

County Councillor Report for Parishes – November 2023 – Cllr Anna Bradnam

Strategy and Resources Cambridgeshire County Council's estimated budget gap for 2024/25 has increased from a predicted £16m to more than £23m—largely due to increases in demand for services and inflationary pressure. Without action being taken this gap will grow, and is predicted to be more than £20m in the following year, and a further £19m the year after that.

Cambridgeshire is not alone. The Local Government Association currently reports that councils across the country face an 'inflationary storm' with a predicted £4Bn funding gap over the next two years.

A report from the Council's Chief Executive Stephen Moir and Executive Director of Finance and Resources Michael Hudson says:

"In 2023-24, pressures on our budget have arisen principally due to several very high-cost children's social care placements and a delay in receiving income from a newly constructed solar farm (which requires connection to the electricity grid). In addition, we are seeing that demand for bed-based care for older people is also rising, following a period of reduction in demand and then stability stretching back for some time, to the beginning of the pandemic."

The report also points to wider national and international issues which have an impact on the council's pressures—such as interest rates which the Bank of England has said are likely to remain above 5% until 2026. This will affect all goods and services the council buys, the cost of borrowing, and pay award costs for council workers as well as for a large externally commissioned workforce which includes staff working in residential care for vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to set the Council's 2024/5 budget will be discussed by councillors in December before a period of scrutiny during January, including an opportunity for residents to comment on the plans.

Quality of Life Survey

Most Cambridgeshire residents feel happy and safe in the county, well connected to their local communities, and believe it's a great place to raise children.

That's the headline finding of the County Council's first annual Quality of Life survey involving more than 5,500 residents. But the news is less good for some specific groups, with a stark finding that loneliness in Cambridgeshire is far higher than the national average. Loneliness was most likely to be reported by those aged 18 to 25, who also reported more struggles with their mental health.

The County Council commissioned the report from national independent market research agency Thinks Insight and Strategy, and plans to use the results to help councillors set business plan and budget priorities for the coming five years. The survey will also be used to inform the Public Health Joint Needs Assessment, a mandatory document which local organisations use to identify the health and wellbeing needs of a local population.

The survey found the council itself plays a relatively trusted role in residents' lives, with just over half of residents trusting it to make decisions. Residents' views about whether the council acts on their concerns and delivers value for money were in line with Local Government Association averages for England.

Satisfaction with council services was mixed—highest across library, waste management, street lighting, and registration services, and lowest in road and pavement maintenance.

Residents reported high concerns about the cost of living and many said they were changing their behaviour because of it. 48 per cent have cut back on heating use, 27 per cent have cut back on nutritious food, eight per cent have used a foodbank and nine per cent have stopped using prescription medicines. The council intends to run the survey again next year.

84%	feel safe in their community
72%	report high or very high levels of happiness
52%	of 18-24s feel lonely—compared to only 18% of those aged 55+
37%	have struggled with mental health (61% of 18-24s, 59% of 25-34s)
52%	trust the council to make decisions about services
44%	think the council delivers value for money (national benchmark 42%)
86%	are concerned about cost of living increases
48%	have cut back on heating use

Flooding

Storm Babet hit Cambridgeshire on Friday 20 October, leaving some households with external or even internal flooding to their homes, or, like some in Waterbeach, unable to flush toilets. Several roads were affected or closed. County Council highways officers have been working through the various incidents logged, and the Flood & Water team is pulling together an overall picture of events.

If you were affected by flooding, and have not yet reported it to the County Council, please do so, as it is really important to build up a full picture of what happened.

You can report **flood issues affecting your home or property** at **cambridgeshire-self.achieveservice.com/service/Flood_reporting** (This is *not* the place to report flooding in an emergency.)

You can report **highways-related flooding** (blocked road drains, sewers, gullies, for example) at **highwaysreporting.cambridgeshire.gov.uk**

Full Council (17 October 2023)

Five motions were debated.

1. A motion instructing the County Council's Chief Executive to convene a meeting to discuss how to move forward after the collapse of proposals for road charging in Cambridge was voted down, since it offered no solutions.
2. A motion suggesting that planners should return to the principle of 'predict and provide' to allow for more and more cars, rather than the current policy of 'monitor and manage', which seeks to avoid developments creating additional congestion. This failed.
3. A third motion called the council to publicise its action plan for addressing the (extremely expensive) problem of 'soil-affected' roads in the county. Once amended this was agreed.
4. A fourth motion was amended and agreed. It asks officers to prepare a report on action to prevent lorries rat-running along the A1421 from Haddenham crossroads to Witcham Toll.
5. Finally, a motion on to review the council's policy on weed control was amended and then approved. A review had already been scheduled for January 2024.

Adults and Health

The County Council has launched its *Be Winter Wise* campaign. The aim is to draw together a range of services, activities and offers, keeping communities across Cambridgeshire

informed and prepared to stay safe and healthy during the winter months of 2023/24—and to signpost to services offered by partners.

The campaign links together everything from winter gritting and road safety activities to falls prevention, flu vaccination support, and the Household Support Fund which helps people with urgent expenses, or by issuing vouchers to every child eligible for free school meals in the half term and Christmas holidays, under a single *Be Winter Wise* banner.

Children and Young People

The Supermarket Voucher scheme will continue to operate in the October half term for all eligible families in Cambridgeshire. Those families were automatically sent a £15 voucher via email or text on Saturday 21 October, which can be used at a choice of ten supermarkets. The County Council will run the scheme until the February 2024 half term.

The voucher scheme has been a huge success since it was introduced and much appreciated by families struggling in the current financial climate. A survey revealed that over 70% of families said the vouchers had helped them cope with the rising cost of living.

Appeal Panel volunteers needed

All parents or carers have the right to make an appeal to an independent appeal panel if their child is not offered a place at their preferred school. Volunteers are urgently needed for these panels. The role of the panel is to decide whether a child who has been refused a place by the County Council should be given a place.

The appeal panel is independent of the local authority and its decisions are binding on all parties, unless overturned by the courts.

Panel members must be able to listen to two sides of a case and weigh up evidence objectively and impartially. They must also be able to:

- Communicate effectively with a wide range of people
- Read and assess information and identify key points
- Listen to key information
- Ask questions to obtain information and clarify points being made
- Analyse information and use it to form opinions and conclusions
- Obtain and weigh up evidence to reach a decision
- Work as part of a team, take advice and develop their own skills

All volunteer Panel Members receive training and support from the Appeals Service. The time commitment depends on how much time volunteers are willing to give. Appeals are held throughout the year but peak months are between April and July. Appeals arranged for half a day or a full day and hearings are currently held online using Microsoft Teams.

Anyone interested in applying or who would like an informal chat about the role should contact clare.cronk@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion

Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund

Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund is a £1M fund to help upgrade and improve community buildings and assets to better meet the needs of the families, households and communities. Many expressions of interest were received by the September deadline. More than 85 per cent of them met the eligibility criteria and those applicants have been invited to submit a full proposal. This second stage will be competitive, with only one in four applications likely to be successful. All applicants who have been invited to submit a full proposal have been invited to attend one of three virtual briefing sessions:

Monday 30 October 4:00-5:00PM, Tuesday 31 October 6:30-7:30PM or Wednesday 1 November 12:00-1:00PM

Environment and Green Investment

Swaffham Prior Community Heat Network

It is a year since the first connections were made to the community heat network and by November 65 properties will be fully connected. Connections will recommence in Spring. The council is keen to complete these in batches to ensure works are carried out effectively and efficiently and disruption is minimised.

Climate scorecard

Campaigning organisation Climate Emergency UK publish a 'scorecard' for each council to measure how it is responding to climate change.

Cambridgeshire was ranked fifth out of all county councils on this year's scorecard, with a gold star for our work on decarbonising buildings and heating. We scored lower than average on biodiversity, and on waste reduction and food. This is unsurprising, given that the Waterbeach waste facility is out of action while the council and its contractor Thalia seek to resolve compliance issues. <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/scoring/county/>

Highways and Transport

Re-surfacing on the A14/A10 interchange has started, with road closures 9pm to 5am.

Winter gritting

Cambridgeshire's gritting crew spent several nights in mid-October carrying out a trial run ahead of winter. Gritters Buzz Ice Year and David Grittenborough were on the roads, along with gritting quad bikes on cycle routes in Cambridge. The salt domes and barns have been filled with 10,000 tonnes of rock salt ready for the start of the cold season.

Last year gritting crews went out 51 times, many of them working throughout the night and early hours. Anyone interested in volunteering to help the council grit Cambridgeshire during the winter months is invited to visit the council's website to find out how they and the local community can get involved. www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/help-with-gritting/

20mph schemes—the next round

The window for new applications will be opened for 20mph funding from Monday 15 January 2024, and will close on Friday 15 March 2024 at 5:00PM. There was intense interest from parish councils, showing how much popular support there is for road safety and speed reduction initiatives. In the meantime, the council plans to review and update its 20mph website pages to provide additional information to applicants. I am checking if those whose applications were not funded last time need to re-apply.

Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) Waterbeach to Cambridge Greenway

The GCP launched the next stage of the consultation, saying that the original preferred route along the railway would not be viable due to flood risk, engineering requirements and remoteness. They have proposed a number of options for the route through Milton.

At recent meetings of the Waterbeach Community Forum and Milton village, residents have expressed views ranging from support for some improvements, to objections to the details.

See details here [GCP Waterbeach Greenway 2023 | Consult Cambridgeshire \(engagementhq.com\)](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/gcp-waterbeach-greenway-2023/)

There will be a public exhibition in Milton Community Centre on Tuesday 7 November 2.15 – 7pm

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