

Neil Gough – Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report

Dear residents,

Here is my update of County Council matters:

Budget Challenges 2024/25

Cambridgeshire County Council's estimated budget gap for 2024/25 has increased from a predicted £16m to more than £23m—largely due to increases in demand for services and inflationary pressure. Without action being taken this gap will grow and is predicted to be more than £20m in the following year, and a further £19m and more the year after that. Cambridgeshire is not alone. The Local Government Association currently reports that councils across the country face an 'inflationary storm' with a predicted £4bn funding gap over the next two years.

A report from the Council's Chief Executive Stephen Moir and Executive Director of Finance and Resources Michael Hudson says:

'In 2023-24, pressures on our budget have arisen principally due to several very high-cost children's social care placements and a delay in receiving income from a newly constructed solar farm (which requires connection to the electricity grid). In addition, we are seeing that demand for bed-based care for older people is also rising, following a period of reduction in demand and then stability stretching back for some time, to the beginning of the pandemic.' The report also points to wider national and international issues which have an impact on the Council's pressures—such as interest rates which the Bank of England has said are likely to remain above five per cent until 2026. This will affect all goods and services the Council buys, the cost of borrowing, and pay award costs for Council workers, as well as for a large externally commissioned workforce which includes staff working in residential care for vulnerable adults and children.

The report highlights how all services in the Council have been the subject of a comprehensive exercise to find efficiencies, alongside a number of specific reviews into particularly high-cost areas such as home to school transport, children's social care placements and high levels of historic adult social care debt.

Proposals to set the Council's 2024/5 budget will be discussed by Councillors in December before a period of scrutiny during January, including an opportunity for residents to comment on the plans.

Storm Babet

Storm Babet hit Cambridgeshire on Friday 20 October, leaving some households with external or even internal flooding to their homes, or without flushing toilets, as well as seeing a number of roads closed. County Council highways officers have been working through the various incidents logged, and the Flood & Water team is pulling together an overall picture of events.

We have contacted Anglian Water in connection with a number of incidents in Willingham and Cottenham where the storm water drains have been overwhelmed resulting in foul water backing up into properties. Regrettably many of the properties have been affected previously but the issues remain unresolved. It will be of little comfort to those residents but it is important that contact is made with Anglian Water who will clean up and disinfect the areas.

Supermarket Voucher Scheme

The supermarket voucher scheme will continue to operate for all eligible families in Cambridgeshire.

Cambridgeshire County Council will run the scheme until the February 2024 half term using the Household Support Fund from the Department for Work and Pensions and additional funding provided by the Council. Most recently, eligible families were automatically sent a £15 voucher via email or text on Saturday 21 October. The voucher can be used at a choice of ten supermarkets.

Highways

Cambridgeshire's gritting crews spent several nights in mid-October carrying out a trial run ahead of winter. The salt domes and barns have already been filled with 10,000 tonnes of rock salt ready for the start of the cold season.

Last year gritting crews went out 51 times, many of them working throughout the night and early hours. Anyone interested in volunteering to help the Council grit Cambridgeshire during the winter months is invited to visit the Council's website to find out how they and the local community can get involved: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/help-with-gritting.

20 mph Schemes

Following the success of the last round, the Council plans to re-open the window for new applications for 20 mph funding from Monday 15 January 2024, and close it on Friday 15 March 2024. The Council plans to review and update its 20 mph website pages to provide additional information and assistance to applicants.

As always, please feel free to contact me with your thoughts, views and issues. My mobile is 07919 990299 and email is neilgoughcrw@gmail.com.

Neil Gough