

District Councillor report to Parish Council February 2024

Housing consultation

I encourage residents and businesses to have their say on the future of housing in Cambridgeshire. The consultation runs for six weeks from 22nd January 2024 to 4th March 2024. More information on how to share your views can be accessed via the link below:

Have your say on the future of local housing (scambs.gov.uk)

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/have-your-say-on-the-future-of-local-housing/>

Civil parking enforcement in South Cambs

As outlined in my January report, civil parking enforcement has now gone live with fines as of the 1st February meaning penalty charge notices will start to be issued with fines between £50 and £70 depending on severity of case.

Grants for community groups and parish councils

If you are from a local community group or parish council, I encourage you to make the most of the council's grant schemes. The GrantGrabber service helps you search for available grants – all in one place.

For further information on receiving a grant for a community project from the council, please visit the grants webpage <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-development/grants/>

Funding to help organisations improve energy efficiency

On 7th December 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launched a £25.5 million funding package to help voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations in England improve their energy efficiency. Eligible organisations will be able to apply for an independent energy assessment and capital grants to install energy efficiency measures. The second part of the scheme opened on 18th January and organisations can apply through three grant rounds, the last of which will close in August 2024. All measures will need to be installed and paid for by March 2025, so all organisations, but particularly those with more complex projects, are encouraged to apply early to ensure sufficient time for the installation of measures.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vcse-energy-efficiency-scheme>

Four-day week data finally published

On 22nd January 2024, the administration finally published the four-day week performance data on the council's website that is being sent to government under the Best Value Notice.

This data can be found by following this link <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/best-value-notice-data-requests/#doc-list-53840-53842>

The publication of the data follows our hard-fought battle to gain access to this information for residents and councillors.

At an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 20th November 2023, we asked to see the business case for the four-day week. In January, we still had not had a response to our request to see the business case and followed up on this request. We then learned that there was no business case – only the original proposal agreed by Cabinet on 12th September 2022. Everything the council does has a cost attached – any time spent on projects by council officers is time being paid for and costing residents, which is why it is so concerning that the Cabinet paper said there was no cost associated with the trial.

With no business case to underpin the trial we are very concerned that the true cost of this trial has not been properly considered.

On 4 January 2024, we received word that the Cabinet had decided they would not publish the data until the Best Value Notice was withdrawn. This worried us as we did not know how long this would take and proper scrutiny of the data should be made in a timely manner.

On 8 January 2024, Conservative councillors requested to see the four-day week data under their rights as a member of the Scrutiny committee – to help them properly scrutinise the administration.

It was confirmed that we had a right to see the information being sent to government and following our request, the administration finally agreed to publish the four-day week data on the council's website.

While we have succeeded in getting the administration to share the data they are sending to government, we will not stop here. We will continue to push for more transparency in relation to the four-day week to enable residents to see where their money is going.

We also asked to see how much money the administration has spent on legal advice relating to the four-day week. We are still awaiting an answer about this.

Best Value Notice

The District Council continues to be subject to a Best Value Notice from Government. We are aware that the administration has not been able to supply answers to all of the initial queries and requests. Government have subsequently requested further information from the Council.

When there will be a vote to make the trial permanent or not is yet unknown. Cabinet may alone decide to extend the trial.

*Thank you for taking the time to read my report; if you have any questions or want to discuss any of the issues raised email me on graham.cone@councillor.online or ring 07595 361 285 (please leave a voicemail if I am unavailable) **Councillor Graham Cone***

