



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 4:30pm on
Thursday 26 September 2024

Present:

Cllr Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Charlotte Cane
Cllr Lorna Dupré
Cllr Anna Bailey
Cllr Mark Goldsack
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr David Miller (*from 4:35pm*)
Cllr Alan Sharp (Chair)
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Alison Whelan
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers:

Sally Bonnett – Director Community
Isabel Edgar – Director Operations
Maggie Camp – Director Legal Services
Kieran Carr – Economic Development Manager
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
Jane Webb – Democratic Services and Elections Manager
Nicole Pema – HR Manager
Ian Smith – Director Finance

In attendance:

Nigel Ankers – ECTC Finance Manager
Emma Grima – Director Commercial ECTC

18. Public Questions

The Chair confirmed there were no public questions for the meeting.

19. Apologies and substitutions

It was noted that several changes had been made to the committee membership since the last meeting:

- Cllr Christine Whelan replaced Cllr Charlotte Cane as a main member.
- Cllr Charlotte Cane had replaced Cllr Caroline Shepherd as a substitute.
- Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith has been removed as a substitute.

Apologies were received from Cllr Bill Hunt and Cllr Mary Wade.

Cllr Martin Goodearl and Cllr Charlotte Cane were in attendance as substitutes.

20. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21. Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2024.

Members unanimously resolved:

That the Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 27 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

22. Chair's Announcements

The Chair explained that the page numbers in the agenda pack were not correct therefore, he would ensure that the correct page number was stated before each item.

23. ECTC Financial Statements 2023/24 and Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

The Committee considered a report, Z62 previously circulated, that detailed the East Cambs Trading Company Finance Statements and Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24. The report was presented by the Finance Manager of ECTC who ran through the financial statements, and the Director Commercial ECTC also ran through the Annual Governance Statement.

In response to a question from Cllr Dupré, the Director Commercial ECTC explained that the contribution for in lieu affordable housing was paid in 2017/18. The Director Community confirmed that the contribution had not been spent to date. The Director Commercial ECTC offered to give a more detailed answer in the exempt session.

It was noted that Cllr Cane had requested that future reports contain a paragraph covering the Directors' thoughts on the statements.

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

1. The East Cambs Trading Company Financial statements 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
2. The East Cambs Trading Company Annual Governance Statement as set out in Appendix 2 of the Report.

24. Medium Term Financial Strategy Update

The Committee considered a report, Z63 previously circulated, that provided an update on the Medium-Term Finance Strategy (MTFS) since the 2024/25 budget was approved in February 2024.

The Finance Director presented the report and Members made comments and asked questions.

In response to a question from Cllr Goodearl, the Director Finance believed the £70 would be cost neutral but this would be checked and reported back on.

A discussion took place about those who found themselves unintentionally in debt with no access to independent advice; it was suggested that ARP would help where needed and that the fines would be used only where necessary.

The recommendations as stated in the report were proposed by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Goodearl.

It was unanimously resolved:

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

1. The information within the report.

Members resolved to **APPROVE**:

1. The introduction of a £70 civil fine to those residents that disclose incorrect information regarding their circumstances around Council Tax discounts as detailed within section 5.4 of the report.

25. Finance Report

The Committee considered a report, Z64 previously circulated, that provided budget monitoring information for services under the Finance & Assets Committee and then, as part of its corporate remit, for the Council as a whole. The Director, Community further explained that there had been no impact on services from the vacancies currently held in the Housing Strategic team.

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

1. A projected yearend underspend of £197,000 for the Finance and Assets Committee when compared to its approved revenue budget of £7,016,768.
2. A projected yearend underspend of £12,718 for the Council when compared to its approved revenue budget of £18,840,342.
3. The overall position for the Council on Capital is a projected outturn of £5,680,541, which is an underspend of £2m when compared to the revised budget.

26. Hedgehog Recovery Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document

The Committee considered a report, Z65, previously circulated, to determine whether to adopt the Hedgehog Recovery Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). If so, this SPD would become a material consideration when making planning decisions.

The Leader, Cllr Bailey proposed the recommendations in the report. In doing so, she thanked officers for their work as this was an opportunity to make a considerable difference to wildlife while making a minimal difference to planning. Councillor Bovingdon seconded the recommendation.

In response to a question from Cllr Dupré, the Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that a workshop had been set up with Parks and Open Spaces team concerning hedgehog management, and he would make sure this also covered the use of pesticides; he would be happy to relay the outcomes from this to Members.

The Committee unanimous resolved to **APPROVE**.

1. The adoption of the Hedgehog Recovery Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

27. Environmental Policy

The Committee considered a report, Z66 previously circulated, that requested Members to approve the updated Environmental Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

Cllr Dupré felt it would be helpful to have an over-arching diagram to show the different policies and a timeline of when these would be implemented or reviewed.

The Chair, Cllr Sharp, proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Bovingdon seconded the recommendation.

Members resolved to unanimously **APPROVE**:

The updated Environment Policy as set in Appendix 1 of the report.

28. Net Zero Villages Grant Scheme

The Committee considered a report, Z67 previously circulated, to agree the arrangements for distributing to our communities the Net Zero Villages grant of £167,737 from the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Combined Authority

In response to questions from Members, it was confirmed that the scheme would be promoted across all parishes, and all applications would be treated equally and assessed by officers.

Cllr Bovingdon proposed the recommendations in the report, adding he felt it was a good scheme. Cllr Goodearl seconded the recommendations.

Members unanimously resolved to:

1. **AGREE** to accept the Net Zero Villages grant of £167,737 from the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)
2. **APPROVE** the East Cambridgeshire-specific onward community grant scheme criteria as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
3. **AGREE** to delegate authority to the Strategic Planning Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Finance & Assets Committee, to finalise the detailed arrangements and opening of the grant scheme, likely in October 2024, following the signing of the CPCA Grant Funding Agreement.

29. Assets Update

The Committee considered a report, Z68 (previously circulated), to receive an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager presented the report.

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

1. The update on Council-owned assets.
2. The expenditure tracking sheet in Appendix 1 to the report.

30. Health and Safety Annual Report 2023/24

The Committee considered a report, Z69 (previously circulated), to receive an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager presented the report.

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

1. The Health and Safety Annual Report 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

31. Economic Development Funding Update

The Committee considered a report, Z70 (previously circulated), to receive an update on Council-owned assets. The Economic Development Manager presented the report and explained that E-space North in Littleport was successful and was running at a 95% occupancy rate. Due to high demand, limited parking space, and the cost of modular buildings, this made extending expensive. Members asked if the Council had any further funding that could be used to fill the gap and encourage start-up businesses.

The Chair proposed an amendment, to drop 2.1 from the recommendations in the report and to propose recommendations 2.2 and 2.3 in the report; this was seconded by Cllr Bovingdon.

Members resolved to **APPROVE**:

1. To delegate authority to the Economic Development Manager in consultation with the Chair of Finance and Assets Committee, to finalise the detailed arrangements and opening of the grant scheme, following approval of the reallocation of the RDPE funding from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).
- 2.

32. Gender Pay Reporting 2023/24

The Committee considered a report, Z71 (previously circulated), providing some measurable data on gender pay at the Council. The HR Manager presented the report.

Cllr Cane queried at 4.6 of the report, whether there was evidence of good promotion practices when the percentage of females in the upper quartile (55%) was less than the total number of females at 70%. Cllr Trapp suggested that table 1 include salary bandings for each of the quartiles in future papers.

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

1. The content of information within the report.

33. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy 2025-2028

The Committee considered a report, Z72 (previously circulated), to present the first draft of the Council's updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2025-2028 for further consultation. The HR Manager presented the report.

Cllr Alison Whelan thanked the HR Manager for the positive changes this policy and made reference to the difference between equality and equity. Cllr Whelan asked for 'equity' to be added to the updated policy. Cllr Anna Bailey queried the wording about civil partnerships in Appendix 1 and them also being available for married couples. The HR Manager will correct this.

The Chair, Cllr Sharp, proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Bovingdon seconded the recommendations.

Members unanimously resolved to **APPROVE**:

1. The first draft of the updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy 2025-2028 for further consultation, and enable a final draft to be presented to the Finance and Assets Committee in January 2025.

34. ECDC Bereavement Centre Project Quarter 2 Update

The Committee considered a report, Z73 (previously circulated), to receive an update on the Bereavement Centre Project. The Director Operations presented the report.

In response to a query raised by Cllr Cane concerning the tight deadlines for construction and the restrictions on when ecology surveys could take place, the Director Operations explained that the surveys were required pre commencement and any further ecology work required would take not impact construction work, although timelines would be tight ahead of commencing construction. The Council continued to work with the Wildlife Trust and Planning to ensure a way forward.

Cllr Dupré proposed adding an amendment:

- 2.2 In view of the size of the gap in the projects contingency budget and increase in build costs reported in 4.4 of the report, which have substantial implications for the project, members are requested to refer this item to the meeting of the Full Council on 17 October 2024.

Proposer: Cllr Lorna Dupré
Secunder: Cllr Alison Whelan

Speaking as proposer of the amendment, Cllr Dupré believed that it was not appropriate to 'note' the report when it was likely that further work and costs would be incurred, it was her opinion that the item should be brought back to Full Council for consideration and discussion by all Members, therefore she proposed the item should be discussed at Full Council in October, in an exempt session. Cllr Alison Whelan seconded the amendment.

Members believed that although it was likely that costs had increased, these figures would remain unknown until they were put out to tender and therefore it was suggested that it would be more appropriate for the item to be brought to Full Council at that point when the full costs would be known.

Cllr Cane agreed that costs would have increased but believed it should be all Members at the Council discussing if it would be worth the money to continue to pursue the project.

Speaking as seconder of the amendment, Cllr Alison Whelan stated that construction costs were rising, and Finance & Assets Committee was not the correct place to consider the item; she felt all Members should be informed and able to debate and discuss at Full Council.

Cllr Dupré added that there was a need to discuss these issues early and to reflect on the issues raised.

At the request of Cllr Cane, a recorded vote was taken on the amended recommendation:

FOR: (5) – Cllrs Cane, Dupré, Trapp, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan

AGAINST: (6) – Cllrs Bailey, Bovingdon, Goldsack, Goodearl, Miller, Sharp

ABSTENTIONS: (0) –

The Amendment was declared to have fallen.

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

1. The information provided in the Bereavement Centre Build Project Dashboard Appendix 1 (Exempt Agenda Item 20) and Strategic Plan Appendix 2 of the report.

35. Appointment of a Substitute Representative on the Rural Services Network

The proposed Julia Huffer be appointed as substitute representative on the Rural Services Network, this was seconded by Cllr Bailey.

Members resolved to **APPROVE:**

That Cllr Julia Huffer be appointed as substitute representative on the Rural Services Network.

36. Forward Agenda Plan

The Committee considered its forward plan of items to be considered.

It was noted that Economic Development Funding Update be added to the November meeting and the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy 2025-28 be added to the January meeting.

37. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS

It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 & 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

(A short break was taken from 6:20pm to 6:27pm.)

38. EXCLUSION BEREAVEMENT CENTRE UPDATE – EXEMPT APPENDIX

Members resolved to **NOTE** the contents of the Exempt Appendix.

39. ECTC Management Accounts Q1 2024/25

The Committee considered a report, Z25 previously circulated, that detailed the management accounts.

Members resolved to **NOTE** the Management Accounts covering Q1 2024/25.

40. Write Off of Unrecoverable Debt

The Committee considered a report, Z26 previously circulated, that detailed the current Business Rate and general debt that the Council no longer felt was recoverable and as such, needed to be written off. The Director Finance presented the report.

The Chair, Cllr Sharp, proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Bovingdon seconded the recommendations.

Members resolved to:

- 1. **APPROVE** the write-off of Business Rate debt to a total value of £109,732.17 and general debt of £3,900.00.
- 2. **NOTE** the Business Rate debt to a total value of 101,916.49 and two general debts to a value of £1,045.00 have been written off using delegated powers.

41. Exempt Minutes

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** that the exempt Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 27 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

The meeting concluded at 6:50pm

Chair.....

Date.....