

January 2022 Report from District and County Councillors

We'd like to wish everyone a happy new year in these continuing challenging times!

South Cambs District Council

Resumption of green bin collections

Collections are planned to resume on Wednesday 12 January, in-line with the previously published Christmas bin collection schedule. We are working on the plan for that resumption, and communicating it, now.

Business grants update 1: Hospitality and Leisure Grant and Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) top-up

On 21st December The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak announced £1 billion in support for businesses most impacted by Omicron across the UK. Amongst other support, businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors in England will be eligible for one-off grants of between £2,700- £6,000 depending on premises rateable value. Additional discretionary funding will be made available for Councils to support other businesses affected.

Our best guess is currently that businesses will be able to start applying during the latter part of January / early February. We are in the process of updating our website to reflect this information.

Business grants update 2: Coronavirus Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

Back in March, Government announced funding for a new business rates relief to help those business that had been impacted by Covid in 2020/21 but had been ineligible for the other business rates reliefs. The announcement was made in response to a number of businesses submitting appeals to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), as they believed the pandemic constituted a "material change of circumstances" in relation to their premises' rateable value. Before the relief would be made available, Government first wanted to pass legislation to prevent Covid from being a reason for an appeal to the VOA. This legislation received royal assent on Wednesday 15 December.

S Cambs have now received guidance from Central Government regarding a new rates relief scheme – the Coronavirus Additional Relief Fund (CARF), along with a funding allocation of up to £6.3m for us at South Cambridgeshire District Council. The guidance sets out that we should design a new local relief scheme to distribute the funding, which is available to reduce the 2021/22 business rates bill. The guidance states that the scheme should:

- Not award relief to ratepayers that are, or would have been, eligible for the Extended Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Discount, or the Nursery Discount
- Not award relief in respect of a property when it is unoccupied
- Direct support towards ratepayers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic and have been unable to adequately adapt to that impact.

We are currently exploring options for scheme design to ensure support is targeted to those impacted, and will then need to turn our attention to the administrative details. This is a considerable piece of work and it may take some weeks before the scheme is launched. Please be assured that we will endeavour to launch the scheme as soon as possible. Details of the relief announcement are on our website.

Business support events and webinars

S Cambs is offering a series of free to attend events and webinars that provide a chance for local businesses to engage with Council services and develop skills to help you run your business successfully.

Looking after your mental health

The past year has been a difficult time to run a business and many people's mental health has suffered as a result. S Cambs are running a free webinar on 20 January from 12 noon to 1pm exploring how to look after yourself as well as your business.

In this inspirational and solution focused sessions, our guest speakers Nick Elston and Zoe Thompson will talk through their lived experience and ways to help you cope in these challenging times.

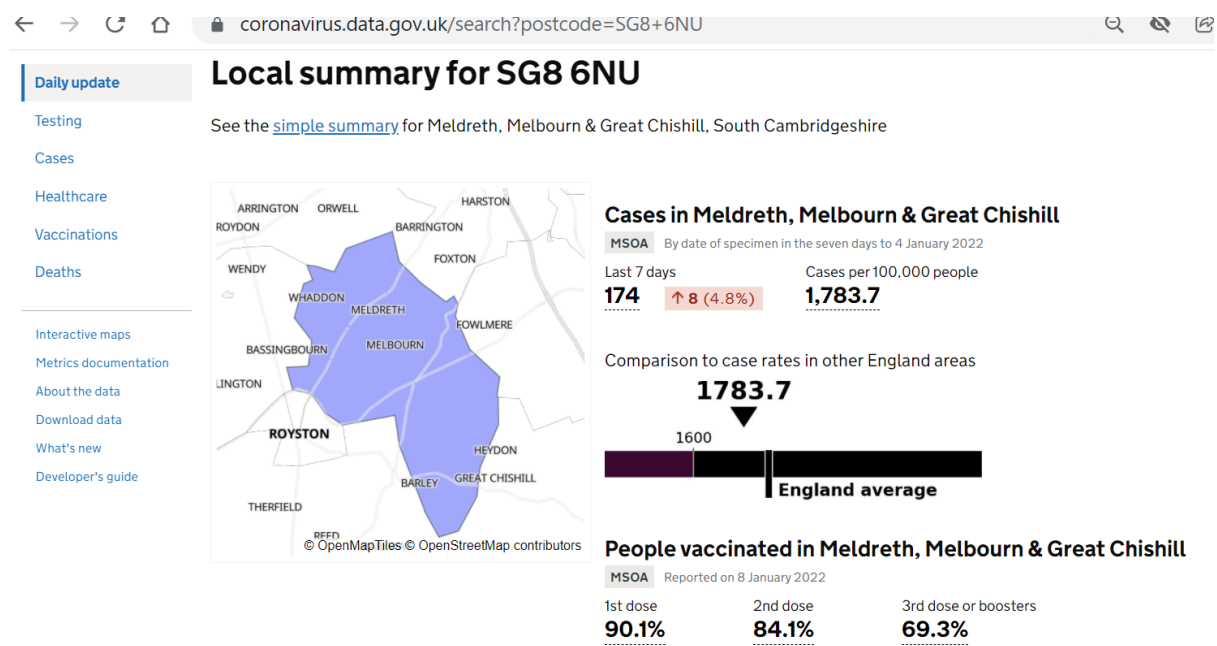
Themes include:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- 'What you do next that counts'
- Resilience, positivity and aspiration
- Acceptance and awareness.

More on all of these items on the Business page at SCDC: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/business/>

Cambridgeshire County Council

Current Covid & Vaccination Status Locally



Household Support Fund

A reminder on the new support fund which aims to help those struggling to pay for food, energy or other essential items this winter has been launched. Cambridgeshire County Council has been allocated £3.58 million as part of the Government's Household Support Fund to help people who need financial support.

From this coming week, letters will be sent out to approximately 6,000 residents who have been identified as being likely to be eligible for Household Support Fund grants. The letter will include reminders of existing financial support that is available during the year (such as our Discretionary Housing Payments to provide financial support towards housing costs, or our Council Tax hardship fund to provide support to those who are struggling financially because of the pandemic). Additionally, information will be included to encourage residents to contact our Welfare and Money Maximisation Officer, Lucy Tompkins, who can discuss residents' circumstances and identify any support that may be suitable.

The Household Support Fund itself is a new one-off grant, which is live until 31 March 2022. This usually provides £49 (for a family) or £29 (for an individual) to cover food or household energy costs, but more funding may be available for people who can demonstrate a higher need – for instance for higher costs of filling an oil tank or buying a new cooker. To be eligible for the Household Support Fund residents will need to earn less than £17,940 or receive any of the following: Income Support; Income-based Job Seekers Allowance; Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; Pension Credit; Universal Credit; Working Tax Credit. Residents can find out more, or apply online, on Cambridgeshire County Council's website. Details of how to access the scheme are available at: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/household-support-fund>

County Highways Issues

The Jan 25th committee will look at:

- Civil Parking Enforcement
- 20 mph scheme funding & principles

County Health and Social Care

The Jan 13th committee will consider:

- Workforce retention funding to help address the very concerning loss of staff in the social care workforce.
- Progress on the council's duties within the creation of the Integrated Care System, which is the local health and social care restructure mandated by government.

Other issues

Pot holes, traffic signals junction

We are arguing the case for a good repair job to the junction where pot holes are getting worse. This is an expensive job due to road closure necessity. We're also aware of other key areas of road and pavement deterioration.

LGA lobbying for councils to meet virtually

The necessity for parish, district and county councils to meet in person for formal decision-making is having an adverse effect for many councils, with meetings cancelled or minimized in terms of people attending and business covered. The LGA is lobbying government to reinstate provision for meeting virtually, if needed.

Rail services

The enormous impact of Covid on staffing levels has meant that the half-hourly service reinstated on December 12 was pulled back again on January 4. GTR insists this is temporary and that the regular service will be reinstated as soon as possible. Meanwhile, GTR have arranged for a special stop order to allow an additional Cambridge-bound train to stop at Meldreth at 8:01 on weekdays, in order to help students get to school and college. This does not yet appear in planners. The situation is under constant review and GTR are also looking at the possibility of a special service for returning home late afternoon.

Thakeham and South West Cambridge Action Group

Parish council representatives in Thakeham's 'South West Cambridge' area have been invited by the South West Cambridge Action Group to an update meeting on the Local Plan and OxCam Arc with Stephen Kelly, Head of Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, on 3 Feb, 6-7PM. This will be held virtually.

Weekly Zoom Cuppa

We continue to hold a weekly Zoom Cuppa councillors' surgery on Wednesdays from 5-6.