

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Annual Report to Parish Councils Civic year May 2018 - April 2019

The civic year started as always with the Annual General Meeting of Council and its usual mix of general council business and motions put forward by members. The appointment of chairman and vice-chairman and some amendments to the Council's constitution were followed by the Commercial & Investment [C&I] Committee's recommendation for the relocation of the Council's headquarters to Alconbury. This provoked arguments for and against but was passed by majority. Plans for the new headquarters building were subsequently published in February 2019. It will be smaller and more flexible with one wing accommodating 350 staff, a public reception area and informal meeting space. Council and committee meetings will be held in a multi-use 90 seater space which can be sub-divided to offer the potential for community use. A planning application will be submitted in April 2019. Construction is anticipated to commence late 2019 and complete by December 2020. Net of building costs, the move is forecast to save the Council in the region of £46.5m over the next 30 years which will be reinvested in front line services. Meanwhile marketing of the 6 acre site at Shire Hall has produced some serious bids for the leasehold.

The Council's aim to become more commercial in managing its assets continued with the approval of outline business cases for 2 smart energy grids at the park & ride [P&R] sites at Trumpington and Babraham. This builds on the development work for a smart energy grid at the St Ives P&R site which was scheduled for construction during 2018. The St Ives site is a demonstrator project for a new business model, the objective of which is to generate income over the medium to long term as well as to address the challenge of the currently heavily constrained local distribution network. Cambridgeshire Housing & Investment Company became This Land and 21 parcels of Council land, some with planning permission, were sold to it, producing capital receipts and the prospect of a future revenue stream. Showing its green credentials in more than just financially beneficial projects Councillors approved unanimously a colleague's recent motion asking the Council to address the issue of single use plastic through changing its own behaviour and influencing other organisations to act similarly.

The same principle of protecting the environment underpins the Council's partnership with Cambridgeshire Community Reuse and Recycling Network. Facilitating the reuse of waste paint, the scheme benefits charities, community groups, schools, pre-schools and low income households, provides work experience, volunteering opportunities and community payback placements and almost halved the cost to council tax payers in its first 6 months. The design of the proposed new headquarters building also demonstrates similar commitment. It will be low energy, efficient and include elements of future-proofing. Car park ducting will allow charging of electric vehicles from day 1 and it includes the potential to harness solar energy at a later stage.

During the year there has been some good news on the funding front. A successful bid was made by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough to the National Lottery. The resultant grant of £500,000 is to be used as part of the Councils' Active New Communities project and will support 8 growth sites across the county between 2018 and 2021. The first year's focus will be on Northstowe, Alconbury Weald and Hauxton. The Chancellor's budget statement included some additional funding for road maintenance [£6.653m] augmenting the already increased budget of £2m allocated by the Council. An additional £2.39m for adult social care has been used for increased capacity of support services to improve performance on Delayed Transfers of Care. Very recently we learned that a bid made jointly by Cambridge City Council and the Combined Authority had been successful. This Government grant of £227m will fund relocation of the water recycling centre at Milton and will pave the way for a new low carbon community north east of Cambridge. A smaller grant but one which members warmly welcomed came from a local organisation, Cambridge Assessment. It has offered £6,000 sponsorship for Bikeability, a national cycling proficiency scheme, so popular in Cambridgeshire that local demand exceeds the Government funding allocation. The value of this scheme cannot be underestimated as a complement to the huge investment that the Council is putting into cycling infrastructure across the county.

The Government's provisional funding settlement for local government for 2019/20 got a mixed reception. Supported by the county's MPs, the Council was successful in its efforts to reverse a position that would have seen it lose £7m but it was disappointing to learn that Cambridgeshire & Peterborough was the only

devolved area of the country not to be included among the 15 councils who will benefit from a Business Rate Retention pilot. The simultaneous announcement that the Government was launching a more detailed consultation on its funding formula came as some consolation. The Council has worked hard with other Shire Councils over a long period of time to highlight to Government the funding inequality between different areas of the country. In setting its precept for 2019/20 the Council accepted Government's offer to raise general council tax by 2.99% whilst continuing to apply the 2% increase to directly fund adult social care services. This equates to an additional £1.20 per week for a Band D property.

The recent demonstration by school children during school time has provoked both support and criticism. I fall into the support group as I believe that learning can happen in places other than the classroom and listening to some of the young speakers outside the Guild Hall was evidence that we are, despite the financial challenges, educating a fine new generation. On the subject of funding for education, Cambridgeshire remains a poor relation despite the recent increase of £1.4bn nationally. Locally we have one primary school that academised last year and another that is currently investigating doing the same. The third will probably remain a Local Authority school for the foreseeable future. At the end of January Government finally published the breakdown by school of the funding announced by the Chancellor 'for those little extras'. Entitlement was calculated at £32.10 per pupil for primary schools and without special dispensation had to be spent by the end of March 2019. The Council continues its programme of investment in schools as the number of applications for secondary school places in Cambridgeshire continues to rise. 6,691 applications were received this year with 89.5% being offered a place at their first preference school. £200m has been allocated between 2019 and 2024 to increase capacity in existing schools and to plan for new schools in areas where demand is greatest.

In January 2019 Ofsted made an unannounced inspection of the Council's children's services. The overall rating of a service requiring improvement was mitigated by the assessment that the impact of senior leaders is good. The report noted whole Council ownership of the change programme that it has embarked upon. It acknowledged that the Council had itself already identified the same areas for improvement as did the Inspectors and that Children & Young People committee had responded with investment to implement changes and to boost staffing levels.

As the Council continues its efforts to transform the way it works, inevitably it must acknowledge that not everything it tries is successful and the reversal of decisions to charge for P&R parking and the use of library computers evidences that. It strives to engage more closely with residents and to establish collaborative partnerships. This year saw the appointment of two new directors shared with Peterborough City Council and the Health & Wellbeing Boards of both Councils have committed to joint working. Its efforts to deliver high quality services and value for money have resulted in a clutch of awards during the year.

The Road Safety team's work with schools and its collaboration with Peterborough in the Road Safety Partnership both attracted awards. The Community Protection team was recognised for its work on the 'Friends against Scams' initiative. The Council's digital champion received a national Technology & Digital award from the Local Government Association recognising that through his advocacy, over 96% of the county is now covered by super fast broadband. The Council received a silver award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme for its support of the armed forces and their families. A joint piece of work by a team of staff from communications, transformation and adult social care picked up a national award for best research and evaluation process for its recruitment campaign for reablement staff and the special educational needs disability summer programme won the National Citizen Service award 2018.

I look forward to receiving any questions or comments that you have about the work of the County Council at your Annual Parish Meetings. My thanks go to Parish Councillors and Clerks and all those of you who have so generously served your communities during the year. I very much look forward to working with you again in the coming year.

Lynda

lyndaharford@icloud.com; 01954 251775/07889 131022; Follow me on Twitter: @2whit2whoo