

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Comprising Barton, Coton, Comberton, Grantchester, Harlton,
Harston, Haslingfield, Hauxton, and South Trumpington

District Councillors' Monthly Report – January 2024

District Councillor contact details

If you have any questions or concerns relating to SCDC services, please contact us using the details below. These are housing need, housing repairs for council tenants, planning, benefits, council tax, bin collection, environmental health issues etc.

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Happy New Year!

We would like to wish all Cambridgeshire residents a happy, healthy and productive 2024. Here's to a wonderful new year!

Cost-of-living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: where to turn for advice; benefits, money and debt advice; help with energy and water bills; help for parents and families; help with food and health costs; help with phone bills; help with making your home warmer; Age UK handy person service and; support if you are in distress.

Useful links

Benefit entitlements - Research suggests that around 25% of some benefits go unclaimed.

You can check your entitlements at: <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>

Local food banks - <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/foodbanks>

Energy saving advice and information on home improvement grants - <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/fuel-energy-and-utilities/>

Community Hubs

Community Hubs offer residents somewhere to socialise, take part in new activities and to receive information on cost-of-living support such as how to reduce bills and access financial support, as well as how to stay healthy and well.

Local Community Hubs include:

- Comberton Baptist Church, Green End, Comberton, Cambridge, CB23 7DY.
Opening times: Monday, 3pm – 5 pm
- Grantchester Communal Hall, Tabrum Close, Grantchester, Cambridge, CB3 9NW
Opening time: Friday, 10am – 12pm

A full list of Community Hubs can be found at:

<https://www.cambsacre.org.uk/projects/cambridgeshire-community-hubs-network/>

Community

Grant for new Mobile/Community Warden Schemes

On 1 January, South Cambridgeshire District Council launched a grant for new [Mobile/Community Warden Schemes](#) that are wanting to set up in the district. £15,000 has been set aside for new schemes out of a total grant fund of £100,000. The aim of this funding (which includes a contribution from Cambridgeshire County Council's unspent Care Together Seed funding) is to provide increased coverage and more equitable access to schemes to support independent living, particularly for older or vulnerable residents. Parish councils and community groups will be able to bid for up to £5,000 per new scheme.

The proposed timeline for grant scheme is as follows:

- Scheme launch and applications open - 1 January 2024
- Application deadline - 5pm 29 February 2024
- Allocation of funding decided- End of March 2024
- Grants paid – April 2024

Before making an application, we would recommend that you refer to the Council's [Mobile/Community Warden Scheme toolkit](#) for guidance about setting up a scheme. The background to this fund can be found in agenda item 6 of the [Grants Advisory committee reports pack](#). If you have any questions, please contact Development Officer, Communities team Emma.Dyer@scams.gov.uk

South Cambs Hall

Like most local authorities South Cambs now encourages hybrid/home working which means that large offices are no longer needed in the way they were. Therefore, staff have been moved onto the first floor of the Cambourne offices and the ground floor is being converted into space for businesses and community groups. It is hoped that this will encourage new start-up businesses as well as help existing businesses through a programme of support and networking events. The new space will be open on 24th April.

Planning

Cambridge 2040 and development corporation proposals

Cambridge 2040 is Michael Gove's vision for supercharged employment and housing growth in Greater Cambridge. He [presented](#) some additional information on December 19th 2023 and stated "We will establish a development corporation, with a broadly based Board to steer its efforts. These we will arm with the right leadership and full range of powers necessary to marshal this huge project over the next two decades, regardless of the shifting sands of Westminster." This suggests that responsibility for delivery of this growth could be taken from our local planners and operate remotely under the Secretary of State.

The 4 council leaders – Cambridge City Council, Cllr Mike Davey, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cllr Bridget Smith, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cllr Lucy Nethsingha – and the Combined Authority Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Dr Nik Johnson, have written to Mr Gove to express their views. The joint statement is available at: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/joint-statement-from-local-leaders-and-the-combined-authority-mayor-on-cambridge-2040-announcement/>.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service wins awards for its youth engagement service

YES, the planning service's youth engagement service, won the prestigious 'Best Local Authority Award' at the 2023 TET Inspiring Future Generations Award. Team member Tom Davies also won this year's 'Individual Youth Engagement Practitioner of the Year Award'.

You can see more at: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/latest-award-for-greater-cambridge-shared-planning-as-youth-engagement-service-praised/>.

Corporate Peer Review of SCDC

The Council has recently published the Peer Review conducted in the first week of November by the Local Government Association (LGA). The administration invited the LGA to undertake the review as part of its commitment to continually reviewing and improving services. The authors of the report identified various strengths for the council and sought to act as a critical friend, suggesting areas for development, so that the council can continue to thrive. The 4-day week trial was not within the scope of the review.

The report praised the Council's high levels of engagement with communities, especially surrounding the 'Greater Cambridgeshire Local Plan' and praised the 'Statement of Community Involvement' consultation. The review noted the positive working culture within the Council and recognised the improvements made to this since 2018. It praised the leadership team and the CEO throughout.

The review recognised the Council's focus on being performance led and highlighted several successful practices (such as key performance indicators (KPIs) emerging from Overview and Scrutiny). It further suggested that KPIs should be incorporated into specific dashboards and that further KPIs should be generated in certain areas.

Most importantly, the report recognised the Council's strong financial position with a balanced budget predicted through to 2024/25 and with reserves of £61 million recorded at the end of the last financial year. They identified minimal investment risk and a well-structured and robust investment governance strategy. SCDC is one of very few councils in the country able to show such a positive financial position, and, as a result, the council has been able to devote resources to deliver cost-of-living support, green initiatives and positive community outcomes.

The current business plan is focussed on 4 core areas – '**housing that is truly affordable for everyone**', '**being green to our core**', '**growing local businesses and economies**' and '**being a modern and caring council**'. Throughout the report, 'being green to our core' was highlighted as being well embedded as a priority for the Council. The review suggested reinforcing the Council's overall vision by reviewing the business plan to ensure a more consistent narrative, especially in the context of the many layers of government in Cambridgeshire so that the voluntary and community sector and parishes can work closer with the Council on shared objectives.

You can find out more and access the full report at: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/corporate-peer-challenge-report-published/>

Housing

Make Things Right update

In March 2023, Michael Gove launched the government's 'Make Things Right' campaign which urges social housing tenants to complain about substandard housing. The steps to get an issue with social housing fixed are:

- Step 1: Report the issue to the Landlord
- Step 2: If the issue is not fixed, complain through the Landlord's complaint process
- Step 3: If the issue is still not fixed, escalate to the Housing Ombudsmen.

You can find out more at: <https://socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk/>.

SCDC housing maintenance

Just over a year ago SCDC entered into a completely new contract with Mears for the repair and maintenance of the council's social housing portfolio. A full contract review has now been conducted which shows that performance over the previous contract has improved significantly. Mears has put in additional measures to improve their performance, including operative upskilling and additional contractor support from central teams and subcontractors. Overall tenant satisfaction is high, with 93% of residents reporting satisfaction with the service they have received. Complaint numbers have been low and when they have been received, they have been fully investigated. The Council will continue to monitor Mears' performance closely to try to drive standards higher still.