

**PERFORMANCE, ASSETS AND STRATEGY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

3 March 2026
5.30 - 8.35 pm

Present: Councillors Porrer (Chair), Gawthorpe Wood (Vice-Chair), Clough, Dalzell, Davey, Griffin, Pounds and Sheil

Officers:

Ben Binns - Assistant Director, Development, Economy and Place

Lynne Miles - Director of Economy and Place

Jane Wilson - Chief Operating Officer

Simon Oliver - Chief Digital Information Officer

Claire Tunnicliffe - Deputy Democratic Services Manager -

Justin Long - Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Other councillors in attendance:

Councillor Rosy Moore - Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Environment

Councillor Simon Smith - Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

26/7/P&A Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

26/8/P&A Declarations of Interest

The following non-pecuniary interests were made under Item 5 (City Centre Heat Network)

Councillor Griffin – Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge.

Councillor Gawthorpe-Wood - Non-stipendiary director and shareholder of Reach Community Solar Farm.

26/9/P&A Minutes

The Minutes of the 27 January 2026 meeting were approved along with the Minutes of the meeting on 4 November 2025.

26/10/P&A Public Questions

There were no public questions.

26/11/P&A City Centre Heat Network

- i. The Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Environment introduced the item stating that the proposed City Centre Heat Network was a game-changing project that could produce a 93% reduction in council carbon emissions over 40 years.
- ii. The Assistant Director, Development, Economy and Place then gave a presentation which can be found [here](#). He introduced consultants working on the project and joining the meeting online: Bill Wilson (Buro Happold), Jeff Laidler (Sustainability Co) and James Derbyshire (Amberside Advisors).

Following the presentation, Members were invited to ask questions and as a part of these discussions the following key points were raised:

- iii. On **Governance**, members stressed the importance of getting these arrangements right (both interim and long-term) and it was agreed that the Chair would make the following recommendations to the Cabinet:
 - an update should be provided to scrutiny on the outcome of the Green Heat Network grant application
 - the need for an open and transparent governance process with appropriate elected member involvement learning lessons from how the CIP (Cambridge Investment Partnership) effectively involves councillors
 - to be mindful of managing any perceptions of a conflict of interest arising from the Council being the primary funder/shareholder and a customer of the planned network

- the importance of keeping all key stakeholders and partners informed including South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- iv. On the **Business Case and Financial Risks**, members discussed the cost of the project, contribution of potential partners, how inflation and rising costs would be factored in, and the impact of the government's future heat network zoning initiative. It was agreed that the Chair would make the following recommendations to the Cabinet:
- the need to monitor costs against carbon benefits as the project progresses
 - a need for clarity on the use of gas boilers (which were justified in the papers on a financial basis) and for this to be kept under review in light of fluctuating energy prices
 - the importance of coordinating activity with utility companies (as and when the project moved to the construction phase) to minimise disruption
 - that future expansion possibilities should be kept under review along with the consequences of a 'do nothing' approach
 - that the Cambridge Growth Company be updated as the project develops.
- v. The Committee also discussed the NPV (Net Present Value) hurdle rate and it was agreed that Councillor Dalzell would word a suitable recommendation for the Chair to recommend to Cabinet.

The following wording was subsequently agreed by the Chair:

The Committee notes that whilst partners have indicated acceptance in principle, the financial modelling applies a uniform hurdle rate across all academic partner investors. Given that individual institutions will each have their own governance processes and fiduciary responsibilities, the Committee considers this a material assumption that Cabinet should satisfy itself has been robustly validated before committing the £600,000 pre-commercialisation expenditure.

- vi. On **Wider Risks**, members discussed several potential risks to the progression of the project including as it moved to the construction phase. These included:
- the impact of utility trenches
 - archaeological considerations
 - LGR (Local Government Reorganisation) and officer resources
 - grid capacity
 - keeping the project attuned to advancements in technology
 - cost overruns
 - and licensing requirements for river extraction.

It was agreed that the Chair would recommend to Cabinet that these risks were kept under review and regularly reported on as the project progresses.

- vii. On **Communications**, members considered the current approach (focused on partner and stakeholder engagement) and discussed future plans. It was agreed that the Chair would recommend the following to Cabinet:
- the need for a proactive and positive communications approach that clearly explains the project and its benefits to local residents, businesses and stakeholders
 - that the opportunity should not be missed to highlight the level of ambition and innovation of the project to a national or international audience.
- viii. On **Construction**, members noted that this was not yet a construction project but discussed possible issues should it move to that stage. It was agreed that the Chair would recommend the following to Cabinet:
- the need to learn lessons from previous projects both locally (e.g. retrofit work) and nationally (e.g. other heat networks)
 - the importance of having mitigation strategies in place to manage disruption in the city centre
 - the need to consistently engage with councillors especially those representing affected wards.

- ix. On the **recommendations going to Cabinet on 24 March 2026**, the Committee supported the proposals for:
- the release of £0.6m from the Council's Climate Change Fund reserve to fund the next steps
 - the project to develop the strategic objectives for a council led joint (51% ownership) venture; and for
 - an application for grant funding of approximately £20m from the Green Heat Network Fund.
- x. The Cabinet Member thanked the Committee for its considerations and said it was important to note that this was a City Council led project with the aim to decarbonise its own city centre buildings. Working with other city centre institutions made financial sense, could lead to increased carbon emissions savings, and there was an opportunity in the future to extend it to other organisations and potentially residents.

26/12/P&A 3C ICT Year One Audit

- i. The Chief Operating Officer introduced the item noting that significant progress had been made since the 2024 decision to reform the 3C ICT model (rather than disband it).
- ii. As summarised in [the report](#), the Chief Digital Information Officer (CDIO) noted that the external review in 2024 had identified several shortcomings and the CDIO role was established and recruited to in December 2024, to deliver the remediation activity and improve digital innovation within the partner councils.
- iii. He summarised this remediation work, also known as the CDIO Programme, along with the subsequent audit report and customer satisfaction survey, and the CDIO360 review. He outlined the plans to move on from “remediation” activity and outlined future workstreams focused on proactive and ongoing work on restructuring, customer engagement and LGR.

- iv. Members questioned officers on the definition of key terms used in the report, governance processes, budget, which systems were the responsibility of which service provider, the KPIs and performance monitoring system in place, the role of the CDIO, the low response rate to the customer satisfaction survey, purchasing strategy and LGR.
- v. In summation, the Chair noted the following points on behalf of the Committee:
 - The Committee welcomed the improvements that had taken place and were supportive of the workstreams being put in the place by the CDIO.
 - There was a recognition from members and officers that the audit report was not a particularly accessible document and the Committee needed to consider how it could best understand and scrutinise ICT services moving forward (given the complexity of the landscape) with a focus needed on the experience of residents.
 - An update on LGR work in this area would be useful for scrutiny once a decision has been made by the government on future arrangements.

26/13/P&A Cybersecurity Update

- i. The Chief Digital Information Officer (CDIO) briefly outlined ongoing work in this area and reported that the Council was in a better position following recent investment and work such as the rollout of Multi Factor Authentication.
- ii. The Committee welcomed the steps taken and formally noted the report.

26/14/P&A Members ICT Update

- i. Members highlighted that it was a failure in terms of democratic engagement when issues with the technology in the Council Chamber and committee rooms resulted in meetings not being livestreamed, start times being delayed, and residents joining online but not being able to contribute to the proceedings. It was agreed that the Chief Operating

Officer would consider with colleagues how best to take things forward particularly in the light of LGR.

- ii. The Committee stressed the importance of getting members ICT right and formally noted the report.

26/15/P&A Work Programme

- i. The Work Programme was noted, and it was confirmed that the draft plan would roll over to the next iteration of the Committee post-May 2026.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

CHAIR