

South Cambs District Councillor (SCDC) Bill Handley's Report to Willingham News November 2023

Help for residents through the cost-of-living crisis

SCDC's latest initiative to help certain residents through the cost-of-living crisis is the offer of a free electric blanket/throw, which cost a fraction to run compared to central heating. Qualifying residents are those who claim Council Tax Support plus certain disability and mobility benefits. They will receive a letter in the coming weeks, explaining how to claim their free blanket. Only those with a letter qualify.

Homes for Ukraine Landlords' incentive scheme

South Cambridgeshire has seen one of the highest number of Homes for Ukraine arrivals for a lower tier authority with over 850 guests coming to the district since 2022. Recently, the focus has been to help guests to move on to independent accommodation, but getting into the private rental sector is expensive and challenging for guests, so SCDC is launching a Landlords' Incentive scheme in an effort to provide more affordable & sustainable housing options. The scheme will offer up-front payments to landlords, depending on circumstances such as property size and the kind of tenancy they offer. The money for this scheme will come from the government's Homes for Ukraine fund.

New bin collection schedule

The move to the new 4-day week bin collection schedule has gone very well so far with 99.7% of bins collected in the first two weeks of the new schedule. The number of calls/complaints was below what was expected as was the number of reports of missed bins. A big advantage of not collecting bins on Mondays is that we all avoid the confusion caused by Bank Holidays.

SCDC's Carbon Literacy Certification

SCDC has been certified as a Carbon Literate Organisation by a national charity - The Carbon Literacy Trust - achieving a bronze certificate as part of its continuing efforts to tackle the climate emergency. It has been achieved by staff undertaking Carbon Literacy training which helps them to act on climate change within their day-to-day roles and to identify potential projects to reduce emissions both within the Council and in the wider district.

Making Connections update

The GCP has decided not to proceed to the next stage of its Making Connections project. The aim of the project was to make travelling in and around Cambridge quicker, simpler and faster by easing congestion and offering better, fairer, and greener travel choices. The focus is now likely to fall on other areas of the City Access programme such as resident parking, road hierarchy and freight consolidation plus other infrastructure projects. These solutions will not be delivered quickly.

4-day week update

The 4-day week is an attempt by SCDC to reduce its agency bill and take control of serious recruitment problems (especially in Planning) linked to the high cost of living in the district. Since the start of the trial, 9 posts have been filled of 23 that have been unfilled for a considerable time,

with a saving of around £550,000 a year. Recruitment appears to have been positively affected by the 4-day week both in terms of the number and quality of applicants.

Bill Handley October 2023.

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