

# Annual Report 2025



**CLLR EDNA MURPHY**

**County councillor for Bar Hill  
division**

## 1. Introduction

The composition of the County Council has changed during this Council's tenure is below.

The table below shows the current composition of the Council compared to the latest election results in May 2021. The Conservatives are not the largest group on the Council—for the first time ever.

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

Local elections for all 61 County Councillors across our 59 electoral divisions will be taking place on Thursday 1 May 2025.

I would encourage everyone who is registered to vote to take part in the forthcoming County Council Elections as well as the election of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor.

## 2. The Council

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 have responsibility on a number of committees, including Strategy Resources & Performance, Adults & Health, and I chair Staffing & Appeals.

I represent the Fire Authority (of which I am Chair) at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, where I am a member of the main board and am the lead member for governance.

## 3. Strategy, Resources & Performance

The Council set a balanced budget in February 2025 for the 2025/26 year, though this is becoming increasingly difficult for councils of all political colours across the country. An increasing number of local authorities are issuing 'Section 114' notices—the nearest council equivalent to bankruptcy. And a 2023 poll of English councillors for the New Statesman found that a quarter of them believed that their council would soon go bankrupt, with 6% saying this was 'very likely'.

Councillors acknowledged the challenges the council is facing with the demand for services, increasing complexity of need, inflation and market failures.

Despite this, the business plan and budget process have been about listening to residents which is why an additional sum of nearly £60m is being invested into highways maintenance over two years, above and beyond the usual ~£50m pa budget.

The county council had to close a gap of £35.1m – with 73% of the Council's net spend now being funded from Council Tax. The council has prioritised several key areas, based on resident feedback through its Quality of Life survey, and are aligned to its vision to make Cambridgeshire greener, fairer and more caring: additional investment of nearly £60m in highways maintenance, sustaining critical adults

and children's social care and continuing to support vulnerable communities.

The council increased its portion of council tax by 4.99% in total— 2% for adult social services. This increase will raise £20m of local income to help maintain and protect critical services for the most vulnerable communities. For most of our residents in Band A-D properties that will mean between an extra £1.04 pence to £1.55 a week.

For the second year, the county council commissioned the Quality of Life Survey involving more than 5,500 residents.

We asked our residents to tell us what it is like for them living in Cambridgeshire and what concerns them most and we were delighted that so many people have been willing to participate.

We heard our residents continue to feel happy, safe and belong which is heartening. However, they have given a clear message about the challenges they are facing around the cost of living crisis.

It is particularly concerning that residents are telling us that they are having to cut back on heating, nutritious food and prescription medicines to save money.

While work to tackle poverty is still ongoing, we clearly need to keep looking at what we can do to support our residents further if we want to deliver on our vision to be a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire.

The survey also tells us that fewer people are struggling with mental and

physical health this year which is a positive change for our residents.

## 4. Adults & Health

The Adults and Health Committee has a significant role in ensuring 'health inequalities are reduced' and 'people enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs', as part of our Strategic Framework

We have confirmed our commitment to ensuring ongoing support for people with learning disabilities and their families, following changes to how the council works with the NHS in Cambridgeshire.

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 that benefits all involved, particularly those who rely on these important services.

County 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.

## 5. Children & Young People

In Cambridgeshire, between 2020 and 2024, there was a 70% increase in children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), cost increases in home to school transport and in autism services. The council is facing significant pressures to meet the demand and costs of supporting children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

Currently we do not receive adequate funding from Government to meet the need. We are doing all we can locally to manage the increased pressures on funding as result of this rising demand. We have recently submitted a revised Safety Valve proposal to the Department for Education to help the council to manage these dual pressures of rising demand and costs.

The Council endorsed a motion for an urgent national review of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system at the March Full Council meeting.

The motion called on the council's Chief Executive to write to Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Schools to take assertive action to address the SEND crisis recognising that for the lowest funded Local Authority areas, like Cambridgeshire, children and young people are the most impacted 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, which was an honest and

thorough assessment of the SEND crisis.

## 6. COSMIC

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.

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, and is provided in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist. The survivor will be given a bespoke safety and support plan focused on their individual needs.

I am pleased the Council has received Council of Sanctuary status, reaffirming the Council's commitments 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.

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 committee will ensure the council responds to its recommendations with our partners.

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 through £1.3m committed for the Libraries Plus programme, creating more flexible spaces and expanding the range of services available to our residents.

## 7. Environment

The Environment and Green Investment Committee discussed Anglian Water's proposals for the two new reservoirs and the Council will be involved as a statutory consultee on these proposals. We want to ensure ambitions for much needed new housing are balanced with the significant pressures they create on local services and infrastructure, and we will continue to work with our mayor and central government to deliver for local residents, communities and businesses.

Through the committee's stewardship, the council itself has reduced its direct carbon emissions by 42% and developed several major energy projects that will not only provide income but also provide renewable energy sources for the council and some of our communities.

The Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership (CERP) has won a national award for its success in promoting environmental best practice and quality retrofit programmes.

The CERP partnership has been awarded bronze for its contribution to 'Green Public Service', these awards recognise, reward and promote environmental best practice across the public sector in the UK.

Also known as Action on Energy Cambridgeshire, CERP is a partnership between Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

## 8. Highways & Transport

The condition of our roads and pavements is still a huge challenge, in Cambridgeshire as it is nationwide—a mixture of inadequate Government funding over a sustained period of time, decades of neglect, increasingly extreme weather, and in some cases poor standards of repair.

The Highways and Transport Committee agreed a £59m highways maintenance and improvement programme for 2025/26, incorporating some of the additional investment.

The county's roads need more than £400m worth of maintenance to address all the issues, and that does not include soil impacted roads, which is roughly an additional £530m.

However, the council's business plan, has enabled an additional £20m in 2025/26 to address our highway issues; a further £20m is allocated for 2026/27.



This funding, along with an additional £8m from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, will prioritise increased funding for Local Highway Improvements (LHIs), trees, weeds and vegetation, drainage maintenance, road safety, active travel, soil affected roads, highways maintenance including potholes, lining and signs, street lighting and bus shelter enhancements.

The programme, which has been produced using a new prioritisation process already agreed by the committee, means each scheme is scored against set criteria. Such as the type of road and in what condition, whether it has active travel links, is it a public transport route, its proximity to a school or care home and how many people use it. It means the schemes are designed to apply the right treatment suitable to that location.

Improvements include more than £30m worth of carriageway maintenance, an additional £2m on soil affected roads, more than £7m on footpath and cycleway maintenance, £1m on active travel and £4m on drainage.

Following approval at committee, the programme will now go through design and development work before delivery begins in April, running through to March 2026.

## 9. Staffing and Appeals

Cambridgeshire has become the first County Council to be awarded 'Gold' membership of The 5% Club's 2024-25 Employer Audit Scheme. This award recognises the Council's significant contribution to the continued development of all its employees through "earn and learn" schemes such as Apprenticeships and Graduate Development Programmes.

The 5% Club works with UK employers to drive positive action towards accessible workplace learning, by looking at numbers of apprentices, sponsored students and graduates employed. The goal is to increase employment and career prospects for young people and equip them with the skills they need to become an integral part of the workforce, and of society.

It is an indication of its improved management that the council has been shortlisted as a finalist in four categories of the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. The LGC Awards celebrate the very best in local government, highlighting councils across the country that demonstrate outstanding leadership, creativity, and impact in serving their communities. Being shortlisted finalists for these four awards is a huge honour and is testament to the positive changes our members and staff are driving forward.

## 10. Combined Authority

The council has reaffirmed its commitment to improving public transport accessibility and affordability by endorsing the Tiger bus fare scheme and the Mayor's recent decision to franchise bus routes, providing a more reliable and integrated service for residents.

We have a modern and growing county and the transport network model that we have is not fit for purpose. We want to expand the Cambridgeshire bus network, with more routes, more destinations; we also want the local authority to be accountable for bus services.

The Combined Authority approved its spending plans from 2025/26, funding improvements to transport, skills and business growth.

Separately, the Mayor's budget was also approved and confirmed that the Mayoral precept portion of council tax bills 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. This aims to maintain affordable and accessible travel, reduce road congestion, and ease cost-of-living pressures.

The Combined Authority secured £2.4m to support local people in getting good jobs. This funding will support skills bootcamps which are designed to equip local people with the skills they need to advance their careers.

This is a fantastic collaboration between employers, learning providers, and the Combined Authority, working together to up-skill residents, fill vacancies, support the unemployed, and develop workforce talent across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Skills bootcamps are an excellent initiative, and I urge people to take advantage of them.

## **11. Local Government Reorganisation**

The Government published the English Devolution White Paper in December, which set out their programme to achieve greater devolvement of powers and their intent to undertake Local Government Reorganisation.

On 5 February 2025, the Government issued an invitation to every council leader in two-tier areas of local government and neighbouring unitary authorities. The invitation asked for an interim update to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025.

Council leaders across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been exploring the impacts and various options for our county.

There is a lot of work ahead of us to explore financially viable scenarios and to argue for the best possible outcomes for residents. We are collectively approached reorganisation with a collaborative spirit and engaging fully with neighbouring councils.

## **12. Lolworth updates**

The long-running challenge of getting the council to properly fix the drainage which has been damaged probably by tree roots seems to be nearing the end of its 26 year run. The council has put together a programme of major works which have been costed, assessed in terms of priority against clear criteria, and now programmed in. This has never happened before! The Lolworth drain is not quite a major work as per the capital programme but it is significant and has been reviewed and committed to the programme. It requires significant planning, but they will be seeking permission to do the work shortly, it will take 13 weeks to secure permission, and then they will commission the work. It does finally look like it will happen.

Parents are concerned that the school bus to Swavesey Village College no longer stops on the Green but will only go to the bottom of Robins Lane. The problem is the trees and shrubbery have damaged the bus and the company is unwilling to send the bus up the road. Obviously parents are concerned with children walking down the single land road to catch the bus. It is not clear that creating a walkway (eg

lines on the road demarcating a path) would be particularly effective. If there are solutions such as the Parish engaging residents to cut back the trees along Robins Lane, or groups walking together down the road to the bus, it may be helpful to discuss them.

## Conclusion

My thanks to the clerk and parish chair whose hard work keeps our communities together, as well as to the many residents who have contacted me both with ideas as well as concerns over the last few years.

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