

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2026

FULL COUNCIL

The full council will meet on Tuesday 10 February, to vote on the budget and business plan for 2026/27 to 2028/29.

It will also consider recommendations from the council's Constitution & Ethics Committee, to allow an unlimited number of motions to Full Council meetings, compensated by shorter motions and shorter speeches.

STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

Business plan and budget

The Strategy Resources & Performance Committee met on Thursday 29 January to receive the views of council committees on the council's draft budget.

In response to the Children & Young People Committee, the Strategy Resources & Performance Committee agreed to amend the draft budget to provide an additional £1 million to support families following the Government's withdrawal of the Household Support Fund which has enabled the provision of supermarket food vouchers during school holidays for eligible children.

The council's Highways & Transport Committee expressed the ambition to be able to add £20 million to the road maintenance budget in 2027/28, as well as in 2026/27—for which that sum is already in the proposed budget.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government is launching its seven-week consultation this month on the options for local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with its final decision announced in summer.

A statement from a minister has however indicated that the timetable by which the new unitary councils will be up and running in Spring 2028 is 'the most ambitious'.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Arthur Rank Hospice

A private donation has enabled the hospice in Cambridge to remain open for a further year, following public outcry. The future beyond that is uncertain.

NHS dental services in Cambridgeshire

The County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee has delivered the following six recommendations to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) following its scrutiny of NHS dental provision in Cambridgeshire, and requested a response by 27 February.

- a. The committee acknowledges the challenges which face the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in relation to NHS dental provision, but urges the ICB to be more ambitious in relation to the provision of NHS dental services in Cambridgeshire.
- b. The committee highlights a lack of transparency locally around the allocation and delivery of extra capacity for urgent dental appointments funded by Government. Whilst recognising the challenges that the Integrated Care Board is facing the committee urges more transparency around this to build public confidence and trust.
- c. The committee expresses serious concerns about the distance that some Cambridgeshire residents have to travel to access NHS dental services and welcomes the commitments given around collecting more data on this.
- d. The committee encourages and supports the pilot projects exploring a hub approach to primary care provision through the co-location of dental services with GP practices to provide wraparound care to the community and offer some savings from shared overhead costs. The committee requests a briefing note on the outcome of these pilot projects and, if they prove successful, where and when they will be introduced in Cambridgeshire.
- e. The committee expresses disappointment at the failure to take concrete steps towards establishing an undergraduate dental training school in the East of England following the undertakings given at the previous scrutiny of dental provision in March 2024. The committee urges the new Central East Integrated Care Board to champion this endeavour which could offer considerable benefits across its geography, and offers the good offices of Cambridgeshire County Council in support of this.
- f. The committee expresses some concern about the level of underspend on dental provision in Cambridgeshire and whether the money being clawed back is being used as efficiently and productively as possible.

Integrated Care Board cost reductions and reconfigurations

The Health Scrutiny Committee met Jan Thomas, the Chief Executive of the new Central East Integrated Care Board (ICB), and Kate Vaughton, the new ICB's Executive Director for Neighbourhood Health, Place and Partnership, about the implications for Cambridgeshire of the cost reductions required of existing ICBs and their reconfiguration into new ICBs serving a much larger population across a significantly wider geographical area.

The Committee made a number of recommendations on this.

- a. The committee expresses concern that structural issues and changes are in danger of crowding out some of the service improvements that both the health service and local authority partners want to see. The committee urges Board members at the new Central East Integrated Care Board to guard against this.
- b. The committee acknowledges the assertion that the Integrated Care Board will need to focus resources on the areas of most need. In return, the public and its elected representatives want to see openness and transparency when services will be changed, reduced or no longer provided, even though this may sometimes lead to difficult conversations.
- c. The committee invites the Integrated Care Board to continue to reflect with partners including Cambridgeshire County Council about how the independent check on health care services and systems currently provided by Healthwatch will be maintained following Healthwatch's abolition.
- d. The committee welcomes and endorses the comments made about the advantages of the digitisation of health services and how this can help target services and resources more effectively. However, the committee hopes that the concerns raised by some committee members about data privacy and security during this public scrutiny session and also during its scrutiny of the delivery of the NHS 10 Year Plan in Cambridgeshire in October 2025 are taken into account.

I expressed my concerns about the security of patients' personal and medical data following the award of a contract to Palantir to create a data platform for the NHS, given that Palantir's expertise is surveillance software including for ICE in the USA. The ICB has committed to provide a response.

East of England ambulance service performance

The East of England Ambulance Service has written to the council's Health Scrutiny Committee to update councillors on its performance, including shortened response times, and reduced handover times at hospitals.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Holiday food vouchers

The Government is withdrawing the Household Support Fund from the end of March, and replacing it with a Crisis and Resilience Fund later this year.

The County Council has been spending the funding on holiday food vouchers for all children on Free School Meals, and was one of the first councils in the country to top it up to ensure no schoolchild went hungry over the holidays. However, the Government is prohibiting councils from using the new Crisis and Resilience Fund for this purpose, risking leaving many vulnerable families without support.

The council is increasing its own financial commitment to holiday food vouchers this year to bridge the gap until September. Without a reversal from Government, however, any new scheme is likely to leave many families in need unsupported.

Education Health & Care Plans

The council invested an additional £780,000 last autumn to increase capacity across the Education Health & Care Plan process for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including assessments, casework and reviews, helping to improve the timeliness and therefore the number of plans completed within the twenty-week target. We were pleased to hear from officers that this is having a positive effect enabling more children to receive their assessments in good time.

Special needs and disabilities funding campaign

Cambridgeshire County Council is backing a campaign by a group named f40 calling for increased and fairer education funding and sweeping reforms to solve the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Publication of a Schools White Paper, setting out Government's plans for education and reforms to SEND, was expected last year but has been delayed. The County Council is urging Government to ensure that expected reforms are powerful enough to solve the crisis and are backed by sufficient funding to enable schools to implement them.

Based on initial allocations for 2026/27, published by the Department for Education in December, Cambridgeshire will receive £6,465 per pupil for the 'Schools Block' of education funding. This places Cambridgeshire 128th out of all 151 local education authorities.

The deficit the county council faces in spending on children with high needs is forecast to be around £94 million by the end of March this year, rising to around £200 million by the end of the following two years, placing the council at severe financial risk. This position is shared by around a hundred other councils.

Across the country demand for SEND support continues to outstrip funding, with the lowest funded local authority area currently receiving less than a third of the SEND funding that the highest funded council receives. This is unsustainable.

It has been estimated that local authorities in England will have accumulated a collective SEND deficit of £6 billion by April this year. Without significant reform, this figure will continue to grow. The County Councils Network, representing county councils across the country, estimates the shortfall could pass £13 billion nationally by March 2028.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Potholes

The council has significantly increased the number of highways crews dealing with both temporary and permanent fixes to the potholes on Cambridgeshire's roads. Normally eight crews and two dragon patchers are available across the county—now there are thirty crews and two dragon patchers out repairing potholes. This will significantly increase the number of repairs attended to each week.

In the winter, a lot more road defects and potholes form due to wet and freezing weather causing those worn areas of road and pavement surfaces to break up.

Since 2023/24, the amount of capital funding spent on highway maintenance in Cambridgeshire has increased by £35 million, from £24 million to £59 million. The Council allocated more than £73 million for highways maintenance in 2025/26—adding £20 million to the amount provided by Government—and expects to do so again this coming year.

Parish councils meeting with highways officers

Many thanks to Phil Harty, clerk of Sutton Parish Council, for convening a meeting with Local Highways Officer Tom Hutchins to discuss highways issues in Sutton, and accepting my request to widen it to clerks and chairs of the other parish councils in the Sutton division.

Many thanks also to the six council officers including Tom who joined the meeting to answer our questions.

The meeting covered a lot of ground, including the new structures in the highways teams, online information from one.network, the functionality of the new Aurora highways fault reporting system, and the need for better communication between works promoters, county councillors, parish clerks and local communities.

We were concerned at the huge amount of work falling on everyone's shoulders, with 35,000 permits being issued every year (as well as a lot of works not requiring a permit), and the need to 'do fifteen years of work in five years'. We were particularly concerned at the scope of the role of Local Highways Officer.

We discussed clashing street works and conflicting signage, arising in part from this volume of work.

I agreed to forward to parish clerks on a regular basis the twice-monthly list of road works and road closures. We agreed to meet six-monthly, as this meeting had been so useful. Phil Harty kindly agreed to continue to host these meetings, and I offered to work with him to facilitate them.

Clashing road works

With a large number of road works scheduled to take place recently, the potential for conflicting closures and misleading signage has abounded.

The 24/7 closure of Twentypence between Wilburton and Cottenham for two months for long-delayed works by Anglian Water has been causing huge congestion on the A10.

The proposal to close the B1050 Earith to Willingham from the Roseberry holiday park to the Willingham Coop at the same time would obviously have made matters much worse, and in liaison with the county councillors for Wilburton and Willingham I managed to get this work put off until after Anglian Water finished on Twentypence.

The works on Ely Road Little Downham were mostly done under traffic lights, but a full closure was needed on the final day to surface the road near Old Fir Close; and when the tarmac refused to set the intended three-hour closure became a twelve-hour closure, to the frustration of many residents.

A visit by a highways inspector three days before the completion of works looked set to see Ely Road fully closed, with a diversion via Black Bank and the congested A10. Fortunately this was averted, not least because the following day Anglian Water arrived to carry out an emergency repair of a burst water main on Black Bank in the middle of the proposed diversion route. Anglian Water found they were unable to carry out the repair, and agreed to come back after the Ely Road works were finished.

Diversion signage for both of these works remained in place, however, and was joined by signage for micro-asphalting works on High Road, Lawn Lane and Station Road in Little Downham. The forest of conflicting signage caused massive confusion, and I managed to get an inspector to drive the route and instruct the various road works promoters to get unnecessary or incorrect signage removed.

I am awaiting a meeting with the council's senior officers responsible for highways maintenance and street works, to discuss with them how the huge volume of street works in Cambridgeshire can be more effectively coordinated and communicated.

£2.1 million works begin on peat soil affected roads

Three large scale projects to rebuild and repair over 3.5 kilometres of peat soil affected roads in the north of Cambridgeshire have started.

These projects include reconstruction of one kilometre of Forty Foot Bank, Ramsey; resurfacing of just under one kilometre of Coates Road, Coates; and reconstruction of 1.8 kilometres of Long Drove, Holme.

Over the last year, eleven kilometres of peat soil affected roads were reconstructed or resurfaced at a cost of £5.5 million. Further large-scale reconstruction or resurfacing works are due across other peat soil affected roads in 2026. The maintenance programme for 2026/27 is due to be put to the Highways & Transport Committee next month, once the council's budget for the year has been set.

NEWS FROM THE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Bus cuts

Thirty-five bus routes across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough—including the T12 from Sutton to Longstanton Park & Ride—are hanging by a thread as the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough seeks to cut half a million pounds from local bus services.

At last month's Combined Authority Transport Committee, the Chair of the County Council's Highways & Transport Committee successfully stood out against the immediate removal of four routes, and insisted that there should be appropriate engagement with residents and parishes on proposals affecting contracted bus services.

The Combined Authority is however ceasing to fund the 8A bus between March and Milton Park and Ride, serving Sutton, Haddenham, Wilburton, Cottenham and Landbeach. The route had been extended recently as far as the Park and Ride in the hope that this would improve passenger numbers, but this was unsuccessful. The operator must give 112 days' notice to the Traffic Commissioner before stopping the service.

A10 / A142 BP crossing

The Combined Authority Board agreed its budget for 2026/27. Following local political pressure this now includes funding for the next steps in planning a safe crossing at the A10 / A142 BP roundabout, but still no money for actual construction for five more years.

There's a petition online calling for long overdue funding and delivery of a safe crossing at this location www.change.org/p/fund-and-deliver-a-safe-crossing-at-the-bp-roundabout-ely

Audit & Governance meeting cancelled

The Combined Authority Audit & Governance Committee meeting last month was cancelled as the absence of any representative from three of the six member authorities meant it was inquorate. Representatives did turn up from both East Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

Sutton surgery

Cllr Mark Inskip and I hold our monthly surgery at Joy Bistro 65 High Street Sutton. Forthcoming dates are Monday 2 February and Monday 2 March, 18:30-19:30.

I can also be contacted ...

- by email at lorna@lornadupre.org.uk
- on Facebook
- by phone on 07930 337596

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division