

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Monthly Report – January 2024

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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Happy New Year!

We would like to wish all Cambridgeshire residents a happy, healthy and productive 2024. Here's to a wonderful new year!

Cost-of-living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: where to turn for advice; 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.

Useful links

Benefit entitlements - Research suggests that around 25% of some benefits go unclaimed.

You can check your entitlements at: <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>

Local food banks - <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/foodbanks>

Energy saving advice and information on home improvement grants -
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/fuel-energy-and-utilities/>

Community Hubs

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

Local Community Hubs include:

- Comberton Baptist Church, Green End, Comberton, Cambridge, CB23 7DY.
Opening times: Monday, 3pm – 5 pm
- Grantchester Communal Hall, Tabrum Close, Grantchester, Cambridge, CB3 9NW
Opening time: Friday, 10am – 12pm

A full list of Community Hubs can be found at:

<https://www.cambsacre.org.uk/projects/cambridgeshire-community-hubs-network/>

Community

South Cambs Zero Carbon Communities programme

This [short film](#) highlights some of the projects to have benefited from our Zero Carbon Communities grants in recent years, including the Harston Community Food Hub. These grants have provided over £500,000 in funding locally since launching. The Council has so far funded 71 projects in this way. Designed to equip community groups to take climate action at a local level, grants have helped upgrade community buildings, educate people around their carbon footprint, and help nature recover in the district.

Healthy You Virtual Festival

Building on the success of 2021, 2022 and 2023 Healthy You Virtual Festival events, Healthy You are excited to announce plans for 2024, and we'd love to invite you to be a part of it!

The aim is to go bigger and better with a month-long programme from 1st – 31st January 2024. The Virtual Festival will provide a myriad of FREE virtual opportunities to support Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents to get active and explore different ways to improve their health and wellbeing throughout January 2024.

The January programme will act as a 'kickstart' for healthier habits that will last into the new year. The month-long programme of classes, workshops, talks and events will focus on the three areas of physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing.

To register, use the weblink [Healthy You Virtual Festival 2024 - Living Sport](#).

Grant for new Mobile/Community Warden Schemes

On 1 January, South Cambridgeshire District Council launched a grant for new [Mobile/Community Warden Schemes](#) that are wanting to set up in the district. £15,000 has been set aside for new schemes out of a total grant fund of £100,000. The aim of this funding (which includes a contribution from Cambridgeshire County Council's unspent Care Together Seed funding) is to provide increased coverage and more equitable access to schemes to support independent living, particularly for older or vulnerable residents. Parish councils and community groups will be able to bid for up to £5,000 per new scheme.

The proposed timeline for grant scheme is as follows:

- Scheme launch and applications open - 1 January 2024
- Application deadline - 5pm 29 February 2024
- Allocation of funding decided- End of March 2024
- Grants paid – April 2024

Before making an application, we would recommend that you refer to the Council's [Mobile/Community Warden Scheme toolkit](#) for guidance about setting up a scheme. The background to this fund can be found in agenda item 6 of the [Grants Advisory committee reports pack](#). If you have any questions, please contact Development Officer, Communities team Emma.Dyer@scambs.gov.uk

South Cambs Hall

Like most local authorities South Cambs now encourages hybrid/home working which means that large offices are no longer needed in the way they were. Therefore, staff have been moved onto the first floor of the Cambourne offices and the ground floor is being converted into space for businesses and community groups. It is hoped that this will encourage new start-up businesses as well as help existing businesses through a programme of support and networking events. The new space will be open on 24th April.

75 bus service review

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Board approved changes to the 75 service at their meeting on the 29th November (Agenda item 18 at <https://cambridgeshirepeterboroughcagov.cmis.uk.com/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/2200/Committee/63/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>).

The information given about changes to the service is as follows:

The 31 and 75 are proposed to be recast, with revised frequency, better integration with the service 26, and a more efficient use of resources across the contracts. The peak journeys will be retained to provide access to work and education, with the changes focussed on the off-peak. The changes will also extend the destinations to provide connections to Royston, timed to complement the service 26. The changes to these services will provide an overall improvement in the network and retain services to the communities currently served.

My understanding is that changes are expected to be put in place from April 2024.

Parking enforcement changes across South Cambridgeshire

New Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) powers in South Cambridgeshire will be given to Cambridgeshire County Council following a decision by Parliament. Benefits are expected to include increased compliance with parking restrictions which in turn would improve traffic flow, road safety and lead to a reduction in obstructive and dangerous parking. It will also support economic growth in the district.

Earlier this year an application was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) to enable Council Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to issue Penalty Charge Notices for the majority of on-street offences such as parking on double or single yellow lines. Previously only the Police could do this. Highways officers have worked closely with South Cambridgeshire District Council on the development of the scheme.

Following the decision by Government, the CPE scheme in South Cambridgeshire officially came into effect on the 19th December 2023. To give people notice and a chance to find a more suitable parking place, information has begun to be placed on vehicles that are parked in some areas where parking is in the greatest demand, such as commuting and shopping areas.

A Warning Notice will be issued to people who continue to park where there are restrictions throughout January – this looks like a parking ticket but there is no fine attached. Penalty Charge Notices will be issued from 1 February 2024 which will mean a fine of between £50 and £70, depending on the severity of the offence.

Under CPE powers, CEOs cannot enforce all restrictions. Restrictions such as dangerous parking, obstruction of the footway and moving traffic offences will continue to be enforced by the Police.

The initial set-up costs to get CPE underway in South Cambridgeshire will be covered by the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

Visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cpe for more information.

Planning

Cambridge 2040 and development corporation proposals

Cambridge 2040 is Michael Gove's vision for supercharged employment and housing growth in Greater Cambridge. He [presented](#) some additional information on December 19th 2023 and stated "We will establish a development corporation, with a broadly based Board to steer its efforts. These we will arm with the right leadership and full range of powers necessary to marshal this huge project over the next two decades, regardless of the shifting sands of Westminster." This suggests that responsibility for delivery of this growth could be taken from our local planners and operate remotely under the Secretary of State.

The 4 council leaders – Cambridge City Council, Cllr Mike Davey, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cllr Bridget Smith, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cllr Lucy Nethsingha – and the Combined Authority Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Dr Nik Johnson, have written to Mr Gove to express their views. The joint statement is available at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/joint-statement-from-local-leaders-and-the-combined-authority-mayor-on-cambridge-2040-announcement/>.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service wins awards for its youth engagement service

YES, the planning service's youth engagement service, won the prestigious 'Best Local Authority Award' at the 2023 TET Inspiring Future Generations Award. Team member Tom Davies also won this year's 'Individual Youth Engagement Practitioner of the Year Award'.

You can see more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/latest-award-for-greater-cambridge-shared-planning-as-youth-engagement-service-praised/>.

4-day week trial and Best Value Notice

The former Minister Lee Rowley issued South Cambridgeshire District Council with a Best Value Notice (BVN). Notices of this type were issued to three other local government bodies in 2023, but for concerns such as unrealistic budget, significant governance weaknesses and major cultural problems. None of these apply to South Cambs which is in a strong financial position and is acknowledged to be well run and high performing.

The BVN requires the Council to provide the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) with extensive data on a weekly basis for 6 months. This covers staffing, costs, service delivery, performance, and resident feedback. Instead of using data that the Council is collecting anyway, an unusual amount of data has been requested - 80 questions totalling 186 individual requests. The 4-day week trial continues in the meantime.

The South Cambs offices remain open 5 days a week and the Contact centre is open longer hours than before the trial. The out of hours emergency response officers are available 24/7 for issues such as homelessness and dangerous structures.

At the Extraordinary Council meeting in November 2023 councillors heard that staff turnover and staff sickness was down, and recruitment had seen clear benefits with almost 100 new staff joining the council this year. The performance of services across the board during the trial was encouraging – including in the waste service, which has recently joined the trial and is seeing more than 99% of bins collected on time every week. Thanks to the improvement in recruitment, the amount expected to be spent on agency staff cover this year is hundreds of thousands of pounds lower than it would have otherwise been.

SCDC has received strong support from other local authorities across the political spectrum, including all five Suffolk district councils, Central Beds and SCDC's partner in Shared Services Cambridge City Council.

Corporate Peer Review of SCDC

The Council has recently published the Peer Review conducted in the first week of November by the Local Government Association (LGA). The administration invited the LGA to undertake the review as part of its commitment to continually reviewing and improving services. The authors of the report identified various strengths for the council and sought to act as a critical friend, suggesting areas for development, so that the council can continue to thrive. The 4-day week trial was not within the scope of the review.

The report praised the Council's high levels of engagement with communities, especially surrounding the 'Greater Cambridgeshire Local Plan' and praised the 'Statement of Community Involvement' consultation. The review noted the positive working culture within the Council and recognised the improvements made to this since 2018. It praised the leadership team and the CEO throughout.

The review recognised the Council's focus on being performance led and highlighted several successful practices (such as key performance indicators (KPIs) emerging from Overview and Scrutiny). It further suggested that KPIs should be incorporated into specific dashboards and that further KPIs should be generated in certain areas.

Most importantly, the report recognised the Council's strong financial position with a balanced budget predicted through to 2024/25 and with reserves of £61 million recorded at the end of the last financial year. They identified minimal investment risk and a well-structured and robust investment governance strategy. SCDC is one of very few councils in the country able to show such a positive financial position, and, as a result, the council has been able to devote resources to deliver cost-of-living support, green initiatives and positive community outcomes.

The current business plan is focussed on 4 core areas – **'housing that is truly affordable for everyone'**, **'being green to our core'**, **'growing local businesses and economies'** and **'being a modern and caring council'**. Throughout the report, 'being green to our core' was highlighted as being well embedded as a priority for the Council. The review suggested reinforcing the Council's overall vision by reviewing the business plan to ensure a more consistent narrative, especially in the context of the many layers of government in Cambridgeshire so that the voluntary and community sector and parishes can work closer with the Council on shared objectives.

You can find out more and access the full report at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/corporate-peer-challenge-report-published/>

Housing

HUG 2 (Home Upgrade Grant 2)

Action on Energy, a local partnership including SCDC, has bid for and received HUG 2 funding to provide energy efficiency measures and low-carbon heating for low-income households. It's open to owner-occupiers and private renters living in homes with low energy efficiency and not connected to the gas grid. You can find out more and see the full eligibility criteria at <https://www.actiononenergycambs.org/funding/home-upgrade-grant-2/>.

Make Things Right update

In March 2023, Michael Gove launched the government's 'Make Things Right' campaign which urges social housing tenants to complain about substandard housing. The steps to get an issue with social housing fixed are:

- Step 1: Report the issue to the Landlord
- Step 2: If the issue is not fixed, complain through the Landlord's complaint process
- Step 3: If the issue is still not fixed, escalate to the Housing Ombudsmen.

You can find out more at: <https://socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk/>.

SCDC housing maintenance

Just over a year ago SCDC entered into a completely new contract with Mears for the repair and maintenance of the council's social housing portfolio. A full contract review has now been conducted which shows that performance over the previous contract has improved significantly. Mears has put in additional measures to improve their performance, including operative upskilling and additional contractor support from central teams and subcontractors. Overall tenant satisfaction is high, with 93% of residents reporting satisfaction with the service they have received. Complaint numbers have been low and when they have been received, they have been fully investigated. The Council will continue to monitor Mears' performance closely to try to drive standards higher still.