

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Monthly Report – January 2026

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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Cost-of-living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: 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 handyperson service and; support if you are in distress.

Community Hubs

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

Local Community Hubs include:

- Grantchester Communal Hall, Tabrum Close, Grantchester, Cambridge, CB3 9NW
Opens: Friday, 10am – 12pm
- Toft Community Hub – Toft Methodist Chapel, High Street, Toft, Cambridge, CB23 2RL
Opens: Monday, 10am – 12pm.

Find out more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/community-hubs>

A £449,000 package of support over two years to tackle cost-of-living challenges

A budget of £449,000 has been [approved](#) to help South Cambridgeshire residents through the next two years of cost-of-living financial pressures. The plan focuses on supporting vulnerable households by expanding access to emergency food and energy support, building financial resilience by delivering workshops on budgeting and debt advice, and continuing community partnerships to provide coordinated support.

Each year the key measures will include:

- £28,000 for laptops and digital training for young and older people to reduce digital exclusion.
- £50,000 for [Community Hubs](#) - warm places run by trained volunteers that serve the local community's needs.
- £18,000 to continue to provide emergency food parcels to those in need to the door.
- £30,000 for an essential white good and furniture scheme for vulnerable people moving into homes to address furniture poverty.
- £50,000 to continue the mobile food hub which provides affordable healthy food in rural communities – with the potential to expand reach.
- £20,000 for dehumidifier and /or air drier provision to help relieve damp and mould for low income and vulnerable households
- £5,000 for grants to set up village pantries to increase access to affordable food in rural communities.

Planning

Greater Cambridge Local Plan consultation – 1st Dec 2025 to 31st Jan 2026

SCDC and Cambridge City Council have been working together on a combined Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This sets out where new homes and workplaces could be built to meet the area's growing economic and housing needs, alongside the utilities, services, green spaces and community facilities to support them. Once adopted, it will become the official development plan for the area – guiding decisions on planning applications.

You can find out about the proposals and have your say at:

<http://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/local-plan>.

A good place to start is with the [story map](#) which sets the context for the draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan, shows the proposed areas for development, and explains the key themes of the plan (climate change, biodiversity and green spaces, great places, wellbeing and social inclusion, homes, jobs, and infrastructure). For example, the proposals aim to limit carbon emissions associated with new development by siting the majority of development in Cambridge or surrounding new towns where there are more facilities and public transport to reduce car dependence, and by requiring the highest achievable standards for energy and water use.

Another useful link is to the [draft policies map](#) which shows areas affected by the proposed policies.

The councils are holding in-person and online events where residents can find out more and speak to planners. You can see a full list [here](#), which includes:

- 4:15 - 7:15pm, Wednesday 7th January – drop-in session at Main Hall, Trumpington Pavillion, CB2 9JT
- 6 - 7pm, Wednesday 7th January – online webinar talking about the plan. Please register [here](#).
- 12 - 2pm, Friday 9th January – drop-in session at Norbury Room, Melbourn Community Hub, SG8 6DZ
- 5 - 7pm, Monday 12th January – drop-in session at Storey's Field Centre, Eddington, CB3 1AA
- 5 - 7pm, Thursday 15th January – presentation and Q&A on Cambridge Biomedical Campus, 1000 Discovery Drive, CB2 0AX
- 4:45 - 6:45pm, Friday 16th January – drop-in session at the Nightingale Pavillion Community Room, off Nightingale Avenue, CB1 8SG

Paper copies of the draft plan are available to view at the council offices and Cambridge Central Library.

If you have difficulty commenting online, please either call 01954 713694 or email localplan@greatercambridgeplanning.org for help commenting in other ways.

New Planning website

The new Planning website (<https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/>) is designed to give users a cleaner, more streamlined user journey, as content that was split across three sites is now available in a single site.

You can enter your address to instantly view planning information relevant to your area, including conservation areas, live planning applications, tree preservation orders, listed buildings and flood zones.

There is also a new searchable document library that allows users to view planning documents, including those related to the current Local Plan consultation.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service named national Planning Authority of the Year

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) awarded Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Planning Authority of the Year at their recent Awards for Planning Excellence. [This nationwide recognition](#) celebrates the service's outstanding commitment to delivering high-quality planning for local communities, supporting sustainable growth, and shaping places where people can thrive. The national RTPI award follows a compelling nomination that showcased the service's transformative work across Greater Cambridge, including its approaches to biodiversity, youth engagement, and digital innovation. Among other councils nominated were the City of Edinburgh Council and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

The award follows a year of significant achievements for Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) – which is a partnership between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District councils. It comes after GCSP was awarded Planning Authority of the Year - East of England at the local RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence earlier this year.

Weekly food waste collections – phased roll out in 2026

Councils are required under national legislation to begin separate food waste collections, with the aim of boosting recycling rates and reducing the amount of food sent to landfill and consequent methane emissions. The service will be rolled out in five stages throughout 2026.

Everyone will be contacted directly with an introductory pack 6 weeks before their start date and will receive a small indoor caddy with bin liners and an outside bin. More information is available at www.greatercambridgewaste.org/foodwaste and the bin calendar page (<https://www.greatercambridgewaste.org/find-your-household-bin-collection-day>) will allow you to see your start date for food waste collections.

Council campaign secures free school meals for children in South Cambs

81 extra children in South Cambridgeshire are now receiving free school meals, thanks to a pioneering initiative between South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County council. The campaign combined an innovative IT system called the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT), designed to identify residents who may be eligible for benefits, and a data sharing agreement between the two councils to identify and contact families eligible for support but not currently claiming it.

The additional free school meals are expected to be worth more than £314,000 to the 66 families over the lifetime of their claims – if they claim from now until their children reach the end of year 11. For each of the 81 extra children now claiming free school meals, South Cambridgeshire schools will also receive extra funding called the pupil premium, aimed at improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The additional funding schools will receive is worth £116,555 in its first year alone and is expected to be worth more than £1 million (£1,020,560) should families claim from now until each child reaches year 11.

One young parent in Cambourne, now receiving free school meals after being contacted as part of the joint campaign, said: "It really will make all the difference. I've been going without things to try and pay for their meals. I've gone without things like clothing and haircuts - basic things most people don't think twice about - because there just wasn't enough money that month. It's not just the school meals, although these are absolutely massive - it helps with everything. I had to tell my son that he couldn't do Geography because I couldn't afford the school trip that went with it. My kids have always come first, and I'm so grateful that they'll be able to eat well without me having to make those sacrifices."

Since adopting the LIFT system 12 months ago, South Cambridgeshire District Council has helped secure nearly 1,000 additional claims for residents for a range of benefits they were previously unaware of. These claims are worth over £500,000 to residents in their first year alone, with a lifetime value of nearly £4 million based on average claim lengths. In addition to the families now claiming free school meals, this includes:

- 113 households now receiving [Pension Credit](#)
- 65 households now receiving [Healthy Start](#)
- 480 households receiving a payment from the Household Support Fund
- 69 households now on a reduced water tariff.

Laptops and digital skills training support young people and older residents in South Cambridgeshire

A new project is bridging the digital divide by providing laptops to disadvantaged young people and digital skills workshops for older residents in South Cambridgeshire.

Cambridge Online, a local charity dedicated to reducing digital inequality, will deliver laptops to young people and run training sessions throughout the remainder of the school year, helping them make the best use of the devices. The project aims to reach up to 25 students across different schools, with Cottenham Village College already signed up to the scheme, and Swavesey Village College and Northstowe Secondary College expressing interest.

For the older residents' part of the project, the charity will visit sheltered housing schemes across the district to deliver training sessions helping residents to use their devices to access and navigate the internet safely.

The project is being delivered thanks to the District Council partnering with Cambridge Online and agreeing funding in a meeting of the District Council's Cabinet in November 2024 as part of Cost-of-Living support. Additional funding came from an underspend in the previous years' budget. £21,000 was allocated to ensure young people have access to the technology they need to thrive in education and beyond and a further £5,000 was dedicated to supporting older residents in sheltered housing, helping them to get online and build essential digital skills. The initiative is part of a commitment to ensure no one is left behind in the digital revolution, giving everyone the opportunity to stay connected.

SCDC supports local organisations through 3-year Service Support Grants

SCDC has committed to Service Support Grant funding of £300,000 a year to local groups. This will underpin the delivery of services to support people with their mental health, independent living, advice services, and to help residents through the cost-of-living crisis. SCDC's Service Support Grant funding has almost doubled compared to the previous budget, made possible by prudent management of the council's finances and a recognition of the acute need for these services.

Grant recipients include:

- Cambridge and District Citizens Advice – £105,000 per year to provide free, confidential advice services to residents.
- Disability Huntingdonshire – £12,998 per year to support people with disabilities to live independently.
- Royston and District Community Transport (RDCT) – £7,000 per year to maintain accessible transport for those who need it most.
- Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre – £10,000 per year to deliver specialist support for survivors of sexual violence.
- Over Day Care – £30,000 per year to provide a transport and hospital discharge support service for older residents.

- Support Cambridgeshire (CCVS) – £20,000 per year to strengthen the voluntary and community sector in the district.
- Hope Against Poverty CIC – £14,400 per year to provide a Wellbeing Programme for people experiencing anxiety, bereavement, or social isolation.

More information, including the full list of grant recipients can be found here:

<https://southcambsweb.azurewebsites.net/news/grants-totalling-900000-for-local-organisations-that-support-residents-of-all-ages>.

Local Government Reorganisation

Four business cases for different potential unitary councils (to replace the current two-tier system of for us, South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Cambridgeshire County Council) have been submitted to the government for their consideration. Councillors at SCDC voted to submit option B, which proposed 2 unitaries, one made up of the areas covered by SCDC and Cambridge City Council, and another made up of the areas covered by East Cambridgeshire District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, Fenland District Council and the Peterborough unitary. You can read a summary of the reasons why this option was supported at <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/news/three-councils-back-case-for-two-new-unitaries-greater-cambridge-with-north-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough> or you can look at the report and business cases at <https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/ielistDocuments.aspx?CId=410&MId=10374&Ver=4>.

The other three proposals put forward to government were:

- Option A – Peterborough, Huntingdonshire and Fenland; Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire
- Option D – Greater Peterborough and West Huntingdonshire; Fenland, East Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire; Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire
- Option E – Huntingdonshire; Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire; Peterborough, Fenland, East Cambridgeshire.

The government has confirmed that the public consultation on LGR for our area will start in early February, and last for seven weeks. There will be statutory consultees (yet to be confirmed) and the public will be invited to respond.

Local Authority Elections May 2026

As a consequence of the Local Government Reorganisation, just before Christmas the government wrote to all local authorities about May's elections. Because of the short time between the 2026 elections and those for the shadow Unitary Councils planned for 2027 they have invited local authorities in England to request the cancellation of their May 2026 elections. This has divided opinion, with some people thinking that a postponement would be undemocratic, and at the other end of the spectrum, there are concerns that the voting public might be turned off by having two local elections within 12 months of each other, especially since only around 30% of the electorate tends to turn out for local elections. This should be resolved quickly in the coming weeks.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority – budget consultation

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) is currently consulting on its draft budget for 2026 and 2027 at <https://cpca-yourvoice.co.uk/budget-and-mtftp-consultation/>. The consultation closes on Monday 12th January 2026. The proposal is to keep the mayoral precept (part of council tax bills that is used to support bus services) the same as the previous year.

The report on the budget is available at <https://cpca-yourvoice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Draft-2026-27-Business-Plan-and-budget-and-Medium-Term-Financial-Plan-2026-2030.pdf>.

The CPCA is the transport authority, so responsible for bus services and had under the previous mayor consulted on and agreed to proceed with bus franchising. There are additional costs associated with setting up bus franchising, along with the benefits of allowing the CPCA to set the routes, the frequency, fares and overall standards. In the [bus franchising consultation document](#), the financing section showed an increase in the mayoral precept to help fund the improvements to the bus services. However, the proposed budget does not include an increase in the mayoral precept (it is recommended to remain at £36 for a Band D property; 2.78) and the report also states that the mayor has set up an independent review of bus franchising and proposed delaying the implementation of bus franchising by a year (2.36).

The current budget does not cover the full cost of maintaining the Tiger Pass, which reduces the cost for young people to travel by bus, and work is being undertaken to look at options to enable continuing support for the pass (2.44). Slightly more information on considerations about the Tiger Pass are available in the report for the [CPCA Board meeting on 18th December 2025](#).

Budget has been proposed to deliver free car parking in parts of the region to support high-street economies and town centres (2.21, 2.78).

Bus service 15 (between Haslingfield and Royston)

The board of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has agreed to stop subsidising two bus services, which includes the 15 service which currently runs on Wednesdays between Haslingfield and Royston. This is because the passenger numbers are low and so for 2024-2025 it has cost £180.32 per passenger. It is planned for the loss of the 15-bus service to be mitigated through the expansion of the Tiger on Demand service. The other affected bus service is the 8A between March and Milton Park and Ride.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – new planning reforms

The government has launched a consultation on its proposals for reform of the NPPF that will run until March. The consultation can be found [here](#).

According to the consultation document, the 12 most significant reforms are:

- 1. A permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development.
- 2. Building homes around stations.
- 3. Driving urban and suburban densification.
- 4. Securing a diverse mix of homes.
- 5. Supporting small and medium sites.
- 6. Streamlining local standards.
- 7. Boosting local and regional economies
- 8. Supporting critical and growth minerals.
- 9. Embedding a vision-led approach to transport.
- 10. Better addressing climate change.
- 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 12. Taking a more positive approach to the use of heritage assets.

Report warns of widespread drought in 2026 without a wet winter

The Environment Agency has published its [Drought Prospects Report](#) examining the weather needed through the winter to ensure the country's current low water levels recover by spring 2026. Despite recent rainfall, the drought situation across the country is still precarious following a record dry spring and a continued run of heatwaves and dry weather throughout the summer. The new report analyses three different rainfall scenarios over

winter and what each one would mean for water security across England's regions ahead of next year's traditionally drier months. Without average rainfall, most of England will experience a drought with widespread impacts felt by consumers, farmers, businesses, and nature. The Environment Agency is urging the public to continue to play their part and use water wisely through winter, in anticipation of another drought year.

Press release: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-warns-of-widespread-drought-in-2026-without-a-wet-winter>