

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: 5 June 2025

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), Henry Batchelor, Yasmin Deter, Daniel Divine, Peter Fane, Leedo George, Bryony Goodliffe, Tom Hawker-Dawson, David Levien, Charlotte Lowe, Geoff Seeff and Elliot Tong

1. Notification of Chair and Vice-Chair

The Committee noted that on 20 May 2025, Full Council appointed Councillor Alison Whelan as the Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year, and Councillor Laurence Damary-Homan as the Vice-Chair.

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alex Bulat (substituted by Councillor Goodliffe), Sarah Caine (substituted by Councillor Hawker-Dawson), Sam Hoy (substituted by Councillor George) and Tom Sanderson.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes – 27 February 2025

While discussing the minutes of the previous meeting, it was noted that it had been suggested that consideration could be given in the future to creating a new fund to support capital projects, and Members were informed that it would need to be considered as part of the next round of business planning.

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

4. Public Questions and Petitions

No public questions or petitions were received.

5. Cambridgeshire Skills Grant Funding Agreement

The Committee received a report on a £6.435m grant that had been awarded to Cambridgeshire Skills by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the provision of adult learning for the 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 academic years.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Paid tribute to Cambridgeshire Skills for the positive Ofsted report that had been published following a recent inspection of the service, emphasising the value of the service in providing opportunities for residents across the county.
- Expressed concern that there had been a 10.6% reduction in funding, although it was acknowledged that there had been a national reduction in funding for adults skills and that it was not based on any issues with previous performance. Members requested further information on how the reduced funding would impact the service and the wider adult learning sector. Members were informed that Cambridgeshire Skills worked closely with other local providers to avoid duplication and to maximise the impact of available funds. It was clarified that there would be an approximate 10% reduction in the number of learners accepted on all courses on a first come first served basis, rather than the removal of certain courses entirely, and it was agreed to provide Members with more detailed figures on the potential impact on learner numbers. **Action required**
- Clarified that 'Free Courses for Jobs' was a level 3 provision aimed at both supporting unemployed people to obtain work and improving the employment of people in low paid work. It was emphasised that Cambridgeshire Skills only provided services to over-19s.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Accept the funding agreement from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to sign the funding agreement under seal.

6. Coroner Service Body Removals Contract

The Committee received a report on the procurement of body removal services to commence in October 2025, and attention was drawn to a late appendix that had been published to provide additional clarity on the geographical areas covered by each separate contract. It was noted that recommendation (b) sought a delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, rather than the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Queried whether the separate contracts could be terminated or extended on an individual basis if necessary. It was confirmed that each contract would be tendered for and agreed separately, and that they could therefore be terminated or extended on an individual basis in the future.
- Sought confirmation that the proposed financial contribution from Peterborough City Council would be sufficient for the services provided. Members were informed that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) signed in 2015 included a provision for either of the two authorities to carry out a review of the SLA, and it was confirmed that this was being considered as part of the procurement process.
- Established that body removal services were paid for on a case-by-case basis, rather than a fixed annual fee, with each bidder submitting a price per removal as part of the procurement process.
- Requested further information on how the providers' response to a catastrophe or mass fatality incident would be reflected in the contracts. Members were informed that the contracts included a provision to ensure the providers would be able to respond appropriately in such a situation, although it was emphasised that the cost for such support would be negotiated separately at the time.
- Queried how many providers were anticipated to submit bids to the procurement process, expressing concern that a smaller number of bidders could afford them greater control over the cost of the contracts. It was acknowledged that there were only a few organisations that could meet the required demands of the contracts, although it was suggested that there were a higher number than in neighbouring areas. Members were informed that three bids had been received in the previous procurement and were provided assurances that the Council was advertising widely to attract attention.
- Suggested that providers could be encouraged to be as environmentally conscious as possible, for example through the energy used for body storage units and transferring bodies. Members were informed that such considerations were included in the weighting criteria of the procurement process and were encouraged by the Council, and it was noted that submissions in the previous procurement had included significant focus on environmental concerns.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the recommissioning of the contracts for the provision of body removals commencing in October 2025, as set out in the report; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to award and execute the contracts.

7. Library E-Stock Procurement

The Committee received a report on the procurement of the library service's estock to commence in April 2026.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Welcomed the significant growth in the provision of electronic resources between 2021 and 2024 and queried whether such growth in demand was expected to continue. Members were informed that the reducing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were a significant cause of the growth since 2021, and while further growth was expected, it was not anticipated to be at such a high rate. The service would continue to expand awareness of the various services that were offered by libraries to increase uptake in the usage of e-stock.
- Queried whether the procurement would have any impact on the provision of non-electronic resources. Members were informed that the budget for overall stock was a fixed amount and therefore the ratio of electronic and non-electronic stock could vary. Notwithstanding, it was emphasised that a benefit of having a higher level of e-stock was an increase in the availability of library space for alternative activities and spaces, such as the expansion of children's areas to accommodate higher levels of physical books and usage.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree to the procurement of e-stock through a single multi-lot procurement exercise, as set out in the report; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to:
 - (i) Award and execute the contract once procurement has been completed; and
 - (ii) Approve all necessary legal documentation relating to the contract award, along with any transactions, associated arrangements and their formal executions.

8. Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 4 (2024-25)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 4 of the 2024/25 financial year, with one key performance indicator (KPI) rated as red, one KPI rated as amber, six KPIs rated as green, and two KPIs rated as contextual. It was clarified that KPI 10 (total number of live investigations that are over 12 months old (including inquests)) had been rated as amber, as set out in the cover report, rather than green, as erroneously indicated in Appendix 1 of the report.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Expressed concern about the red rating for KPI 6 (percentage of clients engaging with the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) Service) and requested further information on the reported decline in performance. Members were informed that recent changes to the medium risk referral process for victims of domestic violence had impacted levels of engagement, while a delay in referrals being received due to a backlog within the police service had resulted in contact being made with victims at a slower rate, resulting in lower levels of engagement. The service was also continuously investigating ways to overcome a perceived reluctance of victims to initially engage due to uncertainty over who was contacting them.
- Observed that the Council could not control the number of Coroner investigations, suggesting that it also only had limited influence on how quickly such investigations progressed through the courts, and queried whether KPI 10 (total number of live investigations that are over 12 months old (including inquests)) was therefore an appropriate way to track performance. Members were informed that the KPI helped to track the effectiveness of the Council in supporting investigations throughout their duration and to provide confidence.
- Noted that the reduced level of funding received from the Combined Authority for Cambridgeshire Skills was not expected to affect KPI 1 (percentage of learners that have been retained) or KPI 2 (percentage of learners who have achieved their qualification), as both indicators were based on a percentage of learners rather than the number of learners.
- Queried what had led to the significant increase in the percentage of learners achieving their qualification, as demonstrated in KPI 2. Members were informed that the Committee's decision in December 2022 to reintegrate the service into the Council's governance structures had positioned it at the heart of the Council, which improved links with other teams and directorates while expanding the reach to potential learners, which had resulted in improved performance levels. It was also highlighted that the service's continuous self-assessment process identified areas for improvement, which had been investigated and acted on to further improve the rate of learners achieving their qualification.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the performance information.

9. Finance Monitoring Report – Outturn 2024-25

The Committee received the Outturn Finance Monitoring Report for the services within its remit for the 2024/25 financial year, which included a £470k underspend across the revenue budgets, while two capital programmes within its remit had a significant variance over £250k.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Clarified that the £500k funding for Fenstanton Village Hall would be re-phased to the 2025/26 financial year, as referenced in section 5.2 of the report, rather than being re-allocated. It was noted that the committee had previously supported the project's continuation when it reallocated funds from other uncompleted projects to the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund.
- Established that twenty-six projects had received funding of up to £40k from the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund, sixteen of which had been completed. A further five projects were ongoing, while five projects were yet to start, although it was emphasised that officers were content with the causes of delays and amended timelines. It was confirmed that there had been no requirement for projects to be completed within the 2024/25 financial year, as projects were often subject to unavoidable delays.
- Queried why the Strategic Management budget line listed in the table in section 4.2 of the report was negative. Members were informed that it related to 'Homes for Ukraine' grant funding that had been received from the government and allocated to services within the committee's remit due to their role in providing support to 'Homes for Ukraine' guests. The one-off grant income had been applied to this budget for a three year period, following which the budget line would return to a positive level.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the content of the report.

10. Agenda Plan, Training Plan, Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Committee received a report which included its agenda plan and training plan, along with lists of appointments to be made to outside bodies, internal advisory groups, and Member Champion roles. It was noted that revised versions of Appendices 3, 4 and 5 had been published, which included the names of Members nominated to the various roles.

While discussing the proposed nominations, Members:

- Welcomed the cross-party nature of appointments that had been proposed.
- Noted that three appointments to outside bodies which had not been received nominations would be further discussed with Spokes and appointed to by the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review its agenda plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- b) Review its training plan attached at Appendix 2 to the report;
- c) Agree the appointments to outside bodies, as detailed in the revised Appendix 3 to the report;
- d) Agree the appointments to internal advisory groups and panels, as detailed in the revised Appendix 4 to the report; and
- e) Appoint Councillor Sarah Caine as the Community Safety Champion and Councillor Alex Bulat as the Migrant Champion.

Chair
16 October 2025