

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 19 January 2023 at 5.20 p.m.

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

Councillors: Anna Bradnam Tom Bygott
Sue Ellington James Hobro
Helene Leeming Judith Rippeth
Richard Stobart Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer

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Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Chamber: Anne Ainsworth (Chief Operating Officer), Farzana Ahmed (Chief Accountant), Peter Maddock (Head of Finance), Jonathan Malton (Cabinet Support Officer), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser), Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Remotely: Philip Bird (Corporate Programme Manager), Peter Campbell (Head of Housing), Jon Hall (Commercial and Licensing Services Manager), Heather Jones (Strategic Lead 3C Building Standards), Stephen Kelly (Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development), Rory McKenna (Monitoring Officer) and Alex Snelling-Day (Policy, Climate and Environment Team Manager)

Councillors Heather Williams (Leader of the Opposition), Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) and John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) were in attendance, by invitation.

Councillors Henry Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Environment), John Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Housing), Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities) and Peter McDonald (Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development) were in attendance remotely, by invitation.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillors Libby Earle, Peter Fane and Sally Ann Hart (each a member of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee) sent apologies.

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

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Richard Stobart declared an interest as a Director of both the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership LLP and South Cambridgeshire Projects LLP.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 28 February 2023.

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

6. Business Plan Action Plan (2023-24 Revision)

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed the Business Plan Action Plan for 2023-24 reflecting work that had been ongoing throughout 2022-23, the continuing evolution of Council priorities, and planned works coming forward from service areas.

Councillor John Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Housing) and the Head of Housing responded briefly to a request for some context to proposed measures such as new council homes to be built. Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) undertook to seek the best way to incorporate a degree of context into the next version of the Business Plan. Related to the issue of context, Councillor Helene Leeming asked whether the aim of building 75 new council homes a year included homes for refugees or whether the recent grant for refugees would enable the Local Housing Authority to build homes for refugees above and beyond the planned annual target figure. The Head of Housing explained that the budget had been set prior to the grant for refugees being announced but that the situation would be clarified in the updated Business Plan.

Members engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about energy efficiency. This included the ongoing installation of energy-saving measures in all Council properties and the provision of electric vehicle charging points throughout the district. They supported an ambition, as a headline objective, encouraging residents to reduce total waste material generated (in addition to the residual waste reduction and increased recycling initiatives). Members asked officers to develop this objective looking at best practice elsewhere and considering realistic interventions for achieving behavioural change.

Councillor Sue Ellington highlighted the risk to the viability of the mobile wardens scheme in South Cambridgeshire posed by significantly increased costs. Councillors Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) and Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities) said they were already acting in this regard and would keep Councillor Ellington informed of progress.

Councillor Helene Leeming requested that supporting fledgling High Streets in Cambourne and Northstowe be specifically included in the Business Plan alongside the ongoing programme to support established High Streets elsewhere in the district seeking to recover from the Covid 19 pandemic and cope with the cost-of-living crisis.

In response to a comment, the Head of Transformation, HR, and Corporate Services gave an assurance that the telephone remained an essential element of the holistic approach to improving residents' ability to communicate with the Council.

The Chief Executive summarised how Key Performance Indicators and staff health and wellbeing surveys would be assessed and then independently reviewed before a decision was made about whether or not to proceed to the next phase.

Following further discussion, and subject to the comments made during the meeting, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **noted and supported** submission of the Business Plan to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

7 (a) **Draft Budget 2023-24**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed the draft budget for 2023-24 alongside an updated probable outturn for 2022-23.

Councillor Richard Stobart expressed concern about pressure surrounding Section 106 income. In reply, Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) attributed this in part to a slow down in the occupation of properties (a common Section 106 trigger point) and the fact that Section 106 Agreements were largely related to major developments. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development summarised several measures adopted recently that had resulted in improved working practices and monitoring of Legal Agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Planning Performance Agreements.

Councillor John Williams assured Councillor Tom Bygott that the Council remained committed to the self-build concept notwithstanding that the current economic climate made viability an important factor.

In response to Councillor Aidan Van de Weyer, the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development explained how recharges worked with regard to the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and 3C Building Control.

Councillor Helene Leeming asked for clarity on how the Council could prepare for the Fair Funding Review expected in 2025-26. Councillor John Williams said that such review was likely to move central government grant money away from district councils towards county councils and unitary authorities. He added that South Cambridgeshire District Council would therefore be transfer any unused surpluses to its reserves in an effort to minimise the anticipated impact on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The Head of Finance assured the Committee that the Council's finances looked to be stable during 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Members noted that the payback period in respect of the 'greening of South Cambs Hall' was likely to be shorter than envisaged because of increases in the cost of gas and electricity.

Members discussed the issue of ambient noise and recognised the nature of evidence needed before the Council could investigate.

Committee members supported the aim of developing an arts and culture policy and noted Councillor Heather Williams' request that Section 106 monies received in respect of arts and culture, but not yet spent, should be retained.

The Chief Executive explained that potential budgetary implications arising from the introduction of Voter I.D. should be negated by central Government covering the cost in full.

Councillor Sue Ellington mentioned the challenges being faced by small villages in maintaining street lighting in the face of substantially increased costs. Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) said he would discuss this at a later date with Councillor Ellington but mentioned that the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) was available with

whom Parish Councils could jointly procure energy contracts.

Following further discussion, and subject to the comments above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **noted and supported** submission of the Budget to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

8. **Conservative Group Budget Proposal for 2023-24**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed alternative budget proposals from the Conservative Group.

Referring to the proposal to increase funding for fraud prevention and investigation in part by reducing publication of the *South Cambs Magazine* from four times a year to twice a year, Councillor Aiden Van de Weyer said that the *South Cambs Magazine* was an important way of disseminating information. In reply, Councillor Heather Williams (Leader of the Opposition) argued that greater impact could be achieved by focussing on schools and community centres in promoting fraud prevention.

Discussion ensued about the proposal to freeze Council Tax. Councillor James Hobro said that such a measure represented a real-terms cut in revenue for the Council, which might impact on service provision. There was also a brief discussion about the need for additional resources for the Council's Enforcement (Compliance) team.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **supported** submission of the Conservative Group Budget Proposals for 2023-24 to Cabinet on 6 February 2023 and **noted** that the proposals would be formally moved at the meeting of Full Council on 21 February 2023.

9. **Work Programme**

Members noted the work programme attached to the agenda.

Councillor Richard Stobart, Chair of the Young People Task & Finish Group, briefly updated the Committee about the Group's progress to date.

The Chair reported that arrangements were being made for an all-Member briefing on Legal Agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

10. **To Note the Date of the next meeting**

Members noted that the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Tuesday 28 February 2023 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.
