

# Cllr Lorna Dupré

## MONTHLY REPORT AUGUST 2022

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### FULL COUNCIL

The Council's new HQ at Alconbury Weald was formally opened on Friday 8 July. The Full Council meeting on Tuesday 19 July was the first to take place in the Multi-Function Room, now called the Red Kite Room.

The meeting approved, by a majority of two, the Chief Executive's proposal for a senior staff restructure. I am part of the interview panel on 2 August for the restructured posts.

The meeting also agreed, by the same margin, to sign the Nature & Climate Declaration, a recommendation from the Environment & Green Investment Committee which I chair. Twenty-four councillors voted against this, on the hottest day on record in the UK.

Five motions were debated, four of which were passed—on advertising of junk food, 40-to-30MPH buffer zones, active travel, and pavement parking.

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### STRATEGY & RESOURCES

#### Complaints handling

The Local Government Ombudsman upheld thirteen complaints (72 per cent) against Cambridgeshire County Council out of a total of 18 investigated in 2021/22—and has told the council to improve its responsiveness to complaints handling. All complaints upheld were in the areas of Adult Social Care, Education or Children's Services.

The percentage of upheld complaints, out of a total of 60 considered by the national local government watchdog, puts the county council only slightly above those made to similar organisations which stands at 71 per cent. But the Ombudsman's annual letter raises concerns about how the Council responds.

The annual report shows that Cambridgeshire had not offered a satisfactory remedy to any of the thirteen complaints before they were escalated to the Ombudsman, but once that was done the Ombudsman was satisfied in all cases that its recommendations had been successfully implemented.

The Council has admitted that this is not good enough and the new Chief Executive has committed to improvement.

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## **ADULTS & HEALTH**

### **Integrated Care System**

Friday 1 July was the first official day of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care System (ICS) which includes both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council.

Integrated Care Systems (ICS) are partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and deliver joined up health and care services. There are now 42 ICSs across England. Our ICS brings together health and care organisations, local authorities, and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. More information is available on the new ICS website [www.cpics.org.uk](http://www.cpics.org.uk).

### **Healthwatch annual report**

Healthwatch in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have published their latest annual report, *Championing what matters to you*. It shows how the feedback that local people have shared has helped influence improvements in health and care services.

<https://www.healthwatchcambridgeshire.co.uk/news/2022-06-30/championing-what-matters-you>

### **NHS Health Check service**

Healthy You provide the important NHS Health Check Service to spot early signs of kidney disease, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes or dementia in the at-risk age group 40-74 years. Clinics are held at least monthly in local libraries, including Ely. To check your eligibility and to book a free NHS health check appointment call 0333 005 0093, or follow the link <https://healthyyou.org.uk/services/health-checks/>

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## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Education White Paper**

Very significant changes to education in England are on the way according to the Government's Education White Paper. These include the intention that every school should be in a Multi Academy Trust by 2030, though councils will also be enabled to set up their own MATs. There will also be an expected 32.5 hour minimum school day, a new test of literacy and numeracy for a sample of pupils in Y9, and new intervention powers over schools with two 'requires improvement' Ofsted ratings.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

The Council continues to need to manage the growing budget, overspend and numbers of Education Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with higher levels of special educational needs and disabilities.

In 2016/17 3,429 Cambridgeshire pupils had EHCPs; in 2021/22 the figure was 6,100. The deficit in 'high needs' spending was £39.3M last year, and is projected to grow to £93.2M by 2025/26 if left unchecked. Government regulations mean that the Council cannot divert funding from other sources to fill this gap.

Cambridgeshire is not the only authority in this situation, and the Department for Education has introduced a 'safety valve' mechanism for those authorities most severely affected. Cambridgeshire has now been invited to participate in the third round of this 'safety valve' programme.

This involves the authority entering into an agreement with the DfE to reform its high needs systems to reduce costs and return 'high needs' spending to balance as quickly as possible. Only when the Government is satisfied that a sustainable local plan is in place to reduce the deficit will it consider any national funding support towards the deficit.

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## **COSMIC (COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION)**

### **Household Support Fund**

The Government-funded Household Support Fund, delivered through the Council, continues into 2022/23 offering emergency pay-outs to households in immediate financial distress. However this is clearly a 'sticking-plaster' solution, and more fundamental help is needed to address the causes of financial distress experienced by increasing numbers of people.

The Council has chosen to additionally fund a 'hub' model, repurposing the Covid-19 Support Hub. Working with district councils, communities, and the voluntary sector, this works with those in need to make them aware of—and facilitate applications to—services such as free school meals, Healthy Start, free childcare, warm home discounts, Council Tax reduction schemes and more.

### **Communities Capital Fund**

In 2020 the Council's previous administration established a one-off £5M 'Communities Capital Fund', in which up to £500K each was allocated to a range of bids for capital projects. Eight of these projects are currently 'red-rated' for a variety of reasons, some—but not all—to do with issues such as Covid-19 or supply chain problems. COSMIC has set up a councillor working group to examine these projects in detail and make recommendations about them, which could include changing deadlines, or even termination. Any request for additional funding would have to be treated as a fresh application.

### **Archives**

The move of the Cambridgeshire Archives from Cambridge to Ely completed at around the same time as the Covid outbreak. It has therefore been very difficult

to know what underlying effect the move has had on the service. There has been a considerable increase in requests for digital copies of records, but a large drop in in-person visitor numbers and in the pool of volunteers. The service is considering ways of responding to this digital shift.

Meanwhile the service has applied to The National Archives for national Accredited Archive status. The National Archives visited Ely on 8 June as part of this process, and a decision is awaited.

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## **ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT**

### **Decisions**

The Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee approved the recommendations I reported last month:

- To spend £2.175M on the first phase of the Council's Net Zero plans.
- To access a contract 'framework' to attract more funding for domestic energy retrofits.
- To spend £1.7M on flood and nature restoration projects.

### **Footpath closures for river works**

Various footpaths along the New Bedford will be closed between 1 August and 31 October for Environment Agency works. These footpaths are

- Footpath 6, Mepal
- Footpath 4, Witcham
- Downham Footpath 26, Little Downham
- Footpath 9, Coveney

### **Sunnica application delay**

The timetable for consideration of the Sunnica solar farm application has been upended. The Planning Inspectorate has adjourned the Preliminary Meeting and thereby postponed the Examination. This is because the applicant has not yet submitted its change request for changes to parts of the scheme caused by the National Grid's refusal to allow an extension to the sub-station at Burwell. The Examining Authority is now inviting comments on the prospect of making sufficient progress to enable an Examination to begin in September.

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## **HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT**

### **Mepal Bridge works**

These works have now been completed.

### **Welney demountable flood barrier work**

The full road closure at Welney is expected to continue until 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.

### **A10 / A142 BP roundabout**

The Combined Authority has assigned active travel funding to the BP roundabout to make it possible to cross on foot or by cycle, after the previous changes made it much more dangerous. A high-level options analysis is being carried out over the summer. Putting right the situation left by the previous Mayor and by the District Council which acted as cheerleader for it, is a very welcome development.

### **A10 Ely to A14**

The Highways & Transport Committee has accepted £4M from the Government delivered through the Combined Authority, to develop plans for changes to the A10 from Ely to Milton. A county and district councillor working group will be established to oversee this process.

No decision has yet been made on whether the eventual proposal will include any element of dualling, or whether it will consist solely of junction improvements. The Government has stipulated that a lower cost option than dualling should be assessed, and that all modes of transport should be considered. The work will also need to integrate with Greater Cambridge Partnership schemes and with infrastructure for the large development at Waterbeach. Carbon impacts will also be considered.

Public consultation is expected in early 2023, followed by selection of a preferred option, and a full preliminary design and environmental statement completed by the end of 2024.

### **Local Transport & Connectivity Plan**

The Council is finalising its comments on the Combined Authority's draft Local Transport & Connectivity Plan. It has welcomed the general direction of the Plan, but wants it to be more ambitious about carbon reduction and active travel, and to become less car centric. Locally, the Council points out that the East Cambridgeshire section of the Plan starts with a description of the problem of traffic within the historic core of Ely but contains no proposals to tackle this through improvements for people walking and cycling or removing through traffic. The section on improvements to rail traffic does not include any proposals to improve active travel links to railway stations.

### **Local Highways Improvement updates**

From the 2021/22 programme

- Solar studs on the B1411 still paused for footpath work (Little Downham)
- Pedestrian crossing for school submitted for pricing (Witchford)

Current schemes for 2022/23

- Design for crossing on The Brook due to be completed by the end of September and tied in with another capital scheme in the same location (Sutton)

The LHI working group is continuing to meet to review every stage of the LHI process, and make recommendations to the Highways & Transport Committee.

### **Road safety schemes**

Work is progressing on proposals for Wheatsheaf Crossroads at Bluntisham, scene of a fatal collision in November 2019. Installation is likely to be in 2023/24.

Options are being considered for the 2.5km single-track stretch of Puddock Road heading south from Forty Foot Bank. Residents have ruled out the option of severing the road altogether.

£100K this year will be allocated to developing a proactive Investment Plan on main A roads, using iRAP methodology to assess risks. This is the process which told us that £5M was needed to make the A142 safer between Ely and Chatteris—but nothing like that amount has so far been spent. I have pointed out that while the methodology may be excellent, the issues it flags up then need to be addressed.

£94K will be allocated to small measures identified as part of ongoing investigation processes by the County Council Road Safety Team.

### **20MPH schemes**

A working group, of which I am a member, is finalising criteria for assessment of 20MPH applications. It has already decided to remove the requirement that existing speeds in an application area should already be 24MPH or below. Fourteen 20MPH applications from this year's Local Highways Improvement applications have already been moved from the LHI process to be the first cohort of schemes to be developed under this new budget.

### **Active travel strategy for Cambridgeshire**

Public consultation on this is expected in autumn / winter 2022 with adoption in 2023.

### **Transport strategy for East Cambridgeshire**

The current Transport Strategy for East Cambridgeshire was adopted in December 2017. The Council plans to review and update this strategy in 2023, once it has finished its current work on the Fenland, Huntingdonshire and Active Travel Strategies.

## Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The new Interim Chief Executive now has his feet under the table, and has been delegated considerable power to appoint interims to senior roles. All focus is on Improvement, with up to £750K allocated to this work, and a self-assessment to be reported to the Board in September. A review of Governance has also taken place, with 47 recommendations for action. A Member-Officer protocol has been drawn up to improve behaviour and relationships.

Government-funded programmes to improve the energy efficiency of low income and energy inefficient homes have run into problems nationally as well as locally. The 'net zero energy hub' for Greater South East England—including Cambridgeshire & Peterborough—was awarded £78.35M in Green Homes Grant (LAD2) money, and £118M for the Sustainable Warmth Programme. But lack of capacity in the supply chain, including surveyors and installers, means it has been impossible to spend anything like this. Extensions of time given by Government to deliver previous schemes have resulted in low take up of later schemes because available contractors are still working on earlier ones.

When considering Bus Service Improvement Plans, the Government prioritised areas with lower economic growth. As Cambridgeshire & Peterborough—as a whole—does not fall into this category, it is not surprising that its bid failed. Meanwhile the Combined Authority is preparing for the massive bus upheaval when the Government ceases Covid support to bus providers.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has agreed a programme for scrutiny of the Combined Authority's forthcoming budget setting. It has also agreed to review some of the Combined Authority's previous housing decisions, including Community Land Trusts, the relationship with Laragh Homes, and the Statement of Community Benefit issued by the previous Mayor in favour of the proposed CLT development at Wilburton.

The Housing & Communities Committee has considered and recommended the residual role for the Combined Authority in housing now that it has no money for this purpose. This includes overseeing the buildout of its remaining projects, retaining some more limited housing expertise in-house.

The Combined Authority has also been developing an Alternative Fuels Strategy to go out for six weeks of public consultation.

## MEET YOUR COUNCILLOR

Meet your councillor events will resume in September.

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### **ClIrl Lorna Dupré**

County Councillor for the Sutton division