

STRATEGY, RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: 31st October 2024

Time: 10.00a.m. to 1.50p.m.

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Ambrose Smith, Batchelor (substituting for Councillor Whelan), Boden, Costello (substituting for Councillor Corney), Count, Dupré, Goldsack, Howitt, McDonald, Meschini (Vice-Chair), Murphy, Sanderson, Slatter (substituting for Councillor Nethsingha) and Wilson

216. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Corney, Nethsingha, Sharp and Whelan. There were no declarations of interest.

217. Minutes – 9th July 2024 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2024 were agreed unanimously as a correct record and signed by the Chair, and the Action Log was noted.

218. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

219. Integrated Finance Monitoring Report for Period 5 2024-25

The Committee was informed that there was a forecast overspend of £9.6m in the revenue budget primarily due to pressures in looked after children placement costs, home to school transport, waste disposal costs, and delays in income generation from renewable energy schemes and investments. Some of this pressure was off set in lower than expected spend in Adult Social Care and additional funding from grants and business rates. There was also a cumulative £50m plus deficit projected in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets particularly in relation to high needs spend, and the council was continuing to work with government on the safety valve intervention programme. It was noted that a balanced financial position was forecast for the Capital Programme. Members attention was then drawn to the recommendations.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- queried whether the Government's budget presented on 30 October had impacted on the DSG budgets. It was noted that officers were still analysing the implications of the Chancellor's budget statement and would provide Members with a briefing in November, and following the local government settlement in December. **Action Required.**

- highlighted continued concerns about the limited time available for submitting amendments to recommendations. The Vice-Chair noted the comments raised and reported that she would try and identify a solution. **Action Required.**
- expressed concern that repeated actions to reduce the risk of debt write offs did not appear to stop them happening again. The Chair of Adults and Health Committee reported that officers were working intensively to reduce such risks which was having an effect, as well as balancing debt recovery against fairness and sensitivity. He highlighted the importance of being open about the difficult financial position facing the council.

It was resolved unanimously:

- a) To note changes in capital grants and contributions, and to agree capital budget changes including funding from prudential borrowing where appropriate, as set out in section 4.5.1 of annex A;
- b) To delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee, to draw-down up to £1.6m from earmarked reserves to cover the legal costs and preparation of the case relating to the guided busway prosecution;
- c) To draw-down up to £674k for temporary posts and capacity in the Human Resources service and Policy, Insight and Change service to support the delivery of the council's Change Strategy contingent upon the Change Strategy being approved by the committee which was being considered as another item on the agenda;
- d) To authorise draw-down of £400k from the Public Health grant reserve to support the mitigation of risks if Drug and Alcohol Grants end in March 2025; and
- e) To authorise the write-offs of three customer accounts totalling £165k following the exhaustion of recovery actions, as set out in sections 5.3.6 and 5.3.7 of annex A.

220. Waterbeach Train Station Relocation – Funding Agreement

The Committee was informed of the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) project to relocate Waterbeach Station to serve the Waterbeach New Town. Planning conditions meant that none of the 4,500 homes on the western section of the new town could be occupied before the station was complete and open for use. The cost of the project was £43.3m with £20m from the GCP City Deal budget, and £23.35m from developer contributions. In the meantime, Homes England had agreed to forward grant fund the delivery of the station and associated construction haul road, which would be repaid by the developers of the new town. It was proposed that the County Council, as the accountable body for the GCP, enter into a long term funding agreement with Homes England, which would extend beyond the life of the GCP, to receive the grant funding. Attention was drawn to the procurement process and the need to retain the project to the agreed budget. It was noted that any overspend against the proposed budget would sit with the GCP.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- queried why the project was double the cost of the new station at Soham. Members were informed that the current estimates had been evaluated by GCP rail specialists and checked by Homes England. It was also noted that £6m would be used to fund the construction of the haul road and £5m to cover future risks.
- questioned whether there would be a change to timetabling. Information on how many trains currently stopped at Waterbeach and Cambridge North every hour, particularly during peak times, was also requested. It was important to identify trains which could stop at the stations in the future, as this project would increase usage for trains currently at capacity. The GCP's Assistant Director, Strategy and Programme agreed to provide a written response. **Action Required.**
- queried the difference between a repayable grant and a loan. It was noted that Homes England terminology used in the funding agreement had been adopted, which would negate the need for the Council and the GCP, in cash terms, to borrow. It was noted that Homes England would take the indexation from the developer contributions.
- confirmed that Homes England would carry all the risk in relation to receiving funding from the developer.
- welcomed the project and the positive steps to remove the Council from all risks. However, concern was expressed about the amount of funding needed to make any changes to the rail network. There was also concern that the capacity of the rail network sometimes made it impossible to deliver the original aims of a project.
- highlighted the need for better integration between buses and train stations, and for car parking at stations such as Waterbeach in order to serve a number of rural villages.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- (a) Approve, for the County Council's part, to receive funding from Homes England by way of repayable grant of up to £23.35m to forward fund the delivery of the station and haul road, with repayment by the developers of the Waterbeach New Town;
- (b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to agree the final terms and execute documents to enable this funding approach; and
- (c) Note that the total budget, which would be agreed formally by the Greater Cambridge Partnership Executive Board, would now total £43.35m, with £20m from the Greater Cambridge City Deal.

221. Business Planning and Budget setting 2025-26 – 2029-30

The Committee considered a report on business planning and budget setting which formed part of a suite of reports for next year and the next five years. Attention was drawn to the current financial position showing a budget gap of £23.5m for 2025-26, projected at full Council in February, which had grown to just under £40m, as well as large gaps for future years. The Council would be analysing the outcome of the Chancellor's budget, and the local government finance settlement when announced, particularly in relation to need and deprivation. Members were advised of local and national pressures set out in the table at section 3.5, and were reminded that the reserves position would be presented in the Section 151 officer's report. The business plan timetable was set out in section 4 of the report culminating in consideration by full Council on 11 February 2025. Engagement would take place from 4 November to 2 December 2024 and consultation from 9 December 2024 to 9 January 2025.

Councillor Count moved an amendment, seconded by Councillor Goldsack, to add the following wording at the end of recommendation b):

"...with the inclusion of an additional new question to the business planning engagement questions on page 121 of the agenda pack, as follows -

- 6) Would you support a revised business plan proposal, that requires no increase in Council Tax 0%?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure;...."

He highlighted the need for an honest consultation which gave residents a voice and the option to identify a preference at either end of the Council Tax increase spectrum. In response, Members highlighted that the current question explained the reasons for what an increase of up to 4.99% meant whilst the consequences of the question set out in the amendment were not clear, which was misleading. The mover of the amendment drew attention to the reference for a "revised business plan proposal", to reflect the fact there would be changes. Another Member highlighted the impact of the Chancellor's budget on small businesses and the affordability of an increase of 4.99% in Council Tax, it was therefore important to give the public an alternative. On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

One Member suggested that this meeting should have been delayed by a few weeks to allow for consideration of the Chancellor's budget. Attention was also drawn to the 2% efficiency savings being imposed by the government and the impact on local government. The Chair reported that the meeting had been rearranged to avoid the Local Government Association Conference which itself had been rearranged to avoid the general election. The Chief Executive added that it was not clear at this point how the 2% target allocated to government spending departments would impact on local government but the impact would be reflected in reports to the next meeting.

Another Member queried whether the engagement questions should ask for the responder's gender or services they experience. It was noted that the profile questions

had been kept succinct as the Council already had the Quality of Life Survey data. The Chief Executive added that the questions had been designed in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy, observed the requirements in the Gunning Principles, and had been approved by the Monitoring Officer.

It was resolved to:

- a) Approve the process and timelines for setting the Business Plan and Budget 2025-26 to 2029-30;
- b) Approve the plans for engagement and consultation with residents and key stakeholders; and
- c) Delegate any amendments requested by the committee to the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, and Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee.

222. Quality of Life Survey Results 2024

The Committee received the results of the Quality of Life Survey for 2024 which provided an insight into the experiences of residents across Cambridgeshire, as part of the Council's commitment to be an evidence-led organisation. This second Quality of Life Survey had been conducted in partnership with the Combined Authority, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge Ahead. Attention was drawn to the key findings which showed overall a high level of satisfaction across a range of quality of life metrics including happiness. However, some residents such as young people had scored lower than average. The information from the survey would provide evidence to support the Council's business planning process and the delivery of the Change Strategy.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- highlighted the importance of this annual report, which had informed last year the provision of funding into improving crisis support and assisting voluntary organisations to help support people with mental health issues. It was acknowledged that there was still a mental health crisis for young people. Another Member reminded Members of their responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the need to avoid any reduction in financial support.
- expressed concern that half of respondents were having to cut back on heating and a quarter were having to cut back on nutritious food, which reinforced the importance of the Council's anti-poverty actions. The increasing concerns about climate change were also a strong endorsement of the Council's actions in this area.
- acknowledged that some services were not universal which meant they did not necessarily receive a rating so it was important to consider last year's results and user satisfaction surveys.

- acknowledged that there were no easy answers to the problem of loneliness which had increased and remained higher than the national average. It was hoped that integrating neighbourhood care closer to communities would assist.
- expressed concern that the results of last year's survey relating to roads and pavements had not been actioned. This year's survey again showed all services receiving a satisfaction score of over 50% except road and pavement maintenance. It was noted that parts of East Cambridgeshire had been without an active Local Highway Officer (LHO) for 18 months, and a Local Member highlighted a recent issue in his Division and queried whether the roads and pavements had been maintained in his area.
- acknowledged that loneliness was indeed a challenge but the inability of residents in rural communities to go out due to trip hazards presented by paths did not help. Another Member commented that there were more than 20 programmes in the Capital Programme for footway resurfacing in South Cambridgeshire. It was noted that for the first time paths and roads were being scanned and reported publicly.
- highlighted the fact that the Council had choices it could make in relation to funding but the only way improvements to roads and pavements could be delivered was if Council Tax was increased to the maximum. There was also no mention of this area in press releases issued on the survey by the Council. The Vice-Chair highlighted the recent amount of investment in Highways which exceeded what had taken place in the last 15 years.
- suggested that there should be a re-evaluation of priorities following the survey. It was noted that the highest dissatisfaction in relation to highways was in Fenland, which was twice as high compared to Cambridge City because of the way funding had been allocated. Concern about the highway issues in Fenland was highlighted by a Local Member, which was creating significant anger in the District.
- highlighted the importance of the "golden thread" from the results of the survey to what could be done rather than just looking at ups and downs each year. This could involve working with partners or doing things differently but there were some things which were difficult to address and might involve continued representations to government. This needed to be considered against a backdrop of years of neglect and very expensive infrastructure particularly in relation to Fen roads. The Council had spent a significant amount on highways which was beginning to have an effect but it needed a fairer funding settlement to make a significant impact.
- queried whether the survey was representative. The Chief Executive explained that the survey had involved 5,500 direct interviews with 1,100 people in each of the five districts. It was statistically significant, undertaken by an independent market research company experienced in this area and did not involve interviewing the same people each year. There were 1,200 responses in addition following the publication of the survey on the Council's website.

It was resolved to unanimously to note the key findings from the 2024 Quality of Life Survey and consider the implications of these findings for the council's Strategic Framework ambitions and Business Plan and Budget setting process.

223. Strategic Framework - Update

The Committee considered an updated version of the Strategic Framework to include insights from the 2024 Quality of Life Survey and further progress the Council had made toward its seven ambitions.

One Member drew attention to the Chief Executive's Forward and the phrase "Everything we do as a council and the services we provide or commission from other bodies is of huge importance to all the people across Cambridgeshire". It was felt this phrase was unhelpful in prioritising what mattered to people and what they needed, as the majority of people did not feel services were important if they did not affect them directly. It was suggested that the Council needed to reprioritise what was important to the public such as roads and pavements rather than what it thought was best for them.

In response, there was concern about generalising that a service did not matter to people who did not use it. However, it was important to talk in terms which people could relate to by detailing everyday experiences. It was acknowledged that people did not necessarily understand the importance of Adult and Children's Social Care if they or their family was not directly receiving this service.

Another Member welcomed continuing aspirations for change set out in the Framework, but acknowledged that there was more work to be done.

It was resolved to:

- a) Approve the newly updated Strategic Framework 2023-28 (Appendix 1); and
- b) Delegate any amendments to the Strategic Framework, approved by the committee, to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee.

224. Our Future Council – Change Strategy

The Chief Executive introduced 'Our Future Council' which was a strategy fundamentally important for the development of the organisation as a whole. This strategy complemented the Strategic Framework, as it highlighted the need to reform and evolve many services and the way the Council operated. It was noted that the process of change had evolved over a number of years, and particularly following the decoupling of services from Peterborough City Council to focus primarily on Cambridgeshire. A change strategy was proposed rather than a transformation one, as transformation was generally used to disguise cuts to services and rarely happened without some form of change. Attention was drawn to the significant programmes and projects of cross-cutting and council-wide change set out in section 3.7 of the report. Progress of the strategy including the delivery of all the major change programmes would be reported to the committee on a regular basis.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- highlighted the need for culture change, as part of the Change Strategy.

- welcomed the outside in perspective by taking into account the needs of residents but queried how the experience of residents could be tested and considered against internal pressures. It was noted that this information would be addressed by the Customer Engagement Programme, and there were opportunities to build on existing information such as the Quality of Life Survey. However, the Council also needed to carry out real time satisfaction surveys using technology and other forms, as well as test the redesign of services with groups of residents across Cambridgeshire via a user panel.
- highlighted the need to take digital exclusion into account when changing how people accessed services. It was noted that officers working on the Digital, Data and Technology Change Programme had been informed of the need for a digital by design approach to include everyone not simply the users of technology; this might involve face to face contact and telephony. The Council also had an equalities duty which included undertaking equality impact assessments when making changes to services. Members were reminded of the work currently taking place to improve digital literacy across the county, and the location of officers in venues in communities, which would be developed to provide a more joined up service with District Council partners.
- expressed concern that reports to committees were introduced in the name of officers rather than Members, as it was felt this was a failure to take ownership and responsibility for policies. However, the Chief Executive's decision to take ownership of this report was welcomed as it was about delivery. The Chief Executive reminded Members that under a committee system, elected members did not have executive decision making powers and that decisions were made by cross-party committees, upon receipt of professional and technical reports from council officers. He also confirmed that he had discussed the development of the strategy with the members of the Joint Administration. Another Member highlighted the need for a requirement for Executive Directors to consult Chairs and Vice-Chairs about any major proposals in their area.
- highlighted the costs involved in decoupling from Peterborough City Council which has been passed to residents.
- welcomed the principles for change set out in the report and an outcome driven approach. However, the programme area relating to "Commissioning and Commercial" needed to take into account the aspiration for a more mixed economy with a more developed relationship with the voluntary and community sector.

It was resolved:

- a) Approve the 'Our Future Council' change strategy (Appendix 1); and
- b) Delegate any amendments to this strategy, approved at the committee, to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee.

225. Engagement and Consultation Strategy Refresh

The Committee considered a refreshed Engagement and Consultation Strategy which aimed to clarify the approach the Council would take to engagement and consultation. Understanding the perspective of residents underpinned the Council's commitment to be closer to its communities as set out in the Strategic Framework. Attention was drawn to the key objectives, which had informed the review of the strategy. This new strategy was aligned to organisational processes to ensure effective, transparent, and legally compliant engagement and consultation activities. Members were advised of the next steps to deliver the strategy set out in section 3.2 of the report. It was noted that the Consultation Guidance document for officers had been refreshed and a further review of the strategy would take place in 2025 with a focus on engagement activity.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- highlighted the need for examples to indicate the scale of consultation expected, and how many people were required to object to a proposal before it was not pursued. It was noted that the purpose of the survey would determine the size of the statistical sample. The Advisory Panel would also advise officers on such issues. Members were reminded that engagement and consultation was used to inform decision making.
- highlighted the need for examples when it might not be appropriate for Councillors to be involved. Officers agreed to provide examples in the future on a case by case basis. This prompted concern from another Member about the abstract nature of the strategy. One Member advised officers to avoid underestimating the ability of Members to crystallise feedback and get quality input from residents. Another Member drew attention to the importance of surveys conducted by Local Members with the assistance of officers.
- questioned the value of consultation, which often attracted very low response rates, as many people did not believe authorities would take their views into account. There was also consultation fatigue particularly in the south of the county. It was therefore suggested that the Council should just comply with the legal minimum particularly when there was no procedural legitimate expectation that a decision could lead to judicial review.
- highlighted the need for clarity in relation to who conducted consultations on behalf of the Council, as often this needed to be carried out by a professional organisation in this field.
- highlighted the lack of self-analysis in the report identifying where the Council could improve.
- suggested the need to consider how consultation could be conducted in relation to commercial bidding processes. The Chair confirmed that such processes would not be covered by the strategy.

It was resolved to:

- a) Approve this Engagement and Consultation Strategy; and
- b) Delegate any further amendments to the strategy, agreed by the committee, to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee.

226. Performance Management Framework Refresh

Members were reminded that the refreshed Performance Management Framework had been deferred from the last meeting to review page 4 in relation to risk mitigation, to bring it in line with the Council's Risk Management Policy, which was about managing and not mitigating risk. This refreshed framework would update the Council's approach to performance at both Directorate level, as well as realigning policy and service committees to report and scrutinise performance at a more strategic level. This work had been informed by best practice produced by the Local Government Association and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and would also enable the Council to work alongside the Office for Local Government. The Committee would be presented quarterly with an organisational-wide balanced scorecard, and there would also be an annual performance report which would be published. It was noted that the Committee would not receive the current key performance indicators going forward if the Framework was approved.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the refreshed Performance Management Framework; and
- b) Delegate any further amendments to the Performance Management Framework, agreed by the committee, to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee.

227. Corporate Performance Report

The Committee received an update on the performance monitoring information for the 2024/25 quarter 1 period, to 30th June. Members were reminded that Directorates were currently looking at the way they presented their scores cards to Policy and Service Committees and whether they had the right selection of indicators, which would then be considered by individual committees.

One Member expressed concerned regarding Indicator 182: Proportion of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests responded to within statutory timescale. It was queried whether it was also a problem for the Council's statistical neighbours. **Action Required.** The Chief Executive acknowledged the concerns and highlighted the fact that 445 requests had been submitted during this last quarter.

It was also questioned how Members could report on behalf of their residents, failings in responses to FOI requests, and whether there was performance information on how such requests were managed. The Committee was informed that the Performance

Management Framework recognised the need for qualitative as well as quantitative measures. The Change Strategy covered the provision of effective quality assurance measures within services. There was also a corporate complaints process to address issues the public felt the Council had got wrong. It was important the Council acknowledged when it had made mistakes and apologised at the earliest possible opportunity. This process was currently being strengthened to take into account recent Local Government Ombudsman recommendations. It was noted that the Chief Executive carried out a random dip sample of FOI responses before they were issued and it was acknowledged that the quality of draft responses could vary at times.

Another Member queried whether a different rating was needed to reflect when red indicators were out of kilter from the last quarter.

It was resolved unanimously to note performance information and act, as necessary.

228. Corporate Risk Register

The Committee considered the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). Attention was drawn to table 1 which provided an overview of the current status of the risks on the CRR, including information on the current risk compared to the scores at the previous report, and the direction of travel for each risk shown as a RAG rating. The key change was the increase in the residual risk score for Risk 3 “Risk that the Council does not have enough budget to deliver agreed short and medium-term objectives” from 12 in June to 16 in October, which was above the Council’s risk appetite. Members noted that the main reason for this change was the continued increase in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Budget. Since the previous report, risk 5 “failure of corporate governance” had been retitled to “serious failure of corporate governance” to reflect the focus on aspects of the risk which had potential for a significant impact on the organisation. Members were informed that the candidate for the post of Corporate Risk Manager had withdrawn so the post was being readvertised.

Individual members then raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- welcomed the improvements to the reporting process being made by the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management.
- queried in relation to risk 3 whether one of the actions should be changing short and medium-term objectives. The Executive Director of Finance and Resources officer clarified that the movement of this risk was primarily due to the current treatment of the DSG deficit, as the statutory override was ending on 31 March 2026. Officers were currently lobbying for clarification on the override position with a response expected in December 2024 and March 2025. The Executive Director of Finance and Resources would provide the committee with a Section 25 report at its January meeting which would address financial risk reserves. It was noted that the controls were considered adequate within the current framework but there was a significant issue which was outside the control of the local authority.
- queried why a review of short and medium-term objectives was not included as a possible control for consideration in the CRR, as there was a difference strategically and financially in the Council providing its mandatory services and its objectives.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the point made and suggested the need for a review by the risk owner. **Action Required.**

- suggested that a trigger relating to horizon scanning was missing to reflect a substantial budget change from central government. The Section 151 officer reported that this point was covered by triggers 1 and 7 but agreed to review in order to improve clarity in relation to this issue. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to note the Corporate Risk Register.

229. Agenda Plan, Training Plan, Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and Panels

The Committee considered its agenda plan, training plan, appointments to outside bodies and internal advisory groups and panels, and the appointment of a Member Technology Champion.

One Member queried whether it was possible for the committee, with its overarching role, to instruct a policy and service committee to revise its agenda plan. This was in relation to a motion considered by Council in July with a report scheduled to come to committee in November 2025. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Monitoring Officer would provide a response and if necessary it would be referred to Constitution and Ethics Committee. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to note the agenda plan and training plan and appoint Councillor Beckett as the Member Technology Champion.

Chair