

Cllr Liam Beckett

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2026

County Council - Draft Business Plan and Budget Proposals

Cambridgeshire County Council's 2026-27 business plan and budget will identify where to spend £1.2billion to deliver services and support for residents and communities across the county. The process of setting priorities and planning expenditure has been under way since the Autumn.

Next year 2026/27, there is a projected significant increase in costs due to a growing population and increasing demands – particularly in children's and adults' social care. Nearly two thirds of our spending is on adult and child social care, while other major areas of spending include Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), home to school transport, and highways maintenance.

Over the last few months, each of the committees has been considering the draft business plan and budget proposals have been scrutinised by elected members. Their views and comments came back to Strategy Resources and Performance Committee on 29 January which has now put forward the final draft business plan and budget for debate and decision at the Full Council meeting on 10 February. I have summarised the main priorities of the committees which met in January in **Appendix A at the bottom of my report.**

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Government LGR Consultation Launches

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 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'.

Adults & Health

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 requested a response by 27 February.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 the good offices of Cambridgeshire County Council in support of this.
- 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.

Children & Young People

Holiday food vouchers

The Government is withdrawing the Household Support Fund from the end of March, and replacing it with a Crisis and Resilience Fund later this year.

The County Council has been spending the funding on holiday food vouchers for all children on Free School Meals, and was one of the first councils in the country to top it up to ensure no schoolchild went hungry over the holidays. However, the Government is prohibiting councils from using the new Crisis and Resilience Fund for this purpose, risking leaving many vulnerable families without support. The council is increasing its own financial commitment to holiday food vouchers this year

to bridge the gap until September. Without a reversal from Government, however, any new scheme is likely to leave many families in need unsupported.

Education Health & Care Plans

The council invested an additional £780,000 last autumn to increase capacity across the Education Health & Care Plan 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. We were pleased to hear from officers that this is having a positive effect enabling more children to receive their assessments in good time.

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 £94 million by the end of March this year, rising to around £200 million 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.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Potholes

The council has significantly increased the number of highways crews dealing with both temporary and permanent fixes to the potholes on Cambridgeshire's roads. Normally eight crews and two dragon patchers are available across the county—now

there are thirty crews and two dragon patchers out repairing potholes. This will significantly increase the number of repairs attended to each week.

In the winter, a lot more road defects and potholes form due to wet and freezing weather causing those worn areas of road and pavement surfaces to break up. Since 2023/24, the amount of capital funding spent on highway maintenance in Cambridgeshire has increased by £35 million, from £24 million to £59 million. The Council allocated more than £73 million for highways maintenance in 2025/26—adding £20 million to the amount provided by Government—and expects to do so again this coming year.

The latest pothole reporting data shows things heading in the right direction, albeit slowly. Outstanding potholes are down from last week (this report was written on 3rd Feb), resident reports are also down (however still about 3x higher than December). Officers are moving staff around the entire county to tackle the backlog which are expected to ease in March/April.

20mph Funding Scheme Now Open for Applications

Anyone can apply if they have the support of their local County Council member – needless to add, I am supportive of 20mph schemes in residential areas. Once an application has been submitted it will be prioritised and scored by officers. This will produce a long list which will then be worked through until all the schemes applied for have been delivered.

The prioritised schemes will be entirely funded by the council out of a budget of £150,000 per year specifically set aside for 20mph schemes. This is expected to fund the delivery of around eight individual schemes per year.

NEWS FROM THE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Bus cuts

Thirty-five bus routes across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough—including Route 65 Buckden to St Neots - are hanging by a thread as the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough seeks to cut half a million pounds from local bus services.

At last month's Combined Authority Transport Committee, I asked the Chair of the County Council's Highways & Transport Committee to take a stance against the immediate removal of the four routes, and insisted insist that there should be appropriate engagement with residents and parishes on proposals affecting contracted bus services. Thankfully, the CPCA has now agreed to consult on three of these services. My request to you all is if you have stories of how the route 65 is used, to speak to me and let me know so I can share real-life stories of why this service should stay. I'm working on a case for the route to be adjusted to improve usage and usefulness by adjusting timetabling.

The Combined Authority is however ceasing to fund the 8A bus between March and Milton Park and Ride, serving Sutton, Haddenham, Wilburton, Cottenham and Landbeach. The route had been extended recently as far as the Park and Ride in the hope that this would improve passenger numbers, but this was unsuccessful. The

operator must give 112 days' notice to the Traffic Commissioner before stopping the service.

LOCAL GRANTS – CURRENTLY OPEN TO APPLICATIONS

Community Watercourse Maintenance Grants

Community Watercourse Maintenance Grants of up to £10,000 are designed to support communities where the condition of local watercourses is increasing the risk of flooding. By providing funding directly, the County Council enables local people to take practical action to improve water flow, reduce flood risk, and enhance the surrounding environment. The grant can be used for vegetation clearance and debris removal, minor repairs to banks or channels, equipment hire or contractor support, volunteer training and safety equipment, and other essential maintenance activities.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/planning-and-development/flood-and-water/community-flood-action-programme/watercourse-maintenance-grant>

The Cambridge Building Society Community Fund

The fund offers grants from £2,500 up to £10,000 to support organisations that are undertaking charitable work with a connection to homes or housing. We are within 15 miles of the St Ives Branch, meeting the eligibility criteria.

Apply by 1st May

Thalia WB Community Fund

The fund offers grants for capital projects to improve the local environment, including public buildings and amenities, habitats and architecture. Offers between £10,000 and £50,000.

Apply by 1st March

A Further 8 Grants currently open for applications this month:

<https://www.cambscf.org.uk/funds/?gt=any&am=any&ea=huntingdonshire&sc=any&dl=any&aa=true>

Other local and national grants can be found here:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/funding-opportunities-in-cambridgeshire>

Councillor Surgeries

(Currently planning the years Schedule for 2026 – tbc).

I can be contacted at...

- By email liam.beckett@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
- By phone 07312 081892

Cllr Liam Beckett

County Councillor for the Brampton and Buckden Division

Appendix A – Committee Priorities and Budgetting

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion committee.

This committee has a significant role in supporting, protecting and developing community resilience.

The Committee seeks to:

- maintain investment in a network of library facilities across the county;
- deliver anti-poverty initiatives across Cambridgeshire, including rolling out the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund, which is replacing the Household Support Fund
- Invest £1.7 million in enabling income maximisation work delivered through Citizens Advice to continue and to help to provide small grants for community projects.
- A review of posts will identify savings of £155,000.
- Investing £87,000 in the Trading Standards Service will protect consumers by tackling unsafe or illegal practices, such as ensuring product safety enforcement, carrying out food standards checks, animal health and welfare oversight, and licensing for petroleum and explosives.

Children and Young People Committee

The committee's plans to provide continued investment in children's social care, fostering and adoption as well as education services, were scrutinised and supported by a majority of Children and Young People committee members.

The council now plans to invest an additional:

- £10.4M for children who become looked after
- £3.8M to support home to school transport services
- £406K to increase direct payment packages for children and young people with disabilities.

Other proposals include:

- Continuing to reduce use of agency social workers. Already down from 38% in January 2024 to 12% in November 2025.
- Supporting families to access their full benefits entitlement and additional help they might need once the Household Support Fund closes
- Delivering a three-year Travel to Learn project to boost independence of learners, improve access to and uptake of safe active travel and public transport routes, and improve efficiency of transport services

Environment and Green Investment

The Committee agreed the draft business plan and budget proposals that would see continued investment in household recycling centres, flood protection systems and the council's renewable energy schemes were scrutinised and unanimously supported by Environment and Green Investment committee members – who put

forward their views for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee on 29 January.

The council has included the following in the draft business plan:

- £4.28m of capital investment is included for the new upgrades for the Household Recycling Centres due to be built at March and Milton during 2026/27.
- £53.9M of continued investment in services including waste disposal, flood risk management, nature and biodiversity management, management of existing renewable energy schemes, supporting economic growth, alongside the support of the council's ambitions relating to carbon reduction.
- The Committee approved the new Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2026-2028.

Highways and Transport

Proposals for an additional £20m of investment in road maintenance, were scrutinised and supported by a majority of Highways and Transport committee. The Highways and Transport committee has a significant role in delivering highways maintenance, road safety, active travel and major infrastructure delivery.

This is why, the council plans to prioritise:

- An additional £20m of capital investment for 2026/27. This reflects the Council's commitment to record levels of spending on highways maintenance and would enable resurfacing, preventative treatments, and upgrades to bridges, footpaths and cycle routes.
- This would create a total investment of £58m for 26/27 as recommended by the draft asset management strategy. Due to the levels of funding invested in 2024/25 and 2025/26, the condition of the highway network has improved, the council has introduced a revised, evidence-led and prioritisation process for investment into maintenance. To maintain this, an annual investment of £58.2m is required.

Other proposals include:

- The development of a draft lane rental scheme to improve the management and co-ordination of streetworks, this will be subject to a consultation and decision-making process. This would allow us to charge companies for the time that roadworks occupy the highway and help us to reduce disruption on the county's roads. This is currently planned for implementation in 2027/28.
- Proposed fee increases for streetworks. This would allow us to hold those responsible to account, driving up standards and reduce unnecessary disruption.
- Changes to the enforcement of car parking to include bank holidays, this will be subject to a consultation and decision-making process. This would make our enforcement more aligned and is something residents have been asking for.

Adults and Health

Draft business plan and budget proposals to continue investment in services for older people and younger adults with care and support needs were scrutinised and supported by a majority of Adults and Health committee members.

The committee supported council plans to prioritise:

- An additional £14.7m of funding to help care providers to meet ongoing costs, including inflation and to support them to pay the Real Living Wage.
- Additional funding of:
 - £1.9m to meet demand for care and support amongst older people accessing both home and residential care
 - £4.9m to help meet the rising levels of need amongst people with a learning disability
 - £2.1m for working age and older people with mental health needs

FAQ: Who is responsible for what?

Function	County	District	Town/Parish
Adult social care	•		
Allotments			•
Building regulations		•	
Births, deaths and marriages	•		
Burials, cremations and cemeteries		•	•
Children's services	•		
Coastal protection		•	
Community safety	•	•	
Concessionary travel	•		•
Council tax and business rates		•	
Consumer protection	•		
Economic development	•	•	

Education and related services	•		
Elections and electoral services		•	
Emergency planning	•	•	•
Environmental Health		•	
Fly tipping clearance		•	
Highways, roads, pavements, footpaths, Public Rights of Way	•		
Housing and homelessness		•	
Housing benefits		•	
Litter, bins, street cleaning		•	
Libraries	•		
Licensing		•	
Local planning		•	[•]
Markets and fairs		•	•
Parking	•	•	•
Parks		•	
Public toilets		•	•
Trading standards	•		
Trees	•	•	[•]
Waste and recycling collection		•	
Waste disposal and public tips	•		

[•] – Parish council is a consultee but has no formal powers