

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCILLORS' REPORT



Report Reference C-21-26
Meeting Date 10th January 2022
Agenda Item 6
Prepared by Knutsford Ward Cheshire East Councillors

REPORT OF CLLR QUENTIN ABEL

I am presently the Environment and Climate Change champion for Cheshire East Council, Deputy Chairman of the Environment and Communities committee and Chairman of the advisory Tatton Board. Under these above heading I try to be as inclusive as possible to all members of our society, to actively involve people I believe to have knowledge and interest in the subjects that are being dealt with all without concern for their political affiliations or any other issue. This report is deliberately short.

I have attended many meetings and briefing sessions with regard to the above roles and I am currently working on:

- Air quality
- This year's tree planting
- Other forms of Carbon capture eg wetlands and soil capture.
- Energy generation, exploration stages
- Flood management, with Tony Dean, and the task and finish group which I am proud to be a member This is a very involved subject. I hope Tony might be interested in a long-term role which we currently do not have, overseeing this very important area for the whole of Cheshire East and indeed further afield with our neighbours as we are the lead authority.

I have been trying to facilitate improvements in our road maintenance scheme. Very early stage as yet.

I appeared on Granada reports explaining briefly about our Hybrid Hydrogen powered Bin lorries - Chewy and Chomper.

REPORT OF CLLR TONY DEAN

2.1 GENERAL

As I stated in my last report, I will focus mainly on the issues being dealt with in the Environment and Communities Committee on which I sit, but it is worth looking first at other major issues for CEC at the current time

2.1.1 COVID

COVID grants from government continue to arrive for CEC to distribute to charities and businesses, and in some cases to individuals. To date the government grants have covered all the COVID-created extra expenditure in Cheshire East, with a little left over which is being held in reserves. I am getting a little concerned with more frequent reports of suspected fraud, not least of one report of a Knutsford businessman allegedly absconding after receipt of three business support grants totalling £55k. This is a predictable result of a money distribution system which has to act quickly to save businesses, but this often means grants are made before proper checks and balances are in place.

2.1.2 WINTER GRITTING ROUTES

This area of CEC's work is a major issue just now, especially for the rural areas to the East of the Borough, and around Nantwich, where routes have been removed from the gritting schedule and subsequently have been the scene of several serious accidents.

There is currently a call for the Highways Cttee to swiftly review the scoring system and its application to individual roads in the Borough (i.e. was it applied correctly), with a view to improving the schedule during this winter, rather than waiting until winter 2022/23. A local example of a mistake being made was when Bexton Road/Blackhill Lane was taken out of the schedule due to the Highways Officer not taking into account Knutsford Academy on that route. I have written twice to Highways about this mistake, I hope the route is now back on the schedule - has anyone seen it being gritted during the recent frosts?

2.1.3 HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES

The decision not to replace the closing HWRC in Congleton in 2021 continues to cause cross party concern from the local councillors. It is a strange decision considering the environmental focus of this administration and the extra car mileage/CO2 emissions this will create as Congleton folks now have to drive to Macclesfield or Alsager HWRCs, or fly-tip!

2.2 ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Unfortunately the promised Minerals and Waste Development Plan did not appear as promised in the September meeting's agenda. Both the Air Quality Annual Status report and the ESAR annual report were also missing from the promised November meeting agenda. There appears to be a general malaise currently within CEC where almost all work completion dates are extended. COVID gets the blame usually, with so many officers 'working from home'. I, and many other Councillors, do not accept these excuses nearly two years into COVID.

2.2.1 PLANNING DEPARTMENT REVIEW

A propos of the above comments, one of the most serious current problems is the huge backlog of Planning Applications in Cheshire East, with some people waiting between six months to two years to achieve resolution. As a result of several requests for action to senior managers falling on deaf ears, I submitted a call for a full review of the Planning Department's current workings as an agenda item in the November meeting.

As a result, and following discussion in the meeting, our new Executive Director of Place, Jayne Traverse, who is a Chartered Planner and who has had experience of Planning departments in Wigan, Lancashire and Tameside Councils as well as five years at the LGA, has begun a full root and branch review of the Department. This will include staffing levels, recruitment and retention systems, all the current procedures, committee timetables and structure etc., starting with a thorough customer

consultation. The review is being overseen by a four person Members' Advisory Panel chaired by me, and Jayne will complete the work by end March (2022), reporting to the Committee's April meeting.

2.2.2 FLOODS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

This is not strictly an item for this Committee, the group (on which I and Quentin sit) is a hangover from the old Environment Scrutiny Committee. The group has just had sight of a draft final report prepared by the officers, but we have delayed the report's completion until we can finally meet with our Highways senior managers, under whose control the small group of Flood officers currently work. As the Highways authority is one of the bodies that the Lead Local Flood Authority (Cheshire East for our borough) is supposed to regulate, this arrangement will be one of the first recommendations for change in our final report, along with other equally significant recommendations. The areas with the worst

REPORT OF CLLR STEWART GARDINER

The December 2021 meeting of Full Council was taken up with a review of the Committee system and several related items as well as approving recommendations from the Corporate Policy, Finance and Audit & Governance Committees.

While the new system has not prevented the Council functioning it is early days, so members and officers are still at the bedding-in stage, and it is too early to say just how the effective making decisions via committees is going to be.

I have already raised concerns that the work programme for the Adults looks very slim after the January Meeting, whilst Finance and Corporate Policy look to be dealing with managing the essentials rather than developing new policy.

It is my intention to request that issues pertaining to the use of the Council's day-care facilities (including the Stanley Centre) and the implementation of the Council's policies for rough sleepers is reviewed following my less than favourable experiences of the service on Christmas Eve.

Motions to Full Council were tabled on the subjects of Winter Gritting, Single Use Plastics, low carbon advertising, a replacement waste facility in Congleton and a review of the Crewe Hub, following national announcements on HS2. However, all of these matters were not debated at the meeting and will be referred to the respective service committee so watch this space.

The last Strategic Planning Board of the year considered just two applications one of which was deferred in an attempt to improve the layout and housing mix on a site on the outskirts of Congleton. This small agenda reflects similar situations on the other two planning boards and reflects the significant delays in progressing applications at present.