

Monthly SCDC Report by Lynda Harford – February 2011

This month has seen councils everywhere presenting their budgets for approval and feelings have run high at many; some even seeing protesting residents being arrested and public galleries being closed due to unruly behaviour. On Thursday, 24 February when we met at Cambourne to approve SCDC's budget there was an air of normality and not a protestor in sight; a fact observed by the leader of the main opposition party when he responded to the Finance & Staffing Portfolio Holder's budget proposals.

Over the past few months I have reported on items that would affect the budget proposals for 2011/12 and we have had a greater opportunity than most to hear from the portfolio holder [better known to us as my ward colleague, Simon Edwards] about them. So there are no shocks to reveal; the size of the savings needing to be made was already known as was the fact that some of the reserves, built up against the possibility of a rainy day, will now be used to provide protection against the downpour that is the economic situation in which we find ourselves. There are some risks: of the still unknowns. The New Homes Bonus looks, on the face of it, to be a licence to print money for SCDC but other factors need to be considered: the continuing physical delivery of new developments and the resilience of the housing market – the bonus is paid on occupation of new properties; boundary changes and not least: the possibility that the Coalition Government will move the goalposts. The budget mitigates against at least this last factor by only assuming receipt of the bonus for two years.

Council Tax will be frozen for the year 2011/12 and SCDC will receive 2.5% pa council tax freeze grant for 4 years. Council tax will be raised by 3.5% in the subsequent 3 years and it is now understood that this is the point at which a government cap will apply.

A sum of £307,000 has been secured by SCDC from Improvement East. This money is intended to support initial costs of projects in areas where possible cost savings have been identified by the council.

The bitterest pill remains the imposition of a payment of £205.6m to be made on 01 April 2012 under the banner 'Implementing self-financing for council housing'. An interim investment strategy is being put in place to allow for the financing of this. There are various options for this borrowing and recommendations will come to Cabinet and Council later this year.

Meetings attended this month:

02/02: Planning Committee - Nothing of local interest.

03/02: Finance Workshop for Members: Excellent preparation for the budget item on the Council meeting agenda for 24 February.

10/02: Cabinet

15/02: [1] Policy & Performance PfH Meeting [2] Finance & Staffing PfH Meeting

16/02: Housing PfH Meeting: One item of local interest: The Pound, Cottenham. A separate report will be made to Cottenham Parish Council.

I have also attended meetings relating to the 2 Task & Finish groups of which I am a member: [1] Member Charter Status – Member Development & [2] Customer Contact. One of the cost savings that is being made is through the closure of the contact centre on Saturday afternoons; a time which is shown to be little used for general enquiries. The emergency contact number will still be operated. There is evidence that the way that residents like to contact SCDC is changing and the Task & Finish group is investigating their preferences. It would be helpful if as many people as possible would complete the questionnaire which will be published in the forthcoming edition of South Cambs Magazine and which can also be found at www.surveymonkey.com/s/SouthCambs

I will also bring copies to parish council meetings in March. For the Task & Finish group the most important questions are 10, 11, 12 & 13.

The following source of funding may be of interest:

Parents for Playgrounds

Play England are pleased to have partnered with Robinsons Fruit Shoot to launch 'Parents for Playgrounds' - a national programme that will give five local play areas the chance of winning a renovation bursary of up to £15,000.

Robinsons Fruit Shoot is asking all parents to support the 'Parents for Playgrounds' campaign and nominate playgrounds local to them that are in need of repair via its new parenting website www.readyforten.com from 15th February to the 16th of March 2011. Robinsons Fruit Shoot, Play England and supporter of the campaign, Patsy Kensit, will then announce a shortlist of playgrounds and these will go to a public vote. At the end of April 2011 the playgrounds that have received the most community votes will be announced and each will receive a renovation bursary of up to £15,000. Up to five play areas will be renovated throughout May, June and July and will be ready for play at the beginning of the 2011 summer holidays.

Congratulations to the following 4 young sports stars from Cottenham who have already received grants under the Elite Athletes Awards Scheme:

Josh Pearson [16] Aiming to get into the GB Junior Clay Pigeon Shooting Team:
Awarded £250.

Matthew Stearn,[16] Member of the U20 National Roller-Hockey squad and currently preparing for the world championships in 2011. Awarded £500.

Charlotte Johnson [12] Member of the U15 England Ladies Roller-Hockey Development squad and aiming to be selected to play for England in the International Tournament in 2011. Awarded £150.

Nathaniel Johnson [12] Member of the U15 England Roller-Hockey Development squad and hoping to be selected to play for England in the international tournament in 2011.
Awarded £150.

Your councillors are here to help you. Please feel free to contact us with comments, questions, problems or complaints. We hope that we can help but, if we can't, we probably know a [wo]man who can.