

Report to 2026 Annual Parish Meeting

From District Councillors Clara Hofman and John Williams for the municipal year 2025-26

Overview

South Cambridgeshire District Council serves some 160,000 residents in 104 Town and Parish councils. It has 45 councillors and has been controlled by the Liberal Democrat Party since 2018. It is responsible for Housing (it owns over 5,600 council homes), Planning (including the processing of planning applications and building control), Environmental Services (such as the removal of household and commercial waste and environmental health) and non-statutory activities like supporting its local communities with grants and loans and environmental projects. Some of the Planning and Environmental Services are shared with Cambridge City Council and managed by South Cambs. The council employs some 700 staff which includes those working in the City Council for the shared services. The city reimburses South Cambs for these colleagues. The council operates a four-day working week.

For 2025-26 it has a gross revenue budget of over £83 million, with £130 million in revenue reserves, of which £100 million is invested in a wholly owned housing company "Ermine Street" delivering private rented accommodation and specialised housing such as Housing of Multiple Occupation in the council's drive to work area. Another £16 million is available at short notice.

Apart from fees and charges for its services, in 2025-26 it received some £13 million in its share of Business Rates, £11 million from Council Tax and £8 million in income from Ermine Street and commercial rents, mainly from properties on the Cambridge Science Park (which is in South Cambridgeshire). In 2025-26 the council borrowed some £35 million mainly for the building of council housing. The council also has an historic debt of £205 million taken out by the previous administration to keep council rents. This borrowing and debt have to be serviced from council rents as housing costs are ringfenced by law from the General Fund of the council.

By law the council has to balance its budget over a five-year period. Due to the four-day week in 2025-26 the council did not have to overspend its budget to employ agency workers to cover vacancies in essential posts. At £170 a year for a Band D property, the council sets one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country. The last independent peer review of the council by the Local Government Association in 2025 reported that its finances were well managed.

Housing

There are 2,000 on the council's waiting list. South Cambridgeshire is one of a few councils in the country that has its own housing stock. Within Cambridgeshire only Cambridge City also has its own housing. In 2025-26 the target for building new council homes was 75 and by the end of March 2026 139 had been completed, including properties in the commercial developments of Farehurst Park and Orchard

Park in Fulbourn. The council owns very little land and most of the new council homes have to be built in commercial developments under Section 106 Agreements. In all over 200 new council homes are planned for the Fen Ditton and Fulbourn ward over the coming five years.

Planning

Thanks mainly to the four-day week, in 2025-26 the Shared Planning service of over 200 was fully staffed and apart from meeting Government targets on the processing of planning applications it was awarded the RIBA award for Best Planning Authority in the country. It has also developed an apprenticeship course for planners.

Environmental Services

The separate weekly collection of food waste started in February, which required the recruitment of some 150 additional bin staff and 18 specialised vehicles. Given this task the food waste collection is being phased in. The Government had promised to reimburse the council for the full cost, but in the end failed to do so. A solar farm is being built at the Waterbeach depot to provide EV charging points for the electrification of the bin lorry fleet. So far, the council has four electric bin lorries out of 40 but progress has been hampered by a shortage of grid capacity and vehicle availability. More are on order. Meanwhile the diesel fleet is being converted to biofuel.

Supporting our communities

The council has invested in software which drawing together information from several sources can suggest to it residents who could be eligible for government benefits. The council can then contact these residents offering to help them with applying for such benefits should they not already be receiving them. In 2025-26 the council contacted some 800 residents and as a result some £3 million worth of benefits were successfully claimed.

The council has also been helping communities, charities and not for profit organisations with grants for well-being activities and education projects as well as ones tackling the effects of climate change and energy efficiency. Since 2019 the council has given some £1 million through its Zero Carbon Community scheme, the Community Chest, Service Support Grants (for supporting vulnerable groups and community transport) and other specific one-off grants such as for improving allotments.

Looking ahead

The future is uncertain for South Cambridgeshire. A Local Government Reorganisation will see the council merge with the county and one or more other districts to form a unitary council, and it is likely to have its planning powers taken from it and given to a Development Corporation for Greater Cambridge to implement Government policy. We are seeing what this could mean for the EWR proposal for a Train Care Centre in Fulbourn.