

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Comprising Barton, Coton, Comberton, Grantchester, Harlton,
Harston, Haslingfield, Hauxton, and South Trumpington

District Councillors' Monthly Report – July 2023

District Councillor Contact Details

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us using the details below.

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Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Development Management Service have successfully received accreditation for the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard

Over the last few months, the Development Management service set up a quality group consisting of team members from across the service to collaborate and capture the District Council's business processes and procedures for development management and compliance. These were reviewed to ensure they meet and exceed the requirements of our service users and stakeholders, and included other areas such as performance, complaints and contracts.

The external ISO 9001 auditor spent several days with the team, reviewing everything from processes, performance, internal audits to leadership and we have successfully achieved the standard without any need for additional work. As far as we know, we are the only Planning Service to have achieved this accreditation. The next step will be to create a business development opportunity by providing a toolkit and support to other councils. Finally, we aim to achieve this standard for the rest of the service by 2024, meeting our ethos of continual improvement. Well done to the team.

Transformation update – customer experience in GCPS

The Transformation team and the Greater Cambridge Planning Service have been working closely together both to improve the customer experience, and ensure we are making the best of available technology. If you would like to know more about some of the work, just watch the following video on the SCDC Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMUHJHfY6WM>

Harston & District Village Warden Trust – Status Update

On 30 June 2023 the Grants Advisory Committee reviewed the Harston & District Village Warden Trust; after due consideration, the Committee recommended to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources that all remaining unspent funds from the Harston & District Village Warden Trust (HVWT) be returned to SCDC for reallocation to the Melbourn Mobile Warden Scheme (MMWS) who will continue to use the funding for its original purpose, i.e., to support older people to live independently in their own homes. This will continue for the duration of the funding, until 31 March 2024.

Information about MMWS can be found on their website: [Melbourn Mobile Warden Scheme – Helping people to remain independent in their own home since 1996 \(mmws.org.uk\)](https://mmws.org.uk)

Their telephone is: 07808 735066

At present the scheme covers Melbourn, Meldreth, Shepreth, Harston, Hauxton, Barrington, Grantchester and potentially Orwell villages.

Updates from DLUHC:

LGA annual conference 2023: Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' speech

Yesterday the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, [gave a speech at the Local Government Association's \(LGA's\) annual conference 2023 in Bournemouth](#). Prior to his speech, a [Written Ministerial Statement was tabled in Parliament](#). In his speech, he announced the [establishment of the Office for Local Government \(Oflog\), a new local government performance body in England](#). Oflog will provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and support its improvement.

DLUHC has also published [a policy document, setting out the plans for Oflog in more detail](#). Further information on Oflog can be found on GOV.UK. The [Local Authority Data Explorer online tool, which brings together a selection of existing metrics across a subset of service areas for data that is available at different levels of local authority](#), was also published today on GOV.UK. The Data Explorer initially covers four sets of metrics; these are a first step and over time Oflog will be looking to expand on and iterate these metrics to cover the range of local government responsibilities.

DLUHC has also launched today a [recruitment campaign for the Office for Local Government Chief Executive Officer role](#). The deadline to submit an application is 11:55pm on 13 August. Alongside the establishment of Oflog, DLUHC has also launched a [consultation into new statutory guidance on what constitutes Best Value and the standards authorities are expected to meet by the government and residents](#)

New midlife MOT website launched to help older workers

On the 5th July, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) launched [a new online Midlife MOT to help older workers with financial planning, health guidance, and to assess what their skills mean for their careers and futures](#). The [free Midlife MOT website](#) encourages people to review their skills and help to break down barriers to the labour market. It brings together trusted services, help such as a jobseeker toolkit and charity resources. It will allow people to identify job opportunities as well as better preparing them for later life and their retirement. The website signposts key organisations and charities, including the NHS, Mind, MoneyHelper, Citizens Advice and [DWP's find a job portal](#). As part of this, [MoneyHelper has created a financial tool](#) which will provide a personalised report to help people understand what to prioritise to improve their financial position, from now through to retirement. The Midlife MOT was originally launched in Jobcentres across England with work coaches working with claimants to encourage planning for later life and improving their confidence.

Councils are encouraged to share this information where appropriate.

Million Hours Fund open for applications

To mark the start of Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week (which takes place between 3 and 9 July), the government and The National Lottery Community Fund have announced [the first round of funding for youth organisations to provide more out-of-school activities and support young people](#). The Million Hours Fund, announced in March as part of the government's [Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan](#), will support an additional one million hours of positive activities from youth services. Additional youth workers, volunteers, venue hire and activity resources will be made available through the first tranche of funding, now open for applications. The £3 million investment will also fund youth workers' engagement with young people in the areas they already spend time in, such as parks and leisure facilities.

The remaining £8 million from the Million Hours Fund will open for applications from the autumn, with further details to be announced in due course. Further information about [eligibility criteria and applications for the first £3 million of the Million Hours Fund can be found on GOV.UK](#). Successful applicants will be informed in due course.

Councils are encouraged to share this information where appropriate.

Community Automated External Defibrillators fund and national defibrillator network database

Organisations in England are being invited to bid for a share of £1 million of government funding to buy defibrillators for community spaces like town halls, local parks or post offices. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is [inviting interested organisations to register expressions of interest for its Community Automated External Defibrillators \(AED\) Fund, aimed at increasing the number of AEDs in public places](#). An estimated 1,000 new defibrillators are to be provided by the fund. As part of the grant award, applicants will be asked to demonstrate that defibrillators will be placed in areas where they are most needed, such as places with high footfall, vulnerable people, rural areas, or due to the nature of activity at the site. Examples could include town halls, community centres, local shops, post offices and local parks, to ensure that defibrillators are evenly spread throughout communities. DHSC wrote to councils yesterday about registering defibrillators on 'The Circuit', the national defibrillator network database, which provides information on where defibrillators are located. Registering a defibrillator with 'The Circuit' enables emergency services, including first responders, to locate the nearest AEDs when they are treating someone out of hospital for sudden cardiac arrest. [AED registration](#) is simple and quick to do.

Councils are encouraged to disseminate this information to as many organisations as possible within your area who may have unregistered AEDs.

Access for assistance dogs to goods and services

The government is committed to ensuring that people with assistance dogs have the fullest possible access to goods and services. Assistance dogs are trained to help people with visual and hearing impairments, epilepsy, diabetes, physical mobility problems and more. The [Equality Act 2010](#) places an obligation on service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, which includes allowing access to assistance dogs and their owners. Failure to comply with this requirement can result in a fine of up to £1,000. Shops, restaurants, taxis, private hire vehicles (PHVs) and other everyday service providers that unlawfully refuse access to assistance dog owners, without specific reasons for exemption, will in most cases be guilty of disability discrimination which could result in payment of financial compensation. It is an offence under the Equality Act for a taxi or PHV to refuse to carry a guide dog, hearing dog and many assistance dogs, or to charge extra for doing so. Where taxi or PHV drivers refuse assistance dogs without having a medical exemption certificate, they may be subject to court proceedings and a fine of up to £1,000 and licensing authorities are encouraged to impose sanctions.

Councils are encouraged to share this information where appropriate.

Assistance Dogs UK (a coalition of assistance dog organisations) has produced some general information for service providers:

<https://www.assistedogs.org.uk/the-law/>

Guide Dogs UK has also produced guidance for service providers, including taxis and PHV operators:

<https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/campaigning/our-current-campaigns/open-doors/>

Rogue business rates agents – reminder

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is urging businesses to protect themselves from rogue business rates agents. New rateable values for business properties came into effect in April 2023. Councils used these new values to calculate business rates bills. Businesses can challenge their valuation if they think it's incorrect and can use a rating agent to do this. The vast majority of agents are reputable and provide a good service. But some rogue agents submit inaccurate information. This could result in penalties or increased rates bills for businesses. Businesses can manage their own business rates by creating a Business Rates Valuation Account on GOV.UK. The VOA has produced [a checklist to help businesses if they want to use a business rates agent](#). Businesses are encouraged to [visit GOV.UK for more advice on how to choose a reputable agent](#).

Councils are encouraged to share this information with businesses in their area.

Avian influenza in birds update: Avian Influenza Prevention Zone lifted today

Yesterday the government [lifted the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone \(AIPZ\) for poultry and captive birds](#), introduced to help stop the spread of avian influenza ('bird flu'). The enhanced biosecurity measures were brought in across Great Britain in October when there was a medium risk for some poultry premises. [The risk of avian influenza has now reduced to low for all poultry](#). As a result, the mandatory requirements were lifted at 12:00pm on 4 July. The risk has reduced but as we have seen with recent premises confirmations, it has not gone away. All bird keepers must follow enhanced measures at all times to prevent the risk of future outbreaks and remain vigilant for signs of disease.

Councils are encouraged to share this information where appropriate.

Update on government's work to improve the quality of social housing

On 30 June, DLUHC [provided an update outlining the government's approach to improving the quality of social housing, as set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#). [Every month, progress on DLUHC's commitments will be shared on the social housing update page on GOV.UK](#).

DLUHC continue to work with the social housing sector, including residents, to inform the upcoming consultation on 'Awaab's Law'. The consultation will test specific time limits for landlords to investigate and repair serious hazards. It will make sure these limits are fair for both landlords and tenants. The update also covers work DLUHC has undertaken this month including:

- Social Housing (Regulation) Bill
- Decent Homes Standard Review
- £15 million fund for damp and mould
- Tenant involvement and mutual exchange
- Social Housing Resident Panel
- Professionalising the social housing sector

RSH sets out key damp and mould findings for social landlords

On 28 June the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has published a [report setting out how social landlords are approaching tackling damp and mould in their tenants' homes](#). The report highlights the features of the strongest and weakest approaches, so that landlords can learn lessons from others in the sector. The findings are drawn from responses that RSH requested from landlords following the coroner's report into the death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. RSH is encouraging all social landlords to read the report and use it to inform their approach.

The key findings are:

- Better performing landlords manage their data well
- Strong oversight from boards or councillors is essential
- Some boards and councillors had limited oversight of the condition of tenants' homes, and in some cases they didn't have specific processes for identifying and tackling damp and mould

The responses show that most social landlords deal with damp and mould effectively, and most tenants live in homes that are largely free from damp and mould. A small number of landlords gave weaker responses, and RSH has followed up to scrutinise their approach.

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rsh-sets-out-key-damp-and-mould-findings-for-social-landlords>

Species Survival Fund launched

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has launched a [£25 million Species Survival Fund](#) to increase the creation and restoration of natural habitats and help drive the action we need to halt the decline in species. The [funding will support projects with grants of up to £3 million to tackle habitat loss, safeguard our fragile ecosystems and create nature-rich landscapes full of wildlife-friendly habitats such as grasslands, woodlands and wetlands](#). Councils, environmental not-for-profit organisations, National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, farmers and land managers are all invited to apply for the funding.