

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report January/February 2019 [For February Meetings]

The **County Council** met at the beginning of this month to approve its budget and set council tax for 2019/20 in the context of its 5 year business plan. The overall objective is to continue to protect and invest in vital services whilst using service transformation, efficiency, investment and commercialisation to offset cuts in funding. The transformation of the way the Council works is a key factor in delivering best value for money and to support this the budget includes an increase of £4.764m in the transformation fund. The Council will also carry forward the £9.1m remaining balance of the smoothing fund that was created last year which will continue to act as a contingency, as it did recently when £3.4m was used to safeguard valued children's services in the face of rising demand. The Council's commercial projects to date are due to return a profit of £11.2m in 2019/20 including £1m from the Soham solar farm which this month met its annual £1m income target 2 months ahead of schedule. The money derived from commercial activities is a key element of the funding required to support delivery of front line services and this month saw a proposal to generate solar power at Babraham Park & Ride. The project would involve putting carports over parking spaces to support solar panels. The Council has completed a high level business case to support a planning application in 2019 with construction starting in 2020.

The coming year and, as importantly, the 5 years ahead continue to provide considerable challenges due to the changes in central Government funding. The decision this year has therefore been taken to raise council tax by 2.99%, the Government's proposed maximum, in addition to the 2% precept for social care. This will allow for increased budgets to be allocated for services that support vulnerable adults and children and for highways maintenance.

Members acknowledged the contribution that staff make to the council, and reflecting on the unpalatable one-off saving of £930,000 that was made this year by imposing 3 days of unpaid leave on staff earning over £26,000 per annum [or pro rata], rejected an Officer proposal that this should be repeated in future years. As has been widely reported in the press, to show solidarity with staff, all but one county councillor has committed to giving up an equivalent sum of 1.2% of their councillor's allowance.

The Council continues to communicate its message to central Government about the inequity of funding. Unlike over 90% of councils, Cambridgeshire now receives no revenue support grant at all from Government. If it were funded even at the rate of the average county council, it would receive an additional £19m each year and avoid the need for the council to pass on council tax increases to residents. The Leader of the Council will be writing again to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to remind him of the need for fairer funding for Cambridgeshire. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2UO1M8j>

Acting in my role as a substitute member I attended the January meeting of **Economy & Environment Committee** [E&E]. Item 5 on the agenda was "Integrated Transport Block Funding [ITB] Allocation Proposals". ITB funding is Government grant that is allocated locally to a range of activities. Some concern was raised by members about the low level of funding for air quality monitoring [£23,000]. This money goes to district councils and it is they who carry out the work. Reassurance was given by Officers that this is only part of the funding available for air quality monitoring and that all planning applicants are required to contribute to monitoring and mitigation of the impact that their proposals may have. For Bar Hill Division there was interest in a funding allocation that was included in 'Delivering Transport Strategy Aims'. The list of projects that will be funded in 2019/20 includes a new footway/cycleway that will link Dry Drayton to the new non-motorised users' path towards Cambridge that is being delivered as part of the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon project. Having worked with Dry Drayton Parish Council and a large contingent of residents over the past year, it was extremely pleasing to have confirmation that the project will receive £175,000 of funding for this. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2sq66yb>

Whilst not called upon to sub at the E&E meeting in February I did attend as the agenda included items on the new developments at Waterbeach and Bourn airfield and particularly one on a proposal to extend the funding on contracted bus services to the end of 2019/20. Following concern that had been raised with me by residents about possible changes to local bus services I wanted to confirm the reassurance I had given that the technical changes to funding arrangements had been misinterpreted as changes to services. Responsibility for bus services now lies with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority [CPCA] which levies the County Council [CCC] for the cost of bus contracts. Until the review of bus services that the CPCA is undertaking is complete, it is effectively returning the levy to CCC for 2019/20 and the Council will continue to maintain the requisite contracts for that time. I have confirmed that the tender specification will be for exactly the services that are currently provided. However, I have asked to be kept updated on progress towards awarding the contracts as it does require a provider's bid to exactly mirror that specification to avoid any changes actually resulting. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2tezOqC>

There was nothing of particularly local interest on the agenda for **Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee's** January meeting. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2UMS31T>

I was though called upon to sub for a colleague on the Local Highways Improvement panel for one of its full day sessions. Whilst there were no applications for Bar Hill division to be considered this year, there was an application by Madingley Parish Council which provoked understandable concern from Dry Drayton and I also attended the panel session when that application was considered to offer Dry Drayton's views and my support for them. The panel's recommendations will be presented to committee for approval at its March meeting.

I also attended the January meeting of **Children & Young People Committee** as most of its agenda was taken up with matters relating to education. I was particularly interested to listen to the debate on the Schools Funding Formula item which included notification of the transfer of £1.7m of Dedicated Schools Grant funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. It is evident that schools' funding and its calculation is incredibly complicated but what is clear is the consistent underfunding of Cambridgeshire's schools and the authorisation of the transfer of this money is only really like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. Annual data for educational outcomes was also reported to committee. South Cambridgeshire is generally the highest achieving district. However, it is sad to see that across the county the gap in attainment between children on free school meals and those not, remains stubbornly high. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2TFt40x>

Locally two of our primary schools are currently considering conversion to academy status and I am following the process closely in both cases. I shall be writing to the Director of Education to let him know how dis-spiriting it is to hear that one of those schools is prompted to consider such a move partly through its disenchantment with the level of support it pays the Council for.

Health Committee has met twice since my last report. This committee is responsible both for the Public Health budget and for scrutinising the performance of NHS providers. January's meeting was attended by the Clinical Director of Hinchingsbrooke to answer questions from the committee on the recent CQC Report that gave an overall rating of the hospital as 'requiring improvement'. Some concern was expressed by members about the reliability and consistency of assessment by CQC. This is not an organisation that the committee scrutinises but members are considering how they may have this concern addressed. Report: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/location/RGN90>

Agenda pack: January meeting: <https://bit.ly/2I4LCpv> February meeting: <https://bit.ly/2URvYz9>

As a member of this committee I also attended a meeting of the NHS Sustainability & Transformation [STP] Board which has 27 members. Much of the debate time was taken up with the items on A&E performance and delayed transfers of care [DToC]. A&E departments are getting busier, treating 243 more patients on average each week this year compared to last. Projects to reduce numbers include identification and re-routing to more suitable resources those who attend on multiple occasions and work to reduce the level of attendances from nursing/care homes. I also attended the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Health & Wellbeing Board [H&WB]. The STP Board's DToCs report was also considered here emphasising that this remains the highest priority for all. Agenda pack - STP Board: <https://bit.ly/2WVviuO> H&WB: <https://bit.ly/2MYEjP0>

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority appointed a new Interim Chief Finance Officer [S73]. Details of this and the CPCA budget and business plan: <https://bit.ly/2DqOEie>

The **Greater Cambridge Partnership's** consultation on the Cambourne to Cambridge busway - Phase 2 has now opened. The closing date is 31 March 2019. Full details: <https://bit.ly/2ULCHdW>

East West Rail's consultation on the route options for Bedford to Cambridge is also open for comment until 11 March 2019: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/haveyoursay>

Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Panel met in January. Members' agenda included a report on the proposed precept: <https://bit.ly/2UQnhW8> Changes have also been announced to the way the police deal with lost/found property: <https://bit.ly/2GAtDoo>

The 2019/20 budget and precept report presented to members of **Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire & Rescue Authority** can be read at: <https://bit.ly/2E20xg1>

I look forward to receiving any questions or comments that you have about the items in this report or any other matters either at your February meetings or by email.

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