

Dear Councillor

**CABINET - THURSDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2020**

I am now able to enclose for consideration at the above meeting the Overview and Scrutiny Panel comments on the below items.

**Agenda Item  
No.**

- 3. FINAL 2020/21 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2021/22 TO 2024/25); INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME (Pages 3 - 4)**
- 4. 2020/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES (Pages 5 - 6)**
- 5. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20 - QUARTER 3 (Pages 7 - 8)**
- 6. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING - REVIEW AND STRATEGY (Pages 9 - 10)**
- 7. PROSPECTUS' FOR GROWTH - HUNTINGDON, ST IVES AND RAMSEY (Pages 11 - 12)**

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## **COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)**

### **FINAL BUDGET 2020/21 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

- 9.1 The Panel received the Final Budget 2020/21 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy at its meeting on 5th February 2020.
- 9.2 Following a query on the Overview and Scrutiny comments on the draft budget and whether they were considered, the Panel was reassured that the comments were given full consideration before a decision was made.
- 9.3 The Council Tax increase was discussed. The Panel was informed that the increase is affordable as it is beneath the average rise in local wages and in line with the increase in the state pension.
- 9.4 A Member highlighted the fact that there was no change in the budget relating to One Leisure Fees and Charges. It was confirmed that because there is no planned increase in the budget it does not necessarily mean there will not be an increase in charges during the course of the calendar year.

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## **COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)**

### **2020/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES**

- 5.1 The Panel received the 2020/21 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies at its meeting on 5th February 2020.
- 5.2 The Panel made no comments on this report.

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## COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

### INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20, QUARTER 3

- 7.1 The Panel received the Integrated Performance Report 2019/20, Quarter 3 at its meeting on 5th February 2020.
- 7.2 Councillor Gaskin was concerned that the energy use rise (performance indicator 29) was attributed to bad weather, however the Member was assured that after analysing the data, the explanation of bad weather was correct.
- 7.3 Carrying on the theme of energy usage, Councillor Gaskin commented that he thought Council Anywhere would have a beneficial impact upon energy use as Officers chose to work from home more often. In response, Members were informed that the Council was currently rolling out laptops to Officers, but it is anticipated that as Officers choose to work from home more often that may have a beneficial impact upon energy use in next year's performance report – however the cost of heating buildings is, to an extent, a fixed cost.
- 7.4 Concern was raised that 71% of the Staff Survey results were worse than 2018 results (performance indicator 34c). The Panel was informed that the reason for the worse results could be that the response rate was higher in 2019 and that could affect the trend. Members were assured that the Staff Survey results have been reviewed at length by the Employment Committee. The Panel was reminded that 86% of the 2019 results remained better than the 2017 results, and that an action plan would be put in place to look at the key areas that required improvement. Staff Council are involved in this process, ensuring involvement from across the Council.
- 7.5 Members were concerned that the new parking machines are taking longer than anticipated to install. It was explained that installation at earlier sites had highlighted a number of issues which need resolving before proceeding with subsequent installations. This has had a robust response from Officers at Director level. In addition, the contractor due to carry out the installation was taken over which caused a delay.
- 7.6 A discussion ensued regarding parking charges, which is forecast to produce a £1.5m surplus this year. It was confirmed that this is down on the forecast due to £34k on the staggered delivery of the new car parking machines and £40k on the free after three initiative in December.
- 7.7 It was noted that the Council is significantly on target regarding homelessness preventions, but Members wanted assurance that the Council would continue to treat the issue as a priority. In response, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Economic Development stated that the issue remained a high priority for the Council and that there is a significant amount of resources dedicated to tackling the issue.

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## COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

### HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Panel received the Homelessness Review and Strategy at its meeting on 6th February 2020.
- 3.2 Concern was expressed that the rough sleeping survey has failed to capture the true number of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire. However, the Panel was informed that the survey is a multiagency survey which aims to capture a snapshot of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire on a specified night. Members were assured that the Council are aware of the individuals who rough sleep, but engagement is challenging as some individuals choose to sleep rough.
- 3.3 A question was raised by Councillor Mrs Smith regarding sofa surfers and how the Council identifies them. Members were informed that sofa surfers would not be included in the estimates as they are not sleeping rough. However, if they require housing advice about their options, they would have to self-identify themselves to the Council. The Panel was advised that many people with insecure accommodation such as sofa surfers do apply to the housing register and their needs are assessed. They are also advised about their options.
- 3.4 The Panel discussed the Council's engagement with further education in this area. It was noted that further education has not historically engaged in homelessness or provided information on students that may be sofa surfing. The workstreams included in the Strategy could include engagement with further education to determine what information they hold.
- 3.5 The status of homeless EU nationals was raised now the United Kingdom has left the EU. The Panel was informed that currently things remain as they were but that in time a new immigration system will be adopted by the Government and this will determine the course of action for homeless EU nationals. Those EU nationals currently in the UK can apply for settled status if they wish to continue living in the country and they should be encouraged to do this through the Home Office's on-line scheme.
- 3.6 Councillor Giles asked if it was more prudent for the Council to buy a hostel to reduce costs. In response, Members were informed that it is the Council's aim to move away from using hostels with shared facilities and instead self-contained short-term units of accommodation are being provided as an alternative. In addition, in terms of owning a hostel, there are practicalities associated with moving individuals and families out of their communities and having the additional challenges of getting to work or taking children to school. The Panel were also informed that the net cost of homelessness includes costs that cannot be recovered from Government. The Council pays Housing Benefit to households in temporary accommodation but, owing to regulations, not all of this can be reclaimed from the Government. This would be the case

irrespective of who owns the accommodation and so establishing Council owned accommodation would not reduce these costs.

- 3.7 Councillor Morris raised concern in relation to long term empty Ministry of Defence properties at Brampton, Wyton and Alconbury. He asked if the Council could engage in order to obtain some of the properties for the Council's housing requirements. In response, Members were informed that the Council has previously engaged with the Ministry of Defence on this matter, but they were unwilling to release the properties as they might be required if operational requirements change.
- 3.8 In summary, the view of the Panel was that the review and strategy is comprehensive and good piece of work. Members suggest the Cabinet should approve the recommendations contained in the report.

## COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

### PROSPECTUS' FOR GROWTH – HUNTINGDON, ST IVES AND RAMSEY

- 4.1 The Panel received the Prospectus for Growth (PFG) – Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey at its meeting on 5th February 2020.
- 4.2 Members welcomed the PFGs and thought they are a good starting point for the economic development of the Towns.
- 4.3 Concerns were raised regarding the funding of the PFGs. In particular a comment was made, in relation to the St Neots experience, that costs could rise. Members were informed that the Towns would have to bid for money up to a limit of £500k but it is intended the funding is seed funding and Towns are expected to raise their own additional funding.
- 4.4 Councillor Wakeford was concerned about the reference to the removal of the ring road without any further explanation. It was explained that the consultants have been tasked with producing a document with suggestions on how to improve the Towns economically and have done so; however, some of the suggestions have not been assessed on whether they are feasible. The Panel was also reminded that the PFGs are draft and that it is up to the Town Teams on what initiatives to take forward.
- 4.5 A comment was made that there are no Action Plans included with the PFGs; however, it was noted that they are draft aspirational documents and should not seek to control matters that would be for planning policy. It will be up to Town Teams to take forward the ideas they want.
- 4.6 Members enquired about the pedestrianisation of Godmanchester Bridge. The PFG for Huntingdon does not mention it as the Town Team has not considered the idea. It was suggested that the Combined Authority should be encouraged to take a view on the Godmanchester Bridge.
- 4.7 The structure of Town Teams and the governance arrangements in place was raised; however, it was explained that governance would be the subject of future discussions.

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