



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 27 June 2024

Present:

Cllr Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lorna Dupré
Cllr Martin Goodearl (substitute for Cllr James Lay)
Cllr Julia Huffer (substitute for Cllr Mark Goldsack)
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr David Miller
Cllr Alan Sharp (Chair)
Cllr Caroline Shepherd (substitute for Cllr Charlotte Cane)
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Mary Wade
Cllr Alison Whelan

Officers:

Sally Bonnett – Director Communities
Maggie Camp – Director Legal Services
Kieran Carr – Economic Development Manager
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Emma-Jane Danielsson – Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
Leah Mickleborough – Interim Democratic Services Manager
Nicole Pema – HR Manager
Ian Smith – Director Finance

In attendance:

Nigel Ankers – ECTC Finance Manager
Karen Wright – ICT Manager

1. Public Questions

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

2. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Charlotte Cane, Mark Goldsack and James Lay. Councillor Lorna Dupré and Councillor David Miller apologised for their late attendance.

Cllrs Martin Goodearl, Julia Huffer and Caroline Shepherd were attending as substitutes.

3. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2024.

Arising from the minutes, Councillor Hunt raised concern with the volume of member questions asked at the previous meeting, totalling over 100. The Chair confirmed that following discussion with group leaders and committee chairs, a motion had been presented to Council on 23 May 2024 which amended the constitutional rules of procedure for members questions.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 28 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

5. Chairman's announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

6. Financial Outturn Report 2023/24

The Committee considered a report, Z19 previously circulated, that detailed the outturn for the 2023/24 financial year. The report was presented by the Director Finance, who reminded members of the recommendations they were being asked to consider.

Councillor Whelan noted that in her experience, there will be unexpected items arise during the course of a financial year. Nonetheless, she was disappointed to see large variances against some budgets, the causes of which she felt would have been known when the budget was set.

Councillor Hunt thanked the Director of Finance and his team for their work, and that sound financial management had meant the Council had been able to freeze Council tax for the 2024/25 financial year.

The Chair echoed his thanks to the finance team and moved the proposals in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Bovingdon.

It was resolved unanimously:

To **APPROVE:**

1. The carry forward of slippage on the 2023/24 capital programme into 2024/25, as detailed in appendix 3.

To **NOTE:**

2. The Committee has a yearend underspend of £1,965,000 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £6,028,412.
3. That overall the Council has a yearend underspend of £2,596,480 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £16,856,960.
4. That the overall position for the Council on Capital is outturn of £3,200,385, which is an underspend of £4,600,402 when compared to the revised budget.

7. 2023/24 Treasury Operations Annual Performance Review

The Committee considered a report, Z20 previously circulated, that detailed the Council's performance in managing its treasury balances during the year. In presenting the report, the Director Finance explained that the Council had benefited from higher interest rates on its cash balances than had been provided for in the original budget which had a positive impact on the financial out-turn.

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

It was resolved unanimously:

To **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL:**

That they approve this report detailing the Council's treasury operations during 2023/24, including the prudential and treasury indicators, as set out in the Annual Treasury Management Review (Appendix 1).

Councillor David Miller arrived at 4:40pm, during consideration of this item

8. Assets Update

The Committee considered a report, Z21 previously circulated, that provided an update on Council owned assets.

The Chair reminded members that the work on inclusive play arose from a cross-party motion on 23 May. It was initially hoped an audit of the Council's play provision could be undertaken by September. Plan Inclusive Play Areas (PiPA)

is the only organisation identified who provide such a service, and they cannot undertake the work to the Council's original timeframes. It remains a priority to progress the work as quickly as feasible.

In presenting the report, the Open Spaces and Facilities Manager clarified that the work undertaken on Newnham Car Park was an interim repair whilst building work was being undertaken adjacent to the car park. Once the building work was complete, a more comprehensive repair would be undertaken.

Councillor Hunt queried whether the budget for a full repair of Newnham Car Park was sufficient. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager confirmed that whilst these were provisional estimates, a separate budget had been included for the gully work required and the Council is committed to undertaking a thorough repair of the site. Councillor Whelan thanked the team for the work on the car park.

Councillor Trapp queried whether there was a time estimate on the work to be undertaken by PiPA. He indicated he was aware of several parishes that were looking to invest in play equipment and would be interested in the work. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager confirmed that the specification was in development, and a timescale will be agreed with PiPA. He emphasised that inclusive play was not just about the play equipment, but about the wider setting and environment.

The Committee **NOTED**

1. The update on Council owned assets, and
2. The expenditure tracking sheet at Appendix 1 to the report

9. Ely High Street renewal – capital grant fund

The Committee considered a report, Z22, previously circulated, that sought approval to use £75,000 from the Council's Market Towns Programme to support building front renewal and street improvement schemes in Ely.

The Economic Development Manager explained the details of the scheme proposed and the funding available, drawing members attention to the designated area outlined in Appendix 2 to the report.

Councillor Huffer sought assurance that the scheme would be appropriately publicised to businesses, which was given.

Councillor Wade highlighted that there had been similar schemes in the past. It was confirmed that the take up of previous schemes was good, but the current scheme was over a larger area and allowed for a wider range of work to be undertaken. It was also confirmed that the economic development team were liaising with Visit Ely about the scheme.

Councillor Hunt noted that the proposals were good and welcomed that the area between the High Street and Cathedral was included, as he had concern that the visibility in that area was poor and required improvement.

Councillor Bovingdon identified the scheme was similar to one in Soham previously. He queried whether the timeframes were sufficient to allow businesses to participate; whether match funding would be required and how the scheme would be publicised. It was confirmed no match funding was required, and there would be a range of communication tools.

In response to a question from Councillor Whelan, it was confirmed the scheme was open to commercial properties, but not residential properties.

Councillor Trapp queried the omission of the area between Egremont Street and Chapel Street. Following expressions of support amongst the Committee, the Economic Development Manager committed to reviewing the map to look at inclusion of this area.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Hunt, and seconded by Councillor Bovingdon.

The Committee unanimously resolved to **APPROVE**

1. The fund eligibility criteria at Appendix 1, and
2. That the fund will open to applicants on Monday 15th July 2024 and close on Friday 30th August at 4pm. In the event that the fund is fully utilised before the close date, the Council reserves the right to close the fund to pending or new applications.

10. Climate and Nature Strategy 2024-2028 and Climate and Nature Monitoring Report and Action Plan 2024

The Committee considered a report, Z23 previously circulated, that detailed the work undertaken to review and refresh the Council's Climate and Nature Strategy and the outcome of work undertaken over the past year.

The Strategic Planning Manager explained the work undertaken to review the strategy, which now covered a 4 year period and was summarised into one page. He highlighted that some of the key proposed actions included developing habitat management plans for the Council's green spaces and working with local businesses to support their decarbonisation efforts. The Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer highlighted some of the key Council achievements over the past year, which included obtaining the Investors in Environment silver award and undertaking carbon reduction training for staff.

The Strategic Planning Manager demonstrated to members the reduction in paper used by the Council over the past year. He reminded them that there was great potential to reduce paper use further if savings were made in producing paper copies of committee agendas.

Councillor Whelan identified she was pleased to see the strategy presented in a simpler format, however raised concerns over the accessibility of the format used and whether equalities had been fully taken into account in its development.

In response to a question from Councillor Miller, the Strategic Planning Manager confirmed it had not been possible to install solar panels on E-Space South in Littleport due to the on-site electricity configuration.

Members reflected on the point raised by the Strategic Planning Manager in relation to paper use at Committees. Councillor Shepherd expressed her disappointment that there continued to be large paper copies of agendas produced for meetings, and whether councillors could move to paper. Councillor Huffer explained some members, including herself, felt uncomfortable using electronic devices for committee meetings whilst Councillor Trapp identified ways he felt the content of agendas could be reduced.

Councillor Miller noted that the planning service was facing a number of challenges such as biodiversity net gain but was concerned that ecology did not seem as prominently placed in the annual report. The Strategic Planning Manager explained that whilst the report was simplified, people could seek further information if they wished.

Councillor Goodearl proposed the recommendations in the report. In doing so, he thanked officers for their work and noted the professional appearance of the document. He was keen to see the Council work with local businesses to access funding to support carbon reduction. Councillor Huffer seconded the recommendation.

Councillor Dupré, who had arrived during the course of the item, noted her concern that there was not sufficient weight placed on the need to work in partnership within the documents. To achieve net zero across the district by 2040 there needed to be work undertaken to decarbonise transport, retrofit properties and reduce carbon generated by land use, all of which required a partnership approach. She believed that the Council needed to place greater focus on where it had challenges and how to approach these successfully rather than on its successes and look at how it supported Parish Councils to reduce their emissions.

Councillors Wade and Trapp noted areas where they felt there was the potential to develop the Council's approach further, including through carbon reduction planning in procurement and rolling out the use of vegetable oil fuel across the whole fleet.

In response, Councillor Huffer felt that the strategy was an opportunity to generate public interest by demonstrating how the Council was setting an example in the areas such as the use of vegetable oil fuel, the work of the waste service review working party and the creation of the hedgehog recovery supplementary planning document.

With 6 members voting in favour, and 3 against (with 3 abstentions) it was resolved to **APPROVE**:

1. The Climate and Nature Strategy 2024-2028 (Appendix 1)
2. The summary Climate and Nature Top 20 Actions for 2024
3. (Appendix 2), together with the more comprehensive Climate and Nature Action Plan and Monitoring Report 2024 (Appendix 3)
4. Support the principle of our website to have a greater focus on live information and campaigns associated with climate and nature, as well as the home for any detailed technical and monitoring information
5. The extension of the Pride of Place grant scheme into 2024/25, with a maximum of £60,000 available to bid for this financial year on a first come first served basis, with the fund closing for applications no later than 31 October 2024 (for spend by March 2025).

11. Annual Report of Representatives on Outside Bodies

The Committee considered a report, Z24 previously circulated, that provided annual reports from the Council's representatives on outside bodies. The Interim Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed there were no changes required to the Council's representatives.

The Committee **NOTED** the 2023-24 annual reports from the Council representatives on Outside Bodies within the remit of the Finance & Assets Committee

12. Whistleblowing Policy Update

The Committee considered a verbal report from the Director Legal Services, updating the Committee on the progress of the Whistleblowing Policy. The Director reminded members that that when they considered the draft Policy in March, they had requested an independent review by the whistleblowing charity, Protect. The Director explained that Protect had requested the Council undertake an initial self-assessment of its whistleblowing arrangements before reviewing the policy. The Director confirmed that she would bring a further report in September.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the whistleblowing policy.

13. Minutes of the Bus, Cycle, Walk Working Party held on 14 May 2024

The Chair introduced this item, explaining that the working group had been set up in 2019 and he wished to thank all members and officers who had taken part. He felt that the group had developed a number of good schemes.

In response to a question the Director Communities, confirmed that it was proposed to hold a seminar in September, where the work of Sustrans could be explained and considered, and the plans would then be uploaded to the website.

Councillor Hunt wished for his concerns about the proposals for Wilburton to Cottenham be noted, and in particular the potential closure of twenty pence road. The Chair confirmed the proposals could be discussed further at the seminar.

14. Forward Agenda Plan

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

The Chair noted the new format, which was welcomed, and that there were two items to add to the forward plan, namely an update on the whistleblowing policy in September, and quarterly updates on the bereavement centre.

7. 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).

15. East Cambridgeshire Trading Company Limited Management Accounts for the 12 months ending 31 March 2024

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

Members resolved to **NOTE** the management accounts covering the 12 months to 31 March 2024

16. Appointments, Transfers and resignations

The Committee considered a report, Z26 previously circulated, that detailed the Council's starters and leavers from 1 January to 30 May 2024.

Members resolved to **NOTE** the information in the report

17. Exempt Minutes of the Finance and Assets Committee held on the 28 March 2024

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** that the exempt Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 28 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

The meeting concluded at 6:15pm

Chairman.....

Date.....