

County Councillor's Notes – August 2007

For everyone the most important part of the quality of life is their health. Your health is probably vital to someone else's too – if you are a parent, carer or employer.

The County Council has a duty to monitor health provision in Cambridgeshire and any changes in it. We have, for example, looked at the proposed move of Papworth Hospital to the Addenbrookes site and the measures put in place to ensure Hinchingbrooke Hospital survives. We will be looking at how and why the Mental Health Trust wants Foundation status.

In May I was appointed as Chairman of the Committee which does this work. It's called the Health and Adult Social Care Committee and has members from all political parties on it as well as Councillors from all the District Councils and from Cambridge City. We have always had a dual rôle: examining the health provision of two world-class Hospitals, District Hospitals, the Mental Health Trust and the Ambulance Trust. In addition we make sure that our own County Council Adult Social Care Services are up to scratch.

From May this year, the Committee given another job – that of watchdog over Public Health. That is what I want to tell you about in this newsletter.

Life expectancy in Cambridgeshire is amongst the highest in the UK (78 years for men and 84 for women). Within that average certain parts of South Cambridgeshire equal the highest in the UK (77 for men and 86 for women). Life expectancy is all about living well and looking after yourself. So what is important for high life-expectancy?

Housing, employment and education contribute most which is why I regard quality of housing as a high priority in all our decision-making. But people can also help themselves by keeping fit, eating well, not smoking and spreading the message to others. The general level of health in South Cambridgeshire is so high that the Government pays us for treating 77,000 fewer people than live here (that's about equal to 65% of the population of Cambridge City). Had we been less fit, more of our own money would have come back in Government health spending instead of being re-directed to Scotland and the North of England. I'm sure I've made this point before and will certainly have to make it again.

Cambridgeshire's population is 570,000, growing at 1% a year – the fastest growing County in the UK. 68,000 more houses will have been built in the next 14 years. South Cambridgeshire is growing faster than anywhere else. 15% of the people are over 65 and half of these are over 75. There will be a boom in the over-85s in the next few years, most of them will be living in South Cambridgeshire. By contrast the lowest population increase is in the 5-14 age group. Huntingdonshire has the most young people and Fenland the least but Fenland has more people with health problems and also has the lowest life-expectancy. A man in South Cambs. can expect to live four years longer than a man in Fenland.

People between the ages of 25 and 65 form the majority of the population and together they make least demand on medical services. The over-65s are just one-sixth

of the population but they account for nearly half emergency admissions to hospital, admissions for surgery and for day case treatment.

There are two big problems with the under 25s: alcohol and drug misuse, and traffic accidents. Cambridgeshire is very significantly above the national average for deaths by accident: they are mainly men and mainly traffic-related. In Fenland, for example, such tragedies are 83% above the national average. Our high student population helps Cambridge City to have high rates of hospital admission for alcohol and illegal drug-taking.

Fenland features prominently as an area where health care needs are most acute. It is one of the 40% most deprived areas in the UK with high rates of death from smoking and from heart problems together with high teenage conception rates (itself linked to low living standards) above the national average. Deaths from cancer are below or well-below the national average everywhere in the County.

Smoking kills half its users. Nationally 26% of adults smoke but most of these are in unskilled jobs. Last year 800 people in Cambridgeshire died of smoking and a further 100 of passive smoking.

Obesity is a condition and it is not funny. The numbers are rising: there has been a 50% increase in obesity amongst men in the last 13 years – it's also increased by 30% for women. It is significant that more children are now obese than ever before – a 46% increase in those aged 2 to 10. Most of these are boys.

Obesity causes 6% of all premature deaths in the UK, 36% of cases of high blood pressure, 47% of Type 2 diabetes and 15% of all cases of angina.

Long-term illness is well below the national average everywhere in the County except in Fenland, where it is well above.

So how does Cambridgeshire compare with the rest of the UK in quality of life? According to Government figures, crime is worst in the London Borough of Haringey and lowest in Forest Heath (that part of Suffolk which includes Mildenhall). Material deprivation is highest in Liverpool and lowest in Basingstoke. Unemployment is highest in Manchester and lowest in Forest Heath (again). It's hardest to get a house in Hull and easiest in West Somerset (the area which includes most of Exmoor). Education is best provided in the London Borough of Richmond and worst in North-East Lincolnshire (the area around Grimsby). The living environment is worst in Liverpool and best in coastal Suffolk (the area north of Felixstowe).

Now South Cambridgeshire came out 8th. in the table of the best places in the UK to live according to the "Location" programme on BBC television. There was little to choose amongst the front-runners and we were beaten by Epsom because housing is so expensive here.

Next month: Back to School - transport and choice for pupils and parents, and where to build a new Primary School in Cambourne.

Lister Wilson
County Councillor for Bourn Division
Cambridgeshire County Council