

Councillor Peter McDonald Duxford Division & Ward:
District Councillor for Parishes of Duxford, Hinxton, Ickleton, Babraham, Pampisford.
County Councillor also for Foxton, Fowlmere, Shepreth, Thriplow, Heathfield, Heydon, Chishills,
Whittlesford

Parish Council Report – November 2023.

Planning Application queries

The Greater Cambridge Planning authority processes well over 3000 planning applications every year, and most of these applications run smoothly. However, occasionally there are problems with the handling of planning applications. Concerns about the planning application process should initially be referred to the application case officer, whose name is listed on the application and whose contact details can be found here

<https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/about-us/contact-us/development-management-area-teams/> (we are in Area Team East). Any concerns that have not been dealt with satisfactorily by the case officer should be referred to the Area Manager (Jane Rodens). If there is still a problem at this stage then please contact either Cllr Hawkins (the Cabinet Member for Planning) or myself and we will investigate. In the event of any problems it is much better to follow this process while the application is still being considered. Once an application has been decided, the mechanisms available to revisit the decision are very limited.

Council Financial Health

Councils across the UK are facing a collective budget gap of over £3 billion, according to recent research by the Local Government Association and Unison. This is affecting most of the 50 councils across the East of England, 29 of which face budget shortfalls of over £1 million, and 41 of which face a budget shortfall of some kind, which is likely to lead to a cut in service provision. South Cambridgeshire District Council is one of only 9 councils in the region that has no shortfall, with a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year, thanks to our administration's careful financial management and well-designed investment strategy.

Youth engagement workshops

As part of the council's youth engagement programme, planning officers have been running workshops in local schools introducing children to some of the design challenges and career options in development and planning. One of these was held recently at Leys School and Fowlmere Primary School, where the children were given presentations about a current development proposal, were taken on a site visit, and took part in a competition to design some visual elements of the proposals.

Continuous Improvement and Key Performance Indicators

The District Council regularly monitors its performance across all services as part of a philosophy of continuous improvement. Performance is tracked by a set of 31 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are examined quarterly along with the other members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

In the last assessment we examined the council's performance for the period April–June 2023, including scrutinising the KPIs and performance against the business plan for the year. Overall, the council is maintaining excellent performance levels when compared with other councils, with most KPIs showing steady good performance or gradual overall improvement. Many of these targets are set at ambitious levels designed to stretch the performance for South Cambridgeshire well above typical levels for local government.

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Performance improvement highlights include reducing the average time it takes to determine householder Planning Applications from 11 weeks to 9 weeks in the past year, and reducing the average time to re-let vacated Council Houses from 100 days to 22 days over the past 3 years. The council will continue to work on improvements like these that make a real, positive difference to the lives of residents. Serious questions are asked in these committee meetings if any KPI appears to be showing a trend in the wrong direction. The questioning is summarised in the minutes which can be examined for all previous meetings.

<https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=417&MIId=9799&Ver=4>

Homes for Ukraine update The war in Ukraine may no longer be on the front pages of our newspapers but the crisis continues for those families who have been displaced by ongoing hostilities. The council has recently launched a Homes for Ukraine Landlord Incentive Scheme, designed to make more options available to guests who are moving on after their initial stay with a host. Landlords who are able to provide properties in South Cambridgeshire to Homes for Ukraine guests resident in the district will qualify for a financial incentive. The incentives differ depending on the size of the property, and whether the property is provided at market rent or at local housing allowance rate. The landlord must also provide a minimum tenancy of 6 months from the outset. To express interest, please sign up here, email HFULiaison@Scams.gov.uk or call the Home for Ukraine team on 01954 71341

Cambridgeshire County Report

Cambridgeshire County Council's estimated budget gap for 2024/5 has increased from a predicted £16m to more than £23m – largely due to increases in demand for services and inflationary pressure.

In papers published for last week's Strategy, Resources and Performance committee, the Council is also estimating that without action being taken this gap will grow, and is predicted to be more than £20m in the following year, and a further £19m+ the year after that.

In 2023-24, pressures on our budget have arisen principally due to several very high-cost children's social care placements and a delay in receiving income from a newly constructed solar farm (which requires connection to the electricity grid). In addition, we are seeing that demand for bed-based care for older people is also rising, following a period of reduction in demand and then stability stretching back for some time, to the beginning of the pandemic.

It also points to wider national and even international issues which have impact on the council's pressures – such as interest rates which the Bank of England has said are likely to remain above 5% until 2026, which impact on all goods and services the council buys, the cost of borrowing as well as pay award costs for both council workers, and a large

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externally commissioned workforce which includes residential care for vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to set the Council's 2024/5 budget will be discussed by Members in December before a period of scrutiny, throughout January, including an opportunity for residents to comment on the plans.

Fostering Teenagers

The Cambridgeshire Fostering Service is asking parents whose own children have flown the nest, either to attend university or gain independence in other ways, to consider fostering vulnerable young people.

In Cambridgeshire, there are currently more than 400 young people in the 12-18 age range who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to continue living with their birth families. These young people would benefit hugely from the invaluable experience of people who have raised teenagers and supported them on their journey to independence.

Quality Of Life Survey

Most Cambridgeshire residents feel happy and safe in the county, well connected to their local communities, and believe it's a great place to raise children – according to the County Council's first annual Quality of Life survey involving more than 5,500 residents.

But unsurprisingly this is less likely to be the case for people in some specific groups, with a stark finding that loneliness in Cambridgeshire is far higher than the national average. Loneliness was most likely to be reported by those aged 18 to 25, who also reported more struggles with their mental health.

Satisfaction with Council services was mixed. It was highest across library, waste management, street lighting and registration services, and lowest in road and pavement maintenance.

A snapshot of results

- 84% of residents feel safe in, and 75% feel they belong to, their local community - defined as the area within 15-minute walk of their home.
- 72% of residents reported high or very high levels of happiness, with an average score of 7.25, in line with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2022 national benchmark of 7.45.
- 29% of residents indicated they often feel lonely - higher than national ONS data, of 8% feeling lonely always or often, and 25% felt lonely always, often or some of the time.
- Younger age groups are more likely to report loneliness – including 52% of 18-24s – compared to only 18% of those aged 55+ years.
- 37% of residents reported struggling with their mental health in the last year. This rose to 61% for 18-24s and 59% for 25-34s reporting struggling with mental health in the last year. A significantly smaller proportion of 65+ years report similar struggles (11%).

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- 30% of parents reported their child has faced mental health problems in the last year.
- 52% of residents trust CCC to make decisions about services.
- 44% agree that the council delivers value for money, slightly higher than the Local Government Association (LGA) national benchmark of 42%.
- 45% agree that the council acts on the concerns of residents against 40% who disagree, with a high number of don't knows (16%). This is below the LGA average of 52%, with only 2% unsure - but the two surveys use different answer scales and so are not directly comparable
- 84% of those who use the services say they are satisfied with libraries and registration services, with 83% satisfied with waste management and 78% with street lighting. Park & Ride, the guided busway and trading standards also scored satisfaction levels above 70%
- 76% are dissatisfied with road and pavement maintenance – both a local and national concern. In open questions at the end of the survey, improving road maintenance and fixing pot holes were the most often raised concern.
- 86% of residents are concerned about cost of living increases, as a result 48% have cut back on heating use, 27% have cut back on nutritious food, 8% have used a foodbank and 9% have stopped using prescription medicines.

Peter McDonald

Nov 5th 2023