

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Monday, 7 December 2020 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of Council)
Councillor Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer (Deputy Leader of Council (Statutory) -
Strategic Planning and Transport)

Councillors:	Bill Handley	Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience
	Dr. Tumi Hawkins	Lead Cabinet member for Planning Policy and Delivery
	Peter McDonald	Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery
	Brian Milnes	Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing
	Hazel Smith	Lead Cabinet member for Housing
	John Williams	Lead Cabinet member for Finance

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Anne Ainsworth	Chief Operating Officer
Phil Bird	Corporate Programme Manager
Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
Susan Gardner Craig	Head of HR and Corporate Services
Stephen Kelly	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development
Kevin Ledger	Senior Policy and Performance Officer
Peter Maddock	Head of Finance
Jonathan Malton	Cabinet Support Officer
Rory McKenna	Deputy Head of Legal Practice/Monitoring Officer
Jeff Membery	Head of Transformation
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Liz Watts	Chief Executive

Councillors John Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Dr. Claire Daunton, Sue Ellington,
Dr. Douglas de Lacey, Geoff Harvey, Judith Rippeth, Bunty Waters, Heather Williams
and Dr. Richard Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

1. Leader's Announcements

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council, announced:

- Councillor Ian Sollom had been appointed to the Brexit Advisory Group following the resignation of Councillor Philip Allen.
- Councillor Steve Hunt had been appointed to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee as a substitute, replacing Councillor Clare Delderfield.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Neil Gough, the Deputy Leader and the Lead Cabinet Member for Transformation and Projects, sent his apologies for absence.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery and Skills declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the Capital Programme update as a member of the Investment Partnership Boards.

4 (a) **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Cabinet **authorised** the Leader to sign, as a correct record, the public version of the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 19 October 2020, subject to the following correction:

The addition of Councillor Heather Williams to the attendance list.

4 (b) **Written answer relating to Minute 5 of the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2020**

Cabinet **noted** the written response relating to the supplementary public question from the previous meeting, as set out below.

Supplementary Question from Mr. Daniel Fulton

“My concern is the Council is basically attempting to monetise it’s regulatory function as the local planning authority, and I’d also be concerned if the Council is going to become a ‘for profit land developer’, it could also potentially leverage this to given a competitive advantage over other local developers who are not the local planning authority. Have these concerns been given any consideration at all?”

Response from Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council:

“There is and has always been a clear divide between the Executive and the Planning Authority, and this is set out in law. The Council’s Investment Partnerships will need to comply with planning regulations just as any other developer would and there are safeguards in place to ensure this will be the case. For instance, a planning application submitted on behalf of an Investment Partnership will always be reported to the Council’s planning committee for a decision rather than being dealt with under delegated powers.

If the council were fully funded to run its services, we would not need to undertake commercial activity. However, following the 2008 financial crash, local authorities were heavily encouraged to become more commercial and to substitute diminishing government grant with new income streams. The alternative was to cut services, and we want to avoid this where at all possible.

Added to the financial pressures that we face as a council, we know our residents face extreme housing pressures both in terms of availability and affordability. We believe that we can play an important role in providing high quality, sustainable and affordable housing that would not be available without our intervention.”

5. Public Questions

There was one public question received ahead of the meeting.

(a) From Mr. Richard Williams

“The internal audit report on the decision at Craft Way, Steeple Morden, is a step in the right direction, but the report fails to address why the planning permission was deleted from the public planning register after it was issued and fails to investigate at what level the decision to delete the permission was taken.

Deleting planning permissions from the public planning register undermines the public’s confidence in the integrity of this Council and calls into question whether the public planning register can in fact be relied upon as the definitive record of planning permission in this district.

Will the Cabinet commit to also ask the internal audit team to investigate the circumstances regarding the deletion of the permission from the public planning register?

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council responded:

“Thank you for your question Mr Williams.

Following a further discussion with the Head of Internal Audit, my understanding of the situation is that an officer noticed that the Planning Permission had been issued on Friday 13th and knew that to be a mistake.

Therefore, it was agreed to take the document down until the system could be interrogated.

This happened on Monday 16th and as is set out in the detailed Internal audit report it was realised that the mistake was a combination of human error and the system not being set up proactively to identify this risk. At this stage, the decision was republished.

I have asked the Head of Internal Audit to continue to investigate whether there are any further improvements the council can make to the system regarding this matter.”

6. Actions taken under Chief Executive's Delegated Powers

Cabinet **received and noted** a report relating to the actions taken under the Chief Executive’s Delegated Powers:

- National Lockdown Business Support Policy, decision taken on Wednesday, 18th November 2020

7. Quarter Two Performance Report

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council, introduced a report from the Head of Transformation, setting out performance information for Quarter 2 of the current year.

The Leader praised Officers for continuing to offer an improved service during this quarter. In particular, she highlighted the dedication of the Revenues and Benefits team during the Covid-19 pandemic. Councillor Heather Williams suggested there should be an additional Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of 'acid ratio tests', previously mentioned by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. The Head of Transformation noted the suggestion and said he would discuss it with the Head of Finance. Councillor Dr. Douglas de Lacey, Chair of the Council, said he was impressed with the continuing progress of the Contact Centre and thanked the Head of Transformation for providing the additional information from the previous quarter's performance.

After a short discussion, the Leader closed the debate, and Cabinet:

Noted the KPI results and comments at Appendix A and progress against Business Plan actions at Appendix B.

8. Equality Scheme

Councillor Bridget Smith, the Leader of the Council, introduced the report from the Head of HR and Corporate Services, and noted the clarity of the action plan. Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins thanked Officers for the Council's progress of the scheme. Councillor Heather Williams endorsed the comments and hoped the Council's scheme would continue to be under review. Councillor Dr. Claire Daunton confirmed that the Task and Finish group's recommendations had been incorporated into the final report.

Following a further discussion, the Leader thanked Members for their comments, and Cabinet:

- a) **Approved** the Equality Scheme at Appendix A (including equality objectives and actions).
- b) **Noted** the 2019-20 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Actions report contained at Appendix B.

9. Refugee Support

Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced a report from the Head of Housing, proposing the continuing of the current policy of housing four Syrian refugee families per year within the district. Councillor Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer, the Deputy Leader (Statutory), said he was pleased the Council would continue the scheme. Councillor Dr. Douglas de Lacey paid tribute to the hard work of the Officers who had ensured the new residents had been welcomed into the community. Councillor Sue Ellington was also supportive of the scheme but reminded the Cabinet about other vulnerable members of society currently living in the district.

The Leader concluded by thanking Officers involved in this report, and Cabinet:

- a) **Agreed** to accept up to 4 refugee families per year within the District as part of the national commitment for the next three years, subject to;
 - Government providing ongoing funding and developing future schemes, and,
 - having access to support services that are currently offered by Cambridge City Council or equivalent.
- b) **Delegated** to the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing to change this timescale if this brings the timescale into line with the announcement of a future government scheme.

10. **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced a report from the Head of Finance, highlighting the updates from the Government's spending review and the forthcoming Local Government Financial Settlement, along with the distribution of the business support grants.

Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery and Skills, highlighted the work of the Business Support Team during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Councillor Heather Williams requested clarity around the situation regarding the Public Works Loan Board, the partial rates reset and an update on the Castlerigg Consulting report. Councillor John Williams responded that a further report would be drafted for Cabinet with the implications to the Public Works Loan Board and confirmed the partial rates reset. The Head of Transformation reported the Castlerigg Consulting report had provided the basis for him to take forward service reviews of all council services over the following two years.

After a further short discussion, Councillor Bridget Smith, the Leader of the Council, concluded by thanking Officers involved in this report, and Cabinet:

- a) **Acknowledged** the projected changes in service spending and the overall resources available to the Council over the medium term;
- b) **Recommended** to Full Council the refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix A and updated financial forecast at Appendix B;
- c) **Noted** the growth bids, detailed at Appendix C, for inclusion in the Budget Setting Report in February 2021;
- d) **Noted** the proposed range of service efficiency savings/policy options detailed in Appendix D of the report and that these would undergo further refinement and consultation with employees and other stakeholders prior to forming part of the Budget Setting Report in February 2021.

11. **Capital Programme Update and New Bids**

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report from the Head of Finance, noting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the changes to many of the Council's ongoing projects.

After a short discussion, Cabinet:

- a) **Acknowledged** the performance achieved in relation to the Capital Programme schemes substantially completed in 2019/2020, summarised at Appendix A in the report.
- b) **Considered** the capital programme bids for new projects outlined in the report at Appendix B and determined to approve the new capital schemes.
- c) **Recommended** to Full Council the revised capital programme for the period 2020/2021 to 2025/2026, at Appendix C for the General Fund and at Appendix D for the Housing Revenue Account, to reflect the new scheme bids, amendments to the programme and the reprofiling of expenditure identified in the report.

12. Fees and Charges

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report from the Head of Finance, stating the fees set originally by the Council would remain the same, while noting an increase in litter fines and cost of a second green bin. Councillor Douglas de Lacey, Chair of the Council, hoped the Council would continue to recommend to residents with large gardens the benefits of home composting. Councillor Heather Williams said the residents in her Ward were not pleased with the cost of a second green bin and hoped this measure would not cause an increase in fly-tipping. Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licencing, confirmed there was no evidence of this within the district.

After a further debate, Councillor Bridget Smith, the Leader of the Council, concluded by thanking Officers involved in this report, and Cabinet:

- a) **Approved** the fees and charges as detailed in Appendix A of the report to take effect from 1 April 2021 (unless otherwise stated) or the earliest feasible date thereafter.
- b) **Noted** the proposed variations to fees and charges in comparison to the prevailing inflation rate detailed in paragraph 13 of the report.

13. Quarter Two Monitoring Report

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report from the Head of Finance, reviewing the Council's expenditure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Councillor Heather Williams referred to the Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating system relating to the underspend and overspends within the report, and updates to right to buy receipts, and sought reassurance from the Cabinet that there would not be a reduction in the planning team's budget. Councillor Bridget Smith, the Leader of the Council, commented that no further updates would be provided to the RAG ratings. Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, said that the Council Housing programme would meet the previously agreed targets. Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning said that all options would be taken into consideration.

Councillor Bridget Smith, concluded by thanking Officers involved in this report,

and Cabinet:

- a) **Acknowledged** the forecast 2020/21 revenue outturn position against the approved revenue budget shown in Appendix B, the projected major variances with reasons for these variances at Appendices C1 and C2 and the action being taken to address the underlying issues;
- b) **Acknowledged** the latest position on the 2020/21 Capital Programme.

**The Meeting ended at
11.19 a.m.**

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