

Monthly update for parish councils: January 2008

County Council meeting

There was no 'real' county council meeting in January. There was however an extra-ordinary meeting to confirm the appointment of Mark Lloyd as Chief Executive. Mark will take up his role in April.

There was a full round of budget consultations and there will be a big meeting in February at which the budget will be debated. As last year the Lib Dems will be presenting an alternative budget.

Environment and Community Services

Health and Adult Social Services Scrutiny reviewed the Council's action plan to improve Adult Social care performance and sent it back to Cabinet. It felt that Cabinet had given it insufficient attention and asked that it reconsider it. Cabinet responded by saying that there had been considerable discussion in other fora. This of course begs the question as to how the public and back benchers can be sure that such discussion has taken place.

A consultation document is being prepared on the future organization of Adult Social Care. There will be 5 options but fundamental to any change is the need for there to be a head of adult social care of equivalent stature to the head of CYPS. This consultation will proceed when the new Chief Executive is in place.

Gatehouse Lane in Histon has again closed and there is much disquiet in the villages about the apparent lack of progress and absence of concern regarding the impact of the closures. Environment and Community Services Scrutiny will be addressing these concerns at a future meeting (possibly February)

Children and Young People's Services

There is a need for a third primary school in Cambourne and this went out to 'competition' in line with the government's new guidelines. There were no bidders but finally a government consultant drummed up 2 bids which will now be assessed by the County Council. This is the shape of things to come.

It is proposed to set up a 'special school' in Cottenham to separate the excellent special unit from the main school so that the performance of the latter is not unfairly impacted by the very nature of the former. The County has applied for 'exemption from competition' (see previous paragraph) so that it may go ahead and implement this change

Corporate Services

The County Council will be submitting a budget for 2008/09 which will call for a council tax increase of 5%. An Indicative rise for 2009/10 of 5% has also been announced. Total spending will rise by 4.8% or about £14.5 million. A large part of this increase is made possible by a £3.5 million swing in reserves.

A consultation regarding the role and structure of press and PR within the County Council is about to start. This is a substantial and highly professional group and was left out of the cost cutting exercise in Corporate Services last year (technically it is not in Corporate Services but reports directly to the Chief Executive) and it is appropriate that it also be reviewed.

The County Council has been rated as 'excellent' in its use of resources by the audit commission. This is a largely technical evaluation and recognizes the professionalism of its officers in financial management.

Police

The controversy around the police pay rise has been well aired with the government, rightly in my opinion, being accused of being unnecessarily tight fisted. It comes as a surprise then that the Police Authority is going for a 5% increase in its council tax.

Local issues

There has been a perceived increase in 'anti-social behaviour' in Histon and Impington. I have discussed this with the police and the school (I am a governor at IVC). There is to be an action meeting in the villages this Wednesday.

I attended the South Cambs DC scrutiny meeting in the Meadows community centre. Questions were asked about the Arbury Park development in general and about several planning matters in particular..

Forthcoming meetings and events

6 Feb 08	Histon/Impington ASB meeting
6 Feb 08	ECS Scrutiny (possible review of CGB road closures)
18 Feb 08	Development Control Committee meeting
19 Feb 08	County Council meeting
TBA (Feb 07)	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon North) (maybe March)
20 Feb 08	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon City)

And finally ...I took a short break to Switzerland during the month and had 3 days cross country skiing near St Moritz. I was blessed with perfect weather and excellent snow conditions. I'd promised myself such a break for some years and believed that I was in some way an experienced cross country skier. At the end of day one I confronted reality and acknowledged that my experience amounted to 2 half days about 15 years ago. Did I ache? But it was good exercise. I stayed for a night in Zurich on the way back and was reminded of the efficiency of the Swiss and of the contribution that an integrated transport system including buses, trams and trains makes to the quality of life.

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