

November Monthly Report for Parish Councils

There was a full meeting of Council this month. It was a very long day and there was a lot of debate on the county's Corporate Assessment. The long and short of it was that the scores were not great, it shows the council performing adequately, which is not the most positive place to be. However the assessment was completed some time ago and there has been a lot of work done to increase this score. One area the county did not perform well on was Performance Management. This is where I have been spending an awful lot of focus. I feel we are getting somewhere with looking at the performance and finding how we can improve things. With this in mind, I had a trip to Hampshire County Council this month to learn how they do things down there. Their score was excellent, I spent a day down there with the Cabinet Member for Performance and Policy, which was enormously helpful, and brought back a whole load of things we should be doing in Cambridgeshire, and interestingly they were quite interested in areas where we have scored better than them.

Transport Innovation Fund

Obviously this is a major point of debate at Council. There are some councillors willing to look at it and see what it all means and there are some that have dismissed it out of hand. After some debate it was decided to submit the bid to government. There is still an awful lot we need to know about this project before we can say for sure where we stand. We are, at this stage, not committed to congestion charging and officers are working on alternatives etc.

Local Area Agreement (LAA)

A hot topic at County at the moment is the Local Area Agreement. The County and various Partners including District Councils, PCT, and Police etc have joined forces to agree the LAA and create the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and other partnerships. The LAA will act as a channel for Government grants totalling around £5.2 Million next year. This money is going to be pooled and distributed by the LAA.

There were some concerns about how accountable the LAA board would be, as it is made up of elected and unelected members. In order to make sure things are handled correctly a new committee has been formed called the Joint Accountability Committee (JAC). It had its first meeting in October.

Its remit will to ensure:

- Services are being delivered through the LAA as effectively as possible.
- Public funding spent through the LAA is being used as efficiently as possible.
- The LAA is adding value and making a real difference to Cambridgeshire's community by ensuring the outcomes achieved by the partners are greater than they would have been had they been working individually.

The new Committee is chaired by South Cambridgeshire District Councillor Liz Heazell.

Guided Bus

The Oakington Road was reopened recently and bang on schedule. We had a couple of days before they closed Park Lane. This was very disappointing given the volume of road closures we have had in our area over the last 18 months or so.

The station was saved this month – which was great news. Pene Nudds and everyone that supported her did an excellent job and showed that where there is a will there is a way.

Budget Time

Things are being done a little differently this year in an attempt to line the budget setting process with the Councils priorities. This new process has been given the name Integrated Planning. I attended a meeting on this process the other day and the notes that came with the meeting were so large they nearly put my shoulder out! This will clearly improve the budget setting process and will ensure sure the money is going in the right directions. Of course this will be a difficult process as the settlement is not great, but members will have an opportunity to feed into this process in the new Integrated Planning Panels, previously known as Budget Advisory Panels.

Art Exhibition at Cottenham Village College

I went along to the exhibition with my wife. Not being a particular art expert and never having been before I really wasn't sure what to expect. I was very pleasantly surprised. A special mention to Chris Boyland, Chair of Rampton Parish Council who had some lovely pieces on show.

Joint Area Review of Children Services (JAR)

The results of the JAR were published mid month. The review looked at all agencies who contribute to the services received by Children and Young People. The results were very good, but as always, some areas could be improved. The overall score was 3 stars out of a possible 4. It was some well needed good news.

The main areas for improvement were in social worker qualifications, more support for children educated not at school and more work on children with complex needs.

Brian Hardy

We had the sad death of Brian Hardy this month. Brian represented Roman Bank and Peckover. He had been ill for some time but had managed to continue as a County Councillor all the way through. He had been a Councillor for 10 years.

Blue Tongue

The second case of Bluetongue in Cambridgeshire happened this month.

Defra confirmed the new case in cattle grazing near Pymoor belonging to a Haddenham farm.

A control zone has been put in place covering a 20km circle around the affected area. This means animals in this area can only be taken out of the zone if they are to be taken directly for slaughter. This zone is in addition to the control zone already operating in the East of Cambridgeshire and in the Peterborough area.

Cambridgeshire County Council Trading Standards are responsible for the enforcement of these new restrictions.

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