Councillor Peter McDonald Duxford Division & Ward:
District Councillor for Parishes of Duxford, Hinxton, Ickleton, Babraham, Pampisford.
County Councillor also for Foxton, Fowlmere, Shepreth, Thriplow, Heydon, Chishills, Whittlesford

Parish Council Report December 2024

South Cambs District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council has written to nearly 300 households believed to be missing out on the Winter Fuel Payment.

Following recent Government changes, access to the Winter Fuel Payment is restricted, with only pensioners receiving a means-tested benefit, such as Pension Credit, able to receive it.

As part of its continued **cost-of-living support for residents**, South Cambridgeshire District Council is using innovative software to better target support and advice to residents on a low income in more of a proactive way. The software uses different pieces of data that residents have already provided to the Council.

Using the data it already holds in more innovative ways, the Council identified 287 local households that are eligible for Pension Credit but not claiming it. A person can claim Pension Credit if they are receiving the State Pension and on a low income. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, the average Pension Credit award is around £3,900 per year.

All these households have received a letter to let them know of this information and explain how to apply – which then opens the door to receiving the Winter Fuel Payment. A follow up reminder is being sent at the start of December to ensure as many people as possible get the support they are entitled to.

The Council is appealing to all local pensioners to check their entitlements as it is estimated that around 880,000 UK households eligible for Pension Credit currently miss out on claiming.

Eligibility criteria

You can now only get a Winter Fuel Payment if you are over the State Pension age, and receiving one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit (for example, through a joint claim with your partner).

You must have been eligible between 16 and 22 September 2024, known as the 'qualifying week', to receive the Winter Fuel Payment this winter. It is however still possible to receive the payment this winter if you apply for Pension Credit by 21 December 2024 and backdate your application to 21 September 2024, which is within the qualifying week. As you can only backdate an application by a maximum of three months, you must do this by 21 December.

To see details on how to apply for Pension Credit, visit the **Gov.uk website** and for additional support to apply, email the District's local partner Hope CIC at **office@hopeagainst.org** or call them on 07474 725477 and they will be able to assist with an application and answer any questions.

Find out about cost-of-living support in South Cambridgeshire **on the District Council website.**

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- Cost of living support

South Cambs Tree Offer

6 free trees are being offered to parish councils to create habitats and food for wildlife, while also playing a role in the battle against climate change. This scheme is in its fifth year and has seen more than 750 trees planted across South Cambridgeshire. The campaign encourages tree planting by promoting its many benefits and is one of a range of initiatives by South Cambridgeshire District Council to support its ambitions to double nature and get the district to net zero carbon by 2050.

Council Tax Fraud

South Cambridgeshire District Council working with Cambridgeshire County Council has run an initiative to identify individuals incorrectly claiming a Council Tax Single Person Discount. The project has identified more than £800,000 worth of lost income which was due to public services. Incorrect and fraudulent claims for Council Tax discounts or exemptions reduce the overall revenue collected by local councils. This means that there is less money available to fund essential public services. Where there is a debt identified, it is recovered through the normal Council Tax billing process. The District Council is urging people to #DoTheRightThing and report any changes of circumstances which may affect their Council Tax liability. For more information about entitlement please visit the Council's webpage.

4 Day Week Trial

The Government has removed the Best Value Notice that was given to South Cambridgeshire District Council for its four-day week working arrangements. The Council received a six-month Best Value Notice from the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in November 2023. It was extended for another six months in May 2024. However, in a recent letter from the recently named Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Government says the Notice will not be reissued.

The letter from MHCLG states "We recognise the Council's constructive engagement with the department throughout the period of the Notices, including your cooperation with the request for data about the impacts of the four-day working week trial. As the Deputy Prime Minister set out in her letter to local authority leaders on 16 July and reiterated on 24 October at the Local Government Association conference, this Government is committed to working as partners in power, with mutual respect underpinning our approach. This means an end to micromanaging local authorities." The letter also outlines how MHCLG believes that "local authorities are independent employers who are rightly responsible for the management and organisation of their own workforces."

South Cambs District Council has published all of the very positive results of the trial and is now considering what else needs it needs to do before a vote is taken by all council members on whether or not the council formally becomes a 4 day a week employer.

County Council Report

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Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

CPCA is undertaking a public consultation on spending plans for the next four years closing 23 December and shaping a £309m capital and £320m revenue budget focused on transport, skills, business growth, and resilience. People can participate online, where they can find out more, or via email. Online: https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/mtfp-budget-consultation

Email: consultations@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk

Some of the Combined Authority programmes budgeted under each Corporate Strategy priority include Improving Connectivity: Funding bus reform, extending the £1 Tiger Bus Pass into 2025/26, £42m for Peterborough Station upgrades, and £4m for an A10 footbridge. For Achieving Growth: A ten-year Local Growth Plan, £9.5m for social enterprises, and £20m for a Strategic Innovation Fund. Business support through the Growth Hub and skills brokerage and for Resilient Communities: Climate Action Plan funding, £14.4m for low-carbon projects and electrification.

Mayoral Precept: Proposed 4.99% rise for 2025/26, funding 30 new or improved bus services and safeguarding existing routes amid rising costs.

Restrictions at the Mill Road

The bridge bus gate will now start along with an extended warning period for drivers to get used to the new layout. Work to install the bus gate was completed at the end of last month (November), despite some disruption by protestors, and it is now ready to be implemented.

The council will now begin a phased approach to the bus gate restriction, to allow people time to get used to it and encourage drivers not to drive over the bridge.

The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is now enforceable, and until the end of January we will be warning drivers, who are not exempt, not to drive over the bridge. We'll be monitoring with civil parking enforcement officers and signs will be displayed. This will be a warning period only – no fines or official warning notices will be issued.

At the end of January, there will be a further warning period where non-exempt vehicles will receive warning notices only, and if they are exempt, will be encouraged to register online. Fines are not expected to come into effect until March.

The restriction over the bridge will be implemented as a bus gate and blue badge holders will need to register up to two vehicles for exemption via an application form online, which is available on the council's website. More information including the exemption criteria will be updated on our website soon and we'll be reaching out to care agencies separately to make them aware.

Blue badge holders will be required to provide a copy of their valid blue badge paperwork.

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Longer term public realm improvements are anticipated for Mill Road, subject to funding and further local engagement.

HAF Programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is again offering free holiday scheme places and family experiences for children in Cambridgeshire this Christmas who are eligible for free school meals.

This continuing initiative offers primary and secondary school children in Cambridgeshire the chance to enjoy exciting experiences at a wide range of holiday schemes. In addition, families can also book onto fun experiences together.

With a focus on providing healthy meals alongside engaging activities, this programme is ideal for children to stay healthy and active this Christmas.

Each session will include a nutritious meal, a variety of exciting experiences or sports and the opportunity to socialise with other children.

Any child receiving benefit-related free school meals is eligible for the programme, which will run from 20 December.

Approximately 19,000 HAF eligibility vouchers were sent to families on 11 November. Each voucher offers 16 hours of access, for no charge, to a HAF scheme or family experience during the Christmas school holidays.

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the HAF scheme enables local authorities 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 are working with schools, childcare providers, experience providers, district councils and voluntary and community organisations to deliver the programme.

As part of the programme, eligible children will be able to access:

- Fun and entertaining opportunities or new experiences that help develop their skills and knowledge.
- A variety of holiday schemes including sports, playschemes, drama, technology, outdoor adventure and youth schemes.
- A variety of family experiences including skating, swimming, visiting the pantomime and engaging in wildlife park adventures.
- At least one meal a day.
- Guidance on increasing awareness of healthy eating, lifestyles, and positive behaviours.

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Parents will also be supported with information and signposting to other services and support which might be helpful to families.

Peter McDonald Dec 9th 2024

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