

County Councillor Report for Parishes – March 2024 – Cllr Anna Bradnam

County Council Budget – 2024/25

The council agreed its budget last week. It was difficult to set, as so many people are worried about the cost of living, whilst the council faces cost increases.

The county council had to close a budget gap of £37.4M, with 75% of the Council's net spending now being funded from Council Tax. Councillors have prioritised a number of key areas, based on residents' feedback from last summer's Quality of Life survey. The budget:

- Sustains critical social care services for adults and children.
- Includes record levels of highways funding to strengthen and improve the standard of roads and pavements, including tackling potholes, weeds and gullies. This is a direct response to the concerns expressed by residents.
- Prioritises support for vulnerable communities, including £3M to continue providing holiday supermarket vouchers for those children most in need (as we believe the government is likely to withdraw funding for this).

The council agreed a Council Tax rise of 4.99%, 2% for Adult Social Services, and 2.99% for general services—raising £17.5M of local income to help maintain and protect critical services for the most vulnerable communities. For the majority of residents in Band A-D properties that will mean an extra 99p to £1.48 a week.

Achieving a balanced budget following ten years of national underfunding has been difficult, when so many county and unitary authorities are struggling. Some additional money from Government came in frustratingly late, well after most councils had set their budget. This one-year funding does not address the longer term need for a Fair Funding Settlement in Cambridgeshire.

Councillor allowances

The council agreed to implement the council allowances scheme recommended by the independent panel set up for this purpose.

(Old) Shire Hall – back on the market

Bids have been invited for the lease or purchase of part of the Shire Hall site in Cambridge, after the previous preferred bidder was unable to continue their interest.

Shire Hall had been the County Council's headquarters since the 1930s, but the site itself was the seat of government in Cambridge for over a thousand years. Previously the site of two medieval castles, the building was the county council's administrative centre from its completion in 1933 until 2022, when the council relocated to Alconbury as part of its planned savings programme.

ADULTS AND HEALTH

Measles – cases of measles are rising throughout the country so the council is asking everyone to check their MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination status and get vaccinated if they are not up to date. Measles is highly infectious and can be serious. Vaccination records are in a child's personal health record (red book). Adults can check if they have been vaccinated with their GP or vaccination records from childhood. Anyone of any age can catch up on missed doses. Vaccination is free from GPs and requires two doses of the MMR vaccine. Walk-in vaccination clinics are taking place across Cambridgeshire. These are for anyone over the age of one year who is not up to date with their MMR vaccinations. More information at <https://www.cpics.org.uk/measles>
Individuals should check their vaccination status if possible **before** attending one of these clinics.

NHS Dentistry

The Adults & Health Committee will be scrutinising the provision of NHS dentistry in Cambridgeshire at its meeting on 7 March. Access to NHS dental care has declined dramatically in recent years and

many practices no longer accept NHS patients. Dentists say that under the current contract, it is not financially viable to offer NHS procedures because of a lack of Government investment. One in five people have resorted to 'DIY dentistry' and 4.4 million children in England have not seen an NHS dentist in at least a year, leading to a 17 per cent increase in tooth decay-related extractions in children.

In February NHS England published a joint NHS and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) 'Dental Recovery Plan' to try to address the growing crisis. This includes

- a 'new patient' payment of between £15 and £50 (depending on treatment need) to treat around a million new patients who have not seen an NHS dentist in two years or more
- focus on prevention and good oral health in children and an expanded dental workforce
- advice for parents and parents-to-be on taking care of baby gums and milk teeth
- one-off payments of up to £20,000 for dentists working in under-served areas for up to three years.

The minimum value of dental activity under the dental contract will increase from £23 to £28. This will affect only a small number of contracts across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and any additional funding will need to be covered from the current dental budget of the local NHS Integrated Care Board.

Have your say on Healthy Communities

A survey has been launched asking for views on access to healthcare services, inclusive and accessible green spaces, opportunities for active travel and healthy play and leisure, and the provision of affordable healthy food options.

The survey is at <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/WNC1CB/> and is open until **Monday 15 April at 5pm**. It will take around 10-15 minutes to fill in and may be completed on behalf of yourself or someone you care for. If you would prefer to complete a paper copy, you can pick one up from your local library. If you have any questions please email healthinallpolicies@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

COMMUNITIES SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)

Free data SIM cards - A reminder that free SIM cards to those unable to afford internet access are available at 11 libraries in Cambridgeshire. The SIM cards or vouchers are donated to the National Databank by Virgin Media O2, Vodafone and Three. They are available to anyone aged 18+ from a low-income household. Recipients can self-declare as eligible, and the support is available for a maximum period of twelve months. This offer is available at a range of libraries including Cambridge Central, Bar Hill, Arbury Court, and Barnwell Road. Ask library staff for more details.

ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN INVESTMENT

Weekly Food Waste Collections - The Government is encouraging a move to weekly food waste collections, with financial support to District Councils for changes to **collection** of the waste. Milton was included in the trial run last year by SCDC to assess systems and viability. However the government has not given any support to County Councils for **disposing** of food waste. Any councils not taking up the arrangements would be 'named in legislation' as being exempt from these collection arrangements, until such time as their existing waste contracts expired. For Cambridgeshire, this is 2037, when the PFI contract with Thalia ends, which is a very long time. After prolonged discussion between Cambridgeshire's county and district councils, they have been able to agree to move to weekly collections, and avoid being listed in the legislation.

Community Flood Risk Newsletter

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Flood and Water Partnership (CPFloW) will start publishing a Community Flood Risk newsletter to help support residents, businesses, and communities in relation to flooding. This will include input from organisations such as the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) and water companies.

Reporting Flooding

If you have experienced flooding, please report it. If there is a flood and a threat to life, call **999**. Report non-life-threatening flood emergencies to the Police on **101**. Outside those events, please report on the County Council's flood reporting page

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/report-a-flood>

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Gully clearing - The council has reinstated the programme of regular, cyclical gully clearing that the previous administration ceased; a decision which had contributed to many local flooding problems. The programme has not yet reached our area.....

Highways Capital Programme – a draft programme has been sent to the Highways and Transport Committee for comment. Further work is needed to prioritise the use of this funding.

Guided Busway - Since February 2022, the southbound track has been closed between Cambridge Railway Station and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. The Council has been working with the bus operators and emergency services to risk-assess and design a fence to be installed along sections of the southern busway. It has been specifically designed with removable sections to allow for safe evacuation. Contractors are working seven days a week and the busway and maintenance track are currently programmed to re-open on Saturday 30 March 2024.

Rail upgrade at Ely – unclear - Investment in Ely was highlighted by government when it announced its target to grow rail freight by 75% by 2050. A joint letter was sent from the private and public sectors which welcomed the government's commitment to upgrading rail capacity at Ely and urged funding to be released as soon as possible so that its benefits can be realised for the country. The letter, co-ordinated by the England's Economic Heartland sub-national transport body, lists six core reasons why prioritising this would benefit the UK. In response, Minister for Rail, Huw Merriman MP said that the Department for Transport is currently engaging with the Treasury to understand when funding will be made available for progressing the scheme.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY

Just after Mayor Nik Johnson announced a list of bus improvements which his precept would be able to fund, Stagecoach announced it would be drastically reducing the **Service 9** bus from Ely to Cambridge. Stagecoach say they can no longer support running buses empty on this loss-making route. Since the route was changed in September 2023, I have been regularly requesting restoration of the connecting service through the villages of Waterbeach, Landbeach and Milton. Instead, from 14 April, the service will be slashed to just four buses Monday to Friday, with fewer stops. The Combined Authority is considering next steps to provide a useable service.

Highways and Road works

Fen Ditton – Cityfibre should have completed their installation in Ditton Lane by mid-February.

Horningsea – Traffic calming works have been put on hold while the Council does re-surfacing works on the footways.

Milton Interchange – another brief overnight closure

Works have been scheduled in **April** to survey the north end of the west overbridge. During recent resurfacing works a void was identified under the carriageway and temporarily repaired. The findings will help to determine a permanent solution. The interchange west overbridge will be closed overnight **8pm – 6am from 8 April until 10 April 2024**.

Traffic will be diverted to the A14 westbound to J32, Histon Interchange and return on the A14 eastbound towards Milton Interchange just north of the A14 overbridge. Traffic will be able to access Milton off the roundabout (near Tesco).