

# Annual Report 2026



## 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

Local elections took place for all 61 seats on Cambridgeshire County Council on Thursday 1 May 2025. 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 | 2025 | Now |
|-------------------|------|------|-----|
| Conservatives     | 28   | 10   | 10  |
| Liberal Democrats | 20   | 31   | 31  |
| Labour            | 9    | 5    | 5   |
| Independents      | 4    | 2    | 2   |
| Reform UK         | 0    | 10   | 9   |
| Non-aligned       | 0    | 0    | 1   |

Since the election, the Liberal Democrats and Independents have formed a Liberal Democrat and Independent Group.

The election for Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough also took place on Thursday 1 May 2025, with Paul Bristow (Conservative) elected.

## 1 The Council

**1.1** The Liberal Democrat and Independent Group now runs the Council. Our vision is to create a healthy, fair and sustainable Cambridgeshire.

I am now Deputy Leader of the Council, and Vice Chair of the Strategy Resources and Performance Committee. I remain a member of the Highways and Transport Committee, and of the Constitution and Ethics Committee and working group.

I am a member of the council's Consents Working Group, reviewing the large-scale infrastructure projects on which the council is consulted but is not the decision-maker. These include major road, rail and energy projects. I am also a part of the Waste

Steering Group considering the council's arrangements for the disposal of recyclable and non-recyclable waste.

**1.2** I am the nominated substitute for the Leader of the Council on the Board of the Combined Authority, which means I am no longer eligible to sit on any of the Combined Authority's thematic committees. However, I am now the County Council's representative to the Board of the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

**1.3** The Council has considered a number of issues put forward by councillors for debate. These include opposing any plans to merge our local police force into a larger and more remote body; the need for support for people in mental health crisis or at suicide risk; GP services for growing communities; and the importance of flood prevention in the Fens.

## 2 Strategy Resources & Performance

**2.1** The Council set its budget in February 2026, including record spending on roads, thousands of extra school places, and support for vulnerable residents.

The budget included an additional £20 million for highway maintenance, delivery of the council's climate change and environment strategy, and £11 million to upgrade household recycling centres at Milton and March.

£14.7 million of additional funding was allocated for adult social care providers to help them manage rising costs and ensure care workers are paid the Real Living Wage, improving

stability and quality for those who depend on care workers for their support.

Provision of holiday meal vouchers will continue until the end of summer 2026 for those children most in need, despite the Government replacing the Household Support Fund which used to pay for this. The Government's replacement Crisis and Resilience Fund is less generous than its predecessor, and is intended to provide a wide range of anti-poverty measures in addition to feeding children in struggling families.

There will be 3,500 new primary school places, and £72 million over five years to increase secondary school places. There will also be continued funding for the Families First early intervention programme that helps keep more families together. And more than £1.2 million will be invested in libraries and archives over the next two years.

**2.2** The council ran its third annual Quality of Life survey in 2025, which provides valuable insights into residents' perspectives and priorities. 5,500 residents (1,100 in each district) were directly polled for their views, and the survey was open in the summer for any other resident who wished to complete it.

**2.3** Like almost every county and unitary council, 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.

## **3 Adults and 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.

One of the first decisions of the new 2025 Liberal Democrat administration was to split the committee into two committees—one for its public health, adult social care and procurement responsibilities, and the other dedicated to the council's role in scrutinising local NHS services.

**3.2** The council's adult social care services were rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission in summer last year.

**3.3** This has been a turbulent time for the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). ICBs are statutory NHS organisations in England responsible for planning and buying healthcare services for local populations. They replaced Clinical Commissioning Groups in 2022.

Last year the Government required enormous in-year and ongoing savings to be made by ICBs. This has resulted in mergers of many ICBs as a way of cutting jobs. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, instead of having its own ICB, is now part of NHS Central East, covering Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes and Hertfordshire.

**3.4** Priors Field in Sutton is now well established under St Mary's GP practice. Primary care provision across Cambridgeshire remains very fragile however, with most residents relying on private dental provision, and many GP practices hanging on by a thread.

**3.5** The new Health Scrutiny Committee has held a number of meetings where we have heard from various health providers and had the opportunity to ask searching questions. Subjects considered by the Committee have included dentistry, primary care and GP services, and services for children and young people with autism.

**3.6** The future of the Arthur Rank Hospice in Cambridge remains uncertain, after the NHS Trust withdrew over £800,000 of support. A private donation has enabled it to continue for a further year.

## **4 Assets and Procurement**

**4.1** The County Council's Assets and Procurement Committee has agreed a partnership with developer Prologis to support the future expansion of Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

**4.2** The council's Shareholder Sub-Committee approved an updated business plan from the council's wholly-owned company This Land. The current council administration has worked extremely hard to stabilise the company, transforming it from the way it had been set up ten years ago under Conservative control. The updated business plan enables the company to repay interest, reduce the amounts owed to the council, and limit the council's exposure to risk from the company.

## **5 Children and Young People**

**5.1** Like most county councils, Cambridgeshire continues to experience huge financial pressures associated with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and with the costs of home to school transport.

The number of children in Cambridgeshire with an Education Health and Care Plan has grown by 71 per cent between 2020 and 2025. The council invested an additional £780,000 in the autumn to increase capacity to process these plans.

The Government will be delivering two new special schools in the county, in Gamlingay and March, with 270 new special school places.

**5.2** Cambridgeshire County Council's services for care leavers have improved since 2024, according to an Ofsted visit in July 2025. They also listed four areas for further improvement.

**5.3** In July I was delighted to be join Cllrs Jonny Edge and Anna Bradnam at the council's Children in Care Celebration and Awards at Inflatebounce in Wyton.

**5.4** A new Community outreach service from the council aims to support and develop the skills of parents and children from birth to five years, and of those leading community groups for families with children from nought to five.

## **6 COSMIC**

**6.1** COSMIC (Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee) has continued to oversee support for people experiencing immediate financial hardship. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment.

**6.2** One urgent issue is the sudden spike in the price of domestic heating oil as a result of President Trump's war in Iran. The council has received

£708,000 from the Government which is ring-fenced to support households struggling with this. The money has been added to the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund, and applications (for up to £400 per household) are being administered by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation. Eligibility for this fund is currently restricted to those on specific means-tested benefits. If the Government's grant were to be shared equally among every household in the county reliant on oil heating, each household would receive less than £27.50—the council is having to make difficult decisions about priorities.

- 6.3** The committee has procured an IT system which will enable more systematic and earlier identification of low income households which would benefit from support. South Cambridgeshire District Council has been using this system for a couple of years now, with remarkable results.
- 6.4** Work is under way to implement the recommendations of Cambridgeshire's Poverty Strategy Commission. These are grouped into six themes: income maximisation, digital inclusion, rural poverty, housing and homelessness, children and families, and mental health.
- 6.5** Adult learning services in Cambridgeshire were given a Good rating by Ofsted in spring 2025, with the behaviour and attitude of learners judged to be Outstanding.
- 6.6** I was pleased to attend a 'Civic and Church Gathering' hosted by St Mary's Church in Ely in September, bringing churches, civic and community leaders together to explore joint

working for the good and flourishing of the places we live and serve.

## **7 Environment**

- 7.1** Water scarcity and water management is a key issue for Cambridgeshire. Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan for Eastern England, with a combination of infrastructure investment and demand management.

Meanwhile, the Fens2100+ project, which brings together a number of agencies to develop a long-term plan to manage future flood risk in the Fens, has published a suite of reports including a Case for Change, Partnership Action Plan, and summary baseline report.

The move of Anglian Water's waste water treatment plant from north-east Cambridge to Horningsea was thwarted after the Government removed the necessary funding.

- 7.2** Community watercourse grants are available from the council to support communities where the condition of local watercourses is increasing the risk of flooding. These can be used for clearance and maintenance, equipment hire, contractor support, or training and safety equipment.
- 7.3** Cambridgeshire County Council is calling on residents to play an active role in restoring local nature as part of the 'Nature Recovery - From the Ground Up' project—a new initiative supporting parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans. The first phase of the project runs from July 2025 to March 2027,

focusing on Cambridge and twenty parishes across East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, and South Cambridgeshire. Other parishes are invited to use the project resources and mapping software, and to register interest for future phases of the project.

**7.4** Cambridgeshire County Council has been ranked by Climate Emergency UK as one of the top performing councils in the country for the action it has taken towards Net Zero.

**7.5** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP) is urging residents to recycle batteries and battery-powered electricals safely, following an increase in fires caused by incorrectly disposed-of lithium-ion batteries. Across the UK, over 1,200 waste-related fires were recorded last year—a 71 per cent rise since 2022.

I have been following up a number of issues with the Grunty Fen landfill site, operated by FCC Environment under a permit which lasts until the end of 2026. These include fires, littering, and the effect on the road of the numbers of heavy vehicles.

**7.6** The Cambridgeshire Digital Inclusion Directory is a practical guide to help residents get online, access devices, and build essential digital skills. It features trusted local organisations offering free support with digital access, equipment and training. Printed copies are available at libraries and community hubs, or it can be downloaded.

## **8 Highways and Transport**

**8.1** The condition of our roads and pavements deteriorated rapidly over

the winter. Highways and Transport Committee chair Cllr Alex Beckett has written a very informative explainer article at [notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-right-now](https://notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-right-now)

**8.2** The council continues to add more funding to its road maintenance budget, as the funding from Government via the Combined Authority is completely insufficient. Around 35,000 permits are being issued annually in Cambridgeshire for work on the highway, and in addition works are undertaken that do not require a permit.

Our peat soil roads are a major problem, taking four or five times as much money to repair as regular roads. St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire MP Ian Sollom asked a question about this in parliament.

In 2025/26 the council reconstructed a number of stretches of peat soil road, including part of Hundred Foot Bank and Straight Furlong in Pymoor. For 2026/27 the priority locally will be part of Hillrow Causeway between Earith Bridge and the approach to Haddenham. Earith Road Willingham (between Roseberry holiday park and the orchard) was resurfaced.

Mepal Bridge was closed for several weekends over the summer for maintenance; and the footpath from Gravel End to Downham Hythe was finally reopened after its bridge was replaced at last.

The road network is being reassessed in April and May this year, to produce an updated list of capital maintenance priorities for 2027/28.

**8.3** The footway at Station Road Sutton has been resurfaced and widened. The junction at Witcham Toll will be widened this year to accommodate more waiting traffic on the A1421. A 50MPH speed limit is being implemented on the A1101 Bates Drove between the top of Black Bank Little Downham and the top of Hundred Foot Bank Pymoor, following a series of injury collisions, a serious motorcycle collision, and a motorcycle fatality.

**8.4** I have continued to work with Witchford Parish Council, the District Council and the County Council on the proposed cycle link between the east end of the village and Lancaster Way business park. Highways engineers have completed the design ready for review and a safety audit.

**8.5** I managed to get the serious overgrowth down the western side of Red Lion Lane Sutton cleared back in late February before the start of the nesting season.

**8.6** There was yet another review of highways staffing and our new Highways Maintenance Officer is Tom Hutchins. Many thanks to Sutton Parish Council for hosting a meeting earlier this year for parish council chairs and clerks with a range of highways officers to discuss issues across the division.

A new highways Asset Management System, Aurora, went live in September, enabling better report handling, workflow handling, and performance oversight.

**8.7** New LED street lights are being installed across the county at a rate of about 2,000 per month. Over

47,000 lights will see the new components fitted, with the aim of reducing the council's energy use by one-third.

**8.8** Sutton was successful in its bid for new 20MPH zones on The Row and Mepal Road, and for the first two phases of a three-phase programme working towards a weight limit for the village. Witchford was successful in its bid for road warning signs and bollards, signs or posts to warn drivers of the existence of public paths and byways crossing the A142.

**8.9** One of the unexpected parts of my role as Deputy Leader of the County Council is to receive a report every time there is a fatality on a Cambridgeshire road. There are far too many of these, particularly involving young motorcyclists.

**8.10** The council is getting tough on utilities and developers who overstay their permits to work on the highway or fail to abide by the conditions of their permits. In 2024/25 the council issued fines totalling £483,000.

**8.11** In summer I took a trip on the pilot autonomous bus service from Madingley Park and Ride to West Cambridge. Great to see this huge technological step forward.

**8.11** More information about the council's highways work can be found at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transparency](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transparency)

## **9 Combined Authority**

**9.1** Work is ongoing on options for bus franchising, with an update due in June. Meanwhile, thirty-five bus routes in Cambridgeshire and

Peterborough—including the T12 from Sutton to Longstanton Park and Ride, which opened in May after I had been campaigning for it for eight years!—are hanging by a thread as the Mayor seeks to cut half a million pounds from local bus services. The County Council had to contribute funding to keep the young people's Tiger Pass going until March 2027.

The former 125 bus from Little Downham to Ely has been replaced by the 10 service, which is more frequent, and extends further into the evening, but does not serve Tesco or the railway station. The Thursday bus from Wardy Hill and Coveney has been preserved by creating a weekly booking of the Tiger on Demand rural bus service; I am still trying to get it to serve Sutton for the GP practice, pharmacy and shop.

**9.2** The Combined Authority produced a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire during the year. It is now working on projects including an employment strategy for young people not in education, employment or training; accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership; and a small trial to install channels in pavements to carry cables for on-street charging of electric vehicles.

**9.3** The new Mayor says he wants to dual the A10 between Ely and the A14 at Milton. However, there is currently no funding for this, from either the Government or the Combined Authority, which would have to find fifteen per cent of the cost.

**9.4** My council leadership colleagues successfully pressed the Combined Authority to fund the next steps in planning a safe crossing at the A10 /

A142 BP roundabout. It's still a long way off, however.

## **10. Council reorganisation**

**10.1** Far too much time this year has been taken up with the Government's plan to abolish district and county councils and replace them with all-purpose unitary authorities.

Four options for different ways of carving up our area have been submitted by local councils, and we expect to hear this summer which one the Government has chosen. The County Council submitted 'Option A' which would join East Cambridgeshire, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire in one council, and Peterborough, Fenland and Huntingdonshire in another. I strongly support this option as it most closely matches the Government's criteria as well as how East Cambridgeshire residents live.

## **11 Finally**

**11.1** I continue to hold regular surgeries in Sutton, and attend Little Downham Book Café once a month, and coffee mornings in Coveney, Sutton and Witchford when I can. Meanwhile, residents can continue to contact me by email, Facebook, or phone.

**11.2** My monthly county councillor reports are at [www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports](http://www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports)

**11.3** 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.