

Dear Councillor

CABINET - TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2025

I am now able to enclose for consideration at the above meeting the following Overview and Scrutiny Comments that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

**Agenda Item
No.**

3. FINAL 2025/26 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2026/27 TO 2029/30) INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME(Pages 3 - 4)

To receive a report from the Corporate Director - Finance and Resources on the final 2025/26 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30) including the capital programme prior to its consideration by the Council.

Executive Councillor: B Mickelburgh.

4. TREASURY MANAGEMENT CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES(Pages 5 - 6)

To consider a report by the Corporate Director - Finance and Resources on the 2025/26 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies prior to their consideration by Council.

Executive Councillor: B Mickelburgh.

5. BUSINESS RATES - DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY(Pages 7 - 8)

To consider a report by the Council Tax and Business Rates Manager seeking approval of the Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy.

Executive Councillor: S Ferguson.

6. HYDROTREATED VEGETABLE OIL (HVO) TRIAL(Pages 9 - 12)

To receive a report from the Head of Operational Services on the outcome of the trial of using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil as an alternative to standard road diesel.

Executive Councillor: S Taylor.

7. PROCUREMENT OF VEHICLES AND CONTAINERS FOR WEEKLY FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE(Pages 13 - 16)

To receive a report from the Head of Operational Services on the procurement of equipment and the onward delivery of a separate weekly food waste collection service by April 2026.

Executive

Councillor:

S

Taylor.

2025/26 REVENUE BUDGET & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2026/27 TO 2029/30); INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

5.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 5.2 The Panel discussed the 2025/26 Revenue Budget & Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30); including the Capital Programme report at its meeting on 5th February 2025.
- 5.3 Following a question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that the provisional Local Government Settlement had been released in December, and that no significant changes were anticipated with the release of the final Local Government Settlement this week. It was noted that some additional monies would be made available to Councils who were experiencing significant increases to the charges made to them by Internal Drainage Boards, however it was not felt that this would make a material difference to Huntingdonshire District Council. It was also advised to the Panel that HDC's response to the provisional Settlement had been made by the Section 151 Officer as part of the response from the Society of District Councils Treasurers.
- 5.4 Councillor Jennings enquired how the approach to budget setting by the Executive Councillor had changed over the past three years and how the budget setting was managed. The Panel heard that the budget process had evolved in recent years with more onus on services to work with their Executive Councillors to manage the process throughout the year. The Executive Councillor confirmed that he took more of a governance role in budget setting and oversaw the robustness overall whilst leaving the detail to portfolio holders and officers.
- 5.5 In response to a question from Councillor Blackwell relating to the Stonehill property within the Commercial Investment Strategy, the Panel heard that the property was undergoing repairs and would be placed back onto the rental market, it was confirmed that this was being actively managed by the estates team.
- 5.6 Concern was expressed by Councillor Blackwell over the proposed increase in parking fees being after the expected implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) within the district. The Panel heard that the introduction of CPE was expected to affect the current car park income but that the approach detailed within the budget was an inflationary increase to support a prudent

approach. It was suggested by Councillor Gleadow, that this would be an opportune time to review the existing parking strategy to ensure consistency across the district before CPE comes into force

- 5.7 Following a question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that wage growth for the proposed budget had been budgeted at 4%. The Panel also heard that this was a prudent budget based on what was known at the moment, it was noted that there were differing predictions from economic forecasters and therefore a medium of these had been used within the proposals. It was further noted that as capital spend was to be expected over the coming year, the budget looked to balance all factors to provide a sensible way forward.
- 5.8 It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Wells, that following a recent restructure of Heads of Service, the proposed budget followed the new structure.
- 5.9 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

2025/26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the 2025/26 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies report at its meeting on 5th February 2025.
- 4.3 Following a question from Councillor Jennings which related to both the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30) Including the Capital Programme and the 2025/26 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies agenda items, the Panel heard that the rates forecast by the treasury advisors were the Bank of England (BOE) lending rates and that investing rates were unlikely to reach as high as this. It was also noted that there was a risk that investing rates may fall faster than the BOE lending rate, since it was some years since rates had fallen from the current level, there is uncertainty about the relationship between fall in BOE rate and the fall in investing rates, which may be steeper.
- 4.4 In response to a question from Councillor Gleadow relating to the development of the Commercial Investment Strategy, it was confirmed to the Panel that work by CIPFA was underway and that this would also include work to support Local Government Reform within this. The Panel heard that workshops would follow the completion of this work, with an update on progress being anticipated by quarter one of the coming financial year.
- 4.5 Following this, it was noted that the Panel had no further comments or discussion to add and that this would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

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BUSINESS RATES – DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the Business Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy report at its meeting on 6th February 2025.
- 4.3 It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that the policy ran up to 31st March 2025 and that the new policy ran from 1st April 2025, it was further clarified that this also applied to the newspaper relief.
- 4.4 In response to a question from Councillor McAdam, the Panel heard that 40% reduction was the maximum amount able to be reclaimed from the Government and that there was not further funding for anything over this.
- 4.5 Following questions from Councillors Hassall, Alban and Kerr, the Panel heard that these changes would be affecting small businesses in hospitality, retail and leisure, and that the team were proactively working to identify and contact affected businesses. It was also confirmed that paperwork detailing available support would additionally be included with the 2025/26 bills and it was anticipated that businesses would be in contact with the team to move forward. More detail on the number of businesses affected would be shared with the Panel once the work to identify them had been completed.
- 4.6 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

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HYDROTREATED VEGETABLE OIL (HVO) TRIAL

6.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

6.2 The Panel discussed the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) Trial report at its meeting on 6th February 2025.

6.3 Councillor Lowe expressed concern that the fuel was being sourced from Denmark and Holland and enquired whether it was possible to source this from the UK. It was confirmed that the fuel was not currently produced within the UK and that these countries were the nearest suppliers. It was noted that opportunities produce this locally would be monitored and further detail would be brought back to the Panel should viable possibilities arise. Following a further question from Councillor Shaw, it was confirmed that the fuel is produced solely from used cooking oil. Councillor Lowe observed that used cooking oil is collected nationwide and questioned whether partnerships could be developed to allow for a fuel supply within the UK. It was also suggested that kerbside collections of domestic cooking oil be investigated, with Councillor Alban observing that Bromley Borough had previously done such kerbside collections. It was noted that this was a complicated and developing market and that the district council's influence within this market would be limited. It was also noted that the fuel as supplied was a treated product originating from used cooking oil and that this was not something which was currently available within the UK. It was proposed by Councillor Lowe to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Hunt and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

6) that the leader contact the Energy secretary to request a reduction in the import tax on this product.

6.4 Councillor Hunt stated that he was impressed by the carbon savings which were achieved by the trial, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel.

6.5 The Panel heard, following questions from Councillors Hunt, Shaw and Bywater, that the collaboration with Fire and Police on the trial had been extremely positive. It was confirmed that the police had joined the trial late and that their participation had been a smaller vehicle than the HGVs used by HDC and the Fire Service. The Panel heard that the site at Eastfield was under 24 hour operation due to the services on site and therefore the emergency services had been able to access the fuel as it was required.

6.6 It was noted that opportunities with East of England Ambulance Trust, CPCA, MOD, local town and parish councils would be investigated as the project moved forward and the Panel wished to encourage the Cabinet and leader to contact relevant organisations to share the benefits of the fuel and collaborative working. The Panel felt that this would give a benefit both financially and environmentally in the significant carbon savings which could be made through developing further partnerships. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Tevlin and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

7) to encourage the Cabinet to reach out to other organisations to develop further partnerships with the scheme.

6.7 In response to a question from Councillor McAdam, the Panel heard that the cost of the fuel versus diesel has varied over the course of the trial but that it was currently much lower than it had been. It was noted that there would be opportunities to fix the price of the fuel for a period of time but should the cost become prohibitive, it would be possible to switch back to standard road diesel. Following a further question from Councillor Alban the Panel heard that a set price at which point the HVO fuel would become prohibitive had not yet been identified but was expected to be as the project moved forward. Cllr Hassall suggested that it would be prudent to secure a cut off price where HVO becomes unsustainable and the switch back to diesel, it was felt that a monetary amount may be unsuitable due to the fluctuations of the diesel market therefore a price which was a percentage above the cost of diesel may be preferred. It was proposed by Councillor Hassall to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

8) to establish a price where the fuel would become prohibitive and to switch back to road diesel.

6.8 Following a question from Councillor Hassall relating to the cost of electric vehicles, the Panel heard that the HVO fuel would be a stepping stone towards future technologies. It was also clarified that the costs of vehicles identified within the report were the list price comparison for the vehicles and capital costs rather than the lifetime costs of the vehicles.

6.9 Councillor Criswell expressed concern that should the use of HVO increase worldwide, this would affect supply and cost of the product. The Panel heard that this was not anticipated to be a fuel of the future but a stepping stone to future technologies. The Panel also heard that the fuel was created from used cooking oil and therefore was making use of a waste product which would have to be disposed of in other manners were it not used for fuel. Councillor Bywater

expressed concern over the odours caused by the storage of used cooking oil. Councillor Hassall expressed a desire to develop and investigate any opportunity to produce the fuel locally. Concern was expressed by Councillors Criswell and Bywater that there was a concern about food security nationwide and that growing crops for fuel would exacerbate this. It was proposed by Councillor Tevlin to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Hassall and the Panel voted in favour, with 10 Councillors voting for and 2 abstentions, of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

9) to create a cross partner steering group of relevant organisations and local producers within Cambridgeshire to develop the production of the fuel within the district.

6.10 It was confirmed to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that the team would investigate the purchase of a larger tank should it be required for more collaborative work in the future. The Panel requested that further details on the progress of the fuel scheme be communicated back to Councillors as it progressed.

6.11 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

6) that the leader contact the Energy secretary to request a reduction in the import tax on this product;

7) to encourage the Cabinet to reach out to other organisations to develop further partnerships with the scheme;

8) to establish a price where the fuel would become prohibitive and to switch back to road diesel; and

9) to create a cross partner steering group of relevant organisations and local producers within Cambridgeshire to develop the production of the fuel within the district.

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PROCUREMENT OF VEHICLES AND CONTAINERS FOR WEEKLY FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

4.2 The Panel discussed the Procurement of Vehicles and Containers for Weekly Food Waste Collection Service report at its meeting on 6th February 2025.

4.3 Councillor Bywater expressed concern that the procurement costs of the vehicles and caddies may increase as the demand would be likely to increase due to demand. The Panel heard that the costs within the report were current but that it was anticipated that they would fluctuate with demand as the implementation date drew nearer. The Panel were assured that the Council's procurement team were already briefed and involved to ensure that the project could proceed as soon as practicable. Councillor Alban identified a shortfall in the funding of the capital investment, the Panel heard that these were indicative costs and that there would be an aim to keep the project within the funding parameters. It was also confirmed that it was hoped that any shortfall would be covered by further funding opportunities. Councillors Criswell and Bywater expressed further concern that it appeared that operational costs for the service had not yet been established and in turn would thereby impact the Council's finances. Following a debate by the Panel, it was established that there would be a desire to see further details on the financial aspects of the project to be brought back to the Panel. It was proposed by Councillor Alban to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Criswell and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

2) to produce a report detailing the revenue and capital costs of the project and submit this to the democratic cycle of meetings.

4.4 Councillor Hunt expressed concern over the anticipated funding from DEFRA which had not yet been confirmed. The Panel heard that the collection project was still in its infancy with the capital costs having been identified, the Panel were assured that communications were ongoing with DEFRA to establish long term funding for the scheme. The Panel were further assured that the Council were a member of the RECAP partnership and as such were working with neighbouring authorities to move forward. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

3) to encourage Cabinet to write to the DEFRA Secretary to confirm the revenue funding as soon as practicable.

- 4.5 The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor McAdam, that the anaerobic digestion of the waste created energy generation and also created an end product which could be used as a fertiliser. The Panel also heard that the food waste collection should be as organic as possible, and that no plastics should be placed within the caddies.
- 4.6 In response to questions from Councillor Tevlin, it was hoped that the weekly food waste collection would result in a reduction of waste within the grey bins but that existing collection arrangements would not be affected. Councillor Hassall expressed concern that the waste from the grey bins required a certain amount of organic matter to aid its disposal process. The Panel heard that this was expected to change but that this was an issue faced nationwide and the disposal methods would be adjusted accordingly.
- 4.7 Following a question from Councillor Hunt, the Panel heard that a preferred supplier had been identified to ensure that the caddies would be British made, 100% recyclable and also supporting a local workforce.
- 4.8 It was confirmed to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Alban, that additional refuse drivers would be recruited to fulfil the collections and that these drivers would include HGV as well giving current staff the opportunity to train as an HGV driver. The Panel heard that further detail would be sought relating to the retention of drivers who had received HGV training and brought back to the Panel.
- 4.9 In response to a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that the Waste Minimisation Team were already in communication with property management companies and residents associations in properties with communal bins to ensure minimal cross contamination and that this would continue with the additional collections.
- 4.10 The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that the initial purchase of the caddies included sufficient additional caddies for new properties within the district still currently under construction.
- 4.11 Following a further question from Councillor Shaw, it was confirmed that contract negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council as the disposal authority, were ongoing to ensure that collections would remain unaffected after 2027 when the current contract was due to end.
- 4.12 In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, regarding the disposal of food waste in the existing green bins should that service not be chargeable, the Panel heard that it would be mandatory to have a separate food waste disposal

from 2026, and that the decomposition of the food waste through anaerobic digestion was better for the environment than within the green waste.

4.13 It was suggested by Councillor Hassall that opportunities to collect used vegetable oil from the kerbside in line with the food waste collections should be investigated in line with investigating opportunities with the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil Fuel Trial.

4.14 Following questions from Councillors Tevlin and McAdam, the Panel heard that a robust communications plan would be developed to ensure resident awareness and compliance. It was also confirmed, following a question from Councillor Lowe, that residents who are already registered for an assisted collection would have an assisted collection for the food waste caddies. It was suggested by the Executive Councillor that a working group comprised of members of the Panel be created to look at the implementation and creation of a communications Plan. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

4) to create a Food Waste Collection Service Working Group to help inform the development of the communications plan to support the scheme.

4.15 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

2) to produce a report detailing the revenue and capital costs of the project and submit this to the democratic cycle of meetings;

3) to encourage Cabinet to write to the DEFRA Secretary to confirm the revenue funding as soon as practicable; and

4) to create a Food Waste Collection Service Working Group to help inform the development of the communications plan to support the scheme.

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