



**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 29 January 2026

Present:

Cllr Anna Bailey
Cllr Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Charlotte Cane (Sub)
Cllr Lee Denney
Cllr Goldsack
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr David Miller
Cllr Alan Sharp (Chair)
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Mary Wade
Cllr Alison Whelan
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers:

Sally Bonnett – Director Community
Maggie Camp – Director Legal
Jane Webb – Democratic Services and Elections Manager
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Richard Kay – Climate Change and Natural Environment Manager
Emma Grima – Chief Executive
Isabel Edgar – Director, Operations
Nicola Pema – HR Manager
Martin Grey - Leisure and Active Lifestyles Manager

41. Public Questions

No Public Questions had been received.

42. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Chika Akinwale, who was substituted by Cllr Charlotte Cane

43. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

44. Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025.

Members unanimously resolved:

That the Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 27 November 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

45. Chair's Announcements

The Chair had no announcements.

46. East Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Report to Net Zero

The Committee received a report (AA130, previously circulated) that was required under s40A of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Richard Kay, the Climate Change and Natural Environment Manager, presented the report.

Some Members believed the report lacked ambition and was pessimistic because it failed to mention some particularly important aspects of biodiversity in the district. The Officer clarified that these details had been included in the previous document, which should be read alongside the current report to gain a complete understanding of the situation.

Other Members expressed gratitude to the Officer for the extensive work done in producing such a detailed report, which they did not find lacking in ambition. It was clear, accessible, and easy to read, and all Members should support it.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Bailey and seconded by Cllr Goldsack.

Members resolved unanimously to **APPROVE**:
The East Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Report.

47. Assets Update

The Committee considered a report (AA131, as previously circulated) to receive an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager presented the report and updated Members:

- Mepal Outdoor Centre – Appendix 1 – Security spend £955 per month, with a running total for the year of £9,559. An amended tracker would be sent to all Members following the meeting.
- Inclusive Play Audit – 19 parishes expressed an interest, and fifteen attended the seminar – 7 returned the required information. Two reminders have been sent to those who have not responded since the seminar, and another will be sent this week.

- East Cambs Playgrounds (owned & managed by ECDC) – 27 in total, with half completed to date and completion due in two weeks.
- Newnham Street Car Park – Tenders now closed and contract to be awarded imminently with works to be completed March/April.

Members asked questions and made comments. The Open Spaces and Facilities Manager clarified the following:

- The tender for the refurbishment of the Cloister toilets was out presently.
- The toilets at Palace Green were closed for refurbishment. The total expenditure had exceeded the initial estimate due to various structural issues discovered during the renovation and the inability to reuse the sanitary fixtures.
- Littleport parking – the existing car park and 40% of the new extended car park will remain open when the new wheelie bins are delivered.

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

1. The update on Council-owned assets, and
2. The expenditure tracking sheet in Appendix 1

48. Bereavement Centre Project 6 Monthly Progress Update

The Committee considered a report (AA132, as previously circulated) providing Members with a 6 Monthly Progress Update on the Bereavement Centre Project. The Director Operations presented the report.

The Director Operations addressed the following questions from Members:

- Unforeseen budgetary costs emerged because additional piling structures were discovered beneath the slabs, which were not identified during the geotechnical work. These differences have required additional work and, therefore, led to higher costs. A briefing note will be shared with members on the surveys completed and assumptions carried through to the contract
- Kier estimated the groundwork based on the information available at the time. Provisional sums were included to account for unknown or unforeseen factors, such as any additional structures that would be discovered. Provisional sums are included in the contract; any variance from these sums is a potential risk to both the contractor and/or the client.
- The risk had been significantly reduced. Even with the additional contingency request, the total contingency amount remained much lower than what was typically required for a project of this scale. The risks have been effectively managed and mitigated throughout the whole project.
- The budget included an estimate of inflationary costs for the project. Some areas, such as professional fees, experienced greater cost increases than others.
- This project was funded by CIL, which mitigated financial risks from the beginning regarding return on investment; there is no payback period, and it does not impact the bereavement centre's future revenue.

- Value engineering was integrated into the project throughout its entirety, from the design phase to the structural phase. It was also included in the original contract.
- There are no options not to complete the project; options that have been considered to reduce costs include landscaping requirements and the fisherfolk carpark. This additional funding is only for new, emerging risks.
- Social Value Returning to the Area – Still on target to achieve £2.5million of social value over the life of the project. A report is imminent and would be shared with Members when available.
- An average contingency fund for this type of project was typically set at 10%. However, even with the additional funds requested, this project would still maintain only a 4.7% contingency. As a result, the project team and Kier have had to be highly creative in managing costs. The cost consultants recommended £300,000, which is why this amount appears in the report rather than a higher figure.
- It was deemed wise to finalise the highway design for the fisherfolk car park to understand the potential costs involved. Additionally, there was a wide access road at the rear of the lake that the fisherfolk currently used for parking.
- The design work had been factored into the costs for highways, which encompassed the main entrance and the fisherfolk car park. However, the construction of the fisherfolk car park fell outside the project's scope and would only be deliverable if no risks emerged.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Bailey and seconded by Cllr Hunt.

Cllr Bailey, as the proposer of the recommendation, thanked the project team, highlighting that it was ahead of schedule and, more importantly, expected to generate revenue by early autumn. She urged Members to keep this request in perspective. A contingency was allocated due to unknowns, even after the surveys were conducted, which helped maintain strong project discipline. Cllr Bailey believed the Council was receiving good value for money. Since this was solely a request for an allocation, it would prevent further delays in the project, and she encouraged all Members to support it.

Cllr Cane expressed her concerns, stating that Members had been informed that this was a low-risk, fixed-price project. However, they were not privy to the conversations with Keir or provided with a detailed breakdown of costs. As a result, she remained unconvinced that the project was being responsibly managed to ensure it stayed within the fixed price. She believed it would be irresponsible to proceed based on the current information. Cllr Cane requested a recorded vote and stated that she could not support the recommendation.

Cllr Miller explained that low risk was different from no risk, and that this project was still low risk, with no significant risks. The contingency monies requested were for the uncertainties that were being discussed.

Cllr Hunt, as seconder to the recommendation, praised the Director Operations for the hard work put into the report and presentation, noting that the information

provided had been substantial. This increase in contingency monies was only 2%, which kept it at 4.7%, well below the industry average. When finalised, this project would produce income for the authority.

Cllr Bailey summed up, stating that there were unknowns at the time the budget was set. She emphasised that proceeding with the function room was essential; it would be irresponsible to delay the project. Any holdup could lead to significant contractual issues, delay the facility's opening, and restrict public access, affecting the Council's revenue. Cllr Bailey urged Members to avoid introducing additional risks into the Council by not supporting this recommendation.

Cllr Cane requested a recorded vote, and these were made as follows:

FOR (6): Cllrs Bailey, Bovingdon, Goldsack, Hunt, Miller, and Sharp

AGAINST (6): Cllrs Cane, Denney, Trapp, Wade, Alison Whelan, and Christine Whelan

ABSTAIN (0)

With six votes in favour and six votes against, the vote was tied. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote which he used to vote in favour of the recommendations.

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

1. The progress towards completion of the Bereavement Centre, and

TO RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL:

2. The approval of up to £300,000 of CIL funding towards the project, for risk contingency.

49. 2026/27 Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy

The Committee considered a report (AA133 as previously circulated) to consider the 2026/27 Treasury Management Strategy, the Annual Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement. In the absence of the Director Finance, the Chief Executive presented the report.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Sharp and seconded by Cllr Bovingdon.

Cllr Alison Whelan requested that Members' best wishes be sent to the Director Finance and hoped that he would recover quickly.

Members resolved unanimously **TO RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL TO APPROVE:**

- The 2026/27 Treasury Management Strategy

- The Annual Investment Strategy
- The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement
- The Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

50. Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy and Council Tax 2026/27

The Committee considered a report (AA134 as previously circulated) to receive the Council's proposed revenue budget, capital strategy, and the required level of Council Tax in 2026/27. In the absence of the Director Finance, the Chief Executive presented the report and highlighted that an officer amendment had been made to the original report prior to the meeting, which changed the narrative but not the figures within the budget, as follows:

“That the two bullet points below replace both 11.8 and 11.9 in the original circulated papers.

11.8 Finance and Assets Committee at its meeting on 27 November 2025 agreed that its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) remain unchanged for 2026/27.

11.9 At the Full Council meeting held on 25 February 2025, it was agreed to apply a premium of 100% to Second Homes from 1 April 2026. This decision is to remain unchanged.”

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

- 2.1 Committee is asked to recommend to Full Council that it approve:
- The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 and MTFS for 2027/28 to 2029/30 as set out in Appendix 1 (Amended)
 - The Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 2 (Amended)
 - The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 3
 - The 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4
 - The application of Business Rate reliefs for 2026/27, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and fully funded by Government through Section 31 grant, as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of this report.
 - 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 Chairman of Committee to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2026/27 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 too) 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 24 February 2026.

Cllr Bailey, the proposer of the amendment, explained that the amendment sought to freeze Council Tax for the thirteenth consecutive year, in line with the pledge made by the Conservatives to the public. Additionally, the Conservatives planned to freeze paid parking fees. This decision comes in light of the fair funding review, which indicated that East Cambridgeshire was one of the most affected councils in the county. While most urban councils receive 41% more per capita funding than the most rural councils, East Cambridgeshire still maintains no external borrowing, has a balanced budget for the next two years, and keeps its reserves at a strong level.

A vote was taken on the amendment with six votes for and six votes against. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote which he used to vote for the amendment.

The amendment was declared to be carried.

Members resolved **TO RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL TO APPROVE:**

2.1

- (i) The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 and MTFs for 2027/28 to 2029/30 as set out in Appendix 1 (Amended)
- (ii) The Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 2 (Amended)
- (iii) The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 3
- (iv) The 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4
- (v) The application of Business Rate reliefs for 2026/27, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and fully funded by Government through Section 31 grant, as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of the report.
- (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 the report.

2.2 To authorise the Director, Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of Committee to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2026/27 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 too) 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 24 February 2026.

Cllr Alison Whelan clarified that, as her Group, the Liberal Democrat and Independent Party, was presenting their own figures at Full Council, it was only appropriate to vote against the recommendation.

A vote was taken on the substantive motion with six votes for and six votes against. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote, which he used to vote in favour of the substantive motion.

Members resolved **TO RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL TO APPROVE:**

2.1

- (i) The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 and MTFs for 2027/28 to 2029/30 as set out in Appendix 1 (Amended)
- (ii) The Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 2 (Amended)
- (iii) The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 3
- (iv) The 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4
- (v) The application of Business Rate reliefs for 2026/27, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and fully funded by Government through Section 31 grant, as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of the report.
- (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 the report.

2.2 To authorise the Director, Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of Committee to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2026/27 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 too) 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 24 February 2026.

51. Finance Report

The Committee received a report (AA135, as previously circulated) providing budget monitoring information for services under the Finance & Assets Committee and, as part of its corporate remit, for the Council as a whole. In the absence of the Director Finance, the Chief Executive presented the report.

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

Members resolved to **NOTE:**

- This Committee has a projected year-end underspend of £762,162 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £7,969,054.
- that overall, the Council has a projected year-end underspend of £1,154,162 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £19,249,383.
- that the overall position for the Council on Capital is a projected outturn of £18,168,081, which is an overspend of £1,200,000 when compared to the revised budget.
- the Treasury Management update report in Appendix 5

52. The Hive Leisure Centre Contract

The Committee received a report (AA136, as previously circulated) for Members to consider exercising the contract extension clause in the Leisure Management Agreement for The Hive Leisure Centre.

As some Members did not receive the exempt appendices in time, the Chair decided to defer the item to the next meeting.

The item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

53. Outside Bodies Update

The Committee received a report (AA137, as previously circulated) to consider the appointment of a representative to the Waterbeach Internal Drainage Board following the resignation of the ECDC representative. The Democratic Services and Elections Manager presented the report.

The Chair requested that the Committee's thanks be passed to the outgoing representative, David Chaplin, for his long-standing service.

A vote was taken, and Cllr Vellacott received six votes, and Cllr Denney received six votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote, which he used to vote for Cllr Vellacott.

Members resolved to **NOTE**:

- The appointment of Cllr Lucius Vellacott as the new representative for the Waterbeach Internal Drainage Board for the remainder of the current term, May 2027

54. Forward Plan

The Committee considered its Forward Plan.

It was unanimously resolved to **NOTE** the forward agenda plan and to add one report:

- The Hive Leisure Centre Contract

55. 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).

56. Appointments, Transfers and Resignations

Members resolved to **Note** the contents of this report.

57. EXEMPT Minutes – 27 November 2025

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 27 November 2025.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The meeting concluded at 6:10pm

Chair.....

Date.....

DRAFT