Council welcomes this Housing Revenue Account budget strategy for 2026/27 to 2027/28, which alongside the proposed Housing Capital Investment Programme, forms part of the council's integrated approach to financial strategy, corporate planning, delivery of outcomes and performance monitoring.

This two-year Housing Revenue Account Revenue budget strategy continues to provide a balanced financial plan, incorporating a 3.5% per annum rent increase, which will allow the council to continue to provide value for money services to our tenants and to be responsive to

customers' needs. It will also enable continued investment in our existing housing stock and infrastructure, as well as to expand the supply of new housing.

Council notes that formal consultation with Council tenants on the five-year strategy for the 2023/24 to 2027/28 budget strategy took place in 2022, and as reported to the Housing Services Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panel on 26 January 2023, 74% of those tenants responding expressed a preference for a 3.5% per annum rent increase over the five-year period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The annual consultation and engagement process with council house tenants on the Rent Strategy for 2026/27 took place over November and December 2025 and the majority of those tenants responding expressed a preference for a 3.5% per annum rent increase over the two-year period 2026/27 to 2027/28. This position is also supported by the Tenants Panel.

The annual consultation and engagement process with council house tenants on the Rent Strategy for 2026/27 took place over November and December 2025 and the majority of those tenants responding expressed a preference for a 3.5% per annum rent increase over the two-year period 2026/27 to 2027/28. This position is also supported by the Tenants Panel.

This minority Labour Administration doesn't underestimate the challenges for our tenants in these very difficult times, and notes the reported level of cumulative rent arrears. However, with an in-year collection rate of 96% this year to date, our tenants yet again are to be commended for the priority they are placing on the payment of rent.

However, affordability of rents remains a key concern and the ongoing support being provided by the council via Housing Services and the Advice Shop will continue to be important in the coming year for those tenants who may struggle to pay their rent and other cost of living expenses.

There also remains a concern on the ongoing impact of Universal Credit, the cost of living crisis, and other cost pressures. As such the Housing Revenue Account reserve should be maintained at £926,000 to meet with unforeseen demands on resources.

Council therefore agrees to:

1. Approve the proposed 3.5% per annum rent strategy and financial plan for the period 2026/27 to 2027/28, which will fund service needs and the Housing Capital Investment Programme;

2. Approve the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for 2026/27 and the associated HRA budgets for 2026/27, as set out in the report; and

3. Approve the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for Sheltered Housing and Homelessness properties, as well as related service and support charges, for 2026/27".

- Moved by Councillor Paul and seconded by Councillor McGuire

The Provost invited the Governance Manager to comment on the competency and lawfulness of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). She confirmed the competency and lawfulness of the motion.

The Provost invited the Head of Finance & Property Services to comment on the financial implications of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). He confirmed the accuracy of the figures.

Amendment

"West Lothian Council acknowledges that as the housing provider of last resort, it is incumbent upon the Administration to manage the Council housing estate with a long-term vision to meet futures needs; the current house-building programme does not do this – only 146 council houses are currently under construction or under commitment for construction by this Administration.

West Lothian Council notes that a current element causing overspend is the large number of voids council properties not currently being let to tenants. Void properties result in reduced rental income and impact on the numbers in expensive emergency accommodation.

West Lothian Council recognises the real misery and despair being caused through the inability of the Council to adequately provide much needed social housing. The annual cost of a placement in B&B emergency accommodation is £21,170 per annum, so every void property that can be re-let could save tens of thousands of pounds in reduced emergency accommodation costs.

The average cost to return a void property, including labour and material costs, is approximately £5,000 per property, and the Council therefore resolves to redirect £150,000 of budget from within existing HRA resources to reduce the number of void properties by a further 30 properties in addition to existing targets for 2026/27 and return them to mainstream lets. This will provide additional capacity to help reduce the pressure on both homelessness costs and persons awaiting mainstream council housing.

By reducing the number of void properties, the budget set aside for void rent loss will be reduced by approximately £74,427.60 and a redirection of £75,572.40 from other budget areas would be accommodated within the 2026/27 HRA revenue budget to deliver this additional capacity.

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West Lothian Council therefore resolves to: -

1. Approve the proposed 3.5% per annum rent strategy and financial plan for the period 2026/27 to 2027/28 which will fund the needs and the Housing Capital Investment Programme subject to

£37,786.20 being redirected from the HRA Supplies and Services budget, and £37,786.20 being redirected from the HRA Premises budget, in 2026/27 towards void reduction

2. Approve the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for 2026/27 and the associated HRA budgets for 2026/27, as set out in the report;

3. Approve the proposed rent increase of 3.5% for Sheltered Housing and Homelessness properties, as well as related service and support charges, for 2026/27".

- Moved by Councillor De Bold and seconded by Councillor Campbell

The Provost invited the Governance Manager to comment on the competency and lawfulness of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). She confirmed the competency and lawfulness of the motion.

The Provost invited the Head of Finance & Property Services to comment on the financial implications of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). He confirmed the accuracy of the figures.

An electronic vote was conducted. The result was as follows :-

Motion	Amendment
Alison Adamson	William Boyle
Tony Boyle	Janet Campbell
Harry Cartmill	Mike Carlin
Tom Conn	Pauline Clark
Angela Doran-Timson	Robert De Bold
Damian Doran-Timson	Jim Dickson
Lawrence Fitzpatrick	Mary Dickson
Peter Heggie	Carl John
Danny Logue	Lynda Kenna
Susan Manion	Maria MacAulay
Andrew McGuire	Moira McKee Shemilt
Anne McMillan	David McLennan
Craig Meek	Andrew Miller
Cathy Muldoon	Pauline Orr
Sally Pattle	Veronica Smith
George Paul	Pauline Stafford

Decision

Following a vote, for which the motion and amendment received 16 votes with one member being unable to vote due to technical difficulties, the Provost used her casting vote in favour of the amendment and it was agreed accordingly.

3. HOUSING CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2026/27 TO 2027/28

The Council considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by

the Depute Chief Executive seeking approval for the proposed Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2026/27 to 2027/28 and to note the scope of works to be undertaken by Building Services under the terms of the Best Value Framework.

It was recommended that Council :-

1. Approves the proposal to purchase up to 15 additional New Build Properties and a minimum of 20 additional Open Market Acquisitions using savings identified within the capital programme as set out in section D.3 of the report;

2. Approves the proposed 2026/27 to 2027/28 Housing Capital Investment Programme and related funding as detailed in the report; and

3. Notes the scope of works to be undertaken by Building Services under the terms of the Best Value Framework, as outlined in section D.5 of the report.

Motion

"West Lothian Council welcomes this Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2026/27 to 2027/28, which alongside the Housing Revenue Account budget, forms part of the council's integrated approach to financial strategy, corporate planning, delivery of outcomes and performance monitoring.

Under the previous minority Labour Administration, the Housing Capital Investment Programme delivered over £188.045 million of investment in both our existing stock and new build council housing. Since May 2022 this Labour Administration has delivered £84.609 million of investment and a further £ 37.226 million is projected for 2026/27, totalling £121.835 million over this period.

Building upon these strong foundations this minority Labour Administration is determined to deliver further investment of £65.738 million under the proposed programme. There continues to be a strong focus within the programme on the creation of additional social housing including continuation of the approved new build programme and continuing with a programme of open market acquisitions.

Good progress is being made in delivery of the West Lothian Affordable Housing programme across the active sites, with 1,386 units completed to the end of Quarter 3 2025/26, and the proposed Housing Capital Investment Programme includes the provision of a further 35 additional new council homes to be delivered with budget provision of £10.321 million.

This will deliver an overall total of 462 new houses by the council, including both new build and open market acquisition additions, over the five-year investment period to 2027/28. These measures will increase the availability of social housing within communities for both existing residents

and future generations.

However, there is a national housing emergency and Council calls on the Scottish Government to provide additional Capital grant.

Alongside investment in new and additional housing stock, there will be significant investment of £55.417 million in existing council housing stock and the environment, to improve homes and local amenity. Energy efficiency is recognised as a continuing priority, with an emphasis on meeting the requirements of the Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing legislation. Air quality will also be a focus for the upcoming year.

Council notes that a review of the Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2026/27 to 2027/28 has been undertaken to determine works that may be carried out by external providers and works that may be carried out in-house to ensure compliance with the Best Value Framework.

This two-year Housing Capital Investment Programme forms a key part in the longer-term approach to asset investment and planning, and considers expenditure required to improve and extend council's assets for future years.

Council therefore agrees to:

1. Approve the proposal to purchase up to 15 additional New Build Properties and a minimum of 20 additional Open Market Acquisitions using savings identified within the capital programme as set out in section D.3 of the report;

2. Approve the proposed 2026/27 to 2027/28 Housing Capital Investment Programme and related funding as detailed in the report; and

3. Note the scope of works to be undertaken by Building Services under the terms of the Best Value Framework, as outlined in section D.6 of the report.

- Moved by Councillor Paul and seconded by Councillor McGuire

The Provost invited the Governance Manager to comment on the competency and lawfulness of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). She confirmed the competency and lawfulness of the motion.

The Provost invited the Head of Finance & Property Services to comment on the financial implications of the motion in terms of Standing Order 15(7). He confirmed the accuracy of the figures.

Decision

To approve the terms of the motion