

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report September/October 2018

As the County Council starts to prepare its **Budget for 2019/2020** councillors have been made aware that increased demand for services this year has already increased the current year's budget gap to £5.2m and that it is forecast that there is an additional £20.7m to find for next year. Figures currently being used make pessimistic assumptions on the level of Government grant that the Council might receive for next year and the actual amount will not be known until the Chancellor's Autumn Statement [inappropriately named as the details are usually published just before Christmas!] The widening gap for the current year reflects the local impact of a national increase in demand for children's and adults' services and is based on assumptions about the level of Government grant that the Council might receive for next year. The predictions of increased numbers that were made earlier in the year have already been exceeded. Whilst there are plans in place to manage the growing levels of demand, the nature of the changes to the way services are delivered means that it could be up to 3 years until the maximum benefits of investment currently being made are realised. Work is also continuing to increase and boost the income the Council makes from its commercial activities. It is forecast that an additional £4m will be realised this year and £10m next. However, at a recent meeting of members with service directors, I asked about the speed of this income generation. The company created by the Council seems currently only to be providing income derived from the charge that is made for the loan of funds. Some ambitious investment plans by the company have been curtailed by central government's restrictions on the use by councils of the money they can borrow at preferential rates from the Public Works Loan Board. However, the company benefits from having had transferred to it Council owned land with planning permissions in place and I am anxious to see these planning permissions enacted so that in addition to the rental revenue that may result, local people can also benefit from the homes that are so badly needed. You will have recently seen media reports that the Council is taking the option that contracts allow, to impose 3 days of unpaid leave over the Christmas/New Year period on all its staff earning more than £26,000 pa. The estimated saving is £900,000 which might otherwise have to be achieved by the loss of 40 jobs. The Council currently employs a total of 4,937 staff. Of that number around 3,100 will be excluded as they are below the salary threshold criterion. All essential Council services will be either unaffected by the closure or will be run by a reduced team. These include residential services, social care safeguarding [for both children and adults], hospital discharge teams, drug and alcohol support, coroner's services and registrars [for pre-booked events].

At the **Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee** [H&CI] meeting my concerns about the reduction in the number of people using the computers at libraries since the introduction of charges were echoed by many members. Against an original forecast that the charging structure would create income of £108,000 pa members were told that, for the first quarter just £4,000 had been generated and that there was no evidence that this would increase over time. The committee was told that it is believed that residents who have stopped using the facility now that it is no longer completely free were previously using the computers to access social media and to watch films. The objective of reducing this and ensuring that those who need to get access to search for jobs, claim benefits etc has some merit, if there is evidence to support this hypothesis. We are all though aware of the need to address social isolation and the concern is that those who are no longer coming to the library are now at risk of becoming more socially isolated. Whilst there was some support for abolishing the charge immediately the majority supported asking Officers to investigate this aspect further and bring an update report back to committee in 6 months.

At the same meeting H&CI members voted to approve the upgrade of speed monitoring cameras from wet film [which are now almost unsupportable] to digital. I took the opportunity to ask specifically about the camera on Huntingdon Road which is one of those that requires upgrade and was assured that further work will be undertaken to establish that its current location is still the most effective following changes to the road. I shall be pressing for it to be relocated from its

current location, at the City end of Huntingdon Road, to one nearer Girton Road in order that some of the speeding and road safety issues that residents complain of are more effectively addressed. Agenda pack and draft minutes: <https://bit.ly/2NudGjB>

In preparation for winter Highways Officers have reviewed the Council's gritting policy to reflect the new risk based code of practice published in October 2016 and implemented from 01 April 2018. To meet its statutory obligations with regard to winter road conditions the Council has a range of vehicles from JCBs to quad bikes and a specialist vehicle for the guided busway. Officers have been making preparations for winter throughout the summer. In addition to new gritters which have been ordered in time for November delivery costing anything up to £100k each, existing ones are returned to the factory where they are completely stripped down and then rebuilt. All the vehicles are fitted with tracking devices and front, rear and side cameras which are capable of capturing 10 minutes before and after any incident in which they are involved. Salt is also ordered during the summer when the price is lower, saving the Council about £17k. When spread its effect is generally considered to last for 24 hours although it can be longer lasting depending on weather conditions and these are monitored remotely through local weather stations. The Council also has cross boundary agreements with neighbouring counties and is working continually to improve communications within this group and with the general public.

The **Health Committee** had no decision items on the agenda for its September meeting but in its scrutiny role received a verbal update from the Interim Accountable Officer for the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Sustainability and Transformation Programme; recently appointed to this role, he is also the CEO at Addenbrookes. It would seem that the programme has not been progressing particularly well as its effectiveness ranking in the national 4-tier assessment structure has seen it slip from tier 2 to tier 3. Delayed transfers of care remain one of the biggest challenges and the reduction in numbers for a short period in the spring had been achieved only through unsustainable levels of senior management focus. Agenda pack and minutes: <https://bit.ly/2Pkp5nJ>

The **Greater Cambridge Partnership** [GCP] held a workshop in September for both Executive Board and Assembly members to discuss the work programme for the year ahead. The first gateway review which is required to assure government that the initial tranche of £100m has been well spent will happen in 2019. Government assurance in this respect is a box that has to be ticked before the second tranche of £200m is released. The Executive Board is due to meet on 11 October. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2plVCsI> The item: 'A428 Cambourne to Cambridge Public Transport Scheme' has been deferred until the meetings of the Assembly in November and the Board in December. This is to allow completion of detailed technical work by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's consultants aimed at ensuring the scheme meets alignment requirements with the Mayor's CAM network proposals as well as other criteria such as cost, deliverability and timing. Members of the GCP are due to meet with the Mayor in October to hear the outcome of the Combined Authority's review.

The County Council's **Planning Committee** refused permission for the Amey-Cespa proposal for a waste to energy plant on its Waterbeach site on the grounds of its adverse impact on the heritage asset [Denny Abbey] and the open countryside; committee's majority [7-1] view was that this harm was not outweighed by the potential benefits. Whilst the decision has been met with relief by the many objectors, it is almost certain that the applicant will appeal and those of a different view have been quick to point out that the cost of any such appeal. Agenda pack: <https://bit.ly/2PjdXHW>

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 September meetings or by email.

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