**Parish AGM 2019**

**May 2018 Elections**

Since May SCDC has reduced its number of Councillors from 57 to 45. There has also been a change of administration following the election results in May SCDC is now a Liberal Democrat administration with the overall political balance of the council being 30 Liberal Democrats, 11 Conservatives, 2 Labour and 2 Independents. The next District Council election will be in 2022 (except in the event of a by-election).

**Planning**

Since July, SCDC has been able to refuse applications on the basis of a five year land supply. The Local Plan was formally adopted in September 2018. With the help of officers I have arranged two meetings in the ward to help parish councillors and parishioners with what these changes mean when assessing planning applications. The process of Exception sites was also explained, and I hope all who took part felt a benefit from the meeting.

**Grants**

During September Cabinet agreed changes to the qualifying criteria of the Community Chest Grants. I made representation on behalf of the Mordens parishes at the Grants Advisory meeting, where I asked the committee to look into allowing smaller parishes to apply. Smaller parishes with less than 160 electors are able to apply and have been encouraging that this threshold should be increased.

At November’s Full council meeting I seconded a motion that called for the administration to give re-consideration to the barring of some parish councils from accessing the Community Chest funding. This is because of my concerns about where the line has been drawn to define which parishes were “small” for the purposes of the policy. Only Parish meetings or parish councils with less than 160 registered electors can currently apply for Community Chest Funding, meaning many parishes in the Mordens ward no longer qualify. I also feel that Council Tax is collected on the basis of households, not electorate, and feel that the link to the number of electors is unfair as not everyone qualifies for inclusion on the electoral roll. I am also concerned that small community groups could apply for funding, but if the scheme is on parish council land, the parish council is expected to contribute 50% of the cost and this could discouraged proactive groups from being able to apply for funding. The explanation below is what has been given as the reason for the change in criteria

*“the scheme is no longer be open to Parish Councils with more than 160 registered electors. This is because, the larger villages are, the more funding their local Parish Council can raise on their own via their dedicated Council Tax precepts.”*

The Elite Athletes Grant Scheme, I am disappointed to report, has been disbanded. This was a pot of £10,000 that was available to aspiring athletes to support them in their sport. This was part of a legacy from the 2012 London Olympic Games.

**Environmental Health**

This Summer we saw a heatwave and this put extra demand on our refuge collection team.

There are more than 150 frontline bin collection staff with each crew emptying up to 1,300 bins each day. On average each refuse collector will walk around 12 miles per shift. If you combine this with often moving heavy bins from kerbside to refuse truck the job really does make for hard work, especially during a heatwave while wearing thick protective clothing. I thought that the refuge collection did a very good job during this difficult period.

There has been a wash and squash campaign, encouraging residents to keep their recycling clean and squash bulky items such as cartons and bottles to maximise capacity, not only for the amount of rubbish in a lorry, but to help you fit more recycling in your blue bin.

The council unanimously voted in support of a motion for South Cambs to have a zero – carbon footprint by 2050.

There has been the introduction of a Green Bin Charge, for any additional green bins. This sum will be £35 per annum, and is not something that I have supported as I feel we ought to be supporting residents to recycle as much as possible in any way we can, I fear this may deter people from this.

**Council Tax**

Following the Budget in February, you will see that SCDC has increased its own element of council tax. This equates to £5 for an average Band D property.

For the 2018 year Council Tax Collection rates at SCDC were some of the best in the country, coming 3rd for domestic rates and 25th for Business Rates. I think this is a fantastic thing for our community and tank all residents and business owners who ensure timely payment of the council tax/business rates.

**East West Rail**

There was unanimous support at Full Council in September that all route options at this stage should be evaluated along with other aspirations for environment etc. The council will now write to the East West Railway Company, the Department of Transport, Network Rail and our MPs to expressing the views supported at the meeting.

While stating that there was a lack of information provided in the recent consultation, SCDC support in principle a route that provides a station at Cambourne. This is something that I entirely support.

**IT Crisis**

There have been many issues this year at SCDC in relation to IT. This has included interruption to emails and resulted at one stage resulted in departments, such as planning, being unable to access the systems. This has created a back log of work that officers are working to clear but are under extreme pressure. The Councils Scrutiny and Overview Committee are looking into what has caused this and what measures can be put in place for the future to mitigate against this happening again.

**Staffing**

Headline news was the departure of the former Chief Executive, Ms Beverly Agass. For Legal reasons councillors are very restricted in what can be said on this matter but I am able to divulge that £202,500 was paid to provide Ms Agass with early access to her pension. I am also able to say that I voted against this.

The senior Management Team has changed this recent year with the loss of a Housing Director, Executive Director, Chief Executive. There is now an Interim Chief Executive (the Director of Health and Enviromental Services who was also covering the Director of Housing’s role). During the year the Cabinet has paid £90,000 for management consultants who will advise on a reorganisation of the council.

**Budget - 2019**

There is now a £100 million investment strategy, this money will be borrowed and invested in commercial opportunities. While I agree with the need to look for further opportunities for additional income to the council, I am uneasy with the proposal that was put to the council as this delegates decision to 4 people (2officers, and 2 councillors). When decisions where taken on matters such as Ermine Street Housing, or the Cambridge Ice Rink, these were taken by the whole council and had gone through a through pre-scrutiny process.

There has been £2.5 million worth of cuts identified over the next 5 years but a further £3 million will need to be found. There is £500,000 allocated for a transformation programme in the planning department and £1 million budgeted for the organisation restructure.

**Thank you**

I would like to end by thanking the Parish Councils I serve and parishioners for inviting me to your meetings, as a new councillor you have been most welcoming, and I look forward to serving you through the year ahead.

If I can be of any assistance then please do get in contact by any of the details below.

**Cllr Heather Williams**



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