

Dear Councillor

CABINET - TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2024

I am now able to enclose for consideration at the above meeting the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

**Agenda Item
No.**

- 3. COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS**(Pages 3 - 4)
To receive a report proposing the implementation of additional Council Tax Premiums in relation to unoccupied properties across the District.

Executive Councillor: S Ferguson.

- 4. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025/26**(Pages 5 - 6)
To receive an update on performance of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

Executive Councillor: S Ferguson.

- 5. ONE LEISURE PV SOLAR INSTALLS**(Pages 7 - 8)
To receive a report seeking approval to proceed with the project to install Solar PV panels at various One Leisure sites.

Executive Councillor: B Pitt.

- 6. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-25 QUARTER 2**(Pages 9 - 10)
To brief Members on progress with the Corporate Plan actions/projects and the results and forecasts for operational performance measures as at the end of Quarter 2.

Executive Councillors: S Ferguson & L Davenport-Ray.

- 7. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 2**(Pages 11 - 12)
To receive a report presenting details of the Council's financial performance for 2024/25.

Executive Councillor: B Mickelburgh.

**8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW
2024/25(Pages 13 - 14)**

To receive an update on the Council's treasury management activity for the first 6 months of the year, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

Executive Councillor: B Mickelburgh.

COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the Council Tax Premiums Report at its meeting on 7th November 2024.
- 4.3 Councillor Shaw expressed support for the scheme and following an enquiry, it was confirmed that the proposal was to charge 100% Council Tax Premium after one year of the conditions being met. It was also confirmed that the date that the property became empty would be the date used once the proposed changes come into effect.
- 4.4 Support for the proposals was also expressed by Councillor Hassall, who also enquired about the criteria for homes being unfurnished. The Panel heard that whilst there was no legal definition the broad view was that the home should be habitable with some furniture and white goods present. Following a further question from Councillor Hassall, it was clarified that the Council proposed to charge the maximum amounts permitted by the legislation.
- 4.5 Following an enquiry from Councillor Bywater drawing on the experience of a constituent, the Panel heard that the Council were able to exercise discretion in genuine cases of houses being on the market and specifically where a property had been through probate for a period longer than exception provided. Further detail on this would be worked into future policy development. It was also confirmed that notice would be placed into local newspapers to confirm the changes along with 12 months notice of these coming into effect.
- 4.6 In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, the Panel heard that properties which were vacant due to the occupant/s moving to a care home would remain exempt provided that they remained unoccupied.
- 4.7 It was confirmed to the Panel, following a question from Councillor McAdam regarding the empty period after which a premium could be charged, as set out within the recommendations, were set in legislation.
- 4.8 Following a question from Councillor Hassall, the Panel heard that guidance was in place to ascertain what classified as a property being actively marketed for sale, but that further work would be developed on this subject during future policy development.
- 4.9 A comment from Councillor Hunt was read out to the Panel regarding receiving detail on and it was proposed by Councillor Mokbul to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this recommendation was seconded by Councillor Lowe and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

4) to agree that an update of the numbers of the properties falling under the scheme be reported back to the democratic cycle once the new policy has been in place for 12 months.

4.10 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

4) to agree that an update of the numbers of the properties falling under the scheme be reported back to the democratic cycle once the new policy has been in place for 12 months.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025/26

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26 Report at its meeting on 7th November 2024.
- 4.3 Councillors Kerr and Hassall expressed support for the Scheme and following a question from Councillor Kerr relating to the costs associated with recovering unpaid Council Tax where it was hoped that this would be reduced due to residents no longer being liable for the bill under the new scheme, the Panel heard that the financial impact of the scheme was being tracked against the prediction. The Panel were advised that a more detailed update could be brought once the scheme had been in place for 12 months.
- 4.4 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

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ONE LEISURE PV SOLAR INSTALLS

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the One Leisure PV Solar Installs Report at its meeting on 7th November 2024.
- 4.3 Following questions from Councillor Shaw, the Panel heard that the export had not currently been included due to the connection times of UK Power Networks, the aim was to install the system and then a decision on how to manage any generated surplus could be looked at on a case by case basis. The Panel also heard that the designs were based on half hourly data for each centre, based on this there was an anticipated return of over 75%.
- 4.4 Councillor Lowe expressed concern over the usage of lithium and queried alternative methods of battery storage, she also enquired about the recyclability of the panels at the end of their lifespan. The concerns around lithium were observed and the Panel heard that further detail on the recyclability would be sought and reported back to the Panel at a later date.
- 4.5 Councillor Hassall expressed concern over the bundling within the report with the return at the St Ives site expected to be 12 years against the other sites at 8 years, concern was expressed that this would affect the SALIX recycling fund. Councillor Hassall further suggested that the £52,000 for the St Ives site may be better used to provide battery storage for the other three sites. The Panel were assured that the project would be funded by Council reserves and that the project was anticipated to have an excellent payback. It was noted that due to the nature of energy consumption at leisure centres, there would be a much different usage when compared to a residential property, and that the designs proposed would make the best use of the available array as possible. Furthermore, it was noted that to proceed with the project across all four sites would massively reduce overhead and that there would be significant financial and environmental benefits through the implementation of the scheme. The Panel were advised that an annual return of 12.1% was anticipated.
- 4.6 Councillor Bywater observed that the siting of the panels within the rooves of the centres would be a much better location than taking up valuable agricultural land, it was also suggested that the Panel would like to see the progress of the project as it developed and after 12 months of implementation.
- 4.7 It was noted, following a query from Councillor Shaw, that energy usage at the St Ives site was more sporadic than the other three sites due to the services provided there.
- 4.8 In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, the Panel heard that there had already been successful installs of solar panels across the council's estate,

including Eastfield House and One Leisure and that this was part of the first stage of introducing renewable energy generation.

- 4.9 The Panel were advised, following a question from Councillor Mokbul, that a solar canopy was due to be installed in the carpark at One Leisure St Ives Indoor following funding from Sport England. It was noted that the steelworks for this type of project doubled the payback period.
- 4.10 Councillor Tevlin expressed disappointment that government funding was not available for the project, the Panel heard that by progressing opportunities to decarbonise where they presented was preferable to waiting for funding. It was also noted that significant savings on utilities and carbon emissions would be made by implementing the project.
- 4.11 The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that subject to the approval of the project, it was hoped to progress using the supplier already secured for the St Ives canopy work which would allow the work to proceed quickly. It was noted that this supplier was based in Northampton but that work was underway to look at the procurement procedure for the Council and how this could positively impact local businesses. Councillor Shaw proposed to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this recommendation was seconded by Councillor Mokbul and the Panel voted in favour, with one Councillor abstaining, of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;
- 3) to agree to apply greater weight to tender applicants from within the district.
- 4.12 Following the discussion and the Panels support of the project, Councillor Shaw proposed to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this recommendation was seconded by Councillor Lowe and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;
- 4) that the Panel encourage Cabinet to proceed with Option 2 outlined within the report.
- 4.13 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendations to their report;
- 3) to agree to apply greater weight to tender applicants from within the district.
- 4) that the Panel encourage Cabinet to proceed with Option 2 outlined within the report.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 2

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 4.2 The Panel discussed the Corporate Performance Report 2024/25 Quarter 2 Report at its meeting on 6th November 2024.
- 4.3 Councillor Jennings expressed concern relating to the achievability of PI21, following which the Panel were assured that the Operations team were confident that this target could be met and strict targets had been put in place to assist this. It was further confirmed that the missed bins were a mixture of the three bin types and that there wasn't a pattern to the issue.
- 4.4 Following a question from Councillor Martin about PI24, the Panel heard that two fly tipping prosecution cases were adjourned and that the reasons for this would be investigated and reported back to the Panel. In response to a further question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that the long term sickness figures shown in the report were not unrealistic for a large organisation with a diverse range of services and a workforce with multiple needs. The Panel were further assured that a robust sickness procedure was in place to manage this and could culminate in dismissal as a final stage. It was observed that commentary within the report to highlight the number of serious long term illness cases would be useful to allow the Panel to understand the picture of those cases which were of concern and those which could be approached with empathy.
- 4.5 Councillor Howell observed that there were discrepancies on the totals within the graph in PI19, the Panel heard that clarification would be sought and brought back to the Panel.
- 4.6 Councillor Gardener observed that the Electrical Vehicle Charging project did not appear to be moving as quickly as had been originally communicated to residents. The Panel were assured that work was underway and detail about timescales would be sought and communicated back to the Panel.
- 4.7 Following a query from Councillor Chapman, the Panel heard that point 31 on page 47 of the agenda, related to all work within the Market Towns Programme, it was also noted that an update on the Market Towns Programme was expected at the December meeting of the Panel. In response to a further question from Councillor Chapman, relating to the removal of trees along the Riverside Park cycleways under item 57, the Panel heard that further details would be sought and brought back to the Panel.

- 4.8 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 2

5.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 5.2 The Panel discussed the Finance Performance Report 2024/25 Quarter 2 Report at its meeting on 6th November 2024.
- 5.3 Councillor Blackwell queried which site was referred to under the Community Resilience line within Appendix One (page 133 of the agenda pack) in reference to the transition from Places for People and the agreement of management of that site, the Panel heard that clarification would be sought and communicated back.
- 5.4 Following an enquiry from Councillor Martin about a possible discrepancy between the forecasted underspend on the revenue outturn figures from quarter 2 versus quarter 1, the Panel were advised that the detail would be sought and brought back for clarification. Following the meeting it was advised that the Corporate Director of Resources queried during the meeting whether Councillor Martin was referring to the capital outturn (which did report an underspend of £1,218k at the end of Q1) and Councillor Martin did confirm that that he was in fact referring to the revenue outturn. We can confirm that the revenue forecast underspend at Q1 was £444k, which included the planned use of underspends of £1,660k. If this had been reported separately (as is the case for the Q2 report) the underspend at Q1 would have been £2,104k (£444k plus £1,660k. The figures reported at Q2 are therefore correct and consistent with those reported at Q1.
- 5.5 Councillor Chapman enquired about a separate amount of £1 million which had previously been allocated to the Market Towns for St Neots project and where that was now allocated within the budget. The Panel heard that the report was to show the accounts for the quarter, however this would be investigated and brought back to the Panel.
- 5.6 Following an enquiry from Councillor Jennings about the highlighted underspend of £100,000 to the increased MRF contract contradicting with a later noted underspend due to late completion of the MRF contract, the Panel heard that this had been split out and reported as previously requested by the Panel which was why it was now showing in a different fashion. Following a further question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel were assured that plans were being implemented to ensure long term debt recovery on commercial rents be addressed and that this would be reported back in a future report to the Panel.
- 5.7 In response to a query from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that additional National Insurance and wages costs were showing in Table 3.2 due to a

previous computer error, in order to correct this, they had been put into the finance budget so that individual budgets would not be affected. Councillor Gleadow observed that it was concerning that an underspend was predicted under the Planning salaries line and that she would endeavour to take this up with the portfolio holder.

- 5.8 Councillor Jennings observed a marked increase relating to Civil Parking Enforcement and enquired why this had occurred, following which, the Panel heard that costs had been estimated within the CPE strategy, however upon implementation the signs and lines required far more work than anticipated and the increase in cost was as a result of that.
- 5.9 Following a question from Councillor Chapman, the Panel heard that due to staff turnover and staff sickness within the CCTV team there had been an increased use of agency staff to cover vacancies during the recruitment period. The Panel were further advised that contracted staff and agency staff were budgeted for separately and that the underspend in one area had balance the increased spend in the other with no detriment to the service.
- 5.10 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2024/25

6.0 Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- 6.2 The Panel discussed the Treasury Management 6 Month Performance Review Report at its meeting on 6th November 2024.
- 6.3 Councillor Martin enquired whether any change was anticipated following the announcement of the government's Autumn budget. The Panel heard that it was anticipated there would not be any immediate change, however interest rates may stay higher for longer, due to possible higher levels of government borrowing, and also possible inflation pressures where higher interest rates might be used to control this pressure. But it was noted that it was too early to tell at this stage.
- 6.4 Following an enquiry from Councillor Chapman about the detail relating to the CIS portfolio, the Panel were advised that this was reported in the manner requested by the auditors.
- 6.5 Councillor Terry enquired whether it would be possible to decrease the rent in the empty units at the Rowley Centre to encourage tenants, the Panel heard that this was commercially sensitive and would be discussed within the item following.
- 6.6 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

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