

## District Councillor's Report for The Mordens Ward SCDC

February 2022

### 2018/19 Accounts Audit

An extra Audit and Corporate Governance committee meeting is being called for the 4<sup>th</sup> March due to further delays in the completion of the 2019 accounts audit. While assurances had been made that the audit would be completed by the end of February, it has become clear that this will not be the case and so the extra meeting has been called to understand why the district council finds themselves facing further delays.

### 2022/2023 Budget

There are many things to welcome in the South Cambs District Council budget such as money towards environmental improvements. I supported money towards building more council houses, something I believe we desperately need more of. However, other areas I could not support, primarily the increase of Council Tax and increased external borrowing for the purpose of commercial investment.

With the current cost of living problems, I could not support increasing the council tax to the maximum legally allowed which is £5 for a Band D property (a £50 difference to the council tax paid four years ago). The budget included spending £200,000 on recarpeting the council building and £70,000 on redecoration which I thought could wait and would cover the majority of the money an increase would raise this year (£327,000 is the amount generated from this year's council tax increase). It was also revealed through the course of the meeting that over £500,000 has been used to pay staff to leave the council over the past four years via Early retirement settlements, gardening leaves and redundancies, if this was avoided then significant savings could be made. The District Council will also be putting up council tenants' rents by the legal maximum of 4.1%, which I did not support.

The council's budget is reliant on the investment strategy. We can see that the only real need for the council to borrow and get into debt is to make commercial investments, like buying offices to rent out. The district Council has had to scale back on its investment plans due to government changing the rules, local authorities are no longer allowed to borrow money from government purely for yield, but there must be additional benefits for communities. Councils looking to bring in money from investments is not a principle that I disagree with entirely, but I don't believe we should be borrowing nearly £150m to do so in uncertain times especially when this risk could burden residents with further tax. Below is a table that shows the authorised borrowing limits:

|  | 2020/2021<br>Limit<br>£000 | 2021/2022<br>Limit<br>£000 | 2022/2023<br>Limit<br>£000 | 2023/2024<br>Limit<br>£000 |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Authorised limit – borrowing                       | 433,893                    | 479,142                    | 359,908                    | 394,468                    |
| Authorised limit – other long term liabilities     | -                          | -                          | -                          | -                          |
| Authorised limit – total external debt             | 433,893                    | 479,142                    | 359,908                    | 394,468                    |
| Operational boundary – borrowing                   | 428,893                    | 474,142                    | 354,908                    | 389,468                    |
| Operational boundary – other long term liabilities | -                          | -                          | -                          | -                          |
| Operational boundary – total external debt         | 428,893                    | 474,142                    | 354,908                    | 389,468                    |

I had proposed for an additional planning enforcement officer, many have felt for a long time now that the planning enforcement department needs additional resource, unfortunately this was voted against but we have been told that there is a review taking place as to how the department runs. I hope that once this review has taken place, more officers will be recruited.

There has been a significant increase in the planning budget, a department that saw a large cut of nearly a million pounds two years ago this means a net increase over the two years of around £2m. Many have pushed for more money for the planning department at every budget meeting so in the first instance were pleased to see this. However, some of this increase covers yet another review of the planning department and in many parts of the planning budget were words such as “an increase in recharges/overheads for 22-23” or “Estimate to 2022-23 is mainly attributable to higher Recharge/Overhead costs being attributed to the service” which means we are unclear as to whether this will equate to more officers aka ‘new money’ or the majority being simply reallocation from other budget areas. This is particularly important as we are aware that over £300,000 is at risk of being returned to developers for failing to deal with their applications on time.

To see the budget papers in full you can do so via the link below:

[https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g9214/Public reports pack Tuesday 22-Feb-2022 14.00 Council.pdf?T=10](https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g9214/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2022-Feb-2022%2014.00%20Council.pdf?T=10)

### **Electric Bin lorries**

Two further electric bin lorries should be arriving at the Waterbeach depot soon. This now takes the depot to it’s maximum electricity supply. A solar plant is now to be installed from part of the ‘greening’ budget proposals so that more electric bin lorries can be purchased in the future.

### **Green Bin collection**

There has been further interruptions to the Green Bin collections of late. The advice is for residents to please keep putting out your bins on the official days but bring them back in if not collected. Currently there is no facility to report a missed green bin on the website. Some residents, in particular those who pay annually for additional green bins, have asked if refunds will be available. I have asked about this and have had the response that this is not currently under consideration.

**Cllr Heather Williams**

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