Annual Report 2025

Cllrs
Maria King & Brian Milnes
Cambridgeshire County Council

County councillors for the Sawston and Shelfords division

1. Introduction

The composition of the County Council has changed during this Council's tenure.

The table below shows the current composition of the Council compared to the latest election results in May 2021. The Conservatives are not the largest group on the Council—for the first time ever.

	2021	2025
Conservatives	28	21
Liberal Democrats	20	23
Labour	9	10
Independents	4	3
Unaligned	0	4

Local elections for all 61 County Councillors across our 59 electoral divisions will be taking place on Thursday 1 May 2025. We encourage everyone who is registered to vote to take part in the forthcoming County Council Elections as well as the election of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor.

2. Your Councillors

The *Joint Administration* of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Independent councillors continues to run the Council. Our vision for Cambridgeshire remains unchanged and we are committed to creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire.

In the past year, Brian and Maria have had to step down from our various Committee memberships due to pressure from our full time jobs and/or other Council duties.

This is why this report will be our last as we are both standing down from the Council at this election.

The Lib Dem candidates have been selected and they are Peter Fane and Laurence Domary-Homan.

Peter and Laurence have a wealth of experience of local government, and are ideally able to deliver well formed, evidence-based policies.

They know how much value electors put on LibDems' activities in the community and they will, if elected, continue to build an excellent representation.

We have no hesitation in recommending them and fully endorse them as candidates.

It has been our privilege to be your elected representatives during a turbulent period in local, national and international politics.

3. Strategy, Resources & Performance

Returning to Cambridgeshire, the Council set a balanced budget in February 2025, though this is becoming increasingly difficult for councils of all political colours across the country. Since 2018, six local authorities in England have issued 'Section 114' notices—the nearest council equivalent to bankruptcy. A 2023 poll of English councillors found that a quarter of them believed that their council would soon go bankrupt, with 6 per cent saying this was 'very likely'.

Councillors acknowledged the challenges the council is facing with

the demand for services, increasing complexity of need, inflation and market failures. Despite this, the business plan and budget process has been about listening to residents which is why, for example, more than £56m is being invested into highways maintenance.

The county council had to close a gap of £35.1m – with 73% of the Council's net spend now being funded from Council Tax.

The council has prioritised several key areas, based on resident feedback through its Quality-of-Life survey, and are aligned to its vision to make Cambridgeshire greener, fairer and more caring: Sustaining critical adults and children's social care and continuing to support vulnerable communities.

The Council increased its portion of council tax by 4.99% in total— 2 % for adult social services. This increase will raise £20m of local income to help maintain and protect critical services for the most vulnerable communities. For most of our residents in Band A-D properties that will mean between an additional £1.04 pence to £1.55 a week.

For the second year, the county council commissioned the Quality of Life Survey involving more than 5,500 residents. We asked our residents to tell us what it is like for them living in Cambridgeshire and what concerns them most and we were delighted that so many people have been willing to participate.

We heard our residents continue to feel happy, safe and belong which is heartening. However, they have given a clear message about the challenges they are facing around the cost of living crisis. It is particularly concerning that residents are telling us that they are having to cut back on heating and nutritious food. Whilst work to tackle poverty is still ongoing, we clearly need to keep looking at what we can do to support our residents further if we want to deliver on our vision to be a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire. The survey also tells us that fewer people are struggling with mental and physical health this year which is a positive change for our residents.

4. Adults & Health

The Adults and Health Committee has a significant role in ensuring 'health inequalities are reduced' and 'people enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs', as part of our Strategic Framework

We have confirmed our commitment to ensuring ongoing support for people with learning disabilities and their families, following changes to how the council works with the NHS in Cambridgeshire. The Learning Disability Partnership (LDP), which has provided integrated health and social care support for adults with learning disabilities in Cambridgeshire, will be formally dissolved from 1 April 2025.

The Council and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care Board (ICB) are continuing discussions on how to work together to maintain services across the county. However, discussions are ongoing about payments owed for the services provided by the council, including historical debts. There still remains an opportunity to reach an agreement before entering formal legal mediation, and the council hopes for a constructive resolution that benefits all

involved, particularly those who rely on these important services.

County councillors have raised concerns about this service separation and the associated financial issues, which has been formally escalated as a corporate risk by the council. Reports presented to the Adults and Health Committee, have highlighted the potential impact of these unresolved issues, and the council continues to press for a resolution.

5. Children & Young People

In Cambridgeshire, between 2020 and 2024, there was a 70% increase in children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), cost increases in home to school transport and in autism services over the same period. The council is facing significant pressures to meet the demand and costs of supporting children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities. Currently we do not receive adequate funding from Government to meet the need. We are doing all we can locally to manage the increased pressures on funding as result of this rising demand. We have recently submitted a revised Safety Valve proposal to the Department for Education to help the council to manage these dual pressures of rising demand and costs.

The Council endorsed a motion for an urgent national review of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system at the March Full Council meeting. The motion called on the council's Chief Executive to write to Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Schools to take assertive action to address the SEND crisis recognising that for the lowest funded Local Authority areas, like Cambridgeshire, children and young people are the most impacted because the funding received is not sufficient to meet the existing needs. A recent report from the Local Government Association and the County Councils Network, stated that reform was necessary, essential, and unavoidable, which was an honest and thorough assessment of the SEND crisis.

6. Communities, Social Mobility & Inclusion Committee "COSMIC"

COSMIC has continued to oversee the Household Support Fund, which supports people experiencing immediate financial hardship to pay for essential items. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment.

COSMIC unanimously approved the renewal of a scheme which helps survivors of domestic abuse to feel safer and more secure in their homes. This is key to the delivery of Cambridgeshire's Safe Accommodation Strategy, and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy, and is provided in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist. The survivor will be given a bespoke safety and support plan focused on their individual needs.

We are very pleased that the Council has awarded *Council of Sanctuary* status, reaffirming the Council's commitments to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for people seeking sanctuary in Cambridgeshire. We are amongst one of the first county councils in the UK to receive this national award.

Poverty affects us all – either through personal experience or through the impact on those around us, family, friends and communities. No single

organisation can tackle poverty alone and a new commission involving organisations from across Cambridgeshire has been launched to tackle poverty in the county. The *Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission* brings together a group of independent commissioners who have extensive professional experience supporting residents. This independent body is concluding its work and COSMIC committee will ensure the council responds to its recommendations with our partners.

We continue to recognise the importance of our libraries which are at the heart of our communities. Libraries are where many of the council's resident facing interactions take place and they have an essential role in our communities as places of sanctuary, knowledge and community. We have planned further improvements for our Libraries through £1.3m committed for the *Libraries Plus* programme, creating more flexible spaces and expanding the range of services available to our residents.

7. Environment

The Environment and Green Investment Committee discussed Anglian Water's proposals for the two new reservoirs and the Council will be involved as a statutory consultee on these proposals. We want to ensure ambitions for much needed growth are balanced with the significant pressures it creates on local services and infrastructure, and we will continue to work with our mayor and central government to deliver for local residents, communities and businesses.

Through the committee's stewardship, the council has reduced its direct carbon emissions by 42% and developed several major energy projects that will not only provide income but also provide renewable energy sources for the council and some of our communities.

The *Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership* (CERP) has recently won a national award for its success in promoting environmental best practice and quality retrofit programmes.

CERP has been awarded bronze for its contribution to 'Green Public Service', these awards recognise, reward and promote environmental best practice across the public sector in the UK.

Also known as *Action on Energy Cambridgeshire*, CERP is a partnership between Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils.

8. Highways & Transport

The condition of our roads and pavements is still a huge challenge, in Cambridgeshire as it is nationwide—a mixture of wholly inadequate Government funding, decades of neglect, extreme weather, and too often, temporary or poor standards of repair.

Following a significant increase in Government funding, the Highways and Transport Committee agreed a £59m highways maintenance and improvement programme for 2025/26.

While we are happy that there has been a significant increase, our road network needs more than £400m worth of maintenance to resolve its deficiencies, and that does not include soil impacted roads, which need circa an additional £530m.

Further on Highways, the council's business plan has enabled an additional £20m in 2025/26 towards our highway issues; a further £20m is allocated for 2026/27.

This funding, along with an additional £8m from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, will prioritise increased funding for Local Highway Improvements (LHIs), trees, weeds and vegetation, drainage maintenance, road safety, active travel, soil affected roads, highways maintenance including potholes, lining and signs, street lighting and bus shelter enhancements.

The programme, which has been produced using a new prioritisation process already agreed by the committee, means each scheme is scored against a set criterion. Such as the type of road, does it have active travel links, is it a public transport route, the condition, is it near a school or a care home and how many people use it. It means the schemes are designed to apply the right treatment suitable to that location.

Improvements include more than £30m worth of carriageway maintenance, an additional £2m on soil affected roads, more than £7m on footpath and cycleway maintenance, £1m on active travel and £4m on drainage.

Following approval at committee, the programme will now go through design and development work before delivery begins in April, running through to March 2026.

9. Staffing and Appeals

Cambridgeshire has become the first County Council to be awarded 'Gold' membership of *The 5% Club's 2024-25 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 and Graduate Development Programmes. The 5% Club works with UK employers to drive positive action towards accessible workplace learning, by looking at numbers of apprentices, sponsored students and graduates employed. The goal is to increase employment and career prospects for young people and equip them with the skills they need to become an integral part of the workforce, and of society. With nearly a million young people not in employment, education or training ("NEET") this couldn't be more important.

We are also pleased that the council has been shortlisted as a finalist in four categories of the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. The LGC Awards celebrate the very best in local government, highlighting councils across the country that demonstrate outstanding leadership, creativity, and impact in serving their communities. Being shortlisted finalists for these four awards is a huge honour and is testament to the positive changes our members and staff are driving forward.

10. Combined Authority

The council has reaffirmed its commitment to improving public transport accessibility and affordability by endorsing the Tiger bus fare scheme and the Mayor's recent decision to franchise bus routes, providing a more reliable and integrated service for residents. We have a modern and growing county and the transport network model that we have is not fit for purpose. We want to expand the Cambridgeshire bus network, with more routes, more destinations; we also want the local

authority to be accountable for bus services.

The Combined Authority approved its spending plans from 2025/26, funding improvements to transport, skills and business growth. Separately, the Mayor's budget was also approved and confirmed that the Mayoral precept portion of council tax bills will be frozen for 2025/26. Included in the approved budget is the extension of the £2 bus fare cap to 30 June 2025, moving to a £2.50 fare cap from July to December 2025. This aims to maintain affordable and accessible travel, reduce road congestion, and ease cost-of-living pressures.

The Combined Authority secured £2.4m to support local people in getting good jobs. This funding will support skills bootcamps which are designed to equip local people with the skills they need to advance their careers. This is a fantastic collaboration between employers, learning providers, and the Combined Authority, working together to up-skill residents, fill vacancies, support the unemployed, and develop workforce talent across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Skills bootcamps are an excellent initiative, and we urge people to take advantage of them.

11. Greater Cambridge Partnership

The GCP, which is often misrepresented as undemocratic despite being controlled by a Joint Committee of its three Councils, continues to develop

- Travel infrastructure and active travel schemes, incl.
- 150km Greenway cycle routes
- New busways
- Skills Training
- Advanced technology incl autonomous buses

12. Local Government Reorganisation

The Government published the English Devolution White Paper in December, which set out their programme to achieve greater devolvement of powers and their intent to undertake Local Government Reorganisation.

On 5 February 2025, the Government issued an invitation to every council leader in two-tier areas of local government and neighbouring unitary authorities. The invitation asked for an interim update to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025.

We have been working with Council Leaders across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to explore the impacts and various options for our county. We issued a response to the Minister outlining our position The letter is available for you to read.

There is a lot of work ahead of us to explore financially viable scenarios and We are pleased to share we have collectively approached reorganisation with a spirit of wanting the best for all our residents and for the local area as a whole.

13. Conclusion

We have listened to a wide spectrum of views on often contentious issues and tried to represent you accordingly. Thank you for your support.

Finally, our thanks to the clerks and parish councillors of our parishes whose hard work keeps our communities together.