

County Council report to Buckden Parish Council, November 10th, 2020

The County Council has met in full once since the last meeting of the parish council. There were three motions agreed, which can be summarised as follows:

- a. That the Chief Executive write to the Secretary of State for Education, G. Williamson, asking him to look again at the funding for children with Special Needs and Disability (SEND), drawing attention to the serious under-funding of this part of the education service. [It was pointed out in the debate that CCC currently has a deficit of £28 million in this fund and does not have the reserves to pay this off. As I represent CCC on a national body looking into education funding, I pointed out that the problems faced here are replicated across the country.]
- b. That more attention needs to be paid to the delay in highways improvement schemes by the inability of utility providers to notify CCC of their cabling. Matter to be carried forward by the Highways and Transport Committee.
- c. Concern about evidence indicating that police are more severe in using stop and search powers in relation to black persons. The motion reaffirmed that the CCC policy is to welcome and acknowledge the value immigrants bring to the economy of our area, including in the technical and biomedical sectors around Cambridge and to the agricultural sector in the north of the county. The Chief Executive will approach faith, non-faith and community leaders and other bodies representing communities of people who might be suffering discrimination to offer reassurance and support. She will also work with Cambridge City and South Cambs to enable them to extend their current refugee settlement scheme.

The Council's forward budget planning will be beginning soon. This is always a complex and detailed matter but will be even worse this year, given that costs have risen unexpectedly, demand for services is increasing and council income has dropped.

Council officers are continuing to work hard to provide the services people need. All the scheduled committee meetings are continuing via Zoom. This extract from the most recent officer report exemplifies the action being taken in relation to the pandemic (written before the announcement of the next lockdown):

We are continuing and stepping up our work with communities - as it is people's day to day behaviour which is key - and we are working closely with all our partners. In the past week we have also:

- Issued a release and worked with local radio and TV to highlight the help available from the Countywide, district and City hubs for all vulnerable people – including low income families who may face difficulties feeding their children during the half term break.
- Continued to work closely with our District Council and NHS partners and with Public Health England to prevent and manage outbreaks in schools, care homes, workplaces and vulnerable population groups across the County
- Issued a release detailing the key facts and figures of the support the countywide hub has provided since it was launched in March, alongside photographs of Cllr Steve Criswell who visited this week to see the operation involved in supporting vulnerable families through half term
- Promoted films produced for last week's Parish Council conference which highlighted the work of parish councils in fighting the effects of Coronavirus.
- Sent a letter to all local employers asking them to consider if more of their employees can work from home, and reminding them of Covid security measures in the workplace.
- Developed further communications aimed at encouraging people to limit the number of people that they mix with indoors – this will feature local people who have recovered from covid talking about their illness and the effect it has had on them

- Continued to work with the local and regional media to explain the issues behind the rise in cases particularly in Cambridge City, and through them reminding people of the rules.
- Continued to work on plans to launch our own enhanced contact tracing pilot in partnership with our district and city council colleagues, and also made a bid for a national asymptomatic testing pilot.
- Continued to share translations of messages in a range of different languages to explain how the test and trace app works are now being shared on our social media channels.
- Supported enforcement activity taken by local police by sharing reports across all of our social media channels

As usual, we are sharing messages with the public about all of this and more. Please support us by sharing information with your family, friends and people in your council area. By doing so, you will be helping to reduce the spread of the virus.

Work is still proceeding on building a new County Council HQ at Alconbury Weald. This is 3 months behind schedule but is expected to be operational from September 2021. This will be a more modern and economical building to run than the current Shire Hall in Cambridge. The Shire Hall site will be let out and it is hoped that this will raise substantial revenue for the County. However, being located well towards the western edge of the council area, there will be an increase in travel costs and time for most staff and councillors.

More schools have experienced Covid cases and in some cases classes have been excluded for the quarantine period. I know that Heads and teachers are taking their 'health and well-being' responsibility very seriously and that, once again, there are substantial extra costs which will more than wipe out the recent improvement in school funding. The overall attendance rate in Cambridgeshire is about 90%.

Local issues

I attended recently a meeting of the A1 Road Safety advisory group and this will be reported to the parish council by Anne Howell-Jones who chairs the meeting.

The current requirements in terms of social distancing etc make it very difficult for me to carry out my normal expectation in terms of local casework but I am always pleased to be copied in to correspondence and, if appropriate, I can give my support or guidance, albeit remotely!

Contact me on 01480 509471, peter.downes@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Peter Downes, November 1st, 2020