

CLLR FIROUZ THOMPSON

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Funding

On 28 November the Government published its Local government finance policy statement 2025 to 2026. This lays out the principles for the funding of principal local authorities for the financial year starting in April.

There will be no change to the council tax cap, which will remain at three per cent for core council tax, with a two per cent adult social care precept. The cap for the police precept will be £14, and £5 for fire and rescue authorities. There will be no cap for Combined Authorities, or for town and parish councils. There will be a number of changes to grant funding. And in 2026/27 the Government plans to ‘radically simplify the local government funding landscape’.

Local Government Reorganisation

Proposals to review local government arrangements are coming over the horizon. In particular, all-purpose unitary councils are likely to replace the two tiers of county and district councils; and we are likely to see more directly elected Mayors in parts of the country which currently do not have them. There will be endless debate and consultations, and it is not clear to me that local government will necessarily be better as a consequence.

Remote Meeting Consultation

I have submitted my own personal response to the Government’s consultation on returning to remote meetings.

My personal view is that I would be very happy if the Government were to permit meetings online, as this is more efficient, and better for the environment too—and it also enables more people, including those with disabilities or caring commitments, to participate in local democracy. Especially as nearly every Town/Parish council in my ward has current vacancies.

Nevertheless, I think hybrid meetings, where some councillors attend in person and others join online, are less effective because they put remote participants at a disadvantage. While I am confident that advancements in technology and better training for chairs will eventually address this issue, many councils currently lack the necessary technology. Implementing these changes would require investments that they may not have.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Special educational needs and disabilities funding update

The County Council’s Children & Young People Committee received an update last month on the ‘safety valve’ agreement it made with the Government in 2023. The agreement was made because of the escalating costs of providing for children and young people with high levels of need to meet their special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The agreement included a contribution of £49M from the Government to help repay the council’s SEND deficit, with a further £9M to be supplied from the council’s reserves. A further £11.3M has been supplied in capital to support new SEND provision in mainstream schools. Two new special schools are to be established in March and Gamlingay delivered directly by the Department of Education.

The intention of the agreement is that children with SEND should be supported to remain in mainstream education wherever possible. However, demand continues to outstrip supply, with an increase of over 46 per cent in the number of requests for Education Health & Care Plans in the last five years. This means that the terms of the agreement have not been met and are being renegotiated. Many ‘safety valve’ councils elsewhere in the country are in the same situation.

STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES

Quality of Life Survey 2024

I would like to provide a follow-up on last month's survey update. The district analysis has now been published and is available on our website: Quality of Life Survey 2024. [Quality of life survey 2024 | Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

You can also access the direct link to the report here: Quality of Life Survey 2024 - District Report.

District break-down of the survey, is currently being worked on and when available will be shared. More information can be found here: [Quality of Life Survey 2024 - District Report](#)

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Booking system for Household Recycling Centre

A new, larger Household Recycling Centre at Milton has been given the go ahead. The modern, split-level facility will be built on the site of the existing centre, and adjacent land, at Butt Lane, Milton, and will include a purpose-built re-use area and more parking for cars and bikes. It will cover a larger area than the current facility, already the busiest in the county, and is designed for easier, more accessible recycling for residents.

Work is expected to start on the new facility in autumn 2025 and will take around nine months. This will include the demolition of the existing centre, so while work takes place the site will be temporarily closed and residents directed to their closest alternative sites at Thriplow, Witchford and Bluntisham.

To help manage demand and tonnages at those sites, the council will be introducing a temporary online booking system while Milton recycling centre is closed. This will help reduce queues and waiting times, and aim to ensure residents can visit the three sites at a time convenient to them.

The papers can be viewed on our website at [Council and committee meetings - Cambridgeshire County Council > Meetings Calendar](#) and the meeting was live streamed on our YouTube channel ([Environment & Green Investment Committee - 28 November 2024](#)).

My speech to the committee regarding the Milton Household Recycling Centre (HRC) agenda item is as below. The extension is partially funded by the Northstowe S106 agreement. It was previously decided that no recycling centre would be required at Northstowe, and the allocated funding would instead be redirected to expand the Milton HRC to accommodate Northstowe.

Dear Members of the Environment and Green Investment Committee,

As the County Councillor representing Northstowe, I wish to provide feedback on the proposed redevelopment of the Milton Household Recycling Centre and its relevance to our community. Northstowe is a growing and forward-thinking community, and the plans for Milton HRC offer significant benefits that align with our residents' needs and aspirations.

The proposed re-use shop at the redeveloped site is a particularly exciting initiative. By allowing residents to access good-quality, pre-loved items at low or no cost, the shop supports sustainability goals while offering economic benefits, particularly for lower-income households. This aligns with the ethos of Sustainable Northstowe and Northstowe status as a Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free Community, reflecting our community's commitment to reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices.

The improved design and increased capacity of the redeveloped facility will ensure it meets the current and future needs of Northstowe's growing population. During the temporary closure, I urge the committee to ensure clear communication about alternative arrangements and implement efficient systems to manage demand at nearby HRCs. Efforts to deter fly-tipping, such as proactive enforcement and education campaigns, will also be essential to maintaining environmental quality in the area.

In conclusion, the redevelopment of Milton HRC represents a vital investment in waste management for Northstowe and beyond. Its sustainability goals and reuse initiatives align perfectly with Northstowe's values and aspirations, ensuring long-term benefits for our residents and businesses.

*Thank you for your time and consideration.
Councillor Firouz Thompson*

Flood funding for Internal Drainage Boards

The government last month announced that £50M will be distributed to internal drainage boards (IDBs). The funding will help projects to improve, repair or replace IDB assets, including flood barriers, embankments, and maintenance of watercourses. The funding will support projects which reduce risks and impacts from flooding to farmers and rural communities across England.

The government has also committed to look at the funding formula for allocating money to proposed flood defences. A consultation will be launched in the new year which will include a review of the existing formula to ensure that the challenges facing businesses and rural and coastal communities are adequately considered when delivering flood protection.

Community Energy Action Plan

The county council has approved a new Community Energy Action Plan which defines how the council will support communities in developing solutions of local energy supply. The eleven actions in the Plan are:

1. Facilitate the set-up of a Cambridgeshire community energy cooperative.
2. Provide match funding for feasibility studies.
3. Employ a council community energy development officer.
4. Offer guidance and advice to community energy groups.
5. Broker customer relationships between community energy groups, host sites and customers for community delivered rooftop solar.
6. Search for sites.
7. Promote uptake of domestic energy efficiency grants.
8. Raise awareness of innovative energy tariffs.
9. Support neighbourhood uptake of domestic renewables.
10. Promote domestic retrofit with private landlords.
11. Continue education and awareness raising.

Packaging Fees

The Government has published an update on the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)—the 'polluter pays' scheme whereby those responsible for producing and circulating packaging must pay for the cost of its disposal over the course of its life.

EPR for packaging fees has been deferred for a year. No EPR packaging fees will be payable in 2024. However, businesses must report their packaging data for 2023, and will be required to pay any related fees in 2025 based on 2024 data. They must also continue to pay any fees due under previous regulations.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Local Highways Improvement schemes (LHI)s

The Highways & Transport Committee meeting on Tuesday 1 October is asked to agree which Local Highways Improvement (LHI) bids will be approved for the coming year. These are divided into complex and non-complex schemes.

The papers for the Committee Meeting can be found here [Council and committee meetings - Cambridgeshire County Council > Meetings Calendar \(cmis.uk.com\)](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cmis/MeetingsCalendar)

Next's year's application round

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

Maintenance work continues on old A14 – between Swavesey and Huntingdon

A 40mph speed limit is in place between Swavesey and Huntingdon, this speed limit had been in place for some time and extensive maintenance works were required before it could be lifted.

The verges have now been cleared, the vegetation has been stripped back and some of the drains have been cleared. However, these works have not been completed as quickly as originally expected as our highways officers have uncovered the need for further drainage work. Some of the drains are not clearing properly and more drains have been discovered which weren't listed on the original plans.

Further ecology survey work is expected to start on Monday (28 October). During this time, traffic management will be in place. Following the survey, some trees, which are posing a risk to the carriageway, will need to be removed. New seeds and mature trees will be planted elsewhere at a more suitable location.

Another priority is the barrier work required between Godmanchester to Huntingdon section. The preparation for this work will start shortly, and will involve clearing the vegetation to allow the barriers to be installed. The barrier replacement work, which will require lane closures, is expected to start in November and continue until at least February 2025.

Winter Preparations

Preparations for winter are well under way with the county council's fleet of 37 gritters and two quad bikes on stand-by to keep the county's roads, paths and cycleways safe for residents in the colder months.

The team's annual preparatory 'dry runs' are now complete. The council's salt barns are fully stocked with 10,000 tonnes of rock salt ready for the start of the cold season, and grit bins across Cambridgeshire have been refilled. The council maintains over 108,000 drains across the county, and has been clearing and repairing these where necessary before winter sets in.

Crews will be on standby across the council's four winter service depots at Huntingdon, March, Whittlesford and Witchford, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, between now and April 2025. Around seventy community volunteers also go out to help grit paths and pavements to keep them safe for those on foot.

Prioritising the Highways Capital Programme

The county council's Highways & Transport Committee on 3 December is asked to approve a new scoring system to set priorities for planned capital highways maintenance schemes.

The total proposed allocation for capital highway maintenance in 2025/26 is subject to the council's business plan being agreed in February, but is expected to total £40.576M. This excludes £5.5M set aside for specific work on the de-trunking of the A14 and reactive capital work throughout the year,

The aim of this new system is to provide a more transparent process for building the programme, based on weighted scoring of a range of factors relevant to each asset type (for example, carriageways, footways, bridges, signing and lining, rights of way, traffic signal replacement).

Bus Franchising Consultation – my response

I submitted my response to the Bus Franchising Consultation and only realised at the end that I was not able to save a copy, but had my answers to the last questions in the short questionnaire:

To ensure the proposed franchising scheme is successful and meets the needs of the community, I would like to emphasise the following key priorities:

Education Transport: Addressing school-related transport must be a cornerstone of the franchising scheme. School term congestion is a significant issue in Cambridge, and providing reliable, coordinated bus services

aligned with school timetables is critical. This will not only reduce the number of cars on the road but also relieve the financial burden on the County Council by integrating school transport into the public bus network. Ensuring comprehensive route coverage for all schools, including those in rural or underserved areas, will promote equitable access to education. Affordable student passes, clear communication with families, and prioritising school routes during roadworks will enhance both accessibility and efficiency.

Congestion Reduction: Cambridge's sheer congestion, particularly during peak hours, requires bold measures. The franchising scheme should prioritise the creation of bus lanes and other priority measures to make bus travel faster and more reliable than car travel. By offering well-designed routes, frequent services, and competitive pricing, the scheme can shift more commuters from private cars to public transport, significantly easing congestion. Improved park-and-ride options, particularly for those traveling into Cambridge from surrounding areas, can further support this goal.

Coordination with Utility and Roadworks: Uncoordinated roadworks and utility projects are a major disruptor of bus services. The franchising scheme must include robust collaboration with the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) and utility providers to minimise disruptions. This could involve establishing a prioritisation framework for road closures, ensuring that essential routes—especially those serving schools and key commuter areas—are maintained during construction. Advanced communication of closures and alternative routes should be a key part of this process.

Comprehensive Route Coverage: Ensuring the franchised network reaches underserved areas, including rural communities and employment hubs, is essential. A robust, interconnected network will help bridge the gaps in accessibility, ensuring that no community is left behind. The network should also prioritise critical destinations like hospitals, schools, and shopping areas to provide comprehensive, inclusive coverage.

Environmental Sustainability: The franchising scheme is an opportunity to advance sustainability goals. Prioritising the adoption of electric or hydrogen-powered buses will reduce emissions and align with Cambridge's broader environmental objectives. Providing bicycle storage on buses and integrating with cycling infrastructure can further encourage sustainable, multimodal journeys.

Customer Service and Passenger Experience: Exceptional customer service should be a hallmark of the franchised system. This includes driver training, clear and accessible communication about schedules and disruptions, and efficient handling of complaints or service issues. Real-time tracking and user-friendly ticketing systems, including integrated fares across transport modes, will greatly improve the passenger experience.

Night buses: Night buses are a crucial element of a comprehensive public transport system, particularly in a city like Cambridge with its vibrant nighttime economy and diverse community needs. They provide essential services for shift workers at hospitals (bio medical centre), students, and those engaging in evening social activities, ensuring that public transport remains accessible beyond standard hours. To maximise safety and usability, it is vital that night bus routes are planned along well-lit roads wherever possible, reducing safety concerns for passengers walking to and from stops. Night buses also support sustainable travel by reducing reliance on taxis and private vehicles during late hours, contributing to congestion reduction and environmental goals. Incorporating reliable, well-routed night bus services into the franchising scheme would help create a truly inclusive and functional network for all users, day and night.

The franchising scheme presents an opportunity to address longstanding challenges in Cambridge's transport network. Prioritising school transport, reducing congestion, coordinating roadworks, and ensuring comprehensive route coverage will make the system more efficient and equitable. Additionally, a strong focus on environmental sustainability and excellent customer service will ensure the network is not only modern but also future-proof.

By aligning the scheme with these priorities, the Combined Authority can deliver a public transport system that truly meets the needs of the community while addressing critical issues like congestion, equity, and environmental impact.

Building the Organisation for Bus Franchising: I am concerned about the scale of work and the level of organisational development needed to implement and sustain a successful franchising scheme. Establishing the necessary governance structures, recruiting skilled staff, and developing expertise in areas like route planning, financial management, and regulatory compliance will require significant time and resources.

The Combined Authority must also invest in the right technology, data systems, and customer service frameworks to ensure smooth operations. This process is further complicated by the need to transition effectively from existing arrangements while maintaining service continuity. It will be essential to create a robust, arms-length organisation that can operate independently of short-term political cycles and focus on long-term strategic goals. Clear leadership, phased implementation, and ongoing performance monitoring will be critical to building a resilient and capable organisation to manage franchising effectively. I hope that most systems will be taken from other cities such as London and Manchester so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel!!

MEETINGS ATTENDED and COMMUNITY WORK 3 November to 2 December 2024

Local meetings:

Quarterly Highways Meeting (8 Nov), Oakington & Westwick PC meeting (11 Nov), Northstowe Delivery Group (14 Nov), Urban & Civic (15 Nov), Northstowe Town Council (26 Nov), Afghan Families meeting (28 Nov).

County Council meetings:

Children & Young People [CYP] Chair/Vice Chair (5, 8 Nov), CYP Business Planning & Budget meetings (6, 15 Nov), CPCA meetings (12 Nov), Northstowe Senior Responsible Officer (14 Nov), Highways (19 Nov), Cambridgeshire Schools Forum (22 Nov), CYP Education Transport Funding (22 Nov), Chairs & Vice Chairs Budget Session (25 Nov), CYP committee and pre-meet (26 Nov), Smart Journeys (27 Nov).

Community work:

Parish/Town Council monthly report, Column write ups within Northstowe News, Oakington & Westwick Journal and Over News online magazine. Northstowe Foodies and Marshall for Light Up Northstowe (29 Nov)

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, ASB.

WARD NEWS

TRANSPORT: Busway Crisis

I am continuing to talk to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to confirm the timing of survey and continue to raise issues with Stagecoach after putting up a post on social media last week, current issues being outlined by residents and discussed at Northstowe Town Council meeting in November are:

- buses are not aligned with London trains, especially in the evening, waiting around for 50mins
- 5 Bus needs to be double decker during peak times, as it is being used more by residents, arriving full by the time it reaches Bar Hill and leaving residents at the bus stop
- 5 Bus is working well, but too slow
- concerns about ticket seller at the Longstanton Park and Ride if they are not able to get on buses – what happens for refunds.
- Long waits during evening peak times at Drummer Street, Cambridge Science Park
- Buses still unreliable, not turning up or arrive full
- Double Decker needed for A bus, but there are bridges at the southern section – not sure what the solution to this could be, as coming off road would add more time, and changing buses would be more disruptive
- Bus journey time to Addenbrookes is taking 1.5-2 hours, 3.5/4 hours of travelling in one day, by car it would take 60mins return!
- Ticket seller working well, but middle doors should open for dismounting

Update on Café at Northstowe Learning Community

Despite initially receiving around six expressions of interest for running the café, no final submissions were received by the deadline. Meridian Trust will follow up with those who showed interest to gather feedback. The work on the café area is nearly complete, so the facility will be protected to prevent any damage until a suitable provider is found.

Police Community Engagement Panel

Cambridgeshire Police hold quarterly public forums where they give updates on the service in South Cambs as well as take questions from the public. The 27 November meeting was moved to 4 December at 7pm, this is a good opportunity to raise any concerns. To register for the event, follow this link –

[Cambridge Community Engagement meeting December 2024 Tickets, Wed, Dec 4, 2024 at 7:00 PM | Eventbrite](#)

MEANWHILE on the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is developing a Fen Roads Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads. This is something I have been asking the Combined Authority to get involved in, given how important our peat soil affected roads are to our area.

The Combined Authority has also received an update on the project 'to address existing and future challenges around capacity and road safety' on transport corridor between Ely and Cambridge. The Department for Transport asked the Combined Authority to put forward a preferred option that includes both junction improvements and dualling, and a lower cost alternative option. Further work is in progress or about to begin, and is expected to conclude by the end of January.

The Authority's Best Value Improvement programme is closing down, now that the 'best value notice' improved by the previous government has been lifted.

More than £10 million announced for better buses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – was the good news announced by the Government on 17 November. details of the funding are still being worked through, but potential improvements could include more frequent services, bus fare schemes, building on the success of the Tiger Card, improvements to bus stops and customer information.

The UK government also announced late October, that the bus fare cap would increase from £2 to £3 and remain in place until the end of 2025.

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.