HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 8 July 2026.

PRESENT:	Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones – Chair. Councillors R Coogan, J A Gray, G Seeff, H Tobias, N Wells and M Young.
APOLOGY:	An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of P Webb – Independent Member.
SUBSITUTES	Councillor N Wells substituted for Councillor S Claffey.
IN ATTENDANCE	Councillors J Harvey and N Hunt.

76. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 June 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

77. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

78. DISPOSALS & ACQUISITIONS POLICY LAND AND PROPERTY - UPDATE ON THRESHOLDS

The Committee received a report (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update on the Disposals & Acquisitions Policy.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources and the Facilities Manager - Hard Services introduced the report, advising that the purpose of the review was to improve accessibility, clarity and ease of reference by combining the two policies into one document. Reference was made to a tracked-changes version of the Policy which had been circulated as a Supplement to assist Members in identifying the amendments from the previous Policy.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Facilities Manager – Hard Services advised that references within the policy related to both land and buildings and that external professional valuers would continue to be commissioned where valuations were required. In terms of the governance arrangements relating to acquisitions and disposals undertaken under delegated authority, he outlined the processes in place to ensure appropriate audit trails, valuation evidence, consultation and financial oversight. Transactions were monitored through established governance processes, and input could be sought from the Treasury Management Capital Monitoring

Group where appropriate. Regarding delegation thresholds, the existing levels had been reviewed through the Constitution Review Working Group.

The Committee emphasised the importance of developing an Asset Management Plan, particularly in advance of Local Government Reorganisation. The Facilities Manager - Hard Services acknowledged the urgency of this work and confirmed that it was being prioritised. The Committee also suggested that the proposed review period of 24 months should be reconsidered in light of Local Government Reorganisation and proposed that a review be undertaken after 18 months.

The Committee further requested that consultation requirements within the policy be strengthened through the inclusion of Ward Members and neighbouring residents as consultees where appropriate.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that

(1) the Committee commented on the report; and

(2) the thresholds be reviewed again in 18 months' time.

79. ANNUAL REVIEW OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

The Committee received a report (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing a summary of the activity undertaken by the Council's Corporate Fraud Team in 2025/26.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance and the Corporate Fraud Manager introduced the report.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Corporate Fraud Manager explained that the Cambridgeshire Fraud Initiative focused primarily on the identification of Council Tax Single Person Discount fraud through data matching exercises undertaken jointly with other Cambridgeshire authorities. The most recent exercise had generated approximately 25,000 potential matches, although the majority were assessed as presenting no risk. Following detailed review, a number of frauds and errors had been identified and work remained ongoing. Cases classified as fraud were only recorded as such where sufficient evidence existed to demonstrate wrongdoing, generally following correspondence, interviews or other investigative enquiries. Errors were recorded separately where incorrect claims or payments arose through mistake rather than deliberate action. Procurement fraud represented a significant area of concern across both the public and private sectors, and references to these risks were contained within the Council's Counter Fraud Strategy. Whilst no such cases had been referred to the Corporate Fraud Team during the reporting period, preventative controls existed through procurement processes, contract management arrangements and fraud awareness activity undertaken across the organisation.

Regarding the identified losses which were ultimately recovered, the Committee were advised that the reported £586,000 represented a combination of recovered funds, prevented losses and financial outcomes arising from investigative work. Where fraud resulted in monies becoming repayable to the Council, recovery action was pursued through the relevant service area using established debt recovery arrangements. In relation to Council Tax fraud, amended liabilities were incorporated within revised Council Tax bills and subsequently managed through normal collection processes. It was not currently possible to isolate fraud-related debts from wider Council Tax collection data without undertaking significant manual analysis.

In response to questions concerning prosecution decisions, the Corporate Fraud Manager explained that all cases were assessed against the Council's own prosecution policy, which incorporated evidential and public interest considerations. Prosecution was not appropriate in every proven fraud case and factors such as financial impact, seriousness, deterrent value and proportionality were taken into account. It was further noted that prosecution costs could be significant and substantial delays continued to exist within the court system. Three cases were currently progressing through the courts and in at least one case, prosecution had been pursued despite there being no actual financial loss to the Council because of the seriousness of the conduct involved and the wider deterrent effect. There was currently no nationally recognised benchmarking framework for local authority fraud outcomes. While comparative information was available through professional networks and national counter-fraud bodies, meaningful comparisons were difficult due to significant variations in housing stock, demographics, service provision and levels of investment in fraud investigation teams between authorities. However, the value of benchmarking was noted, and work was underway nationally to improve consistency in reporting.

The broader social benefits generated through fraud investigation work, particularly in relation to tenancy fraud, were noted. Successful tenancy fraud investigations not only protected public resources but enabled properties to be returned to legitimate housing provision, helping to reduce pressure on waiting lists and temporary accommodation.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on the content of the report.

80. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting a summary of the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service since the Committee last met in June 2026.

The Audit Manager, Alastair Foster of RSM introduced the report.

In response to questions from the Committee the Internal Audit

Manager drew attention to the fact that some residual risk would remain where recommendations had not yet been fully implemented. However, recent reviews had identified occasions where original target dates had been overly ambitious or impractical. In such circumstances, revised implementation timescales had been agreed to ensure that improvements were delivered effectively rather than simply meeting deadlines.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources welcomed the progress that had been made and emphasised that, whilst timely implementation remained important, priority should be given to ensuring that actions were properly embedded and delivered to an appropriate standard.

The Committee sought assurance that the relationship between the Council and the Internal Audit provider remained effective and that opportunities existed for knowledge sharing and development of internal capacity. The Audit Manager advised that regular meetings took place between Internal Audit and Officers, including weekly liaison meetings. In addition, arrangements had recently been agreed for a member of the Council's internal team to shadow audit work undertaken by RSM in order to support skills transfer and organisational learning.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Audit Manager advised that there had been some capacity pressures and instances where debrief meetings had been postponed. However, no significant concerns existed regarding cooperation from services and there were no issues requiring formal escalation. He noted that a range of factors informed the prioritisation process and that recommendations were assessed according to the level of risk they posed to the Council. Both Officers and the Committee played a role in determining priorities within the annual Internal Audit Plan.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources advised that some requests for revised implementation dates had arisen following a review of outstanding actions undertaken after her appointment. In a number of cases, while deadlines may technically have been achievable, the associated work could not have been completed effectively within the timescales originally set.

The Audit Manager confirmed that adequate resources were in place and expressed confidence that the full work programme of reviews would be delivered. Members noted that some audits would commence later in the municipal year but were expected to conclude within planned timescales.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources recognised that the substantial number of recommendations identified through recent audit work demonstrated robust scrutiny and provided a clear basis for driving further improvements. Members emphasised the importance of not only identifying weaknesses but also ensuring that agreed actions were implemented and embedded across the organisation.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on and noted the update on work undertaken by Internal Audit to date.

81. INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the progress made in implementing management actions arising from final internal audit reports.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources introduced the report, advising that all six actions due for completion by 30 June 2026 had been completed. Three of four previously overdue actions had also been completed, with the remaining action, relating to key financial controls, continuing to be monitored. Officers reported that no matters required escalation and that progress continued to be made across all action plans.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on and noted the current position regarding actions arising from internal audit reports.

82. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing it of the approach and work undertaken on the Corporate Risk Register including the latest heat maps relating to the corporate risks.

The Risk Manager introduced the report, advising that no risk score changes had occurred since the previous report, which reflected the short period of time since the Committee's previous meeting. Two actions associated with the Data Protection risk had been completed.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the significant gap between current and target risk levels, and whether the current target remained realistic in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which Officers would review. Reference was also made to the risk associated with non-completion of mandatory training and Members queried whether the inherent risk rating adequately reflected the importance of training in areas such as safeguarding, fraud prevention and legal compliance.

The Committee also requested that a separate report be added as a standing item for each meeting, regarding a Risk Register specifically for LGR for ongoing monitoring, with a risk framework addressing LGR risks, and a greater breakdown of strategic, transitional and organisational risks.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee commented on the reports in the appendices and progress with risk management and noted the risks to the organisation and whether they are being managed in line with the Risk Management Strategy.

83. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to the Committee's draft Annual Report to Council summarising the work it had undertaken during 2025/26 and the issues that arose in the year. The report had been prepared by the Chair of the Committee during the period covered by the report and was scheduled to be presented at the next full Council meeting. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Governance Committee 2025/26 Annual Report be approved for submission to the Council

84. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE WORK

The Committee received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the progress of actions in response to decisions taken at previous meetings.

The Chair requested the scheduling of a further meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group to progress outstanding governance matters.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources advised of two reports that needed to be added to the agenda for the September meeting of the Committee, regarding the Procurement Code of Practice and the Scheme of Delegations review.

In response to concerns raised about the potential size of the agenda for the September meeting, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources advised that Officers would be contacted regarding whether there were legislative deadlines for reports that meant they needed to be considered at that meeting, or if they could be deferred to help ease the number of items.

Chair