

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT JULY 2022

FULL COUNCIL

The next Full Council meeting will take place on Tuesday 19 July. It will be the first one to take place in the Multi-Function Room at the Council's new HQ at Alconbury Weald—an acid test of its capacity.

STRATEGY & RESOURCES

Decentralisation

The Council's Strategy & Resources Committee has agreed the policy framework and design principles for its programme of decentralisation, and has approved the next steps and pilot approach to put it into place. The principles are that

- a. A greater proportion of the Council's resource (workforce and budget) will be invested through decentralised approaches and structures.
- b. We will involve communities in our decision making, design, and activity.
- c. We will deepen relationships with voluntary and community sector organisations, District, Parish and Town Councils, other public sector partners, and community groups—working together through our democratic roles and most suitable governance structures to deliver the best outcomes for communities.
- d. Social, economic and environmental impacts will be given equal consideration in our decision-making processes.
- e. Our local presence should seek to be navigators and reference points for all local public services. Opportunities to apply this approach should be pursued by the Council's land and property functions.

Climate change and flood money

The first spending from the Council's new Just Transition fund has been agreed. £2.175M over four years has been awarded for a business case for the first phase of the Council's plan for Cambridgeshire to reach Net Zero carbon by 2045. And £1.7M has also been awarded for flood work and nature restoration.

Highways IT system

A new Highways IT system is on the cards for the County Council—but officers have been asked to do more work on their proposals after a report to the Strategy & Resources Committee was sent back. I proposed the delay not only so that more information could be obtained on the costs, but also for more discussion with Highways & Transport Committee councillors on what we would want to see from such a system.

Household Support Fund

The Government has confirmed that it is extending the Household Support Fund for six months of 2022/23 and has allocated £3.58M of grant funding to Cambridgeshire for this. The Fund is intended to provide support to households through free school meals for eligible children during school holidays, and for payments to people in need. In order to meet the Joint Administration's commitment to provide free school meals in the holidays throughout the year, and to have a direct support scheme that is comprehensive, the Strategy & Resources Committee has allocated a further £1.87M to supplement this locally.

Inflation adds to council costs

The County Councils Network and the Society of County Treasurers have revealed that spiralling inflation has left forty of England's largest councils with £729M of additional unfunded costs since they set their budgets in March.

To balance their budgets—as they are legally required to—and control costs, councils warn they face a winter of 'difficult decisions'. The increased costs nationally include

- £428M for adult social care services
- £72M for children's social care
- £397M for capital projects
- £107M for energy prices
- £136M for external contract and labour costs
- £77M for school transport services
- £259M for staff pay

These inflationary costs far outstrip any increases in Government funding or council tax.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Care reform costs

The cost of the Government's adult social care reforms could be a minimum of £10Bn higher than currently estimated, according to the County Councils Network. The reforms include a more generous means-test, a cap on care costs of £86,000, a move towards a 'fair' cost of care, and the ability for people who arrange and fund their own care to ask their council to do it on their behalf.

The higher costs could create a further workforce crisis in social care, with over 5,000 extra staff projected to be required to carry out extra care and financial assessments for those seeking to benefit from the reforms. Councils in rural areas could face the greatest challenges.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The Council's Children & Young People Committee will receive on 5 July a report on the strategy to deliver more SEND school places. It will also be asked to amend the specification of new build primary schools to include 55m² of additional SEND space per up to two forms of entry.

COSMIC

Library@home award

Cambridgeshire's Library@home volunteers are one of three voluntary groups in the county to be given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK and is equivalent to an MBE. It aims to recognise outstanding work by local volunteer groups to benefit their communities. The award was created in 2002 to celebrate The Queen's Golden Jubilee. Recipients are announced each year on 2 June, the anniversary of the Queen's coronation.

The Library@home service provides books and audiobooks to residents who find it difficult to get to a library through disability, illness or caring responsibilities. Volunteers visit once a month to bring and return library books and to have a chat.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/libraries/accessibility>

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Resourcing Net Zero

The Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee is moving ahead to implement its ambitious climate change strategy. The Committee is being asked on 7 July to approve a business case for the first phase of a three-phase approach to getting Cambridgeshire to Net Zero Carbon by 2045. The first phase will use the £2.175M awarded by the Strategy & Resources Committee (see above) and will involve eight workstreams.

1. Gaining professional technical competence in carbon across the Council.
2. Gathering data and intelligence.
3. Refreshing Council policy, governance and decision making on carbon.
4. Maximising the finances to support decarbonisation activity.
5. Enabling more low carbon purchasing.
6. Upskilling the Council workforce and enabling understanding of carbon.
7. Developing a forward strategy.
8. Supporting services in moving their existing knowledge into action.

Carbon pricing

Progress is being made in implementing internal carbon pricing at the County Council. This is a way of assessing the financial value of carbon emissions or carbon reductions, to help inform decisions about projects on environmental as well as financial grounds.

Nature & Climate Declaration and Climate & Ecology Bill

I have asked the Environment & Green Investment Committee on 7 July to recommend to the Full Council that it sign the Nature & Climate Declaration and endorse the Climate & Ecology Bill.

The Nature & Climate Declaration asks the UK Government to deal with key climate risks by

- Fulfilling the UK's fair share of emissions reductions to ensure that the average global temperature increase will not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius
- Halting and reversing biodiversity decline by 2030, and
- Delivering a more ambitious and integrated environmental protection and decarbonisation plan.

The cross-party Climate & Ecology Bill is a plan for a new UK law that addresses the full extent of the climate change and nature crisis in line with the most up to date science.

Energy retrofits

Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership is a collaboration between the County Council and Cambridgeshire's district councils. It is currently delivering energy efficiency projects in over 500 homes across the county with the poorest energy efficiency and lowest incomes, using over £9M of Government grant.

The Government has indicated that it will continue to make funding available to councils for this work until 2025, and the partners are looking to use a contract 'framework' to maximise success in attracting this funding, both for council schemes and also to enable private households to secure a 'trusted contractor' if they can afford to privately fund their own home retrofit works.

Flooding and nature restoration

The Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee is being asked on 7 July to agree to spend the £1.7M awarded by the Strategy & Resources Committee (see above) on

- A natural flood risk management project in the town of March
- Designing a number of 'shovel ready' flood mitigation projects
- Community-led nature restoration and environment schemes

Waterbeach waste facility

Preparations are happening at the Amey waste park at Waterbeach in advance of major works to reduce odour emissions. The works will allow district councils to continue to deliver collected waste to Waterbeach for transfer to alternative processing sites and to landfill from August while the odour emission works are done. These are necessary to comply with new legal requirements.

Updated operating procedures for the transfer station use have been submitted to the Environment Agency for their approval. A planning application has been submitted to the Council's Minerals and Waste Planning team seeking approval for the works proposed for the black bag waste facility.

Hundred Foot de-silting near Welney

The response from DEFRA minister Rebecca Pow MP to the letter from the County and District Councils, Internal Drainage Board, and Stop The Floods about works undertaken on the Hundred Foot last autumn was disappointing. Stephen Barclay MP has been asked to involve himself in the matter.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Local highways officer retires

We have now lost our superb local highways officer Pam Joyce who has retired and will be much missed. Our new local highways officer is Phil Harty, who was previously a local highways officer in West Cambridgeshire before a spell in the Street Works team.

Mepal Bridge works

A reminder that the bridge will be closed for works from 8:00PM Friday to 6:00AM Monday on

- 15-18 July (north joint)
- 22-25 July (south joint)
- 29 July-1 August (central joint)

Welney demountable flood barrier work

The full road closure at Welney for the installation of the demountable flood barrier is due to start on Wednesday 20 July and end on Thursday 25 August. From Friday 26 August to Friday 16 September there will be two-way traffic lights for footpath reinstatement works. The public footpath access at Welney to Welmore Lake Sluice will remain closed until the end of construction.

A reminder of the Environment Agency's weekly surgery event during the Middle Level Barrier Bank works, with their Public Liaison Officer Yazmin Parry every Thursday at the Lamb & Flag in Welney, between 3:00 and 5:00PM.

Local Highways Improvement updates

From the 2020/21 programme

- Footway widening at the Church View junction on to Main Street began on 20 June (Witchford)

From the 2021/22 programme

- The solar studs on the B1411 have been ordered, but the scheme has been paused while footpath work along this road is awaited for later this financial year—the studs will be installed after this (Little Downham)
- The pedestrian crossing on Main Street near the school is awaiting its road safety audit (Witchford)
- The gateway, signing and lining at Jerusalem Drove is complete (Coveney)

Current schemes for 2022/23

- The design is due to be completed by the end of August for the central island on The Brook north of the junction with the High Street, with existing double yellow lines to be extended from their current end point (Sutton)

High Road and Mill Hill junction

Following concerns expressed by a resident, I have taken up with the local highways officer the sight lines and visibility at the junction of High Road Little Downham for drivers and cyclists coming up Mill Hill from Pymoor.

A Furlong Drove crossing

An application has been made to close Furlong Drove Footpath crossing (Byway 33 Little Downham) for six months. The crossing needs an upgrade, and the ballast footway approach has fallen away on both sides, making it unsafe. Plans are being drawn up for this work, which is needed to keep the track safety compliant for rail and road users.

CENSUS

Cambridgeshire has seen one of the UK's biggest population increases over the past ten years, data just published from the 2021 Census shows.

Overall the number of people living in the county rose by more than 57,000 in the last decade to 678,600. This 9.2 per cent rise is higher than the East of England average, in a national picture which saw the East grow faster than any part of the UK.

The figures confirm the County Council's contention that previous Office of National Statistics figures—on which the government bases its grant allocations—under-estimated the size of the county's population.

Included within the Cambridgeshire Census figures is an overall 26 per cent rise in the number of Cambridgeshire people aged 65+, against an 18.6 per cent national average rise—with a high percentage increase of people in the 70 to 74 age band in all districts.

While the more urban areas of the county like Cambridge have seen population growth across all age ranges, its more rural areas have seen small or no growth in the youngest age groups (0-19) but large increases in older populations.

Last year's census took place in March 2021 and data from the census will be published in stages over the next two years. Future releases will include figures on ethnicity, religion, the labour market, education and housing. Also, for the first time, there will be information on UK armed forces veterans, sexual orientation and gender identity.

www.ons.gov.uk/census

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority Board's Annual Meeting on Wednesday 8 June considered only the first part of its long agenda before being held over to Monday 27 June, when it managed to conclude its business.

The day before the Platinum Jubilee holiday, the Chair of the Combined Authority's Audit & Governance Committee received a letter from auditors EY expressing concerns about value for money at the Combined Authority as a result of various ongoing issues.

There is a consensus among Combined Authority officers, chief executives of the member councils, and the Mayor and his statutory deputy, that there is a need for external support for the Combined Authority in addressing the risks which the EY letter has identified. The Combined Authority Board has mandated its officers to continue their ongoing conversations with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) about what this support may look like.

As Chair of the Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee I was invited to attend the delayed meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee on Thursday 30 June. The two committees will need to work closely together as they play their respective roles in responding to the letter from auditors EY about the various issues facing the Combined Authority.

The Audit & Governance Committee agreed that external support would be necessary for the Combined Authority to successfully address the concerns raised by the auditors; and agreed to invite DLUHC to its next meeting. However, it declined to support a specific proposal for an Improvement Board.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLOR

Sutton ward district councillor Mark Inskip and I will be holding our virtual surgery via Zoom from 6:30 to 7:30PM on Tuesday 12 July. Please contact Mark at mark@markinskip.org.uk to book your timeslot.

I hope to be at the Book Café on Friday 19 August and Friday 30 September, 10:00-11:00 at the Village Hall Little Downham.

I am considering options for face to face surgeries in Witchford and Sutton.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division