

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report Dry Drayton Parish Council - 06 April 2021 meeting

We've all just had an Easter weekend of very variable weather during which we have been able to enjoy some small new freedoms. From 29 March the government allowed a slight relaxation of the lockdown rules which meant that groups of up to six people or two households could meet outdoors while maintaining social distancing. Whilst this is good news and reflects the hard work that the vast majority of people have put in during the lockdown to reach this point, we are all still being reminded to continue to stick to the rules that are in place and to follow the 'hands, face, space and fresh air' guidance.

Incidence rates remain relatively stable across all areas of Cambridgeshire, and South Cambridgeshire remains below the national average and showed a -17% change in case numbers in the last report I received and is the lowest of any area in the county. You can view the latest case rates for Cambridgeshire on a daily basis using the Government data website:

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=utla&areaName=Cambridgeshire>

An important recent change is that anyone who records a positive LFT [lateral flow test] will now be required to take a follow up PCR test [polymerase chain reaction] test. This provides an additional check in the effort to control the spread of Covid-19. More details about tests can be found at:

<https://bit.ly/3fNOMHf>

The number of patients being treated for Covid-19 in our hospitals and the number of people dying from the virus is now, thankfully, much lower than earlier in the year.

The roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme is continuing to progress well and the latest statistics on vaccine delivery for local authorities in Cambridgeshire are available under the 'weekly data' heading on [Statistics » COVID-19 Vaccinations \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/statistics/covid-19/vaccinations)

There is financial support available to parents who need to take time off work to look after children who are self-isolating. Details at: <https://bit.ly/3fJi7Jc>

Transport

The government recently announced allocation of £3bn for 'a greener bus revolution' aimed at improving bus services. The Mayor has subsequently announced that he has secured £100,000 for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority [CPCA] area to begin work on delivering a reformed service.

Since he took office in 2017, the Mayor has devolved responsibility [and budget] for transport to the county council. That responsibility includes provision of public transport, including contracted local bus services, community transport and concessionary travel. From 01 April 2021 devolution of that responsibility ended and is now the direct responsibility of the CPCA. I understand that current bus services arrangements will remain unchanged. The Combined Authority's Local Transport Plan policies commit it to increasing the take-up of public transport in rural areas as well as our towns and cities. The Authority has established a bus reform programme which is developing a business case for using public subsidy in new and more effective ways to deliver bus services to more people and communities. This could potentially involve franchising or quality partnerships with bus companies. £13m has been budgeted to be spent in 2021/22 supporting bus services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Whilst the majority of bus services are run by the providers on a commercial basis, the number of supported bus services in this area is increasing. In the last year four new subsidised services [including to rural areas] have been introduced. A pilot of a new demand responsive transport scheme has also been commissioned in West Huntingdonshire.

This work is going on against a background of Covid-19 and its impacts on bus services. Government guidance included guidance on avoiding the use of public transport which reduced the number of passengers using buses by as much as 80%. The Combined Authority is currently working with bus companies on plans to ensure a recovery in services and passenger numbers once the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

Another priority consideration in any reshaping of public transports is the legal target to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. This will inevitably impose significant costs on the bus sector. At the moment electric buses cost twice as much as diesel vehicles and upgrading the bus fleet to zero carbon standards will require significant investment. The Campaign for Rural England has suggested that higher bus subsidies could be paid for by repurposing road building funds but bus subsidies mainly require annual revenue funding while road building funds are capital expenditure. The road schemes promoted by the Combined Authority include, among their aims, support for economic growth, the reduction of congestions and improvements in road safety. To complement those objectives, its Local Transport Plan policies also aim to deliver better rural bus services.

Adult Social Care

This year the county council's budget included an increase in the adult social care budget of over £20m. 2021/22 will see an increase from a net budget of £141.4m to £161.8m. Similar to councils across the country, Cambridgeshire County Council's Adult Services has faced pressures for a number of years. Wage costs and the increasing complexity of needs being just two of the factors contributing to this but, despite this, the county's adult services generally benchmark as low cost with good outcomes.

2020/21 started with a balanced budget with no un-mitigated pressures carried forward from the previous year. However, the financial and human impact of Covid-19 on the service has been substantial. As previously reported it is anticipated that there will be at least a 10% increase in spend required. A large proportion of this will be funded by new grants or by the NHS, as part of national financial arrangements for hospital discharges. However, additional to this the council is having to make investment into the care market to ensure stability and sustainability. A major element of that investment is the 10% resilience payment made to most providers of adult social care during much of the first quarter of the year. This payment was to fund personal protective equipment [PPE], additional staff costs, increased cleaning regimes and other similar pressures that providers faced. For the council this impacted on delivery of savings programmes and, at the end of January, Adult Services were forecast to be £8.9m [4.7%] overspent, although that was an improvement on the position as forecast in December. The financial impact of Covid-19 though will continue to be felt into the next budget year and prudential management of some of the NHS funding [up till March] includes allocating some of it to offset the effects in 2021/22.

Communities

Cambridgeshire Local [formerly Think Communities] is continuing its efforts to develop the new working model that is intended to embed services more firmly in the community. New members of the team have now taken up their posts, and partnerships with agencies across many different sectors have continued to grow. The council's focus on effecting positive change in relation to Cambridgeshire residents' social mobility has sharpened, whilst work to deliver support to those affected by the pandemic also continues. The council's determination to improve social mobility is supported by its recent partnership with a team from UCL Institute for Innovation & Public Purpose, to understand more about food poverty in Cambridgeshire. It is acknowledged that food poverty is an issue that has grown during the pandemic as has the number of people experiencing financial hardship. It is hoped that this research will support the design of a policy that will most effectively tackle these issues.

Education

The work of teachers and support staff during the pandemic and cannot be over-estimated. That work continues since the return of all children to school. Local incidence of Covid-19 is being very well managed.

Initial reports suggest a general feeling of relief among the great majority of parents about children returning to school. It is to be hoped that this will make a real difference to family stress and to the mental and emotional wellbeing of young people in particular. There were increasing demands for support from families struggling to cope with behaviour in the home as lockdown continued. Young people's workers have been reporting increasing anxieties among young people who have talked about a growing sense of isolation and of missing their friends. The return to school will hopefully have a swift impact in addressing issues such as these.

It is likely that there will be some increased demand for support and services for children, young people and their families even after school attendance returns to normal. Being out of school for the best part of a year is bound to have an impact on children's ability to undertake classroom learning, and some children will have fallen further behind than others. These are additional factors that must surely serve to increase pressures on teaching staff. The education service will be carefully monitoring the situation.

Household Recycling Centres

From 1st April until 30th September all sites will be operating for the longer summer opening hours. Details: <https://bit.ly/3uoJhcc>

Management of the sites continues to require maintenance of two metre social distancing and the booking system for all users remains in place at Alconbury, Bluntisham, Milton, St Neots and Thriplow sites. Information on booking: <https://bit.ly/3fM1ite>

Some monitoring of the time residents actually spend at the sites has, where possible and safe, been taking place and this has led to the ability to increase capacity for bookings. Every week approximately 1,100 residents book a slot and then don't use it or cancel it. 300 - 400 residents still turn up each week without making a booking. This currently allows site staff to apply a light touch with regard to enforcing the booking rule but this may not always be the case, and the safest way to ensure against a wasted journey, is to book a slot. Residents are also asked to ensure that they do cancel unwanted appointments to allow them to be reused.

I look forward to seeing you all at your meeting. Please do contact me at any time with any questions or comments either by email or phone.

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