

## **Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – January 2025**

The Gamlingay Division comprises the Parishes of Abington Pigotts, Arrington, Barrington, Croydon, Gamlingay, Guilden Morden, Litlington, Hatley, Orwell, Shingay-cum-Wendy, Steeple Morden, Tadlow & Wimpole. This report is for all Division Parish Councils but please be aware that it will include items that may have little or no relevance to your particular Parish. Apologies in advance!

Your Councillors are always ready to help. Please do not hesitate to contact County Councillor Sebastian Kindersley on 01767 651982 or [skindersley@hotmail.com](mailto:skindersley@hotmail.com) or write to the Manor Barn, East Hatley, SG19 3JA or District Councillor for The Mordens Heather Williams: [cllr.williamsh@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.williamsh@scambs.gov.uk) / 07885 774 775.

### **Elections**

May 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 will see local elections for the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and for all 61 Divisions of Cambridgeshire County Council including the 13 Parishes of the Gamlingay Division. Sebastian says “It has been a tremendous privilege to represent local people and communities since 1999 but I have decided not to put my name forward again. If you would like to know more about the role; or are considering standing (for whatever party or none) I would be very happy to answers any queries or concerns you might have so please do feel free to get in touch.”

### **Council Budget**

Cambridgeshire County Council will set its budget on 11<sup>th</sup> February, with recommendations being considered in advance by the Strategy Resources & Performance Committee. Each year councils are required to set a balanced budget for the year ahead. This has become more difficult in recent years for several reasons including

- Growing demand for services and increasing complexity of health and care needs
- Inflation
- Market failures in services such as provision for children in care, with high demand, insufficient supply, provider profiteering, and diminished council negotiating power.

The totality of the council's gross budget, including schools and services funded by specific grants, is expected to be over £1.1 billion for 2025-26. Of this, over half (£567 million) is proposed to be spent on children, education and families, and health and adult social care. In December, councillors were told that efficiencies and savings or additional income of £34 million would be needed to set a balanced budget for 2025-26, and considered draft proposals to achieve this. However, the coming five years show an overall funding gap of £132 million, of which £73 million is not yet addressed.

### **Social care reform—but not until 2028**

The Government has promised to ‘finally grasp the nettle on social care reform’, with an independent commission due to begin work in April. Proposals on a stable system for the long-term funding of adult social care

in England have been needed for years. But these are unlikely to be delivered before 2028 at the earliest, the government has confirmed. The proposed commission, chaired by Baroness Louise Casey, is not due to publish its final report until then. Meanwhile, councils and care providers across the country are saying this is far too long to wait for reform of vital social care services which are already on their knees.

### **Urgent and emergency care**

The County Council's Adults & Health Committee received a report last month for their scrutiny on the performance of the NHS in urgent and emergency care. During 2024/25, performance has been below the planned trajectories submitted as part of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) operational plan, and below national standards. Two key national metrics for urgent and emergency care are that

- Emergency departments should see and treat a minimum of 78 per cent of patients within four hours of arriving in the department by the end of March 2025, and
- Patients categorised by the ambulance trust as Category 2 emergency, should have an ambulance response time within 30 minutes.

Both these targets remain behind plan, with the NHS under considerable pressure locally and nationally.

### **CAB grant for income maximisation**

The County Council's COSMIC committee has agreed a grant of £800,000 over two years to Citizens Advice in the county for income maximisation—working with residents to ensure they are in receipt of all financial assistance they are eligible for, and helping people out of poverty across Cambridgeshire by providing a long-term solution to financial hardship. Since income maximisation work began in 2023, 5,455 Cambridgeshire residents have accessed the service, resulting in an income gain of £3,887,844.

### **Non-recycled waste**

A recent article in the Guardian newspaper reported that 87 per cent of Cambridgeshire's non-recyclable waste goes to landfill—second only to Essex. The council commented: "Our first priority is to reduce, re-use and to recycle as much as possible, as there are limited methods available to treat the waste that is left over in the short-medium term. "We are actively working with both our waste contractor, as well as Central Government, to try and find the best long-term solution to manage the county's waste." It is important to note that all mixed dry recycling collected from Cambridgeshire households and household recycling centres is recycled; all food and garden waste collected from households is composted; where legislation prohibits sending waste to landfill the council is in full compliance and where possible, black bag waste is treated using energy recovery or mechanical

biological treatment, to divert as much as possible from landfill. The whole waste industry and legislative framework is currently going through a period of significant change. The council is awaiting detailed guidance from Government to inform its long-term waste strategy.

### **£10 million for road maintenance**

The Government has announced how much each council area will receive for highways capital maintenance for 2025/26. For the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough area it's £10 million, with a quarter of that amount to be held back until the respective councils have proved they will meet certain—still to be announced—criteria. £10 million sounds a lot, but the Government may hold back twenty-five per cent of it; it includes Peterborough as well as Cambridgeshire and in Cambridgeshire alone the backlog of highways maintenance is around £600 million. Better than nothing, then, but a long way from what we need.

### **Speed cameras**

A question to the Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways & Transport Committee about whether the council might consider the introduction of more speed cameras produced an interesting answer. In a discussion about Cambridgeshire's 'Vision Zero'—the aim to reduce to zero the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads—a Councillor pointed out how few speed cameras there are in Cambridgeshire compared with, for example, Staffordshire.

The answer from the road safety manager focused on the cost but also that another factor was that 'there have to be the appropriate available court slots to deal with anybody committing speeding offences'. Increasing enforcement could lead to people 'falling through the cracks' as there would simply not be space to 'push them through' the court system—and this was 'a bigger problem to solve' than the cost. It's yet another example of the collapse of the justice system under the previous government.

### **Meanwhile on the Combined Authority**

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority has decided not to increase the current bus fare cap of £2 per journey. This comes despite the decision of the Government nationally to increase the fare cap to £3, and will be welcomed by many bus passengers. The new Tiger on Demand bus service, which replaces the 'Ting' demand responsive service in the west of Huntingdonshire, will soon be coming to East Cambridgeshire, and opening up public transport opportunities for many village residents here.

### **NO-HGV ZONE?**

We wrote last month canvassing opinion in Gamlingay and surrounding South Cambs villages about a no HGV Zone across the area – a plan currently being mooted by Central Beds Councillors – asking for your views. Responses have been few – less than 5 – most of which supported a ban.

However, this is nothing like a mandate so we will continue to learn about what Central Beds propose but will ask for much stronger public feedback locally before supporting any changes.

### **Herbert Protocol**

Have you heard of it? It's a scheme the Police support that can help find people with dementia if they go missing. It encourages family and friends to keep a document that will help officers in the event a loved one goes missing by collating key pieces of information, such as a physical description, familiar places, health details and an up-to-date photo. Feel free to share this post and help spread the word about this important scheme. Keeping a completed form means you don't have to try to remember the information when you are under stress if someone goes missing. And it saves time, so the Police can start the search sooner.

For more information or to download a Herbert Protocol form, [visit the dedicated web page](#).

### **Local Government Organisation - Devolution White Paper**

The government published the devolution white paper on 16 December. There are many proposals for Combined Authorities and Mayors. One of the most significant proposals is the creation of unitary authorities where there are currently two tier councils such as in our region. It is expected that newly created unitary authorities would have populations exceeding 500,000 but there may be exceptions. The rationale for creating unitary authorities is expected efficiency savings and service improvements. The paper cites a PWC County Councils Network commissioned report. It emphasises maintaining community-level engagement despite the larger size of unitary authorities compared with our local district and city councils. A phased implementation approach is proposed.

The paper also discusses changes to the way that councils are funded including a review of the business rates retention system. The rationale given by government for creating massive unitary authorities is expected efficiency savings (£2.3 billion which is not a lot when you look at the cost of social care and health) and service improvements.

Many councils are challenging this and expressing grave concerns about losing what is truly local in Local Government. It means there will be far fewer councillors each responsible for much larger areas. The outcome is that many people will not know who their councillor is and councillors will no longer have the sort of close relationship with their communities which we currently enjoy.

Additionally local government reorganisation takes years and costs millions of pounds to implement. During that time we are likely to see councils having to focus their resources on restructuring and away from a lot of the discretionary things they currently do such as helping people struggling with the cost of living.

## **Campaign – Support for Young Carers**

The Digital Poverty Alliance wants to make more people aware of the support on offer to equip young carers with digital access and skills. The Alliance is not reaching everyone who could benefit so we are sharing this information and asking parish councillors to reach out to people you're your communities who you think could be supported. More information is available on the Digital Poverty Alliance website.

## **Useful information – Flooding**

SCDC's Scrutiny and Overview Committee recently discussed local drainage, flooding and mitigation of water pollution. One of the tasks to come out of that meeting was to provide South Cambridgeshire's parish and town councils with some helpful information and tools to support them – particularly when it comes to flooding.

*Who is responsible for what and who should I contact?*

It can be confusing and time-consuming to work out who is responsible for what when it comes to investigating and regulating flooding. The handy flowchart from Cambridgeshire County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority shows a clearly defined list of responsibilities and contact details on the website. The idea of this flowchart is to help you identify an issue relating to flooding and make contact with the appropriate organisation. We hope it will help with more isolated or local emergencies related to sewerage or surface water issues, which can present challenges for residents who don't know who to contact to find help.

*Watercourse rights and responsibilities*

If there is a watercourse on, next to or under a property you own, then you could be a Riparian Owner. The deeds for your property or land may tell you if this is the case. However, even if your deeds do not say you are responsible for an adjacent watercourse, the law will assume you are. Waiver of responsibility only applies where a title deed states specifically that you are not responsible. This means you are responsible for its maintenance to ensure it flows freely without obstruction, pollution or diversion, and you should also maintain your side of the riverbank. A map of all watercourses in Cambridgeshire is available on the County Council website. You can also read more about rights and responsibilities as a riparian owner.

## **North Lane Gamlingay**

Please do not take cars from North Lane directly on to Drove Rd through the illegal access that has recently been created. The reason that this route was closed off is that it was extremely dangerous and we have already seen a number of tragic accidents close to where the access has been created in recent years.

## **Foul drainage**

Any parishes that are experiencing sewer drainage issues should email Anglian Water at their Public Affairs mailbox on [public.affairs@anglianwater.co.uk](mailto:public.affairs@anglianwater.co.uk)

## **Frozen green waste bins**

At this time of year there is a risk that the contents of green bins can freeze and stick to the inside, preventing the bins from being emptied properly. The council's web pages on bins and recycling contain some advice on how to minimise the risk of your bin freezing. Please circulate this and keep residents informed to help minimise this frustrating problem. In January and February the green bins will be emptied once a month and from the beginning of March, they will be emptied fortnightly.

## **Net Zero Villages Grant Scheme**

The scheme offering a total funding pot of £362,547 has been launched by South Cambridgeshire District Council to help rural communities become low carbon, more sustainable and more resilient to the effects of climate change. The initiative, funded by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, provides grants ranging from £20,000 to £100,000 to support transformative, community-led projects. With climate change at the forefront of global and local concerns, this grant scheme is designed to support the district's villages in taking meaningful steps towards reaching net zero and securing a more sustainable future.

The Net Zero Villages scheme will fund capital projects under the following themes:

- Energy Efficiency and Generation – Examples include installing insulation, LED lighting, solar panels, wind turbines, or battery storage for renewable energy.
- Low Carbon Transport – Initiatives such as community-run electric shuttle buses or other sustainable transport solutions.
- Nature-Based Solutions – Projects like green roofs, walls, or tree planting to cool and enhance community spaces.

Eligible projects must improve community assets and reduce carbon emissions, such as retrofitting village halls, enhancing public transport access, or implementing green infrastructure.

The grant is open to community groups, parish councils and rural businesses across South Cambridgeshire.

## **Council Tax increase for vacant properties**

From April 2026, Council Tax will be doubled on long-term vacant properties in South Cambridgeshire as an incentive to bring the estimated 2600 empty properties in the district into use. Exemptions exist for

properties that are on the market, subject to probate, or are under renovation. This approach has been used successfully by other councils to bring properties back into use and is expected to help address the high demand for housing in the district. It is estimated that the change will generate an additional £100,000 a year in income for South Cambridgeshire which will help support vital frontline services.

### **Help for people working with health problems**

The District Council has worked in partnership with neighbouring councils to launch a free programme called WorkWell, offering help to anyone struggling to find or keep a job due to health problems. This is a valuable initiative that seeks to improve the lives of those affected, to work with the wider community to understand and overcome the barriers involved, and to help boost our local economy.

### **Menopause friendly accreditation**

South Cambridgeshire District Council has recently been independently accredited as a menopause friendly employer. This is an important step in the council's drive to ensure that it is an inclusive and supportive employer. For more information on the Menopause Friendly Accreditation, please visit <https://menopausefriendly.co.uk/>

### **Bridgit**

The County Council has launched "Bridgit" - an AI-enabled carer support platform to provide a one-stop shop to help carers in Cambridgeshire in collaboration with Caring Together and alongside Peterborough City Council.

Bridgit has been crafted by carers and care experts, specifically for those who juggle busy and often stressful lives. Its user-friendly interface ensures easy navigation, even for those with limited digital skills.

### **How will Bridgit help Cambridgeshire's carers?**

- **Comprehensive resources:** Free wellbeing, employment, finance, and care advice and events.
- **Local and national support:** Tailored support services and training opportunities.
- **Personalised Self-Care Plans:** Customisable self-care plans to manage well-being.
- **24/7 Availability:** All resources are available at any time of day, no registration required.

Bridgit automatically updates itself and streamlines all the information available to carers into one easy to use portal. It uses AI to create a bespoke experience for each user, meaning they don't get swamped with irrelevant information.

Bridgit can be used without having to create an account but there is an option for carers to sign up for fortnightly emails and there's also a carer support coach you can contact via WhatsApp. Carers can create their own self-help plan in seconds and find out how to get personal advice, find local events, support and services. Examples include information on carer assessments, care providers, emergency planning, the end of a caring role, managing work/life/carer balance, receiving carers allowance, cost of living, mental health support and much more.

### **UK-wide Day of Reflection**

A UK-wide Day of Reflection for the COVID-19 pandemic will take place on Sunday 9 March 2025. The COVID-19 Day of Reflection is an opportunity for communities across the UK to come together in reflection and commemoration for those who lost their lives and for everyone impacted by the pandemic. On the day itself and in the week before, the public will be able to mark the day in ways that feel most appropriate and fitting to them, both in person and online. More at <https://dayofreflection.campaign.gov.uk/about/>

### **South Cambs 4 Day Week**

Plans for how people will be able to share their views on South Cambridgeshire District Council's services during a trial of a four-day week have been published. A report to be discussed at the Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee sets out the proposals for an eight-week public consultation. Subject to final sign-off, there will be a full public consultation that anyone, anywhere can respond to – starting at 9am on Monday 27 January. The planned consultation would then run for eight weeks, closing at 11.59pm on Sunday 23 March.

The information gathered during the consultation will help District Councillors decide on the next steps for the four-day week at the Council. The consultation has been set up so that residents can share their views on how they have found Council services since January 2023 – when a trial of a four-day week began.

The Council announced plans to trial a four-day week – where people deliver 100% of their work, in around 80% of their hours, for 100% of their pay – to help address acute recruitment and retention issues.

Following a detailed and independent review of an initial three-month trial, the trial was extended for a further year and the Council has continued to work in this way as further information was awaited from Government.

During the Local Government Finance Settlement consultation for 2024/25, which was published in December 2023, the previous Government consulted on the potential of using financial levers, to come into force from April 2025, to discourage councils from adopting four-day weeks. Until there was more clarity on this, Cabinet members considered it not feasible for the Council to carry out a meaningful consultation and decide on next steps.



The new Government's Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26, which was published on 18 December last year, made no mention of any financial levers that were threatened by the previous Government. This means that the Council is now able to consult.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr John Williams, said: "We have always made it very clear that we planned to give residents, businesses, parish and town councils and community groups the chance to share their views with us, on the impact on services they've received during our four-day week arrangements. We have not been able to do that up to this point because of threats made by the previous Government. With those threats lifted, we are now able to begin this process. Our approach is designed to ensure those who have used our services during the four-day week arrangements can quickly and easily share their views - though anyone, anywhere will be welcome to submit comments."

Cllr Mike Davey, Leader of Cambridge City Council, said: "We have supported the four-day week trial from the start, as South Cambridgeshire District Council works to find innovative solutions to the recruitment and retention challenges that are facing councils across the UK, with a knock-on impact on the cost of delivering services. We've always said that the most important factor for us is ensuring that services for residents continue to be delivered reliably and to a high standard, and we have been keeping a close eye on this throughout. It's right that residents are also invited to feedback on their experiences of Council services during the trial, and we'll be making sure that the consultation is well publicised to Cambridge residents once it's live, to ensure our residents voices are heard."

The idea of the four-day week at the Council is to help attract and keep talented colleagues in an incredibly competitive local employment market. It is also to help improve services by filling vacant posts permanently, rather than relying on more expensive agency staff. Regularly changing staff, or using agency staff to cover posts, is both costly and disruptive to services for residents.

Last summer, an independent report by two universities into the Council's performance during its four-day week trial was published. Of 24 key performance indicators monitored by the Council, analysis by the Universities of Cambridge and Salford found 22 improved or remained the same. The areas found to have improved included percentage of calls to the Council's Contact Centre answered, average number of weeks to determine householder planning applications and average number of days to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support changes.

There was also a financial assessment of the trial, which outlined a known full year cost saving of £371,500. This was mainly due to permanently filling 10 posts that were previously identified as 'hard to fill'. The financial saving reduced the Council's budget overspend because of not needing more expensive agency alternatives to fill the 10 posts.

The Council's opening hours have been maintained so it has been open for business just as it was before the trial – with longer opening hours on Wednesdays too.

Your Councillors are here to help you. Please do feel free to contact us with comments, questions, problems or complaints. We hope we can help but if we can't we are likely to know someone who can!

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