District Councillor's Report for The Mordens Ward SCDC

January 2025

4-day week consultation

The council will open its 4-day week consultation to the public on Monday 27 January at 9am. This will run for 8 weeks, so will close at midnight on Sunday 23 March. All residents are encouraged to participate in the consultation to tell the council how you feel about the 4-day week.

I strongly believe that increasing council tax whilst paying council staff not to work is deeply unfair. I have fought hard for all residents and all councillors to have a say in this – and two years after the 4-day week began, the time has finally come to tell the council your views on its 4 days' work for 5 days' pay scheme.

The consultation was scrutinised in a council meeting on 16 January, where councillors on both sides raised concerns, including the length of the consultation. Even if none of the initial questions about your experience with council services apply to you, I am strongly encouraging residents to fill out the 4-day week specific questions. I am disappointed that the consultation does not ask residents directly whether or not they are happy for the council to be doing this. The only question is whether you would be more likely to apply for a job there, which I find incredibly one-sided and shows a bias towards council staff as opposed to residents who ultimately are the ones funding this. There is, however, a free text box that I would encourage all to use to share their views, either for or against, and I will continue to seek clarification as to how this information will be analysed and whether or not the results of this consultation will be shared in a transparent manner.

4-day week referendum

In my alternative budget proposals, I have called for a referendum on the 4-day working week at the council. This is in response to the issues with the consultation that I've raised above and my lack of trust in the way that this consultation has been drafted and the lack of clarity as to how the information will be handled. I also believe there is no current mandate for what is happening as this was not in any party's manifesto and with local government reform it is unclear when the next opportunity residents will have to express their views at the ballot box.

I believe the public consultation document produced by the administration is inadequate, as it does not ask residents if they agree with the 4-day week – or if they are happy to pay for it.

That is why I am calling for a referendum for South Cambridgeshire's residents to decide once and for all if they want to continue paying their council to be paid 5 days per week but only work 4 days.

Annual report to tenants and leaseholders

There are a number of things in this report that are concerning for our tenants and leaseholders within South Cambs. In several areas, South Cambs are bottom of the pile compared to other local authorities when it comes to the people that matter most – our residents. This report can be found on the council's website.

Improving Complaint Handling: Effective complaint handling is crucial for any organisation, particularly in public services like housing management. Recent survey results reveal that South Cambridgeshire's approach to managing complaints is falling behind compared to other organisations, with a satisfaction rate of just 29%. This puts the local authority among the lowest scorers, with the lowest satisfaction rate across other organisations being 28%.

Resident Involvement: When it comes to whether the landlord listens to tenants' views, only 54% of residents were satisfied. Unfortunately, when compared to similar organisations, South Cambridgeshire ranks among the lowest in tenant satisfaction related to the landlord's responsiveness and follow-through on tenant feedback.

Local Government reorganisation

I am keeping a close eye on the government's local government reorganisation plans. It is my understanding that May elections will not be affected for South Cambridgeshire. However, the government is aiming for all two-tier areas (for example, district and county council areas) to become one unitary authority for their area alongside a mayor. These authorities would be responsible for transport, skills, housing and planning, economic development, climate change, health and wellbeing, and public safety.

All councils will receive an invite to submit proposals by spring and autumn 2025, ready for the first wave of new unitaries to be set up in line with the 2027 target. I am continuing to work with council officers to ensure everyone is up to speed on new updates.

Increased electric vehicle charger funding

Funding for electric vehicle chargers has increased from £5,000 to up to £12,000 per project. The grant is open to parish councils, community groups and charities for public EV chargers in car parks associated with community buildings and village halls.

I am pleased to see increased funding for these projects. I understand funding is unfortunately not guaranteed to be available into the next financial year, so if any local organisations are interested, please do apply as soon as you can on the council's website to benefit from this support.

£10k grants for community groups

I am pleased to see £10,000 in community grants be awarded to local voluntary and community groups, improving the quality of life for South Cambridgeshire's residents.

This includes support for The Liberation Cycle, a charity based in Steeple Morden which recommissions and revives bikes destined for landfill so that they can contribute to the mobility and wellbeing of those in need, as well as decarbonising travel in South Cambridgeshire. I am sure many of us are proud to support incredible charities like The Liberation Cycle to help those who need it in our community.

Planning problems with self-builds

Currently, the district council does not have a 5-year land supply for self-builds. This means that when determining these applications, there is a tilted balance with the presumption in favour of development being much higher than in normal applications. This means that development, for example out of the village framework, in a conservation area, or in an unsustainable location, that would normally be refused is likely to be given permission if self or custom-built housing.

At the last Planning Committee meeting, I expressed concern and exasperation at how powerless we are to turn down applications that we know are completely wrong for our

communities, simply because of the words ‘self-build’. I think it’s important for all to be aware of this situation and be able to respond to applications accordingly.

If a permission of this type is sought in your parish and you would like assistance, please do get in touch. While as a committee member I cannot give my personal view on the application, so as not to predetermine myself, I am able to help and support through the process and procedures that apply in these situations.

Christmas gifts for patients at Fulbourn Hospital

112 Christmas gifts were donated this year to the Fulbourn Hospital by staff and councillors here at South Cambs. Fulbourn Hospital cares for people with a wide range of conditions, many of whom spent Christmas in the hospital.

I am proud that our council is supporting vulnerable members of our community to help make Christmas special for everyone, including those who had to spend it away from their families.

Grants for community groups and parish councils

If you are from a local community group or parish council, I am 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.

Thank you for reading my report. If I can be of any assistance, please do get in touch.

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