

## **South Cambridgeshire District Council**

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Thursday, 21 March 2024 at 5.30 p.m.

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

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

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Peter Maddock (Head of Finance), Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser) and Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Councillors Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) and Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) were in attendance, by invitation.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Councillors Sally Ann Hart (Scrutiny and Overview Committee member), Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities) and John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) sent apologies.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2024. Councillor Judith Rippeth had not been at the previous meeting so abstained from approving the minutes.

### **4. Public Questions**

There were no public questions or statements.

### **5. Peer Review Action Plan**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed a report summarising how the Council proposed to respond to the recommendations made by the recent Peer Review.

Committee members spent some time discussing Recommendation 2 which they considered to be open to interpretation despite a request that the Peer Review Team clarify its meaning. They concluded that Cabinet and officers should continue to nurture working relationships with partners noting that a crucial step would be to capture feedback

from partners such as Parish and Town Councils.

A general concern was to assess how actionable the Peer Review recommendations were and to understand how the Council should measure its achievements against such recommendations. An example of this was Peer Review Recommendation 3(a) (Finance - 'accelerating the closure of outstanding accounts') where the Committee said that Cabinet should emphasise the distinction between those things that were achievable internally and the role of External Audit over whose work practices and timescales the Council had no control. Councillor Helene Leeming referred to assurances given at the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee meeting on 20 March 2024 and suggested that Part (a) be treated separately from the rest of Recommendation 3.

With reference to Recommendation 6 about developing a community strategy, the Leader of the Council clarified the Council's proposed action by describing a community statement as a promise as to what individual communities could expect from the Council. She assured the Committee that the Council would continue to develop a strategy through experience gathered in the District's diverse communities including Cambourne, Northstowe and Waterbeach. The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services said that the Council already had several 'mini strategies' and that a community statement would serve as an over-arching document. The Leader indicated that this was preferable to seeking a 'one size fits all' community strategy.

The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services responded to the Committee's interest in reviewing progress with, and the outcomes of, the Action Plan. Progress reports would be presented alongside existing Performance and progress against Business Plan reports. On a general point, it was important that appropriate narrative be used to provide an evidence-based link between recommendations and actions. Discussion ensued around the proposed action relating to Recommendation 9, namely that there should be a Member / officer workshop to review and revise existing Key Performance Indicators to ensure that they remain meaningful and relevant to the Business Plan.

Following further discussion between Committee members, officers and Leader of the Council, and having reviewed the report and received responses to questions posed by Committee members, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee endorsed the action plan shown in Appendix A to the report and made the following recommendations:

1. That in respect of Peer Review Recommendation 2 ("Reset and define relationships at a local and regional level with key partners to support the delivery of business plan priorities")
  - a. Cabinet should interpret the word 'reset' as an opportunity to take stock of current working relationships and develop them where appropriate.
  - b. in continuing to build effective relationships with key partners, a single Cabinet member together with a single Leadership Team officer would be more effective in identifying different but still measurable ways of enhancing partnership working.
  - c. that Cabinet should explore options for capturing meaningful feedback from partners so that the Council could provide an evidence-based response to the Peer Review Team.
2. That in respect of Peer Review Recommendation 3 ("Finance - 'accelerating the closure of outstanding accounts'") Cabinet should emphasise the distinction between those measures that were achievable internally and the role of External

Audit over whose work practices and timescales the Council had no control.

3. That in relation to Peer Review Recommendation 12 (“Effectiveness review of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee”) Cabinet should note the steps already taken in addressing this aspect, and the Scrutiny and Overview Committee’s desire to relate its work programme more closely with those strategic risks most likely to affect the residents of South Cambridgeshire.
4. That in respect of Table 2 in Appendix A to the report, Cabinet should ensure that the proposed residents survey is genuinely independent and posed questions that did not suggest what responses should be.
5. That in respect of Recommendation B in paragraph 5 of the report, Cabinet should note the Scrutiny and Overview Committee’s intention to review the draft progress report to the Peer Review Team in Autumn 2024 as well as the Peer Review Team’s response.

## 6. **Work Programme**

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

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**The Meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.**

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