

Report to: Cabinet 6 February 2023

Lead Cabinet Members: All

From: Councillor Stephen Drew, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Councillor Graham Cone, Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Update from Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Purpose

1. This report is to inform Cabinet about relevant discussion among members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at their meetings on 15 December 2022, 12 January 2023, and 19 January 2023, and the Committee's recommendations at paragraphs 3, 5, 7, 9 and 12.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting – 15 December 2022

General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

2. The Committee
 - a. notes that the MTFS will have been updated since December 2022 given the current uncertain economic climate. It also notes the assumption made that South Cambridgeshire District Council will borrow funds at the rate of 5%.
 - b. is anxious that sufficient funds should remain available to the Council at short notice should such funds be needed.
 - c. notes that the scenarios set out in the report are those deemed most likely to affect the Council but that any risks identified will immediately be brought to the attention of the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources and Cabinet as a whole.
 - d. Is satisfied that the MTFS is on the Corporate Risk Register, which is regularly monitored by Leadership Team and reported every six months to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

Recommendation

3. **Subject to** the comments in paragraph 2 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **notes and supports** submission of the MTFS to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting – 12 January 2023

Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Development Strategy Update (Regulation 18 Preferred Options)

4. Members of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC) were specifically invited to this meeting. Comments made were as follows

Water

- a. Scrutiny and Overview Committee members expressed concern about the challenge of water supply and consequent impacts on the chalk aquifer.
- b. Discussion took place regarding the issues set out in the Development Strategy Update regarding the sequencing and timing of development in relation to water infrastructure, and the connected issue of realistic rates of housing delivery in the period following provision of water supply infrastructure.
- c. CEAC members
 - i. Emphasised the importance of the two Councils' (South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council) independent water cycle study exploring all relevant issues in full.
 - ii. Expressed a desire to use all policy levers possible to influence high water efficiency, and carbon, standards in new development.
 - iii. Expressed a desire for government to support accelerated delivery of water supply infrastructure.
- d. Comments from Members not on either committee included concern that the Councils might be obliged by water constraints to refuse preferred strategic scale sites but might not have the ability to refuse smaller scale development.

Jobs

- a. Discussion took place regarding the robustness of the employment forecasts in relation to the level of scrutiny council officers had had regarding the assumptions; specific queries about the forecasting model and methodology; the forecasts' statistical basis; commuting patterns; and comparison of the employment forecasts with those for other comparable locations such as Oxford.
- b. Comments from Scrutiny and Overview Committee members included:

- i. Concern regarding the impact of proposed national policy changes on the appropriateness of identifying updated needs at this point
- ii. Question regarding what could be done to encourage the mid-tech sector in Greater Cambridge. Officers confirmed that this was an issue being explored through the plan

Development Strategy

- a. Comments from Scrutiny and Overview Committee members included:
 - i. Reassurance was needed that in considering sustainability impacts to identify a development strategy, that the environment will be given priority in relation to the three elements (economic, environmental, and social) – all are dependent on water resources.
 - ii. Consideration was needed of the likely impacts of not delivering enough homes to support the expected jobs growth.
 - iii. Officers should provide a written definition of ‘gentle density’, in relation to Government references to this approach in its proposed revisions to national policy.
 - iv. Discussion of the rationale for considering whether exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release exist at land south of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, and the potential benefits of providing a better range of uses within the site. Desire for a new Cambridge Biomedical Campus masterplan to be prepared to improve amenity and effective functioning of the site.
- b. Councillor Pippa Heylings, on behalf of the Climate and Environment Committee (CEAC):
 - i. Supported the climate-focused development strategy principles set out in the First Proposals and sought confirmation that the councils would use these when considering additional sites, rather than following the housing delivery study’s conclusions that a change towards a more dispersed spatial strategy could support higher annual housing delivery rates if that was the councils’ priority, which she said would be unacceptable from a climate perspective.
 - ii. said that CEAC would like to be involved in confirming the definition of unacceptable environmental harm referenced at paragraph 3.13 of the Development Strategy Update.
- c. Comments from Members not on either committee included:

- i. Concern about the risks to the Councils' 5-year housing land supply of identifying a high objectively assessed need that may not be deliverable. Discussion followed regarding the proposal to manage this risk through the production of a stepped housing target as set out at 3.20 of the Development Strategy Update.
- ii. asked whether conversations were being held with neighbouring districts about potentially meeting some of Greater Cambridge's identified development needs.

Housing and infrastructure

- a. Comments were made on the priority of delivering infrastructure ahead of or alongside homes, including for electricity, transport, healthcare, schools, green space, and community facilities including faith provision, alongside policy compliant affordable housing levels.
- b. Comments from CEAC members included:
 - i. Concern about the impact of proposed national changes to infrastructure funding mechanisms on infrastructure and affordable housing delivery.
 - ii. Concern about the ability of the councils to support delivery of a diverse range of housing types in the current economic climate.

Recommendation

5. **Subject to** the comments in paragraph 4 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **notes and supports** submission of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting – 19 January 2023

Business Plan Action Plan (2023-24 Revision)

6. Arising from a thorough investigation of the issues in the report, the Committee
 - a. Suggests that the next iteration of the Business Plan should provide better context so as to better explain the significance of figures stated, such as new council homes to be built, in relation to the current position.
 - b. Asks Cabinet to clarify 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 Housing Authority to building homes for refugees above and beyond the planned annual target figure.

- c. Urges the Cabinet to maximise its efforts in installing double glazing and solar panels at existing council homes as well as at sheltered accommodation and community rooms.
- d. Asks that better information be posted to the Council's website to help parish and town councils to better understand the support available to them in providing electric vehicle charging points in their areas.
- e. Supports an ambition, as a headline objective, encouraging residents to reduce total waste/material generated (in addition to the residual waste reduction and increased recycling objectives) , and officers are asked to develop this objective looking at best practise and consideration to a realistic target that could be attributed to behavioural change interventions that the Council undertakes.
- f. Requests Cabinet to take urgent action to protect the viability of the mobile wardens scheme in South Cambridgeshire in the light of significantly increased costs.
- g. Asks Cabinet to consider supporting fledgling High Streets in Cambourne and Northstowe alongside established ones elsewhere in the District seeking to recover from the Covid 19 pandemic and cope with the cost-of-living crisis.
- h. Urges Cabinet to make sure that the Council continued to offer residents an ever-improving array of ways in which to contact it, including by telephone.
- i. Emphasises the importance of monitoring the four-day-week trial, including where officers continue to work five days a week.

Recommendation

- 7. **Subject to** the comments in paragraph 6 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **notes and supports** submission of the Business Plan to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

Draft Budget 2023/24

- 8. Arising from a thorough investigation of the issues in the report, the Committee
 - a. Notes the negative impact of diminishing Section 106 income and strategic site budgets and urged Cabinet to view this as a significant risk for the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.
 - b. Asks Cabinet to reassess the Council's approach to providing self-build plots to ensure viability and to encourage an increased take up.

- c. Recommends that there be greater clarity as to the nature and extent of recharges paid by shared services.
- d. Supports the aim of developing an arts and culture policy, and requests that Section 106 monies received in respect of arts and culture, but not yet spent, should be retained.
- e. Notes that potential budgetary implications as a result of the introduction of Voter I.D. should be negated by central Government covering the cost in full but suggests that the matter be kept under review.
- f. Requests that Cabinet investigates ways of helping parish and town councils to continue providing street lighting for which they are responsible in the face of ignorantly increased costs.

Recommendation

- 9. **Subject to** the comments in paragraph 8 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **notes and supports** submission of the Budget to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

Conservative Group Budget Proposal for 2023/2024

- 10. Councillor Aiden Van de Weyer said that the *South Cambs Magazine* was one way of raising fraud awareness.
- 11. Councillor James Hobro said that freezing Council Tax represented a real-terms cut in revenue for the Council, which might impact on service provision.

Recommendation

- 12. **Subject to** the comments in paragraphs 10 and 11 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **notes and supports** submission of the Conservative Group Budget Proposal for 2023-24 to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

Report Author:

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