Employment Committee – 25th November 2026

Report by: Head of Finance

Lead Cllr: Cllr J E Harvey
Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources

Wards	Open / Exempt	Key Decision?
ALL wards	Open	No

Use of Consultants and Temporary Staff

Executive Summary:

This annual report enables Members to monitor the Council's use of consultants and temporary staff during 2025/26. Total expenditure increased from £4.113m in 2024/25 to £5.827m in 2025/26, an increase of £1.714m (41.7%). The increase principally reflects investment in major capital projects, specialist support for key strategic programmes and the use of temporary resources to maintain statutory and frontline service delivery whilst permanent recruitment was undertaken.

Beyond maintaining service delivery on a temporary basis; the use of consultants and temporary staff has enabled the Council to deliver outcomes that would not otherwise have been achievable within existing capacity or capability. This includes progressing the Huntingdon Sport & Health Club project through RIBA Stages 1-4, advancing the Local Plan, supporting preparations for Local Government Reorganisation, maintaining Development Management performance during recruitment challenges, delivering the Windows 10 end-of-life programme, and providing specialist expertise across finance, audit, risk, treasury, commercial estates and ICT where the Council does not hold the required expertise in-house.

The Council's approach remains focused on securing temporary or specialist skills only where these are unavailable internally or where a temporary resource represents better value than establishing permanent capacity for short-term or project-specific requirements.

Recommendations

1.1. Members are asked to comment on the report and note its contents

	Key Corporate Plan Priorities
1	Delivering good quality, high value for money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

Report Author(s)

Sandra Beard – Head of Finance sandra.beard@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the Council's use of consultants and temporary staff during the 2025/26 financial year, including the principal reasons for their use and the movement in expenditure compared with 2024/25.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 In July 2014, the Employment Panel approved guidance for managers on the use of consultants and temporary staff.

2.2 Consultants and temporary staff are used where the Council requires either specialist skills not available within the establishment, or additional short-term capacity to deliver priority outcomes, or where a resourcing gap is required to be filled to maintain service delivery – for example during a recruitment exercise, or where recruitment for a hard to fill role has not been successful.

2.3 During 2025/26 this included professional expertise in areas such as major capital project delivery, planning policy, internal audit, treasury management, commercial estates, ICT transformation and environmental initiatives. In many instances the knowledge required is highly specialised, infrequently needed or linked to time-limited projects, making permanent recruitment neither practical nor cost effective.

The use of these resources has enabled the Council to maintain service resilience, meet statutory obligations, protect income streams and deliver key corporate priorities whilst operating within ongoing recruitment and labour market challenges. Temporary appointments have also provided continuity in critical service areas while permanent recruitment campaigns were undertaken.

2.4 The Council also secures external funding to deliver projects that support its corporate objectives. Where consultants or temporary staff are engaged specifically to deliver these projects, the related costs may be met from the external funding awarded and therefore do not create an additional pressure on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

2.5 The Council's definitions of consultants and temporary staff are set out below:

Consultants

Individuals engaged directly by the Council, either as sole traders or through a contractor, to provide specialist or professional skills and knowledge that are not available internally. They are generally appointed to deliver a defined task or project where retaining the expertise permanently would not represent value for money. The engagement ends after a

specified period or event, such as completion of a report or delivery of advice.

Temporary Staff

Individuals supplied through an agency or contractor to provide additional capacity. This may include short-term cover for staff absence, such as refuse operatives, or medium-term cover for vacant or hard to fill posts while permanent recruitment is completed.

3. EXPENDITURE ANALYSIS

3.1 The analysis below distinguishes between capital and revenue expenditure. Costs that are directly attributable to bringing a capital asset into use may be charged to the relevant capital project and financed from available capital resources, subject to the Council's accounting policies. All other costs are reported as revenue expenditure.

3.2 Capital

During 2025/26, capital expenditure on consultants and temporary staff was £1.625m, compared with £0.955m in 2024/25, an increase of £0.670m. The summary below is shown in rounded £000s, with detailed analysis provided in Appendix 1.

Capital Comparison of consultants and temporary staff 2025/26 and 2024/25			
	Consultants	**Temporary**	**TOTAL**
	£000	**£000**	**£000**
2025/26	1,575	50	**1,625**
2024/25	763	192	**955**
Increase	**812**	**-142**	**670**

The largest element was £1.367m of consultancy expenditure on RIBA Stages 1 to 4 for the Huntingdon Sport & Health Club. Other significant expenditure included £76k for Hinchingbrooke Country Park, £50k for the Windows 10 end-of-life programme, £28k for the replacement income management system, £50k for leisure centre refurbishments and £20k for roof-mounted solar panels.

3.3 Revenue

During 2025/26, revenue expenditure on consultants and temporary staff was £4.202m, compared with £3.158m in 2024/25, an increase of £1.044m. Consultancy expenditure increased by £0.274m, principally reflecting support for the Local Plan and Local Government Reorganisation. Temporary staffing expenditure increased by £0.770m, with the largest

increase relating to Development Management, alongside additional capacity across ICT, Corporate Resources and Public Protection. The summary below is shown in rounded £000s, with detailed analysis provided in Appendix 2.

Revenue Comparison of consultants and temporary staff 2025/26 and 2024/25			
	Consultants	**Temporary**	**TOTAL**
	£000	**£000**	**£000**
2025/26	1,697	2,505	**4,202**
2024/25	1,424	1,734	**3,158**
Increase	**274**	**770**	**1,044**

4. KEY IMPACTS

4.1 The use of consultants and temporary staff has delivered tangible benefits to the Council during 2025/26. These resources have enabled the progression of major capital projects, supported delivery of the Local Plan and Local Government Reorganisation workstreams, maintained Development Management capacity, strengthened financial governance through specialist audit, treasury and risk expertise, and supported critical ICT and transformation programmes.

4.2 The Council has deliberately focused consultancy expenditure on areas where specialist expertise is either unavailable internally or only required for a defined period. This approach provides access to professional skills and experience without creating ongoing employment costs.

4.3 Temporary staffing has enabled services to maintain performance and resilience during vacancies, periods of high workload and recruitment activity. Without this additional capacity there would have been increased risks of service disruption, delays to major projects, reduced income generation, slower planning decisions and reduced organisational capacity to deliver corporate priorities.

Value Delivered

Revenue expenditure on consultants and temporary staff supported a number of significant organisational outcomes during 2025/26, including:

- Progression of the Local Plan and associated evidence base.
- Specialist support for Local Government Reorganisation preparations.
- Maintenance of Development Management capacity and performance during recruitment challenges. The additional experience of those brought in has also enabled the service to continue to generate income though PPAs etc.

- Delivery of specialist finance, treasury, audit, risk and commercial estates activity.
- Protection of ICT service continuity and delivery of key technology programmes.
- Additional operational capacity to maintain frontline services and statutory functions.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Legal and contractual requirements relating to individual engagements remain applicable and must be considered as part of the relevant procurement and appointment process.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Since 6 April 2017, public sector bodies have been responsible for assessing the employment status for tax purposes of individuals engaged through intermediaries where the off-payroll working rules apply. For individuals engaged directly, rather than through an agency, the Council must determine the appropriate tax treatment using HMRC guidance and, where required, account for income tax and National Insurance contributions. Assessments consider the substance of the working arrangement, including factors such as control, substitution and the nature and duration of the engagement. Incorrect treatment may expose the Council to tax liabilities, interest and penalties. The Management Team have previously been briefed and provided with links to HMRC guidance and the online employment status assessment tool. Heads of Service are responsible for identifying relevant engagements and ensuring that the appropriate assessment is completed.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- Appendix 1 - consultants and temporary staff – capital expenditure
- Appendix 2 - consultants and temporary staff – revenue expenditure

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

CONTACT OFFICER

Lydia Morrison
Corporate Director of Finance and Resources

Appendix 1

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

CONSULTANTS CAPITAL EXPENDITURE			
Service Area	**2024/25 £000**	**2025/26 £000**	
Corporate Resources	14	0	Investment Property in Hampshire
Housing Strategy	424	0	Market towns & future high streets*
	117	0	Old Falcon
	5	0	Transport project*
ICT Shared Services	85	4	Hardware replacement
		28	Income Management System
		20	Server 2016 Migration
		5	Windows 10 end of life
Leisure & Health	80	0	Solar canopy & panels
		5	Biodiversity
		1,367	Huntingdon Sport & Health Club
		50	Leisure centres refurbishment
Strategic Insight & Delivery	38	76	Fees relating to Hinchingbrooke Country Park
Facilities	0	20	Roof mounted solar
TOTAL	**763**	**1,575**	

TEMPORARY STAFF CAPITAL EXPENDITURE			
Service Area	**2024/25 £000**	**2025/26 £000**	
Economic Development	10	0	Administrative support relating to UK Shared Prosperity Fund
Housing Strategy	157	0	Old Falcon*
	25	0	Market towns & future high streets*
ICT Shared Services	0	50	Windows 10 end of life
TOTAL	**192**	**50**	

* externally funded

Appendix 2

REVENUE EXPENDITURE

CONSULTANTS REVENUE EXPENDITURE				
Service Area	**2024/25 £000**	**2025/26 £000**	**Expenditure for 2025/26 includes**	**Justification for Spend**
Chief Operating Officer	33	22	Support for Licensing	Specialist advice not available within establishment
Chief Planning Officer	175	197	Support for: Planning applications**	Specialist advice not available within establishment
	103	496	Local plan**	
	25	0	Community Infrastructure Levy	
	9	8	Other**	
Corporate Leadership	20	18	Support for: Leadership team	Specialist advice not available within establishment
	16	32	Strategic communications	
			Place Strategy**	
Corporate Resources	87	27	Support for: Risk management & internal audit	Specialist knowledge not available within the Council and/or that is required for financial stewardship and audit
	60	44	Financial management system	
	48	68	Commercial Estates**	
	41	13	Treasury, valuations and pension fund administration**	
	37	3	HR initiatives**	
	31	3	CIS	
	5	3	VAT reclaims**	
	8	43	Other areas	
	0	168	Bridge Place Car Park	
	0	120	LGR	
	0	19	Insurance	

Economic Development	43 43	0 20 27 12	Support for Hunts travel UKSPF Economic Growth Strategy Other Areas	Specialist knowledge not available within the establishment
ICT Shared Services	74	33	Support for ICT applications**	Specialist knowledge not available within the establishment
Leisure & Health	57 20 6 0 18	141 1 5 43 55	Support for Feasibility studies Latent demand surveys Mystery shoppers Website Development Other areas	Specialist knowledge not available within the establishment
Operations	55 30 12	0 20 14	Support for Garden waste project** Materials recycling contract** Other areas	Specialist knowledge not available within the establishment
Strategic Insight & Delivery	221 53 45 37 12	1 7 34 0 0	Support for: Biodiversity initiatives* Climate change strategy** Civil parking enforcement implementation project* Parks, open Spaces & countryside management** Other areas	Specialist advice not within establishment.
TOTAL	**1,424**	**1,697**		

* externally funded or funded from earmarked reserves/increased income

** budgeted in MTFS

TEMPORARY STAFF REVENUE EXPENDITURE				
Service Area	**2024/25 £000**	**2025/26 £000**	**Expenditure for 2025/26 includes**	**Justification for Spend**
Chief Operating Officer	98 60	16 88	Agency staff for: Commercial team Benefits Administration*	A combination of cover to maintain service delivery and to cover additional workload re grant payments
Chief Planning Officer	132	671	Agency staff for: Development Management*	Cover to maintain service delivery
Corporate Resources	60 37 10 3	79 121 13 0	Agency staff for: Procurement Finance Human resources Maternity cover* Other	A combination of cover to maintain service delivery and to support the income generating portfolio of property
Corporate Leadership	25	0	Agency staff for: MD team & Communications	
ICT Shared Services	228	309	Agency staff for: 3CICT service	Cover to maintain service delivery
Leisure & Health	4	2	Security	
Public Protection	0	80	Environmental Protection	Additional capacity
Operations	667 98 19 6 0 287 0 0	596 74 17 21 14 356 29 19	Agency staff for: Waste Management* Street Cleansing* Grounds maintenance Vehicle maintenance* Arboriculture Recycling Skip Services CCTV	Requirement to back fill vacancies, sickness and holidays with agency staff to maintain service delivery
TOTAL	**1,734**	**2,505**		

* externally funded or funded from earmarked reserves/increased income/staff savings

** budgeted in MTFS