

# Annual Report 2026



**CLLR EDNA MURPHY**

**County councillor for Bar Hill division**

**(including Bar Hill, Girton, Dry Drayton, Lolworth)**

## 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.
- 1.2** As a result of taking control I was elected to serve as the Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee, with responsibility for children's services including education, SEND, children in care, fostering and adoption, and early years. I am also on the Council's Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee, and am Chair of the Lib Dem Group.
- 1.3** With the responsibility for children and young people comes leadership and participation in a number of internal and external formal groups such as the Virtual School Board, the Children's Rapid Improvement Board, Children's Safeguarding and the Schools' Forum. I am also the Council's representative on the Skills Committee of the Combined Authority, planning and administering government funds allocated to our area for skills.
- 1.4** The Council has considered a number of

issues put forward by councillors for debate in motions. 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.
- 2.2** The budget included an additional £20m for highway maintenance, delivery of the council's climate and environment strategy, and £11m to upgrade household recycling centres at Milton and March.
- 2.3** £14.7m 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.
- 2.4** 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 most of it. The Government's replacement (the Crisis and Resilience Fund) is less generous than its predecessor, and is intended to provide a wide range of anti-poverty measures for people of all ages.
- 2.5** There will be 3,500 new primary school places, and £72m over 5 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 £1.2m will be invested in libraries and archives over the next 2 years.
- 2.6** 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.
- 2.7** Like almost every county and unitary council, the Council increased its portion

of council tax by 4.99 % in total — 2 % for adult social care, and 2.99 % 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.
- 3.2** 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.
- 3.3** The council's adult social care services were rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission in summer last year.
- 3.4** 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.
- 3.5** 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.
- 3.6** Maple Surgery in Bar Hill is now much more established but primary care provision across Cambridgeshire remains very fragile, with most residents relying on private dental provision, poor support for mental health services particularly for young people, and many GP practices are hanging on by a thread.
- 3.7** 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.
- 3.8** The future of the Arthur Rank Hospice in Cambridge remains uncertain, after the NHS Trust withdrew over £800k. 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 (of which I am a member) 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. We have worked extremely hard to stabilise the company, transforming it from the way it had been set up 10 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.

### **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.
- 5.2** The number of children in Cambridgeshire with an Education Health and Care Plan has grown by 71% between 2020 and 2025. The council invested an additional £780k 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.
- 5.3** 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.
- 5.4** 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 0 to 5.

### **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 now.

**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 £708k 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 6 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.

## **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.

**7.2** 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.

**7.3** 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.

**7.4** 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.

**7.5** 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.

**7.6** 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.

**7.7** 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 % rise since 2022.

**7.8** 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.
- 8.3 The additional funding in our budget of £20 million is underpinning a much larger and rapid response to pothole in the peak season for them appearing (the first part of the year), as well as preventive work to head off potholes before they form.
- 8.4 Around 35,000 permits are being issued annually in Cambridgeshire allowing companies to do work on the highway. We have made it a priority to ensure as far as possible that work is being done as per these contracted arrangements and overstaying is being penalized. In 2024/25 the council issued fines totalling £483,000.
- 8.5 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.
- 8.6 The road network is being reassessed in April and May this year, to produce an updated list of capital maintenance priorities for 2027/28.
- 8.7 There was yet another review of highways staffing and also a new highways Asset Management System, Aurora, went live in September, enabling better report handling, workflow handling, and performance oversight.
- 8.8 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.
- 8.11 More information about the council's highways work can be found at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transparency](https://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 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.

- 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.

## 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.
- 10.2 4 options for our area have been submitted by local councils, and we expect to hear in June 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. It most closely matches the Government's criteria but recent announcements have thrown the process into doubt.
- 10.3 If we do go forward with LGR it will mean significant time, effort and financial expenditure will be required to set up the new 'shadow' organizations which will then take over all functions of current councils. Amongst other things it will involve electing members to run the shadow authorities perhaps as early as May 2027.

Finally, my thanks to everyone on Parish Councils who has worked with me over the last year and also to residents who have been in touch with concerns or feedback.

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