

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 28 February 2023 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Drew – Chair
Councillor Graham Cone – Vice-Chair

Councillors:	Paul Bearpark	Anna Bradnam
	Libby Earle	Peter Fane
	Sally Ann Hart	James Hobro
	Helene Leeming	Richard Stobart
	Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer	Heather Williams

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Gareth Bell (Communications and Communities Service Manager), Peter Campbell (Head of Housing), Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Bode Esan (Head of Climate, Environment & Waste), Heather Jones (Strategic Lead 3C Building Standards), Peter Maddock (Head of Finance), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser) and Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) was in attendance.

Councillors Sue Ellington (Committee member), Bunty Waters, Henry Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Environment), John Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Housing) and Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) were in attendance remotely.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillor Tom Bygott and Councillor Judith Rippeth (both members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee) sent apologies. Their substitutes were Councillor Heather Williams and Councillor Paul Bearpark respectively.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins (Lead Cabinet Member for Planning) and Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council).

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Peter Fane declared an interest as a Director of Shire Homes. Councillor Fane said he would take no part in the debate and would refrain from voting or otherwise affirming the Committee's conclusions relating to any matter connected with that organisation.

Councillor James Hobro declared an interest as a Non-Executive Director of Ermine Street Housing. Having discussed the nature of his interest with the Council's Monitoring Officer, Councillor Hobro said he would take part in the debate but refrain from voting or otherwise

affirming the Committee's conclusions relating to any matter connected with that organisation.

Councillor Richard Stobart declared an interest as a Director of both the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership LLP and South Cambridgeshire Projects LLP. Having discussed the nature of his interests with the Council's Monitoring Officer, Councillor Stobart said he would take part in the debate but refrain from voting or otherwise affirming the Committee's conclusions relating to any matter connected with those two organisations.

Councillor Heather Williams declared an interest as a member of the Greater Cambridge Partnership Joint Assembly.

4. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 subject to an amendment being made to show Councillor Helene Leeming as having been present in the Chamber.

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 subject to an amendment being made to show Councillor Heather Williams as having been present in the Chamber.

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023.

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

Daniel Fulton (Fews Lane Consortium) had expressed an interest in making a statement. His request was made after the deadline for registration had expired and was rejected by the Chair.

6. Investment Strategy

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report on the review of the existing Investment Strategy in the context of wider economic conditions, including changes in the rules governing the Public Works Loan Board. The Committee reviewed a refreshed version of the Strategy.

Committee members expressed concern at the robustness of the risk register regarding the returns on investments, and the ethical framework of the proposed strategy. The Lead Cabinet Member for Resources confirmed that all of the investments entered into by South Cambridgeshire District Council were consistent with its Policies and Business Plan.

Committee members noted the location and tenancy strength of current and proposed investments. The Lead Cabinet Member for Resources said that, while local authorities were expected to diversify income generation, there remained an emphasis on commercial regeneration within the district and support for local businesses.

The Vice-Chair highlighted Section 5 of the Strategy document about capacity, skills, and the use of external advisors. His concern was that those involved in identifying investment opportunities to make the subsequent recommendations and decisions should have

received appropriate training to qualify them to do so. The Lead Cabinet Member for Resources welcomed this point and suggested that a similar level of training should be required for those responsible for scrutinising investment proposals and decisions.

Committee Members noted the increase in Green Investment projects, the differing rates of return, and the new Public Works Loan Board rules prohibiting new investment purely for income generation. However, they also noted that green projects that benefitted residents would be supported under the new rules.

Committee Members commented on the process for determining investments in commercial properties, and the impact that changes to the Public Works Loan Board had had on the 'pipeline' of future projects. The Chief Executive and Lead Cabinet Member for Resources said that these changes had prompted the Council to focus on supporting local projects, such as the Northstowe Enterprise Zone.

There were comments on the prudential indicators and the need to make sure that all data within the Strategy was sufficient to empower Members and Officers with regard to future investments. The Council's Investment Team should continue to benchmark against other local authorities and monitor the impact caused by changes to the Public Works Loan Board. The Head of Finance confirmed that sections 8.4.1 and 8.4.4 would be amended prior to submission of the Investment Strategy to Cabinet.

Having considered the report presented to it, and the Investment Strategy attached at Appendix A, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the Investment Strategy by affirmation but recommended that Cabinet ask officers to ensure that training provided was sufficiently robust and offered in future to all Councillors.

7. 2022-23 Quarter Three Performance Report

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter Three (Q3) position regarding its operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Councillor Helene Leeming referred to AH211 (Housing, average days to re-let all housing stock), noting the improvement in performance. She did however question the viability of the target of 17 days. The Head of Housing and the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing informed the Committee that this Indicator was to be broken down into its component parts and that work was ongoing to assess how the re-let period could be improved.

Regarding AH204 (Housing, percentage of tenants satisfied with responsive repairs), Councillor Heather Williams drew a distinction between major and minor repairs asking that future reports should differentiate between the two. The Head of Housing and the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing informed the Committee that a new methodology for collecting data for this KPI was currently being developed.

The Committee discussed the disparity between the satisfaction with emergency repairs (SH322) and responsive repairs (AH204) with the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing stating that levels of feedback on AH204 were low and that the aforementioned methodology changes were expected to remedy this.

Regarding ES418 (household waste sent for reuse, recycling, and composting (cumulative)) Councillor James Hobro noted that the overall trend from July 2021 to date appeared to be going down. The Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for the Environment explained that there was an increase in the target figures and that increased recycling, reduced contamination of residual waste, and behavioural change were all essential. The Head of Climate, Environment & Waste said that the challenge being faced by South Cambridgeshire District Council was replicated throughout the UK and assured Members that the Council would collaborate with other local authorities, including Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in seeking ways to manage waste and take other steps to improve performance.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for the Environment explained that the Shared Waste Service frequently audited the waste collection process which measured what was being put in bins, but a specific KPI would be considered.

The Head of Climate, Environment & Waste explained that although waste as a whole was not tracked, a national target would be coming into force which would help set a target for South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The Committee highlighted and briefly discussed the subsidised home composting scheme that was available to all residents, the difficulties in obtaining accurate figures for dry recycling and composting, and the Food Waste trial.

The Chair commended managers for their support of staff working for the Shared Waste Service (SF786a (Staff sickness days per FTE - Shared Waste Service only)).

The Committee noted the improvement regarding CC305 (percentage of formal complaints resolved within timescale (all SCDC)). The Chief Executive outlined the measures that had been taken, including the creation of 'complaints champions' in every Council service.

Having reviewed the Key Performance Indicator results and narrative at Appendix A and being satisfied with the comments made by Lead Cabinet Members and officers in response to Members' questions, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **noted** the report and by affirmation supported its submission to Cabinet.

8. Further support for cost-of-living crisis for South Cambridgeshire residents

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed the draft Cabinet report.

Committee members discussed the use of warm hubs and the impact of social isolation. They highlighted the availability of Parish hardship funds.

Councillor Anna Bradnam asked that all available data (both internal and external) should be analysed so that the Council could give evidence-based justification for continuing support and focus such support on those people in greatest need. Officers were able to provide limited data during the meeting.

Members wondered whether residents using warm hubs were being surveyed about their

experiences and suggestions for enhancement. The Communities and Communications Service Manager said that monitoring was ongoing, and that more data would be obtained in the coming months.

Progress reports on cost-of-living support for residents would be presented to Cabinet every six months. These reports would enable Cabinet to decide whether any additional support was required, such as self-help initiatives.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report and, by affirmation, supported its submission to Cabinet for approval with data-driven and evidence-based justification. Should such data not be available in time, the Committee recommended that Cabinet asks officers to continue their analysis and provide an update in due course.

9. Work Programme

Members noted the Scrutiny and Overview Committee work programme attached to the agenda.

10. To Note the Date of the next meeting

The next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting had been scheduled to take place on Tuesday 28 March 2023 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.37 p.m.
