

County Council – 18 October 2022

Written Question under Council Procedure Rule 9.2

1. Question from Councillor Steve Count

The GCP has a consultation on congestion charging in Cambridge. Vehicle movements in the City could reduce by 50% and £80m revenue a year could be raised.

- 1(a) What discussions have you had or are you aware of, regarding the loss of parking revenue to Cambridge City Council being subsidised out of the revenue raised?
- 1(b) Why is the possibility of GCP subsidising Cambridge City Council not covered in the consultation papers?

Response from Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee

I personally am not aware of any discussion or intention for any of the potential income from any possible sustainable travel charge to be used to subsidise loss of parking revenue for Cambridge City Council. My understanding is that any revenue will be used first to subsidise reliable and efficient bus services, enabling greener, fairer and more sustainable travel across Cambridgeshire. If there is any additional funding available longer term it would go towards increased provision for active travel, (walking and cycling) across the County.

The legislation governing road user charging schemes sets out that any revenue can only be spent on directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of local transport policies. This has been made clear in the consultation documents.

The GCP is working with the County Council and City Council on an Integrated Parking Strategy for Cambridge and agreed a vision and objectives for this work in June this year. Any impacts of the Sustainable Travel Zone on both County and City car parking revenue would be assessed following the consultation.

2. Question from Councillor Steve Count

The current Liberal Democrat administration at South Cambridgeshire District Council has announced that it will move to a four day week five day pay offer for many of its employees, due to a staffing shortage. This is for a pilot period and will not affect all employees. Cambridgeshire County Council also has many vacancies, especially in the Children's services and highways departments. Do you believe

- (a) This pilot is a good idea, yes or no?
- (b) Will you ask our chief executive to consider implementing a pilot at Cambridgeshire County Council?
- (c) Whether it can be damaging to staff moral to have a pilot where you tell one section of employees they have to work a four day week for five days pay, and tell another sector of employees they have to continue with their normal contracted hours.

Response from Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee

Recruitment and retention challenges are greater than ever for most organisations, and this is generating lots of different approaches from employers to try to compete in the employment market. Evidence of success or otherwise for organisations that have implemented the four-day week is very limited at this stage, and currently there are no local authorities operating that approach.

There are no current plans to consider implementing such a pilot in Cambridgeshire, but we will watch the progress at South Cambridgeshire with interest for the learning it will offer other local employers.

3. Question from Councillor Steve Count

In the July highways directorate update we were informed that in a structure of 27 positions, there were 12 vacancies, 7 interim appointments, 1 secondment and 2 positions were acting in addition to their substantive roles. In fact out of 27 positions only 5 positions were actually filled, with 2 of those expected to cover a second position. I therefore ask the following

- 1. What are you doing over and above normal procedures (because that has obviously failed) to recruit to this team?
- 2. When can we expect positive results?
- 3. How will you report progress to Council and thereby the public?

Response from Councillor Alex Beckett, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee

(1)

We have successfully completed the recruitment of the Highways and Transport management team, with the final appointment of the Assistant Director: Project Delivery on 11th July 2021. The new management team has been working closely with Human Resources to address the vacancies across Highways and Transport. A campaign-based approach to proactively recruit to vacant positions and those currently occupied by interim workers is planned to commence during November. The process began with a review of the existing posts and developing a strategy to address what is and will remain an exceptionally challenging employment market. The strategy is focused on reducing reliance on interim workers and moving towards a higher proportion of Council employed staff. In addition, as part of this approach, we are creating opportunities for up to 10 apprentices to support a 'grow our own' approach within Highways and Transport. This longer term investment in workforce development has been shown to significantly improve retention and progression within other Councils.

(2)

There have been a number of new appointments made recently and this is an on-going process which is expected to continue to deliver positive and sustainable improvements in the coming months.

(3)

A report is scheduled to be presented to the Highways and Transport Committee in March 2023, which will give an overview of the capacity and resources across the service and the steps being taken to both plan for and better meet demands in the future.

4. Question from Councillor Steve Count

Whilst you are aware I am fully opposed to the introduction of a congestion charge in Cambridge, I still want it to be as fair as possible if you force this extra unfair Tax onto our residents. Therefore I ask, as leader of the County, can you give us your position on residents discount in Cambridge City for the congestion charge. London provides residents with a 90% discount under their scheme, however they have an excellent tube and bus system, to provide an alternative. Without a tube, the road space according to the GCP is needed to be freed up in order to run enhanced bus services. As 50% of journeys within Cambridge City start and stop within the charging zone, the plans would not work if a residents' discount was introduced, as City residents would simply be able to back fill the now semi-empty roads.

Can you therefore confirm your continued support for the policy of bringing in a charge with no discount for the vast majority of ordinary City residents? If not, can you explain why rural residents, many of which live inside the GCP area in South Cambridgeshire, should be paying the full charge?

Response from Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee

The consultation proposes charging both residents of the Sustainable Travel Zone and residents of the wider area equally. Residents make up 53% of car journeys in the morning peak – in London, the figure for residents is only 3-4%. Treating both populations equally has been a key principle for the proposals. Additionally, the proposed improvements to bus services, cycling and walking will benefit the whole area and provide alternatives to car travel for both Cambridge residents and residents of the wider area.