

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT DECEMBER 2023

STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

Council leaders respond to Chancellor's autumn statement

Cambridgeshire County Council leaders have expressed disappointment about the lack of any additional funding for local government in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council said: "The failure to address the funding crisis faced by the whole local government sector, caused by rising levels of inflation and spiralling need, in [the] Autumn Statement is disappointing for all County Councils.

"While we welcome an increase in the national minimum wage, as people on the lowest wages have been affected most by the cost of living crisis, this will make setting our budget this year even more difficult. Councils like Cambridgeshire have been underfunded for many years by central government, and central government are again asking for more growth without recognising the costs that brings in the need to provide more schools and more care for our growing older population.

"A previously announced £2.3million over the next two years for highways improvements in Cambridgeshire is helpful, but it's a drop in the ocean of the need for investment in our highways network. Soaring inflation in highway maintenance costs, alongside the impact of climate change on our 4500 miles of roads, 37% of which are affected by peat damage due to extreme weather events, have left us with a huge challenge to simply stand still on keeping our roads safe. Like the Local Government Association said over the weekend, we need highways funding to be over a minimum of five years—as has been offered to National Highways."

"We're firmly on the side of our residents and remain committed to bringing forward proposals in our budget next month which focus on those who are in greatest need, and which consider some of the key areas that were highlighted to us in our Quality of Life survey this year – such as improvements to our highways, mental health support – particularly for younger people, tackle the climate emergency and support those most affected by the current cost of living crisis." said Cllr Elisa Meschini, deputy leader of the council.

"The cost-of-living crisis means it's costing us far more today to do the same things we were doing just a few months ago. This at a time when more and more people than ever need our help. We've already seen applications to

our household support fund reach their highest ever levels this summer, compared to the same time last year.” confirmed Cllr Tom Sanderson, Leader of the Independent group on the council, and chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.

Proposals for Cambridgeshire County Council’s 2024/5 budget and five-year business plan are set to be presented to its Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 19 December, the same day the Government is likely to unveil the full detail of its Local Government Financial Settlement.

National concern at council funding challenges

County councils across the country have warned of the risk of major budget overspends due to ‘uncontrollable’ pressures, and fear that even well-managed councils are ‘running out of road to prevent insolvency’.

The County Councils Network (CCN) says all frontline council services are being affected, with increasing demand for care services amongst vulnerable children and a rise in the cost of placing children in care leading to spiralling costs.

- £319 million of the projected £639 million national overspend by county councils this year comes from children’s services.
- One in ten ‘well-managed’ councils are unsure whether they are able to balance their budget this year, which is a legal requirement. This figure is expected to rise to four in ten for next year, and then six in ten for 2025.

The overall funding deficit is anticipated to reach £4 billion up to 2026, regardless of the £2 billion worth of savings and cuts that councils are planning to make in order to prevent the issuing of a ‘Section 114 Notice’ (the local government equivalent of bankruptcy).

Council wins staff development award

Cambridgeshire has become the first county council to be awarded ‘Silver’ membership of The 5% Club’s 2023-24 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, graduate development programmes and sponsored student course placements.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Winter vaccinations

Flu, COVID-19, and shingles vaccines are now available for eligible groups. Flu and COVID-19 vaccination information at www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations and information about shingles vaccinations at www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/shingles-vaccination/

Older Adults Social Inclusion Grants

Cambridgeshire County Council is opening up grant funding for services, clubs and activities that support older adults (over 65) with emerging care or support needs to be:

- socially included in their community
- more physically active
- as independent as they can be.

These activities support the Council's 'Care Together' objective of enabling older adults to remain independent for as long as possible. Older adults and partners have co-designed what should be funded in each Cambridgeshire district.

Some examples of the grants on offer include:

- building-based services (day centres)
- community-based activities (providing opportunities for social interaction, such as lunch clubs, wellbeing walks, knit and natter groups)
- hospital discharge support (with a view to regaining independence)
- some Community Transport funding.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/care-together/older-adults-social-inclusion-grants>

ASSETS & PROCUREMENT

Shire Hall to be re-marketed

Cambridgeshire County Council is poised to begin work to find a new commercial partner in the redevelopment of the former Shire Hall building in Cambridge.

The previous preferred bidder Brookgate has now confirmed that altered market conditions mean they are unable to complete the deal. Councillors have been asked to approve moves to re-market the site from early next year with a deadline to complete with a new partner by the end of 2024.

Council officers have been working with expert legal and property advisors to review the six-acre site and provide a comprehensive update on all the options available. The review has recommended that the development of the site for office and hotel use remains the most valuable option for potential developers and local taxpayers—with a likely annual return in the region of £3 million each year to invest in frontline services for the next fifty years and £6 million to invest in Cambridgeshire's infrastructure and assets.

All proposals for the site will require full planning, Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument consents, and ensure protection of the assets on site.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Teenage fostering appeal

In Cambridgeshire, there are currently more than 400 young people in the 12-18 age range who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to continue living with their birth families. These young people would benefit hugely from the invaluable experience of people who have raised teenagers and supported them on their journey to independence.

When you foster with the Cambridgeshire Fostering Service, you will receive:

- generous allowances and carer perks
- an individualised training programme tailored to your needs
- round-the-clock support
- a dedicated, skilled and experienced Supervising Social Worker

If you are over 21 years of age, have a spare bedroom, and believe you have the qualities and skills to become a compassionate, resilient foster carer, please get in touch.

Facebook at [@CCCFosteringService](#)

Online at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/fostering-and-adoption

Phone 0800 052 0078

Care quality initiative

The new initiative aimed at nurturing and developing social care skills in Cambridgeshire (see November report) has now been launched.

Cambridgeshire Academy for Reaching Excellence (CARE) is a new approach launched by Cambridgeshire County Council to support learning and develop talent within its children's social worker and social care practitioner workforce.

The new Social Care Academy aims to improve outcomes for children and young people through support and training being offered for social work students and apprentices, international practitioners, experienced social workers and those in leadership positions. It comes at a time when across the country local authorities are facing a shortage of social workers.

For more information see www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/care

Modeshift STARS

Four Cambridgeshire schools attended a regional award ceremony for their achievements in promoting sustainable travel and developing school travel plans. The schools made a shortlist of only 124 schools across England chosen to take part in the 2023 Modeshift STARS Regional Awards.

Two of these, Highfield Littleport Academy and Barnabas Oley C of E Primary School went on to win STARS Local Authority School of the Year 2023/24 awards. Highfield Littleport then went on to receive STARS Regional SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities) School of the Year 2023/24 – East of England. All these awards are fantastic achievements.

Highfield Littleport, which is part of The Active Learning Trust, will now go on to represent the East of England in person at the National STARS School Travel Awards in London in March 2024.

Modeshift STARS, supported by the Department for Transport, is the national school travel awards scheme to recognise schools that have demonstrated excellence in supporting walking, cycling and other forms of sustainable travel for the journey to and from school.

Cambridgeshire County Council's Road Safety team is keen to see more schools in Cambridgeshire taking part in the Modeshift STARS travel planning scheme to encourage sustainable school travel. More information about the scheme can be found at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/road-safety/road-safety-education-for-schools/school-travel-planning

Holiday activities and food

This Christmas, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is offering free spaces for children in Cambridgeshire who are eligible for free school meals, to enjoy enriching experiences and nutritious food.

Approximately 19,000 HAF eligibility vouchers have been sent to families. These vouchers offer sixteen hours of access, for no charge, to a HAF scheme this Christmas, subject to availability. Each session will include a nutritious meal, a variety of exciting activities or sports and the opportunity to socialise with other children.

The HAF scheme is part of the County Council's 'Be Winter Wise' campaign, which draws together a range of services, activities and offers, keeping communities across Cambridgeshire informed and prepared to stay safe and healthy during the winter months of 2023 and 2024.

Subject to availability of places, any child receiving benefit-related free school meals is eligible for the programme. The programme will run from 21 December to 3 January, except for bank holidays.

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the scheme enables councils to coordinate free holiday childcare and enriching experiences locally. The programme will be delivered by approved providers, co-ordinated by Cambridgeshire County Council. The Council is working with schools, childcare

providers and voluntary and community organisations to deliver the programme.

Further information at

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/holiday-activities-and-food-programme

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Swaffham Prior Community Heat Network

The Swaffham Prior community heat project, which is offering residents in the village the opportunity to swap from oil to clean green energy with no upfront costs and better prices, has won the prestigious Edie Net Zero Award for Renewable Energy Project of the Year.

The Edie Awards—formerly known as the Sustainability Leaders Awards—are the world’s largest sustainable business awards and recognise green projects which are transforming the energy landscape for good.

There are more than 25,000 homes in Cambridgeshire—and around 4.4 million nationally—that are off the gas grid. The Swaffham Prior project provides a new business model for community-wide adoption of renewable heat, and off-gas communities have been in touch wanting to replicate the project.

Meanwhile, interest in the project continues, and I was interviewed on-site by Reuters last month who were keen to cover the scheme.

New Environment Minister

I was invited on to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire after last month’s Government reshuffle to respond to the move of North East Cambridgeshire MP Stephen Barclay from Health to Environment.

I pointed out that there are national challenges he needs to address, like climate change and the water pollution scandal. But I said Cambridgeshire also faces local environmental issues.

- Flood risk in the north of the county; water shortages in the south.
- The need to get 25,000 homes off oil, and retrofit many thousands more.
- Carbon emissions from our peatland, and how to cut these while continuing to farm and to feed the nation.
- Transport, the biggest source of carbon in Cambridgeshire.
- And being asked to tackle all of that while meeting demands for huge growth in and around Cambridge.

There are things the new Environment Secretary can do directly. Implement sensible funding regimes, not ones where bidding rounds for funding open, then

run dry within ten minutes. Real serious investment in flood defences to protect vulnerable communities and in decarbonising our homes and buildings.

But he also needs to be the voice calling for action across Government. He needs to be talking to Transport ministers about money to repair and rebuild the fen roads damaged by the effects of extreme weather on their soil base; and about major public transport and active travel investment, and an electric vehicle charging network that meets the growing demand.

He needs to be talking to colleagues within Defra about being helpful to Cambridgeshire in trying to move to weekly food waste collection under new Government demands when we are constrained and limited by a waste PFI (private finance initiative) contract that runs until 2036.

But most of all, we need to know where we stand with Government. David Cameron is now back in Government as Foreign Secretary, but when he was Prime Minister it didn't take him long to move from hugging a husky to demanding that the Government should 'cut all the green cr*p' (a direct quote that earned me a rap on the knuckles from presenter Louise Hulland). The present Government is moving away from its environmental targets as fast as it can, in response to vociferous and powerful lobbying.

Flood drop-in

The County Council's flood and water team will be joined by representatives of the National Flood Forum and other partner organisations at a dedicated drop-in session on Friday 8 December from 10:00AM to 12:30PM at New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald. The event is open to all, and no bookings are necessary.

The team will be able to discuss any concerns, explain measures you can take to help protect your property and community against flooding, and talk you through how to report different types of flooding.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Local Highways Improvement applications

The window for Local Highways Improvement applications is now open, and will remain so until 5:00PM on Friday 12 January 2024.

More information can be found on the Council's website at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/improving-the-local-highway/local-highway-improvement-funding/applying-for-a-local-highway-improvement-lhi

The status of schemes currently in delivery can be found at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and->

parking/roads-and-pathways/improving-the-local-highway/local-highway-improvement-funding/local-highway-improvement-delivery-programme

Over the course of the application window officers have arranged a drop-in session for applicants with any questions. This will take place on Friday 5 January 2024, 10:30AM—12:00noon). If you are an applicant parish council, please contact the relevant County Council officers to confirm your attendance.

Street lights switchover on the way

The Highways and Transport committee agreed in October a project to switch its street lights to newer, more efficient LED lights.

The work is expected to begin in 2024 and will involve replacing 47,500 streetlights with LED lanterns. This will take two years to complete. The works should cause minimal disruption to residents, with no impact on roads or footpaths. Each unit should take about one hour to replace.

The Council will share the proposed installation dates for each area before the start of the works, and will publish this information on its web site. The Council's street lighting service provider, Balfour Beatty Living Places, will also provide information on its own web site. Questions can be addressed to

Street.Lighting@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Wardy Hill Byway 12

Wardy Hill Byway 12 is due to be cut back this winter subject to weather and contractor timetables.

Coveney Footpath 3 Gravel End to Downham Hythe

I have continued to chase up the restoration of a crossing to enable the reopening of Footpath 3 from Gravel End to Downham Hythe. Officers have now commissioned Milestone to construct a new footbridge at this location beginning with a site appraisal, ground Investigation, topographical survey and other necessary preparations.

The job will then have to be priced and a bridge fabricated. The earliest the team expects to be on site would be in summer 2024, but with the potential for unforeseen issues along the way. This is all immensely frustrating.

PLANNING

Envar

Waste management company Envar Composting Ltd have submitted an appeal to the Secretary of State after Cambridgeshire County Council voted in April to refuse their planning application.

Envar's plans include building a healthcare waste energy recovery facility on Somersham Road in Woodhurst, near St Ives, which would lead to the construction of a 26 metre-high chimney stack. This would allow for clinical waste, transported to the site from local hospitals, to be incinerated.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Code of Conduct complaint against Mayor Nik Johnson has now been adjudicated by the Combined Authority's Audit & Governance Sub-Committee. The Mayor was found to have breached the Code on two counts—civility and disrepute, the latter brought upon himself.

The Mayor was cleared of bullying but investigators took the view that his failure to intervene over the behaviour of a former employee 'amounted to him condoning such behaviour'. He was asked to issue an apology and to undertake appropriate training. The decision notice, the Mayor's apology, and a statement from the Combined Authority chief executive, are all publicly available at <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/code-of-conduct-decision-notice/>

The Board has agreed £550,000 for the next stage of the project for safe crossing of the A10/A142 BP roundabout, and £3M capital for construction.

The change of political control at Peterborough City Council last month following a vote of no confidence in leader Wayne Fitzgerald and his cabinet is significant for the Combined Authority. Peterborough, like Cambridgeshire County Council, has a veto over significant financial and transport decisions at the Combined Authority.

Following the change of control, the Combined Authority Board has been able to agree its updated Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, which Cllr Fitzgerald had previously vetoed.

A number of bus services have been reviewed and proposed ways forward agreed by the Combined Authority Board. These include the 8A between March and Cottenham, where a significantly improved interchange at Milton Park & Ride is being proposed; and the 12 between Newmarket and Ely via Fordham, Soham and Stuntney, which will be retained but kept under review.

In East Cambridgeshire, the proposal is for the Combined Authority to work with the District Council to agree preferred ways forward for potential trials of demand-responsive bus transport on two routes:

- Burwell to Ely via Soham, Fordham, Isleham and Prickwillow
- Mepal to Ely via Witcham, Wardy Hill, Coveney, Pymoor, Little Downham.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

- **Sutton:** Cllr Mark Inskip and I will be in the school Community Room on Monday 8 January and Monday 5 February, 6:30-7:30PM.
- **Witchford:** Cllr Dr Caroline Shepherd and I will be in St Andrew's Hall in Main Street on Monday 18 December and Monday 15 January, 6:30-7:30PM.
- **Little Downham:** I hope to be at the Book Café in the Village Hall on Friday 26 January from 10:00 to 11:00AM.
- **Coveney:** I hope to be at the Coveney coffee morning on Wednesday 20 December (change of date from last month's report).

I can also be contacted

- by email at lorna@lornadupre.org.uk
- on Facebook
- by phone on 07930 337596

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division