



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET

TUESDAY 20 JANUARY 2026
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWNHOUSE, HADDINGTON
AND DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY

Cabinet Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar	Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor A Forrest	Councillor N Hampshire (Convener)
Councillor C McGinn	Councillor J McMillan

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor N Gilbert (R)	Councillor C Yorkston (R)
Councillor S McIntosh (R)	

Council Officials Present:

Mr L Rockey, Chief Executive
Ms L Brown, Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities (R)
Ms S Fortune, Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy
Ms H Barnett, Head of Corporate Support
Mr K Dingwall, Head of Development (R)
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Mr E John, Head of Communities & Partnerships
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education (R)
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing (R)
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure (R)
Mr S Cooper, Service Manager – Communications
Mr C Grilli, Service Manager – Governance
Mr E Hendrikson, Service Manager – Sport, Countryside and Leisure
Dr J Lothian, Strategy, Policy and Development Manager
Ms Z McFadzean, Team Manager – HR Operations
Mr M Mackowiak, Planner
Mr G Marsden, Service Manager – Planning (R)

Clerk:

Mrs L Gillingwater (Clerk)
Ms E Barclay (Meeting Administrator)

(R) = remote attendee

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest:

None

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting which was being held via the hybrid system as provided for in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003.

The clerk advised that the meeting was being webcast live via the Council's website in order to allow the public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. East Lothian Council was the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention, and a recording of the meeting would be publicly available for five years from the date of the meeting.

The clerk confirmed the attendance of Cabinet members by roll call.

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL: CABINET, 11 NOVEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet on 11 November 2025 were approved, subject to the following amendments:

p. 2, Declaration of Interest: 'member of the SSTA board' to be replaced by 'Scottish Public Pensions Agency (SPPA) Teachers' Pension Board'.

p. 3, Item 4, para. 3: 'to ensure that the wording in the Plan aligned with the Supreme Court's ruling on the definition of sex in the Equality Act 2010' to be replaced by 'to reconsider the wording in the section of the Plan regarding the collection of data in relation to participation in sport'.

2. CABINET ACTION NOTE

The Members agreed to the closure of Items 25/02, 25/03, 25/04 and 25/05 in the Action Note.

3. BUDGET DEVELOPMENT UPDATE 2026/27

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy providing an update on the development of General Services and Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2026/27 onwards.

The Head of Finance, Ellie Dunnet, presented the report, highlighting the projected budget gap of £6.9 million for 2026/27, rising to £37 million over the next five years (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report). She provided an update on the recently announced provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, advising that £15 billion had been allocated to local government for 2026/27, representing a cash uplift of £591.8 million. For East Lothian, the increase would equate to an additional c. £7.8 million for 2026/27, of which £3.7 million would be allocated to existing or new policy commitments. Taking this into account, the budget gap was projected to be £2.7 million. Ms Dunnet expected that the Council's contribution to the funding floor would increase by £1.3 million. She noted that these figures were subject to change. On capital funding, she advised that a significant proportion was undistributed, and she was awaiting further detail on flood scheme funding and the impact of this on the draft Capital Plan. As regards revenue, she signalled that the position was slightly improved for 2026/27, albeit there were current and emerging risks to be taken into consideration.

Responding to questions from Members, Ms Dunnet: reported on the estimated additional transfer of funds of £0.47 million to the Integration Joint Board (IJB) (outlined in Appendix 1); advised that there was no new information in relation to the proposed removal of non-residential care charges; noted that c. 25% of the Council's funding is provided through council

tax; and set out the timelines for the preparation of the budget proposals, which would be presented to Council on 24 February.

There followed a debate, with Members highlighting the financial challenges facing the Council. The particular pressures facing health and social care services were pointed out, including the impact on patient experience, the reduction in Council-owned care home places, recruitment and retention of staff, financial recovery, and a growing population. Reference was also made to the need to deliver infrastructure to support growth.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to note the updated high-level General Services Revenue budget model (2026-27 to 2030-31) and updated budget gap shown at Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. to note the update on the development of the General Services Capital Programme (2026-27 to 2030-31);
- iii. to note the update on the development of the Housing Revenue Account budget; and
- iv. to note the next steps to develop budgets for 2026-27 onwards, outlined in Sections 3.19-3.20 of the report.

4. DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy requesting approval for the Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence Policy, following formal Trade Union/employee consultation and CLT approval.

The Team Manager for HR Operations, Zoe McFadzean, presented the report, noting that this policy would replace the 2009 Domestic Abuse Policy. She highlighted the key aspects of the new Policy, namely, that there would be a ‘zero tolerance’ approach adopted; it would promote awareness and understanding of the challenges associated with domestic abuse and gender-based violence; support would be provided to perpetrators who seek such support; staff training and guidance would be provided; and that the approach would be person-centred and trauma-informed.

Ms McFadzean responded to questions from Members on the definitions of domestic abuse and gender-based violence (as defined in section 4 of the Policy); the commitment to embed the Policy at all levels in the Council through training and support for staff; consultation with other agencies, such as Women’s Aid, regarding the drafting of the Policy; and the importance of signposting people to the best place for support.

The Policy was welcomed by Members, who stressed the importance of supporting staff affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence and providing a safe space for those affected. Reference was made to the work of the multi-agency Equally Safe group, which worked alongside the Council and its partners to provide support for those experiencing domestic abuse. The ‘zero tolerance’ approach was welcomed by Members, as was the provision of training and guidance for staff at all levels.

The Convener moved to a roll call on the recommendation, which was approved unanimously.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to approve the Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence Policy for implementation.

5. EAST LoTHIAN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2026

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities presenting the East Lothian Open Space Strategy (OSS) 2026 for approval.

The Strategy, Policy and Development Manager, Jennifer Lothian, presented the report, drawing particular attention to the key outcomes and main themes of the Strategy; the audit undertaken of 462 accessible open spaces across East Lothian; enhancement projects completed as part of the current OSS; public consultation and feedback; and the link between the OSS and the Local Development Plan (LDP2).

Dr Lothian responded to questions from Members, advising that consultation respondents had emphasised the value of open spaces for health and wellbeing; that preserving heritage was an important aspect of the Strategy, as was addressing climate change and protecting nature; that community and voluntary groups played an important and valued role in preserving and enhancing open spaces; that NHS Lothian were involved with the preparation of this Strategy and the Health and Social Care Partnership could make use of open spaces for prevention and early intervention; how the Strategy linked to the Tree and Woodland Strategy and Climate Change Strategy; the work already underway on developing nature networks; the development of park management plans, with input from local communities; and that officers would work with colleagues in Planning regarding developing policies for open spaces in new housing developments.

The debate followed, with Members welcoming the proposed Open Space Strategy as a ‘plan for the future’. A number of aspects of the OSS were highlighted, including: recognition of the work done to enhance open spaces by staff in Amenity Services, as well as community groups and volunteers; the positive impact of green spaces on health and wellbeing; the need to protect open spaces; and the importance of including the evidence set out in the OSS within the LDP2 documents to ensure developers create high-quality spaces as part of new developments.

The Convener moved to a roll call on the recommendations, which were approved unanimously.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to approve the East Lothian Open Space Strategy 2026; and
- ii. to note that preparation of an Open Space Strategy is a statutory duty for local authorities under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, and it must be taken into consideration in the Local Development Planning Process.

Signed

Councillor Norman Hampshire
Council Leader and Convener of Cabinet

The webcast for this meeting will be available at the link below for five years from the date of the meeting: https://eastlothian.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1041838