

District Councillors' Report: July/August 2025

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: What's proposed

The government is currently progressing with an ambitious programme of local government reorganisation in England, aiming to simplify local government structures and expand devolution. The main focus is on replacing the two-tier system - where county and district or borough councils share responsibilities as they do in Cambridgeshire - with larger unitary councils that deliver all local government services within their areas. This reorganisation is intended to improve public service delivery, enhance local accountability, and generate savings for reinvestment in communities.

In June, SCDC held two briefings about the reorganisation for town and parish councils prior to a consultation survey, open to all, which closes/d on 20 July. SCDC will vote on the option to create a new unitary authority comprising the current South and East Cambridgeshire District Councils along with Cambridge City Council at its July meeting.

After final proposals are submitted to government in the autumn, there will be statutory consultations. If approved by the Secretary of State and Parliament, elections for new 'shadow' unitary councils will be held as soon as possible, leading to the full implementation of new structures—most new unitary authorities are expected to be in place by 2028

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) are a new, statutory system introduced under the Environment Act 2021 to drive the recovery of nature and deliver wider environmental benefits across England. Each LNR is designed to be locally led, evidence-based, and highly collaborative, involving input from local authorities, landowners, farmers, environmental groups, and the wider public.

Key Features of Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Spatial Strategies: LNRs map out the most valuable existing areas for nature and propose specific actions and locations for habitat creation or improvement.

Local Priorities: Each strategy sets out tailored biodiversity priorities for its area, identifying where targeted action will have the greatest impact for nature recovery and other environmental goals such as flood management, carbon capture, and water quality improvement.

Core Components:

- A local habitat map showing current and potential areas important for biodiversity.
- A written statement of biodiversity priorities and proposed actions.
- Collaborative Approach: LNRs require extensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation, ensuring the strategies reflect local knowledge, values, and priorities

There will be an eight week public consultation on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy commencing 18 July. CPCA will be informing Parish and Town Councils of the consultation and publicising it to the public in July. A link to the draft strategy, including the local habitat maps, is:

<https://democracy.cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AId=1575>

For more information about Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and a link to the survey when this becomes available, go to <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/planning-and-development/conservation-trees-and-hedges/biodiversity-and-ecology/local-nature-recovery-strategy>

EXPIRY OF POSTAL VOTES – are you affected?

As a resident of South Cambridgeshire, you need to be aware of an important change to postal voting. Following a change to the law as part of the Elections Act, postal votes no longer apply indefinitely. Postal votes now expire after a period of three years. The timing of the reapplication legislation means that around 15,000 South Cambridgeshire postal votes are due to expire at the end of January 2026. Voters who wish to keep their postal vote in place will need to make a fresh application. The SCDC Elections Team has already started the process of contacting those residents whose postal vote will be expiring in the new year to ensure they have sufficient time to make a new application before next year's elections. An article about this is also planned for the South Cambs Magazine in Autumn 2025.

Affected electors who do not make a fresh application will have their postal votes removed when they expire at the end of January 2026. If you have any questions, or need help with this, you can email the elections team at elections@scambs.gov.uk.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING REFORM – changes on the way for South Cambs

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is undergoing a significant funding and structural reform as part of the 2025 government spending review and the ongoing Fair Funding Review 2.0.

Key elements of the MHCLG funding review:

Administration Budget Cuts: MHCLG's administration budget will be reduced by 15% over the next five years. Savings will be achieved through efficiency measures, including workplace and digital reform, increased use of AI, insourcing services, and reducing reliance on external consultants. The department aims for £50 million in annual efficiency gains by 2028-29.

Funding Simplification: The number of MHCLG-led grants will be "significantly reduced," consolidating multiple funding streams into fewer, larger grants to cut the administrative burden for both local authorities and the department. Further details expected in the 2026-27 Local Government Finance Settlement.

Consolidated Grants: At least four consolidated grants will be introduced in 2026-27, each bringing together existing grants for similar services into a single, ringfenced fund. For example, all homelessness and rough sleeping revenue funding (except temporary accommodation) will be merged into one grant.

Multi-Year Settlements: The government is moving towards multi-year Local Government Finance Settlements, with the first such settlement in a decade planned for 2026-27. This is intended to improve financial certainty and enable better long-term planning for local authorities.

Fairer, Needs-Based Distribution: The review aims to introduce a new, transparent methodology for funding allocation, better aligned with relative need, cost, and resources.

Consultation and Transition: The government is consulting on the details of the new funding system, including how to support local authorities through the transition and ensure the system remains up-to-date. There is an emphasis on partnership with local government and protecting service users during the transition.

Reduction in Competitive Bidding: The reforms will reduce the use of competitive bidding for grants, which has been costly and time-consuming for councils, and instead focus on rolling grants into the main settlement.

A consultation on the funding review proposals is open until 15 August and can be found [here](#)

MHCLG has also launched [a consultation to modernise the administration of council tax](#). The consultation will explore options to improve support and the council tax collection, and enforcement processes to deliver a fairer and more efficient system for taxpayers and councils. The council tax consultation will close on 12 September. MHCLG is encouraging everyone with an interest to respond to the consultation and provide feedback.

(Press notice:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/council-tax-shake-up-to-deliver-fairer-billing-and-support>)

FASTER PLANNING APPEAL PROCEDURES

In June the government announced [new regulations to streamline the planning appeals process](#). These changes aim to make planning processes faster and more efficient, benefitting councils, communities and developers. The new regulations will speed up planning appeal decisions, reducing delays and uncertainty over planning applications. The new process of written applications will only accept evidence put before the local planning authority during the application. This will help reduce additional bureaucracy, speeding up decision-making while keeping decisions locally based. The new regulations are expected to be implemented by the end of 2025. More details will be provided in updated guidance once the final draft of the regulations is received.

FOUR DAY WORKING WEEK – the final decision

New independent analysis of South Cambridgeshire District Council's four-day week shows almost every service that was monitored either improved or was maintained.

A report from the Universities of Salford, Bradford and Cambridge highlights how 21 of 24 services have improved or stayed the same since the trial of four-day week working began at the Council in 2023. Those areas which saw a statistically significant improvement include:

- The percentage of calls answered by the Contact Centre.
- The average number of days taken to update Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims.

- The average number of weeks for householder planning applications to be decided.
- The percentage of planning applications (both large and small) decided within target or agreed timescales.
- The percentage of Council house repairs complete within 24 hours.
- The percentage of complaints responded to on time.

The reports also show that the number of applications for jobs at the Council rose by more than 120 per cent during the four-day week, and the number of workers leaving fell by more than 40 per cent - helping provide benefits to communities through greater stability of services.

During the four-day week, the Council has been able to cut the amount it has to spend over its budgets on staff. There has been a yearly saving of £399,263. This is mainly due to filling many vacancies permanently – rather than using expensive agency workers, which can be disruptive for residents as officers change.

All the detailed data will be considered by SCDC councillors, who will decide whether the Council will become a permanent four-day week employer, and by Cambridge City Council in relation to four day working for shared services (planning and waste), at their respective council meetings in late July.

GRANTS TO IMPROVE ALLOTMENTS – recognising importance of growing food

SCDC has made a grant fund of £100,000 available to improve facilities and access to allotments. Allotment gardens are sometimes overlooked as a valuable community asset. In addition to bolstering food security they are also excellent for social cohesion, fitness and mental wellbeing and, increasingly, are seen as a way of fostering biodiversity. Bids for up to £10,000 can be made available for allotment site improvement projects, such as installing a water supply or improving security. More about the grants and who can apply can be found [here](#). Applications close in late August.

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