

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Monday, 6 December 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of Council)

Councillors:	Bill Handley	Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience, Health and Wellbeing
	John Williams	Lead Cabinet Member for Finance

Officers in attendance in the Council Chamber for all or part of the meeting:

Aaron Clarke	Democratic Services Officer
Rory McKenna	Monitoring Officer
Peter Maddock	Head of Finance
Liz Watts	Chief Executive

Officers in attendance remotely for all or part of the meeting:

Anne Ainsworth	Chief Operating Officer
Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
Julie Fletcher	Head of Housing Strategy
Jonathan Malton	Cabinet Support Officer
Jeff Membery	Head of Transformation
Ian Senior	Scrutiny and Governance Adviser

Councillor Heather Williams was in attendance in the Council Chamber
Councillors Anna Bradnam, Grenville Chamberlain, Dr. Claire Daunton, Neil Gough (Deputy Leader), Dr. Tumi Hawkins (Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery), Peter McDonald (Lead Cabinet Member for Business Improvement and Skills) and Brian Milnes (Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licencing) were in attendance remotely.

1. Announcements

There were no announcements.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillors John Batchelor and Judith Rippeth sent apologies for absence.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Cabinet authorised the Leader to sign, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 19 October 2021.

5. Public Questions

Cabinet received two public questions ahead of the meeting. Both questioners attended virtually:

a) From Mr. Daniel Fulton

In the Cambridge Independent on 15 September, Cllr Tumi Hawkins, lead cabinet member for planning, stated that, "We are committed to work with Longstanton Parish Council and Northstowe Parish Council to investigate water levels across the local area."

As part of its investigations, has the district council actually obtained any data on groundwater levels in Northstowe or Longstanton after May of this year, for example from borehole BH144 or any of the other boreholes being regularly monitored by the developers?

If the district council has obtained any such data, why hasn't it been made available to planning officers and members of the public?

If the district council hasn't obtained any such data, why hasn't it done so?

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins responded:

The District Council does not have specific borehole data on groundwater levels. As part of the application for Northstowe Phases 3a and 3b, the applicant has supplied a technical report setting out the assessment of the impact of that development upon groundwater for consideration as part of the planning application. The Planning Service is, with consultee's reviewing that material.

Earlier in 2021, SCDC funded a study on behalf of Longstanton Parish Council investigating the issue of groundwater impacts upon the Kingfisher Pond. The final report from HRW Wallingford was submitted to the Parish Council in May 2021. The Council has prepared a draft action plan in consultation with the Parish Council that seeks to respond to the conclusions in that report. SCDC continues to engage with the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority on the issue of groundwater conditions at Northstowe.

The Leader invited Mr. Fulton to ask a supplementary question:

Mr. Fulton asked if the Lead Cabinet Member was being regularly updated by the Head of Service.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins responded that she regularly met with the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

b) From Dr. Kate Grant on behalf of Mrs. Jane Williams

In May 2020, the council voted to give all delegation powers for planning decisions to a single unaccountable, un-elected officer. You may recall that this

change was quite controversial and attracted vociferous opposition from councillors and from a number of parish councils and local activists. You may also recall that during the debate, the leader of the council, the lead cabinet member for planning, and other from the majority group repeatedly promised that this change was only temporary and that the delegation scheme would be comprehensively reconsidered in light of the findings of a report by the Planning Advisory Service.

The report has long since been published and forgotten, and yet the majority's undemocratic delegation scheme, which was promised to be "temporary", remains in place a year and a half later.

The council's leadership has promised time and time again that this will be a "modern and caring council" that operates in an open, honest, and democratic fashion, and yet the council keeps falling short of these goals.

What steps will the council's cabinet take to get the council back on track towards open, honest, democratic governance, and when will a truly democratic planning delegation scheme be put into place for the Parishioners of Waterbeach and residents of South Cambridge?

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins responded:

The Council remains committed to ensuring that the scheme of planning delegations provides good value for money to the residents and businesses of South Cambridgeshire, whilst at the same time ensuring that local voices are heard and recognised in planning decisions.

The Planning Advisory Service recommended, as part of its report, that the Council keep the scheme of delegations under review. A combined group of members and officers was therefore formed and have had discussions about what changes – if any – are needed to the current delegation arrangements to ensure they best serve our community. There is a wide range of views within the group about what arrangements might work best. An exercise is therefore currently underway to gather information from other planning authorities about the schemes of delegation used elsewhere and their respective merits. This information will inform further discussion within the group which will allow a recommendation to come forward in the new year.

The Leader invited Dr. Grant to ask a supplementary question:

Dr. Grant asked why minutes from the delegation meetings hadn't been published, and asked for an update on the Waterbeach new town east cycleway and footway delegation meeting.

Councillor. Dr. Tumi Hawkins responded that she would investigate why the minutes had not been published, and a further response regarding the cycleway delegation meeting would be shared in due course.

6. Issues arising from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

The Leader invited Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, to introduce the report, summarising the meeting held on Thursday, 11 November 2021, relating to the following agenda items:

- Empty Homes Strategy
- Investment Strategy

7. **Quarter Two Performance Report**

Cabinet received the Quarter Two Performance Report. Councillor Neil Gough, Deputy Leader, introduced the report, noting the Council's ongoing progress despite the continuing Coronavirus pandemic, including the improvements made at the Contact Centre, and the introduction of the 'golden number' and upgrades made during the telephony project. The Deputy Leader commented on the processing of complaints, and the performance against the Business Plan.

Councillor Heather Williams commented on the low number of responses from Council tenants, and formal complaints. The Head of Housing responded that a range of options was being investigated, and the Head of Transformation mentioned that further resources had been allocated to address the backlog.

The Leader closed the discussion, and Cabinet:

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

8. **Empty Homes Strategy**

Cabinet received the Empty Homes Strategy, Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council, introduced the draft policy and requested that the Head of Housing Strategy summarise the report. It was mentioned that the strategy would tackle the current issue of Empty Homes within the district, and be subject to public consultation.

The Leader invited the Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, to introduce the committee's comments. It was suggested that empty properties, that the Council had a financial interest in, could form part of the Council's Investment Strategy.

Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, thanked Officers for their work in drafting the report, and noted the number of empty homes within the district was very small in the context of the overall housing stock owned by the Council.

Councillor Neil Gough, the Deputy Leader, mentioned the strategy focus on the derelict housing that could cause anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Brian Milnes, Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licencing, supported the Deputy Leader's comments, and hoped the strategy would reduce the need for police attention.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery, commented that while empty homes were not widespread within the district, they could be a blight in the villages, and was looking forward to the comments from the public consultation.

Councillor Anna Bradnam suggested that one of the options to purchase the empty homes was through Shire Homes or Ermine Street Housing and questioned who would complete the valuation of the properties. The Head of Housing responded that this would be undertaken by the qualified surveyor.

Councillor Dr. Claire Daunton queried who would be consulted and suggested that Parish Councils should be made aware of the consultation. The Head of Housing Strategy said that consultation would be carried out among owners of empty properties, and that Parish Councils would be contacted when the consultation was published on the District Council's website.

The Leader closed the discussion, and Cabinet:

- a) **Approved** the Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2021 -2025, as set out at Appendix A, to go out to wider public consultation
- b) **Delegated** authority to the Lead Member for Housing to approve the final Strategy subject to minor amendments, if any, arising from the consultation.

9. Investment Strategy

Cabinet received the Investment Strategy, Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and commented on the updated strategy, including the regeneration projects being undertaken by the Council. Councillor John Williams also mentioned the updated figures for table 8.4.1 and 8.4.2, and noted these would be updated again before the report is published again in February 2022.

The Leader invited Councillor Grenville Chamberlain to introduce the comments from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. Attention was drawn to the committee's reservations about the conversion of underutilised office buildings into affordable homes.

Councillor John Williams responded that demand within the Greater Cambridge area for commercial buildings was still high, and there were no plans to convert office buildings into homes within the current strategy.

Councillor Anna Bradnam requested clarification as to whether the policy to convert office buildings into homes was still part of the Investment Strategy. The Head of Finance confirmed this had been removed.

Councillor Heather Williams asked if the figures in the published report relating to suitability would need to be updated ahead of the final Council decision.

The Head of Finance responded that the current report would need to be updated before the Council meeting in February 2022. The Leader of the Council also mentioned that any figures relating to sustainability within the district would be kept under review.

The Leader closed the discussion, and Cabinet:

Recommended to Full Council the updated Investment Strategy attached at Appendix A which includes a range of investment indicators to comply with the Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments and the governance arrangements that enable the Council to seek approval for priority investments in a timely manner in response to market conditions, subject to minor amendments by the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance.

10. **Capital Programme Update & New Bids**

Cabinet received the Capital Programme Update, Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report, and the new bids for the next financial year.

Councillor Heather Williams asked about the variances from the external funding. The Head of Finance commented that this formed part of the reprofiled Capital Programme, and it was relating to Cambridge City Council.

Councillor Anna Bradnam requested clarification when using the same acronym for both Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. The Head of Finance noted the comments.

The Leader closed the discussion, and Cabinet:

- a) **Acknowledged** the performance achieved in relation to the Capital Programme schemes substantially completed in 2020/2021, summarised at Appendix A in the report.
- b) **Considered** the capital programme bids for new projects outline at Appendix B and to determine whether to approve the new capital schemes.
- c) **Recommended** to Full Council the revised capital programme for the period 2021/2022 to 2026/2027, 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.

11. **Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring (Quarter 2)**

Cabinet received the 2021/2022 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring for Quarter Two, Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance,

introduced the report, and the Council's financial position for the previous three months.

The Leader closed the short discussion, and Cabinet:

- a) **Noted** the forecast 2021/22 revenue 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) **Noted** the latest Capital Programme 2021/22 position [and variances, if any] as shown in Appendix D.

12. **Bids and Savings**

Cabinet received the most recent General Fund Revenue Bids and Savings, Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and highlighted the investment in new Officer roles, along with the continued development of staff across the Council.

Councillor Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Community Resilience, Health and Wellbeing was pleased with the report, and supported the investment in the Council's Officers.

Councillor Heather Williams asked about the use of agency staff across the Council. The Head of Transformation responded that the new bids would reduce the reliance on temporary staff.

Councillor Anna Bradnam was pleased with the introduction of a money advice service but asked if this service was being offered to tenants living in Council properties. The Head of Housing confirmed the new service would be available to all residents within the district.

The Leader closed the discussion, and Cabinet:

- a) **Noted** the growth bids put forward (both one off and ongoing) and detailed at Appendix A and B and consider whether those for 2022/2023 should be included in the Budget to be proposed in February 2022.
- b) **Noted** the proposed range of service efficiency savings/policy options detailed in Appendix C and that these will undergo further refinement and consultation with stakeholders prior to forming part of the Budget Setting Report in February 2022.

13. **Fees and Charges**

Cabinet received the Proposed Fees and Charges for 2022/2023, Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report, noting the regulatory fees due to be introduced in April 2022.

The Leader closed the short discussion, and Cabinet:

- a) **Approved** the fees and charges as detailed in Appendix A of the report to take effect from 1 April 2022 (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 the report.

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