

County Councillor's Annual Report 2023/24

Annual Parish Meeting 2024 – Councillor Neil Gough

I represent Cottenham, Rampton and Willingham at the County Council.

Background

My role is to represent the interests of residents and communities and work with all parish councils in support of the community.

The Council has just completed its third year as a Joint Administration, which has seen a successful partnering of Liberal Democrats, Independent and Labour Groups. We are entering the last year before County Council elections in May, 2025.

The County Council is the statutory Local Authority for Highways, Social Care, Education, Waste and Recycling, Libraries and Leisure, Registration services (births, deaths, marriages), and Public Health. It also convenes citizenship ceremonies. The County Council is a partner organization on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mayoral Combined Authority, which was created in 2017. It assumed the Transport Authority remit that previously sat with the County Council.

The County Council, together with South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City Councils, is a partner on the Greater Cambridge Partnership. The GCP is a time-limited body with the remit of dispersing government funding for infrastructure in this high growth area.

Finance – the key issue

The issue Local authority finance has become increasingly pressured across the country, and has resulted in a number of local authorities being unable to deliver a balanced budget. The Local Government Association currently reports that councils across the country face an 'inflationary storm' with a predicted £4 billion funding gap over the next two years.

The increase interest rates has significantly increased borrowing costs, and centrally-determined national living wage increases have resulted in significant costs increased particularly in the workforce in residential care for vulnerable adults and children. Cambridgeshire County Council is not one of those councils facing financial crisis but the past year has been extremely challenging in the context of high inflation, increasing demand for core services and constraints on the ability to raise council tax. The consequence of this situation is the gradual loss of discretionary services which has a significant impact on daily lives in our community as less practical assistance and support is available and local communities are asked to do more. At the same time, the County Council has shown huge resilience and creativity in adapting to changing times.

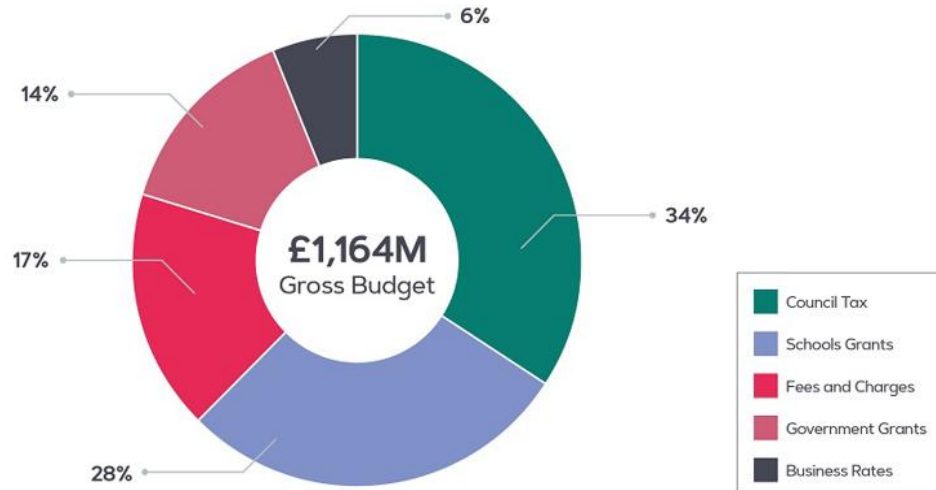
Budget Detail

The County Council is a large organisation with a budget that exceeds £1 billion. The sources of income and the areas of expenditure are illustrated below (for the 24/25 budget).

A balanced budget for 2024/25 was achieved through a mix of savings, use of one-off reserves, and the generation of additional income including a council tax rise for the coming year to 4.99% comprising 2.99% Council Tax and 2% Adults social care. Band D properties in the county will pay an additional £76 per year, although more than half (64%) of county lives in homes rated band C or below and would see rises of between £50 and £70 per year.

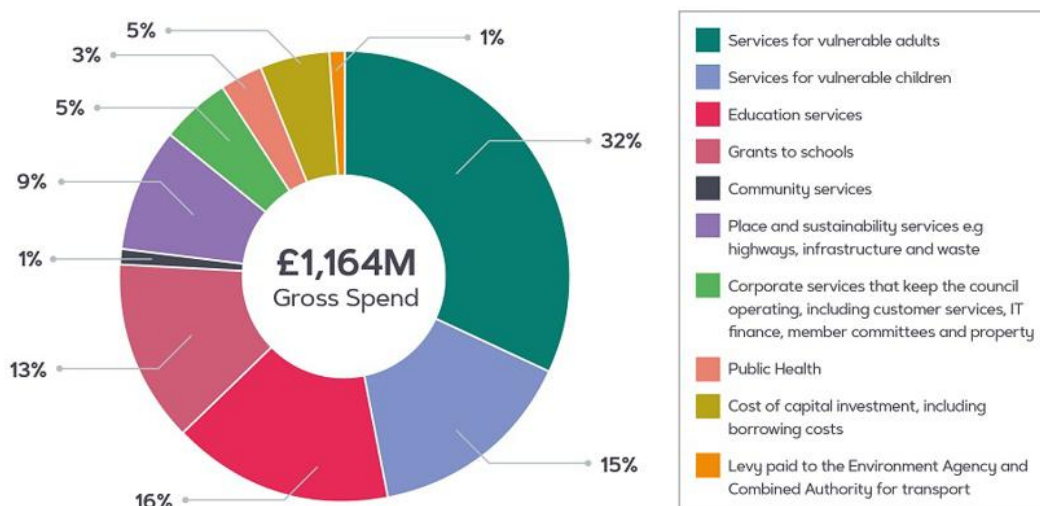
Income

(In black and white, Council Tax = 34%, the other segments follow clockwise)



This shows how the budget will be spent

(In black and white, Services for vulnerable adults = 32%, the other segments follow clockwise)



Social care for adults and children is demand-led, with expenditure on a mixture of preventive and means-tested care; this accounts for a large proportion of the council's net budget. Good work has

been done to bolster the social care workforce, both via rolling out the Real Living Wage and supporting our providers to do so; developments of the Care Academy supporting professional training and development, and the creation of new work around 'care micro-enterprises', new small, localized care businesses that offer both new employment opportunities and also new choice in care provision for those who need it.

While forming a relatively minor proportion of total expenditure. Highways is the service perhaps most in the public eye as we all encounter it every day. The well-known 'managed decline' of the Highway Network over many years has left the network in very poor condition and the service in a state of fire-fighting. Government provides 33 times more funding to the national highway network than it does to Local Authorities for their highway networks. The improvement in processes is gradually having a positive impact. Locally, the Quarterly meetings between the Parishes and the Local Highways Officer has produced a regular review of "issue-action-closure" for the most pressing problems.

Huge efforts are underway to introduce cyclical maintenance where none existed, for example on gully emptying, but turning around a network allowed to decline so severely, with limited resources to do so, will take time. 2024/25 will see additional investment of £23m into making highways, footpaths, and cycleways safer – on top of a recently announced government allocation of £2.3m. This will be to deliver improvements which both repair and prevent potholes, deliver improved drainage schemes, and reinstate cycleway maintenance and weed clearance. However, major issues in our road network, such as the subsidence of peat-soil affected roads, will not be able to be funded without very significant central government support.

Local Issues

Locally, the delivery of Civil Parking Enforcement and the funding of 20 mph schemes in Cottenham and Willingham is progressing forward. These initiatives go some way towards addressing the irritants of traffic and poor parking that have been raised frequently with me. We are also finalising schemes for traffic calming in Willingham, Cottenham and Rampton that are funded by Northstowe s106 contributions.

The deterioration in our public transportation services are of concern. We have seen Stagecoach, over which the Council has no direct governance role, gradually reduce and degrade the quality of service to all our villages. In response, the Mayor has increased his precept to restore some of these services and we need to ensure that these are delivered to our communities.

Lastly, the next year will probably see the launch of the consultation on the A10 upgrade – an issue that will be of great significance to the villages adjacent to the corridor.

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