

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT APRIL 2026

FULL COUNCIL

The Full Council resolved to oppose any proposals to merge our local police force into a regional or national entity, and called on the Government to prioritise increased funding for community policing teams, national standards for vetting and technology upgrades to improve efficiency, and enhanced rural crime support and local police desks in community hubs.

The Full Council also resolved to explore ways to provide targeted holiday support including funding an ongoing holiday voucher scheme subject to the Government's funding rules, and using a proportion of the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund to do this where it meets Government eligibility criteria. The council also agreed to ask the Government to provide sufficient funding for councils to continue supporting families during school holidays.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has now announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation for Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Hampshire.

In all cases it has chosen new unitary councils which are smaller than their proposed 500,000 minimum population, and in the case of Norfolk and Suffolk it has chosen to split districts, something it originally indicated would be unusual.

With the Government apparently throwing all its criteria out of the window, we wait with interest for the Government's announcement for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which is expected in early July.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Holiday voucher values

Following the Government's withdrawal of the Household Support Fund, replaced by the Crisis & Resilience Fund with lower levels of funding, the council has agreed holiday voucher values as follows for the coming holidays.

Holiday Period	Weekly Voucher Value	Total Voucher Value
Easter (30 March – 10 April)	£10	£20
May Half Term (25 – 29 May)	£10	£10
Summer (21 July – 1 September)	£10	£60

The Crisis & Resilience Fund is expected to support all those facing 'financial shocks', not just children eligible for free school meals.

Two new special schools for Cambridgeshire

The Government has confirmed that it will be delivering two new special schools in Cambridgeshire—Greensands Academy in Gamlingay, and Lime Academy in March. Between them the two schools are expected to provide 270 new special school places in Cambridgeshire. Demand for in-county special school spaces has grown significantly year on year, in line with national trends, since these schools were first planned. In Cambridgeshire the number of children with an Education Health & Care Plan grew by 71 per cent from 2020 to 2025.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Help with oil heating costs

The council has received £708,000 from the Government which is ring-fenced to support households struggling with the cost of domestic oil heating. The money has been added to the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund, and applications are being administered by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation.

Applications to the fund opened on Monday 30 March. The link to apply is at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/crisis-payment>

This fund is intended for Cambridgeshire households on low incomes who are reliant on heating oil and who need to top up their tanks as a matter of urgency. To receive this support, applicants must meet all the following criteria:

- Live in Cambridgeshire.
- Be reliant on heating oil to heat their home and/or water.
- Have 150 litres or less of oil remaining at the time of application.
- Be in receipt of or eligible for one of the following means-tested benefits:
 - Universal Credit
 - Pension Credit
 - Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

If funding allows, the council hopes to expand the scheme at a later date to households on incomes just above the threshold for means-tested benefits, or with exceptionally high energy needs.

Eligible households can apply for up to £400 of support. The level of support awarded may fluctuate with the price of oil. The target for payment to be issued is 48 hours from the time that all required evidence is received. Once the fund is exhausted, second payments will be issued where necessary. Residents will first be expected to access income maximisation support from Citizens' Advice and only those referred back following a financial assessment will be eligible for further payments.

Residents can apply direct to Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, or may be referred by a referral organisation that has assessed their circumstances and can verify that they need immediate assistance. All applicants will need to provide proof of address, income, and the need to top-up with heating oil.

For residents whose household income is above the level for means-tested benefits, other support is available. The council funds Citizens' Advice Rural Cambs to deliver an income maximisation service.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/rural-cambs/>

All information and updates to residents can be found on the council's website. Any communications received by the Contact Centre are being directed to this webpage. The details of residents who have called or emailed the council so far are being collated and they will be contacted directly when the fund opens.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/help-with-utility-bills>

There will likely be a large number of residents applying into the fund and the outlined 48-hour turnaround for payments will be challenging in the early weeks of the fund, given foreseen high demand. In line with the Crisis and Resilience Fund and Poverty Commission objectives, applicants will receive signposting to other forms of support available to improve resilience against future financial shock.

ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN INVESTMENT

Help shape new Community Nature Recovery Plans

Cambridgeshire County Council is calling on residents across the county to play an active role in restoring local nature as part of the 'Nature Recovery - From the Ground Up' project—a new initiative supporting parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans.

A Community Nature Recovery Plan is a locally created blueprint that sets out priorities for improving nature and wildlife at a parish level. These plans help communities to shape a vision for nature locally and identify steps to bring about the changes. The plans will support the wider goals of Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Key actions include:

- Restoring habitats
- Creating nature corridors and stepping-stones for wildlife
- Increasing areas managed for wildlife.

As part of the project, all Cambridgeshire parishes will have free access to the online mapping software Parish Online until March 2027. This will allow parish councils and community groups acting on their behalf to map out proposed

projects relative to LNRS priorities, explore cross parish projects, and contribute to collaborative maps (for example showing swift boxes across the county).

Cambridgeshire is one of the counties with the least nature-rich land in England, and the LNRS sets out an ambitious plan to “double nature” locally, expanding nature-rich land from eight per cent to the national average of sixteen per cent.

The first phase of the project runs from July 2025 to March 2027, focusing on Cambridge and twenty parishes across East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, and South Cambridgeshire. Other parishes are invited to use the project resources and mapping software and register interest for future phases of the project.

The project is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council’s Just Transition Fund and delivered in partnership with Natural Cambridgeshire.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/improving-the-natural-environment/nature-recovery-from-the-ground-up>

HEALTH SCRUTINY

Children’s autism health services

The council’s health scrutiny committee considered the provision of health services for children with autism. CCS NHS Trust is the body responsible for provision of autism services for children aged 0-11.

Referral activity prior to the COVID-19 pandemic averaged fewer than 100 referrals per month. During the pandemic and periods of lockdown, referral numbers reduced slightly, falling to below 90 referrals per month. Since early 2022, average monthly referrals have risen to over 135 per month, with considerably greater month-to-month variation. This increased volatility makes demand more difficult to predict and plan for.

CPFT is responsible for services to 12-18 year olds. It reports that increasing awareness of autism and recognition presentations combined with high demand for complex multidisciplinary assessments have led to extended waiting times in some cases. An increasing number of families are seeking assessments from independent providers via their GPs, or via private referrals.

The Integrated Care Board, CCS and CPFT are aware of the issues within the services and the impact of waiting times on children and families, and are trialling several initiatives to address them. The challenges of increased awareness, demand for diagnosis support and strained resources to support this need remain a challenge.

Primary care in Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire is facing sustained and structurally significant population growth, especially in Cambridge and surrounding areas. It has an ageing population with long-term conditions, increased clinical complexity, health inequalities, delay in new or expanded healthcare premises, and pressure on appointment availability and telephone access.

Recruiting and retaining GPs and practice nurses is a challenge. There is disproportionate workload for practices serving communities in pockets of deprivation. The national 'Carr-Hill' formula for core GP funding is insufficiently responsive to deprivation and current patterns of need. The Government's Ten Year Plan is aiming to shift care from hospitals to neighbourhoods.

The Integrated Care Board explained how it is managing these challenges while itself going through a process of radical reorganisation. It is working with local GP practices, many of which are in a very vulnerable situation.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Road conditions

Highways & Transport Committee chair Cllr Alex Beckett has written a very informative article which is well worth a read at

<https://notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-right-now>

Road updates

Black Bank Road, Little Downham: Black Bank has sadly not scored highly enough for work to be done on it in the coming year. The road network will be re-scanned in April and May this year, and re-scored for next year's work plan. In the meantime, patching is being ordered once permission has been secured from Network Rail to work near the railway line.

The Droves, Little Downham: Second Drove will also be patched once Network Rail has given consent. Overnight working is planned to resurface the entrance to Third Drove under a night-time closure, and an order has been placed to repair carriageway defects along the drove—a date is awaited. Repairs to potholes on Fourth Drove and Main Drove have been ordered, with some small patching works on Main Drove.

Straight Furlong, Pymoor: daytime closure ongoing to 27 April for reconstruction.

Hundred Foot Bank, Pymoor: the section between the pumping station and Straight Furlong has been dilapidating fast. The council is assessing what patching can be done in the short term. Officers admit this is not the long-term solution this section of road needs, but it scored as a lower priority than the

roads which are being rebuilt this year. (I asked the council about the sign at the bend of Hundred Foot Bank which said surface dressing would be taking place in May and June. This sign is nothing to do with any works in Cambridgeshire and should now have been removed.)

Station Road, Sutton: footway resurfacing and widening is under way and is scheduled until 24 April.

Witcham Toll junction: widening of the junction where the A1421 meets the A142 is due to take place as soon as legal agreements have been finalised and road space booked. This work is being paid for by the developers of the housing at the top of Mepal Road Sutton; the homes there cannot be occupied until the changes to the road have been completed. The widening will enable more vehicles to queue side by side on the A142 to turn left or right, and the works will be entirely contained within the space of the existing highway. A number of people have expressed understandable disappointment that more significant changes to the junction are not happening, but there is no funding for this and the council can only ask the developers for a contribution that is proportionate to the development they are building.

Witchford cycleway: highways engineers have now completed the design ready for review. The next stage will be the road safety audit.

Earith Road, Willingham: not in Sutton division but used by a great many residents. The section between Roseberry holiday home site and the orchard has been completed. The question everyone is asking is when the section from Roseberry up to Earith Bridge will be repaired—unfortunately this will be a much more expensive job and did not score highly enough to be done in 2026/27. During the closure, the T12 bus was diverted to St Ives which was a popular destination. I recently met with the T12 operator to discuss bus services in the Sutton division.

Red Lion Lane Sutton

I was pleased to be able to get the serious overgrowth down the western side of Red Lion Lane cleared back before the start of the nesting season.

NEWS FROM THE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Water resources plan

Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan for eastern England including Cambridgeshire. This is a combination of infrastructure investment and demand management. Cambridgeshire will increasingly rely on water resources transferred from other parts of the region, and increased water storage, improved transfer and sharing of water between regions, and reduced demand will all be important.

Youth employment strategy

The Combined Authority has approved the development of a Youth Employment / NEET* Strategy for 14-25 year olds and recommend it to the Combined Authority Board.

*NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

Local visitor economy partnership

The Combined Authority has agreed to submit an application to Visit England for accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Rural tourism will be a key focus of this.

Electric vehicles

A two-phase trial will take place shortly across Cambridgeshire to install channels in pavements to carry cables for on-street charging of electric vehicles. This will be a very small trial, consisting of just ten dwellings in each district in Phase 1 between April and September, and a further forty in each district in Phase 2 later in the year. Further details will be forthcoming soon.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

Sutton surgery

Cllr Mark Inskip and I hold our monthly surgery at Joy Bistro 65 High Street Sutton. Forthcoming dates are Monday 27 April (a week early because of the bank holiday) and Monday 1 June, 18:30-19:30.

On Wednesday 29 April I hope to be at the Coveney coffee morning at 10:30AM and Little Downham Book Café at 2:00PM.

I can also be contacted ...

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

County Councillor for the Sutton division