

Agenda Item No. 7 – Council’s Business Plan and Budget Proposals 2021-22 to 2025-26 – Liberal Democrats Amendment

Proposals:

This year has been an extraordinary year both for this Council and for the residents of Cambridgeshire.

When the Council set its budget last year, no-one could have predicted just how significantly the virus which had arrived here in January would affect our lives. A year on, while we know that Covid-19 has had a catastrophic impact for the last twelve months, we cannot tell what the impact of this combined with Brexit will be for the coming year, or what the scale of the ongoing damage to our local economy will be.

In a state of extreme national and local uncertainty, with more uncertainty to come, this Council must set a budget which is prudent, but which also allows us to build back stronger and better in the coming years.

Our priorities for this Council are therefore focused on four key issues.

Communities

Over the last year, residents across Cambridgeshire have come together in amazing acts of mutual support. Council staff and many councillors have been among those at the forefront of these activities, many of which have been publicly recognised through the Chairman’s Commendation Scheme.

Communities have been hard hit and placed under pressure, at a time when they have already experienced Conservative cuts to children’s centres, and the long slow decline of youth services and public transport. The pandemic has added pressure for parents home-schooling their children, with young people and many adults experiencing anxiety and poor mental health.

This Council needs to use its budget to help local people rebuild and strengthen their local communities, in a way that increases fairness and equality of opportunity across our county. That is why we propose to invest £600,000 this coming year, £1.2M the following year, and £2M in subsequent years, in universal community support services across the county, working with partner councils to increase this provision where we can. This new community support will be based in libraries, children’s centres and other local facilities and will work with existing local groups and organisations to help our communities build back better. Regular local youth centres, where young people know they can drop in and talk to an adult they know, who is not from their school or their family, have been shown to have a beneficial impact on young people’s mental health. Such support is also of great value to vulnerable adults, which is why this new additional help will be there for the whole community.

Jobs

Small and medium sized businesses in Cambridgeshire have been hit hard by the double whammy of the pandemic and Brexit. The impact on jobs and training places for young people has been disproportionate.

South Cambridgeshire District Council has shown just how effective business support can be, and how crucial it is in the current nightmare environment for many small and medium enterprises.

To ensure that the Council is ready to play its part in a strong - and green - economic recovery, this proposal seeks to establish a programme of work which will ensure that Cambridgeshire is well placed to take advantage of the £3bn green investment package promised by Government; target support to those small and medium enterprises which are focused on sustainability and green recovery; invest in green jobs and particularly green apprenticeships; encourage a more diverse, local and sustainable supply base, making it easier for new entrants such as small businesses and voluntary, charitable and social enterprises to compete and win public contracts; and identify and support the businesses, projects and people who are invested in a long term, green and sustainable recovery.

That is why we propose to invest £200,000 this coming year, and £400,000 in the following and subsequent years to coordinate support for small businesses, in particular focusing on coordinating work between businesses and FE colleges to increase the number of apprenticeships available to young people in the area. This investment will establish and resource a programme which links commercial, procurement, recovery, and green initiatives, working closely with the Combined Authority, district councils, and partners across the system.

Climate change

The pandemic must not mean that we slow our commitment to dealing with the climate crisis. 2020 was one of the hottest years on record, and the three hottest years on record have all been in the past five years. Fires and temperatures of over 35 degrees in the Arctic demonstrate that combatting climate change is more urgent than ever. Closer to home, flooding and extreme weather has taken its toll on our own communities.

The council has already made commitments to tackling the climate emergency, supporting schools and other organisations to make the transition to cleaner heating. We need to expand that work and increase its pace, backing more projects such as the one in Swaffham Prior, so that more communities are able to invest in a green future.

We need to contribute to the aim of doubling nature and increasing biodiversity, as well as addressing the carbon emissions from Cambridgeshire's peatlands and the potential to turn this carbon source into a powerful carbon sink.

That is why we propose to invest a further £400,000 this coming year, and £800,000 in subsequent years in green energy for schools and other public buildings; and a further £200,000 this coming year, and £400,000 in subsequent years, to work with the Council's County Parks teams and with tenants of the County Farms estate to identify areas of land which could contribute to this ambition.

Highways

Across Cambridgeshire residents are frustrated and angry at the state of local roads, drains, and gullies, with dangerous potholes which reappear only weeks after they have been filled, and blocked gullies leading to damage to homes and commercial premises. The Conservative administration has proved utterly incapable of keeping roads, pavements, cycleways, and verges in a reasonable state. We will make the maximum possible investment now and look to radical reform under a Liberal Democrat-led or influenced administration in future years.

We also continue to believe that young people need safer travel to school, and to be empowered to make their own decisions about better road safety, and healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.

That is why we propose to invest an additional £5M a year for two years, then £500,000 in year three, and £400,000 for the final two years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, to

improve the condition of our roads, pavements, and cycleways, and ensure local drains are kept clear; and £40,000 in each of the coming five years to expand the Junior Travel Ambassadors scheme, demand for which has outstripped the funds available.

Finally

The Liberal Democrats have consistently objected to the level of waste and duplication in this Council, especially now that the Mayor's Combined Authority has taken over so much of the Council's role. Conservatives both in Westminster and on this Council are cutting services for some of our most vulnerable citizens, while at the same time wasting money on excessive committees and unjustifiable roles. A huge number of Conservative councillors receive substantial special allowances.

The Council must work harder and more efficiently for its residents. That's why we would save £105,000 each year by cutting spending on Councillor SRAs.

Our alternative budget reduces waste and duplication, while investing in the key priorities of highway safety, active travel, community and business support, and investment to tackle the climate emergency.

Our budget amendment this year balances the need to invest in the recovery of our communities after the devastation of the pandemic, Brexit, and years of Conservative cuts, with the recognition that family incomes are also under pressure. Our proposals would mean a two person household in a Band D property (i.e. above average house value) would face an increase in Council Tax of 39p a week more than the existing proposals. Single person households, students and those on benefits would pay half or less than half of that. At a time when the vulnerable have suffered most, we must make sure our communities get the support they need to rebuild.

AMENDMENT

Proposed by Councillor Nethsingha, Seconded by Councillor Dupré

Delete recommendations 2a, 2b and 2c:

~~2. Receives the following recommendations to Council:~~

- ~~a) That approval is given to the Service/Directorate budget allocations as set out in each Service/Directorate table in Section 3 of the Business Plan.~~
- ~~b) That consideration is given to a total county budget requirement and precept level~~
- ~~c) That consideration is given to a Council Tax increase for each Band of property, based on the number of "Band D" equivalent properties notified to the County Council by the District Councils as set out in Section 2, Table 6.4 of the Business Plan~~

Replace recommendations 2a, 2b and 2c as follows:

- 2a Approve the Service/Directorate budget allocations as set out in each Service/Directorate table in Section 3 of the Business Plan, to be balanced and amended with the following adjustments:**

<i>Revised budget gap as proposed £000</i>		2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
		9,612	17,637	12,884	13,638	10,611
Permanent change by year £000		2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
b	Community Support Hubs	600	600	800	-	-
c	Green apprenticeships and support for businesses	200	200	-	-	-
d	Junior Travel Ambassadors	40	-	-	-	-
e	Green Investment (capital impact on revenue)	4	20	34	34	33
f	Road improvement and enhancement (capital impact on revenue)	45	213	170	16	12
g	Increasing biodiversity (capital impact on revenue)	2	10	17	17	16
h	Reduction in Councillors' Special Responsibility Allowances	-105				
Revised budget gap after investments and savings		10,398	18,680	13,905	13,705	10,672
<i>Financing adjustments</i>						
i	Application of remaining MRP policy review benefit	-4,115	590	565	542	529
j	Revise Council tax policy to +1.99% general and +1.5% ASC precept	-4,569	-278	-150	-174	-184
k	Revise 2022-23 Council tax policy to +1.99% general and +1.5% ASC precept	-	-4,788	-317	-153	-185
l	Revise 2023-26 Council tax policy to +1.99% general and +1.0% ASC precept	-	-	-3,332	-3,711	-3,976
m	Application of transformation funding to address remaining budget gap	-1,714	1,714	-	-	-

Revised budget gap after financing adjustments	0	15,918	10,671	10,209	6,856
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- 2n Approve a total county budget requirement in respect of general expenses applicable to the whole County area of £890,039,000 as set out in Section 2 Table 6.1 of the Business Plan, including a levy of £9,246,000 payable to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the delivery of Transport Services and a levy of £433,000 payable to the Environment Agency for flood and coastal schemes.
- 2o Approve a recommended County Precept for Council Tax from District Councils of £325,392,497.92, as set out in Section 2, Table 6.3 of the Business Plan (to be received in ten equal instalments in accordance with the fall-back provisions of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1995).
- 2p Approve a Council Tax for each Band of property, based on the number of “Band D” equivalent properties notified to the County Council by the District Councils (231,331.0), as set out in Section 2, Table 6.4 of the Business Plan reflecting a 1.5% ASC precept increase and a 1.99% increase in the Basic Council Tax precept:

Band	Ratio	Amount (£)
A	6/9	937.74
B	7/9	1,094.03
C	8/9	1,250.32
D	9/9	1,406.61
E	11/9	1,719.19
F	13/9	2,031.77
G	15/9	2,344.35
H	18/9	2,813.22

3. Amend recommendation 3 and Increase the current capital programme by the addition of the following items

- Invest a total of £11.3m in Roads, Pavements and Cycleways; £5m per year in 2021-22 and 2022-23, £0.5m in 2023-24 and £0.4m in 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- Invest grant funding, in addition, into Cambridgeshire’s highways, pursuant to allocations and conditions awaited from government.
- Invest £0.2m in biodiversity projects in 2021-22 and £0.4m per year from 2022-23 to 2025-26
- Invest £0.4m in green energy for schools and other organisations in 2021-22 and £0.8m per year from 2022-23 to 2025-26