

# **East Herts Council Report**

## **Executive**

**Date of meeting:** Tuesday, 2 June 2026

**Report by:** Councillor Carl Brittain – Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

**Report title:** Drawdown from Executive Priority Reserve - Ward Freeman Project

**Ward affected:** Buntingford

**Summary** – This report seeks Executive approval to allocate £105,000 from the Executive Priority Reserve, established as part of the 2026/27 budget, to support the reopening of Ward Freeman Swimming Pool in Buntingford. The funding will provide additional support towards essential works to enable the facility to reopen, building on the £130,000 UKSPF funding approved in 2025/26.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE:**

- a) Approve an allocation of £105,000 from the Executive Priority Reserve to support the reopening of Ward Freeman Swimming Pool in Buntingford.

#### **1. Proposal**

- 1.1. To seek Executive approval to allocate £105,000 from the Executive Priority Reserve to support the reopening of the Ward Freeman Swimming Pool.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. Ward Freeman Swimming Pool in Buntingford was closed in December 2023 due to health and safety concerns and the significant level of investment required to bring the facility up to an acceptable standard.

- 2.2. Following the closure, the council has worked with Hertfordshire County Council (as freeholder) and the local community to explore options for the future of the facility. A community-led solution has emerged through the formation of the Ward Freeman Community Pool Group (WFCPG), a registered charitable organisation established to refurbish and reopen as a community-owned and operated asset.
- 2.3. As part of the 2026/27 budget setting, at its meeting of 4 March 2026 Council approved the establishment of an Executive Priority Reserve, funded from forecast surpluses within the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 2.4. In 2025/26, the council allocated £130,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support initial works associated with the reopening of Ward Freeman Swimming Pool.

### **3. Reason(s)**

- 3.1. A request has been received from WFCPG to provide further financial support towards the reopening of Ward Freeman Swimming Pool.
- 3.2. The proposed funding would provide support towards essential refurbishment and enabling works, helping to address a current funding gap and maintain progress towards reopening. The project is currently targeting an opening in late 2026, subject to completion of works and necessary approvals.

### **4. Options**

- 4.1. Executive could choose not to approve the requested funding or alternatively approve a reduced level of support and require the project to secure the remaining funding from other sources. However, both options would place significant pressure on the project's financial viability and delivery programme. This could result in delays to the planned reopening or, in the worst case,

prevent the project from being completed altogether. The proposed allocation therefore provides the most certain route to supporting the delivery of the scheme within anticipated timescales.

## **5. Risks**

- 5.1 The project remains subject to a number of delivery risks, including potential changes to timescales and final costs as works progress. There is also a possibility that further funding may be required if additional works are identified or costs increase. In addition, the proposed allocations will reduce the overall balance available within the Executive Priority Reserve, limiting flexibility to respond to future emerging priorities. These risks will be managed through ongoing engagement with the project and regular monitoring of progress.

## **6. Implications/Consultations**

### **Community Safety**

Not directly arising from this report.

### **Data Protection**

Not directly arising from this report.

### **Equalities**

Not directly arising from this report.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Not directly arising from this report, although refurbishment works may provide opportunities for future efficiency improvements.

### **Financial**

The budget for 2026/27 includes a provision for £250,000 in 2026/27 which has been set aside in the Executive Priority Reserve to support emerging priorities.

The proposed allocation of £105,000 would be met in full, from this reserve.

Following this allocation, sufficient balance will remain to support other priorities, although this will reduce overall flexibility and will be kept under review as part of ongoing financial monitoring.

### **Health and Safety**

The funding supports works required to address previous health and safety concerns associated with the facility.

### **Human Resources**

Not directly arising from this report.

### **Human Rights**

Not directly arising from this report.

### **Legal**

In accordance with the council's financial procedures and scheme of delegation, authority to approve allocations from earmarked reserves, such as the Executive Priority Reserve, sits with the Director for Finance, Risk and Performance, that is, the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer). Given the nature and intention of the Executive Priority Reserve, the Director for Finance, Risk and Performance has determined that, under the Constitution, decisions on use of the Executive Priority Reserve should instead be taken by the Executive. This is enabled by paragraph 3.36.1 and, indeed, maximises transparency and openness in decision-making on this important matter.

### **Specific Wards**

Buntingford.

## **7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material**

None.

### **Contact Member**

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