

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report to Parish Councils January 2017

The debate about the level of increase in council tax that the County Council should levy for 2017/18 has already started. When **General Purposes** Committee [GPC] met in December one of the reports it considered related to the review of draft revenue and capital business planning proposals for 2017/18 to 2021/22. The assumption about any increase in council tax is currently being made on the basis of the same 2% as was finally agreed last year. During debate at GPC differences of opinion were expressed on what might be the right level for 2017/18. One member drew attention to what the Council could do if it raised council tax by 4% whilst another commented that he could not support any increase. It will be up to each political group to consider its position with regard to any increase and put forward a budget proposal based on that position, if it differs from the assumed 2% in the current draft. Agenda pack etc 20.12.16 meeting: bit.ly/2izxXbi

At its first January meeting GPC received an update on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. There is a stark difference between the Government's change in 'Spending Power' for Cambridgeshire [a decrease of only 0.17%] and its reduction in the Settlement Funding Assessment for 2017/18 [approximately 18%]. The largest component of this 18% reduction is in the Revenue Support Grant [RSG], the main revenue government grant. The Council will see a reduction of £18.035m in RSG [approximately 54.1%]. For those of you with good accounting brains, the explanation for the disparity between the -0.17% Spending Power and the -18% in the Settlement Funding Assessment is that Spending Power attempts to account for Council Tax. In arriving at its Spending Power figure, the government has assumed a growth in the council tax base of the average of the preceding three years, and has also assumed the Social Care Authorities apply the full 2% social care precept in each year. The Spending Power figure also fails to take account of inflationary or demographic pressures. Last year's Council meeting to approve the budget took nearly 12 hours. This year?
Agenda pack etc 10.01.17 meeting: bit.ly/2jndjfd

I have been asked whether, post devolution, the County Council has plans to control bus services under a franchise model. It is important to say that any decision to implement a franchise model would be made by the Combined Authority for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and not by the County Council. At least one member of the Greater Cambridge City Deal Board has expressed support for working more closely with private bus operators but it is acknowledged that any improvement proposal would have to be part of a wider strategy. Meanwhile our MP, Heidi Allen has been gathering feedback from across the district on what local concerns are regarding bus services [or the lack of them]. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to that.

On a related subject: tackling congestion in Cambridge has been in the news again recently. I remain opposed to a congestion charge that would disproportionately affect South Cambridgeshire residents accessing the city whilst doing nothing to address the contribution to congestion made by city residents. I believe that any such charge must be part of a wider strategy to ensure that our villages have options other than driving and must include better bus services.

Providing the infrastructure for other sustainable modes of travel will obviously also help to reduce congestion and, as the Hills Road cycle path has shown, when the facilities are good, numbers increase dramatically. Whilst some really good major schemes have been completed in recent years and others are planned [Chisholm Trail and the Greenways], there are other, smaller schemes that would benefit our villages. A link from Wellbrook Way is an aspiration of Girton's residents. I understand there is S106 money for cycle infrastructure from Phase 2 of the NIAB development but that is quite a way off being triggered. I am investigating how we might find the money to forward fund this. I also recently arranged a meeting for local representatives of Boxworth to meet with County officers to look at the possibility of a pedestrian/cycle path. Remember there is the A14 legacy fund and County's Local Highways Improvements scheme that can be used at least as seed funding for bids that might realise aspirations like these.

It's that time of year when cold and icy conditions can be expected. Once again I ask you all please to look out for others, particularly the more vulnerable members of our community, and to take extra care yourselves, too. Anyone eligible should seek entitlements and benefits such as Winter Fuel Payments and Cold Weather Payments. Older and disabled people can also sign up to their utility supplier's Priority Services Register to get extra help and support with energy supplies. This includes advance notice if the supply is going to be interrupted as well as priority reconnection. To sign up, you need to contact your supplier and, if you have different suppliers for gas and electricity, you need to contact both.

Members of the **Health** Committee had a presentation from the ambulance service at its January meeting. Although the headlines say that locally and nationally response times are not being met, locally the service is exceeding targets and national performance for getting patients to acute units for life threatening incidents such as heart attacks or strokes. The committee is also receiving regular briefings on the Sustainability & Transformation Plan for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. The NHS and local government have come together to develop a plan to keep the service 'Fit for the Future'. Proper engagement with users is going to be key to changing how health and care services are delivered to meet the needs of people living in the 21st century. A Public Involvement Assembly has been set up to encourage wider involvement from local people. Anyone wishing to join and participate in workshops can phone: 01223 725304 or email [with Public Involvement Assembly as the subject]: capccg.contact@nhs.net

Other agenda items for the Health Committee included the proposal to co-locate the out of hours service that is currently sited at Chesterton with the accident and emergency department [A&E] at Addenbrookes Hospital. One of the main benefits of this would be that, those presenting at A&E who do not need the specialist service that this provides, can very easily be redirected to the out of hours service. This should help to reduce pressure on A&E. Members also received a very interesting report on a system wide review of health outcomes in Cambridgeshire. Agenda pack etc: bit.ly/2iuEEbs

I look forward to seeing those of you who have forthcoming meetings. Additionally please don't hesitate or email any questions or comments that you may have.

Lynda

lyndaharford@icloud.com;
01954 251775/07889 131022;
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