MINUTES of
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
23 JULY 2026

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor A Fittock
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor M G Bassenger
Councillors	J R Burrell-Cook, S Dodsley, J Driver, M F L Durham, A S Fluker, K M H Lagan, S J N Morgan, U G C Siddall-Norman and P L Spenceley

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the general housekeeping arrangements.

At this point in the meeting, reference was made to a recent tragedy that had occurred on Mersea island, which was in a neighbouring District. It was noted that two persons had, lost their lives and others remained in hospital. At the request of the Chairperson, all present stood for a moment's silent reflection.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 June 2026 be approved and confirmed.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were none.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No requests had been received.

6. ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICY SUITE

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance presenting the following Policies for Members' consideration, which together formed the Council's Anti-Corruption Policy Suite:

- Anti-Money Laundering Policy at Appendix A, updating and replacing the Council's existing policy.
- Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy at Appendix B, updating and replacing the Council's existing policy.
- Anti-Fraud Policy at Appendix C, updating and replacing the Council's existing policy.
- Sanctions and Prosecutions Policy at Appendix D, updating and replacing the Council's Benefit Counter Fraud policy.
- Whistleblowing Policy at Appendix E, replacing the Council's existing policy.

Members noted that the Council's anti-bribery, corruption and fraud policies were reviewed every three years, or sooner if legislation changed. The report highlighted when the last set of related policies were agreed and the UK Government definition of corruption.

The Director of Finance introduced the report and noted that there had been no cases of proven fraud in the past six years, although small numbers of potential fraud cases had been investigated during that period. The Council had robust processes and guidance in place to reduce the risks of corruption and financial fraud. The report outlined the six principles of adequate procedures to prevent bribery and corruption.

The policies before the Committee had been reviewed alongside IT policies and processes designed to protect the Council from cyber-attacks, staff policies detailing employee and management obligations, and service specific guidance. The review had been undertaken by a number of Officers, with advice and support from other local authorities, together with the Council's Senior Leadership and Senior Management teams.

In response to questions raised, the Director of Finance confirmed that:

- The last sentence of paragraph 3.2 was incomplete, this was a drafting error and it should say that a whistleblowing policy had been previously approved by Committee. However, he would confirm the exact information missing from the report and circulate this to Members outside of the meeting.
- On Appendix D, Sanctions and Prosecutions Policy 2026, the table on page 2 of the policy was incomplete, specifically the summary of purpose section. The Director advised that he would correct this and circulate the missing information to Members outside of the meeting.

In response to a further question, the Director of Finance advised that he was the Council's Money Laundering Reporting Officer (MRLO) and if necessary, he would engage with the Monitoring Officer to ensure that appropriate action was taken.

The Chairperson moved the recommendation set out in the report. This was duly seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that the Anti-Corruption Policy Suite, as set out in Appendices A to E of the report, be agreed:

- Anti-Money Laundering Policy at Appendix A.
- Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy at Appendix B.
- Anti-Fraud Policy at Appendix C.

- Sanctions and Prosecutions Policy at Appendix D.
- Whistleblowing Policy at Appendix E.

7. FRIARY FIELDS PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Place, Planning and Growth seeking Members' approval to acquire Friary Fields, Maldon, a property comprising six self-contained one-bedroom flats, for use as Temporary Accommodation (TA).

Members were reminded of the pressure nationally on TA services. It was noted that, if approved, the acquisition would increase the Council's supply of in-district TA, reduce reliance on costly nightly paid and out of area placements, and provide a long-term housing asset that supports the Council's statutory homelessness duties. The report also sought approval for a capital budget of up to £800,000 comprising the acquisition cost together with essential refurbishment and compliance works required prior to occupation.

The Head of Housing and Building Control introduced the report and provided further information regarding the Council's duty to provide temporary accommodation, the current sustained demand for TA, the use of out of district placements and the benefits from the recent acquisition of Stephens House by the Council.

It was noted that the acquisition of Friary Fields would provide a further opportunity to increase the Council's supply of TA, reduce reliance on costly out-of-area placements and improve housing outcomes for homeless households. In addition, it would provide a long-term housing asset which could support service delivery during and beyond Local Government Reorganisation.

Members were advised that the proposal was considered to be a prudent investment which supported both operational service requirements and the Council's longer-term strategic objectives. The proposal would be subject to the satisfactory completion of valuation, surveys, legal due diligence and financial appraisal prior to acquisition, together with refurbishment costs once acquired.

The Chairperson then put the recommendations set out in the report and these were duly seconded.

In response to a number of questions, the Head of Housing and Building Control provided the following information:

- the Council had made an offer to the Registered Provider and received a quote for the remedial works required in order for the building to be brought into use. Therefore, a maximum budget of £800,000 had been requested based on these prices.
- The property would comprise six one-bedroomed flats of the same size and would be offered to residents of the District, rather than to persons from outside of the District.
- The units would be used as TA as a stop-gap measure whilst the Council supported residents in finding longer-term housing solutions.
- Any income received from the property would be used towards ongoing maintenance, and the Council was expecting to enter into a service level agreement with a Registered Provider that would manage the property.

The Chairperson then moved the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) That a capital budget of up to £800,000 be approved to fund the acquisition of the Friary Fields property and any essential refurbishment, compliance and associated works required to bring the accommodation into use as temporary accommodation;

(ii) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Section 151 Officer, to agree the final purchase price, approve the scope of essential refurbishment works within the approved capital budget, and complete the acquisition subject to satisfactory survey, valuation, legal and financial due diligence.

8. SUEZ DEPOT EXPANSION PROJECT

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities presenting the Suez Depot Expansion Project business case (Appendix 1) and seeking Members' approval of the total project budget which was funded through the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Grant. It was noted that the Business Case (Appendix 1) had been circulated in a supplementary pack to all Members.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities introduced the report and reminded Members that the Council's waste, recycling and street cleansing services were delivered by SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd from the Promenade Park depot. He then provided background information regarding the current depot layout and the need to identify a suitable long-term solution.

A feasibility study had been carried out to consider a range of options, detailed in the report, for increasing depot capacity and was attached at Appendix 2 to the report. Each option had been assessed against technical, financial, operational, legal and risk criteria and the conclusion was that extending the existing depot into the neighbouring Parks Depot area represented the preferred option. Further details of this preferred option, together with its benefits, were provided by the Director and set out in the report.

Members were informed that, to formally cover the proposed extension of the site and set out the Council's rights and responsibilities, a lease was required and Committee approval was therefore sought. The lease would be in place until the expiry of the contract period in 2032 and would exclude the automatic right to renew at the end of the term. The proposed peppercorn rent reflected the current lease and ensured consistent arrangements.

The Chairperson put the recommendations set out in the report, which were duly seconded.

The Committee congratulated Officers on the submitted report and the successful attainment of the EPR grant. It was commented that the proposal would provide the best possible facility for the Council's waste services both now and in the future.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) That the total Suez Depot Expansion project budget of £348,289 be approved;

(ii) That the Committee noted that the project was fully funded through the Extended Producer Responsibility Grant;

(iii) That a lease for the extension of the site area, on terms consistent with the current contract, including a peppercorn rent, be granted and the necessary arrangements to give effect to this decision be authorised.

9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance on the Council's investment activity for the 2025 / 26 financial year in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code, and the Council's Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Practices.

It was noted that the CIPFA Code of Practice required authorities to report on the performance of the treasury management function at least twice yearly. The report provided detail in respect of the following areas:

- External Context – Appendix 1 to the report, prepared by the Link Group engaged by the Council to provide treasury management consultancy and advice services, provided an overview of the external economic environment.
- Local Context – The Council did not hold any external debt during 2025 / 26, with the exception of a five-year hire purchase agreement relating to the acquisition of two tractors in April 2023. The Council remained under-borrowed by £8.552m, attributable to the cost of waste collection vehicles and investment in the Blackwater Leisure Centre.
- Investment Activity (April 2025 – March 2026) – Members were advised that the level of investments held by the Council had seen a decrease of £3m during this period and the report highlighted the reasons for this. The Council continued to take a prudent approach to investment, with priority given to security and liquidity over yield.
- Performance – Budgeted Income and Outturn – The average income returns on the Authority's investments were detailed along with the overall investment for the year.
- Compliance with Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy - As set out in Appendix 1, it was noted that all Prudential Indicators for 2025 / 26 had been complied with. All treasury management activities undertaken during the second half of the year complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.
- Outlook for 2026 / 27 (summary of advice from Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG) Corporate Market) - The Committee noted the updated economic outlook from MUFG Corporate Markets, which indicated that inflationary pressures and energy market uncertainty had delayed expectations of interest rate reductions. As a result, the next Bank Rate cut was not forecast until 2027, with gilt yields expected to remain under pressure from inflation and wider fiscal challenges.

The Chairperson put the recommendations set out in the report.

In response to comments raised, the Director Finance advised that:

- Up-front payment dates had been agreed with Parish Councils, and other organisations, such as Essex Fire and Essex County Council. This ensured that the Council knew when monies needed to be paid out and could meet payment dates. The slight differences between these timings were what enabled the Council to make those investments. The collection rate remained strong at slightly over 98%.
- Investment decisions were framed within the Treasury Management Strategy, including counterparties, credit ratings and capitalisation levels. Advice was also taken from the Link Group, which provided more technical guidance on the way the Council invested. In simple terms, the Council followed the market rather than seeking particular advantages or disadvantages by scrutinising the accounts of individual companies, a practice known as passive investment.
- Borrowing from the Council's reserves had been referred to in the Treasury Management Strategy. In addition, the Link Group had helped the Council navigate the fluctuations in borrowing and consideration of the 'cost of carry', being the total expense of holding an investment or asset over time, including interest on borrowed money, storage fees and insurance.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

(i) that the 2025 / 26 Treasury Outturn report be noted, including compliance with all treasury management indicators during the course of the year and the positive result from investment income secured;

(ii) That the alignment between the Treasury Management Outturn, the Budget Outturn for 2025 / 26, and the 2025 / 26 (pre-audit) accounts, which provided confirmation of the overall reported position, be noted.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.02 pm.

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CHAIRPERSON