**Report of Councillor Carla Hofman and Councillor John Williams to**

**Parish Councils for March 2025.**

*This report contains factual information which we hope will be of use and of interest to the parish council and to the wider community of the parish.*

*For queries pleaser email us at cllr.williamsjg@scambs,gov.uk or cllr.hofman@scambs.gov.uk*

**South Cambridgeshire Revenue and Capital Budget for 2025/26**

We are required by law to set a balanced budget each year. South Cambridgeshire District Council’s plans for the year ahead will see us remain as one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with an increase of less than 10p a week for a band D home, bringing the charge for this band to £175.40 for the South Cambridgeshire part of the total Council Tax bill.

In a meeting of Full Council on 25 February) members voted to back the budget for the upcoming 12 months and said the budget was being set against a challenging background of rising population, increasing costs due to inflation and the rise in the employer’s National Insurance contribution and a national homelessness crisis.

The total cost of running the council in 2025/26 is £84 million, the net cost of providing services is £28 million and we will need £33.5 million from taxation; these figures are broadly the same as this financial year despite the increase in costs. This neutral position has been accomplished by productivity improvements including the use of AI, while improving or maintaining service delivery.

Council Tax will bring in £12 million – the other sources to make up the difference being £18 million from Business Rates and £3 million in grants from the Government. In addition, the council is expecting to receive nearly £8 million in commercial rent and interest from loans in addition to fees and charges mainly from large scale planning applications. Surplus income from taxation enables us to transfer £3.5 million into reserves to meet a predicted deficit in coming years. We expect a deficit of £3 million in 2026/27.

As to our revenue reserves, we have £31.5 million earmarked for various projects ranging from a fund to support renewable projects to support our net zero communities’ grants schemes to providing support for homelessness.

As to capital expenditure, the council expects to spend some £29 million in 2025/26, £8 million of which will be funded by borrowing.

One major project for the forthcoming year will be the beginning of construction work, next month, of the Northstowe Phase One Community Centre - named the "Unity Centre" by the local community. The Unity Centre is one of several community buildings the Council is constructing at Northstowe. It is expected to open in early 2026 - featuring a spacious multi-use hall, a playful messy room, meeting rooms, provision for a cafe and a landscape courtyard with bespoke artwork inspired by Northstowe's history. The Centre will be equipped with solar panels, ground source heat pump and sustainable super-insulated timber frame.

Elsewhere, following the successful introduction of the Council’s first public-facing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on its website last year – new websites for the Council, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning and Greater Cambridge Shared Waste will make it even easier for residents to access services, find information and complete tasks online.

The Council will also continue with its cost-of-living support for residents and will be rolling out targeted initiatives aimed at supporting single-parent households, pensioners, and families affected by benefit caps.

There have also been additions to the Council’s plans for the year ahead following recent discussions between Councillors. This includes purchasing an extra vehicle and employing another member of staff to support the Council’s Enviro-Crime team as it tackles fly-tipping. There will also be additional resource to combat and raise awareness of fraud, plus further support to strengthen ties with parish and town councils.

The budget does not take account of the 4-day week trial and its possible adoption.

**South Cambridgeshire Council Housing Budget**

The cost of repairing, improving and building new council homes cannot by law be subsidised by Council Tax or Business Rates. So, the cost of this, apart from Right to Buy receipts, funding from housing developers and Government grants, is shouldered by our council tenants through their rents or others renting other housing assets such as council garages.

We have over 2,000 on our waiting list for homes, so building more council homes for rent is a priority and we have a target of at least delivering 75 new homes a year. We have 5,815 council homes, up from 5,705 last year. We also want to improve the standard of our existing homes, particularly their energy efficiency.

In 2025/26 we also have a £205 million loan to repay on top of the £12 million borrowing to build more homes: taken out in 2012 to pay the then Government to keep all council house rents for the council. This loan as I have explained has to be repaid by council tenants. So, we have had to increase council rents by 2.7% bringing the average rent to £129.98 a week bringing an income of £38 million. Some 40% of our tenants receive Housing Benefit.

**New Corporate Plan Adopted**

South Cambridgeshire District Council has confirmed its vision for a ‘fairer, kinder and greener’ place ‘where all residents will be equal partners in their communities’. The Corporate Plan sets out the Council’s high-level vision for the next five years as well as its priorities for achieving that vision. The headline aspiration is to ‘create a better district to the benefit of everyone in our communities’ whilst the Council recognises ‘the many challenges that face the district and will continue to work to overcome these’.

The Council’s five new priorities – shaped by hundreds of responses during a consultation last year – are:

*Healthy and supported communities*​ - Supporting and engaging with our communities is key to tackling the challenges we face as a district. Our diversity is our strength and helping everyone live freely and independently is essential to promoting healthy and supported communities.

*Sustainable homes and vibrant places*​ - A home is more than a roof over your head, it is the foundation on which people build their lives. An affordable home is essential for people to live happy, fulfilling lives. In light of the housing crisis, we are committed to strengthening our communities by delivering sustainable, affordable homes and vibrant places to live.

*Being green to our core*​ - Being green is at the heart of everything we do. We’re tackling the climate and ecological crises head-on, ensuring our district is ready for the challenges of climate change.

*Helping businesses to thrive in South Cambridgeshire*​ - Already recognised as a nationally significant area for development, helping local businesses thrive is key to the development of our district - bringing new jobs and opportunities into people’s communities.

*Financially secure and fit for the future*​ - We have a duty to provide high quality cost-efficient services. Being open, transparent, and inclusive and letting evidence guide our decisions is critical to putting residents first.

**State of the District report published**

A ‘State of the District’ report, providing a high-level overview of the key dimensions of society and economy in South Cambridgeshire has been published.

Using data from a number of sources, the report covers six areas: population, health and wellbeing, deprivation, the local economy, housing, and carbon emissions.

The report follows feedback from the 2023 Corporate Peer Challenge that recommended setting the context for decisions made to ensure effective communication to staff and key partners.

It is hoped that the data provided can help inform decision-making at all levels of the Council, as well as providing an overview of the district to partners, residents and businesses.

You can read the full report at:

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/0tlljrvr/state-of-the-district-south-cambridgeshire.pdf>

**Carla & John**