

**FULL COUNCIL**

**Council composition**

In the last month, the Reform UK group on the council has lost one of its members who now sits as an Independent, and appointed a new interim leader Cllr Stefan Fisher to replace the previous leader James Sidlow.

Meanwhile the 31 Liberal Democrats and two other Independents have joined forces to form a single Liberal Democrat & Independent Group.

The new composition of the council is as follows.

Liberal Democrat & Independent	33
Conservative	10
Reform UK	9
Labour	5
Green	3
Independent	1

**Local Government Reorganisation**

The Full Council meeting on Tuesday 21 October resolved by a majority to submit Option A to Government for its consideration. Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire will vote to submit Option B, as will East Cambridgeshire though with at least half the council opposing it. Huntingdonshire may submit either Option C, or its own Option E which looks like Option C but with a separate Huntingdonshire.



**Proposal A**



**Proposal B**



**Proposal C**

Peterborough is likely to submit either Option A or Option D which is being pushed by its two MPs. Option D would split Huntingdonshire in two, with East Cambridgeshire in a council with Fenland and the east half of Huntingdonshire. It is not clear what if anything Fenland will submit.

Proposals A, B and C all are viable but have slightly different pros and cons. The councils have worked collaboratively, creating a common data set from which to work and also agreeing on their approach. For example, an early view was that proposals which offered a 3 unitary solution were unlikely to be viable. Councils agreed which would progress the business case for which options, thus ensuring Government had a range of viable options to choose from.

Surrey is further along in the process than we are, and the Government has just announced its decision on the new boundaries there. This will create just two unitary authorities, with five of the current districts in one, and six in the other. The majority of respondents to the Government's consultation did not want this solution for Surrey—just 19% supported it while 56% opposed it.

Cambridgeshire's outcome may be different, but at the moment it appears that Local Government Reorganisation is being led by the Treasury and resulting in larger councils, with local opinion not counting for much. It is important to remember that this is a Government process and they have no obligation to stick to options proposed - they can propose something completely different or indeed not propose anything at all and keep the options on the back burner for activating at some point in the future. The costs of implementation will be for local councils to find, so costs are an important consideration. Also note there is a bill going through parliament now which removes the voluntary principle (such as it is) and gives the Sec of State the power to direct local authorities to reorganize so in future this is more likely to be the way these changes take place.

#### **Motions for debate**

Four motions were debated at the County Council meeting on 21 October.

- the impact of the Government's plan to end overseas recruitment for social care visas.
- the opportunity to lower the voting age to 16 for the new unitary councils, and to change the voting system.
- attacks on public-facing workers including, but not only, shop workers.
- support for people in mental health crisis and suicide prevention.

A fifth motion, on fast food advertising on bus shelters, was withdrawn for further work.

#### **STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE**

##### **Customer care**

The Council has amended its Customer Feedback Policy and Care Standards in line with recent changes made by the Ombudsman. Among other things, these changes mean that a council's internal complaints system must have no more than two stages—Cambridgeshire's had three, which has now been reduced.

##### **Budget and business plan**

The council continues to forecast an overspend for the current year, which is gradually reducing but needs to reduce further. The overspend reflects the key pressures facing the council, including the increasing number of children requiring care and the shortfall of local placements; the cost of home to school transport; higher costs for services for people with learning disabilities following the end of a pooled budget arrangement with the NHS; and higher capital financing costs.

Every year, the council must set a balanced budget to support a wide range of services including social care, education, libraries, highways and transport, environmental services, and waste management. With rising costs, a growing population, and increasing demands, more than half of the council's spending currently goes toward social care, while other major areas of spending include special educational needs and disabilities, transport, and the environment.

## **Budget survey**

The council has launched a public engagement survey to gather residents' views on where the council should prioritise spending and savings in the years ahead.

The engagement survey, which will close on Monday 24 November, asks residents for their views on how the council should approach budget priorities. It asks questions such as whether the council should be looking to increase its income, or decrease spending on some of its services.

<https://yourvoice.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business-planning/26-27-phase-1-engagement/>

## **ADULTS & HEALTH**

### **Arthur Rank Hospice**

Arthur Rank Hospice is facing a funding deficit of £829,000, primarily due to the withdrawal of a long-standing funding contribution from Cambridge University Hospitals. This cut could force the hospice to close nine of its 23 beds—a 40% reduction in capacity, and a contradiction of the government's own 10-year Health Plan to shift care into the community.

This dramatic loss of service will mean that over 200 people a year could be denied the option of dying with dignity, receiving compassionate, specialist palliative care in the community until the very end of their lives.

The hospice's financial crisis is worsened by the government's increase in employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs), which is costing the hospice an additional £225,000 a year and further threatens patient care.

A petition to save the Arthur Rank Hospice beds and protect end-of-life care in Cambridgeshire is due to be presented to Government on Monday 3 November.

### **Integrated Care System**

In response to Government requirements for cost savings, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough's NHS Integrated Care Board, responsible for planning and commissioning local health services, has now been gathered into a much bigger cluster of boards. Stretching from Milton Keynes to Hertfordshire, the new Board will be one of the biggest in the country, with the focus on Cambridgeshire very much reduced.

The change is being implemented at breakneck speed, in a way which means it cannot deliver. The Boards must cut their running costs by 50% in a matter of months. Obviously a very great number of staff are at risk of redundancy, but there is no money for those redundancies to be carried out! Staff cannot be let go from their current jobs, or the new system staffed, because there is no money to do so.

### **Health scrutiny**

The first meeting of the council's new Health Scrutiny Committee reviewed how the system of annual health checks for young adults with learning disabilities was working. It also considered the Government's ten-year plan for the NHS.

### **CCS Trust merger**

Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) NHS Trust is planning to merge with Norfolk Community Health & Care NHS Trust, to form East of England Community Health & Care NHS Trust. The organisations will be engaging with the public, stakeholders and local MPs, and working with NHS England on the process to ensure everything is in place for the end of March 2026.

CCS provides a range of health services in Cambridgeshire, from services for children and young people and dental provision to musculoskeletal physiotherapy, contraception and sexual health services.

### **Be Winter Wise**

Cambridgeshire County Council has relaunched its annual #BeWinterWise campaign, for winter 2025–26. The campaign aims to help Cambridgeshire residents stay safe, warm, and healthy throughout the colder months by sharing practical advice, highlighting local support, and encouraging communities to look out for one another. It will:

- Raise awareness of how winter weather, financial pressures, and health challenges can be connected.
- Provide support by signposting residents to useful services, and sharing advice tailored to different needs.
- Encourage community spirit, empowering neighbours to support one another and build resilience together.

The campaign will share useful information about cost of living support, including practical guidance on how to claim Pension Credit for those over State Pension age and on a low income. It will explain how families can apply for supermarket vouchers for children eligible for free school meals during the school holidays, helping to ease pressures on household budgets.

In addition, the campaign will signpost to support and information from local partner organisations who provide essential services during the winter months, from heating and energy advice to community-based wellbeing support.

### **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **New special schools delayed**

The Department for Education was due to build two new special schools in Cambridgeshire, in March and Gamlingay, as part of an agreement with the council to help contain overspending on special educational needs and disabilities.

However, the Government's special schools and free schools programme has been paused and the council is unclear when the promised schools will be built. Without these extra schools children are being placed in expensive specialist independent schools, sometimes located at great distances from the children, which is creating unnecessary cost for the council and stress for the families involved.

The Government had promised to publish a schools white paper in the autumn, but this has now been delayed until the new year – significantly, after the Budget. While this will create more time for reforms to special educational needs and disabilities support, it does not help the council and all other tier 1 authorities who are facing the same extraordinary financial and operational pressures in this area.

#### **Education Health & Care Plans**

The council has agreed to move an additional £780,000 from reserves to improve the timeliness of the production of Education Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Recent years have seen significant increases in the numbers of children needing these plans—4,667 in 2019, compared with 8,007 now – and Cambridgeshire urgently needs to improve its ability to deliver good quality plans in a timely fashion.

#### **Care leavers' celebration**

The council held a celebration event for young people between the ages of 17 and 25 from across

Cambridgeshire moving on out of care. The council has in place a 'local offer' for care leavers, which provides services and support for those leaving care to ensure they are well looked after. This includes support from the council as well as external organisations.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/children-s-social-care/what-is-the-care-leavers-local-offer>

## **COMMUNITIES SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION**

### **Poverty Commission**

The council has agreed to start work with its partners to implement the recommendations of Cambridgeshire's Poverty Strategy Commission. The Commission's report focuses on six main themes:

- Income maximisation: support for individuals and households to increase their financial stability by ensuring they are receiving all the income, benefits, and financial support they are entitled to.
- Digital inclusion: the link between poverty and digital exclusion is well established, and access to the internet and digital technology is critical to everyday life, from applying for jobs and claiming benefits to accessing healthcare, managing finances and engaging with public services.
- Rural poverty: transport, health and wellbeing, loneliness and isolation, and affordable housing are the most pressing issues for rural communities.
- Housing and homelessness: housing costs place a significant burden on households. For those experiencing homelessness, access to support can depend on an individual's ability to navigate multiple, often fragmented and demanding service systems.
- Children and families: children are at the most risk of the effects of poverty, and many families that are 'just about managing' are at risk of crossing a line into poverty.
- Mental health: those living in poverty are more likely to experience mental health problems.

## **ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT**

### **Flood resilience campaign**

The council has launched a new flood resilience campaign to improve flood preparedness and communications about flooding. As part of the campaign, practical advice and resources will be shared through the council's website and social media channels. This includes how to sign up for flood alerts, report flooding to the appropriate authority, and access support to form or join a community flood group.

For more information and to get involved, visit <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/flood-prepare>, or follow the campaign on social media, using #CambsFloodResilience.

## **HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT**

### **LED street light replacements**

The county council's programme to replace existing street lights with LEDs continues. Where vegetation or trees are obscuring the street lights, contractor Balfour Beatty should arrange for works to be completed as a separate task to trim up to one metre around the lantern where required.

Balfour Beatty should also send the council a monthly report of any vegetation or trees needing to be cut back to allow street lights to light the road correctly.

### **Public Rights of Way maintenance hierarchy**

The council has now agreed a new hierarchy for maintenance of Public Rights of Way, targeting activity on the rights of way which are most used and valued by local communities.

Council officers have reviewed feedback received over the summer, and undertaken a map-based review of school catchment areas. Any Public Rights of Way that provide a direct alternative to on-road walking or cycling routes towards a school site from residential areas within the catchment have had their rankings increased. 221 Public Rights of Way have had their rankings uplifted.

Parishes will be formally invited to comment every two years on the rankings of Public Rights of Way within the hierarchy beginning in 2027.

Cllr Edna Murphy  
County Councillor for the Bar Hill division