

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT – DECEMBER 2024
LONGSTANTON, NORTHSTOWE, OVER, OAKINGTON & WESTWICK

CLLR FIROUZ THOMPSON

FULL COUNCIL

Five motions were debated at the December Full Council meeting.

Being a 'trauma-informed' council

This motion was about those delivering council services needing to be aware of the effects of trauma on residents with whom they come into contact, and how to support trauma survivors.

Special educational needs and disabilities

This motion asked the council to respond to the Government's review of the school curriculum making clear the importance of an appropriate curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, and to gather information from secondary schools in the county on how they are ensuring they are able to meet the needs of all pupils.

It also asked the Children & Young People Committee to consider how the child and adolescent mental health system is working, and gather information about experience of special educational needs and disabilities in early years and primary school settings. I seconded this motion.

Mill Lane bridge, Huntingdonshire

This motion was about flooding at this location and the timetable for an options appraisal. It was voted down as unnecessary, as work is already under way.

A1421 Haddenham to Witcham Toll

This motion was about road safety options at this location and the timetable for a report. Again this was voted down as unnecessary, as this road will be included in a report coming to the Highways & Transport Committee shortly.

Family farms and inheritance tax

This motion asked the council to write to the Secretary of State calling on the Government to stop changes to inheritance tax on family farms, and engage with the local farming community to offer support.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

New 'Inclusion for All' SEND Strategy to focus on early support

The Children and Young People Committee meeting on Tuesday 26 November shared a new strategy to adopt an 'Inclusion for All' approach for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Members discussed how children would be supported as early as possible, to enable children with additional needs to engage and thrive in education, whilst making better use of public funds.

The Committee also noted the update on key activity and progress with the Safety Valve programme, as well as local funding arrangements.

Like many other councils, Cambridgeshire County Council is facing significant challenges due to rising demand for, and the increasing costs of, supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Over the past five years, the council has seen nearly a 50% increase in the number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) required.

To address the resulting financial pressures, local officers are actively working to manage funding constraints. Recently, a revised Safety Valve proposal was submitted to the Department for Education. If approved by Education Ministers, this proposal will help the council address the financial deficit in the High Needs Block while enabling a reform of SEND service delivery over the next five years.

STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES

Council Budget

Cambridgeshire County Council will set its budget on Tuesday 11 February, with recommendations being considered in advance by the Strategy Resources & Performance Committee on Tuesday 28 January.

Each year councils are required to set a balanced budget for the year ahead. This has become more difficult in recent years for several reasons including

- Growing demand for services and increasing complexity of health and care needs
- Inflation
- Market failures in services such as provision for children in care, with high demand, insufficient supply, provider profiteering, and diminished council negotiating power.

The totality of the council’s gross budget, including schools and services funded by specific grants, is expected to be over £1.1 billion for 2025-26. Of this, over half (£567 million) is proposed to be spent on children, education and families, and health and adult social care.

In December, councillors were told that efficiencies and savings or additional income of £34 million would be needed to set a balanced budget for 2025-26, and considered draft proposals to achieve this. However, the coming five years show an overall funding gap of £132 million, of which £73 million is not yet addressed

ADULTS & HEALTH

Social care reform—but not until 2028

The Government has promised to ‘finally grasp the nettle on social care reform’, with an independent commission due to begin work in April.

Proposals on a stable system for the long-term funding of adult social care in England have been needed for years. But these are unlikely to be delivered before 2028 at the earliest, the government has confirmed. The proposed commission, chaired by Baroness Louise Casey, is not due to publish its final report until then.

Meanwhile, councils and care providers across the country are saying this is far too long to wait for reform of vital social care services which are already on their knees.

Urgent and emergency care

The County Council’s Adults & Health Committee received a report last month for their scrutiny on the performance of the NHS in urgent and emergency care.

During 2024/25, performance has been below the planned trajectories submitted as part of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) operational plan, and below national standards.

Two key national metrics for urgent and emergency care are that

- Emergency departments should see and treat a minimum of 78 per cent of patients within four hours of arriving in the department by the end of March 2025, and
- Patients categorised by the ambulance trust as Category 2 emergency, should have an ambulance response time within 30 minutes.

Both these targets remain behind plan, with the NHS under considerable pressure locally and nationally.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)

CAB grant for income maximisation

The County Council’s COSMIC committee has agreed a grant of £800,000 over two years to Citizens Advice in the county for income maximisation—working with residents to ensure they are in receipt of all financial

assistance they are eligible for, and helping people out of poverty across Cambridgeshire by providing a long-term solution to financial hardship.

Since income maximisation work began in 2023, 5,455 Cambridgeshire residents have accessed the service, resulting in an income gain of £3,887,844.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Non-recycled waste

A recent article in the Guardian newspaper reported that 87 per cent of Cambridgeshire’s non-recyclable waste goes to landfill—second only to Essex. The council commented:

“Our first priority is to reduce, re-use and to recycle as much as possible, as there are limited methods available to treat the waste that is left over in the short-medium term.

“We are actively working with both our waste contractor, as well as Central Government, to try and find the best long-term solution to manage the county’s waste.”

It is important to note that

- All mixed dry recycling collected from Cambridgeshire households and household recycling centres is recycled
- All food and garden waste collected from households is composted.
- Where legislation prohibits sending waste to landfill the council is in full compliance.
- Where possible, black bag waste is treated using energy recovery or mechanical biological treatment, to divert as much as possible from landfill.

The whole waste industry and legislative framework is currently going through a period of significant change. The council is awaiting detailed guidance from Government to inform its long-term waste strategy. Meanwhile the council is actively looking at more modern ways to treat waste that can’t be recycled and is currently going to landfill.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

£10 million for road maintenance

The Government has announced how much each council area will receive for highways capital maintenance for 2025/26.

For the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough area it’s £10 million, with a quarter of that amount to be held back until the respective councils have proved they will meet certain—still to be announced—criteria. £10 million sounds a lot, but

- The Government may hold back twenty-five per cent of it
- It includes Peterborough as well as Cambridgeshire
- In Cambridgeshire alone the backlog of highways maintenance is around £600 million. Better than nothing, then, but a long way from what we need

This year’s application round for LHIs – a reminder

The application window for the next LHI application round will be as follows.

- Application window opens: Friday 1 November 2024
- Application window closes: **Friday 10 January 2025**
- Feasibility studies undertaken: February—May 2025
- Panel meetings: June—July 2025
- Report to committee including prioritised list for approval: October 2025

Prioritising the highways capital programme

The council's Highways & Transport Committee on 3 December approved a new scoring system to prioritise planned capital highways maintenance schemes.

Parish councils and county councillors were approached by the council to submit suggestions of roads that needed significant capital work. As part of this process, I put forward all the discussed areas with all my parishes.

When it meets in March, the committee expects to receive a proposed three year forward capital maintenance programme and an indicative programme for the following two years. The same meeting will also consider a proposed hierarchy for maintaining walking, wheeling, and cycling routes. Proposals for a hierarchy for maintaining Public Rights of Way is expected to follow in July or October.

Winter gritting reminder

With the weather taking a cold turn, a quick reminder about gritting on Cambridgeshire's roads.

Cambridgeshire County Council's 37 gritting vehicles cover 44 per cent of the county's road network. Cambridgeshire is split into three gritting areas:

- Fenland and East
- Huntingdonshire and South
- Cambridge

Which roads are gritted and when will depend on forecast temperatures in each of these three areas, so there may be occasions when some parts of the county are gritted but not others.

Roads on the gritting network are classified as primary or secondary routes. Primary routes are the priority for gritting, because they serve as major connecting routes for communities and allow people to get to work and access essential services. Secondary routes are gritted in addition to primary routes as and when resources allow when there is a forecast of a prolonged cold spell, where road surface temperatures fall below zero, or when snowfall is forecast.

You can find which roads are primary or secondary gritting routes at <https://maps.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/> In the Map categories menu to the left of the screen, choose Transport and Streets, then select Primary Gritting Routes and Secondary Gritting Routes from the drop-down menu.

The Council checks detailed weather forecasts throughout the day, and at midday every day during winter receives road and air temperatures from twelve weather stations around the county. This information guides where and when to send out the gritters and how much salt needs to be spread.

You can find more information about winter gritting in Cambridgeshire at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/gritting-roads-cycleways-and-paths> And the County Council posts regular updates on Facebook and Twitter, including road gritting news and weather warnings.

In 2022, 14 people were killed, 379 seriously injured, and 1,227 slightly injured in reported road collisions on Great Britain's roads when there was rain, snow, sleet or foggy conditions, according to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. The AA has useful advice for driving in snow and ice, at <https://www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/how-to-drive-in-snow>

Speed cameras

At a recent Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways & Transport Committee, the council stated that they might consider the introduction of more speed cameras.

In a discussion about Cambridgeshire's 'Vision Zero'—the aim to reduce to zero the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads—it was pointed out how few speed cameras there are in Cambridgeshire compared with, for example, Staffordshire.

The answer from road safety manager Simon Burgin was as expected, about the cost. But he went on to say that another factor was that 'there have to be the appropriate available court slots to deal with anybody committing speeding offences'. Increasing enforcement could lead to people 'falling through the cracks' as there would simply not be space to 'push them through' the court system—and this was 'a bigger problem to solve' than the cost. It's yet another example of the collapse of the justice system under the previous government.

Another topic of the 'Vision Zero' discussion was about hold-ups of traffic behind slow-moving agricultural vehicles, and whether spaces at the sides of appropriate roads could be cut out and marked—in the same way as passing places on narrow roads—to enable agricultural vehicles to pull in and let following traffic pass. This would avoid the temptation of risky overtaking.

MEETINGS ATTENDED and COMMUNITY WORK 2 December 2024 to 5 January 2025

Local meetings:

Northstowe Delivery Group (12 Dec), Afghan Families event (14 Dec), Rain Gardens in Over (18 Dec),

County Council meetings:

Guided Busway meeting with GCP (3 Dec), Full Council (10 Dec), Northstowe Senior Responsible Officer (11 Dec), Ian Sollom MP (13 Dec), Children & Young People Committee member training – Performance Management (17 Dec), Children & Young People Spokes (19 Dec)

Community work:

Parish/Town Council monthly report, Column write ups within Northstowe News, Oakington & Westwick Journal and Over News online magazine. Northstowe Foodies and Northstowe Carol and Beers (20 Dec)

Private case work:

Most Councillors will have private case work that they are dealing with, details of which cannot be shared due to GDPR – current themes are Transport, SEND, Northstowe coverage, GP services.

WARD NEWS

TRANSPORT: Busway Pricing for Longstanton Park and Ride and Northstowe

Recent changes by Stagecoach place Longstanton Park and Ride and Northstowe within the Flexi Travel Plus zone, increasing travel costs. However, the Combined Authority's £2 cap on bus fares (through to March 2025) and the £1 Tiger Pass for youth under 25 continue to support affordable travel. We await further updates in April.

In the meanwhile, I reached out to Stagecoach to understand this new decision, as it was raised by residents on Facebook, Stagecoach have shared the following statement, with no reference to the Flexi tickets bought before January if they would be able to use:

From 1 January 2025, in a Town Zone, a Flexi 10 book of tickets allows unlimited travel for just £4.20 per day. Cambridge Town Group and Flexi fares will now be valid as far as Oakington, with travel towards Longstanton and St Ives needing a Cambridgeshire Plus Group and Flexi ticket. Existing Flexi tickets will be able to be used as per the updated fare Zones.

With great regret, we have been forced to make difficult decisions to maintain the financial viability of our local bus network, as we prepare for the results of the government's Budget decision to raise the cost that bus companies need to pay in National Insurance.

The Budget means that we will now have to pay National Insurance at 15% on salaries above £5,000 from April, dramatically up from the costs now of 13.8% on salaries above £9,100. This 1.2% increase and the reduction of the threshold collectively adds about 3% to our wage bill, which cost pressure has caused the new fares.

As a significant employer in the region, providing jobs for over 800 local people, and a bus driver can earn up to £38,000 per year, so the hit of increased costs here is substantial at approximately £800,000 per year. Buses offer outstanding value: under the new fares, on a 4 Week ticket adults will pay just £2.93 per day for unlimited travel in a Town Zone; Youth prices will be just £2.04 per day. A Student Annual ticket will be just £1.65 per day.

Overall, Youth tickets will still be priced on average 30% less than adult ticket equivalents and Job Seekers singles will remain at a 50% discount. Up to four children under the age of five will still be able to travel for free with a fare paying adult.

A return trip, including all day parking of up to 18 hours, on the Park & Ride bus services will be £4, less than the cost to park for just two hours at either Grand Arcade, Park Street or Grafton East or West.

By contrast, Cambridge City Council's current consultation on car parking charges proposes to increase the price of a stay of over five hours at the weekend at Grand Arcade or Park Street by £3.00 to £33.10.

In terms of the time taken to on-board customers, we have already added additional buses into the Busway routine, and made adjustments to timetables to make the service work better for our loyal customers, and we will certainly continue to monitor the situation and make further adjustments if required.

The Plus Zone cost of travel per day (unlimited) are:

- Day Ticket: Adult £9.70, Youth £6.90
- Flexi 5: Adult £7.76, Youth £5.52
- Flexi 10: Adult £6.79, Youth £4.83
- 7 Day MegaRider: Adult £5.55, Youth £3.95
- 28 Day MegaRider: Adult £4.43, Youth £3.15
- MegaRider Xtra: Adult £4.43, Youth N/A
- Student Annual (per day): £2.04
- Small Group (3 people): £4.24 each
- Large Group (5 people): £4.08 each

B1050 Cycle/Footpath Project

This project, split into two phases, aims to improve connectivity to Bar Hill and Swavesey and beyond?

Phase One: From the A1307 to the new B1050 roundabout, funded by Section 106 contributions. Construction is expected to begin in early 2025.

Note: Section 106 agreement is a legal obligation between developers and local councils to provide funding or infrastructure to offset the impact of a development on the community.

Phase Two: From the new B1050 roundabout to where the Home Farm Road meets the B1050 in Longstanton. This phase has faced delays due to ongoing works, land acquisition, and planning permissions but aims to start in late 2025, all being well.

Progress in Northstowe

Construction continues across our growing town. The Northstowe Learning Community is nearing completion, with the Sixth Form College and Primary School moving into their designated buildings during February half term hopefully.

Urban & Civic (who acquired L&Q last summer), the master developer of Phase 1, is working to complete roads and cycle paths, with work expected to finish by summer 2026. For details and emergency contact information, visit this link: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/media/pa5lr4u2/northstowe-roadworks-update-final.pdf>

Meanwhile, the County Council is finalising Section 38 legal agreements with Urban & Civic. These agreements ensure roads, footpaths, and associated infrastructure are built to standards passing all Road Safety Audits, allowing the council to adopt and maintain them. Side agreements covering street furniture and green spaces are also being finalised, with minor technical issues like updated signal specifications being resolved. Until adoption is complete in 2026, maintenance will remain Urban & Civic's responsibility, thereafter, covered by County Council.

Busway works at Oakington Platform – 6 to 17 January

These works caused some confusion on 6 January as the buses were not stopping at the allocated temporary bus stop in Oakington. I raised my concern to County officers and queried why works could not be done over the holidays and together with the Histon platforms. I was informed that to undertake Histon and Oakington at the same time would have led to an even longer diversion with another stop out of action. Also Swavesey platform works will happen after the Oakington closure, the dates will be issued over the next week. The diversion will add around 10 minutes to the route. Most contractors close down for two weeks over Christmas. Even if we could have got them to do the work the cost would be astronomical. We are not Network rail I'm afraid!

MEANWHILE on the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority has decided not to increase the current bus fare cap of £2 per journey. This comes despite the decision of the Government nationally to increase the fare cap to £3 and will be welcomed by many bus passengers.

The new Tiger on Demand bus service, which replaces the 'Ting' demand responsive service in the west of Huntingdonshire, will soon be coming to other parts of the county, including parts in South Cambs, but not in our ward. <https://transport.cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/buses/tiger-on-demand>

COUNCILS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND KEY GOVERNMENT FUNDED ORGANISATIONS

If you have a problem or concern do not worry too much about who can solve it just ask the question and we will endeavour to signpost to the right person. The organisational structure of Cambridgeshire is complex, but it is important to identify where responsibility lies.

<p>County Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Education, Transport, Highways, Heritage, Social care, Libraries, Trading standards, - Waste management, Maintaining their estate.</p> <p>Some of these services are shared between Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council but any concerns should be directed to the county council.</p>
<p>District Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Council tax payments and benefits, Household bin collections, Housing and housing benefits, Council leisure facilities, Environmental health, Residential planning.</p>
<p>Parish/ Town Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Looking after community buildings, Open spaces, Allotments, Play Areas, Bus shelters.</p>
<p>Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP)</p> <p>'The local delivery body for a City Deal with central Government worth up to £500 million over 15 years, to vital improvements in infrastructure (decarbonising transport), supporting and accelerating the creation of 44,000 new jobs, 33,500 new homes and 420 additional apprenticeships.'</p> <p>Partnership between Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, University of Cambridge.</p>
<p>The Combined Authority, Cambridge and Peterborough, our elected Mayor</p> <p>'A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries.'</p> <p>What our mayor does – Business support, skills, housing, transport, environment, international, digital connectivity, resilience, research, and strategy. New homes.</p>
<p>Police and Crime Commissioner, Cambridge and Peterborough</p> <p>To support and challenge the Chief Constable to provide effective and efficient policing services for the area.</p>
<p>Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority</p> <p>The Fire Authority is the governing body responsible for delivering a fire and rescue service to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is made up of Cambridgeshire County Councillors and Peterborough City Councillors.</p>

CONTACT DETAILS

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the above, or any other matters.

Firouz Thompson, County Councillor for Longstanton, Northstowe, Over and Oakington & Westwick

Email: firouz.thompson@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2066298150052161/> - Longstanton, Oakington and Northstowe

<https://www.facebook.com/libdems3rdMay18> - Over & Willingham

[Report a highways fault - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

[Report a flood - www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/planning-and-development/flood-and-water/report-a-flood](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/planning-and-development/flood-and-water/report-a-flood)

NOTE: Homes England areas in Phase 2 Northstowe including South Access Road West and new B1050 roundabout – any estates or maintenance issues should be report to 24/7 helpdesk number 0845 603 1485 (which is the same cost as a local rate). The number is manned 7 days per week 24 hours per day and all calls are placed in an auditable system to ensure matters are progressed.