

## County Councillor report - Sawston & Shelford Division

(includes Sawston, Little and Great Shelfords, Stapleford, Babraham, South Trumpington, Hauxton, Harston, Newton and Haslingfield)



Brian Milnes & Maria King

Annual report and May 2022 update

### 1. The Council

1.1 Since May 2021 a new Joint Administration of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Independent councillors has been running the Council, and the three groups have signed an Agreement including a policy framework, protocols for working arrangements, and a new committee structure.

1.2 Brian Milnes' role in the Administration focuses on the issues of Highways & Transport: Brian

is a member of the Council's Highways and Transport Committee, of the Highways Improvement Board and of the Greater Cambridge Partnership Assembly. Brian has been instrumental in progressing the Council's policies and approach on the vital issues of road repairs, active transport and providing the voice of the Council and our residents when decisions on large infrastructure schemes are being taken. Maria King is a Vice-Chair of Children and Young People Committee at the Council, focussing on the issues of education, children's health, children services and social care.

- 1.3 The County Council's move from Shire Hall in Cambridge to Alconbury Weald finally took place in the autumn - but not yet for Full Council meetings. The 'Multi-Function Room' at Alconbury is certainly too small for meetings with COVID social distancing, and possibly even permanently.
- 1.4 The new Joint Administration has been taking stock of the Council it inherited. We invited in a panel of expert councillors and council officers from the Local Government Association (a "peer-challenge" group) to look at the operation of the Council and advise on priorities. They did so, and came back in spring this year to update on how we were doing. We also convened an Independent Remuneration Panel, as we are required to do, to review councillor allowances. Unlike the previous administration we agreed their recommendations unaltered.
- 1.5 The Council's Chief Executive retired during the year, and we appointed a new Chief Executive Stephen Moir who started in post in February 2022.

### 2. Strategy & Resources

- 2.1 The new Council inherited a budget gap of £22.2M for this year. We managed to balance the budget this time, but very significant financial challenges lie ahead. The budget gap we inherited was set to rise to £86M by 2027, and our 'peer-challenge' team identified this as an issue 'of significant magnitude'.
- 2.2 The Council increased its portion of Council Tax in February, by 1.99 percent for general services, and three percent for adult social care. This was a difficult decision to take during the current cost of living crisis, but many people struggling most with increased bills and prices are those who are most likely to need council services, and likely to pay a lower council tax increase. The Conservative opposition proposed an increase of three percent instead, with no increase for general services.
- 2.3 The Council's budget for this year included a £14M 'Just Transition Fund' to tackle inequality, improve lives, and care for the environment.

### 3. Highways and Transport

- 3.1 The Highways & Transport Committee met on 26 April and awarded funding to the successful Local Highway Improvement bids from parishes. The Committee has set up a working group, of which Brian is a member, to review the Local Highway Improvement scheme process. Subject to that group's proposals, the provisional

application window for next year's round will be October-November 2022, with approval of schemes in June 2023 and pricing and construction March-June 2024.

- 3.2 We have established a new funding pot for local communities to bid into for 20MPH zones, to make these more widespread and easier to obtain. Maria is chairing a working group which will publish a proposed new policy on heavy goods vehicles in villages, which will align with the Combined Authority's forthcoming Local Transport & Connectivity Plan.
- 3.3 Traffic in Cambridge is set to grow by 30 per cent in the next ten years, and there is a serious lack of funding for public transport. Without this, many people who cannot drive, or cannot afford to buy, insure or fill up a car, are left with limited or no options for travel. The Greater Cambridge Partnership has been consulting for some time on ways to relieve traffic congestion in Cambridge and improve public transport into the city. These consultations are still ongoing. One of the options on the table is some form of congestion charging to pay for better public transport.
- 3.4 **No Mow May** Cambridgeshire County Council will stop cutting grass on its road verges during May this year to support local biodiversity, with a particular focus on pollinators such as bees. 'No Mow May' is run by Plantlife, an organisation that promotes the maintenance and growth of wildflowers, plants and fungi. According to Plantlife, more than 700 species of wildflowers grow on road verges in the UK. Cutting the grass less often will help reduce carbon emissions, as well as providing habitats for pollinators, such as bees, to thrive. The Council is also encouraging all local parish councils that cut verges on its behalf to take part in No Mow May. Road safety is a priority for Cambridgeshire County Council, so in agreement with Plantlife the Council will still cut grass where leaving it could cause danger, such as at junctions or bends.

#### 4. People and Communities

- 4.1 Huge congratulations to Siobhan Rouse, Headteacher at Harston & Newton Primary School, on celebrating 25 years of working as a Headteacher. Mrs Rouse had special messages from Secretary of State for Education, senior Royals, County and Parish Councils. Maria King attended a special assembly at Harston & Newton School on 27 April alongside Anthony Browne MP and CEO of Cambridgeshire County Council Stephen Moir.
- 4.2 A motion from a Fenland councillor calling for a network of mental health hubs to meet the needs of young people received unanimous support from the Council. Work is beginning on putting this into practice.
- 4.3 Senior leaders in Children's Services at Cambridgeshire County Council have responded well to the challenges of COVID-19 and have ensured children stayed safe, according to Ofsted inspectors. The inspectors also praised senior leaders at the authority for maintaining continuity throughout structural changes. The team from Ofsted visited the Council in March. They acknowledged the challenges of social worker recruitment in the county, but added that leaders recognised this. They particularly praised the support from 'well-informed, committed' councillors, adding that with financial investment, action was being taken to strengthen services. They found that most children in need and those with a child protection plan were supported well, and that children's practitioners held cases that were appropriate to their role, and received regular supervision. Inspectors highlighted some areas for improvement, mostly related to capacity and staffing.
- 4.4 As noted by Ofsted, recruiting and retaining social workers remains the single biggest issue for Children and Adult services across the Council. A special project to consider all aspects of working life of social workers and their remuneration has been started by the Council, with support from Maria King as a vice-chair of Children and Young People Committee and other members. We strive to reduce the caseload through bringing in more staff and improve our offer on financial and non-financial incentives for these highly valued members of the Council and society as a whole.
- 4.5 More children offered first choice primary school. The proportion of children in Cambridgeshire offered a place at their preferred primary school for this September has risen. A total of 95.1 per cent were offered a place at their first-choice school – up from 94.4 per cent last year. The proportion offered a place at their second-choice school was down slightly from 3.9 per cent in 2021 to 3.1 per cent this year. A total of 0.6 per

cent were offered a place at their third-choice school—the same as last year. The Council’s school admissions team received and processed more applications than last year—up from 6420 to 6568.

- 4.6 Admissions to the area’s secondary schools have been broadly successful although we appreciate more work could be done to improve communications to both parents and children before the process starts (e.g. at the end of Year 5), so they have information and reassurance regarding excellent secondary schools with competent and committed staff in our division and wider area.
- 4.7 Household Support Fund During 2021/22 the Council administered the Household Support Fund scheme to support those most in need over the winter months, primarily with food and fuel costs. This used £2,457,158 of Government funding. The Joint Administration’s budget in February set aside £1M for a new Household Support Fund wider scheme for 2022/23. The £1M provided from Council funding will enable the 2022/23 offer to be more flexible, as it will not be limited by the Government rules that applied to last year’s funding.
- 4.8 We are delighted to welcome over 300 guests from Ukraine into Cambridgeshire. A Cambridgeshire Ukraine Response Group has been established to bring together a range of organisations in a co-ordinated response. The Group meets at least twice weekly. Support for families and individuals is available through multiple routes and includes free English classes for children and adults, education in Russian and Ukrainian language, Russian-language hotline to support with financial and other queries, tours of Cambridge, ‘life in the UK’ chats, books, clothes and other necessary items, many other activities. Maria King is a Russian speaker and would be delighted to help the families in whatever way possible. For further information please contact us via email below.
- 4.9 #LetsGetOutdoors The County Council has launched a #LetsGetOutdoors campaign which is encouraging people to make use of Cambridgeshire’s fantastic parks. The campaign is highlighting a new online map <https://www.cambsopenspace.co.uk/> which lists all the main green spaces across Cambridgeshire.

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