

Cambridgeshire County Council

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2026

Sawston and Shelfords Division (Cllrs Damary-Homan & Fane)

FULL COUNCIL

The full council will meet on Tuesday 10 February, to vote on the budget and business plan for 2026/27 to 2028/29, and opposition Groups will be given the opportunity to bring forth alternative budget proposals. Policy Committees have met to recommend their budgets, and Strategy, Resources & Performance Committee has also made its recommendations to full Council.

Links to the papers for Committees are included in this report in case you would like to see proposals at a granular level, and these pages will eventually contain the minutes of the meetings. I also link the summaries of Committee discussions.

Full council will also consider recommendations from the council's Constitution & Ethics Committee, to allow an unlimited number of motions to Full Council meetings, compensated by shorter motions and shorter speeches.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Arthur Rank Hospice

The Arthur Rank Hospice has received a private donation which will allow it to remain open for a further year. This short term security is excellent news but the future of the hospice remains uncertain. We continue to support calls for a longer term solution to be found and are grateful for all of the public support for the hospice.

NHS dental services in Cambridgeshire

The County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee has delivered the following six recommendations to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) following its scrutiny of NHS dental provision in Cambridgeshire and has requested a response by 27 February.

- a. The committee acknowledges the challenges which face the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in relation to NHS dental provision, but urges the ICB to be more ambitious in relation to the provision of NHS dental services in Cambridgeshire.
- b. The committee highlights a lack of transparency locally around the allocation and delivery of extra capacity for urgent dental appointments funded by Government. Whilst recognising the challenges that the Integrated Care Board is facing, the committee urges more transparency around this to build public confidence and trust.
- c. The committee expresses serious concerns about the distance that some Cambridgeshire residents have to travel to access NHS dental services and

welcomes the commitments given around collecting more data on this.

- d. The committee encourages and supports the pilot projects exploring a hub approach to primary care provision through the co-location of dental services with GP practices to provide wraparound care to the community and offer some savings from shared overhead costs. The committee requests a briefing note on the outcome of these pilot projects and, if they prove successful, where and when they will be introduced in Cambridgeshire.
- e. The committee expresses disappointment at the failure to take concrete steps towards establishing an undergraduate dental training school in the East of England following the undertakings given at the previous scrutiny of dental provision in March 2024. The committee urges the new Central East Integrated Care Board to champion this endeavour which could offer considerable benefits across its geography, and offers offices of Cambridgeshire County Council in support of this.
- f. The committee expresses some concern about the level of underspend on dental provision in Cambridgeshire and whether the money being clawed back is being used as efficiently and productively as possible.

Integrated Care Board cost reductions and reconfiguration

The Health Scrutiny Committee met Jan Thomas, the Chief Executive of the new Central East Integrated Care Board (ICB), and Kate Vaughton, the new ICB's Executive Director for Neighbourhood Health, Place and Partnership, about the implications for Cambridgeshire of the cost reductions required of existing ICBs and their reconfiguration into new ICBs serving a much larger population across a significantly wider geographical area.

The Committee made a number of recommendations on this:

The committee expresses concern that structural issues and changes are in danger of crowding out some of the service improvements that both the health service and local authority partners want to see. The committee urges Board members at the new Central East Integrated Care Board to guard against this.

- a. The committee acknowledges the assertion that the Integrated Care Board will need to focus resources on the areas of most need. In return, the public and its elected representatives want to see openness and transparency when services will be changed, reduced or no longer provided, even though this may sometimes lead to difficult conversations.
- b. The committee invites the Integrated Care Board to continue to reflect with partners including Cambridgeshire County Council about how the independent check on health care services and systems currently provided by Healthwatch will be maintained following Healthwatch's abolition.
- c. The committee welcomes and endorses the comments made about the advantages of the digitisation of health services and how this can help target services and resources more effectively. However, the committee hopes that the concerns raised by some committee members about data privacy and security during this public scrutiny session and also during its scrutiny of the delivery of the NHS 10 Year Plan in Cambridgeshire in October 2025 are taken into account.

I note that concerns were expressed about the security of patients' personal and medical data following the award of a contract to Palantir to create a data platform for the NHS. Palantir is entering numerous contracts across the British public sector, and I am certainly concerned by the volume of public data that is being handed over to a

morally questionable company. The ICB has committed to provide a response on the security of patient data provided to Palantir.

East of England ambulance service performance

The East of England Ambulance Service has written to the council's Health Scrutiny Committee to update councillors on its performance, including shortened response times, and reduced handover times at hospitals.

Budget recommendation

Following discussion, the Adults and Health Committee voted to recommend the budget and business plan for the service area as laid out in the papers (11 for, 2 abstentions).

[Adults and Health papers](#) & [summary](#)

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Holiday food vouchers

The Government is to withdraw the Household Support Fund (HSF) at the end of March. The fund had supported vulnerable families with food vouchers and support for households struggling to meet the cost of their utilities. A new fund, the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), is coming in to 'replace' the HSF, but its focuses are different and individual payments will be much lower under the CRF.

Like many local authorities, Cambridgeshire used a significant proportion of HSF funding to provide holiday food vouchers for children on Free School Meals (FSM). Unlike most other local Authorities, Cambridgeshire has been topping up the funding from its own budget, ensuring that all FSM children could receive a voucher. The County Council had been issuing vouchers to the families of roughly 22,500 children.

With the Government's withdrawal of the HSF, it is unviable for the Council to continue the scheme, unless a new national scheme is introduced. However, we do not want to cut families off when the funding from Government ceases, so the Children and Young People Committee has requested that the Council continues to spend £1m or more in the coming financial year to ensure that families can claim vouchers in the Easter and, most importantly, summer holidays. We hope that the Government will provide new support for holiday vouchers, but come September the Council will be better placed to identify and support the most vulnerable families.

Special needs and disabilities funding campaign

Cambridgeshire County Council is [backing a campaign by a group named f40](#) calling for increased and fairer education funding and sweeping reforms to solve the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Publication of a Schools White Paper, setting out Government's plans for education and reforms to SEND, was expected last year but has been delayed. The County Council is

urging Government to ensure that expected reforms are powerful enough to solve the crisis and are backed by sufficient funding to enable schools to implement them.

Based on initial allocations for 2026/27, published by the Department for Education in December, Cambridgeshire will receive £6,465 per pupil for the 'Schools Block' of education funding. This places Cambridgeshire 128th out of all 151 local education authorities.

The deficit the county council faces in spending on children with high needs is forecast to be around £94m by the end of March this year, rising to around £200m by the end of the following two years, placing the council at severe financial risk. This position is shared by around a hundred other councils.

Across the country demand for SEND support continues to outstrip funding, with the lowest funded local authority area currently receiving less than a third of the SEND funding that the highest funded council receives. This is unsustainable.

It has been estimated that local authorities in England will have accumulated a collective SEND deficit of £6 billion by April this year. Without significant reform, this figure will continue to grow. The County Councils Network, representing county councils across the country, estimates the shortfall could pass £13 billion nationally by March 2028.

Education Health & Care Plans

The council invested an additional £780,000 last autumn to increase capacity across the Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) process for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including assessments, casework and reviews, helping to improve the timeliness and therefore the number of plans completed within the twenty-week target. EHCPs are a national concern and Cambridgeshire is performing below the national average with respect to EHCP processing. Officers were able to report some improvements and the Council is heading in the right direction, but work continues to improve local performance.

Budget recommendation

Following discussion, the Children & Young People Committee voted (8 for, 2 against, 4 abstentions) to recommend the budget and business plan for the service area as laid out in the papers, with requests for:

- £1m to be allocated for continued provision of holiday food vouchers, reversing the saving from the return of investment in the HSF.

[Children & Young People Papers](#) & [summary](#)

The papers also contain the details of schools and early years funding arrangements. A late change was made to recommendation a) of this item (4) to recommend that no funding was block transferred from the Schools block to the High Needs block. This change was made following consultation with the local Schools Forum who requested that the initially proposed 0.5% transfer would have a negative impact on schools. The proposal was to take 0.5% of the funding from the Dedicated School Grant out of the mainstream funding (which would've impacted different institutions differently) and sent

that funding to the High Needs funding. High Needs funding is currently kept off the Council's books separate from the operating budget (we are one of many councils with a 'Safety Valve' agreement), and the transfer of this funding would have taken a small amount off the debt for High Needs education spending in the County- it was felt that money was better going to the schools this year.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND INCLUSION

Anti-poverty action

The service area continues its anti-poverty action, with ringfenced funding available to implement the recommendations of the Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission. The calendar year will bring new developments in local poverty prevention work, and the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund's aims will support the Council's ongoing work in this area. It is unclear at this time how the Council dedicated funding for children's holiday food vouchers will be administered, but the Government has explicitly stated that the Crisis and Resilience Fund cannot be used to fund such vouchers. A small amount of funding will be available to support individuals in crisis with direct payments, but the details of the Council's administration of the scheme are still being worked with the Guidance documents being released in January.

Budget

The service area sees a small but stable budget. Savings are mostly coming through internal role restructuring, but these restructures will not see the reduction of any posts that provide frontline services. Libraries continue to be invested in and are a valued asset by the Council. An additional cost is coming from the decoupling of the shared Trading Standards service with Peterborough, where many Trading Standards staff were employed by Peterborough rather than Cambridgeshire.

The Committee unanimously recommended the budget and business plan for the service area [as laid out in the papers](#). [Summary](#)

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Potholes

Our area has been battered this winter. Peter and I have spent a lot of time inspecting issues on the ground, highlighting the serious problems we face in our Division and calling for repairs. We have seen some success, with some emergency repairs going in and hundreds of holes filled in the County Division, but the works we have seen completed only scratch the surface of the problems we face locally. We also appreciate that some repairs are creating new faults and our trying to keep on top of these too.

The council has significantly increased the number of highways crews dealing with both temporary and permanent fixes to the potholes on Cambridgeshire's roads, going from 8 to 30 crews actively working on our roads in the last few months. Repairs should continue and accelerate as we move forward, but Peter and I are challenging how we

have got to this point in the first place and will work to prevent such a disastrous winter for us next year.

Please do continue to report and let us (as Cllrs) know of major defects. We appreciate that it is frustrating to report and not see action, but the date of a report is crucial information to have on record and we are chasing as many cases as we can. We will work to get our A roads sorted, with the A10 suffering and the A1301 nigh on disintegrating, and focus on central village routes and important connective roads. From there, we will seek to work through the damage sustained in our smaller and residential roads, including our footpaths and verges. Please do let us know of serious problems wherever they are and we will try and get them priority attention.

With the Capital Maintenance Programme applications closed, Peter and I have been lobbying the Council to ensure that some of our worst affected areas (A1301, A10 and key roads in Sawston) are resurfaced, not just patched. The papers with the details of the proposed programme will be available at the end of February/ early March. I note a learning point on the Capital Maintenance Programme for myself, and will work harder to engage with all parishes in the run up to the next application window now that I have a much better understanding of the process and highways more generally.

£2.1 million works begin on peat soil affected roads

One of the biggest challenges we face in the county is our highways on peat soil in the north of the County which require a lot of attention and resources to reconstruct. Three large scale projects to rebuild and repair over 3.5km of peat soil affected roads in the north of Cambridgeshire have started.

These projects include reconstruction of 1km of Forty Foot Bank, Ramsey; resurfacing of just under 1km of Coates Road, Coates; and reconstruction of 1.8km of Long Drove, Holme.

Over the last year, 11km of peat soil affected roads were reconstructed or resurfaced at a cost of £5.5m. Further large-scale reconstruction or resurfacing works are due across other peat soil affected roads in 2026.

Budget

The Council continues to commit funding to highways maintenance. The amount of capital funding spent on highway maintenance in Cambridgeshire has increased by £35m since 2023/24, going from £35m to £59m. £73m was allocated this year, with the Council adding £20m on top of funding from Government, and the Council expects to internally fund £20m of investment in the forthcoming year.

[Papers](#) & [Summary](#)

STRATEGY, RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government is launching its seven-week consultation this month on the options for local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with its final decision slated to be announced in summer.

A statement from a minister has however indicated that the timetable by which the new unitary councils will be up and running in Spring 2028 is ‘the most ambitious’.

Business plan and budget

The Strategy Resources & Performance Committee met on Thursday 29 January to receive the views of council committees on the council’s draft budget.

Additional papers:

[Assets & Procurement](#) - [Summary](#)

[Environment & Green Investment](#) - [Summary](#)

In response to the Children & Young People Committee, the Strategy Resources & Performance Committee agreed to amend the draft budget to provide an additional £1m to support families following the Government’s withdrawal of the Household Support Fund which has enabled the provision of supermarket food vouchers during school holidays for eligible children.

The council’s Highways & Transport Committee expressed the ambition to be able to add £20m to the road maintenance budget in 2027/28, as well as in 2026/27.

The Committee recommended the budget as [laid out in the papers](#), subject to [the amendment](#).

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