

Annual Report 2025



CLLR LORNA DUPRE

County councillor for the Sutton division

(including Sutton, Mepal, Witcham, Wentworth, Coveney, Wardy Hill, Way Head, Little Downham, Pymoor, and Witchford)

Introduction

The composition of the County Council has changed during this Council year.

The table below shows the current composition of the Council compared to the election results in May 2021, and to this time last year.

	2021	2024	2025
Conservatives	28	22	21
Liberal Democrats	20	23	23
Labour	9	9	10
Independents	4	4	3
Unaligned	0	3	4

Local elections for all 61 county councillors will take place on Thursday 1 May, along with the election of the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough on the same day.

1 The Council

1.1 The Joint Administration of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Independent councillors continues to run the Council. Our vision for Cambridgeshire remains unchanged, and we are committed to creating a greener, fairer, and more caring Cambridgeshire.

I remain in the same roles as last year, chairing the Environment & Green Investment Committee, and a member of the Strategy Resources & Performance, Assets & Procurement, Highways & Transport and Constitution & Ethics committees.

I still chair the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Flood & Water Partnership, and remain a member of the County Farms working group and Green Investment & Utilities Advisory Group, and co-chair a working group on the many very large infrastructure

developments that organisations like Anglian Water, Network Rail and large energy companies are planning countywide.

1.2 I continue to represent the Council on the Combined Authority's Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee.

2 Strategy Resources & Performance

2.1 The Council set a balanced budget in February 2025, though this is becoming increasingly difficult for councils of all political colours across the country.

Cambridgeshire had to close a budget gap of £35.1M this year. This is difficult when a massive 73 per cent of the council's net spend is funded from Council Tax, which is capped.

The council faces numerous challenges including escalating demand for services, increasing complexity of need, inflation, and market failures. Despite this, the business plan and budget process has been about listening to residents.

2.2 The council has prioritised several key services, based on resident feedback through its annual Quality of Life survey. These are aligned to our 'greener, fairer and more caring' vision: investment of more than £56M in highways maintenance, sustaining critical adults' and children's social care, and continuing to support vulnerable communities.

2.3 The Council increased its portion of council tax by 4.99 per cent in total—two per cent for adult social care, and 2.99 per cent for general spending.

This will raise £20M to help maintain and protect critical services. For most residents in Band A-D properties that will mean somewhere between an extra £1.04 and £1.55 per week.

- 2.4** The council commissioned its second Quality of Life Survey involving more than 5,500 residents. We asked them to tell us about their experience of living in Cambridgeshire, and what concerns them most.

We heard that our residents continue to feel happy and safe and experience a sense of belonging. However, they have given a clear message about the cost of living challenges they are facing. Residents say they are having to cut back on heating and nutritious food. Whilst work to tackle poverty is still ongoing, we clearly need to continue to consider what we can do to support our residents further. The survey also tells us that fewer people are struggling with mental and physical health this year than last, which is a positive change for our residents.

3 Adults & Health

- 3.1** The Adults and Health Committee has a significant role in ensuring that health inequalities are reduced, and that people enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support suited to their needs.
- 3.2** The Learning Disability Partnership (LDP), which has provided integrated health and social care support for adults with learning disabilities in Cambridgeshire, will be formally dissolved from 1 April 2025.

The Council and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care

Board (ICB) are continuing discussions on how to work together to maintain services across the county. However, discussions are ongoing about payments owed for the services provided by the council, including historical debts. There still remains an opportunity to reach an agreement before entering formal legal mediation, and the council hopes for a constructive resolution.

Councillors have raised concerns about this service separation and the associated financial issues, which has been formally escalated as a corporate risk by the council. Reports presented to the Adults and Health Committee have highlighted the potential impact of these unresolved issues, and the council continues to press for a resolution.

- 3.3** St Mary's in Ely is to take on the contract for NHS services at Priors Field Sutton, following the conclusion of Malling Health's two-year temporary contract. The local Patient Participation Group helped evaluate the bids from providers wanting to run this service. The NHS has now bought the premises. It is a vast improvement on the situation our community found itself in two years ago. Updates are available at www.cpics.org.uk/sutton

4 Assets & Procurement

- 4.1** The council is working to seek to reach agreement with an alternative bidder to take on Shire Hall in Cambridge after previous applicants pulled out. We have agreed to close five council premises, including Noble House in Ely and invest in other existing accommodation. The plans will save nearly £11M in capital over

the next two years, and £2M each year in annual savings.

4.2 We have established a new Shareholder Sub-Committee to improve governance of the various companies in which the council has a substantial interest. Not least of these is its development company This Land.

4.3 The Assets & Procurement Committee is responsible for the council's extensive farms estate, and I was delighted to attend a packed conference of tenant farmers in February. As well as sustainable farming techniques, the hare coursing incursion at the start of the year was also a subject of discussion and concern.

5 Children & Young People

5.1 2020-2024 saw a 70 per cent increase in children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Cambridgeshire, and cost increases in home to school transport and in autism services over the same period.

Cambridgeshire is not alone in facing these pressures, and the Council has instructed its Chief Executive to ask Government ministers to take assertive action to address the SEND crisis, recognising that for the lowest funded local authorities like Cambridgeshire, children and young people are the most affected because the funding received is not sufficient to meet the existing needs. A recent report from the Local Government Association and the County Councils Network stated that reform was necessary, essential, and unavoidable.

5.2 Cambridgeshire County Council's children's services have been graded overall as 'requires improvement' according to Ofsted—no change from the previous inspection. The report follows a recent inspection

5.3 The Holiday Activities & Food programme will continue over the school holidays. Meanwhile Mepal & Witcham primary school is among fourteen schools chosen to pilot a free breakfast club, starting in April and running to July before it is introduced nationally.

5.4 I have been working for about a year now with a number of parents of young adults in receipt of care, whose experience of these services has been, to put it mildly, poor. I had hoped to have been able to make more progress more quickly than we have, but the battle goes on.

5.5 A new specialist autism resource centre is being established at Sutton primary school.

5.6 The council has selected two former farmhouses close to each other in Soham as a pilot project to increase the number of local residential places for children and young people with complex needs. They will be fully refurbished and a provider will be offered a contract for up to ten years to provide care services to best meet the needs of the children. This project offers an opportunity for local and more stable placements, as well as avoiding over £635,000 of costs each year on private placements.

6 COSMIC

6.1 COSMIC (Communities, Social Mobility & Inclusion Committee) has

continued to oversee the Household Support Fund, which supports people experiencing immediate financial hardship to pay for essential items. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment.

- 6.2** COSMIC unanimously approved the renewal of a scheme which helps survivors of domestic abuse to feel safer and more secure in their homes. This is key to the delivery of Cambridgeshire's Safe Accommodation Strategy and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy. Survivors will be given a bespoke safety and support plan focused on their individual needs.
- 6.3** The council has received Council of Sanctuary status, reaffirming our commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for people seeking sanctuary in Cambridgeshire. We are amongst one of the first county councils in the UK to receive this national award.
- 6.4** Poverty affects us all – either through personal experience or through the impact on those around us, family, friends and communities. No single organisation can tackle poverty alone and a new commission involving organisations from across Cambridgeshire has been launched to tackle poverty in the county.

The Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission brings together a group of independent commissioners who have extensive professional experience supporting residents. This independent body is concluding its work and COSMIC will ensure the council works with partners to respond to its recommendations.

- 6.5** We continue to recognise the importance of our libraries which are at the heart of our communities. Libraries are where many of the council's resident facing interactions take place and they have an essential role in our communities as places of sanctuary, knowledge and community. We have planned further improvements for our libraries, committing £1.3M for the Libraries Plus programme, creating more flexible spaces, and expanding the range of services available to our residents.

The community managed library in Little Downham continues to offer Book Café on Wednesday afternoons, though it has had to cease opening on Friday mornings. The volunteer-run service is continuing to look for residents interested in giving their time to keep the library (and tea and cake!) going.

7 Environment

- 7.1** The Environment and Green Investment Committee discussed Anglian Water's proposals for the two new reservoirs in Lincolnshire and Fenland, and the Council will be involved as a statutory consultee on these proposals. We want to ensure ambitions for much needed growth are balanced with the significant pressures it creates on local services and infrastructure, and we will continue to work on these issues with our Mayor and central government.
- 7.2** Through the committee's stewardship, the council has reduced its direct carbon emissions by 42 per cent, and developed several major energy projects that will not only provide income but also provide

renewable energy for the council and some of our communities.

- 7.3** The Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership (CERP) has won a bronze award for its contribution to 'Green Public Service', for its success in promoting environmental best practice and quality retrofit programmes. Also known as Action on Energy Cambridgeshire, CERP is a partnership between Cambridgeshire County Council and district councils.
- 7.4** The incinerator at Wisbech, granted permission by the Conservative government is going ahead after the Government lifted its temporary ban on the Environment Agency issuing new operating licences just before the general election.
- 7.5** The Sunnica solar farm was approved very quickly by the incoming Labour government. The Government loaded considerable costs onto the local councils for all the work we will need to do on this permission, and refused to reconsider. There is as yet no timetable for Sunnica to start on site.
- 7.6** Local council waste partnership RECAP has awarded its contract for mixed dry recyclables (blue bin waste) to Biffa and Re-Gen after a procurement exercise. The contract was previously held by Thalia who run the waste facility at Waterbeach.
- 7.7** The council has agreed a Tree & Woodland Strategy for the management of trees and hedgerows on the council's own land, and a Biodiversity Strategy.
- 7.8** I successfully proposed a motion to the full council about safety risks

from lithium ion batteries such as in e-bikes and e-scooters.

- 7.9** I was very pleased to take part in an augmented reality trial at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge, showing the potential for new technology to contribute to live entertainment and digital experiences.

8 Highways & Transport

- 8.1** The condition of our roads and pavements is still a huge challenge, in Cambridgeshire as it is nationwide—a mixture of inadequate Government funding, decades of neglect, extreme weather, and in some cases poor standards of repair.
- 8.2** The Highways & Transport Committee has agreed its programme for 2025/26. Our roads need more than £400M of maintenance to address all the issues, and that does not include our rapidly dilapidating peat-based roads, at an additional £530M—money we do not have.

The council's business plan has enabled an additional £20M in 2025/26 for highway works; a further £20M is allocated for 2026/27.
- 8.3** Work on the 'bends' on Chain Causeway, including deep excavation and rebuilding to incorporate stabilisation grids, was carried out between January and March. The Combined Authority is spending £1.5M on trials of different techniques for mending our peat fen roads. And the council is spending £50,000 on options assessment for the frequently-flooded section of the A1123 at Earith bridge.

Coveney Parish Council was granted funding for mobile speed-activated signs. Sutton Parish Council's third application for an HGV weight limit through the village will be considered by the council in the summer.

- 8.4** I have worked with Witchford Parish Council, the District Council and the County Council to try to enable the proposed cycle link between the east end of the village and Lancaster Way business park to proceed without unaffordable risks falling on the parish council if work overruns beyond the deadline specified in the grant from the district council.
- 8.5** I was delighted to be able to finally resolve the ownership of the spur road serving 2-9 Brick Lane Mepal, a disagreement that had been going on for years. Council research showed that responsibility had been transferred in 1949 from the Ely Rural District Council to the Isle of Ely County Council, the predecessor to Cambridgeshire County Council. I have also got the council to confirm that the access road from Ely Road Sutton (B1381) to the Coop is in fact adopted highway.
- 8.6** Our new Local Highways Officer Neal Stevens started in post last spring and has been getting to grips with the many highways issues in our area.
- 8.7** A number of 20MPH schemes, requested by parish councils, are being put in place across Cambridgeshire. The council has decided to review these within two years. Schemes put forward by Sutton and Witchford were not successful.

8.8 Proposals are continuing to be developed for a better pedestrian and cycle route between Sutton and Mepal. I am also seeking to achieve progress on improving pedestrian connections between Mepal and Witcham. Other local highways issues I have worked on this year include a sink hole and highways flooding in Little Downham; clearance of Byway 12 in Wardy Hill; unhelpful repairs to the stile at Sutton Gault, and the prolonged closure of Footpath 3 from Gravel End Coveney to Downham Hythe, now finally being repaired.

8.9 I have been asking questions about road safety and how the 'Vision Zero' partnership can be energised.

8.10 Work is beginning on approaches to procurement of highways services when the current contract with Milestone ends in June 2027.

9 Combined Authority

9.1 The Combined Authority has introduced new Tiger bus routes and a Tiger bus fare scheme, and the outgoing Mayor has decided to proceed with franchising of bus routes, providing a more reliable and integrated service for residents.

9.2 The Combined Authority approved its budget for the year, and confirmed that the Mayoral precept will be frozen for 2025/26. Included in the approved budget is the extension of the £2 bus fare cap to 30 June 2025, moving to a £2.50 fare cap from July to December 2025.

The Combined Authority is also coordinating the production of Cambridgeshire's Local Nature

Recovery Strategy, which we hope will be finalised by the end of 2025.

9.3 The Combined Authority has secured £2.4M to support local people into good jobs, with skills ‘bootcamps’ designed to equip local people with the skills they need to advance their careers. Employers, learning providers, and the Combined Authority are working together to up-skill residents, fill vacancies, support the unemployed, and develop workforce talent across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

9.4 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussed a (heavily redacted) report on concerns about past governance of the Combined Authority’s housing funds, particularly (though not only) regarding schemes in East Cambridgeshire.

10. Growth around Cambridge

10.1 The end of January saw a high-profile announcement from the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, about the Government’s ambitions for growth. Much of the announcement focused on Cambridgeshire, and in particular the decision to revive the Oxford-Cambridge corridor or ‘OxCam arc’ dumped by Boris Johnson three years ago.

This announcement is a recognition of Cambridgeshire’s significance to the UK economy. But it’s also an urgent attempt to revive flagging economic growth, and much of what has been announced by way of infrastructure to support intensified development around Cambridge consists of schemes already planned or under way. Large-scale growth also requires plentiful access to water,

which is a challenge, as well as other key infrastructure.

11. Council reorganisation

11.1 The Government published the English Devolution White Paper in December, announcing its intention to undertake a reorganisation of local government, the abolition of two-tier (district and county) council structures, and the creation of new, larger all-purpose unitary councils.

Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough supplied an interim update to Government on 21 March as required. Further work will now take place between the 1 May elections and the Government’s November deadline for a single final proposal for new boundaries.

The proposals also include more powers for directly elected Mayors.

12 Finally

12.1 I have continued to hold regular surgeries in Sutton, and attend the Book Café in Little Downham once a month, and coffee mornings in Coveney, Sutton and Witchford where possible. Meanwhile, residents can continue to contact me by email, on Facebook or Twitter, or by phone.

12.2 My monthly county councillor reports are at www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports

12.3 My thanks to the clerks and parish councillors of the seven parishes in the Sutton division, and the many community organisations, whose hard work helps keep our communities together.