

Cornwall Council report

Cllr Dick Cole

Time period: 21st January – 23rd February 2024

1.0 Council and other meetings

Over the last five weeks, I have attended a range of physical meetings. At Cornwall Council, these have included Full Council, Cabinet, Customers and Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Constitution and Governance Committee, Scrutiny Improvement Review Informal Working Group, meetings about the production of a White Paper seeking greater devolution for Cornwall (2), and a meeting about data relating to my role as chair of unitary authority's National Minority Working Group,

I have also attended a range of online Cornwall Council meetings via Teams / Zoom video-conferencing. These included a briefing in advance of Full Council, Group Leaders' meeting, National Minority Working Group (and an associated briefing), planning training, plus meetings about road safety measures at Seaview Terrace, local lettings plans and 20mph limits in the China Clay Area.

Other physical meetings have included St Dennis Parish Council, St Enoder Parish Council, St Dennis and Nanpean Community Trust, the Incinerator Liaison Group and the Annual General Meeting of the Indian Queens Pit charity.

In addition, I have had informal meetings with a wide range of groups and individuals.

2.0 Cornwall Council budget

The Cornwall Council budget for 2024-2025 was agreed at the Full Council meeting on 20th February. Put simply, the Deputy Leader of the Council argued that the Conservative administration was doing a fine job in difficult circumstances, but had no option other than to make cuts, reduce reserves and increase council tax by the maximum allowable amount – all at the same time. But credit where credit is due, Cllr David Harris was forthright in talking about the "financial abyss" facing councils and acknowledged that, if funding arrangements for local government do not change, Cornwall Council will be "bust" within two years.

Speaking on behalf of the Mebyon Kernow / Green Group, which did not support the budget, I pointed out – once again – that Cornwall has a majority Conservative Council, all Cornish MPs are Tories, and the Government in Westminster is also Conservative.

It is indeed time that they collectively delivered, in the words of Cllr Harris, "a longer term funding settlement ... based on a fair funding formula" plus a "significant financial intervention" from central government.

3.0 Homechoice

I have written previously about the review into the Homechoice system, through which publicly-owned rental properties are allocated, and I have outlined my concerns. A meeting was organised for 30th November 2023 for me to discuss my concerns in detail, following a second consultation. A number of officers were present including the Service Director for Planning and Housing (Chief Planning Officer) and the Head of Planning and Housing Policy, plus the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing.

I recently found that my views were not being taken on board and the ruling Cabinet took the decision to proceed with their changes to the Homechoice system. I was actively considering "calling-in" the review to a scrutiny committee but discovered that, following the second consultation, the review had been downgraded by the administration from a "key" to a "non-key" decision. This effectively removed my right to "call-in" the decision. I have challenged this and I am awaiting a response from senior council officers.

I have, nonetheless, had additional meetings about possible "local lettings plans" for the two parishes I represent, which I am continuing to follow up.

4.0 Housing Supplementary Planning Document

At the meeting of Cornwall Council's Cabinet on 14th February, the administration agreed to task officers to redraft the existing Housing SPD. This followed the changes to the Homechoice system noted above. I challenged the ten members of the Cabinet to broaden the work out to involve the wider council membership, but my requests were ignored.

5.0 20mph limits

One of the key policies of the administration at Cornwall Council is 20mph limits in built-up areas. This policy is being rolled out, area by area. The Falmouth-Penryn and Camelford networks were completed in 2024, and council staff are now working up detailed proposals for a second tranche of areas, including Clay Country.

The proposed extent of these speed limits is quite extensive and there will be a detailed consultation in the very near-future, which I will do my best to promote locally. Please look out for it and make sure that the unitary authority hears your views.

Officers at Cornwall Council have looked at issues on the road from Penhale, through Fraddon and St Columb Road, to the Halloon roundabout. I can report that a meeting is being arranged to consider whether any of the suggestions emanating from that study could be brought forward in tandem with the new speed limits.

6.0 Seaview Terrace

I have also been following up on the commitment from Cornwall Council to install some road safety improvements at Seaview Terrace, between Fraddon

and St Stephen. I had hoped that the works would be done by now, but there have been delays. I have had a recent meeting with officers and the works will still be happening.

7.0 Planning matters

As always, there continue to be a number of significant planning applications in our area. Listed below are a few applications for which I have updates.

- **Tourist accommodation to rear of Silver Birch Gardens, St Columb Road (PA23/05462).** A number of local people and the Parish Council have objected to development in this area. The scheme has been modified and the number of units restricted to a maximum of 19. There is a fresh consultation on the proposal.
- **One residential dwelling in place of the old pumping station, Higher Fraddon (PA23/07359).** A number of local residents objected to this proposal, but it was passed by Cornwall Council because it was on previously developed land.
- **Five dwellings off Pit Lane, Indian Queens (PA23/09094).** This application is in an enclosure, which had been part-developed without first securing planning permission in the past. The Parish Council has objected to this proposal and it will be heard at a meeting of Cornwall Council's Central Planning Committee in the near-future.

8.0 Local consultation events

I have also attended a couple of consultation events for proposals in Clay Country, which lie outside my division. These were about the proposed solar farm at Trelion near St Stephen (St Stephen Community Centre) and the British Lithium project at Goonbarrow and surrounding areas (Roche Victory Hall).

9.0 Advice

In addition, I have assisted numerous households and individuals with guidance and advice on a range of topics.