

September Report John Reynolds

Ring Of Success for Cambridgeshire Direct

Cambridgeshire Direct has been named one of the top 50 contact centres in the country for delivering excellent customer service. The accolade puts Cambridgeshire Direct amongst some of the biggest names in the industry, such as Marks and Spencer, Royal Bank of Scotland, Thomas Cook, nPower and Tesco.

Cambridgeshire Direct is a contact centre, set up by Cambridgeshire County Council, to help give communities better access to services. Anything from applying for a Blue Badge or renewing library books to finding out about how to arrange care for vulnerable members of society or reporting a pot hole are delivered from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Saturday.

The assessment, carried out for Call Centre Focus Magazine by leading researcher GfK NOP, follows a comprehensive three month mystery shopping exercise when hundreds of actual contacts are made to the Contact Centre. The overall position and the actual score for the level of customer service will be announced in October. The comprehensive report issued from the exercise is a key tool in deciding which areas of development Cambridgeshire Direct will concentrate on over the coming year.

Councillors Furious At BAM Nuttall's Latest Delay

Busway contractors BAM Nuttall have again angered senior councillors and transport bosses as the firm has announced they will not now finish building the Guided Busway until January - another one month delay. Cabinet members criticised BAM Nuttall for the further delay at the County Council's Cabinet meeting (7 September) and said that the contractor's attitude to completing the job was not good enough for a well respected national and international firm.

The contractor has told the Council the extra delay is because they need to carry out an assessment and remedial works of an old railway bridge - a task which the Council believes could have been done at any time over the last four years. For the past 6 months BAM Nuttall's construction programme has shown the Busway would be completed in December. But despite reassurances from senior BAM Nuttall staff that they would complete the job before December they have now said it won't be completed this year.

The contractor was due to complete both sections of the Busway in February 2009 and has had damages of almost £14,000 a day deducted for late delivery - over £7 million so far. This extra one month delay will mean a further £420,000 will be deducted from BAM Nuttall in damages.

Joint Approach To Ongoing Economic Wellbeing And Development

A proposal for a Greater Cambridge-Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been submitted to Government. The proposed area covers Cambridgeshire, Peterborough City, Rutland, Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire, and the neighbouring market towns.

Beyond the administrative boundaries above, the real economic geography extends into parts of North Hertfordshire, Uttlesford, St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath; King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

The Greater Cambridge-Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership proposal outlines a mission to lead the area's growth to 100,000 significant businesses and create 160,000 new jobs by 2025 in an internationally renowned low carbon, knowledge-based economy.

To achieve this mission, the proposed Local Enterprise Partnership will provide economic leadership across the area and work with partners to support much needed investment in skills, business growth, transport, broadband and homes. Meeting the needs and ambitions of this growing area will require a step change in business success, unlocking the ability of the private sector to create jobs, wealth and offset the impact of public sector job losses.

For further details of the proposal, go to: <http://www.yourlocalenterprisepartnership.co.uk/>

Cambridgeshire Libraries Need You At Second Series Of Public Meetings

Your Local Library Needs You - that is the message of a public consultation that is putting communities at the heart of transforming library services to help meet tough national savings.

The second series of public meetings are being held in Cambridgeshire as part of an initial public consultation launched to help protect front line library services and shape them for the future in the wake of Government led cuts in money for public services. A series of meetings have already been held in August and Library officials and councillors are once again out and about explaining the challenges facing the service and answering people's questions.

Councillors and officers have been listening to what communities have had to say and explaining the challenges faced by all authorities in transforming library services. Public meetings have already been held in Ely, Cambridge and March. Remaining meeting:
16th September 6.30 - 8.30 p.m. Huntingdonshire Huntingdon Library

National Government is asking authorities to make massive savings to meet the national deficit. Cambridgeshire County Council is required to make a £2 million reduction (almost 30%) from the Library Service budget over the next 3 years.

The Council wants to do its best to maintain library services, rather than cutting services to meet these targets. The aim is to protect front-line services by transforming how things are done and to listen to communities to see what they think and what facilities they want. However, the challenge is tough and means it will be impossible to make the required savings without some reductions.

From August 9, people have been asked to have their say as part of the public consultation which ends on September 30. A questionnaire is available at libraries as well as online and at the roadshows. This will help shape proposals for Councillors in the Autumn and could be the first of a series of consultations depending on what changes are suggested. Residents will be able to see a taster of what libraries offer, complete the questionnaire and find out how they can get involved on the Council's website www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/library and in libraries.

A range of proposals for transforming the Library Service across Cambridgeshire, designed to meet the required budget savings, have been approved by County Councillors. The proposals include:

- * possible new shared and / or externalised management and support arrangements
- * introducing self-service machines into all libraries and working more closely with community volunteers
- * a review of library provision in Cambridge City and the surrounding area streamlining the mobile library service
- * new support arrangements for Library Access Points
- * cutting costs
- * increasing income

New Bit Added To Cycle Way Chain

Further improvements to the network of cycleways around Cambridge started on Monday, (September 6), when contractors begin work on National Cycle Route 11 at New Bit (Newnham), Vicar's Brook and Coe Fen.

The work, expected to take around six weeks, includes widening sections of the existing cycleway, resurfacing and repairs to the banks of the brook and a culvert. The new improved cycleway will help to reduce conflict between pedestrians and cyclists who currently share the route.

The £150,000 project is being carried out by Cambridgeshire Highways on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council and is funded from the Joint Cycleway Schemes Budget. The improvements to the cycleways are also part of the wider Cycle Cambridge programme, which will see around £7 million invested on new infrastructure and promotions in Cambridge and the surrounding areas.

Trading Standards Hit The Roof Over Rogue Traders

Cambridgeshire Trading Standards officers have renewed warnings about rogue traders after an increase in the number of attempts to con people in Cambridgeshire. During August there has been an increase in Rogue Trader activity with thirteen offences reported with elderly and vulnerable people in particular being targeted. A favourite trick is people offering to clean house gutters for a low price - whilst carrying out the work or appearing to, the workman claims to have found a problem with the roof and offers to carry out repairs.

Typically the conman claims ridge tiles need re-pointing. Offers to carry out unnecessary moss clearance from roofs or the need to replace/repair wooden fascia boards or soffits are also regular tactics used by the conmen - typically they will offer a plastic replacement, not agree a price and then charge from £3,000 to £8,000 for this unnecessary work.

Recently one victim in their 90s was charged £4,500 for cementing a few ridge tiles and another elderly victim had a deposit of £1,800 taken for work on a roof which was in perfect condition.

Fortunately a neighbour alerted Trading Standards via Consumer Direct and the Trading Standards Officer managed to cancel further work and made sure the deposit was returned - removing the threat of a bill of £5,400 for totally unnecessary work.

Trading Standards is also urging people who know their neighbours may be vulnerable to be extra vigilant and to report anything suspicious to either the police or Consumer Direct on 08454 040506.

Homerton Children's Centre Outstanding In Every Way - OFSTED

Every aspect of provision at Homerton Children's Centre has been judged as outstanding by Government inspectors. Inspectors from OfSTED - the Office for Standards in Education - gave all areas of the Centre in Cambridge a grade 1 ranking - the highest attainable. This is the third time the Centre has been judged to be outstanding.

They particularly praised headteacher Heather Lowe and her staff and governors. Children in turn were highlighted for their outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Pastoral care was also described as outstanding - inspectors said staff made every effort to eliminate any barriers to learning and did their utmost to ensure that all children thrive emotionally and academically.

They said the nursery remained at the forefront of the very best practice in extending excellence in the Early Years Foundation Stage, adding that capacity to improve was outstanding.

"Homerton is outstanding. It provides an exemplary, vibrant start to learning for every child, whatever their ability, culture, home language, individual circumstances or needs may be, "inspectors concluded.

Anti-smoking Campaign Attracts Parliamentary Praise

South East Cambridgeshire MP James Paice has praised young people from Bottisham for the anti-smoking campaign they launched in June.

The students from Bottisham Village College took their campaign Kick Ash to the House of Commons.

Katie France and sisters Jess and Carlie Foster - all aged 15 - received a letter from the MP praising their activities to prevent young people from starting to smoke and thanked them for making him aware of the issues young people face regarding smoking.

Kick Ash was launched at Bottisham Village College where the project has been piloted. It involved 250 students who pledged to be smoke free. During the pilot, 30 student volunteer mentors were recruited and worked with over 500 students aged between 11 and 13 about the importance of being smoke free.

Council Points The Way To Enjoying The Countryside

Taking a partnership approach has helped the Council to point the way to enjoying the countryside around West Wickham.

The council's Countryside Access Team worked with local landowners, parish councils and the Ramblers Association to install 24 signposts and 140 waymarks directing people to footpaths and other rights of way in the village and surrounding countryside which is amongst the most scenic in Cambridgeshire.

The area includes gently rolling hills, the Roman Road, fields and hedgerows which are teeming with wildlife.

Work Starts To Protect Ancient Flood Arches In St Ives

Work has started on a long term project designed to protect ancient flood arches on the old approach road to St Ives.

The Council has committed itself to repairing at least five of the 55 arches on the bridge in each financial year for the next decade to protect the ancient bridge which was once a major approach to the town centre. The work will be subject to the County Council's budget situation.

The arches have deteriorated and are now in need of refurbishment to the brickwork and mortar joints. The materials and working methods needed approval from the district council and English Heritage and the first phase of repair work started last month.

Pedestrians and vehicles will be unaffected by the work which will be carried out from scaffolding alongside the structure and a full ecological survey has been carried out and measures put in place to protect species living around the work site. The work is expected to take five weeks.

St Neots Library Due To Turn A New Page

St Neots Library is due to undergo a major £78,000 facelift to improve facilities for the whole of the community. The refurbishment works include the introduction of a new learning centre and three self service facilities which are already being used successfully in libraries across Cambridgeshire, including Huntingdon and St Ives.

The new self-service machines will enable customers to issue and return their own books, story cassettes, DVDs and CDs quickly and easily and to pay any loan charges and fines without having to queue at the library counter.

Changes also include improving the lay-out of the adult and children's library with better shelving and furniture.

To improve facilities for all users there will be the installation of a new accessible toilet and baby changing facilities. Some £10,000 was donated by Eynesbury Hardwicke Parish Council and the rest of the money was provided through section 106 agreements.

St Neots Library was closed on the morning of Tuesday 14 September, to allow preparatory works for the library's refurbishment to be carried out. All books already issued and due for return on 14 September were extended to 21 September.

To carry out these major improvements and refurbishment the library will be closed for six weeks in autumn. It is planned to provide an interim service through the use of a mobile library and details of this will be released nearer the time. Other local libraries in Huntingdon, St Ives and Buckden will continue offering a full service.

John Reynolds September 2010