

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report June/July 2019

The agenda for full **Council** on 23 July included among other matters, recommendations from the Constitution & Ethics Committee for some governance changes including the addition of a specific code for Councillors on the use of social media. This is to be redrafted having been criticised as patronising and not reflecting the reality of social media use by elected members. Council was also asked to comment on and approve the draft Plastics Strategy that it requested at its last meeting to be drafted at the earliest possible opportunity. You can view the agenda pack for this meeting at: <http://bit.ly/2LV0QOm>

I try to follow as closely as time and my limited technological understanding allows, the progress of the Council's investment in energy creation and battery storage projects. I am particularly impressed by the diligence and competence of this relatively small team in its detailed presentation of its proposals to the **Commercial & Investment** [C&I] committee. A very interesting report was presented to this committee at its meeting on 21 June outlining both the opportunity and risks of the battery storage market. Having joined the competitive market place for solar energy creation rather late in the day and suffering the initial setback of seeing the Government scheme to reward such effort being withdrawn very shortly after, the Council's careful progress here may well qualify it as a front runner this time. More detail for those wanting it at: <http://bit.ly/2XQ2Zgr>

Although I am not a member of **Communities & Partnerships** committee I was able to attend to listen to the first part of its July meeting which included a report on the County Council's approach to addressing housing and homelessness. Although the Council doesn't have a statutory responsibility for housing, as of October 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act placed a new duty on all public sector agencies to refer individuals or families who may be at risk of homelessness to local housing authorities. The County Council does too have key statutory duties and responsibilities, the execution of which impact on the housing economy and local residents for whom it has a duty of care. These include older people and vulnerable adults [with learning, physical or mental disabilities], older people with care needs, young adults with learning or mental health difficulties and those leaving care, those who may be victims of domestic abuse or are drug/alcohol dependent as well as offenders/ex-offenders. It is too responsible for public health of which housing is an important determinant. Thus the Council recognises that homelessness prevention is integral to its work and is now taking steps to work with Officers at the District Councils, the Combined Authority and the local area Housing Board to address it. An Officer working group has been set up. Progress is slow it seems but the committee was asked to agree its proposed key outcome: 'To play our part in contributing to the wider housing system in order to achieve better outcomes for Cambridgeshire citizens' as well as its four priorities and action plan. I had been pleased to see that recently the C&I committee had included social value as one of the criteria for assessing business proposals which I am fervently hoping will support the work now being done by the County Council on homelessness. As with everything, finance holds the key so I was pleased to see reference to the £100m housing element of the devolution deal. Sadly, following progress on the use of this funding through the **Combined Authority** [CA] does not provide reassurance. The report that was considered at its June meeting includes the following information: 14 schemes have been approved for funding by the CA, 2 schemes have been completed with 2 more schemes due to complete during summer 2019. Of the 777 units that this totals, construction on site of 122 has started and 13 units have been delivered. Notably there is no mention of how many of these are affordable. One of the criteria for use of the £100m was that it would provide 2,000 additional affordable homes.

Agenda pack for Communities & Partnerships: <http://bit.ly/2Gdydbw>

Agenda pack for Combined Authority: <http://bit.ly/2ShMGaQ>

Health Committee's agenda included a late scrutiny item. Following the deferral by the Clinical Commissioning Group [CCG] of considering proposals to cut grants to a list of voluntary sector organisations, the Chairman had asked that it send representatives to attend and report to

committee. Whilst it is quite obvious that the CCG has got to make some difficult decisions in order to meet the saving of more than £32m that it has to make, there seems to be a lack of joined up thinking in what it is doing overall. With the introduction of new GP contracts at the beginning of July that require practices to work together in new primary care networks to provide an increased range of services, local voluntary sector organisations would seem to be crucial to support that endeavour. The matter was considered again at a special meeting of the CCG on 16 July and, having taken into account further evidence from affected organisations, there were some changes to the original proposals. Full agenda pack for Health Committee: <http://bit.ly/2YddZJa>

Highways & Infrastructure committee received the Road Casualty Data Annual Report which included a health warning that despite generally positive outcomes of recent changes to the data collection process, the information is still dependent on the quality of the information entered by the reporting Officer. The positive impacts are improved efficiency of recording, timeliness and, ultimately, consistency of the data. However there was a further acknowledgement that the 2016-2019 data set will be adversely affected by the changes. Very appropriately the new system is called CRASH! An interesting point was made that it is estimated that only 1 in 10 accidents is actually reported. During consideration of the standing item on finance and performance Officers were asked to investigate the feasibility of extending the exemption for use of a concessionary bus pass before 09.30. It currently only applies to those with a sight disability. It was suggested that this should be extended to others with disabilities and who are in employment. Officers explained that it is up to the CA to set the rules but that they would pursue the request with that organisation. Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2SlwjtZ>

Safety on the **Cambridgeshire Guided Busway** [CGB] continues to be reviewed as a priority for the County Council. It carries out regular inspections and assessments on all the roads, footpaths and cycleways for which it is responsible and the CGB is no different. Following the incident at King's Hedges Road, Officers have been assessing all the crossing points along the busway to increase awareness and promote safety. As a result extra advisory signs have been installed at the crossing points along the route. These additional signs are blue and state 'Busway Look Both Ways' to remind cyclists and pedestrians to stop and look for buses before crossing the busway. Since the busway opened in 2011 the area along the route has changed and evolved. There are increasing numbers of people and cyclists as the number of houses and businesses expands. The Council has also reduced the speed of buses as they approach the crossing point at Fen Drayton Lakes from 30mph to 20mph. These latest enhancements follow the additional signage and guard rail installed previously on the busway at King's Hedges Road.

The **Police & Crime Commissioner** has announced that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are set to receive nearly £400,000 additional funding to support projects to prevent young people from getting involved in knife crime. The money has been awarded following a successful bid for Home Office Funding in partnership with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Youth Offending Service. The £384,431 grant will fund a team of specialist workers who will support young people with complex needs who are at significant risk of criminal exploitation and youth violence.

I have recently supported several requests for jetting of drains and it has been confirmed that County Highways no longer have a proactive schedule for this activity. Gully cleansing is now carried out on a reactive basis. The Council takes action where ponding is reported 2 hours after a rainfall event. Please do report this as usual on the website: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/roadworks-and-faults/>
Regrettably Officers have confirmed that in the interests of fairness and consistency, no extensions of time will be granted this year for LHI applications, the deadline being 04 August 2019.

I look forward to receiving any questions or comments that you have about the items in this report or any other matters either at your July meetings or by email.

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