

CLrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT APRIL 2024

Operational Services Committee (Monday 25 March)

Service delivery plans

Mark and colleagues asked a large number of questions about the plans, including street sweeping, economic development, and voter ID.

East Cambs Street Scene business plan

Again Mark and colleagues asked some robust questions about increased agency costs, unrealistic fuel costs, and other elements. In 2023/23 East Cambs District Council paid East Cambs Street Scene an annual fee of £3 million to collect waste and recycling, and clean the streets. Two years later the council administration has just signed off a £4.6 million payment to deliver exactly the same service—an increase of fifty-three per cent. Mark and colleagues voted against the business plan.

Housing adaptations and repairs

A proposal was agreed to increase the maximum top-up assistance allowable for housing adaptations from £15,000 to £30,000, as the amount offered was often insufficient, leading to underspent budgets and people in need being unable to have necessary adaptations installed.

Community engagement strategy

The strategy was approved, with a somewhat confusing discussion about how to identify and engage with people in homes in multiple occupation. Mark asked why an action to identify the most common non-English languages spoken in the district was given a target date of December 2025 when this could be answered by information from the census in thirty seconds.

Vulnerable community strategy

Cllr Cane asked why no formal assessment had been carried out of disabled parking spaces across the district, why restrictions on disabled spaces in car parks ceased in the evenings, and how disabled parking spaces were enforced—answers were unavailable at the meeting but would be forwarded. The strategy was approved.

Health & Wellbeing strategy and action plan

The budget for this was confirmed to be just £5,000, and questions were asked whether this was sufficient for the actions in the strategy, and what the service could do with more money. Mark queried whether the target in the action plan for each parish to make three pledges to commit to health and wellbeing at a

local level might be seen as onerous for some smaller parishes. The strategy was approved.

Finance & Assets Committee (Thursday 28 March)

New terms of reference

Under the recent changes to the council's constitution, responsibility for climate change and environmental issues has now been moved out of Operational Services Committee and passed to the Finance & Assets Committee. (Mark and I and our colleagues opposed this, believing that climate, environment, and strategic planning were important enough to require their own committee.)

East Cambs Trading Company business plan

The ECTC business plan for 2024/5 was approved by a majority. Lorna and colleagues voted against the plan but were defeated. The company is not delivering more than thirty per cent affordable housing, which is what is required of any commercial developer, and it is not delivering a surplus for the council. A table in the plan that suggested the company had contributed £5.3 million to the council included elements that the council would have received from any developer, and the interest on loans to the company repaid to the council was less than the council would have earned if it had invested its money in the commercial markets.

Service delivery plans

We managed to ascertain through some adroit questioning that it will be the finance team who will be monitoring the costs of the administration's crematorium at Mepal.

Climate change and nature restoration chapter

This chapter is the first step in the replacement of the council's increasingly dog-eared local plan. This piece of work is somewhat hampered by the Government's announcement that council local plans will not be allowed to be more ambitious for carbon reduction than current building standards.

Lorna seconded a proposal that the council should ask officers to update us regularly on how far other councils are able to move the dial on this, and that we should ask the Chief Executive to write to the Minister pointing out the short-sightedness of his announcement, but we were defeated.

Consultation on the new chapter will take place in due course.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs were chosen by public vote to have their own Supplementary Planning Document. This proposed policy contains a number of measures such as creating 'hedgehog highways' via gardens through simple measures such as

small holes created at the bottom of fences. For larger developments, the policy seeks wider habitat creation suitable for hedgehogs.

Consultation on the new policy will take place for a minimum of four weeks after the Police & Crime Commissioner elections in early May.

Whistleblowing

The council has updated its whistleblowing policy. Lorna seconded a proposal to check this against the benchmark framework promoted by Protect, a national organisation that has been supporting and advising whistleblowers for over thirty years. At first this was set to be defeated, but after some debate the committee agreed unanimously to pass the version of the policy in front of it with some minor amendments, but to investigate using Protect's framework to evaluate the new policy and report back in June.

RIPA

The annual review of RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) policies was approved. This document governs how the council carries out surveillance and investigation, for example in planning enforcement or flytipping enquiries.

Garden Close planning application (23/00870/RMM)

The latest planning application for the details of the development at Garden Close Sutton was approved by the Planning Committee on Wednesday 6 March. This is an application for 41 homes.

However, if Abbey win their appeal against the council's refusal of their previous application last April, they could choose which scheme to build—and their refused scheme from last year was for 47 homes.

Sutton Neighbourhood Plan

Andrew Ashcroft is the Independent Examiner who will be examining the Sutton Replacement Neighbourhood Plan. He has set out the arrangements for the examination, and has sent a clarification note to the Parish Council raising questions to which the Parish Council is responding. This will enable the Examiner to consider whether a hearing is needed.

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan

Meanwhile, Mepal is about six weeks ahead of Sutton in its Neighbourhood Plan timeline. The Examiner has reported, suggesting some minor amendments. The district council is setting up a referendum expecting this to take place in June.

Meet your councillors

Our next surgeries will take place on

- Monday 8 April, 6:30-7:30PM
- Monday 13 May, 6:30-7:30PM

in the Community Room at Sutton School. Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

Cllr Mark Inskip

District Councillors for the Sutton ward