

District Councillor report to Parish Council March 2024

Home adaption grant

Please could Parish Councillors be aware of the following grants for adaptations and repairs to homes occupied by people with long-term health conditions and disabilities. This grant was accessed by more than 100 families in our district last year and can help with adaptations to homes to prevent accidents, help with assisted living and help people live more comfortably and more independently within their homes. These grants are limited to £30,000. There is a lot of information on the website, I have attached the link below:

<https://www.cambshia.org>

Cambridgeshire Home Improvements Agency is a partnership between SCDC, Cambridge City Council and Huntingdonshire District Council with an aim of enhancing living conditions of residents that are older adults, have disabilities, combined with low incomes. If you have any further questions, feel free to get in touch with the officer leading on this project, Frances Swann on 01954 713 456.

Information for residents who believe their Council Tax banding is incorrect and want to challenge this

The Valuation Office Agency has put together a video to support residents who wish to challenge their council tax banding to give them information as to how to go about this. I have shared the link below as parish councillors and residents might find this useful if asked this question as we approach people receiving their council tax bills for the next financial year: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDA4xDiXla0> .

SCDC budget

I was able to support some parts of the budget and other parts I was unable to support this year. There are many positive things in the budget that as an opposition Cllr, I can agree on, such as the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, the plan for Ermine Street Housing and the additional borrowing / funding for this, the localised Council Tax support Scheme and the pay policy statement (although I have raised concerns that the 4-day week was not mentioned within the pay strategy). However, I could not support the budget as a whole as there is a black hole in the Council's finances of around £4.485 million between 2024 and 2029 which is much higher than what was forecast in the previous year. The budget deficit for this year is bigger than the administration predicted.

The Conservative Group had put alternative budget proposals forward that were fully costed working through this with the Council finance team. These can be found within the budget documents on the SCDC website.

I could not support putting council tax up by the maximum allowed by Government and putting up council rents by 7.7% per year. I would much rather abolish the 4-day working week trial, strip out large amounts of money from the ever-growing

transformation department and remove the second special responsibility for councillors.

4-day working week

As you will be aware, as an opposition councillor I have been pushing for a vote on the 4-day working week (whilst staff are being paid for 5 days). Despite the opposition group pushing for a vote, there is still no clear timeline as to when this will happen. We are told that a consultation will be held (costing around £40,000) but this would only be done once the Local Government financial settlement is confirmed. My guess would be that we are looking at around about June for all of this to have taken place and during this time the 4-day week will continue as it is currently set up.

I was pleased that officers have recognised that there is an unfairness and inequality between office-based staff that have to do 30 hours for 37.5 hours pay and refuse collectors that have to do 32 hours for 37.5 hours pay. As Chair of Scrutiny, I know that this inconsistency had been challenged with Cabinet and as an opposition, we have always highlighted this as completely unfair that you would have manual workers expected to do more hours than chief executives and office staff. From the briefings I have had, it looks like the council will up the working hours of office staff to reflect this inconsistency. This has been a long time coming and always, in my opinion, wrong from the outset.

My question to full council

My question to the Leader of the Council was as follows:

Is the Leader aware that the staff directory for councillors on Insite is not being updated, and how does the Leader think this may affect the essential services councillors provide for residents of South Cambridgeshire?

The reason I had asked this question is because for months the council has been running 2 systems side by side, neither of which have been functioning properly, so councillors have not had an up-to-date list of officers contact details, making it very hard to get to information quickly on behalf of our residents. I was pleased that 2 working days prior to my question being heard, the council put in place a directory that can be accessed by councillors across the political spectrum.

The motion I seconded at full council

At full council I was happy to second the following motion:

This Council requests that the Cabinet expands its Cost of Living Support scheme to include providing free sanitary products to those who may not be able to afford them.

I was happy to second this motion for Cllr Heather Williams, which I believe would bring SCDC in line with other local authorities, the private sector and charitable organisations. The motion will start a conversation about the cost of sanitary products to employees on site at the Council, working with charities and foodbanks

and other public sector organisations to make sure that sanitary products are available to those that may struggle with this by their own financial means.

*Thank you for taking the time to read my report; if you have any questions or want to discuss any of the issues raised email me on graham.cone@councillor.online or ring 07595 361 285 (please leave a voicemail if I am unavailable) **Councillor Graham Cone***