

County Councillor Monthly Report - Sawston & Shelford Division

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

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February 2024

Budget

On Tuesday 30 January the county council's Strategy, Resources & Performance Committee made its final budget recommendation for Full Council to debate on Tuesday 13 February.

The county council's various policy committees have scrutinised the draft budget proposals, and three of them—Communities Social Mobility & Inclusion, Environment & Green Investment, and Highways & Transport Committee—have all asked that the Strategy, Resources & Performance Committee give consideration to increasing the funding available for Emergency Planning, in view of the increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather leading to flooding.

Overall, as expected, pressures on the budget come mostly from adult and children social care, highways and supporting children with special needs and disabilities. However our prudent financial planning coupled with a maximum permitted council tax rise and a recently announced extra government support gives confidence that the Council will continue to provide all its statutory services.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Measles

Measles cases have been rising since last November, with the West Midlands seeing more than 200 confirmed cases, the largest outbreak outside London.

The UK Health Security Agency declared the outbreak a national incident on 19 January 2024.

Measles is highly infectious. Nine out of ten unvaccinated children can catch measles if someone in their class has it. It can be severe, particularly in the immunosuppressed and infants, and can be more severe in pregnancy. It can be mild for some children, but one in five will require a hospital visit. At its worst it can lead to complications such as meningitis and pneumonia and can in rare cases be fatal.

Currently there are no confirmed cases in Cambridgeshire and in 2023 there were only eight confirmed cases across the East of England. But there is a strong likelihood that it will spread to Cambridgeshire. Uptake of childhood vaccinations has been low in Cambridge and parts of Huntingdonshire and Fenland. A target vaccination rate of 95 per cent is considered necessary to prevent outbreaks, and both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have rates lower than this.

If the outbreak spreads to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, control measures such as isolating unvaccinated school contacts for 21 days may be necessary. This will have an impact on school staff, parents and the economy, and an outbreak of any size will stretch health care capacity at the busiest time of year.

- Parents should have their children vaccinated if they have not already done so.
- Residents should call their GP or 111 if measles is suspected or if someone who is at risk has been in contact with a confirmed case. Typical symptoms include a high fever, sore red watery eyes and a blotchy red-brown rash.
- Isolating when asked to do so is important if any outbreak is to be contained.
- There are a number of measles myths—such as the idea that it is a good idea to deliberately infect children with the disease at 'measles parties'—which should be ignored.
- Information about vaccine outreach clinics can be found at <https://www.cpics.org.uk/measles>

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Carbon footprint

The Environment & Green Investment Committee last month received the council's carbon footprint report for 2022/23. As usual, this reports on the council's carbon emissions, and the carbon emissions of the county of Cambridgeshire as a whole.

The Council's total known greenhouse gas emissions in 2022-23 amounted to 99,104 tonnes CO₂e. The largest share, nearly sixty per cent, was from waste, with construction materials second at nineteen per cent, and transport third at ten per cent. This is 46 per cent lower than the council's baseline year of 2018/19.

For Cambridgeshire as a whole, the most recent year of data is 2021—the figures are published by Government. Total greenhouse gas emissions for Cambridgeshire that year were 6.78 million tonnes CO₂e. Transport was the highest emitting sector in the county, accounting for 27 per cent of emissions, followed by land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), at 23 per cent.

There has been a twenty-five per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Cambridgeshire between 2005 and 2021. However, there was a 6.1 per cent increase in 2021 compared to 2020, because of the effect of covid in 2020.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Weeds policy

The council's Highways & Transport Committee has changed its policy on highways weed spraying. It will now be reverting to regular twice-yearly weed killing in the places where it used to do this before last year's policy change.

Communities which do not want chemical weed spraying in their area will however be able to opt out in favour of manual weed removal by volunteers.

Cllr Alex Beckett, chair of the Highways and Transport Committee at Cambridgeshire County Council, said:

"I know we didn't get this change right, which is why I asked for a review of the policy. While some communities really appreciated the reduction in chemical weed killing, a large number did not. Local decision making is important, we have listened to that feedback and hope these new changes, if approved, will allow those communities who wish to continue without chemical weed killing to do so whilst allowing those who preferred the previous regime to go back to that."

Peat soil roads

The Highways & Transport Committee approved a report on action to address the problem of Cambridgeshire's collapsing fen roads. The report identified 156 such roads which are increasingly failing due to historic lack of maintenance, and more extreme weather. Most of these roads were not constructed to carry the volume and weight of traffic they are now seeing.

Active travel maintenance

The Highways & Transport Committee has approved changes to the Highways Operational Standards to improve recognition of, and response to, faults on cycleways and footways. These changes will help ensure a safe environment for cyclists and pedestrians, encouraging and facilitating active travel.