

# Cllr Lorna Dupré

## MONTHLY REPORT OCTOBER 2021

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### COVID-19

#### Overview

Covid cases are rising across the county, largely due to the return of schools. In Cambridgeshire 32 per cent of recorded Covid cases for the week ending 22 September were in the 10 to 14 age group. A further 11 per cent were amongst those aged 15 to 19. Secondary school students are being encouraged to test twice a week to help identify those who have Covid without symptoms. All adults are also being encouraged to use rapid lateral flow tests regularly as well.

There has also been a rise in the number of people aged 40+ testing positive, believed to be because children are taking the virus home to their parents or carers. This is of course concerning as it means more older people may catch Covid and we know that they are far more likely to suffer more severe symptoms and end up in hospital, particularly if they are unvaccinated.

#### Case rates in Cambridgeshire

Huntingdonshire	489.4 per 100,000 (UP 55 per cent)
Fenland	464.3 per 100,000 (UP 29.2 per cent)
<b>East Cambridgeshire</b>	<b>418.1 per 100,000 (UP 63.2 per cent)</b>
Cambridgeshire (all)	383.1 per 100,000 (UP 36.2 per cent)
National average	333.9 per 100,000
Regional average	315.7 per 100,000
South Cambridgeshire	284.6 per 100,000 (UP 12.5 per cent)
Cambridge	266.3 per 100,000 (UP 19.4 per cent)

Comparisons with previous week in brackets.

#### Vaccinations

Vaccination take-up varies by district, with Cambridge around 10 per cent behind the rest of the country which of course is concerning. In the other areas, acceptance rates are largely in line with the national average.

The end of September saw vaccinations starting to be offered to 12-15 year olds in secondary schools. Vaccinating this age group should also help to reduce the need for young people to have time off school and reduce the risk of spread of the virus within schools. Education and public health teams continue to work closely with schools to manage the high number of Covid cases and to ensure that schools can continue to keep children learning in the classroom.

- Vaccination bookings [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19)
- Vaccination walk-in centres and pop-up clinics [www.thevaccinators.co.uk](http://www.thevaccinators.co.uk)

The Government has decided to end the shielding scheme for clinically vulnerable people. The County Council is therefore writing to everyone on the local shielding list to ensure they are aware of this. They will also receive a letter from the Government. The Countywide coordination hub, which has supported thousands of people since the start of the pandemic, will continue to operate, alongside a network of support hubs across the county, with anyone in need of help urged to get in touch.

- <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/covid-19-coordination-hub-your-community-needs-you>

The Government has extended the financial payments available to help people self-isolate, until the end of next March. These payments support people who will lose income as a result of having to self-isolate and will struggle to pay their bills or buy food and essentials.

- <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19-support-to-self-isolate>

## Testing

Mobile rapid testing vehicles continue to visit sites across the county, offering on-the-spot lateral flow tests as well as test kits to take away and complete at home. You can also order kits to use at home. More information at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rapidtesting](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rapidtesting)

## Information

- <https://twitter.com/CambsCC>
  - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19-overview>
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## Peer challenge

The County Council invited the Local Government Association to send in a Peer Challenge team to look at how the council works. The team's report has now been published. The team found 'there are positive early signs that the joint administration in Cambridgeshire County Council is working collaboratively and there is a strong willingness to work together and create strategic plans to deliver against the future challenges and political ambition'.

The team's main recommendations are as follows.

1. Devise a strategic approach to financial strategic planning for Cambridgeshire as a place.
2. Ensure the budget planning process for 2022/23 addresses the medium-term budget gap and incorporates contingency planning.
3. Develop a member/officer strategic forum to consider the overarching picture of progress and outcomes across the organisation.
4. Take action to recalibrate member roles, behaviours and conduct.

5. Sustainable capacity in the Chief Executive role needs to be established for Cambridgeshire.
6. Embrace the opportunity to reset, clarify and rebuild the different roles for the Combined Authority, the Greater Cambridge Partnership, Cambridgeshire County Council, and District and Town and Parish Councils in place shaping and place delivery, and take the lead where appropriate.
7. There is a need to review 'This Land'.
8. Review the effectiveness of the new Committee system arrangements, including the role of scrutiny, in six months.
9. The use of short-term additional capacity should be considered to ensure that there is the necessary capability to both develop and deliver the savings programme and strategic financial plan.
10. Develop some shared services to deliver greater efficiencies through shared data and client record systems and a shared service Target Operating Model where appropriate.
11. Further develop the current organisational resource to better support wider transformation and innovation.

There were also some recommendations about the future of shared services with our partners.

- <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/Cambridgeshire-County-Council-Corporate-Peer-Challenge-Report.pdf>

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## Parental leave policy

The County Council's Constitution & Ethics Committee voted to recommend to the Full Council a new parental leave policy. The policy would allow six months maternity leave to councillors giving birth, adopting, fostering for adoption, or becoming surrogate parents, and two weeks paternity leave for biological, adoptive or surrogate fathers. The proposal is the result of a recommendation from the Independent Remuneration Panel, highlighting the positive benefits it could bring to attracting a more diverse group of people to become councillors.

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## Free school meals

Cambridgeshire County Council is keeping its promise to maintain free school meals for eligible children during school holidays. During the recent summer holidays the Council allocated

- 32,725 vouchers to families with eligible children in schools
  - 4,050 vouchers to families with eligible children in early years settings
  - 250 vouchers to families with eligible children not on a school roll or in an independent school.
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## HGV driver shortages

The shortage of HGV drivers means the County Council is facing challenges in both home to school transport and school catering. These difficulties are being managed but are adding still more pressure for staff on top of Covid.

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## Watercourse reinstatement grants

The County Council has agreed to offer grants from a pot of money set up to ensure watercourses across the county are properly maintained. Applications may be made by established community flood groups and parish councils where a watercourse needs to be reinstated, and the riparian owner\* either cannot be identified or genuinely cannot afford the works to reinstate their watercourse.

*\*A riparian owner is anyone who owns a property where there is a watercourse within or adjacent to the boundaries of their property. A watercourse includes a river, stream or ditch. A riparian owner is also responsible for watercourses or culverted watercourses passing through their land.*

The Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee has set criteria against which applications will be considered. It is expected that the work to bring the watercourse back up to standard would be one-off in nature, with them being regularly maintained thereafter.

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## Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

The County Council's Flood & Water team has been revising the Council's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy in the light of the growing recognition of climate change, and the flood events of last winter. The updated strategy will be considered by the Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee later this year.

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## Biodiversity boost

The County Council's Strategy & Resources Committee has agreed a request from me and my committee vice-chair, for additional investment over this winter in biodiversity across the county.

The need for extra resource has been identified as a result of increased use of public open spaces (including several council-owned scheduled monuments) as more and more people have taken to the outdoors in the pandemic.

The requested £109k is to be used towards staff capacity and to undertake urgent and seasonally dependent site repairs and maintenance, plus beginning a biodiversity audit across the council's land which will help with the countywide

'doubling nature' agenda. We have inherited from the previous administration a commitment to increase biodiversity by 20 per cent—but no baseline from which to measure this.

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## Queen's Green Canopy

I was recently invited to be interviewed by Richard 'Spanners' Ready on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire's The Great Outdoors Sunday morning programme, about the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

The scheme will see thousands of trees planted between now and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next summer. 70 special trees, one for each year of her reign, will be given to schools in cities across the UK, including Spring Meadow in Ely.

Local individuals, schools, businesses, community groups, councils are all being encouraged to plant trees where appropriate to do so. The County Council's website includes advice on this, and the national Queen's Green Canopy website will soon include a map on which residents can mark the trees they have planted as part of the scheme.

In Cambridgeshire, the initiative is backed by the Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire Julie Spence. The County Council will be identifying some land in its ownership on which to plant trees.

- <https://queensgreencanopy.org>
  - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/improving-the-natural-environment/trees-and-woodland/queens-green-canopy-project>
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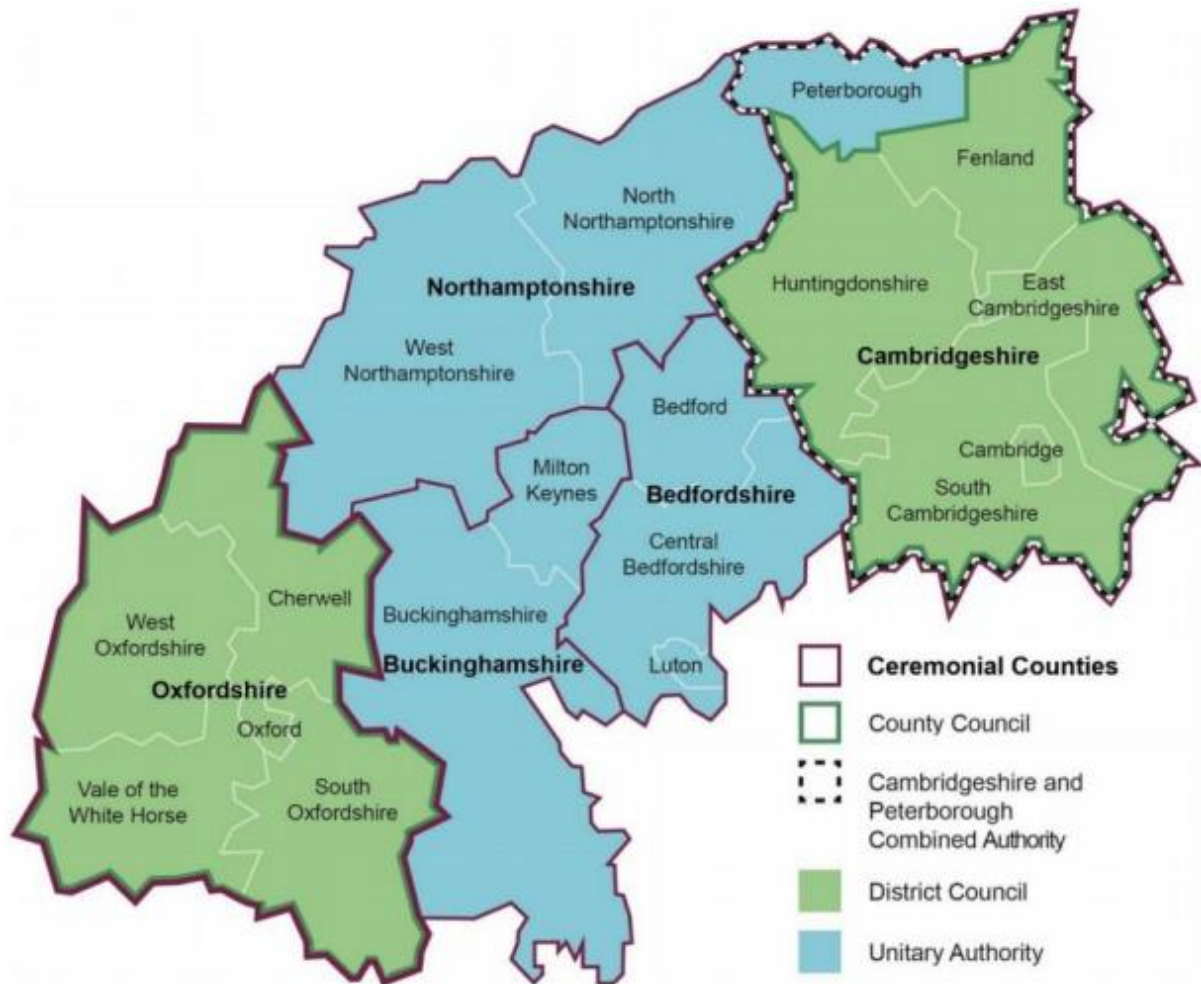
## Climate Strategy review

The County Council is beginning the process of reviewing its Climate Change and environment strategy, which will come to the Environment & Green Investment Committee at the end of this year. The new administration has committed to move the Council's climate change targets forward towards 2030 where it can.

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## OxCam Arc principles

The County Council is responding to the Government consultation on the principles of the OxCam Arc, an area of proposed growth from Oxford to Cambridge. This is a Government initiative, not a County Council one. The amount and detail of information within the consultation is not sufficient to respond with any detail or certainty. The Council is engaging in the Government process, but this should not in any way be construed as endorsement of what is being put forward.



The Council's response says that any growth must be led through the Local Plan process and justified by need, and should enhance and complement existing communities. It should demonstrate how it will help achieve the county's net zero carbon aspirations, and contribute to maximising positive health and wellbeing outcomes for all. Water management should be considered early on. New growth areas should facilitate opportunities for public transport, and active travel should be prioritised.

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### Dangerous chemicals on old Mepal-Sutton alignment

A resident referred to me the dumping of two large canisters on the old Mepal-Sutton right of way, containing corrosive chemicals. I took this up with the Council's highways department, who tracked them to one of the subcontractors working on the Council's micro-asphalting programme. As this was not the first such abuse by the subcontractor of the storage facility on the right of way, the Council has now withdrawn use of the facility from that particular subcontractor.

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### Highways updates

- Wayhead Drove: road recycling and surface dressing is due to take place between Monday 11 and Tuesday 19 October.
- West Fen Road: road recycling and surface dressing is due to take place for five days starting Monday 18 October.

- Long Causeway: I have received a complaint about the condition of the road between Coveney and Wardy Hill following resurfacing, which I have passed to officers.
- Hundred Foot Bank: I have received concerns from residents about the condition of this road, which is not currently in the Council's three-year programme. I am arranging to meet council officers on site.
- M11: National Highways (formerly Highways England) will be carrying out maintenance work on the M11 to replace the expansion joints and re-waterproof the junction 9 bridge. They are also carrying out some resurfacing. The work will be planned to be completed over 13 weeks to Monday 13 December, subject to weather conditions.

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### **Hospital waiting lists**

5.45M people across the UK are waiting for hospital treatment following the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthwatch Cambridgeshire would like to hear from residents if they or a loved one have been affected by cancellations or delayed treatment, operations or appointments. They have published a short online survey for residents to complete.

- <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/SQVSJO/?ct>
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## Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority has been told by the Government that after May 2022 there will be no tranches of funding for it—or any other Combined Authority—for affordable housing. The Combined Authority was granted £100M for affordable housing in 2016 for a five year period. News is still awaited from Government on whether it will support the affordable housing programme put forward by the Combined Authority for 2021-22.

The Combined Authority has also agreed to close down its £100K homes scheme. A report to the Combined Authority's Housing Committee said: "It is noted that the objectives of the £100K homes programme were worthy, but the scale of the delivery was limited and the funding resources that enabled the loans to deliver the majority of the £100K homes opportunities are now no longer available. Various reduced cost purchase options for local people are a key part of the schemes that CPCA want to see started in the future, subject to the funding position with MHCLG [Government department]."

The financial impact of the closure of the iMET centre at Alconbury Weald has hit the headlines, with the Combined Authority facing an £8M loss. The centre was established in 2016 by the business-led Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to train young people, and the £10.5M construction and fit-out was cost supported through a Government grant from the Local Growth Fund. The obvious point that without public transport no young person would be able to get to Alconbury Weald appears to have eluded decision-makers. The centre opened in 2018 and closed within two years having made substantial losses. Meanwhile the LEP had been taken over by the Combined Authority under the previous Mayor. The building is now being sold, but the Combined Authority which has been left holding the baby will net only around £2.4M.

Plans are being put together by the Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which I chair, for the first Mayoral Question Time—the first of what will be a regular opportunity to hold the new Mayor to account.

## Meet Your Councillor

Sutton ward district councillor Mark Inskip and I will be holding our virtual surgery via Zoom from 6:30 to 7:30PM on

- Tuesday 12 October 2021
- Tuesday 9 November 2021

Please contact Mark at [mark@markinskip.org.uk](mailto:mark@markinskip.org.uk) to book your timeslot.

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## Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division