

Borough councillor report for Kempston Rural Parish Council – July 2024

Borough Council matters

As mentioned in my last report, due to the General Election that took place on 4th July, many of the council meetings were postponed or cancelled during the purdah period. These have now resumed though we are heading towards the summer break when council meetings are not held.

There was a full council meeting that took place on 10th July. The main issues that came out of this meeting were the approval of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which had been amended at our request to state that the council will aim for zero rough sleepers. A discussion took place about the Wixams station and how costs have risen significantly since the original costing was put forward to a total of £63.5 million as detailed in the council papers, including an increase of over £3 million of which we were notified in the week before the meeting by Network Rail. The council is currently planning on funding this by using ALL CIL money both already received and that projected to be received between now and 2032 to fund this.

A paper on the review of the revenue reserves was put before the council which details that in the two years since the new administration took over, the level of reserves will have been depleted from £56.9 million to £27.2 million, more than halving the amount the council has in reserve (52% reduction). The General Fund Budget Outturn and the Capital Outturn were also brought to full council for approval.

Of particular note at this council meeting was the question raised about the administration's proposal to start charging Telecare users to use the service. This service provides residents with emergency buttons and pull cords to summon assistance. Up until now the Telecare service has been free to those who need it, but the administration now want to charge users £4.50 a week for the service. Those residents on a care package (30% of users) will continue to receive free Telecare services and those coming out of hospital will be allowed a 6 week free trial. All other people (70% of users) will be charged. We are incredibly angry about this proposal not only as it is the most vulnerable in society who are affected by this, but that one year's worth of Telecare costs paid by an elderly person is equivalent to two houses in Great Denham having their open space management charges paid for – something the administration chose to pay for for residents. The £1 million that the Mayor gave to two private sports clubs could have gone towards this charge. We have heard from local residents who are now planning on stopping subscribing to the service as they can't afford the costs with their pensions. Even the council's own equality impact assessment shown below states that the elderly, disabled and women are likely to be negatively affected by this change.

Impact on Protected Characteristic and Other Relevant Groups

Based on the evidence presented what positive and negative impact will your activity have on equality?				
	Positive impact	Negative impact	No or neutral impact	Explanation
Age	☐	☒	☐	The majority of Telecare customers (82%) are 65+. The proposal to charge could have a negative impact on those older customers on fixed incomes, who may choose to give up Telecare or retain the Telecare service and cut other expenditure. Either of these choices could be detrimental to health & wellbeing.
Disability	☐	☒	☐	A proportion of Telecare customers identify themselves as being disabled. However, the majority of these individuals will have been assessed as having Care Act eligible needs and therefore they will not be impacted by the proposals as they will continue to receive the service free of charge. Alternatively, Disability related benefits may be claimed which are paid to offset such charges along with VAT exemption.
Gender	☐	☒	☐	Women statistically make up a greater percentage of older people and a larger proportion of Telecare customers are women, whose income/pension may be less than that of their male counterparts. They may therefore decide to do without Telecare equipment because of the proposed charge.
Pregnancy	☐	☐	☒	No specific impact.

It is a false economy as taking away the safety net for residents enabling them to stay in their own home will result in an increased impact on Adult Services. As a result, as a group we have 'called in' this decision to the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will hear this item on 29th July.

The council have put forward their draft corporate plan and have been consulting on its contents. There are several items missing from the plan, including mentioning any areas outside of Bedford and Kempston town centre when it comes to economic growth. There is a focus on family, seemingly leaving out those in need for whom a family is not something they are part of. Protecting the borough waterways was not included as well as no mention of tackling climate change and sustainability. The deputy mayor has spoken to all political groups who have each suggested amendments and a wider consultation has taken place with stakeholders and members of the public.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee that I am a member of met on Monday 15th July. As part of that meeting we received a report from the ICB on the re-procurement of Musculo-Skeletal Services (MSK) within this area. It was disappointing to note that despite the current system creaking and not functioning well, and that despite first conversations being held with the public in 2021, the new service is not planned to commence until 1st October 2025.

Local Issues

I have been away for a couple of weeks and so am currently catching up with local issues.

You will have seen the email regarding the payment for the surveyor of the land at the rear of 41 – 47 Wood End Road. I haven't heard anything further from BPHA about this.

Speed sign data – Looking at the data from 12th June to 11.30pm on 16th July, a total of 424,943 vehicles were counted by the speed sign. Of these 66,879 were traveling over 30mph – 15.74% of all vehicles. The maximum speed recorded was 84mph, with 92 vehicles travelling over 50mph in that time period with 13 of those travelling over 60mph, 6 of which were between the hours of 11am and 8pm. While downloading the information at 11.30pm on 16th July, several vehicles sped past me. The sign does seem to be effective for the majority of drivers. I will send the information on to the Borough Council and diarise downloading the information regularly.

I'm holding my Councillor surgeries in Wood End (10 – 11am) and at Gibraltar Corner (11.15am – 12pm) as usual this Saturday (20th July).