

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Harlton Parish Council March 2019

Grants for Mobile Wardens scheme

This year, 14 South Cambridgeshire community groups have been awarded £23,410 by the District Council's long-running Mobile Wardens grant scheme. The funding will help the groups to tackle isolation by supporting elderly residents to stay in their own homes and communities. Mobile Wardens regularly visit elderly residents in their homes, helping with light practical tasks and establishing supportive relationships.

The applicants for 2019–20 grant funding included 11 schemes that were supported during the previous year, plus three additional schemes. In order to fund all 11 returning schemes to the same level, as well as the three additional schemes, including in Stapleford and Great Shelford, the total funding for 2019–20 has increased by £3,300, despite misleading and incorrect reporting of grants being cut being placed on social media.

Grant funding is an incredibly cost-effective way of supporting local residents to remain, and thrive, in the communities that they know and love.

Full council

At the meeting of full council on 21st February the new business plan and budget were agreed.

The four priority areas agreed in the business plan were:

- Growing local businesses and economies – which includes putting in place a single point of contact to support businesses through the planning process and making it easier for small local businesses to bid for Council contracts.
- Housing that is affordable for everyone to live in – which will see the Council double the number of Council homes built each year, deliver high environmental standards on new homes to reduce running costs and focus on working with partners to make sure walking, cycling and public transport improvements provide alternatives to using the private car.
- Being green to our core – by the Council developing a plan for a carbon-neutral future for South Cambridgeshire, exploring opportunities for green energy generation and improving air quality.
- A modern and caring Council – by being an employer of choice for people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, generating an income from investments to offset cuts to national funding and improving the way people can carry out transactions online.

At the meeting the Council's budget was also agreed. This included plans to generate a quarter of the money the Council spends on services from investments within five years. By the end of March 2024, Council investments are forecasted to return an income of just over £5 million a year which will be used to protect the services people want and need. The Council's administration has said that they want a range of investments in the district to generate a return in a way that also delivers on the priorities of local people and makes a positive contribution to the area. Investments could include investing to help provide space for small and growing businesses which will fill a recognised gap and make a return for the Council. This will also help businesses grow and create new jobs for local people.

The Council also wants to invest to deliver improvements in communities that have not been delivered commercially by the private sector. This could help deliver more homes or facilities for

communities or improve the green credentials of a development to make sure it is of the highest standard.

The documents that were reviewed by the council at the February full council, including the full business plan can be found here:

<http://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=410&MIId=7348>

Council tax

Councillors also agreed at the February meeting to a £5 per year increase in Council Tax for the average band D home. This is the equivalent of 10 extra pence per week. Even with the increase in Council Tax the Council must save a further £3 million over the next five years.

The Council's average band D charge for 2019/20 will be £145.31, meaning it remains one of the lowest taxing district councils in the country.

The council also agreed to increase council tax on empty properties with the aim of incentivising owners to bring them back into use.

- Homes that are empty for two years or more will be charged double their regular Council Tax (i.e. an additional premium of 100%). This will come into effect from 1 April 2019
- Homes that are empty for five years or more will be charged a 200% premium on top of their regular Council Tax. This will come into effect from 1 April 2020
- Homes that are empty for ten years or more will be charged a 300% premium on top of their regular Council Tax. This will come into effect from 1 April 2021

Currently across South Cambridgeshire, there are 100 properties that have been empty for between two years and five years. There are 41 homes that have been empty for between five and ten years. There are 39 properties that have been empty for more than ten years.

Despite these figures, in relative terms, South Cambridgeshire does not have very high numbers of long-term empty properties – especially in comparison to more urban areas. Around 1% of all the homes in the district have been empty for six months or more.

During a recent public consultation that asked for views on these proposals, almost two in three people who responded were in favour of the increased empty homes premium.

Retirement of SCDC chief executive

South Cambridgeshire District Council has announced that, Beverly Agass, the Chief Executive, is retiring from her post. The following statement has been released regarding this:

Beverly Agass, who became Chief Executive of the Council in July 2017, has been working closely with the new Liberal Democrat administration elected in May 2018 as it establishes its programme.

At a Full Council meeting today (Thursday 21st February) Councillors agreed Mrs Agass leaving the Council with early access to her local government pension. In order for this to happen, the Council will be contributing circa £202,500 into the Local Government Pension Scheme towards the cost of early retirement.

Beverly Agass said: "I have very much enjoyed my time at South Cambridgeshire District Council. I am proud to be leaving such a fantastic team in place which is so motivated to serve our residents. I successfully supported the new administration in defining its programme and initiating the change process to enable that. I believe it is now the right time for me to hand over to a new person to lead the organisation on the next stage of its journey."

Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cllr Bridget Smith, said: “I want to thank Beverly for her commitment and work at South Cambs over the past two years. She was appointed by the Council in July 2017 and I would especially like to thank her for her support in managing the transition to the new Liberal Democrat administration in May 2018. The Council has an ambitious agenda, and this will require a change to the way the organisation is structured and led. The Council’s business plan and detailed budget is being considered and now is the right time for new leadership to manage the implementation phase. I am very grateful to Beverly for enabling this transition. Beverly has had an impressive career in local government, and she deserves to enjoy her well-earned retirement.”

At the meeting, Councillors also agreed interim arrangements for the position of Chief Executive. The Council’s current Director of Health and Environmental Services, Mike Hill, will take up the role on an interim basis until a new Chief Executive is appointed.

Disability confident employer scheme

At full council it was also confirmed that the council was signing up to the disability confident employer scheme with the aim that the council will become an employer of choice for disabled people. Cllr Sarah Cheung Johnson will be the councillor leading on this initiative.

<https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>

Choices for better journeys consultation

The Greater Cambridge Partnership has also opened a consultation asking for views on the future of the public transport network for the Greater Cambridge area. You can find more details about this consultation and complete the survey by 31st March via:

<https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/choices-for-better-journeys/>

Climate and environment

Following on from the decision by South Cambs councillors to raise the bar by aiming to be carbon neutral by 2050, solar panels have been installed on the roof of the waste depot at Waterbeach, which will generate around a quarter of all the electricity the building uses. The installation is expected to pay for itself within eight years. It will take advantage of the last of the Government’s feed-in tariff, which is a payment to an energy user for the renewable electricity they generate. It will provide income to the Council for 20 years.

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