

County Report

February 2020

Cllr Roger Hickford & Cllr Kevin Cuffley

General

As usual this time of year time is taken up producing the budget for the next financial year, and also looking medium to long term.

Budget

Much of the budget process and setting has been through and agreed by the Council's appropriate Service Committees. At the end of this process the County Council only had a deficit of just over £4m for the next financial year, and this was still based on a 0% precept on the General Council Tax.

The Conservative administration will address that deficit at the Full Council budget meeting on Tuesday (11th Feb), and will show how their additional proposals and any associated costs will be funded.

It is necessary to try to balance any increase in Council Tax with the funding requirements of the Council, bearing in mind that any increase in Council Tax directly affects many of our residents. It is after years of prudent financial management by the Administration that the Council can now make significant investment in areas that matter to many. Although we would like to do more, and more quickly, we are still constrained by a lack of government funding when compared to similar authorities. However, unlike other authorities or indeed other political groups on this council, and as our precept history shows, we will not raise council tax by the maximum allowed each year unless we absolutely feel it necessary to do so.

We always take a prudent financial view of both the short term and longer medium term needs and requirements.

We, like many other councils, have declared a climate emergency. We were already doing significant work in this area but we want to do more.

We propose to invest a combined total of **£16m** in climate action related proposals. Firstly in order to support the Council's target to reduce direct carbon emissions by 50% by 2023, it is estimated the Council will need to invest around **£15m** in the decarbonisation of Council owned and occupied buildings (approximately 69 buildings). We will maintain an ongoing review of whether this is sufficient over the coming years. This investment is expected to be recouped in full from savings delivered on the Council's energy bills.

The £15million earmarked will take all Council buildings owned and occupied off fossil fuels (oil and gas primarily) and will be replaced with low carbon heating solutions such as Air or Ground Source heat Pumps. Allocation within this £15million will also include energy efficiency improvements to those buildings with new low carbon heating solutions and a contingency for asbestos removal for those buildings where deeper energy efficiency measures will be required requiring changes to the buildings fabric. Our aim is to complete this task by 2025.

We also intend to invest in Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure for main offices to host Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) electric pool cars/vans and staff vehicles – initial costing for a minimum of 20 chargers (2 rapid chargers for fast turnaround @£50k each) including contingency - **£200K**.

Our aim is to shift all our pool cars and small van fleet from petrol and diesel to electric. To facilitate this change, the Council will need to provide EV charging infrastructure at those sites that host pool cars specifically but in addition as staff move onto EV's, provision of EV charging will be required. We wish to deliver all the EV infrastructure by 2025.

Furthermore, we will support oil dependent schools and communities to come off oil and onto renewable sources of energy. We believe that this will require an initial investment of **£500K** but this will be paid back through business case investments into heat infrastructure. Currently, we have committed £95,700 match funding towards the Swaffham Prior Community Heat Scheme, which has drawn down £392,300 grant from government to develop a community heat scheme. This element of the fund will support oil based communities to develop community heat schemes, acting as match funding to draw down grant and to create joint venture arrangements on community heat schemes with communities. Currently there are four further villages interested in community schemes totalling 1500 homes in total out of the estimated 10,000 homes on oil.

We will also provide a further **£300K** to support the delivery of other projects/ideas with viable business cases that could come forward from services, bringing the total investment in climate action to **£16m**.

Whilst all of the above proposals will be supported by business cases and will largely be self-financing in the medium to long term, to be prudent we have made full provision for the financing costs of these investments.

There is also abundant and increasing evidence that investment in our community infrastructure, community resilience and societal cohesion has amplified benefits for our citizens and positive impacts across all of the public services. With this in mind, we propose to make a further major capital investment of **£5m** into a fund to support the delivery of community capital projects that help the Council to deliver the outcomes and objectives that it has set out in the Strategic Framework. This project will be established and worked up through the Communities and Partnership Committee, which will also oversee the governance of the scheme and allocation of the funds.

Another area where we see working with the wishes of local communities and seeing huge success is in our Local Highways Improvement programme (LHI), to which we will now commit an additional **£200K** per annum, increasing the total annual spend from £682k to £882k.

By this time of year we will usually have notification of the amount of government grant for Highways maintenance. This year the announcement is delayed. The amount usually received is in the region of just over £6m and we feel confident this will be forthcoming from this new government. Therefore, we will also allocate **£6.366m** today towards our highway's infrastructure for 20/21, as we recognise the vital need to continue to spend and invest to improve the standards of our roads and footpaths**

We have previously allocated under a previous Conservative amendment a staircase of increases in the highways budget totalling £18m over the first four years of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) - £3m 20/21, £4m 21/22, £5m 22/23 and £6m 23/24. We wish to continue to demonstrate that commitment by allocating a further increase of **£1m** revenue in the year 24/25.

The maximum we could raise the General Council Tax element of the precept is 1.99%.

As a result of the above and to bridge the deficit in the current budget, we feel it is necessary to only raise the General Council Tax element of the precept by **1.59%**.

We have always, and will continue, to only raise Council Tax when and if necessary.
Confidential

As a result of the above proposals it is proposed to:

- Create a **£16m** capital environmental pot in order to invest in projects in support of the Council's stated position on the climate emergency
- Create a **£5m** pot that will help to deliver a range of community based investments that support the Council's aspiration of "Making Cambridgeshire a great place to live"++
- Invest a further **£6.366m** in highway infrastructure**

These proposals will increase the current capital programme and as a consequence the level of prudential borrowing – the revenue implications of which are set out below.

++ We anticipate that this pot can be funded from capital receipts yet to be confirmed however as the current pipeline of sales has already been allocated to support delivery of the approved programme, for prudence we are making provision for additional financing costs in our amendment.

** We expect the Government to provide additional highways funding for 20/21. As this has not yet been announced, it is proposed to fund £6m of this sum through prudential borrowing and £366k from revenue until such time as this additional funding is forthcoming.

The revenue implications of this additional borrowing will be funded by reducing the MRP contribution to the Transformation Fund for the 20/21 financial year and rebalanced once Government commitments have been received.

Will we also make the following revenue additions -

- Further increase the investment in the Council's highway infrastructure by an additional **£1m** per year from year 24/25
- Increase funding to the Local Highways Improvement Schemes by **£200,000**.

Adults Committee

Every year the County Council undertakes a self-assessment of its Adult Social Care service - a "state of the nation" look at how the service is performing and delivering for users. A very accessible summary document, called the Local Account, is then published on the Council's website every year. The detailed document and the summary are well worth a read for those interested to know how adult social care is fairing in Cambridgeshire.

Both can be found here:

<https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1112/Committee/3/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>

Children and Young People

[The Strategy - SEND](#) is Everybody's Business - sets out our vision, principles and priorities to identify and meet the needs of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) from birth to the age of 25.

Economy & Environment

East West Rail

Preferred Route Option between Bedford and Cambridge announced

Communities between Bedford and Cambridge move a step closer to faster, more sustainable connectivity, as a Preferred Route Option for this section of the East West Rail line was announced. This will lead to the Government making a final decision on whether to take this project forward, and to make an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO).

The route is expected to link existing stations in Bedford and Cambridge with communities in Cambourne and the area north of Sandy, south of St. Neots.

The Preferred Route Option was chosen following detailed analysis which found that:

- It would deliver the best value for taxpayers, returning the most benefit for every £ spent
- It was the most popular option with people who responded to EWR Co's 2019 consultation
- It would deliver the best opportunities for supporting and enhancing the environment.

The announcement reveals the detailed potential benefits of the Preferred Route Option for local communities, including:

- A potential brand new station for the growing population at Cambourne
- A potential brand new station in the area north of Sandy, south of St Neots connecting with services to towns including Peterborough and Doncaster and even as far as Edinburgh
- Easy access to Bedford town centre, potentially supporting plans to regenerate the town and enabling connections to communities across the midlands
- Simple access to Cambridge city centre, and connections onto communities across Suffolk and Norfolk

The chosen route would also support local aspirations to develop housing which is more affordable in areas along the route.

Local businesses would benefit from access to suppliers, customers, and talent as more people will be able to afford to live and work in the area.

Health

County Council funded Health Checks

Free NHS health checks are being offered to residents aged 40-74 years to help detect early health issues before they do real damage. The 20-30 minutes checks, funded through the County Councils Public Health budget, will include monitoring blood pressure, weight, cholesterol and lifestyle factors that influence health.

By booking a check our residents can find out how likely they are to get heart or kidney disease, diabetes or have a stroke in the future, and if the likelihood is high, advice on how to reduce this. Those aged over 65 are also told about the signs and symptoms of dementia. Between April 2017 and March 2018, over 20,500 Health Checks were completed across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, an increase of 14 per cent from the previous year.
