



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 30 January 2025

Present:

Cllr Chika Akinwale
Cllr Anna Bailey
Cllr Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Mark Goldsack
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr David Miller
Cllr Alan Sharp (Chair)
Cllr Caroline Shepherd
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Mary Wade
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers:

Sally Bonnett – Director Community
Isabel Edgar – Director Operations
Maggie Camp – Director Legal Services
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Nicole Pema – HR Manager
Jane Webb – Democratic Services and Elections Manager
Ian Smith – Director Finance

60. Public Questions

The Chair confirmed a question had been received from a member of the public, Cameron Martin of Stuntney, Ely:

“Can the councillors confirm that funding is being sought from the CPCA Active Travel Capital for the Soham to Ely cycle path? If so, please can you provide additional detail and clarity on how these funds are being built up and how it will be allocated along the route but more specifically the Stuntney Causeway section.

Further to this, and alluded to in my previous discussion, the residents of Stuntney are aware of the historic efforts for the progression of the cycle path. We are however increasingly frustrated that it progressed to the bid stage for construction and contract award but fell at the final hurdle - implementation.

We are now three years on with little to no sign of progress. Due to these frustrations the Stuntney residence would like clarity of the following aspects:

- Cost breakdown of the historic £600k budget within the "Phase 2 Stuntney Causeway work".
 - We have reason to believe this should sit within the DFT bid documentation and / or response(s) provided by the previous contractors and bid teams.
- Visibility of costs allocated to or associated with land acquisition needs for the route.
 - We as a community have proactively progressed stakeholder engagement and gained verbal agreement with the key landowner for the allocation route on the Southern side of the A142. Ensuring that adequate costs have been considered / accounted for is a key aspect for success.
- Reassurance by councillors and/or Active Travel Team, that the historic work is not lost. That plans previously used (ref attached) are not unnecessarily reworked and thus impacting allocated funds.
 - The Stuntney residence are concerned that there will be unnecessary remeasure / rework when revisiting the proposed route. There was a lot of good work done previously and this should not be lost, it should be more of an update than full rework.
- Access to and frequent check-ins with key team members within the Active Travel team who are dealing with the design and construction.
 - I would like to be put forward as a key contact with the Active Travel team, through which I can relay any and all updates to the community (and councillors where needed) on progress.

I hope that the above underlines our community's eagerness and determination to progressing the cycle path to the point of completion. I (we) look forward to receiving updates on the aspects listed."

The Chair gave the following response:

"The Council is continuing to work with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council to deliver active travel improvements for the district.

Proposals for funding the development of active travel routes in East Cambridgeshire including Ely to Soham, is undergoing the Combined Authority Single Assurance Framework. The Outline Business Case which seeks funding for a programme of work funded by the Combined Authority's Active Travel Capital Funding will seek final approval by the Investment Committee in March following review by the Investment Panel in February.

With regard to previous schemes, East Cambridgeshire District Council does not hold any of the information that you have requested as the work was led by Cambridgeshire County Council.

I understand that Officers have already sent you the contact details for the Principal Active Travel Officer at Cambridgeshire County Council so that you can forward your request to them.”

Cameron Martin asked the following supplementary question:

“I will be keen to see the outcome from both February and March’s meetings; the main concern was that the correct level of funding had been applied, and I appreciate your time and efforts on this and look forward to the next update.”

The Chair thanked Mr. Martin for his time and dedication to this matter.

61. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Alison Whelan; Cllr Christine Colbert was in attendance as a substitute.

62. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

63. Minutes

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

Members unanimously resolved:

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

64. Chair’s Announcements

There were no Chair’s announcements.

65. 2025/26 Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy

The Committee considered a report, Z121 previously circulated, that detailed the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy, the Annual Investment Strategy, and the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement.

The Director Finance presented the report; Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Bovingdon seconded the recommendations.

Councillors Christine Whelan and Shepherd expressed concerns about the accuracy of the figures in the report. The Director of Finance acknowledged

that while the movements within the figures were incorrect, the final figures were accurate. He confirmed that he would update the report in preparation for the Full Council meeting.

Cllr Christine Whelan proposed, and Cllr Trapp seconded the following amendment:

Members resolved to recommend that the movement in the figures of 2026/27 be adjusted to the correct figures and checked before being submitted to Full Council.

It was resolved unanimously to recommend that the movement in the figures of 2026/27 be adjusted to the correct figures and checked before being submitted to Full Council to approval:

That approval be given to:

- 1. The 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy**
- 2. The Annual Investment Strategy**
- 3. The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement**
- 4. The Prudential and Treasury Indicators**

66. Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy and Council Tax 2025/26

The Committee considered a report, Z122 previously circulated, that detailed the Council's proposed revenue budget, capital strategy, and the required level of Council Tax in 2025/26.

The Director Finance presented the report, and Members commented and asked questions.

Cllr Bailey proposed the following amendment which was seconded by Cllr Sharp:

2.1 This Committee recommends to Council to approve:

- (i) The draft revenue budget for 2025/26 and MTFs for 2026/27 to 2028/29 as set out in revised Appendix A.
- (ii) The Statement of Reserves as set out in revised Appendix B.
- (iii) The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 3.
- (iv) The 2025/26 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4.
- (v) The application of the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure 40% Business Rate relief (which will be fully funded by the Government through Section 31) as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of this report and any other Business Rate reliefs that may be announced in the national budget (as detailed in section 6.8).
- (vi) The changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and premiums for Long-Term Empty and Second Homes as detailed in sections 11.8 and 11.9 of this report.

2.2 To authorise the Director, Finance, in consultation with the Chair of Committee to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2025/26 and future years (as available), to ensure that the net budget as detailed in 2.1 remains unchanged (in the event of any additional information becoming available, principally in relation to (but not exclusive to) the Final Local Government Settlement and/or the NNDR1 return). These adjustments to be made in advance of the report being presented to Full Council on the 25th February 2025.

2.3 To authorise the Director Finance to bring forward proposals to Council to identify savings to balance the 2026/27 estimate as detailed in the revised Appendix A.

As proposer to the amendment, Cllr Bailey expressed gratitude to the finance team and council officers for their excellent work on the budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). She emphasised that the Conservatives committed to raising Council Tax only as a last resort, which is why the amendment calls for a twelfth consecutive year of Council Tax freeze. Additionally, Cllr Bailey highlighted a proposal to keep commuter car parking charges unchanged, meaning that rates at the Angel Drove car park etc will remain the same. The amendment also included an additional paragraph (2.3) that empowers the Director Finance to bring forward any identified savings. Cllr Bailey hoped that all Members would support this freeze as a recommendation to Full Council.

Members provided feedback and asked questions. The Director Finance stated he would explain the movement of staff and funding streams within the report offline.

A vote was taken on the amendment as follows:

FOR: (6), AGAINST (0), ABSTENTIONS (6)

The amendment was declared to be carried.

Members resolved to recommend to Full Council to approve

1.
 - (i) The draft revenue budget for 2025/26 and MTFS for 2026/27 to 2028/29 as set out in revised Appendix A.
 - (ii) The Statement of Reserves as set out in revised Appendix B.
 - (iii) The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 3.
 - (iv) The 2025/26 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4.
 - (v) The application of the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure 40% Business Rate relief (which will be fully funded by the Government through Section 31) as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of this report and any other Business Rate reliefs that may be announced in the national budget (as detailed in section 6.8).
 - (vi) The changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and premiums for Long-Term Empty and Second Homes as detailed in sections 11.8 and 11.9 of this report.

2. To authorise the Director, Finance, in consultation with the Chair of Committee to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2025/26 and future years (as available), to ensure that the net budget as detailed in 2.1 remains unchanged (in the event of any additional information becoming available, principally in relation to (but not exclusive to) the Final Local Government Settlement and/or the NNDR1 return). These adjustments to be made in advance of the report being presented to Full Council on the 25th February 2025.

3 To authorise the Director Finance to bring forward proposals to Council to identify savings to balance the 2026/27 estimate as detailed in the revised Appendix A.

67. Finance Report

The Committee considered a report, Z123 previously circulated, that provided Members with 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 Finance presented the report and Members provided feedback and asked questions as follows.

Members observed that the numerous vacancies, while positive in cash flow, were not necessarily beneficial for productivity.

Members resolved to note:

- The Committee has a projected yearend underspend of £881,000 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £7,016,768.
- The Council has a projected yearend underspend of £602,030 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £18,840,342.
- The Council's position on Capital is a projected outturn of £5,502,942, which is an underspend of £2,177,599 when compared to the revised budget.
- the Treasury Management update report

68. Assets Update

The Committee considered a report, Z124 previously circulated, which provided Members with an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager presented the report and Members provided feedback and asked questions as follows.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Open Spaces and Facilities Manager for the advancements made on the inclusive playgrounds. They appreciated his assurance that PIPA are the leading experts in the field, providing support to the central government on playgrounds accessibility. Additionally, he confirmed that each Parish would be evaluated individually, focusing on accessibility and amenities related to the playgrounds.

Members resolved to:

- Note the update on Council owned assets.
- Note the expenditure tracking sheet at Appendix 1.

69. ECDC Bereavement Centre Project Quarter 3 update

The Committee considered a report, Z125 previously circulated, which contained an update on the Bereavement Centre Project progress.

The Director Operations presented the report and Members provided feedback and asked questions as follows.

A Member queried as to why the exempt paper was exempt from disclosure. The Director Operations explained that the exempt document was created by the project managers and contained more detailed information about existing risks. Since some information related to managing these risks is still pending, it was decided to keep this information in a closed session. This is necessary because even non-financial risks relate to the project's viability. Therefore, the document must remain exempt while we are currently engaged in a live procurement process.

Members resolved to:

- Note the information provided in the Bereavement Centre Project Dashboard as detailed in Appendix 1, (Exempt).

70. Constitution Update – Contract Procedure Rules

The Committee considered a report, Z126, previously circulated, to consider the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, part of the Constitution, which needed to be updated to reflect changes in relation to the Procurement Act 2023.

The Director Finance presented the report.

Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Bovingdon seconded the recommendations.

Members resolved to recommend to Full Council that the updated Contract Procedure Rules, at Appendix 1 of the report, be approved as an update to the Council's Constitution.

71. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2025-2028

The Committee considered a report, Z127 previously circulated, to consider, approve and adopt the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy following a period of public consultation.

The HR Manager presented the report and Members provided feedback and asked questions as follows.

THE HR Manager confirmed that six separate groups had provided feedback to the consultation.

Cllr Bovingdon proposed the recommendations in the report and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the recommendations.

Members were pleased to see the word 'Equality' replaced with the 'Equity' as this was important.

Members unanimously resolved to:

- That the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2025-2028, as set out in Appendix 1 be approved.

72. Forward Plan

The Committee considered its Forward Plan.

Members unanimously resolved to note the forward agenda plan.

73. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the following item because it was likely, in the 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 items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Category 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

74. Appointments, Transfers and Resignations

Members resolved to Note the contents of this report.

The meeting concluded at 6:00pm

Chair.....

Date.....