

District Councillors' Report: January 2025

Severe Weather Emergency Provision

As we write this report in mid-January the frost is thick on the ground and car door locks are frozen solid. The council has a Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEPE) that enables us to assist people who, for whatever reason, do not have adequate shelter in severe weather. We can support you during periods of prolonged cold, damp or windy weather during the months of November to March.

Anyone in South Cambridgeshire who needs to access this service should contact us by one of the following methods to speak with our Housing Advice and Homelessness Team:

- email: housingadvice@scambs.gov.uk
- call: [01954 713 000](tel:01954713000)
- emergency out of hours telephone: [01253 501 117](tel:01253501117)

Help for people working with health problems

The District Council has worked in partnership with neighbouring councils to launch a free programme called WorkWell, offering help to anyone struggling to find or keep a job due to health problems. This is a valuable initiative that seeks to improve the lives of those affected, to work with the wider community to understand and overcome the barriers involved, and to help boost our local economy.

Frozen green waste bins

At this time of year the lids and contents of bins can freeze. This is especially the case with green bins and there is a risk that the frozen contents can stick to the inside, preventing the bins from being emptied properly. Another annoying problem in frosty weather is the lids of bins freezing shut, making them difficult to prize open. Inserting a small (pea-sized) pebble on the rim, which props the lid open very slightly, will prevent it from freezing onto the bin. The council's web pages on bins and recycling contain some advice on how to minimise the risk of your bin contents freezing. Please do check this out to help minimise this frustrating problem.

In January and February the green bins will be emptied once a month. From the beginning of March, they will be emptied fortnightly again.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/recycling-and-bins/our-policies-and-what-happens-to-your-recycling-and-waste>

Council Tax increase for vacant properties

From April 2026, Council Tax will be doubled on long-term vacant properties in South Cambridgeshire as an incentive to bring the estimated 2600 empty properties in the district into use. Exemptions from these higher charges exist for properties that are on the market, subject to probate, or are under renovation. This approach has been used successfully by other councils to bring properties back into use and is expected to help address the high demand for housing in the district. It is estimated that the change will also generate an additional £100,000 a year in income for South Cambridgeshire which will help support vital frontline services.

Government consultation on Right to Buy

On 20 November the government launched a consultation seeking views on how the Right to Buy for council tenants should be reformed to deliver a fairer and more

sustainable scheme. The consultation closed on 15 January 2025. SCDC has responded; the response can be read at <https://scambsmoderngov.co.uk/documents/s137791/Appendix%20A%20-%20Right%20to%20Buy%20Consultation%20response.pdf>

Assets of Community Value

The council maintains a list of Assets of Community Value. These are buildings or land which further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, have done so in the recent past, or have the potential to do so in the near future. The current register includes the Greyhound public house. Parish Councils and other community groups are encouraged to nominate candidates for listing where appropriate to help protect these key facilities from being lost to the community.

The Herbert Protocol

The Herbert Protocol is a scheme that can help find people with dementia if they go missing. Named after a Normandy veteran who suffered from dementia, it's endorsed by the Police and encourages family and friends to keep a document that will help officers in the event a loved one goes missing. The document contains key pieces of information, such as a physical description, familiar places, health details and an up-to-date photo. Feel free to share this post and help spread the word about this important scheme. Keeping a completed form means you don't have to try to remember the information when you are under stress if someone goes missing. And it saves time, so the Police can start the search sooner.

For more information or to download a Herbert Protocol form, [visit the dedicated web page](#).

Local government organisation - devolution white paper

Changes to the organisation of local government have been much in the news in recent months, and the government published the devolution white paper on 16 December. One of the most significant proposals is the creation of unitary authorities to replace the current two-tier arrangement of district and county councils. It is proposed that newly created unitary authorities would have populations exceeding 500,000 but there may be exceptions. The white paper emphasises maintaining community-level engagement despite the larger size of unitary authorities compared with our local district and city councils. A phased implementation approach is proposed.

The rationale given by government for creating large unitary authorities is anticipated efficiency savings (£2.3billion – just over 1% of the NHS budget for comparison) and service improvements. Many councils are challenging this and expressing grave concerns about losing what is truly local in local government. It means there will be far fewer councillors each responsible for much larger areas. Inevitably councillors will no longer have the sort of close relationship with their communities we currently enjoy.

Any reorganisation of this magnitude would take years to implement, if and when agreed, so it's a case of keeping an interested eye on developments.

Flood risk and available help

SCDC's Scrutiny and Overview Committee recently discussed local drainage, flooding and mitigation of water pollution. One of the tasks to come out of that meeting was to provide South Cambridgeshire's parish and town councils with some helpful information and tools to support them – particularly when it comes to flooding. An excellent online map to check your current flood risk can be found at <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk>

Who is responsible for what and who should I contact?

It can be confusing and time-consuming to work out who is responsible for what when it comes to investigating and regulating flooding. A page on the SCDC website gives comprehensive information on who to contact and what to do in the event of imminent, or actual, flooding. <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/community-safety/emergency-planning-and-resilience/flooding>

Five years on from the pandemic

A UK-wide Day of Reflection for the COVID-19 pandemic will take place on Sunday 9 March 2025, five years since the start of the emergency in 2020. The COVID-19 Day of Reflection is an opportunity for communities across the UK to come together in reflection and commemoration for those who lost their lives and for everyone impacted by the pandemic. On the day itself and in the week before, the public will be able to mark the day in ways that feel most appropriate and fitting to them, both in person and online. More at <https://dayofreflection.campaign.gov.uk/about/>

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