

Cllrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2026

CREMATORIUM CASH

By the casting vote of its chair, the council's Finance & Assets Committee has agreed to recommend to the Full Council that it put a further £300,000 into the leadership's crematorium project.

Councillors were originally told that the crematorium's £13 million contract price was fixed, but the scheme has already blown through all of its £400,000-plus contingency, and is coming back for more.

Our colleagues Cllr Charlotte Cane MP and Cllr Alison Whelan asked searching questions and mounted a strong challenge, but the opposition team was outvoted. The council will be asked to wave through the additional £300,000 at the budget meeting on Tuesday 24 February.

£4 MILLION FROM RESERVES TO FREEZE COUNCIL TAX

A budget amendment by the council's Leader at the same meeting was also passed by the Finance & Assets Committee. This amendment proposes to take £4 million from reserves to freeze the district council's portion of council tax for a further year. As above, the council's budget will be set on Tuesday 24 February.

DAMNING AUDIT

The council's Audit Committee agreed, once again by the casting vote of its Chair, that sign-off of East Cambridgeshire District Council's 2024/25 statement of accounts should be delegated to the committee chair himself and the council's director of finance, without further committee scrutiny.

The decision means the Audit Committee will not meet again to review a corrected version of the accounts before they are submitted for audit sign-off. A proposal by Lorna for a further meeting of the committee prior to sign-off was rejected, again by the Chair's casting vote.

The meeting identified multiple significant issues in the draft accounts. Lorna highlighted that figures showing the movement of £11 million out of cash was directly contradicted by the explanatory note beneath it saying that money had been moved *into* cash. Meanwhile the external auditors confirmed that £17 million of cash had been miscategorised, which suggests neither movement may actually have taken place at all.

Another entry showed expenditure on employees rising sharply from £9 million to £25 million, an increase that those present at the meeting were unable to explain. Councillors were subsequently told that this was a pension fund valuation issue, but we are unconvinced.

The report of the external auditors was damning. The council's arrangements for supporting the audit were graded Ineffective for quality and completeness of the draft financial statements, delivery of working papers in accordance with agreed client assistance schedules, quality of working papers and supporting evidence, and volume and value of identified misstatements and disclosure amendments.

No assurance could be given by the auditors for short-term debtors, short term creditors, grants received in advance, reserves, other income and expenditure, cash flow statement, collection fund, other disclosures, or leases. The external auditors found

- Significant delays in the responses to audit queries.
- Lack of evidence to corroborate responses to audit queries.
- Responses to audit queries did not always address the questions raised.
- Lack of references to the CIPFA Code of Practice or Accounting Standards for complex areas, such as judgements and estimates.

The auditors made eight specific recommendations, including within Recommendation 1 that "the finance team must develop a strong understanding of Local Government accounting requirements". The auditors warned: "if we are not satisfied with the pace and substance of improvements in addressing our Recommendation 1 (Page 39) as part of the 2025/26 audit, we would be minded to issue Statutory Recommendations at that point, given the recurring inability to prepare robust financial statements and support the audit process".

The council's statement of accounts must be signed off by external auditors by the statutory backstop date of 27 February.

BIN CHANGE PLANS CONTINUE

Plans for the council's new bin service, to be introduced from June this year, continue to be developed. The new service, resulting from fresh Government legislation, includes introducing a weekly food waste collection and replacing black sack collections with wheeled bins.

Residents will receive a five-litre kitchen caddy to collect food waste indoors, and a larger twenty-three litre outdoor caddy to transfer it into for collection. We will also receive one year's supply of caddy liners, free of charge, and a new 180 litre black wheeled bin which will be emptied every two weeks.

Soft plastic such as carrier bags, film lids, and salad and vegetable packaging will be able to be added to our blue bins. Green bins will continue to be collected free of charge, but from 1 June food waste should be put into the new food waste caddies and not into the green bins.

For more information on changes to the bin changes, visit
eastcambs.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/new-bin-changes-1-june-2026

ANTI-SOCIAL DRIVING

A reminder that the council's consultation on anti-social driving remains live until Monday 16 February. We would strongly encourage residents to give their views, in order to help increase the powers available to the police and the council to tackle the long-standing problem of anti-social behaviour arising from car meets at the Elean Business Park.

Link to the survey from the press release at eastcambs.gov.uk/press-releases/2026/residents-urged-share-their-views-anti-social-driving

WITCHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The referendum on Witcham's proposed Neighbourhood Plan takes place on Thursday 12 February.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Significant applications in the Sutton ward which are still awaiting consideration include

- **Three Pickerels, Mepal:** single storey function toom within garden area to replace temporary marquee (25/01303/FUL)
- **Meadlands Farm, Sutton Gault:** replacement dwelling (25/01258/FUL)
- **Garden Close, Sutton:** modification of planning obligation 17/01445/OUM to remove affordable housing requirement (25/01097/MPO)
- **Garden Close, Sutton:** variation of approved plans 22/00057/RMM (25/00667/VARM)
- **104 High Street, Sutton:** demolition of existing garage and erection of five dwellings (25/01016/OUT)
- **Site between 8 and 14 Bridge Road, Mepal:** subdivision of existing horticultural site to create single self-build residential plot, retaining remainder for horticultural use (25/00421/OUT)

FEBRUARY MEETINGS

- Wednesday 11 February: Licensing Committee
- Wednesday 11 February: Licensing (non-statutory sub-Committee)—postponed from January
- Tuesday 24 February: Full Council
- Thursday 26 February: Full Council additional reserve date

The February meeting of the Planning Committee has been cancelled for lack of business.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

We will be at Joy Bistro, 65 High Street, Sutton on Monday 2 February and Monday 2 March at 6:30-7:30PM. Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

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District Councillors for the Sutton ward
(Mepal, Sutton, Wentworth, and Witcham)