



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 16 July 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor James Lay
Councillor David Brown	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Kelli Pettitt (Chair)
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Lee Denney	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Mark Goldsack	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Gareth Wilson
Councillor Keith Horgan (Vice Chair)	

1. Public Question Time

Question received from Fiona Wynn, Biodiversity Lead, Sustainable East Cambs and Surrounding Areas

The Democratic Services and Elections Manager read out the following statement on behalf of Fiona Wynn:

“SSECAM (Sustainable South-East Cambridgeshire and surrounding areas) is aware of public concern around chemical spraying by the Council’s trading company ECTC, including apparently unnecessary spraying around litter bins, walls, signs and benches in public open spaces which could easily be controlled by means of strimming or hand tools rather than the use of chemicals. A herbicide-free approach can have significant benefits, including biodiversity protection, supporting pollinators such as bees and butterflies; improved soil and water quality, preventing chemical runoff into local waterways; health and safety improvements, reducing public exposure to chemical herbicides.

“Could the Council please confirm:

“What policy it has in respect of plant spraying, and where such a policy can be found by the public?

1. If there is no such formal policy, do you commit to preparing and publishing one no later than the end of 2026?

2. What precise chemical spray do you use, and on what criteria has it been chosen (for example, cost, safety, environmental harm)?
3. Whether it commits to reviewing the spraying around bins, signs and benches to determine whether it is strictly necessary to do so or whether alternative chemical-free methods would be more appropriate in such locations; and
4. Whether it commits to consider discontinuing the use of herbicides across all council-owned sites, including parks, pathways, car parks and housing areas, in the same way that Cambridge City Council and many cities and countries have already done.

“Many thanks for your time and consideration towards becoming a chemical free Council.”

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey

“I want to provide some reassurance around the approach on the use of chemicals. In general, we do aim to keep areas safe, tidy and accessible, whilst balancing environmental considerations and the needs of the community. Herbicide weed control, where used, is applied in a targeted way, rather than blanket treatment and it is typically focused on areas where weeds could create maintenance or access issues, for example around street furniture or hard surfaces and fence lines. We are mindful of concerns regarding the use of herbicides, and we always look to minimise their use wherever practicable. Where treatments are necessary, approved products are used in accordance with guidance and application is carried out by trained staff. At present, glyphosate is the chemical that is used and the UK regulatory body known as CRD (Chemicals Regulation Directorate), which is a division of the HSE (Health and Safety Executive), has always been pro-glyphosate. Our pesticide policy reflects our current practice, and we continue to keep this under review to ensure that we strike a balance that we strive to achieve and the Council is of course committed to improving biodiversity within our parks and open spaces, for example planting trees, improving hedgerows and sowing wildflowers.”

Question received from Mark Grooms, Chair of Ely Wildspace

The Democratic Services and Elections Manager read out the following statement on behalf of Mark Grooms:

“Ely Wildspace (EWS) is increasingly concerned about the lack of clear direction from East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) regarding the current management and future development of Ely Country Park, including its proposed extension. EWS has played a leading role in shaping the Country Park since its inception and our concerns relate specifically to the “country” and biodiversity aspects of the site, rather than the urban-park elements such as the play area and the developing maze.

“We are particularly worried that some areas designated as Country Park may be considered for private development. In addition, land purchased by ECDC from the Environment Agency approximately three years ago does not appear to have been registered with the Land Registry. There also seems to be uncertainty regarding the precise boundary of the Country Park.

As part of the accreditation process with Natural England, two essential criteria for Country Park status are clearly stated:

- **Defined boundary** – the site must have a clear, mapped boundary, whether open or fenced.
- **Public influence** – local people must have meaningful input into the management and development of the site.

“In light of these requirements, we ask the Council to establish a **joint Ely Country Park Management Group**, including representatives from the public, Ely Wildspace, landowners, and other interested parties. This group would help ensure that the Country Park - and any future extensions - continues to be developed for the benefit of wildlife, the people of Ely, and the wider area. Does the council support a joint Management Group of this type being formed, and if so, can you please outline how the council will take this forward?

“Given the forthcoming changes associated with local government reorganisation (LGR), we request that this group be formed within the next six weeks so that it can contribute to the LGR process in a timely and constructive manner.”

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey

“I will not go into LGR as we will be talking about this later. I am proud about what we have achieved at the Country Park in Ely, obviously this endeavour did not happen alone, and I want to thank all those involved. It has been a long-term project and continues to be so. I am sure that they will continue to be involved in maintaining open spaces, which will be available to residents and visitors to Ely. The Country Park has once again been awarded green flag status; that is the eleventh time this has been achieved. It is a coveted status, and it is awarded to parks and open spaces that are free and open to everyone to enjoy, whilst meeting strict standards and offering excellent visitor facilities. The Country Park does in fact have a defined boundary and there are five entranceway notice boards, which provide a clear map of the Country Park area. The boards are located at the five key entranceways into the park. This gives the area a clearly defined identity and lets landowners, residents and visitors know when they are within the Country Park boundary. QR codes have recently been added to the Country Park signs which do direct visitors to safety information and a map on the Council's website. The timing of receiving the land for the Country Park extension is currently unknown, however we are very much committed to working with a range of stakeholders to make sure that this land is used to benefit residents and visitors in Ely and no doubt there will be a range of offers from the landowners and the people working on it. Development in the Country Park has been carried out in a phased approach so that proposals can be influenced through consultation with users and local interest groups. The Council carries out consultation throughout the year, seeking the views of the site users to ensure that the development is shaped by the community. The Council has consulted with the community, including the local schools, groups, local access groups and site users to ensure that all needs are taken into consideration so that Ely Country Park continues to provide a high-quality visitor experience. We have delivered a number of phased improvements, which have been informed by community feedback, and we are

now installing a butterfly mound, which will enrich the biodiversity at the Country Park. The Council does have a management plan for the Country Park, and this was developed in partnership with the Wildlife Trust. So, I don't believe that it is necessary to create a formal management group. We maintain our commitment to have continuous engagement with all interested parties, as I have outlined and the Council of course welcomes views from all organisations and individuals who wish to improve the experience of residents and visitors to the Country Park and we have demonstrated that working together with a wider range of stakeholders has enabled us to keep delivering improvements."

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Chika Akinwale, Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann, Cllr Mark Inskip, Cllr John Trapp and Cllr Mary Wade.

3. Declarations of Interest

The Director Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that any Member who was a tenant in social housing provided by the Council should declare an interest in agenda item 7. No Declarations of Interest were made.

4. Minutes – 21 May 2026

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 May 2026 and the Exempt Minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 May 2026 be agreed as a correct record.

5. Chair's Announcements

The Chair expressed her disappointment with the Government's announcement to delay making a decision on Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, as so much time and effort had been spent compiling the different options. The Council would continue to work with the other local authorities in the county, whilst further information was awaited from the Government.

6. Petitions

No petitions had been received.

7. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

(i) Social and Affordable Housing

Cllr Lee Denney proposed, and Cllr Anna Bailey seconded the following Motion.

This Council believes that all residents living in social and affordable housing deserve safe, responsive and high-quality housing services, regardless of their landlord.

Council recognises the important role played by housing associations and community land trusts in meeting local housing need across East Cambridgeshire, values strong partnership working with these organisations, and acknowledges the positive contribution made by community led housing groups across the district.

32 registered providers own housing in East Cambridgeshire representing 6,524 homes, both general needs and supported living. Sanctuary Housing is by far the biggest provider, owning 4,260 (65%) of these homes, representing around 10% of the entire housing stock in the district. The next largest provider is CHS (Cambridge Housing Society) Group with 554 homes. Flagship Housing owns 231 homes, Clarion 208, Accent Group 137 with remaining other smaller providers owning around 100 homes or less.

Council is concerned that inconsistent service levels experienced by some housing association tenants may disproportionately affect older and vulnerable residents and recognises the importance of ensuring that all tenants are able to access responsive services and have their voices heard. Whilst the larger providers are subject to regulatory judgement this does not provide sufficient transparency or granularity about performance at a local level.

Council resolves, with the aim of improving transparency, accountability and outcomes for tenants across the district, to:

1. Request Officers to work with housing associations above an agreed stock threshold within the district to establish a simple six-monthly performance reporting framework covering key housing management and maintenance measures.
2. Refer this reporting to the Operational Services Committee for regular review, enabling Councillors to monitor trends, identify good practice and understand where improvement may be required.
3. Invite representatives of housing associations to attend meetings with the Council to discuss performance, challenges and improvement activity where appropriate.
4. Request Officers to explore options to strengthen tenant engagement and improve understanding of tenant experience, particularly amongst vulnerable residents and those less likely to raise concerns directly.
5. Commit to continued collaboration with housing providers, with the aim to increase East Cambridgeshire's social housing capacity.

Cllr Lee Denney asserted that all residents should have a high quality, secure place to live, as poor quality homes could have a detrimental impact on their health and life expectancy. He explained that the Council sought to achieve this for residents in social and affordable housing by ensuring that they received

responsive, high-quality housing services. There was an inconsistency in the service provided by landlords and the aim of the Motion was to improve transparency, accountability and outcomes for tenants by working collaboratively with housing associations to achieve this.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the following amendments to the Motion:

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32 registered providers own housing in East Cambridgeshire representing 6,524 homes, both general needs and supported living. Sanctuary Housing is by far the biggest provider, owning 4,260 (65%) of these homes, representing around 10% of the entire housing stock in the district. The next largest provider is CHS (Cambridge Housing Society) Group with 554 homes. Flagship Housing owns 231 homes, Clarion 208, Accent Group 137 with remaining other smaller providers owning around 100 homes or less.

Council is concerned that inconsistent service levels experienced by some housing association tenants may disproportionately affect older and vulnerable residents and recognises the importance of ensuring that all tenants are able to access responsive services and have their voices heard. Whilst the larger providers are subject to regulatory judgement this does not provide sufficient transparency or granularity about performance at a local level.

Council resolves, with the aim of improving transparency, accountability and outcomes for tenants across the district, to:

1. ~~Request Officers to work with housing associations above an agreed stock threshold within the district~~ **social and affordable housing providers owning significant housing stock within East Cambridgeshire** to establish a ~~simple proportionate~~ six-monthly performance reporting framework ~~covering key housing management and maintenance measures~~ **drawing wherever possible on existing regulatory and management information** so as to minimise additional reporting burdens.
2. **Request that the framework should, where reasonably available, provide information disaggregated to East Cambridgeshire level and include a consistent core set of measures covering matters such as repairs performance, outstanding repairs, damp and mould, complaints and complaint response times, anti-social behaviour, relevant property safety measures and tenant satisfaction.**

3. **Request that structured six-monthly reporting should normally apply to social and affordable housing providers owning 100 or more homes within the district, with proportionate annual or exception-based engagement with smaller providers, particularly where concerns arise in relation to vulnerable tenants, supported housing, service quality or safeguarding.**
4. **Refer ~~this reporting~~ the resulting performance information to the Operational Services Committee for regular review, enabling Councillors to monitor trends, identify good practice and understand where improvement may be required.**
5. **Invite ~~senior~~ representatives of ~~social and affordable~~ housing associations ~~providers~~ to attend meetings with ~~of the Council's~~ Operational Services Committee where appropriate to discuss performance, ~~tenant experience~~, challenges and improvement activity ~~where appropriate~~.**
6. **Request Officers to ~~work with social and affordable housing providers to~~ explore options to strengthen tenant engagement and improve understanding of tenant experience, particularly amongst vulnerable residents and those less likely to raise concerns directly the establishment of an East Cambridgeshire Social and Affordable Housing Provider Partnership Framework or Charter, setting out shared expectations to partnership working, local accountability, information sharing, tenant communication, support for vulnerable residents and the escalation of significant service concerns.**
7. **Request Officers to establish practical arrangements to strengthen the voice of social housing tenants across the district, including consideration of periodic tenant surveys, tenant forums or reference panels and targeted engagement with older and vulnerable residents, disabled residents, rural communities and those less likely to use digital channels or formal complaints processes.**
8. **Request Officers to develop a proportionate escalation process for significant or persistent concerns about tenant outcomes, including senior engagement with the relevant provider, monitoring of agreed improvement actions and, where appropriate, referral or signposting in accordance with the respective roles of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.**
9. **Request that an initial report on the proposed performance framework, provider engagement arrangements and tenant voice mechanisms be brought to the Operational Services Committee within six months.**
10. **Commit to continued collaboration with housing providers, with the aim to increase East Cambridgeshire's social housing capacity.**

Cllr Lorna Dupré agreed that the original Motion identified a gap in accountability but was disappointed that the administration had not been prepared to work with the opposition group in the wording of the Motion. She explained that the amendments would ensure that social housing providers were held to account for the services they provided. She stated that contrary to the wording of the original Motion, all providers were regulated. She suggested

that a six-month timescale for the reporting back on this matter was reasonable for the providers. Complaints should be monitored, with an escalation procedure if necessary. This would make the providers more accountable.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that he favoured a collaborative approach with the service providers, as framed in the original Motion, because the Council was not the regulating body. He feared that this amendment would risk alienating the service providers. The Council did not have the power to summon them to a meeting of the Operational Services Committee. He concluded that the authority needed to work in partnership with social housing providers, so he opposed the amendment.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that the Council did not have any statutory powers over the providers and instead the authority would have to co-operate with them to improve the service. The aim of the original Motion was to build a framework that, over time, would allow collaboration between Members, the wider community and service providers. It would not be appropriate to summon the provider to a public meeting, where sensitive information would be discussed. The original Motion gave officers the flexibility to develop a co-operative framework with the providers, whilst the amended Motion would create duplication of work on escalation routes. For these reasons she opposed the amendment.

Cllr Christine Whelan stated that the amendment strengthened the original Motion by identifying the issues that mattered most to residents such as repairs, response times and tackling anti-social behaviour. Six-monthly reports from providers who had over 100 homes and annual reports from the others would ensure accurate, proportionate monitoring of performance. Tenant satisfaction surveys would amplify residents' voices and highlight good practice. It would also ensure that the views of elderly residents, who lacked internet access, were heard. The amendment would provide an escalation process when problems persisted and monitor improvements. The regulator and ombudsman would monitor every six months. The amendment was balanced and deliverable, and she regretted that personal and political disagreements were a barrier to what was good for tenants.

Cllr Lee Denney welcomed the input from the opposition group but disagreed with the assertion that there was an accountability gap. The Motion would allow officers to work with providers to the benefit of tenants, whilst the amendment could be antagonistic. Tenant surveys were carried out every year and so this clause in the amendment was unnecessary. He concluded that the amendment was bureaucratic and counter-productive and so he could not support it.

A vote was taken and with 8 votes in favour, 15 votes against and no abstentions, the amendment was lost.

Cllr Lorna Dupré suggested that those who proposed the Motion should have discussed its wording with opposition members prior to the meeting, to resolve any misunderstandings and propose amendments that were acceptable to

everyone. She supported the Council working as a facilitator to deliver the best possible service to social and affordable housing tenants.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that he trusted the Council's officers to work with providers on behalf of tenants and therefore supported this Motion.

Cllr Anna Bailey assured Council that, if agreed, the Motion would start the process, and officers would be expected to report back on progress. The Operational Services Committee would be given an opportunity to discuss this. She was pleased that there was cross-party support regarding the outcomes of this issue.

Cllr Lee Denney explained that structural changes were needed to improve the social housing service provided to residents. He had every confidence in officers to work effectively with service providers. He hoped that Council would support this pragmatic Motion.

A vote was taken and Council unanimously.

Resolved

To approve the above Motion.

8. To Answer Questions from Members

There were no questions from Members.

9. Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies

Council considered a report (AB48, previously circulated) which sought approval of a recommendation from the Finance and Assets Committee to agree the Annual Review of the Council's Treasury operations during 2025/26.

Cllr Alan Sharp stated that the proposal had been unanimously recommended by the Finance and Assets Committee and he thanked the Director Finance and his team for their work on this.

Cllr Mark Goldsack stated that the report showed that the Council's finances were well run and that the authority had no external debt. He also thanked the finance officers for their work in producing this report.

Cllr Sharp proposed and Cllr Goldsack seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and

Council unanimously

Resolved:

That the contents of the Annual Review of the Council's Treasury operations during 2025/26, including the prudential and treasury indicators, as set out in the Annual Treasury Management Review (Appendix 1), be approved.

10. Corporate Plan

Council considered a report (AB47, previously circulated) that invited Council to consider the updated Action Plan 2026/27 to support the implementation of the 2023-27 Corporate Plan. The Chief Executive explained that the report detailed both the progress made on the previous year's actions and the actions for the forthcoming year.

Cllr Anna Bailey noted that the Council was the only principal authority to freeze Council Tax for 13 years. This had been achieved, not by cutting services, but through careful financial management and generating income through the trading company. She thanked officers for their hard work in introducing a new waste collection service, which was generating an exceptionally high level of food waste collection, boosting recycling rates. The Bereavement Centre was expected to open in late summer and would not only offer a service for residents but would also generate income for the Council. Good progress had been made in the provision of affordable housing, with more units expected in 2026/27, delivered by the Council and by Land Trusts. A new open-air theatre would be provided in Ely. These things helped to make East Cambridgeshire unique, and she hoped that all Members would celebrate these achievements and ambitions and agree the Corporate Plan.

Cllr Lorna Dupré agreed that it was important for the Council to be financially sustainable and to promote recycling. She suggested that the Council could be more ambitious in its efforts to lower carbon emissions and promote the construction of reservoirs. She suggested that local businesses should be supported and the effectiveness of grants awarded to them should be assessed. She supported the inclusive play strategy in the Corporate Plan, which resulted from an opposition group motion. The implementation of Public Space Protection Orders to combat anti-social driving was very welcome, as was participation in the Low-Income Families Tracker initiative, which had been particularly successful in South Cambridgeshire. She remained opposed to the Bereavement Centre and expressed concern about the aim to improve town and city centres, as it was unclear how this would work. Complaints had been received regarding the reliability of the interactive digital screens in Ely. She stated that the achievements of Community Land Trusts had been variable. She asked why actions on crime enforcement were not in the work programme and why the motions agreed on tackling empty homes and banks in the district had not been included in the Plan. She expressed concern that the announcement of an open-air theatre in Ely pre-empted the decision of the Planning Committee and suggested that it was unclear how such an initiative would be run.

Cllr Bill Hunt stated that the Wilburton and Stretham Community Land Trust had been successful, and he expected the initiative at Haddenham to also deliver its aims. The implementation of the new waste collection service had been a resounding success, and he asked if there were any figures on recycling rates under the new regime.

Cllr Mark Goldsack stated that he was proud of both the Council's achievements and the aims for the coming year, which were listed in the report for residents to see.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott thanked officers for preparing the Corporate Plan, which provided details of both the Council's work and what it sought to achieve in the last normal year of its existence. It was clear that residents supported the new waste collection service, with 90% of them now recycling their food waste. He was proud of the work of the communities and partnerships team and its outreach service directed at young people. The Council had frozen its Council Tax for 13 years in a row, had not cut its services and was debt-free. He hoped that this level of financial management would continue under the new unitary authority that would replace the Council. He expressed concerns regarding the impact of the Government's Fair Funding Review and the new planning regulations. He was proud to support the Council's Corporate Plan.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith stated that from her experience, the Council had an effective Empty Homes Strategy.

Cllr Julia Huffer thanked officers for the successful implementation of the new waste collection services during a heatwave. She also thanked officers for delivering high-quality services on budget. When parish councils had asked her how the authority was able to achieve this, she had stated that the Council was able to think outside the box to deliver services on time and on budget.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the Community Land Trusts in the district were made up of volunteers who gave up hours of their time to deliver a successful service for local residents.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and with 15 votes in favour, no votes against and 8 abstentions, it was agreed

To resolve:

That Council

- (a) Approved the updated Action Plan for 2026/27 at Appendix 1; and
- (b) Noted the completed actions and progress made during 2025/26.

11. Local Government Reorganisation – Establishment of Voluntary Joint Committee

The Council received a report (AB49, previously circulated) that proposed the establishment of voluntary Joint Committees with the Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. These committees would oversee transitional and implementation activities leading up to the vesting day for the new Shadow Authorities. The Chair proposed that, in light of the Government's announcement that no decisions regarding the structure of Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire would be made until October, this item should be deferred to a future Council meeting. Councillor Bailey seconded the recommendation.

Cllr Lorna Dupré expressed that the Government's delay in making a decision was an insult to everyone who had worked diligently to provide evidence on the various options by the Government's deadline. She believed that the report's recommendation was premature and welcomed the proposal to defer the item, noting that all the authorities in Cambridgeshire needed to be in agreement, and the County Council would not meet until 13 October. Therefore, she supported the recommendation to postpone the item to a future Council meeting.

Cllr Charlotte Cane expressed her frustration regarding the Government's failure to make a decision on the options for Local Government Reorganisation. She was present in Parliament when the Minister made his announcement and asked him what plans were in place for consulting on the decision and the various options in the coming months, but he did not respond to her question. She emphasised that the Government could have sought more information if it had been needed to.

Cllr Cane was particularly concerned about the impact that this uncertainty could have on the staff of all affected councils. While she hoped the May elections would still proceed, she noted that it was impossible to finalise electoral wards or seek nominations while the number of councillors and wards remained uncertain. She urged the Minister to engage with the public to ensure that they have a say in the Government's decision-making process.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her gratitude to Cllr Cane and all the Cambridgeshire MPs who had posed questions to the minister. She noted that all councils had worked diligently to provide information to the Government, but they now faced uncertainty until the minister announced a decision, which was expected no earlier than October. While the Local Government Review was expected to proceed according to the agreed timetable, this situation reduces the available time and increases the project's risks. The Council will continue to keep its staff and residents informed of any developments.

It was unanimously agreed

To resolve:

To defer this item to a future meeting of Council.

12. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Update Report

Council considered a report which provided details of the update reports for June 2026 from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board and Committees.

The Chair proposed and the Vice Chair seconded the recommendations in the report. A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed

To resolve:

To note the update report for June 2026.

The meeting concluded at 7.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

