



South Cambs District Council (SCDC) Councillor Bill Handley's Annual Report to Over and Willingham Residents - 2026

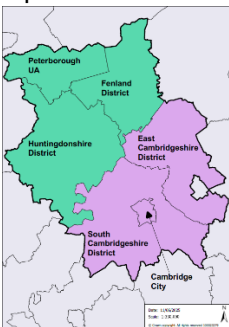
The first two items in this, my last annual report, are of profound significance for local government and local democracy.

Local Government Reorganisation

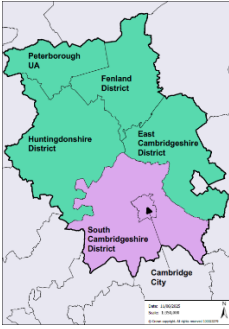
In the last year, the council has spent a great deal of time dealing with government requirements for a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in which the Government is seeking to replace existing district, city and county councils with a single layer of “unitary councils.” In November 2025, the principal authorities of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough submitted their proposals for what those new councils should look like. The Government is currently consulting on those proposals and is expected to make its final decision in the summer. You can read all four business cases and respond to the consultation here (Deadline 26th March): <https://tinyurl.com/HMG-LGR-proposals>

The four proposals on the table are as follows:

Option A: Submitted by Cambridgeshire County Council

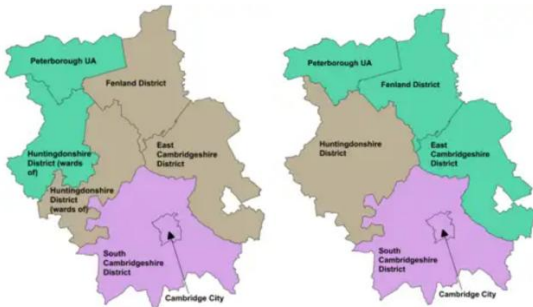


Option B: Submitted by South Cambs DC, East Cambs DC, Cambridge City Council



Option D: Submitted by Peterborough City Council and Fenland District Council

Option E: Submitted by Huntingdonshire DC



A fifth option - C - would have included South Cambs, Cambridge and Huntingdonshire in the same authority, but this was not taken forward by any council. We expect the Government to decide which option they want in the summer, so that elections to the “shadow councils” can take place in May 2027, and for the new councils to take over in April 2028. Therefore, the upcoming district council elections (7th May) will be the last ones for SCDC.

Development Corporation (“DevCo”)

In the past year, the Government has introduced proposals to install an Urban Development Corporation for Greater Cambridge. This would take important planning powers away from local authorities (both determining applications above a certain size and making the local plan) and vest them with a DevCo, made up of a majority of members appointed by the Secretary of State, rather than locally elected people. This is as part of the government’s ambitions to “turbocharge” growth in and around Cambridge, but they are vague on numbers and have not defined what they will consider to be success. At a recent meeting of full council at SCDC, there was cross-party objections to this loss of democratic accountability and the imposition of an *urban* DevCo on a largely *rural* area. Councillors all agreed that Greater Cambridge is a special place to live and are concerned that without the input of democratically elected local politicians this special place could be under threat with its future in the hands of unelected bureaucrats in London.

Planning

Ironically, just as the government is proposing to remove many planning powers from the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS), it has, in the last year, won the prestigious award for

Planning Authority of the Year 2025. This was a massive achievement and something the councils are immensely proud.

The GCSPC's draft Local Plan is in an advanced stage of development and a recent consultation garnered over 4,500 responses which are now being analysed. You can learn more about the Local Plan here: <https://greatercambridgeplanning.org/emerging-plans-and-guidance/greater-cambridge-local-plan/>

You can also view SCDC's Authority Monitoring Report, which sets out how the council is progressing towards targets in the *existing* Local Plan and government housing targets. Link: <https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s142090/App%201.pdf>

New Council Homes

The year has seen a record-breaking year for South Cambridgeshire when it comes to the building of new council houses. When the current administration came to power in 2018, the council was building no more than 35 new council houses each year and because of 'right to buy' sales its portfolio was shrinking; the period 2013 to 2018 saw a net reduction of 99 council houses. Since 2018 the current administration has nearly quadrupled the rate of council house building. This year, at the time of writing, at least 120 new council homes had been completed across the district and should (by the end of the financial year) have delivered 139 new council homes. This is something about which the administration is enormously proud.

Cost of living crisis mitigation and Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Another proud initiative is the LIFT scheme, which was made permanent in the last year. The LIFT software interrogates the council's databases to identify South Cambs residents who are missing out on benefits that they are entitled to claim. A two-year apprentice role has been added to the scheme to make the most of the LIFT programme. It's already done fantastic work for residents – helping over 1,000 residents so far.

With many residents still facing financial pressures, the Council will continue providing its comprehensive cost-of-living support package. A budget of £449,000 is set aside to help residents through the next two years through schemes such as emergency food and energy support, workshops, budgeting and debt advice, white goods and furniture for vulnerable people and laptops with digital training.

Projects in Over and Willingham benefit from SCDC grant funding

Thanks to prudent financial management, SCDC remains one of the few councils in the country that is able to maintain significant grant funding for grassroot community initiatives and green projects in the district.

In the last year, trustees of Willingham's Octagon Community Centre and the associated Memory Café have improved the heating in the building and improved the kitchen facilities. Over Community Centre has installed a significant solar array plus EV charging points supported by grant funding from SCDC's Zero Carbon Communities fund. As part of SCDC's Service Support Grant funding, Over Day Care is to receive £30,000 per year for the next three years to provide a transport and hospital discharge support service for older residents. SCDC contributed (via its [Community Growing grant](#)) to Over Day Centre's new garden which provides clients with a tranquil and relaxing environment and also received £1,708 from the Community Chest grant scheme to install four electric garden awnings which provide shade and shelter when it rains, enabling the garden to be enjoyed even in inclement weather.

Budget and Council Tax Setting

At the Council's recent budgets meeting, councillors agreed to a £5.24 Council Tax increase for a Band D property, which works out at 10p a week. SCDC's precept is smaller than a number of parish councils! This doesn't include the police, fire, parish council or Mayor's precepts which are not set by SCDC but are collected by the council. This rise is in the context of significant cuts to local authority funding from central government. SCDC's spending power is being cut by over £5 million over the next 3 years, following the Government's "fair funding review 2.0" which is especially damaging to rural councils like ours. Thankfully, due to prudent financial management and investment of reserves, these reductions are considered manageable by SCDC, but it seems likely that there will be some trimming of budgets.

Coming in the next 12 months...

Solar energy park

The next 12 months will see the completion of SCDC's solar energy park at its Waterbeach waste collection depot. This will power the council's growing fleet of electric bin lorries.

Weekly food waste collections

This year will see the roll-out of the government's weekly food waste collections. This will help reduce the amount of food waste being sent to landfill and the waste will be used in anaerobic digesters to produce biofuels. Over and Willingham will be one of the later areas to receive the new service – probably in the autumn. More information is here: <https://tinyurl.com/ykwrf83t>

Bill

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