



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 17 October 2024 at 6.00pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Kelli Pettitt
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Caroline Shepherd
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Mark Goldsack (Chair)	Councillor Mary Wade
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Kathrin Holtzmann	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Keith Horgan	Councillor Gareth Wilson
Councillor Julia Huffer	

33. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

34. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs David Brown, Mark Inskip and James Lay.

35. Declarations of Interest

Under agenda item 7a, Cllr Charlotte Cane declared an interest in the motion on Winter Fuel Allowance as she had voted on this matter in the House of Commons. The Monitoring Officer advised that she should not participate in the debate. Councillor Charlotte Cane did not participate in the debate and did not vote.

Under agenda item 9, 2a Waste and Street Cleansing Service Proposals, Cllr Lorna Dupré declared an interest as a member of the County Council's Environment and Green Investment Committee. The Monitoring Officer advised that she could participate in the debate and vote.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Council was about to discuss a motion on the Winter Fuel Allowance and whilst councillors might stand to benefit if the policy was changed, this Council did not decide national policy and so councillors were permitted to debate and vote on the motion.

36. Minutes – 25 July 2024

It was agreed unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

37. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- **Signing of the Armed Forces Covenant**
The Chair was proud to report that he had signed the Armed Forces Covenant on behalf of the Council.
- **Commemoration of 75th anniversary of plane crash near Isleham**
The Chair reported that he had attended a memorial service at St Andrews Church, Isleham to commemorate the 75th anniversary of a plane crash, where the crew had remained on board to ensure that the village was saved.

38. Petitions

No petitions had been received.

39. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

a) Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty

The following Motion was proposed by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer:

This Council resolves to:

- Increase the Council's local awareness campaign which has been underway for several weeks now, to alert those eligible for Pension Credit to apply by the deadline of 21st December 2024, to try to ensure Winter Fuel Payments still get to those most in need.
- Continue to encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through Council services, Anglia Revenues Partnership, and other partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in East Cambridgeshire are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and

asking the Government to take urgent steps to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

- Write to all Members offering them the opportunity to sign the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK.

Cllr Anna Bailey was aware that all Members of the Council were concerned about the Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Allowance to those receiving more than £218 per week, which was only a third of the national average wage. It was inevitable that many pensioners who were eligible for the allowance would not apply. She expressed her disappointment that the Government had not written to these pensioners to ensure they continued to receive the allowance they were entitled to. The Council resolved to encourage all the District's pensioners to apply for the allowance, if they were eligible.

Councillor Lucius Vellacott asserted that the Government was obligated to assist people who needed it, and it was wrong that pensioners who had paid tax all their working lives were now having the Winter Fuel Allowance removed. He thanked Cllr Charlotte Cane for voting with the Conservative opposition in the House of Commons on this matter.

Councillor Lorna Dupré reported that there was widespread agreement that the Government's decision to withdraw the Winter Fuel Allowance from some pensioners was wrong. However, she stated that the same proposal had been included in the manifesto of the Conservative party in 2017. She recommended that the Council use its data to contact the District's pensioners individually to ensure that all those who were eligible continued to receive the allowance. She expressed her regret at the decision to close the Citizens Advice Bureau in Ely and recommended that the Conservatives also support the removal of the two-child benefit cap.

Councillor Anna Bailey explained that the Conservative Government had decided not to implement the withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance in 2017. The Citizen Advice Bureau had been provided with offices free of charge, but they had decided to close. She expressed her regret at the decision taken by the Liberal Democrats on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to not support a similar motion opposing the decision to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance from pensioners. She promised that the administration would work with officers to investigate the possibility of approaching pensioners individually to ensure that nobody in the district missed out on the allowance they were entitled to.

On being put to the vote, Council unanimously agreed that the Motion be carried.

b) Sea Toilets

The following Motion was proposed by Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann and seconded by Cllr Lorna Dupré:

This Council resolves that:

This Council notes that control of the Great Ouse rests with the Environment Agency which currently permits the use of sea toilets which discharge human waste and other materials directly into the river.

The discharge of sea toilets is permitted by regulation on all inland waterways unless specifically banned.

This Council believes that this practice should be prohibited on the Great Ouse and its tributaries, and therefore resolves to request the Environment Agency to take the necessary steps to achieve a ban.

Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann explained that the Environment Agency needed to pass a bylaw to prevent boats from discharging sewage into the Great Ouse and she hoped all Members would support the motion that called for the Council to write to the Environment Agency to take the necessary steps to achieve a ban. Cllr Anna Bailey supported this motion and added that there was a pump at the riverside that did not require payment for its use. Cllr Lorna Dupré expressed her pride in the Riverside, Ely and hoped that the Environment Agency would take the appropriate action.

On being put to the vote, Council unanimously agreed that the Motion be carried.

40. Questions From Members

Five questions were received, and responses given as follows:

1. Question from Cllr Lucius Vellacott to the Leader of the Council:

“The youth unemployment rate is rising, from 13.0% in 2023 to 14.2% this year. The youth economic inactivity rate is also rising, now at 41.2%, 26% of whom are not in full-time education, which is the highest since records began. In East Cambridgeshire, the overall unemployment rate is 3.5% with an 18.2% economic inactivity rate.

“I consider that the Council has a duty to help young people into work if they are unemployed or economically inactive, and not in full-time education, caring or otherwise unable to work. Young people who are able to work learn important life skills such as financial management, perseverance, people skills and more. It also provides a sense of purpose and motivation which is essential when transitioning into adult life. But young people are struggling. They have told us, via our Youth Engagement Strategy, about difficulties arising from the pandemic, one of the effects of which is that it is more difficult to get a job or to obtain work-related skills.

“What is the Council doing to engage with relevant partners, and what action is it taking itself, to promote local apprenticeships, employment, work experience and skills training for young people across the District?”

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey:

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the Council’s youth education and work webpage included links to a wide range of organisations that detailed opportunities for young people. These included the national apprenticeship week and an annual skills fair at Ely Cathedral on 5 November, which was sponsored by the Council. The authority also supported the Chamber of Commerce networking event and was considering

restarting the district skills partnership, with the DWP and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. A recent Youth Fusion event provided career advice to attendees and gave details on opportunities to volunteer. The Council was also liaising with the Combined Authority to address the lack of further education providers in the District. Cambridgeshire County Council planned to conduct a youth survey in the area. It should also be noted that the annual SME Business Awards, hosted by the Ely Standard, included awards for both the business that provided the best apprenticeships and the young business person of the year.

2. Question from Cllr John Trapp to Cllr Bill Hunt:

“What legal advice did you seek, and what legal advice did you receive, to inform your decision whether to chair the meeting of the Planning Committee on 13 August 2024 that determined the Soham Gateway and Soham Medical Centre planning applications?”

Response from Cllr Bill Hunt:

Councillor Bill Hunt suggested that this question should have been asked to him directly instead of at full Council. He explained that since being elected as a County Councillor in a by-election in 2023 had had no involvement in the matter under discussion. He had informed the Planning Committee on 13 August 2024 that he had taken legal advice from the Council’s Monitoring Officer, who confirmed that providing he declared an interest as a County Councillor and confirmed that he came to the debate with an open mind, no further action was necessary.

3. Question from Cllr Caroline Shepherd to Cllr Alan Sharp:

“What legal advice did you seek, and what legal advice did you receive, to inform your decision whether to participate in the meeting of the Planning Committee on 13 August which determined the Soham Gateway and Soham Medical Centre planning applications?”

Response from Cllr Alan Sharp

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that he had sought advice from the Monitoring Officer on whether he could participate in the debate at the Planning Committee on 13 August 2024. He had not taken part in any discussions of the matter in question as a County Councillor and came to the meeting with an open mind, so the Monitoring Officer advised that he could participate at the meeting. He reported that he had declared an interest as advised and had voted against the planning application at the meeting.

4. Question from Cllr Charlotte Cane MP to Cllr Alan Sharp:

“At the meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee on 26 September 2024, it was acknowledged that some of the information that was in the exempt papers relating to the proposed crematorium at Mepal could and should have been placed in the public domain. Will the chair of the Finance & Assets Committee, in conjunction with the Liberal Democrat lead member on that committee, now work to identify and publish that information?”

Response from Cllr Alan Sharp:

“The Council is committed to openness and transparency and as such we did provide a detailed update on the project within the public session. The commitment I made at Finance & Assets Committee was to ask the Director of Operations to review what information could be shared within public session for future reporting.

“It is vital that the information we provide in the public domain does not compromise the council’s ability to secure a competitive quote back from the market for the build of the Bereavement Centre, and I will take advice from officers and the professionals we have brought on board to lead the project, about what information should remain confidential to ensure that we secure value for money for residents of East Cambs.

“I understand the public interest in the project and am keen to provide the public with as much information as possible as the project progresses. But the project team need to ensure that the release of any project detail, including elements not related to the commercials of the scheme, do not compromise the project during the tendering process, during the build or the future management or running of the Bereavement Centre. Much of the risk, financial or operational aspects are interrelated and disaggregating the information to ensure it remains meaningful to the public may not be straightforward and could potentially be misleading.

“Therefore, as agreed the Director of Operations has already committed to take professional advice from the external design team about what information could be used in public without compromising the Council’s financial position.”

5. Question from Cllr Christine Colbert to Cllr Lorna Dupré

"What legal advice did you seek, and what legal advice did you receive, to inform your decision whether to participate in the meeting of the Planning Committee on 13 August which determined the Soham Gateway and Soham Medical Centre planning applications".

Response from Cllr Lorna Dupré

Cllr Lorna Dupré reported she had asked Cambridgeshire County Council’s Monitoring Officer whether it was appropriate for her to participate in the discussion at the Planning Committee as she was a County Councillor and a member of the Strategy, Performance and Resources Committee and the Assets and Procurement Committee.

The County Council’s Monitoring Officer had advised that as the Assets and Procurement Committee holds the shareholder function for This Land Ltd and the Strategy, Performance and Resources Committee had a vested interest in the company as part of the medium term financial plan, she should not participate in the debate. Cllr Dupré concluded that she did not participate in the debate on this matter.

41. Recommendations From Committees and Other Member Bodies

Council considered report Z76, previously circulated, detailing recommendations from Committees as follows:

1. Licensing Committee – 11 September 2024

a) Gambling Policy Consultation

The Chair of the Licensing Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer, proposed that the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles, as attached at Appendix 1, be approved. Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the proposal.

It was agreed unanimously:

That the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles be approved.

2. Operational Services Committee – 23 September 2024

a) Waste & Street Cleansing Service Proposals

The Chair of the Operational Services Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer, proposed that the Waste and Street Cleansing Service Proposals, as recommended by the Operational Services Committee, be approved. Councillor John Trapp seconded the proposal.

Cllr Julia Huffer reported that these recommendations had been unanimously approved by the Operational Services Committee. She thanked the Members of the cross-party working group for their hard work in framing these excellent proposals.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the aim was to provide an excellent service to the district's residents and increase the recycling rate. The Council was already in the top twenty for recycling and hopefully with these changes the authority could improve into the top ten by reducing the amount of waste that went into landfill.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott expressed his support for the recycling of food waste, and he recognised that the Council would need to mount an information campaign to ensure that residents put waste into the correct receptacle. He praised the East Cambs Street Scene company for putting the needs of residents first.

It was suggested that residents should be advised on where to dispose of items such as toothpaste tubes and takeaway boxes. Cllr Charlotte Cane stated that there was a useful A-Z of items and which bin to put them in on the Council's website. Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann explained that toothpaste tubes could be recycled at TerraCycle.

Cllr John Trapp announced that the parish councils in his ward were on the whole very positive about the forthcoming changes to the waste collection service. He was glad that exceptions were being made for some households who had special needs.

A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously:

- a) That the Council implements the measures as detailed in section 4.3 - 4.5 of this report and collect food waste in a separate container, on a weekly basis by 31 March 2026.

- b) That the Council implements the collection of residual waste in a 180lt wheeled bin on a fortnightly basis as detailed in section 4.3 - 4.5 of this report by 31 March 2026.
- c) That the Council retains a free fortnightly garden waste collection service that is suspended for 6 weeks during winter and Christmas catch up period by 31 March 2026.
- d) That the Council removes the annual subscription charge for a second garden waste bin from 1 April 2026.
- e) That the Council removes the one-off charge for an additional recycling bin from 1 April 2026.
- f) Instruct the Director of Operations to progress with the procurement of vehicles, caddies and bins required to implement 1. and 2. above by 31st March 2026.
- g) That the Council approves the supporting mobilisation and communication plans as detailed in Appendices 3 and 4.
- h) That the Council retain the current street cleansing service specification, with minor changes to ways of working set out in sections 4.19 - 4.21.
- i) That the Council review the Street Cleansing specification in one year's time with regards to how it has enabled performance delivery against the Key Performance Indicators with ECSS (East Cambs Street Scene) to determine any new specification for implementation from 1 April 2026.

b) Waste & Street Cleansing Delivery Model

The Chair of the Operational Services Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer, proposed that the Waste and Street Cleansing Delivery Model, as proposed by the Member Worker Party and recommended by the Operational Services Committee, be approved. Councillor John Trapp seconded the proposal.

A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously to:

- a) Approve the decision to proceed with using East Cambs Street Scene Ltd (ECSS) as set out in section 4.7-4.8.
- b) Authorise the Director Operations to develop the service specification and, in consultation with Director Legal, prepare a new contracting arrangement to commence from 1 April 2026.

42. Local Plan

The Strategic Planning Manager presented his report (Z77, previously circulated) on whether to commence a full update of the Council's Local Plan.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer.

Cllr Anna Bailey thanked the Strategic Planning Manager for accurately summarising such a complex subject. The administration had wanted to wait for Government guidance in order to start a new Local Plan under a new national planning system but unfortunately this had now been delayed until the summer of 2025 at the earliest and further delays were possible. It was imperative that the Council kept its five-year land supply because if this was lost it would result in unplanned development. For these reasons she supported the commencement of the Local Plan process.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that the delay in the issuing of national guidance was unfortunate, and he expressed concern at the apparent indifference of the Government to rural areas. The risk of losing the five-year land supply and the need to ensure that development in the district was governed by the residents of the district meant that he supported the recommendations in the report.

Cllr Lorna Dupré reminded Council that the opposition group had recommended that the Local Plan process commence at least two years ago. She asserted that a committee would have been preferable to a working group. She also proposed an amendment to the recommendation so that the membership of the proposed Working Group be increased from five to six as having three members from both political groups would better reflect the political make-up of the Council. Cllr John Trapp seconded the amendment. Cllr Anna Bailey replied that the administration was comfortable with the proposals in the report and did not support the amendment. Cllr Charlotte Cane suggested that as the administration had half the number of councillors on the Council it made sense for the administration to have half the number of councillors on the Working Group. She did not support the administration having the majority on the Working Group over such an important matter. Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann reported that the Council had a history of cross-party co-operation on its working groups and a six-member group would ensure a non-political scrutiny of the main issues. Cllr Lucius Vellacott suggested that whichever party that formed the administration would expect to have the majority on its working groups. Cllr John Trapp suggested that as the Working Group was not a decision-making body it made sense for it to have three members from both parties, as this more accurately reflected the political balance of the Council. A recorded vote was taken on the amendment and these were cast as follows:

For (12): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Caroline Shepherd, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Against (13): Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Abstain (0)

The amendment was defeated.

Cllr Charlotte Cane welcomed the proposal to commence a Local Plan as it was long overdue. She stated that there was inadequate provision for both supported housing and sheltered housing and expressed the hope that the Local Plan would not just focus on housing numbers. Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith supported the extra provision of social housing and added it was important that these matters were effectively negotiated with developers.

Cllr Julia Huffer assured Council that the Working Group would take all matters into account, following the example of the working party that reviewed the waste collection service. Cllr Anna Bailey explained that those on the Working Group would be acting as spokespersons for their political groups. The Conservative members of the Working Group would be Cllr Martin Goodearl, Cllr Julia Huffer and Cllr Alan Sharp. The current Local Plan had delivered for the district, with £35 million received in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments for infrastructure. Cllr Bailey concluded that the Local Plan would also have to consider climate change, biodiversity and helping neighbourhoods.

A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously:

- a) To commence a new East Cambridgeshire Local Plan and approve with immediate effect the attached Local Development Scheme (LDS) (Appendix 1), which sets out the timetable for the production of the Local Plan.
- b) To establish a Local Plan Member Working Group, in the form as set out in Appendix 2.
- c) To agree membership of the Working Group, as Cllr Martin Goodearl, Cllr Julia Huffer, Cllr Alan Sharp and two other councillors to be nominated by the Liberal Democrat Group, in line with the arrangements set out in paragraph 4.26 of the report.

43. Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan

The Council received the report (Z78, previously circulated) on the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan. The Director (Community) was pleased to report that last week's referendum had resulted in 77% of voters supporting their Neighbourhood Plan.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Mark Goldsack from the Chair and seconded by Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott welcomed the fact that residents had overwhelmingly voted in favour of adopting the Neighbourhood Plan. It was important that any development in Soham met the needs of the people and that common land was protected.

Cllr Bill Hunt recognised the amount of hard work that Soham Town Council had put into its Neighbourhood Plan and as the County Councillor for Soham he wanted to congratulate them and the four local members for their efforts in bringing the matter to a successful conclusion.

Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann stated that the Neighbourhood Plan was an example of local democracy in action and congratulated those involved.

Cllr Ian Bovingdon thanked Soham Town Council and those involved in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Chair informed Council that Soham was the second largest settlement in the district and commended all those involved in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan.

A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously:

- a) That Soham Town Council be congratulated on their preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and a successful referendum outcome.
- b) To formally make the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

44. Cheveley Neighbourhood Plan

The Council received the report (Z79, previously circulated) on the Cheveley Neighbourhood Plan. The Director (Community) reported that September's referendum had resulted in 84% of voters supporting their Neighbourhood Plan.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Mark Goldsack and seconded by Cllr Alan Sharp.

Cllr Alan Sharp thanked Cheveley parish councillors both past and present for their work on the Neighbourhood Plan over the last five years. Cllr Mark Goldsack congratulated those involved and asked councillors to support it.

A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously:

- a) That Cheveley Parish Council be congratulated on their preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and a successful referendum outcome.
- b) To formally make the Cheveley Neighbourhood Plan part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

45. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Update Report

The Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's Business Board (8 July 2024), the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11 July 2024), the Audit and Governance Committee (18 July 2024), Transport and Infrastructure Committee (22 July 2024), Combined Authority Board (24 July 2024), Skills and Employment Committee (29 July 2024), Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee (31 July 2024), Investment Committee (29 August 2024), Combined Authority Board (4 September 2024), Transport and Infrastructure Committee (18 September 2024) and the Audit and Governance Committee (26 September 2024).

It was agreed unanimously:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7:28pm

Chair.....

Date.....