

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: 15 January 2026

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall

Present: Councillors Alison Whelan (Chair), Laurence Damary-Homan (Vice-Chair), Anna Bradnam, Alex Bulat, Sarah Caine, Daniel Divine, Peter Fane, Samantha Hoy, Tom Sanderson, Geoffrey Seeff, Christopher Thornhill, Elliot Tong and Christine Whelan

21. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Yasmin Deter (substituted by Councillor Bradnam), Stefan Fisher, David Levien (substituted by Councillor C Whelan), and Charlotte Lowe.

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Minutes – 16 October 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

23. Public Questions and Petitions

No public questions or petitions were received.

24. Business Plan and Budget 2026-29

The Committee received a report on the Council's draft 2026-29 Business Plan and Budget, with a focus on the services and responsibilities within the committee's remit, before it was scheduled to be presented to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 29 January 2026 and Full Council on 10 February 2026. The report also set out the fees and charges schedule for the committee. It was clarified that the second paragraph 3.6 of the report should have referred to drawing down from a remaining £1.7m budget, rather than £1.5m.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Expressed concern about the crisis-support element of the CRF, particularly the nature of its demand-led individual requests, and queried how the Council might operate the fund and what measures it could take to increase resilience to these challenges. Members were informed that officers were still assessing the details of the new fund, but initial plans included recruiting roles to enable the delivery of the scheme, developing an in-house platform to meet the recommendations of the poverty commission and proactively identify residents eligible for help and support, recommissioning the Local Assistance Scheme, and working closely with district councils to shape proposals by mid-February to ensure funding was directed appropriately, while also bringing forward food-security proposals with a strong emphasis on prevention alongside crisis support. It was also highlighted that a report at the Committee's next meeting on the procurement of a data-led system for identifying low-income households would provide more information on the Crisis and Resilience Fund and how it could be used by the Council.
- Highlighted the importance of addressing and overcoming inequalities and queried whether the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) would allow the Council to continue providing support to families through its holiday voucher scheme, which had previously been funded from the Household Support Fund (HSF). Members were informed that the CRF was not a direct replacement of the HSF and that an identical voucher scheme would not be possible, although attention was drawn to a proposed additional £100k investment in the business plan to support families likely to be affected by the withdrawal of the voucher scheme. It was also noted that the Council was developing mechanisms to help identify families and people that needed such support.
- Requested further information on the decoupling of the Trading Standards service from Peterborough City Council (PCC) and the estimated £87k cost pressure, particularly in relation to staff and technology. Members were informed that the service had historically been fully managed and delivered by PCC, with most staff working from existing County Council accommodation at no extra cost. The Council was currently identifying which TUPE-protected staff would transfer and it was noted that the Council had already been meeting core salary and service costs from its base budget, although it was also acknowledged that leadership and specialist roles previously shared with PCC may require additional recruitment, creating the main area of financial uncertainty. Technology presented a manageable risk, as both councils would initially retain access to the current system while the Council procured a new case management system, which was costed at around £215k with identified funding. Overall, while the estimated £87k pressure reflected leadership and specialist capacity needs, any further costs were expected to be absorbed within the existing directorate budgets.
- Suggested that the Trading Standards service could expand its work with district and city councils in the future, although it was acknowledged that there was a limited amount of crossover between the work carried out by the service and district or city councils.

- Highlighted the importance of libraries as a community resource and sought confirmation that budget proposals would not result in the closure or reduced operating hours of libraries, a reduction in the mobile library service or a loss of support to library access points. Members were provided with assurances that no such measures would result from the budget, and it was noted that a bid had been submitted for part of the funding for a new mobile library vehicle, with remaining cost included in the capital finance tables within the report.
- Requested further information on the proposed reduction in charges for the hire of meeting rooms in libraries. Members were informed that it was proposed to reduce the rates for larger meeting rooms to encourage increased usage of the spaces, and it was confirmed that comparisons had been made to the cost of alternative sites.
- Drew attention to the removal of printed newspapers from libraries and expressed concern about the impact on users of the service. It was clarified that the service had been reluctantly withdrawn in November 2025 as part of the Council's wider attempts to reduce expenditure and ensure value for money, and it was noted that most libraries in other parts of the country had already removed the service. Notwithstanding, Members were informed that the Council offered free access to digital newspapers and magazines through PressReader.
- Confirmed that the Communities service had sufficient unspent reserves to ensure that the ongoing migrant-related work could continue through the 2027/28 financial year as well as the upcoming financial year.
- Highlighted the success of projects funded by the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund and suggested that it could be worth considering a similar scheme in the future if funding became available. It was also clarified that the support for community-led nature recovery projects referred to in the Council's draft new vision and set of ambitions would fall within the remit of the Environment and Green Investment Committee.

The Executive Director of Place and Sustainability provided a summary of the discussion, which was endorsed by the Committee.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Consider and scrutinise the proposals relevant to this committee within the 2026-29 Business Plan and Budget put forward by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 11 December 2025;
- b) Recommend changes and/or actions for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2026 to enable a business plan and budget to be proposed to Full Council on 10 February 2026; and
- c) Receive the fees and charges schedule for this committee included at Appendix 2.

25. Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 2 (2025-26)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 2 of the 2025/26 financial year, with two key performance indicators (KPIs) rated as amber, six KPIs rated as green, and two KPIs rated as contextual.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Welcomed that KPI 009 (All deaths registered within 5 days) had improved to a green rating and paid tribute to officers for achieving the path to green that had previously been identified.
- Sought clarification on whether the reduction in the number of youth and community organisations supported with initial seed funding (KPI 007) was due to a lack of demand or a lack of Council capacity. **Action required**
- Suggested that it would be beneficial to monitor the Trading Standards service in performance monitoring reports. Members were informed that although various measures were recorded to demonstrate compliance with statutory requirements, the wide-ranging nature of the service made it difficult to include suitable indicators. Notwithstanding, it was agreed to consider whether any such measures could be identified. **Action required**
- Requested further information on the reduction in the number of people supported through the safe accommodation strategy. Members were informed that the apparent reduction was due to the service now only covering Cambridgeshire, whereas it previously covered Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. They were provided with reassurance that all the services continued to operate and reach those who required their support.
- Sought clarification on the levels of usage and uptake at libraries that had reopened, and suggested that levels of engagement with library events, such as the Summer Reading Challenge, could be monitored and published to demonstrate the service's success. It was agreed to provide Members with a briefing note on both matters. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Scrutinise and comment on the performance information presented in the report.

26. Finance Monitoring Report – October 2025-26

The Committee received the Finance Monitoring Report to the end of October 2025 for the services within its remit, with a forecast revenue underspend of £626k and no capital schemes with a variance over £250k.

While discussing the report, Members requested further information on the Communities service £320k underspend. It was clarified that the Council had received a higher amount of funding from the government's Homes for Ukraine programme than it had budgeted for. Some of the additional resources had been distributed to the district and city councils that provided support, while the remainder represented a saving to the Council.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the content of the report.

27. Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

While discussing the Committee's agenda plan, Members requested the organisation of a workshop on the Trading Standards service. **Action required**

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
26 February 2026