

POLICY AND PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th December, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr S.J. Masterson (Chair)
Cllr Lisa Greenway (Vice-Chair)

Cllr A. Adeola
Cllr Steve Harden
Cllr Rhian Jones
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr M.J. Roberts
Cllr Dhan Sarki

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllrs Abe Allen, T.W. Mitchell and Ivan Whitmee.

Cllr C.W. Card attended the meeting as a Standing Deputy.

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th November, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

25. FREE PARKING FOR SHOPPERS

The Board welcomed Mr Lee McQuade, Economy and Growth Service Manager, who provided information that had been established in response to the approval of a Motion at the October, 2025 Council meeting that had called upon the Board to consider whether free or discounted car parking might be offered to shoppers in Aldershot and Farnborough town centres. The wording of the agreed Motion was attached to the agenda and requested that officers, under guidance from PPAB, should develop a suitable method of consulting residents, local businesses and potential investors about the likely impact of free or discounted parking and how it might work best. Furthermore, it was requested that the Portfolio Holder should present the findings to PPAB to allow it to make recommendations to the Cabinet in time for next year's budget.

The Board was advised that the evidence showed that parking cost could influence behaviour and that high charges could discourage short visits, impulse shopping and the use of cafes and other hospitality outlets but it was also acknowledged that cost was not the only factor. In terms of cost, charges in Aldershot and Farnborough town centres appeared to be comparable to or lower than those levied in Camberley, Basingstoke and Guildford town centres. Research showed that visiting shoppers valued a range of factors including:

- Retail and leisure offer
- Ease of parking / availability of spaces
- Proximity to shops
- Safety and attractiveness of the town
- Cost - though evidence suggested that convenience, relative to what the visitor wanted to purchase or experience, mattered more than price of parking

Mr McQuade explained that the Welsh Government had commissioned a report called 'Assessing the impact of car parking charges on town centre footfall' and that this had concluded that parking cost was only 'one aspect of a complex interplay' influencing visitor behaviour and that the evidence linking changes in parking charges to changes in footfall was 'very weak'. The report added that towns performed best when parking policy was combined with:

- Strong retail and leisure mix
- Events and animation
- Attractive public spaces
- Market and place branding

Other evidence had come to similar conclusions; that parking costs were a factor in town centre performance but not the main one. In concluding his presentation, Mr McQuade explained that some parking in town centres was already free, such as the privately owned car park at Morrisons' in Aldershot. It was also pointed out that any reduction in car parking income would have a negative impact on the Council's revenue position, which would need to be evaluated and considered. The proposed approach to progress this matter was to;

- Assess the impact of limited / targeted changes e.g. time limited offers at specific car parks
- Test those approaches with businesses and residents (would require resources)
- Come back to PPAB with options, possibly at the meeting in March

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- Promotion to local resident and visitors of any parking offers would be key
- Infrastructure within town centres would also need to be in place, such as working escalators and lifts at the Wellington Centre in Aldershot

- Should consider reducing cost of parking at periods before and after school run / work, such as 9am to midday and 3pm to 6pm
- Must remember the green agenda and encourage alternative forms of transport, such as busses, ensuring that public transport services are joined up
- Recall that free parking was offered in High Street Multi Storey in Aldershot in late 90s/early 00s – thought to have had some effect on footfall but not much
- If wanting to support local businesses, should the Council look at rent and rates instead? It was considered that these would be likely to have a greater impact in supporting businesses than changes to parking costs and it was important to consider what outcomes any policy changes were trying to achieve
- PPAB would need to understand revenue implications of free parking to make an informed recommendation
- Requested that Mr McQuade should share the data used for presentation with PPAB members
- Important that PPAB focusses on the wording of the Motion in relation to free parking as opposed to other initiatives, such as the suggested refund of parking charges as a result of spending a certain amount in town – the motion requested that only changes to parking charges be considered, not any other interventions to support town centre businesses
- Should Council be encouraging residents to park outside of town centres and walk in, whilst protecting blue badge holders?
- ‘Pop in bays’ appeared to work well elsewhere
- What events / special days could be hosted / supported to bring footfall into town centres?
- Could any initiatives be advertised on Council Tax bills?

The Chair thanked Mr McQuade for his input and confirmed that this item would be programmed to be discussed again at the Board’s meeting on 24th March, 2026.

26. **WORK PLAN**

The Board noted the current Work Plan. Further to Minute No. 25 above, it was agreed that ‘Free Parking for Shoppers’ would be added to the agenda for the meeting on 24th March, 2026.

It was further agreed that the work plan would be updated following the next meeting of the Programme Management Group. The Chair invited Board members to submit any items for consideration by email.

27. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That, taking into account the public interest test, the public be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of the under mentioned item to avoid the disclosure of exempt information within the paragraph of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 indicated against the item:

Minute No.	Schedule 12A Para. No.	Category
28	3	Information relating to an individual, financial or business affairs and labour relations

THE FOLLOWING ITEM WAS CONSIDERED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC

28. COUNCIL BUDGET 2026/27 - SERVICE REVIEWS

The Board welcomed Mr Ian Harrison, Interim Managing Director, Mr Peter Vickers, Executive Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Mr Alex Shiell, Service Manager – Policy, Strategy and Transformation, who provided a briefing on the options under consideration by the Cabinet to improve the Council's financial sustainability, with a view to enabling the Board to make recommendations to the Cabinet if it wished. Cllr Gareth Williams, Leader of the Council had also been invited to attend the meeting for this item.

The Board was advised that work to set the Council's budget for 2026/27 was well underway, with final proposals going to the Council meeting on 26th February, 2026. There were a number of areas of uncertainty, such as the impact of Fairer Funding arrangements this year, along with a reset of business rates. After many years of finding ways of delivering sufficient savings to deliver a balanced budget without cutting services, it was felt that it would now be necessary to review expenditure on staffing, being a major cost centre that had not shown much change over the previous decade. It was explained that the Cabinet had worked through the base budget on a line-by-line basis with a view to a redesign in the new year that would look to identify savings of £2 million. The Board was informed that, given the influence of local government reorganisation, the need for financial sustainability and the achievement of political priorities, the Council would need to:

- Refocus budgets to support political priorities
- Reduce budgets to achieve a prudent minimum reserves balance
- Achieve financial sustainability

- Have a clear Council Delivery Plan that focussed activity on the most desired outcomes to produce improvements in residents' lives and places, with a framework for accountability and performance monitoring

The Cabinet had provided the following steer in relation to the service review process in the context of its political priorities:

- **Grow** – relevant to services producing a net income
- **Sustain** – services or activity that would not provide any financial benefit from review
- **Refocus / retreat** – services where there were options to achieve a budget reduction and / or improved value for money through doing something different or less
- **Stop** – services or activity that had no statutory implication and were not a political priority or offered poor value for money

It was noted that growth in base budget cost, namely the expansion of a service, would be dealt with outside of this process. The Cabinet had provided a list of areas to grow income from current net income and this was included in the presentation. Also listed within the presentation were cost centres where it was recommended to sustain at the current budget level and areas where it was recommended to refocus to achieve either a budget reduction or better outcomes.

The Board was being asked for its views on:

- Approach to service reviews
- Categorisation of service budgets – grow income / sustain / refocus
- Implementation priority order
- Strategy to get to unitary council vesting day

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- Will continue to be a challenge to explain the Council's complex financial challenges to the public
- Acknowledged that staffing reductions would have an effect on service delivery
- Council is ensuring services are provided to a required standard by benchmarking with neighbouring authorities
- Clarified that this would be a managed process over time, with the opportunity to reshape as the process goes on and, dependent on the budget position and

savings requirement at the time, compulsory redundancy would be a last resort

- Councillors suggested some areas where more information would be required before a view could be taken
- Where areas had been identified for reduce/refocus, teams have been asked to carry out their own review and bring forward proposals for how the service could be delivered in future – no targets for reductions set at this stage of the process
- Could maintenance of Council assets, including skateparks, be incorporated into one budget?

In thanking Mr Harrison, Mr Vickers and Mr Shiell for their contributions to the meeting, the Chair asked Members to submit any further views on this subject to Mr Shiell via email.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

CLLR S.J. MASTERSON (CHAIR)
