

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 20 October 2022 at 5.20 p.m.

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

Councillors:	Anna Bradnam	Libby Earle
	Sue Ellington	Peter Fane
	Helene Leeming	Dr John Loveluck
	Richard Stobart	Heather Williams

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Chamber - Suzy Brandes (Principal Accountant (General Fund & Projects)), Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser), Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Virtually - Peter Campbell (Head of Housing), Bode Esan (Head of Climate, Environment & Waste), Rory McKenna (Monitoring Officer) and Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services)

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

Councillor Sunita Hansraj (Scrutiny and Overview Committee member) attended remotely.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillors James Hobro and Sally Ann Hart (Scrutiny and Overview Committee members) and Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) sent apologies.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

By affirmation, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022.

As she had not been a Scrutiny and Overview Committee member at that time, Councillor Heather Williams did not take part in the affirmation.

5. Public Questions

Mr. Daniel Fulton had been due to make a public statement. Mr. Fulton was not present and was deemed to have withdrawn his request to make such a statement.

6. Fees and Charges

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee a draft of the report to be presented to the Cabinet on 14 November 2022 as part of its annual review of fees and charges and determination of those non-regulatory fees and charges for which the Council had discretion for the provision of services from April 2023.

Councillor Heather Williams drew Members' attention to the table entitled '2023-2024 Administration Charges Leasehold Housing' in Appendix A to the report. This appeared to show the fee for Deeds of Postponement increasing from £140 in the current year to at least £550 in 2023-24. The Principal Accountant acknowledged that this was an administrative error: the figure of £140 in fact related to a previous year and there was no anticipated increase in this charge for the next civic year. However, Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) undertook to provide a written answer should there be any further relevant information to impart.

In response to Councillor Anna Bradnam, Councillor John Williams and the Head of Housing explained who would and would not be expected to pay charges for Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Councillor Helene Leeming raised concerns about the potential funding gap in the Budget given that the current rate of inflation was about twice the overall increase of 5% in fees and charges. Members recognised though that the estimated income from such fees and charges amounted to less than 10% of the total Budget and that it was difficult to anticipate what underlying economic conditions might be during 2023-24.

While Councillor Sue Ellington accepted that Council costs in providing services were currently being covered by the proposed fees and charges sounded a note of caution in saying that the cost of providing an individual service in future might not be covered by a flat rate percentage increase.

Councillor Richard Stobart mentioned how an increase in fees might actually lead to decreased income by changing behaviour. Councillor John Williams responded but said that such a situation was not anticipated, especially where the charge formed a relatively small part of the overall project cost, such as in the case of planning application fees.

Councillor John Williams assured the Scrutiny and Overview Committee that South Cambridgeshire District Council's fees and charges had been benchmarked against those set by other local authorities. He pointed out though that no two Authorities were exactly the same or facing identical circumstances. He was satisfied that this Council's proposed fees and charges remained entirely reasonable.

The Head of Housing highlighted the fact that one of the charges not yet available related to council house rents. This was because central Government had yet to notify local authorities about the rent cap for 2023-24.

Following further discussion, including about community alarms, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **endorsed** the recommendation that Cabinet should

(a) Approve the fees and charges as detailed in Appendix A of the report to take effect from 1 April 2023 (unless otherwise stated) or the earliest feasible date thereafter, and

(b) Note the proposed variations to fees and charges in comparison to the prevailing inflation rate detailed in the report,

subject to the comments from Committee members summarised above.

7. Work Programme

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

8. To Note the Date of the next meeting

Members noted that the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 6.11 p.m.
