

# Report to Parish Councils from County Councillor Claire Daunton

January 2025

**COUNCIL BUDGET** Cambridgeshire County Council will set its budget on Tuesday 11 February, with recommendations being considered in advance by the Strategy Resources & Performance Committee on Tuesday 28 January. Each year councils are required to set a budget including: balanced budget for the year ahead. This has become more difficult because of:

- Growing demand for services and increasing complexity of health and care needs
- Inflation
- Market failures in services such as provision for children in care, with high demand, insufficient supply, provider profiteering, and diminished council negotiating power.

The totality of the council's gross budget, including schools and services funded by specific grants, is expected to be over £1.1 billion for 2025-26. Of this, over half (£567 million) is proposed to be spent on children, education and families, and health and adult social care. In December, councillors were told that efficiencies and savings or additional income of £34 million would be needed to set a balanced budget for 2025-26 and considered draft proposals to achieve this. The coming five years show an overall funding gap of £132 million, of which £73 million is not yet addressed.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

**Social care reform:** The Government has promised to 'finally grasp the nettle on social care reform', with an independent commission due to begin work in April. Proposals on a stable system for the long-term funding of adult social care in England have been needed for years. But these are unlikely to be delivered before 2028 at the earliest, the government has confirmed. The proposed commission, chaired by Baroness Louise Casey, is not due to publish its final report until then. Meanwhile, councils and care providers across the country are saying this is far too long to wait for reform of vital social care services.

**Urgent and emergency care:** the Adults & Health Committee received a report last month for their scrutiny on the performance of the NHS in urgent and emergency care. In 2024/25, performance has been below planned trajectories submitted as part of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) operational plan, and below national standards.

Two key national metrics for urgent and emergency care are that

- Emergency departments should see and treat a minimum of 78 per cent of patients within four hours of arriving in the department by the end of March 2025, and
- Patients categorised by the ambulance trust as Category 2 emergency, should have an ambulance response time within 30 minutes.

Both these targets remain behind plan, with the NHS under considerable pressure locally and nationally.

**CAB grant for income maximisation:** the Council’s COSMIC committee has agreed a grant of £800,000 over two years to Citizens Advice for income maximisation—working with residents to ensure they are in receipt of all financial assistance they are eligible for and helping people out of poverty across Cambridgeshire by providing a long-term solution to financial hardship. **Since income maximisation work began in 2023, 5,455 Cambridgeshire residents have accessed the service, resulting in an income gain of £3,887,844.**

## ENVIRONMENT

**Non-recycled waste:** a recent article in *The Guardian* newspaper reported that 87 per cent of Cambridgeshire’s non-recyclable waste goes to landfill—second only to Essex. The council commented: “Our priority is to reduce, re-use and to recycle as much as possible, as there are limited methods available to treat the waste that is left over in the short-medium term. “We are actively working with both our waste contractor, as well as Central Government, to try and find the best long-term solution to manage the county’s waste.”

- All mixed dry recycling collected from Cambridgeshire households and household recycling centres is recycled
- All food and garden waste collected from households is composted.
- Where legislation prohibits sending waste to landfill the council is in full compliance.
- Where possible, black bag waste is treated using energy recovery or mechanical biological treatment, to divert as much as possible from landfill.

The whole waste industry and legislative framework is currently going through a period of significant change. The council is awaiting detailed guidance from Government to inform its long-term waste strategy. Meanwhile the council is actively looking at more modern ways to treat waste that can’t be recycled and is currently going to landfill.

**Kingsway Solar Farm:** I attended the meeting called by West Wrattling parish council to alert all affected parishes to the many issues that this nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) some weeks ago. It is one of four NSIPs in this area (the others are: East West Rail, move of sewage works, new reservoir), and will require Secretary of State decision if it is to proceed. The county council has a statutory role to play in the consultation on and development of these projects and this role involves being closely involved in all the technical details and holding proposers to account on a wide range of detail. County councillors are kept fully abreast of these responses as is the county’s Environment Committee. I have to declare that, as a parish councillor for Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom I also have a close local community interest in the many issues this proposed development throws up.

## HIGHWAYS Local Highways, Great Wilbraham issues:

Footpath: the footpath on Angle End has been marked up for repair again; I am still waiting for a date for the work to be done.

Drainage: drainage investigative work on Church Street will take place on 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> January. This will complement the investigations undertaken in the cemetery area on 9<sup>th</sup> December with County flood and drainage colleague and GreaterCambridge planning colleague. I suggest that the PC might want to see the outcome of both complementary investigations before further, more extensive long-term action is taken on the cemetery. It was agreed that the ditch could be dug further at this point, without need for planning permission.

Bollard: I am still waiting for a date for the damaged bollard on the triangle to be replaced.

Buses: it is widely known now that the tendering process for the proposed bus service will need to be re-run because a provider withdrew; further details are subject to commercial confidentiality. This outcome will result in a further delay, especially as the mayoral election period (late March to early May) will cut across the tendering period.

**£10 million for road maintenance :** The Government has announced how much each council area will receive for highways capital maintenance for 2025/26. For the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough area it's £10 million, with a quarter of that amount to be held back until the respective councils have proved they will meet certain—still to be announced—criteria. Cambridgeshire County Council will receive £8 million of this.

It sounds a lot but:

- The Government may hold back twenty-five per cent of it
- It includes Peterborough as well as Cambridgeshire
- In Cambridgeshire alone the backlog of maintenance is around £600 million.

**Winter gritting reminder:** With the weather taking a cold turn, a quick reminder about gritting on Cambridgeshire's roads. The County Council's 37 gritting vehicles cover 44 per cent of the county's road network. Cambridgeshire is split into three gritting areas:

- Fenland and East
- Huntingdonshire
- South Cambridge

Which roads are gritted, when will depend on forecast temperatures in each of these three areas, so there may be occasions when some parts of the county are gritted but not others. Roads on the gritting network are classified as primary or secondary routes. Primary routes are the priority for gritting: they serve as major connecting routes for communities, allow people to get to work and access essential services. Secondary routes are gritted in addition to primary routes as and when resources allow when there is a forecast of a prolonged cold spell, where road surface temperatures fall below zero, or when snowfall is forecast. You can find which roads are primary or secondary gritting routes at <https://maps.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/> In the Map categories menu to the left of the screen, choose Transport and Streets, then select Primary Gritting Routes and Secondary Gritting Routes from the drop-down menu. The Council checks detailed weather forecasts throughout the day, and at midday every day during winter receives road and air temperatures from twelve weather stations around the county. This information guides where and when to send out gritters and how much salt needs to be spread. More

information at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/gritting-roads-cycleways-and-paths>. Council posts regular updates on Facebook and Twitter, including road gritting news and weather warnings.

**Prioritising the highways capital programme:** Highways & Transport Committee on 3 December approved a new scoring system to prioritise planned capital highways maintenance schemes. Parish councils and county councillors were approached by the council to submit suggestions of roads that needed significant capital work. When it meets in March, the committee expects to receive a proposed three year forward capital maintenance programme and an indicative programme for the following two years. It will also consider a proposed hierarchy for maintaining walking, wheeling, and cycling routes. Proposals for a hierarchy for maintaining Public Rights of Way is expected to follow in July or October. I submitted a comprehensive list of areas for repair across this Division.

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM PROPOSALS: English Devolution White Paper**

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Government published the English Devolution White Paper: [English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#). I include here a statement from Dr Stephen Moir Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council: “This White Paper sets out the Government’s programme to achieve greater devolvement of powers and funding from Westminster through the establishment of Mayoral Combined Authorities and directly Elected Mayors across the whole of England, with a presumption of ‘Devolution by Default’.

#### **Local Government Re-organisation (LGR)**

The White Paper also sets out the Government’s intent to undertake Local Government Re-organisation working with individual areas, by inviting proposals from all remaining two-tier areas, i.e. those areas with both County and District Councils, which will include **Cambridgeshire**. The paper also states that LGR may also be considered for existing unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services to their residents. In effect, this part of the White Paper is intending to move England to a consistent model of Unitary Local Government across all areas, which is already the case in some other parts of the UK.

Following an initial letter from the Minister for Local Government and Devolution about LGR, we expect to receive further details from Government in respect of the LGR provisions in the White Paper in January 2025, when invitations for proposals for reorganisation from local authorities in two-tier areas, like ours, will be requested. At that point we expect that greater clarity about the Government’s criteria for taking forward these changes will become even clearer. The White Paper does, already, provide a ‘rule of thumb’ that new Unitary Council proposals should be based on serving populations of a minimum of 500,000, in the main.”

#### **Devolution and Mayoral Combined Authorities**

For Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, we already have a Mayoral Combined Authority, which provides a platform upon which further devolved powers and funding can be sought. Contained in the White Paper, there are a series of increases proposed in the responsibilities of both the role of the Mayor and the Combined Authority going forwards. For example,

this includes the Mayor, in the long-term, becoming responsible for the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Fire Authority and becoming much more involved in the Integrated Care Partnership for Health and Social Care across our system. There are also further powers relating to strategic planning and housing proposed for Mayors/Combined Authorities, along with the potential for devolved powers in relation to rail services. These extensions of functions will build upon the existing responsibilities for transport, skills, employment, and economic growth which are already vested in the Mayor/Combined Authority.