



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 23rd June 2025

Present

Cllr Anna Bailey (substitute)
Cllr David Brown
Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Lee Denney (substitute)
Cllr Martin Goodearl
Cllr Julia Huffer (Chair)
Cllr Mark Inskip
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
Lewis Bage – Communities and Partnerships Manager
Nick Baker – Waste and Environmental Services Manager
Isabel Edgar – Director Operations
Martin Grey – Leisure and Active Lifestyles Manager
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager
Catherine Sutherland – Senior Waste Management Officer

1. Public Question Time

No public questions were submitted.

2. Apologies and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith and Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann. Cllr Anna Bailey attended as a substitute for Cllr Ambrose Smith. Cllr Lee Denney attended as a substitute for Cllr Holtzmann.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 March 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendments:

- In the final paragraph on page 6, Cllr Alison Whelan was corrected to Cllr Christine Whelan.
- In the penultimate paragraph on page 7, "... on the collection of spending" was amended to "... on the collection and spending".

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that he had not yet received a reply from Cllr Keith Horgan regarding the query he raised on the Anglia Revenue and Benefits Joint Committee minutes about Council Tax collection rates. The Chair agreed to contact Cllr Horgan about this matter.

5. Chair's Announcements

The Chair stated that the Council had developed and shared a youth events toolkit for parish councils and local organisations to use if they wished to run events for local young people. She explained that the toolkit contained a suite of templates that organisations might wish to use, including an event management plan, risk assessment signage, and a health and safety checklist.

6. Proposed Changes to Planning Committee Consultation

The Committee considered a report, AA10 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the Government's proposed changes to planning committees and provided details on how the Council was preparing to respond to the consultation. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Government had introduced the Bill earlier this year and had now gone out to consultation. He explained that the Government planned to increase the number of applications that would be delegated to officers, which the Government were describing as Tier A applications, whilst all other applications were labelled Tier B, which could be decided by councillors if they passed a gateway test. Further information and guidance from the Government on the legislation was awaited.

Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to a query from Cllr Christine Colbert, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager stated that whilst all planning applications had to be determined according to planning rules, officers and councillors often gave different

weighting to different planning considerations when deciding whether to approve an application.

Cllr David Brown asked whether applications for solar farms would be decided by officers or the Planning Committee and what would happen if the Chair disagreed with the officer. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager hoped that a solar farm would be seen as a matter of important consideration and so be determined by the Committee. He explained at a previous authority the Chair would have a casting vote if the planning officer and the legal officer disagreed on an application.

In response to a question from Cllr Christine Whelan, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that taking applications to the Committee required more resources than an officer decision and so it was unlikely that the new rules would mean extra work for officers, although it was unclear how the delegation rules would work.

In response to a question from Cllr John Trapp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager suggested that by preventing Planning Committees from “revisiting the same decisions” the Government were trying to ensure that, after a Planning Committee had agreed an outline application, officers could then determine the finer points without the matter having to return to Committee.

In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager agreed that a small development of nine units would be more significant in the open countryside than if it were within a village envelope. This level of nuance was not apparent in the current proposals.

Cllr Martin Goodearl was concerned that under the Government’s proposals, a developer could build homes in the same area but under separate applications and so abuse the system. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager hoped that further details in the legislation would prevent this.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott welcomed the cross-party support for opposing the Government’s proposals. He supported the current call-in system which allowed small but contentious matters to be debated by the Planning Committee, and he feared that this would be lost under the legislation proposed by the Government, to the detriment of local decision making. He believed that local member representation should be involved in the gateway test. He suggested that members should be automatically notified when the consultation on an application closes, as it would give local councillors time to influence the triaging process. He opposed national planning training, as locally based training could be tailored to local needs.

Cllr David Brown stated that not all reserved matters applications should be put in Tier A. He asked that statistics on the outcomes of applications be provided.

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that it was important that the Council made a well-argued case opposing the Government's plans. He hoped that contentious matters would continue to be considered by the Planning Committee, which should not just consider larger, strategic applications. He explained that the Committee often introduced changes to the application, which everyone benefited from. He spoke of the importance of having an up-to-date Local Plan and funding neighbourhood plans to ensure a local voice when applications were determined. He reported that parish councils used their local knowledge when considering a high number of planning applications and he suggested that the Government wanted to remove local safeguards to simply make it easier for developers to get planning permission.

Cllr John Trapp suggested that larger committees could take better, more professional decisions than smaller, less knowledgeable committees. He expressed concern that matters that were very contentious locally, could be decided by officers instead of at Committee, where local concerns could be heard. He suggested that councillors gave more weight to neighbourhood plans than officers.

Cllr Martin Goodearl suggested that the Government was attempting to make development easier in order to try and reach its overly ambitious target of building 1,500,000 new homes.

Cllr Alan Sharp stated that in the past, the developer had changed the housing mix that had been in the outline planning application in favour of more five-bedroom homes. He suggested that local representation could help to prevent this.

Cllr Christine Colbert suggested that the Planning Committee ensured that issues such as the adoption of trees and road safety were not overlooked. She expressed the hope that councillors would still be able to call-in applications to the Planning Committee if they disagreed with the officer decision.

Cllr Anna Bailey praised the Council's Planning Committee, which ran smoothly whilst taking open and transparent decisions regarding highly important and contentious matters. She did not support the Government's proposals to determine the size of planning committees. On many occasions, applications, including reserved matters applications, had been improved by the Planning Committee, which had listened to local concerns and added appropriate conditions. The call-in process was used responsibly by local members and should not be removed. Planning decisions could not be appealed if permission was granted, so it was important that the correct decisions were taken. She expressed her support for neighbourhood plans, which included matters of great importance to local residents, and she was concerned that under the Government's proposals funding for this would be reduced. She explained that the proposals appeared to be taking power away from local representatives and were more appropriate for urban areas. She stated that relatively small applications could be contentious and needed to be discussed in a public forum, and this ultimately relieved the pressure on the Council. She welcomed the cross-party support for submitting a robust rebuttal of the Government's proposals.

Cllr Julia Huffer stated that the proposals were trying to fix something that was not broken.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Anna Bailey seconded the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was unanimously resolved to:

- A) Note the potential changes proposed by the Government
- B) Give delegated authority to the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager to respond to the consultation in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee, Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Planning for the Liberal Democrats and Independent Group.

7. Quarter 4 2024/25 Performance Report for the Waste and Street Cleansing Services

The Committee considered a report, AA11 previously circulated, which provided the Committee with the performance report for the delivery of the waste and street cleansing services by East Cambs Street Scene Ltd (ECSS). It was noted that the μ symbol meant average or mean. The Senior Waste Management Officer explained that the figures showed a considerable improvement since the previous year. There had been fewer missed bins compared to last year, with only 2,500 bins being missed out of a total of approximately 4,500,000 bins, which was a collection rate of 99.95%. The challenging 95% target for street cleaning had been met. The Council was on track for an overall recycling rate of about 55%, which was comparable to last year's performance. Changes to the Council's waste and recycling collection service was expected to result in improvements in the recycling rate next year.

In response to Cllr Anna Bailey, the Senior Waste Management Officer explained that recycling rates dipped in the third quarter as there was less garden waste in the winter months.

In response to Cllr Christine Whelan, the Senior Waste Management Officer stated that whilst Environmental Health were responsible for the enforcement side of fly-tipping, the street cleansing vehicles displayed relevant adverts as part of the RECAP SCRAP fly-tipping campaign. Cllr Christine Colbert suggested that the Council's bulky waste collection service should be advertised more widely. Cllr John Trapp proposed that the relevant contact number could be advertised on the sheet with weekly collection dates, along with the number to report fly-tipping. It was noted that the ECSS had two days to clear fly-tipping waste after being notified and that they were not responsible for removing fly-tipping from private land.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Senior Waste Management Officer explained that the performance data regarding street cleansing referred to the number of streets.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed concern regarding the performance in the Community, Education and Promotion area. The Senior Waste Management Officer explained that there had been staff turnover in the ECSS team, but a Council officer had recently become responsible for this, and events were planned to coincide with the new service launch. Information on this would be shared with councillors.

It was resolved to:

- A)** Note the performance of service delivery for quarter 4 (January-March) 2024/25.

8. Changes to Waste Collection Service – Project Update

The Committee considered a report, AA12 previously circulated, which provided an update on the progress being made towards implementing the necessary changes to the Council's waste and recycling collection services, as approved by Council. The Waste and Environmental Services Manager explained that the Council was on track to deliver its new service of weekly food waste collections, which would reduce residual waste and increase recycling. New vehicles and bins had been purchased. The start date had been moved from 1st April to 1st June to avoid having any Bank Holidays in the first eight weeks of the service.

Cllr Mark Inskip asked if in future, the Committee could receive details of the risks and how these were being mitigated. He also requested details of the milestones to allow the Committee to measure whether the project was on track. The Waste and Environmental Services Manager explained that there was a large amount of information on risks, and he suggested that to be effective, the Committee should focus on the key issues. The Director Operations explained that the Project Management Board met monthly and they evaluated and mitigated the risks. She stated that the Committee did not manage projects and any information on risks would be quickly out of date. Cllr Inskip requested headline information to assure the Committee that the project was on track.

In response to a question from Cllr Mark Goodearl, the Waste and Environmental Services Manager explained that the ECSS had planned for the expected growth in population for the next 8 years to ensure that the waste service had the necessary capacity.

The Committee thanked the Waste and Environmental Services Manager and his team for the clarity of his report.

It was resolved to:

- Note the report and the progress being made towards the implementation of the new waste and recycling collection service.

9. Budget Outturn Report

The Principal Accountant presented a report, AA13 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the financial position for services under the Operational Services Committee.

In response to Cllr Mark Inskip, the Director Operations explained that Section 106 money was often used to fund matters related to growth, such as new vehicles for the schools' contract that ECTC was successful in winning. She agreed to provide further details on this.

It was resolved:

- A)** To note that the Committee had a revenue of overspend of £195,163, when compared to its approved budget of £7,134,292.
- B)** To note that the Committee had a capital programme spend of £1,869,054, an underspend of £2,858,721 when compared to its revised budget.

10. Community Sports Facility Grant

The Leisure and Active Lifestyles Manager presented a report, AA14 previously circulated, which invited the Committee to consider a recommendation to approve a grant of £10,000 to Ely Outdoor Sports Association for the construction of two Padel tennis courts. He explained that the Association had received a quotation for the work.

Cllr Martin Goodearl proposed and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was unanimously resolved to:

- A)** Approve a grant of £10,000 to Ely Outdoor Sports Association.

11. Citizens Advice West Suffolk SLA Performance Monitoring Update

The Communities and Partnership Manager presented a report, which invited the Committee to note the Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CAWS) performance update for the period between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. It was noted that the report number was AA18 but had been previously circulated with the number AA14.

Cllr Mark Inskip, Cllr John Trapp and Cllr Alan Sharp agreed that the report justified the grant of £69,498 paid by the Council to CAWS last year and were pleased to note the number of East Cambridgeshire residents using the service.

It was unanimously resolved to:

- A)** Note that the Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CAWS) performance update for the period between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

12. Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire SLA Performance Update

The Communities and Partnership Manager presented a report, AA15 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire (VCAEC) performance update for the period between 1 April 2024 and 30 March 2025 following the grant of £39,530 awarded to VCAEC for a Service Level Agreement running from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that whilst some targets were not being met, these were outside the organisation's control. Cllr Alan Sharp reported that organisations were also finding it difficult to recruit volunteers and hoped that this could be addressed. It was noted that the Council funded VCAEC to deliver specific outcomes and did not specify how the organisation spent the grant and so information on phone and office costs was not available.

It was resolved:

To note the Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire (VCAEC) performance update for the period between 1 April 2024 and 30 March 2025.

13. Representation on Outside Bodies and Annual Reports

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented a report, AA17 previously circulated, which provided the Committee with the annual reports from Council representatives on Outside Bodies within the responsibility of the Operational Services Committee. It was noted that reports had been received from Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith and Cllr Martin Goodearl after the agenda had been published. It was understood that Cllr Julia Huffer had been the lead member for Citizens Advice West Suffolk for the period in question, not Cllr Alan Sharp as indicated in Appendix 1. It was noted that Cllr Christine Whelan had not been sent a report to complete and that was why there was no update on the Police and Crime Panel.

In reply to Cllr Mark Inskip, Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that whilst there had been no formal meetings arranged with Historic England, it was important that the Council liaised with this organisation, who were a consultee on major planning applications. Cllr Vellacott also reported that there he had only been aware of one meeting of the Soham Sports Association which no representative from the Council had been able to attend. The Association was hugely important to the town of Soham and it was important that the Council maintained its links with this organisation. Democratic Services were asked to find out the date of the next Soham Sports Association meeting

It was resolved to:

Note the annual reports from Council representatives on Outside Bodies within the responsibility of the Operational Services Committee.

14. Draft Minutes of Anglia Revenue & Benefits Joint Committee

This item was not discussed. The minutes will be included in the agenda for the next meeting of the Committee.

15. Forward Agenda Plan

The Chair presented the Committee's Forward Agenda Plan. It was noted that an updated version of the Plan had been circulated. It was understood that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 29 September at 4:30 pm, where a report monitoring the budget would be considered.

It was resolved:

That the Forward Plan be noted.

16. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Cllr Martin Goodearl proposed and Cllr David Brown 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).

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

The Committee considered a report, AA16 previously circulated, which considered the ECSS Management Accounts for the 12 months to 31 March 2025. The ECSS Senior Finance Manager explained that maintenance costs had been reduced due to the purchasing of new vehicles.

It was resolved that:

The ECSS Management Accounts for the 12 months to 31 March 2025 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6:10 pm

Chair

Date.....