



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Operational Services Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 4:30 pm on
Monday 24 March 2025

Present

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith
Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Martin Goodearl
Cllr Julia Huffer (Chair)
Cllr Mark Inskip
Cllr Kelli Pettitt
Cllr Alan Sharp
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Ross Trent
Cllr Lucius Vellacott (Vice Chair)
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers

Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Nigel Ankers – ECSS Finance Manager
Jude Antony – Principal Accountant
Marie Beaumont – Senior Caseworker – Home Improvement Agency
Isabel Edgar – Director Operations
Emma Graves – Neighbourhood and Community Safety Officer
Emma Grima – ECSS Director Commercial
John Hill – ECSS Managing Director
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager
Angela Parmenter – Housing and Community Advice Manager
Paul Remington – Chair of ECSS
Catherine Sutherland – Senior Waste Management Officer

In Attendance

Lis Every – Chair of East Cambridgeshire Community Safety Partnership

47. Public Question Time

No public questions were submitted.

48. Apologies and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann.

49. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

50. Minutes

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 November 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51. Chair's Announcements

The Chair explained that the Committee would be discussing agenda item 7 before agenda item 6, as the Chair of Community Safety Partnership had another meeting to attend at 5 pm.

52. ECSS Business Plan

The Committee considered a report, Z144 previously circulated, on the ECSS Business Plan. The Director Commercial stated that the Business Plan had been agreed by the Board at its meeting on 13 March, with no amendments. The Committee were being asked to agree the Plan, as part of the Shareholder Agreement. The Director Commercial explained that Local Government Reorganisation had not been included in the Risk Management Plan as it was unlikely to have an operational impact on the company in the next 12 months. It was noted that 2025/26 was the last year of the current contract and work was already being undertaken with the Council's Project Board to draw up a new contract from 2026.

The ECSS Finance Manager stated that two minor errors needed to be corrected. The date for the budget column on page 21 of the agenda should be 2025/26 not 2024/25 and the text "Vehicle Dept Repayment" should be changed to "Vehicle Debt Repayment" in the lefthand column in the same table. He highlighted the main financial points in the Business Plan.

It was noted that the management fee for 2025/26 had been agreed by the Council at just over £5 million. This was based on staffing costs of £3 million and non-staffing costs of £2 million. It allowed for 60 operatives, 5 agency staff to cover sickness and annual leave and 9 management and administration staff. Non-staffing costs included using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) for all vehicles.

In response to concerns expressed by Cllr Mark Inskip, the Director Commercial explained that it was not unusual for companies to draw up draft terms of a contract for the client to consider. The Director Operations added that the Council would draft the specifications of the contract. Cllr Inskip suggested that as a first step, the specifications should be identified by the Council for the ECSS to consider. The

Director Commercial explained that the standard terms of the contract were being drafted now and ECSS had engaged a legal firm to help expedite the process.

Later in the meeting, it was reported that there was no evidence that fly-tipping had increased following the decision taken by the County Council to restrict the number of visits to its recycling centre.

In response to a query from Cllr Martin Goodearl, the Director Commercial explained that discussion on future Key Performance Indicators targets would form part of the negotiations regarding the new contract.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and it was resolved to:

Approve the ECSS Business Plan 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 1.

53. Community Safety Partnership 6 Monthly Report

The Committee considered a report, Z145 previously circulated, on the work of the East Cambridgeshire Community Safety Partnership (ECCSP) over the last six months. The Neighbourhood and Community Safety Officer introduced Lis Every, the Chair of the ECCSP, who presented the six-monthly report from the Partnership.

Lis Every stated that the report was based on the last strategic assessment plan and all actions were supported with evidence that had been carefully assessed. The Partnership were working on next year's action plan. She emphasised that East Cambridgeshire was a low crime area, surrounded by Peterborough, Cambridge City and Fenland where crime was higher. The main challenges were anti-social behaviour, shop lifting, road safety, hate crime, neighbourhood disputes, fraud and scams, domestic violence, youth provision and rehabilitation. The Partnership were going to make tackling serious violence in the district, one of their priorities.

Cllr Christine Colbert stated that the website in the report should be www.stopthinkfraud.gov.uk not www.stopthinkingfraud.gov.uk. In response to Cllr John Trapp, Lis Every explained that the Partnership were raising awareness of frauds and scams, some of this work involved putting messages on the side of lorries.

It was noted that the statutory members of the Partnership included the Police, Fire and Rescue, Health, County Council, District Council and the Probation Service. Lis Every explained that unfortunately the Probation Service were not attending the meetings of the Partnership. Other Community Safety Partnerships in the area were having the same problem. It was agreed that the Chair of the Committee should write a letter to the Probation service, urging them to send a representative to the quarterly meetings. Cllr Alan Sharp, who had worked in the Prison and Probation Service for over 20 years, offered to assist in this matter.

Lis Every reported that the Partnership were moving to a place based approach to tackling crime and this made liaising with parish councils particularly important. She

praised Littleport, Soham and Burwell parish councils for their work with the Partnership. The Partnership was looking to work with the City of Ely Council. Lis asked councillors to contact her directly with any issues of concern.

Lis Every explained that whilst the statistics showed an increase in hate crime, this was hopefully due to more people willing to report hate crime than an actual increase in instances of the crime. The Neighbourhood and Community Safety Team Leader explained that a task and finish group had been set up to ascertain how to engage with hard to reach groups in order to tackle hate crime.

Cllr Christine Colbert expressed concerns regarding hare coursing and recent indiscriminate attacks on domestic and farm animals. Lis Every reported that the Police were tackling these rural crimes. The Neighbourhood and Community Safety Officer stated that she regularly liaised with colleagues from neighbouring areas in order to share best practice and discuss shared concerns over cross border crimes such as hare coursing.

The Committee agreed that councillors should encourage residents to report all crime to the Police, to ensure that crime statistics were accurate.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the report at Appendix 1, from the Chair of the East Cambridgeshire Community Safety Partnership.
- b) Write a letter to the Probation Service from the Chair of the Committee to urge them to attend meeting of the Partnership.

54. End of Year Reports 2024-25 Service Delivery Plans 2025/26

The Director Operations presented a report, Z146 previously circulated, which provided details of the Service Delivery Plans and end of year reports for services reporting to the Operations Committee for 2025/26. It was noted that in a change from previous years, the Strategic Planning Service and the Development Management Service had been combined. In previous years the Strategic Planning Service had been reviewed by the Finance and Assets Committee but the combined report was going to this Committee.

In response to a question from Cllr Christine Whelan, the Housing and Community Advice Manager explained that her team assisted the small number of transgender residents who had been forced to leave their family home by placing them in suitable accommodation, in compliance with the legislation. She added that all housing officers received extensive training in how to deal with sensitive cases.

In response to a question from Cllr Martin Goodearl, the Housing and Community Advice Manager stated that her team had provided accommodation for the low number of homeless forces veterans in the district. Housing officers had received training in how to deal with these cases.

Cllr Mark Inskip asked what the Council was doing to attempt to meet its target regarding the number of families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Housing and Community Advice Manager explained that the Council was discussing with one of its providers, the possibility of providing self-contained accommodation for families with special needs to reduce the number of families staying in bed and breakfasts.

Cllr John Trapp suggested that the first paragraph of page 79 in the agenda, regarding the Communication Team Service Delivery Plan 2025/26, should be rephrased to state that the Team were providing a service instead of delivering a mission statement.

In response to a question from Cllr John Trapp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Council was achieving around a 90% rate of processing planning applications within the agreed timescales, when nationally the performance was between 60%-70%. The Council had brought in a negotiation protocol in order to address applications that were unlikely to be progressed. In many of these cases it would not be appropriate to grant an extension, so they would miss the deadline and this explained a slight drop in performance. Information on performance was considered at each monthly Planning Committee meeting.

In response to a question from Cllr Ross Trent, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the aim was to respond to queries from councillors as soon as possible and he requested that councillors contact him directly if this was not the case.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was resolved to:

Approve the Service Delivery Plans and note the end of year reports in Appendix 1, for the following services:

- a) Building Control
- b) Communities & Partnerships
- c) Communications
- d) Customer Services
- e) Housing and Community Advice
- f) Leisure and Active Lifestyles
- g) Licensing
- h) Strategic Planning and Development Management
- i) Waste and Environmental Services

55. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Housing and Community Advice Manager presented a report, Z147 previously circulated, which invited the Committee to consider and approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. She explained that the aim was to intervene to prevent cases of homelessness and rough sleeping. Demand for the service was increasing and this had to be managed.

In response to a question from Cllr Ross Trent, the Housing Options Team Leader explained that the Council was liaising with its supplier about increasing the number of categories for reasons for the loss of a settled home, as it was recognised that too many cases were categorised as “other”.

The Housing and Community Advice Manager explained that officers were aware of a small number of instances in Ely of criminal organisations employing professional beggars and this was being reviewed.

The Housing and Community Advice Manager reported that there had been an increase in homeless young people with serious mental health conditions since the Covid pandemic and officers had been trained to deal with this.

The Housing and Community Advice Manager explained that grants received from the Government could be spent on any initiative that reduced homelessness. Historically, these funds had been carried over to the following financial year as they had not been required. It was hoped that this money could be used to keep families with special needs out of bed and breakfast accommodation.

It noted that a child was considered to be anybody under 18 or in full-time education.

Members of the Committee praised officers for the face-to-face advice it offered to residents and they expressed concern that the excellent service provided by the Council could be under threat from the Government’s Local Government Reorganisation plans. It was suggested that if a unitary authority was set up, a hub or satellite office that could deal with housing queries should be set up.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith seconded the recommendation in the report.

It was unanimously resolved:

To approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

56. Housing Adaptations and Repairs Policy 2025-30

The Senior Caseworker – Home Improvement Agency presented a report, Z148 previously circulated, which invited the Committee to consider the updated version of the Housing Adaptations and Repairs Policy 2025-30. This was part of a county-wide review, following the Government’s decision to allow more flexibility regarding capital funding.

Cllr Christine Whelan requested that in future any updated policies show track changes to indicate what has been amended. The Senior Caseworker – Home Improvement Agency explained that when the County Council produced the document for other authorities to review, the formatting had been amended and so track changes would have indicated that everything had been amended.

It was understood that raising the limit from £10,000 to £15,000 for adaptations meant that more work could be carried out, including the installation of new boilers, rewiring of homes and roof repairs. An interest free discretionary loan could be granted to pay for more expensive works. It was noted that this was for individuals, although some housing associations did provide top-up grants.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was unanimously resolved to:

1. Approve the updated version of the Housing Adaptation & Repairs Policy 2025-30.
2. Increase the limit of the Discretionary Special Purpose Grant from £10k to £15k, and to £25k for Category 1 Housing Hazards.
3. Give delegated responsibility to the Director Operations in consultation with the Director Finance to review grant limits on discretionary payments and increase limits of grants on eligible works up to 20% on an annual basis.

57. Budget Monitoring Report

The Principal Accountant presented a report, Z149 previously circulated, on the financial position for services under the Operational Services Committee.

The Principal Accountant explained that a number of homeless grants that had been received this year, actually belonged in next years' accounts and this explained the variance figures.

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that the Council was overspending on both its Building Control and Planning services and whilst the drop in income was outside this authority's control, he asked if more could be done to control expenditure on those items, for example by delaying recruitment until there was an increase in development. The Director Operations explained that a vacancy in Building Control was being held open for the time being. There had been an increase in the number of pre-applications and it was expected that this would lead to an increase in income in quarter 4. The overall reduction in income had been taken into account for next year's budget.

Cllr Christine Colbert suggested that figures on the collection and spending of Section 106 funds should be shared with councillors. She was liaising with the Director Community on this matter.

It was unanimously resolved to:

1. Note that the Committee was currently projecting a yearend overspend of £335,000 on revenue, when compared to its approved budget of £7,134,292.
2. Note that the Committee has a projected capital programme outturn of £2,912,425; an underspend of £1,743,774 when compared to its revised budget.

58. Waste Performance Monitoring Report Q3

The Senior Waste Management Officer presented a report, Z150 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the Waste and Street Cleansing Services performance by East Cambs Street Scene Ltd (ECSS) for quarter 3. She was happy to report that service levels were being maintained.

It was noted that percentage of productive days for the third quarter was 96.6%, which met the target of 94% productivity rate. It was noted that improvements in the management process had resulted in the reduction of long term sickness for waste collection staff.

In response to a question from Cllr John Trapp, the Senior Waste Management Officer explained that the report stated “NO DATA” where no tolerance figure had been set for those Key Performance Indicators.

Cllr Mark Inskip asked about litter picking on the A roads in the district that were not the responsibility of the Highways Authority. The Senior Waste Management Officer reported that the Council was working with their contractor to improve the litter removal on these roads.

In response to concerns expressed by Cllr Alan Sharp, the Senior Waste Management Officer reported that the Council was working with its neighbouring authorities to mitigate the impact of the temporary closure of the recycling facility at Milton in the autumn. The closure would be advertised to residents, along with details of the Council's bulky waste service. It was noted that the facility was the responsibility of the County Council.

In response to the suggestion that the Committee could receive these reports every six months, the Director Operations explained that under the existing contract the ECSS were required to report to the Committee every three months.

It was resolved:

To note the performance of service delivery for quarter 3 (October to December) 2024/25.

59. Citizens Advice West Suffolk SLA Performance Monitoring Update

The Director of Operations presented a report, Z151 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the performance of the Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CAWS) for the period between 1 April and 30 September 2024. It had been agreed to monitor the performance to ensure that the criteria included in the Service Level Agreement were being met.

Cllr Mark Inskip asked why residents from as far away as Ely West, Littleport, Sutton and Stretham were attending the centre in Newmarket. It was agreed that this query should be directed to the Communities and Partnerships Manager.

It was resolved to:

Note the report.

60. Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire SLA Performance Monitoring Update

The Director of Operations presented a report, Z152 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the performance of the Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire (VCAEC) for the period between 1 April and 30 September 2024. It had been agreed to monitor the performance to ensure that the criteria included in the Service Level Agreement were being met.

Cllr Mark Inskip pointed out that the VCAEC had only provided advice to three voluntary and community groups at the six month stage, when the annual target was 20, so it appeared unlikely that the target was going to be met.

It was resolved to:

Note the report.

61. Draft Minutes of Anglia Revenue & Benefits Joint Committee

The Committee received the recent minutes of the Anglia Revenue & Benefits Joint Committee for 3 December 2024. Cllr Mark Inskip queried why the minutes referred to this authority's Council Tax collection rates being far behind target. It was agreed that Cllr Keith Horgan should be invited to respond to this statement.

It was resolved:

To note the draft minutes of the Anglia Revenue & Benefits Joint Committee of 3 September 2024.

62. Forward Agenda Plan

The Chair presented the Committee's Forward Agenda Plan.

It was resolved:

That the Forward Plan be noted.

63. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Cllr Martin Goodearl proposed and Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith seconded that the meeting should go into private session. 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 items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Category 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

64. East Cambs Street Scene Management Accounts for the 3 months to 31 December 2024 - EXEMPT

The Committee considered a report, Z153 previously circulated, which considered the ECSS Management Accounts for the nine months to 31 December 2024.

It was resolved that:

The ECSS Management Accounts for the nine months to 31 December 2024 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6:06 pm

Chair

Date.....