

Monthly SCDC Report by Lynda Harford – August, 2010

As August is generally a holiday month, even some parish councils taking the opportunity to have a rest, I left July's report to be consolidated with this month's. With the start of the new school year and holidays for most now a fading memory as we all get back to work I hoped that it would be more appropriate to leave the serious business until now; so quite a lot to report.

New CEO

The new CEO for South Cambridgeshire District Council is Jean Hunter; who comes to us from South Ribble Borough Council where she also held the position of CEO. Her appointment follows a national recruitment campaign and a robust candidate assessment and interview process. She was clearly the best in a field of very high calibre candidates and was the panel's unanimous choice. I had the pleasure of meeting her recently and I am sure you will all join with me in wishing her every success in her new role and the challenges that she will face.

The Future and Government Spending Decisions

The Government's spending review is going to have a huge impact on District and County Councils and many of the decisions will affect our communities directly as spending on local government is cut by £32 billion. Proposals so far include cutting Local Housing Allowance probably by about £25 per household per week, giving local residents power to veto excessive council rate rises through local referendums, the introduction of control over Parish Council precepts and devolving some core services such as day care and youth work down to local communities.

We know that the following are already going to happen:

- Cutting community grants
- Axing the second Connexions bus
- No more support for parish plans
- Removal of housing targets and the national minimum housing density requirement of 30 houses per hectare
- No nationally imposed targets for traveller pitches
- Legislation introduced to make it more difficult to develop land that is currently garden

The cuts have begun...

SCDC administration's manifesto action on "extra litter picking in 10 larger villages" will not now happen as it was being funded from Local Strategic Partnership funding from the government which has all been immediately cut. These cuts also stopped some funding to projects with voluntary organisations, and it looks as though SCDC may be about £80,000 out of pocket in money already spent from this fund that will not be repaid.

Sustainable Parish Energy Partnership

We are dismayed that the government withdrew funding last month for this fantastic project for which there has been a great deal of support from the parishes. There was £150,000 available which we were going to use for education on renewable energy and the benefits of photovoltaic technology. We are assured that South Cambridgeshire will find some money to at least deliver part of the project and I have no doubt that the parishes will continue to do marvellous work albeit on a shoe string.

Housing

At the full council meeting on 08 July the cabinet failed to carry the council or indeed its own members to agree that the council should take on a £200m debt in order [eventually] to regain control of our own housing stock and the rents and receipts that derive from it. Even the portfolio holder stated he didn't agree with some of the report before us despite the fact that he had already submitted it to Government. I'm not sure where this leaves us but I shall be watching very carefully as we are currently a debt-free authority and it seems very wrong to me that we should shoulder the burden of debt created by other authorities.

The Executive has also continued with a tender exercise in relation to the DLO – the part of the Council that provides repairs and maintenance for housing tenants. This service has a value of £2.1m pa and earns the Council £200K a year. Loss of this income if the contract were outsourced would have to be made up via cuts on top of the £2.2m already planned. The current service has excellent customer feedback. It does not need to be outsourced. It has a solid business plan demonstrating a 5 year surplus for reinvestment into housing. I understand that a tender exercise will cost £35,000 - £50,000. It will undoubtedly de-stabilise our staff and would seem to be entirely unwarranted. Additionally it appears that the process so far has been less than successful as not enough bidders made it through to the end and now the entire process has to be repeated.

Online Planning System

This has been updated now although it is still proving problematical. The service appears to be less convenient than before and some search features which were not always working properly have been taken out although possibly not permanently. This is an off-the-shelf system that we are told has been used by other councils. Please let us know if you are having problems using the new system.

Environmental Services

The campaign to publicise the new blue wheelie bins is all on schedule. Residents with small houses/gardens will have the option of sacks for recyclables. If you are sufficiently insistent you should be given the option of sacks for black bin rubbish [volumes ever decreasing]. The contract for sorting it all has gone to *Donarbon at Waterbeach*. Bids came from companies from as far away as Northern Ireland. 33 staff from Veolia [currently responsible for the collection of the green box recyclables] will have the right to transfer to the council although there may be some redundancies.

Member Development

The portfolio holder for Environmental Services who also has responsibility for member training and development has decided to commit the council to working towards Member Charter Status. The achievement of this requires the council to be able to demonstrate via an assessment process the effectiveness of its training and development processes for members. A task and finish group has been set up to establish the effectiveness of current processes, the gaps between what exists and the standards required and a plan for closing the gaps and achieving Member Charter Status. I am part of the task and finish team and am greatly looking forward to supporting its efforts. As a new member I am well aware of the need for training and development. With my experience in both business and people development I know what a difference good training makes to the success of an organisation and for SCDC that means in the service that we deliver to the communities we serve. I'll keep you updated on progress.

Love Food Hate Waste?

Cambridgeshire Community Foundation has opened the *Love Food Hate Waste Community Action Fund* offering grants of between £100 and £500 to *voluntary and community groups* in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The grants are to fund an event or activity which tries to encourage people to reduce their food waste. Your activity or event must involve more than 12 people. Applications for a grant are invited until December 2010 although, please note:

- The funding available will be allocated on a first come first served basis, so late applicants may be unsuccessful
- Your project or event must run between October 2010 and January 2011.
- You must attend an informal workshop (see below) before running your event.

If you think this fund may be relevant to your group or organisation, applications can be made online at

<http://applications.communityfoundations.org.uk/Entry.aspx?DeliveryAgentID=160&FundName=LoveFoodHateWasteCommunityActionFund&FormName=Small>

Your councillors are here to help you. Please do feel free to contact me with comments, questions, problems or complaints. I do hope I can help but if I can't I shall try jolly hard to find someone who can.

I hope you all have a good month,

Lynda