

Local Government Reorganisation

On 19 March, the Council held an Extraordinary Full Council meeting to discuss the Council's response to the government's Local Government Reorganisation plans, which look to replace the current council system with larger unitary authorities.

In Cabinet's response to the government's plans, I requested that the following considerations be made:

- The workload that will be required for councillors in larger authorities representing significantly more residents, and how this may become a barrier for full-time workers looking to become councillors alongside their job.
- That the impact of reorganisation on our parishes is considered to preserve the most local levels of government.
- That all options are considered when it comes to dividing areas into unitaries.
- To formulate a plan for engagement with residents and parish councils to encourage well-informed cooperative working, achieving the best outcome for our residents.

I feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied that the government is doing this *to* us when there was no mandate for these changes in their general election manifesto. Similarly, I raised concerns over the 'London feel' of the proposed model, which may not suit our rural district where parish councils and localised government ensures representation at all levels.

The joint response given by council leaders in Cambridgeshire can be found [here](#). I am continuing to fight for the best way forward possible for parish councils and residents in South Cambridgeshire, in order to ensure local representation is not compromised in any way by these changes enforced from above. If you or your parish council has concerns about Local Government Reorganisation, please do get in touch and I will help in any way I can.

Free Healthy Start vouchers

I am encouraging parents of children under 4 years old to claim free Healthy Start vouchers offered by the NHS to buy food and milk.

If eligible, you will receive a card in the post that can be used in most UK supermarkets and can be used to buy essentials including fruit and vegetables, pulses, milk and formula milk.

To qualify for the vouchers, a household must be claiming one of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit with earned income of less than £408 per month from employment
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Income-related Employment Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (not contributory benefits) and have a household income below a specified amount.

Please do take a look at the [council's webpage](#) for more information and details on how to apply online or by telephone.

#DoTheRightThing campaign

I am pleased to see that fraud officers have got back £360,000 in false claims for Council Tax discounts. My alternative budget proposals included more support for the council's fraud team, and these successes only reinforce the importance of ensuring everyone is paying their way and not taking undue advantage of support they are not entitled to. I am encouraging all residents to ensure they are filling in forms correctly to ensure council resources can be used to support essential public services in South Cambridgeshire.

Equally, I would encourage anyone with information about suspected fraud to [report online via this link](#).

Having said all this, if you are entitled to support, please do make sure you get it as it is a great help in these difficult times. You can check your eligibility for discounts and support on the [council's webpage](#). Please do reach out if you have any queries or concerns.

Weekly food waste collections

The council is following national policy change by the previous government. It will become mandatory for councils to collect separate food waste on a weekly basis. I am pleased to see weekly food waste collections being implemented to improve the cleanliness of streets for the residents who live there.

The original grant awarded by the government to cover the costs of weekly food waste collections did not cover our costs at the council. Following conversations with government, this shortfall has now been rectified.

Nevertheless, I am continuing to investigate the additional costs of weekly food waste collections under a 4-day week bin collection scheme, as bin crews in Greater Cambridgeshire are also working 32 hours per week but being paid 37 hours. I believe that more lorries and more staff are required to collect the same number of bins in 4 days rather than a regular 5-day week, and I believe it is important to understand these additional costs.

Five Year Land Supply

I am pleased that, after losing its Five Year Land Supply in December, from April the council will be able to demonstrate a Five Year Land Supply again. This is good news for South Cambridgeshire's residents and green spaces, which have been under threat from uncontrolled development over the past few months. I would still urge caution in responses to planning applications being robust and clearly identifying harm when outlining reasons for refusal. To be clear, it is still the case that there is no land supply for self-builds.

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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