

District Councillor report to Parish Council November 2024

Bus fares put up in the Budget

The current £2 cap on bus fares has been increased to £3 in the recent budget. I think this is a real shame as we know that one of the barriers to using public transport is cost and we have seen an upturn in usage since the £2 cap was introduced. I am pleased to see a cap retained, just disappointed that is a 50% raise on what it was. I have already had residents contact me about this, mainly commuters saying how disappointed they are that the £2 cap is being increased. The Government has said local authorities and Metro Mayors can step in to keep fares down at the current £2 cap. I hope the Mayor considers this carefully given the impact this decision will have on commuters within my ward and their access to public transport. It is also worth noting that modal shift from cars to public transport goes a long way towards helping with our carbon footprint.

Winter Fuel Payment

We are working to protect the Winter Fuel Payment for vulnerable pensioners that are currently at risk. In October's council meeting, all councillors unanimously supported our joint effort to sign Age UK's petition to preserve this important support and to increase awareness of pension credit assistance.

Research from Age UK indicates that 2 million pensioners who rely on this support to stay warm this winter may no longer receive the Winter Fuel Payment. With the Energy Price Cap set to rise, the well-being of elderly individuals in the UK could be compromised.

We are committed to raising awareness about this important issue, including sending a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to encourage a re-evaluation of this situation and to ensure support for those at risk of fuel poverty.

Four-day week update

Despite the four-day week trial ending in March 2024, the council is continuing to work four days a week for five days' pay. The Best Value Notice remains in place until November, when the new Labour government will decide whether to reissue the notice or to endorse charging taxpayers for five days' worth of work when they are only getting four.

It is our understanding that a public consultation on the four-day week will happen at a postponed date of January 2025 – two years after the four-day week trial first began. When this consultation is live, we encourage all residents to make your voice heard on this significant issue.

We strongly believe that, in these uncertain times, we require more support from our local councils – not less. We are continuing to scrutinise the weekly data and council performance to ensure the four-day week does not jeopardise services for residents.

Water authorities attend council Scrutiny meeting

We were grateful for the opportunity to welcome flood management representatives from Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, and from Cambridgeshire County and South Cambridgeshire District Councils to the council's October Scrutiny and Overview committee meeting which I chair.

The meeting provided a useful forum for councillors to raise residents' specific concerns, including recent flooding in South Cambridgeshire, the impact of new housing developments on water supply and management, and improving communication between communities and the water authorities.

Given recent heavy rainfall, we are encouraging residents to be vigilant about any flooding risk. In an emergency where there is an imminent risk to life, you should call 999. In the event of flooding on the roads, pavement, garden or property, or from sewers or watercourses, please report the issue to Cambridgeshire County Council [online](#).

There were a number of recommendations made to cabinet:

Recommendation 1

That Cabinet asks officers to convene a meeting involving operational leads from relevant organisations to agree on a set of priorities and, within that, a clearly defined list of actions to be taken and by whom, in the event of undeclared emergencies.

Recommendation 2

That Cabinet asks officers to work with relevant organisations, including Town and Parish Councils, to enhance the existing Multi-Agency Group and to clarify, simplify and speed up communication so that those affected by flooding and similar events have the comfort of knowing that such events are being dealt with and that there is an indication of when repair work might be completed.

Recommendation 3

That Cabinet supports any reasonable measures that can be taken by officers or local District, Town or Parish Councillors to strengthen support within communities and joint working which, depending on the nature of the work being conducted, could include the Local Highways Authority, riparian landowners, and community groups or individuals.

Recommendation 4

That Cabinet recognises residents' frustration as a result of the delay in roads on new developments being adopted by the Local Highways Authority, caused in turn by delays in drains being adopted by Anglian Water, and supports and encourages the convening of a meeting to include relevant District Councillors, developers, Anglian Water and the Local Highways Authority in an effort to speed up the adoption of drains (and thereafter roads), especially outside schools, doctors surgeries, and civic buildings.

Recommendation 5

That Cabinet supports the idea of Flood Action Groups within local communities and asks officers to investigate how existing groups can be made more effective in facilitating communication and to encourage the establishment of new groups where none currently exists.

Recommendation 6

That Cabinet asks officers to write to local Members of Parliament requesting a meeting to discuss the feasibility of increasing the funding needed to replace aging infrastructure such as sewers.

Supporting Prostate Cancer UK and period poverty

In October's council meeting, I seconded our group's motion to support Prostate Cancer UK's BOG-STANDARD campaign which was unanimously supported by all councillors. The campaign seeks to help men who have suffered from prostate cancer by providing incontinence products and discreet disposal bins in male toilets.

You can find out more about Prostate Cancer UK's campaign in partnership with PHS [here](#).

In February's council meeting, our group's motion to tackle period poverty was also unanimously supported by all councillors. We are pleased that the council has since taken swift action to secure a £12,000 grant in partnership with Hey Girls to distribute environmentally friendly menstrual products for up to 700 South Cambridgeshire residents.

You can [apply here](#) for a home delivery of free period products. Please check you meet the eligibility criteria outlined on the Hey Girls webpage.

Awaiting planning policy from Government

We are still awaiting the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from the new Government. It is frustrating and challenging that this has not yet been decided, particularly as this plan will have a significant impact on South Cambridgeshire. We will ensure that residents are updated when the new NPPF is issued.

Supporting older people in their homes

We are pleased to see the council pledge £345,000 to Mobile Warden Schemes in South Cambridgeshire for the next three years to help more elderly people stay living in their own homes for longer. It is disappointing, however, that the administration at SCDC is phasing out support for this vital service over the next ten years. We will continue to scrutinise this decision and work to support South Cambridgeshire communities in every way we can. The scrutiny committee has encouraged this to be regularly reviewed to ensure other providers will step in such as Parish councils, the NHS or the service uses (through higher fees) as the SCDC funding is reduced over the next 10 years.

There are currently 16 active Mobile Warden Schemes in 49 parishes, many of which are run by charity AGE UK. Mobile Warden Schemes are a community lifeline for many, providing reassurance for families that their loved ones are cared for at home.

Please do not suffer at home alone. You can find the contact information for all Mobile Warden Schemes in South Cambridgeshire on the [council's webpage](#).

Grants for community groups and parish councils

If you are from a local community group or parish council, we are encouraging you to make the most of the council's available 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](#).

Taxi Drivers Under Scrutiny: Shocking Non-Compliance Revealed

The recent stop checks on taxi drivers and their vehicles have unveiled alarming levels of non-compliance with licensing conditions. Out of 17 drivers inspected, only two emerged without issues, while the remainder received advisory letters or had penalty points issued against their Council-issued licences.

Conducted as part of a coordinated effort by licensing officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council and police officers from Cambridgeshire Constabulary, these stop checks scrutinized essential compliance measures, including the display of driver badges, door signage, and the presence of a first aid kit and fire extinguisher.

The results were disturbing:

- Several violations were identified, including two vehicles parked illegally on double yellow lines, and one parked on double red lines at Addenbrookes Hospital, disregarding a clear 'no parking at any time' sign. Additionally, some drivers failed to display their identification badges or had missing door signage.
- One driver faced a fixed penalty notice for failing to wear a seatbelt, despite regulations stating that private hire drivers must use a seatbelt once their customer has exited the vehicle.
- Notably, one licensed vehicle was found to have aftermarket window tints, which are prohibited under the South Cambridgeshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire policy. In violation of UK law, this vehicle only allowed 49.6% light transmission, far below the mandated minimum of 75%. Consequently, its licence was immediately suspended, and the driver was given just 14 days to rectify the situation.
- Another vehicle was also in breach of policy due to aftermarket tints on the rear windows, resulting in a delayed suspension notice with a strict 48-hour compliance deadline.

This operation has raised serious concerns about the commitment of some taxi drivers to uphold the safety and legal standards required of licensed operators. Immediate action is essential to address these violations and protect the public.

Most drivers were cooperative, but two had a poor attitude towards Council and Police officers, leading to one driver being cautioned by the Police. Their suitability to continue to hold a licence may lead to a referral to the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee.

South Cambridgeshire Neighbourhood Sergeant, Rob Taylor, said: "It was disappointing to see the majority of taxis checked during the operation were not meeting the required standards. Checking drivers are using a safe, approved vehicle with the correct equipment when carrying members of the public and following all laws and regulations will undoubtedly help improve road safety and reduce the risk of collisions.

*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***