

**STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** 25 March 2024  
5.30 - 7.40 pm

**Present:** Councillors Robertson (Chair), Baigent (Vice-Chair), Bick, Gawthrop Wood, Griffin, Holloway, Sheil and Young

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

**24/17/SR Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

**24/18/SR Declarations of Interest**

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Baigent	All	Personal: Member of Cambridge Cycling Campaign
Councillor Gilderdale	All	Member of Cambridge BID board.

**24/19/SR Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

**24/20/SR Combined Authority Update**

**Matter for Decision**

This is a regular report to the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee each cycle providing an update on the activities of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Board since the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee on 29 January October 2024.

**Decision of the Leader**

To invite the Council's representative on the Combined Authority Board, Councillor Anna Smith, to provide an update on the Board and issues

considered at the meetings of the Combined Authority Board held on 31 January 2024 and 20 March 2024.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Council's representative on the Combined Authority Board Councillor A. Smith provided a verbal report.

The Council's representative on the Combined Authority said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Disappointed by changes made by Stagecoach. Bus reform was needed.
- ii. UKREiiF was an investment conference. Was trying to get investment into the region by marketing Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- iii. Could provide further details about UKREiiF.
- iv. There was not currently a wider plan for more affordable homes.

### **Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

## **24/21/SR 2023-24 General Fund Virements and Provisional Revenue Carry Forwards**

### **Matter for Decision**

This report presents details of any anticipated variances from budgets, where resources are requested to be carried forward into the 2024/25 financial year in order to undertake or complete activities which were originally intended to take place in 2023/24.

### **Decision of the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources**

The Executive Councillor, is recommended, following scrutiny and debate at Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee:

- a) To agree the provisional carry forward requests, totalling £220,700 as detailed in Appendix A, subject to the final outturn position.
- b) To agree the principle of the learning and development proposal including the creation of a permanent post as detailed in paragraph 3.4, and delegate

the detailed budget adjustments to vire up to £100k of budget from services to the training and development budget to the Chief Finance Officer or Acting Chief Finance Officer in the 2024/5 financial year.

c) To agree the virement of £60,000 across portfolios for the creation of the one-year fixed term post within Procurement outlined in paragraph 3.5 and delegate the detailed budget adjustments to the Chief Finance Officer or Acting Chief Finance Officer in the 2024/5 financial year.

d) To agree to use the budget headroom resulting from the review of cost apportionment of the shared 3CICT service for the establishment of the permanent post of Strategic Digital Lead as outlined in paragraph 3.6.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

Head of Finance said the following in response to Members questions:

- i. Regarding empty property, and how long it had been vacant, and if realistic prospect to be re-let, stated did not have information at hand. Would investigate and report back to Committee.

The Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

## **24/22/SR Greater Cambridge Accommodation BID and Visitor Levy**

## **24/23/SR Council Tax Premiums on 2nd Homes and Long Term Empty Property**

### **Matter for Decision**

- i. The purpose of this report is to seek approval relating to Council Tax premiums - as provided within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act – which received Royal assent on 26th October 2023, and is due to become effective from 1st April 2024.
- ii. The Act provides additional discretionary powers for Council Tax premium options in respect of Long-Term Empty property and Second

Homes. Those options enable the Council to impose additional Council Tax premiums on Long Term Empty property and Second Homes with effect from 1 April 2025.

- iii. Government has confirmed that billing authorities that wish to adopt any changes are required to make a resolution confirming their requirements at least 12 months prior to the financial year in which the changes come into effect; meaning the earliest these changes can be adopted is the 1 April 2024 with new premiums being applied from 1 April 2025. This 'notice' period provides that a minimum of 12 months notice must be given before the financial year from which the changes to a premium can be applied.

### **Decision of the Leader of the Council**

- i. Support in principle that the following additional Council Tax premiums be applied from 1 April 2025 or as soon as possible thereafter, subject to the required legislation or further guidance being in place:
  - 100% premium for properties which have been empty and unfurnished for a period of between 1 (previously 2) and 5 years. This brings forward the charging of an Empty Homes premium so that it would be charged after 1 year of being empty instead of the current 2 years, and
  - A premium of up to 100% for second homes subject to any exception being applicable.
- ii. Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer (s151 officer) to implement the introduction of these additional premiums taking into consideration any future guidance and best practice issued by Government.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Local Taxation Manager said the following in response to Members questions:

- i. Expect to be able to manage the project with current resources within the Council Tax team.

- ii. Premiums would not come into effect until 2025.
- iii. There would be an element of data cleansing to get the correct information.
- iv. There could be challenges and appeals. There was an appeals process though the valuation tribunal.
- v. Were proposing a 100% charge, not up to 100%.
- vi. Only applies to people with a second home within Cambridge.
- vii. Only allowable exemption was if you were required to live elsewhere for work.
- viii. There was an inspection process in place for empty properties.
- ix. Normal rental properties were excluded, as were student accommodation.

Members proposed amendment to wording of Recommendation 2.1 to: *Up to 100% or maximum allowable in regulation.*

The Committee unanimously approved the amendment.

The Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

### **Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

### **24/24/SR Update on the Four Day Week Trial Being Carried out by South Cambridgeshire District Council**

#### **Matter for Decision**

This is a short paper setting out next steps and recommendations in relation to the four-day working week trial at South Cambridgeshire District Council. It is presented at this scrutiny committee because SCDC operate two shared services on behalf of Cambridge City Council, the Shared Waste Service and the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.

#### **Decision of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Transformation**

- i. Approve the request of South Cambridgeshire District Council to continue the working arrangements for SCDC staff delivering shared services with Cambridge City Council (shared waste and Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, in line with the decision taken by SCDC Cabinet, as follows:
  - a. To continue the four day week working arrangement for both desk based and waste service operational SCDC colleagues until:
    - 1) information is provided by the Government regarding potential future financial levers they might impose on Councils using this working practice, as announced in their Local Government Financial Settlement consultation in December 2023, and
    - 2) a subsequent consultation is carried out by the Council, analysed, and all trial data is presented to SCDC Full Council for a final decision.
  - b. for all SCDC colleagues working a four-day week (desk-based and waste operations), the hours are harmonised at 32 hours per week (pro rata for part time colleagues) at 86.5% of contracted hours from 1 April 2024.
- ii. To note the decision taken by SCDC to present an update report to this scrutiny committee, no later than the end of July 2024, providing data on the trial periods (desk-based and waste), up to the end of March 2024, including information about the ongoing effectiveness, including recruitment and retention, costs and savings of a four-day week working model

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Chief Operating Officer (Cambridge City Council), Chief Executive of South Cambridgeshire County Council, Head of Climate, Environment and Waste, Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services (South Cambridgeshire) and Chief Operating Officer (South Cambridgeshire) said the following in response to Members questions:

- i. Agency savings had been significant, There were several posts that previously could not be filled. The majority of savings from Planning Services.
- ii. Were seeing better staff retention. Less vacancies for posts. Less recruitment costs.
- iii. Had seen a reduction in sickness, however still need to analyse data regarding that.
- iv. Recruitment had been more successful.
- v. Have data regarding the trial, would not analyse from May-July.
- vi. If other Councils started apating a 4 Day Week (4DW), that could cause a challenge regarding recruitment.
- vii. The year long trial allowed for the newness to wear off and for work to normalise and stabilise.
- viii. If the 4DW was stopped now, there would be morale issues.
- ix. Currently there were less meetings taking place on Monday's and Friday's.
- x. Staff have the ability to drop out of the trial if they so wished.
- xi. SCDC had staff drop in sessions with HR.
- xii. Had regular meetings with unions.
- xiii. Issues included study time for apprentices.
- xiv. The review of waste services was for growth and the 4DW. The growth review had already taken place.
- xv. The new refuse collection rounds that had been put in place will be in place for at least 3 years, unless there was further growth.
- xvi. SCDC would be doing a residents survey and a consultation.
- xvii. Would provide update at a future meeting of this Committee.

The Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

**24/25/SR To note Urgency Action taken by Officer**

**9a** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority- Appointment of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserve (substitute) member

**24/26/SR Hartree**

The Committee voted 4-3-1 and agreed to exclude the public after considering that the public interest was outweighed by paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 to enable committee debate of the officer report.

The Committee voted 5-1-2 to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

**CHAIR**