



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 4:30 pm on
Thursday 24 September 2026

Present:

Cllr Chika Akinwale
Cllr Anna Bailey
Cllr Christine Colbert (Sub)
Cllr Lee Denney
Cllr Martin Goodearl (Sub)
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr David Miller (*arrived 4:35 pm*)
Cllr Alan Sharp (Chair)
Cllr John Trapp (Sub)
Cllr Alison Whelan
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers:

Sally Bonnett – Director, Community
Jude Antony – Director, Finance
Jane Webb – Democratic Services and Elections Manager
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Nicola Pema – HR Manager
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager
Nigel Ankers – Senior Finance Manager, ECTC
Lucy Flintham – Community Infrastructure Manager

23. Public Questions

No Public Questions had been received.

24. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Mark Goldsack, substituted by Cllr Martin Goodearl; Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann, substituted by Cllr Christine Colbert; and Cllr Mary Wade, substituted by Cllr John Trapp.

25. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2026.

Members unanimously resolved:

That the Finance & Assets Committee meeting minutes of 25 June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(Cllr Miller arrived at 4:35 pm)

27. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Nigel Ankers, ECTC's Senior Finance Manager, to the meeting.

28. ECTC Financial Statements 2025/26 & Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

The Committee received a report (AB68, previously circulated) providing the ECTC's Financial Statements and Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26. The ECTC Finance Manager and Managing Director presented the reports.

Members made comments and received responses as follows.

- Administrative expenditure had increased due to additional staffing costs and increases in National Insurance contributions.
- Other receivables related to a temporary loan provided to a Community Land Trust to assist with the delivery of affordable housing projects. Part of the loan had been repaid since the year-end.
- The non-current lease liability reflected payments which had moved into the current accounting period and related to the Market Square lease.
- Members identified a number of apparent inconsistencies within the Financial Statements and requested clarification regarding figures, dates, corporation tax rates and references within the notes to the accounts. Officers agreed to review the points raised and provide written clarification to Members.
- The reference to borrowing within Note 23 should refer to the loan facility provided by ECDC.
- Members queried the £4.5 million social value figure contained within the Annual Governance Statement. It was explained that this represented the additional social value generated above normal policy-compliant development requirements, including affordable housing schemes that exceeded standard planning policy expectations.
- A typographical error was identified within the Annual Governance Statement and would be corrected.

Cllr Bailey proposed the recommendations in the report, and Cllr Huffer seconded them.

Cllr Bailey, as proposer, welcomed the significant social value delivered through ECTC developments and highlighted the contribution of affordable housing schemes across the district.

Cllr Huffer, as seconder, expressed support for the work undertaken by ECTC and the benefits delivered to local communities.

A vote was taken on the recommendations as follows:

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The East Cambs Trading Company Financial Statements 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 1 be **NOTED**;
- The East Cambs Trading Company Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 2 be **NOTED**.

29. Growth and Infrastructure Fund

The Committee received a report (AB69, previously circulated) on the expenditure of the remaining Growth and Infrastructure Fund monies. The Director Community presented the report and explained that, because the funding must be spent by May 2027, it proposed directing the remaining allocation to two projects that could be delivered within the available timeframe.

- Members sought clarification on whether the proposed allocations complied with the funding requirements and whether funding opportunities should also be available to other housing providers.
- It was explained that opening a further grant process would require a further application round, Member Panel consideration and Committee approval, which would significantly reduce the time available for project delivery. The proposed approach provided certainty that the funding could be spent within the required timescale.
- Members queried whether alternative projects had been considered following the withdrawal of previously approved schemes. Officers advised that, whilst alternative projects may have been possible, there was insufficient time to run another competitive process and still guarantee delivery by the funding deadline.
- It was noted that approval of the proposals would ensure the funding remained within the district and supported both affordable housing delivery and investment in sustainable infrastructure.
- Members noted that the installation of solar photovoltaic panels at the Lake View Bereavement Centre would reduce future operating costs and make use of infrastructure already incorporated into the site's design.
- It was also noted that the affordable housing proposal would contribute towards the provision of 100% affordable housing at Phase 3 Arbour Square, Ely.

Cllr Bailey proposed the recommendations, and Cllr Denney seconded them.

As proposer, Cllr Bailey welcomed the proposals and said funding had been secured to benefit residents of East Cambridgeshire. She considered both projects an excellent use of the remaining funds, supporting affordable housing and sustainable energy generation.

Cllr Denney, as seconder of the recommendations, supported the proposals, noting the ongoing demand for affordable housing and the financial and environmental benefits the solar energy scheme would bring.

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The grant of £405,000 to East Cambs Trading Company as a contribution towards a housing development scheme delivering 100% affordable housing at Phase 3 Arbour Square, Ely, be **APPROVED**
- The allocation of £373,107.60 to install PV panels on the car park canopy and/or a battery solution at Lake View Bereavement Centre, Mepal be **APPROVED**
- The tendering of the solar PV panels and/or battery solution and installation through a specialist framework be **APPROVED**.
- Authority be delegated to the Director Legal, in consultation with the Director Operations and Director Finance, to enter into the necessary contractual and/or legal arrangements to implement the above recommendations.

30. Inclusive Playground Strategy

The Committee considered a report (AB70, previously circulated) on the draft Inclusive Playground Strategy and Inclusive Playground Toolkit. The Director Community presented the report, outlining findings from play audits across Council-managed play areas and proposed actions to improve accessibility and inclusivity across the district. The report also detailed the toolkit developed to support parish councils and other organisations in delivering inclusive play facilities.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Members queried the extent to which children, young people and families had been consulted in developing the toolkit. Officers explained that the toolkit drew on guidance and best practice published by a range of specialist organisations, including Scope, PiPA, Play England and Play Wales.
- Clarification was sought regarding responsibility for developing and delivering future inclusive play projects. Officers advised that the toolkit was intended to support parish councils, community groups, housing associations and developers, with consultation on individual projects expected to take place as part of the design process.
- Members asked how the priority locations identified within the strategy had been selected. It was confirmed that the recommendations were based on findings from PiPA play audits conducted on Council-managed facilities.
- Officers confirmed that, whilst twenty parish councils initially expressed an interest in the audit programme, ten parishes ultimately participated, resulting in fifteen play areas being audited.

- Questions were raised regarding future inspection, maintenance and replacement responsibilities. Members were advised that Council would continue to maintain Council-owned play areas, while other organisations would be responsible for the long-term management of their own facilities. The toolkit highlighted the need to consider future maintenance arrangements as part of any project proposal.

Cllr Bailey proposed the recommendations, and Cllr Goodearl seconded them.

As proposer of the recommendations, Cllr Bailey welcomed the Strategy and Toolkit, describing them as comprehensive and readily accessible documents. She noted that funding was now available to support inclusive play projects and thanked Cllr Akinwale for bringing the initiative forward.

Cllr Alison Whelan welcomed the cross-party support for the project and thanked everyone involved in bringing the Strategy to Committee.

Cllr Goodearl, as seconder of the recommendations, thanked Cllr Akinwale for championing inclusive play and acknowledged the work of officers, parish councils and town councils involved in developing the Strategy and Toolkit. He highlighted the importance of ensuring play facilities were accessible to all children.

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The draft Inclusive Playground Strategy in Appendix 1 and the draft Inclusive Playground Toolkit in Appendix 2 be **APPROVED**
- Authority be delegated to the Leisure & Active Lifestyles Manager, in consultation with the Chair of Finance & Assets Committee, to make minor amendments to the draft documents.

31. **Extension of Lease to Ely Museum**

The Committee considered a report (AB71, previously circulated) regarding a request to extend the lease of The Old Gaol, Market Street, Ely, occupied by Ely Museum. The Chief Executive presented the report and explained that Ely Museum had requested a lease extension to support future funding applications and long-term planning. The proposal would extend the current lease to 31 March 2125 on the existing terms and conditions.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows.

- Members sought assurance that the extension would not alter the existing terms of the lease. It was confirmed that the proposal was simply to extend the lease term and that all existing obligations on both parties would remain unchanged.
- Clarification was sought regarding responsibilities for repairs and maintenance. Officers confirmed that the lease would continue on its current basis, with existing responsibilities unchanged.

- Members queried whether Local Government Reorganisation would affect the Council's ability to grant the lease extension. Officers advised that nothing prevented the extension from being granted and that any future Local Government Reorganisation proposals would not affect the Council's ability to approve the extension at this stage.
- It was noted that any future arrangements relating to the property could be considered by successor authorities in the normal way if required.

Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendations in the report, and Cllr Hunt seconded them.

Cllr Bailey welcomed the proposal and wished Ely Museum every success with its future plans and funding ambitions. She noted the Museum's positive contribution to promoting the history of Ely and the surrounding area.

Cllr Hunt, as seconder of the recommendation, supported the Museum and praised its continued development and forward-thinking approach. He noted that the request demonstrated the organisation's commitment to securing future investment and improving the service it provides to the public.

Cllr Sharp, as proposer of the recommendation, thanked officers for bringing the report forward and expressed his support for the lease extension.

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The extension of the lease to Ely Museum at The Old Gaol, Market Street, Ely to 31 March 2125 be APPROVED
- Authority be delegated to the Director Legal & Monitoring Officer to complete the relevant legal documentation.

32. Assets Update

The Committee considered a report (AB72, as previously circulated) providing an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces & Facilities Manager presented the report and provided Members with an update on a number of ongoing projects and maintenance activities.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Members sought an update on the ongoing repair works to the Council Chamber lift. Officers explained that the lift's mechanical elements had been replaced; however, additional issues had been identified with the software and control systems. Whilst the lift could be operated when required, officers were awaiting further works to resolve the remaining faults.
- Clarification was sought regarding the cost of the lift repairs. Officers confirmed that the Council would be responsible for the costs and that the final cost of the latest repairs was not yet known.

- Members identified an apparent inconsistency within the asset expenditure tracker relating to Ely Museum expenditure. Officers agreed to review the figures and provide clarification.
- Officers confirmed that there had been interest in the Inclusive Play and Open Spaces Fund, although no formal applications had yet been received.
- Members welcomed the ongoing work to refurbish the Cloisters public conveniences and sought reassurance that disruption would be kept to a minimum. Officers advised that they would provide notices to the public and that the facilities would remain operational wherever possible during the refurbishment works.
- Members queried whether future asset monitoring reports could include information relating to inclusive play projects. Officers agreed to consider how this information could be incorporated into future reporting.
- Clarification was provided regarding the security costs associated with Mepal Outdoor Centre, which related to the wider site and included monitoring and call-out arrangements.
- Members noted that security arrangements at the Bereavement Centre would be reviewed as part of future budget considerations now that the facility was operational.

Members expressed appreciation to the Open Spaces & Facilities Manager and his team for managing the Council's assets and delivering projects in a practical, cost-effective manner.

Members resolved that:

- The update on Council-owned assets be NOTED
- The expenditure tracking sheet at Appendix 1 be NOTED.

33. Planning Charges

The Committee considered a report (AB73, as previously circulated) on the introduction of a charging regime to recover costs associated with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) following recent changes to legislation. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager presented the report and explained that the proposed charging schedule would enable the Council to recover reasonable costs incurred in processing and responding to such projects.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Members sought clarification on the proposed arrangements for refunding fees where projects did not proceed. Officers confirmed that they would refund any unspent monies after reconciling costs.
- It was noted that the proposed charging rates were broadly in line with comparable authorities and reflected the Council's existing approach to Planning Performance Agreements.

- Members welcomed the opportunity to recover costs associated with major infrastructure projects and recognised the benefit of ensuring the Council was not required to absorb these additional expenses.
- Clarification was sought regarding the proposed £20,000 upfront payment. Officers explained that the initial payment would establish resources and cover costs incurred at the start of a project. Detailed records of officer time would be maintained and further invoices raised as necessary in accordance with the charging schedule.
- Officers advised that developers would receive regular information on expenditure and anticipated future costs throughout the lifecycle of a project.

Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendations in the report, and Cllr Hunt seconded them.

Cllr Hunt, as seconder, welcomed the proposals and considered them a practical and proportionate approach to recovering costs associated with major infrastructure projects.

Cllr Sharp, as proposer of the recommendations, stated that the proposed charging structure represented a sensible and fair approach and would ensure that the Council was able to recover the costs incurred in supporting Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The report relating to the introduction of a new charging regime to cover the expenses of dealing with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), in line with recent changes to legislation, be **NOTED**.

34. Gender Pay Reporting 2025-26

The Committee considered a report (AB74, as previously circulated) providing information on the Council's gender pay position for 2025/26. The HR Manager presented the report and highlighted the Council's current gender pay gap figures and the actions being taken to address any disparity.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Members sought assurance that employees undertaking comparable roles received equal pay regardless of gender. Officers advised that all roles were evaluated through established job evaluation schemes, including the Green Book Job Evaluation Scheme and the Hay Evaluation Scheme for senior posts, ensuring consistency and fairness in pay grading.
- It was noted that mean pay figures could be influenced by a small number of higher-paid roles and that the median pay gap often provided a more representative comparison of pay across the workforce.
- Members commented that the reported pay gap reflected differences in the distribution of men and women across roles rather than differences in pay for equivalent work.

- A suggestion was made that future reporting could include additional analysis of mean and median pay within each pay quartile to provide further context regarding workforce composition.

Members resolved that:

- The content of the report be NOTED.

35. CIL Local Infrastructure Funding Request

The Committee considered a report (AB75, as previously circulated) on the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding towards Phase 2 of the Walter Gidney Pavilion Project in Soham. The Community Infrastructure Manager presented the report and advised Members of two corrections to the published report: the project completion date should read August 2027 and the reference to the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan should read Policy SBNP9.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Officers advised that the project would extend the existing pavilion facility by providing a replacement kitchen, additional community space, accessible toilet facilities and storage areas.
- Members were informed that planning permission had been granted and the tendering process was nearing completion.
- It was noted that the project was supported by Soham Town Council, had demonstrated community support and had achieved the required score under the Council's eligibility and assessment criteria.
- Officers confirmed that the project would be funded through a combination of local CIL receipts, Soham Town Council funds and borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board.

Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendation, and Cllr Bailey seconded it.

As proposer, Cllr Sharp welcomed the application and said the project would provide a valuable community asset for Soham, reflecting the town's continued growth and the need for improved community facilities.

Cllr Bailey, as seconder, wished Soham Town Council every success with the project and acknowledged the significant commitment to secure the remaining funding required to complete the development.

Members unanimously resolved that:

- The allocation of up to £400,000 Community Infrastructure Levy funding to the Walter Gidney Pavilion Phase 2 expansion project be APPROVED.

36. Medium-Term Financial Strategy Update

The Committee received a report (AB76, previously circulated) updating the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) since the 2026/27 budget was approved in February 2026. The Director Finance presented the report and outlined the latest assumptions underpinning the Council's financial projections, including business rates, council tax, inflation, pay awards and other income and expenditure pressures. The MTFS had also been extended to 2030/31 to reflect the uncertainty surrounding Local Government Reorganisation.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Officers advised that the Council had achieved a favourable outturn position of just over £3 million in 2025/26, which had been transferred to reserves. Members were reminded that this reflected additional income received during the year rather than reductions in service provision.
- It was noted that the Council was currently forecasting a favourable position of just under £200,000 for 2026/27, which, subject to the final outturn, would also be transferred to reserves.
- Members were advised that whilst reserves provided short-term support, they remained a finite resource and significant savings would be required in future years to achieve a balanced budget.
- Clarification was sought regarding an apparent discrepancy between the underspend figure reported in the June Finance & Assets Committee minutes and the outturn position referred to within the MTFS update. Officers agreed to review the figures and provide clarification to all Members following the meeting.

Members resolved that:

- The content of the report be NOTED

37. Finance Report

The Committee received a report (AB77, previously circulated) providing budget monitoring information for services within the remit of the Finance & Assets Committee and, as part of its corporate remit, for the Council as a whole. The Director Finance presented the report and highlighted the Council's financial position at the end of the first quarter of 2026/27.

Members were advised that:

- The Finance & Assets Committee was forecasting a year-end underspend of £85,000 against its approved revenue budget.
- The Council was forecasting an overall year-end underspend of £199,000 against its approved revenue budget.

- The current capital programme forecast showed an overspend of £289,021, primarily due to increased costs associated with the rollout of waste containers and food caddies.
- Treasury Management performance remained positive, with investment income exceeding the profiled budget during the first quarter.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Officers explained that a number of variances identified within the report were timing-related and would continue to be monitored throughout the financial year.
- Members noted that investment income was currently performing above budget expectations due to higher interest rates and investment returns.

Members resolved to note that:

- The Committee is currently forecasting an underspend of £85,000 at year-end when compared to its approved revenue budget of £8,284,422.
- The Council is forecasting an overall underspend of £199,000 at year-end when compared to its approved revenue budget of £21,585,345.
- That the overall position for the Council on capital is an outturn of £13,787,601, which is an overspend of £289,021 when compared to the revised budget including slippage from 2025/26.
- The Treasury Management update report in Appendix 5.

38. East Cambridgeshire Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for 2026/27

The Committee received a report (AB78, previously circulated) detailing the annual review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) and considering whether any changes were required for 2027/28. The Director Finance presented the report and advised that no changes to the current scheme were proposed. The recommendation was therefore to retain the existing minimum contribution of 8.5%, meaning the maximum level of support available would remain at 91.5%.

- Members sought clarification that any changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme would ultimately require approval by Full Council.
- It was confirmed that the purpose of the report was to undertake the annual review of the scheme and recommend whether any changes should be made for the following financial year.
- Members noted that there were no proposed amendments to the existing scheme.

Cllr Sharp proposed the recommendations in the report, and Cllr Bailey seconded them.

Members resolved that:

- The annual review of the LCTRS and the recommendation that no changes are needed to the Scheme in 2027/28 be **APPROVED**.

39. Forward Plan

The Committee considered its Forward Plan.

Officers advised Members that two additional items would be added to the November meeting agenda:

- A report regarding a proposed new tenant for 70 Market Street, Ely.
- The Public Open Spaces Disposal Strategy relating to parishes interested in taking on responsibility for green spaces within their areas.

Members resolved to **NOTE** the Forward Plan and add the following items:

- Tenant for 70 Market Street, Ely.
- Public Open Spaces Disposal Strategy.

40. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the following items 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).

41. EXEMPT – ECTC Management Accounts

The Committee received a summary view of the ECTC Management Accounts. The Senior Finance Manager, ECTC, presented the report.

Members resolved that:

- The contents of the report be **NOTED**

42. EXEMPT – Write-Off of Unrecoverable Debts

The Committee considered a report regarding the write-off of irrecoverable debts. The Director Finance presented the report.

Members unanimously resolved to:

- **NOTE** that six Council Tax debts had been written off using delegated powers.

43. EXEMPT Minutes – 25 June 2026

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the Finance & Assets Committee meeting held on 25 June 2026.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The meeting concluded at 6 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....

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