

Cllr Jonny Edge

MONTHLY REPORT – APRIL 2026

FULL COUNCIL

The Full Council resolved to oppose any proposals to merge our local police force into a regional or national entity, calling on the Government to prioritise increased funding for community policing teams, national standards for vetting and technology upgrades to improve efficiency, and enhanced rural crime support and local police desks in community hubs.

The Full Council also resolved to explore ways to provide targeted holiday support including funding an ongoing holiday voucher scheme subject to the Government's funding rules, and using a proportion of the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund to do this where it meets Government eligibility criteria. The council also agreed to ask the Government to provide sufficient funding for councils to continue supporting families during school holidays.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Fourteen parishes in Woodditton and Burwell combined forces to submit a letter to government ministers, stating clarity on our ambition to remain connected to Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire regardless of the options being consulted on. This received support from over the border in South Cambridgeshire with parishes there supporting our case.

This followed a series of local public engagement events that though not well attended, gave those wanting to know more a balanced perspective on the options being consulted on. A survey was also circulated via social media and at the events with 261 respondents from all villages, 97% of whom supported retaining the connection to Cambridge and South Cambs.

The Government has now announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation for Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Hampshire.

In all cases it has chosen new unitary councils which are smaller than their proposed 500,000 minimum population, and in the case of Norfolk and Suffolk it has chosen to split districts, something it originally indicated would be unusual.

With the Government apparently throwing all its criteria out of the window, we wait with interest for the Government's announcement for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which is expected in early July.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Holiday voucher values

Following the Government's withdrawal of the Household Support Fund, replaced by the Crisis & Resilience Fund with lower levels of funding, the council has agreed holiday voucher values as follows for the coming holidays.

Holiday Period	Weekly Voucher Value	Total Voucher Value
Easter (30 March – 10 April)	£10	£20
May Half Term (25 – 29 May)	£10	£10
Summer (21 July – 1 September)	£10	£60

The Crisis & Resilience Fund is expected to support all those facing 'financial shocks', not just children eligible for free school meals.

Two new special schools for Cambridgeshire

The Government has confirmed that it will be delivering two new special schools in Cambridgeshire: Greensands Academy in Gamlingay, and Lime Academy in March. Between them the two schools are expected to provide 270 new special school places in Cambridgeshire. Demand for in-county special school spaces has grown significantly year-on-year, in line with national trends, since these schools were first planned. In Cambridgeshire the number of children with an Education Health & Care Plan grew by 71% from 2020 to 2025.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Help with oil heating costs

The council has received £708,000 from the Government which is ring-fenced to support households struggling with the cost of domestic oil heating. The money has been added to the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund, and applications are being administered by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation.

Applications to the fund opened on Monday 30 March. The link to apply is at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/crisis-payment>

This fund is intended for Cambridgeshire households on low incomes who are reliant on heating oil and who need to top up their tanks as a matter of urgency. To receive this support, applicants must meet all the following criteria:

- Live in Cambridgeshire.
- Be reliant on heating oil to heat their home and/or water.
- Have 150 litres or less of oil remaining at the time of application.
- Be in receipt of or eligible for one of the following means-tested benefits:
 - Universal Credit
 - Pension Credit
 - Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

If funding allows, the council hopes to expand the scheme later to households on incomes just above the threshold for means-tested benefits, or with exceptionally high energy needs.

Eligible households can apply for up to £400 of support. The level of support awarded may fluctuate with the price of oil. The target for payment to be issued is 48 hours from the time that all required evidence is received. Once the fund is exhausted, second payments will be issued where necessary. Residents will first be expected to access income maximisation support from Citizens' Advice and only those referred back following a financial assessment will be eligible for further payments.

Residents can apply direct to Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, or may be referred by a referral organisation that has assessed their circumstances and can verify that they need immediate assistance. All applicants will need to provide proof of address, income, and the need to top-up with heating oil.

For residents whose household income is above the level for means-tested benefits, other support is available. The council funds Citizens' Advice Rural Cambs to deliver an income maximisation service. <https://www.citizensadvicerruralcambs.org.uk/>

All information and updates to residents can be found on the council's website. Any communications received by the Contact Centre are being directed to this webpage. The details

of residents who have called or emailed the council so far are being collated and they will be contacted directly when the fund opens.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/help-with-utility-bills>

There will likely be a large number of residents applying into the fund and the outlined 48-hour turnaround for payments will be challenging in the early weeks of the fund, given foreseen high demand. In line with the Crisis and Resilience Fund and Poverty Commission objectives, applicants will receive signposting to other forms of support available to improve resilience against future financial shock.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Help shape new Community Nature Recovery Plans

Cambridgeshire County Council is calling on residents across the county to play an active role in restoring local nature as part of the 'Nature Recovery - From the Ground Up' project; a new initiative supporting parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans.

A Community Nature Recovery Plan is a locally created blueprint that sets out priorities for improving nature and wildlife at a parish level. These plans help communities to shape a vision for nature locally and identify steps to bring about the changes. The plans will support the wider goals of Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Key actions include:

- Restoring habitats
- Creating nature corridors and stepping-stones for wildlife
- Increasing areas managed for wildlife.

As part of the project, all Cambridgeshire parishes will have free access to the online mapping software Parish Online until March 2027. This will allow parish councils and community groups acting on their behalf to map out proposed projects relative to LNRS priorities, explore cross parish projects, and contribute to collaborative maps (for example showing swift boxes across the county).

Cambridgeshire is one of the counties with the least nature-rich land in England, and the LNRS sets out an ambitious plan to "double nature" locally, expanding nature-rich land from 8% to the national average of 16%.

The first phase of the project runs from July 2025 to March 2027, focusing on Cambridge and twenty parishes across East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, and South Cambridgeshire. Other parishes are invited to use the project resources and mapping software and register interest for future phases of the project.

The project is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council's Just Transition Fund and delivered in partnership with Natural Cambridgeshire.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/improving-the-natural-environment/nature-recovery-from-the-ground-up>

HEALTH SCRUTINY

Children's autism health services

The council's health scrutiny committee considered the provision of health services for children with autism. CCS NHS Trust is the body responsible for provision of autism services for children aged 0-11.

Referral activity prior to the COVID-19 pandemic averaged fewer than 100 referrals per month. During the pandemic and periods of lockdown, referral numbers reduced slightly, falling to below 90 referrals per month. Since early 2022, average monthly referrals have risen to over 135 per month, with considerably greater month-to-month variation. This increased volatility makes demand more difficult to predict and plan for.

CPFT is responsible for services to 12–18-year-olds. It reports that increasing awareness of autism and recognition presentations combined with high demand for complex multidisciplinary assessments have led to extended waiting times in some cases. An increasing number of families are seeking assessments from independent providers via their GPs, or via private referrals.

The Integrated Care Board, CCS and CPFT are aware of the issues within the services and the impact of waiting times on children and families and are trialling several initiatives to address them. The challenges of increased awareness, demand for diagnosis support and strained resources to support this need remain a challenge.

Primary care in Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire is facing sustained and structurally significant population growth, especially in Cambridge and surrounding areas. It has an ageing population with long-term conditions, increased clinical complexity, health inequalities, delay in new or expanded healthcare premises, and pressure on appointment availability and telephone access.

Recruiting and retaining GPs and practice nurses is a challenge. There is disproportionate workload for practices serving communities in pockets of deprivation. The national 'Carr-Hill' formula for core GP funding is insufficiently responsive to deprivation and current patterns of need. The Government's Ten-Year Plan is aiming to shift care from hospitals to neighbourhoods.

The Integrated Care Board explained how it is managing these challenges while itself going through a process of radical reorganisation. It is working with local GP practices, many of which are in a very vulnerable situation.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Road conditions

Highways & Transport Committee chair Cllr Alex Beckett has written a very informative article which is well worth a read at <https://notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-rightnow>

Road updates

Ashley, Church Street and Silverley: Are scheduled for maintenance works with a road closures between 7th and 13th April

B1063, Silverly through to Suffolk border on Ashley Road Newmarket: This road is scheduled for surface treatment from with road closures from 9th to 11th June. This will commence from the Newmarket end. Pre-patching will be completed in advance.

Bottisham, Approach to Hilton Park: This section of road is in poor condition and has been missed by inspections for a long while. This has now been reported and is being prioritised.

Bottisham, Bradfords Close and Peacock Drive: Are scheduled for maintenance works with a road closures between 10th and 16th April

Bottisham, Arber Close: Is scheduled for maintenance work with give and take traffic management between 13th and 17th April

Bottisham, Tunbridge Lane: Is scheduled for maintenance work with give and take traffic management between 9th and 15th April

Cheveley, Moulton Road, Cheveley: This stretch is scheduled to be surface dressed on 11th June. We still await dates for pre-patching. Both instance will require a road closure and diversions.

Dullingham, Brinkley Road: Is scheduled for maintenance work with road closures between 13th and 17th April to pick up final pre-patching work. The surface dressing is scheduled for 22nd April

Dullingham, London Road: Is scheduled for surface dressing with road closures from 24th to 25th of April

Kirtling, various: All roads are currently undergoing pre-patching with the surface dressing is scheduled for 20th and 21st April

Swaffham Bulbeck, Fen Lane: Being a byway this is not a high priority for maintenance, but I am intervening to try and secure some plainings to help residents

NEWS FROM THE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Water resources plan

Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan for eastern England including Cambridgeshire. This is a combination of infrastructure investment and demand management. Cambridgeshire will increasingly rely on water resources transferred from other parts of the region, and increased water storage, improved transfer and sharing of water between regions, and reduced demand will all be important.

Youth employment strategy

The Combined Authority has approved the development of a Youth Employment / NEET* Strategy for 14-25 year olds and recommend it to the Combined Authority Board.

*NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

Local visitor economy partnership

The Combined Authority has agreed to submit an application to Visit England for accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Rural tourism will be a key focus of this.

Electric vehicles

A two-phase trial will take place shortly across Cambridgeshire to install channels in pavements to carry cables for on-street charging of electric vehicles. This will be a very small trial, consisting of just ten dwellings in each district in Phase 1 between April and September, and a further forty in each district in Phase 2 later in the year. Further details will be forthcoming soon.

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