

## Report to STC January 2025

Cllr. Hilary Frank



### 1. Proposed closure of Adult Education Centres

Together with councillors from Callington, Penzance and Launceston, I have been making representations to Cornwall Council about the decision to close various Adult Education Centres, including the one in Saltash. The Chief Executive emailed before Christmas saying that the representations were being considered by the Monitoring Officer. We have continued a dialogue over the festive break, and I've been assured that the Monitoring Officer will issue a decision this week. Here are the representations I gave to the Monitoring Officer:

#### i. Lack of Transparency

The closures were recommended by the Adult Education Board, but their meetings are not open to the public, and no records or minutes of their discussions seem to be available online. From the report accompanying the Individual Decision, it appears that closures were discussed at Board meetings held in September and October, with the recommendation finalised on 6th December. Yet, this recommendation was not communicated to Councillors in impacted Divisions until 18th December, when the decision to close the centres was announced.

#### ii. Misleading 'consultation'

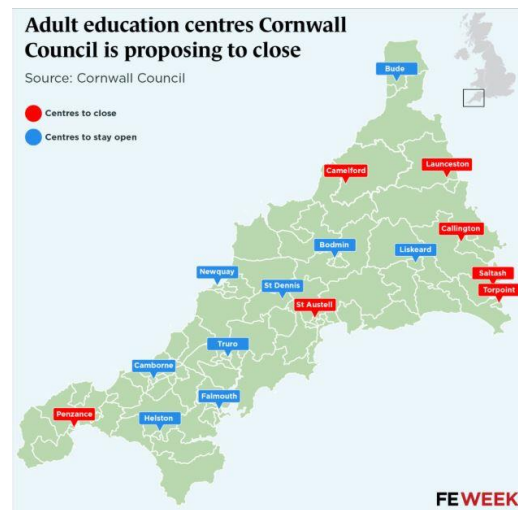
The online consultation inviting feedback from the general public only opened on 25th November, less than two weeks before the recommendation was apparently finalised on 6th December. The consultation officially closed on 20th December, so was still open even though the decision had already been taken.

#### iii. Lack of meaningful engagement

Cornwall Council claims to have consulted local stakeholders, but this only began in November and was limited in scope. Online briefings were held for Cornwall Councillors in affected towns, but councillors in rural areas - also impacted by these closures - were left out. Strong objections were raised in letters from Saltash Town Council, Torpoint Town Council, and others, but Cornwall Council made no efforts to explore cost reductions with stakeholders.

#### iv. Disproportionate impact on East Cornwall

The closures disproportionately affect East Cornwall. This unfair concentration of closures in one area will exacerbate existing inequalities and further isolate communities.



**v. Historical neglect skews the metrics**

Saltash Adult Education Centre has suffered from years of underinvestment, with a limited number of courses on offer. Saltash Town Council has worked hard over the past year to expand the course offering, but the centre hasn't been given the chance to grow and thrive. Basing a decision to close centres using metrics such as the number of clients is unfair on those centres which have suffered from underinvestment.

**vi. Mislabelling as 'in-year budget saving'**

The decision notice says that the closures aren't due to take place until February, so it will only save £8,000 this year. In fact, after factoring in redundancy costs, it will actually end up increasing the costs in the current year. A decision to close the centres, however, is permanent, enabling £300,000 per year to be cut from the annual budget for each of the next three years. So this decision is about future budgets, not 'in-year savings', and should therefore not have been taken by an officer.

**2. Leasing of Car Parks, including Belle Vue West**

Cornwall Council currently manages 132 chargeable car parks and 72 free car parks across Cornwall - more than any other local authority in the UK. The revenue from parking fees is reinvested into maintaining car parks and improving the transport network. Proposals have been issued by Cornwall Council's Cabinet to lease 28 of these car parks to a private company. One of the car parks is Belle Vue West in Saltash. If the proposals go through, the private company would take over the maintenance and operation of the 28 car parks, with Cornwall Council receiving rental income and sharing any additional income with the private company.

One key issue is that local authorities in England are unable to use ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) for managing car parks because the government needs to authorise the equipment for use by local authorities. (The application for authorisation has apparently been sitting with central government for several years!) This means that Cornwall Council has to rely on payment machines and parking enforcement officers, which is both inefficient and costly.

Given the significant financial challenges Cornwall Council is facing, I can understand the potential benefits of improved car park maintenance through private management. However:

- We must protect our high street economy, which is already very fragile. So there need to be safeguards and controls to ensure that if this goes ahead the private company would only be able to introduce price increases or penalties after consultation with Cornwall Council.
- A break clause needs to be included to allow Cornwall Council to break the lease when central government does (finally ! ) approve ANPR equipment for use by local authorities.
- Many private companies operate with a 'grace period' of 5 minutes between entering a car park and making payment. Many residents have told me this is far too short. We need to ensure that the grace period is longer.

The consultation on the car park transfer ends today, but it isn't clear whether the results will be discussed at a Cabinet meeting or if there is a briefing planned for all members.

### 3. The new NPPF, the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024, central government published the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It embeds a new mandatory standard housing methodology, which significantly increases the number of homes that Cornwall is required to plan for: from a target of 2,707 per year in the current plan to 4,421 per year. This is with immediate effect – there is no grace period.

Cornwall Council expects that the current Local Plan's housing supply policies will be deemed to be 'out of date' if tested at appeal. The knock-on impact is that most Neighbourhood Plans, including the Saltash Plan, are considered to be non compliant. (For reference, compliant plans are: Camelford, Carn Brea, Falmouth, Looe, Madron, Menheniot, Padstow, Perranzabuloe, Porthleven, St Clear, St Newlyn East, St Stephen in Brannel and Truro.) These issues will be discussed at a meeting of the Economy Growth and Development Committee on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January.

### 4. Surveys currently open on Cornwall Council's Let's Talk website:



**Closure of the Handyperson Service**

Seeking feedback on proposal to close to close the handyperson service, where customers pay a nominal fee for small repairs and adaptations. Although there is a charge for the service, the income from those charges do not cover the costs – with Cornwall Council making a loss of approximately £170,000 per year to provide the service.

Closes on 12<sup>th</sup> January



**Road Safety Survey**

Seeking feedback to help develop a new strategy for road safety.

Closes on 13<sup>th</sup> January