

Annual Report by County Cllr Peter Hudson March 2018

It's been another busy twelve months. Chasing the inevitable highway problems, surface flooding, stopping ludicrous traffic diversions, cutting back the Tomato Farm trees to name but a few. Also, successfully lobbying hard to achieve a new Child and Family Zone at the Pathfinder School in Northstowe. In addition to this, I have been supporting and working with the Parish and District Council colleagues on a number of issues, as in the incorrect routes taken by HGV traffic from the Northstowe site, traveling through local villages in contrary to planning conditions, being the Chair of the Public Health Committee, and an active member of the Staffing and Appeals, Audit and Accounts, and GPC Committees of the County Council. I have also been asked how many hours I spend on council duties, it averages out at 30 hours per week during the working day, and on top of that any evening work with parishes and residents, etc.

Once again, I have received a large amount of correspondence from our friends and neighbours with requests for help on a number of issues that affect their everyday lives. Over the past twelve months I have received 89 requests from residents for help (down from 148 last year) on issues as local fun run road closures, school placements, home to school transport, special educational needs requirements, parent and school difficulties, social care for the elderly and venerable adults, general council benefit entitlements, with 85 of these cases resolved to the complete satisfaction of our residents, the remainder were either not possible for various reasons or the information given was found to be untrue. This individual case work very satisfying and extremely rewarding, it also gives me the chance to meet and get to know many of our neighbours who continue to keep in touch and in some cases bring their friends along who also may have some difficulties.

I have actively continued my work in finding and helping our low income families to take advantage of any free child care they may be entitled to. On top of the existing free 30 hours child care and early learning for 3 and 4 year olds, now your 2-year-old can get 15 hours per week free early education and childcare starting from the term after the child's 2nd birthday if you get one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit - if you and your partner have a combined income from work of less than £15,400 a year after tax
- tax credits and you have an annual income of under £16,190 before tax

Council Budget 2018/19

At a full council meeting on Tuesday 6th February, it was unanimously agreed by all members to raise the basic council tax by 2.99% this is as well as the 2% ring fenced Adult Social Care precept. The only disagreement was what to do with the small amount left over, some wanting just to spend it all, with the majority wanting to keep it to one side to support any unexpected demands on Children's and Adults Services over the next year.

Due to the continuing programme of transforming back office functions and service delivery, this is the first time in 3 years that the County Council Tax has had to raise. Unlike many County Councils in the news recently, Cambridgeshire has retained, and in some cases, improved front line services whilst delivering essential savings and balanced budgets. 75-80% of the total county budget is spent on vulnerable adults and looked after children (children in care). These are demand-led budgets and because of a recent and unprecedented demand on these budgets, a budget gap of £4.3 million is forecast. An example of this is that as of January 2018, there are 701 children in the care of the Council. Of these 62 are unaccompanied asylum seekers as part of the County's share of the national

total. The total “Looked after Children” budget for 2017/18 is £17.3 million and due to the extra unforeseen demands, is currently forecasting an over spend of around £3million.

The 2.99% increase will cover £4.3million gap, and leave an extra £3 million to be placed into a reserve to sensibly enable the council to cover any extra demands on these essential services over the next year. The council has continued to lobby government and explain to them that increasing taxation locally to offset an unfair national funding formula cannot be justified.

It is essential that the County Council continues to change how it operates even more than it has done over the past few years. The shared Chief Executive and shared services with other Local Authorities are saving many millions of pounds - backroom money put into front line services. This still has to be taken much further to enable a slimmed down, transformed, highly efficient council, to provide the highest level of services to our residents at the lowest possible cost. Examples of recent transformation:

New look for Cambridgeshire’s Child and Family Centres

The County Councils new approach to supporting Cambridgeshire families will launch in April 2018. The redesigned Child and Family Centres will better meet the needs of our growing and rural county with activities and events taking place in a range of new locations across the county with an extended focus on families with children of all ages. Activities will be run from new communities such as the fantastic new Child and Family Zone at the Pathfinder School in Northstowe, as well as continued activities at Bar Hill and outreach centres in other new locations across the county. Buildings that will no longer be operating as Children’s Centres will be used to boost childcare provision with up to 325 new places provided for under 5s. Changes will also allow much needed school expansions to take place. Frontline staff and managers are now working in new district-based teams and any remaining vacancies have been advertised. A new “What’s On” event programme for the summer term with additional online information and new district Facebook pages will be launched in April. This will further continue to develop with additional activities, including more for older children and in new outreach locations, during the summer term. Work has been going on behind the scenes to ensure that the redesigned service is more responsive to the needs of our rapidly changing county whilst delivering the agreed savings target of £900,000 with no cuts to frontline delivery budgets. In fact an extra £65,995 is going back into front line delivery which equates to just over 7% of the savings target. So, before transformation, 40 fully financed children centre buildings, after transformation, 27 fully financed buildings plus an extra 120 new outreach centres and an increased frontline service budget. Our communities new Child and Family Zone makes all the work, arguments and lobbying I have done over the past 12 months on behalf of Longstanton so very worthwhile on seeing this great new service for our community.

Transforming our library services

We won’t have far to go to access a whole range of tailored services under a new set of proposals to transform libraries. The plans, will put the county’s 32 libraries and three mobile library vans, which stop at 200 places throughout the county, at the very heart of local communities. It will mean that children and family services, public health and council services will be tailored and relevant for every resident throughout the county and available on our door step. These changes will reinforce libraries as the ‘front door’ of the County Council, offering a better and wider range of services. For all the people of Cambridgeshire this will mean more reasons for them to use their local library with an improved access to more services under one roof, more help and support when they need it and new ways to get involved. It will also help the council meet its priorities around keeping vulnerable and elderly people more independent through early help and prevention.

Through a range of initiatives, libraries are set to generate new revenue and progress towards becoming more financially self-sufficient. This will allow the council to invest £230,000 back

into the book fund in 2018/19 so stock remains relevant and up-to-date. Key recommendations to generate more income include a special membership, paid-for events such as author talks, and maximising the use of library meeting rooms. From the 1st May a £1 hourly charge will be introduced for computer access after an initial 30 minutes free. This will help prevent people from monopolising the IT facilities in our libraries and will allow us to make sure everyone has fair access to computers

Everyone will be able to use computers for free for the first 30 minutes. Children up to the age of 18 and Jobseekers will be able to continue using computers totally free of charge at all times. Additional websites for government and council services (such as universal credit, child benefit applications, etc.) will remain completely free to browse for all. Also, the County Council has just committed to spend up to £500,000 to replace and update all the library computers and software available for public use.

I would just like to add a very big thank you to our Parish Clerk for her very valuable help and support over the past 12 months.

Peter Hudson
County Cllr
Longstanton, Northstowe, Oakington, Westwick, and Over