



# South Cambs District Council

## **Annual District Council Report: April 2024**

Oakington & Westwick APM (22.04.24)

Longstanton APM (09.05.24)

Northstowe ATM (30.04.24)

**Cllr. Natalie Warren-Green**

**District Councillor for Longstanton Ward**

# Annual Report 2024: Scope

- **Introduction**
- **SCDC Services**
- **2024/25 Budget & Council Tax Support**
- **SCDC Business Plan**
  - 4 Themes: Business; Housing; Environment; Modern & Caring Council
- **Cambridge 2050**
- **4-Day Week Trial**



# Introduction

## 1. District Councillor

- Elected November 2022
- Case work for residents (Confidential)
- SCDC Point of Contact for:
  - PCs & NTC
  - Transport Group
  - Environmental Action: EAG, LEGG
  - Community Groups
- Member of Northstowe Delivery Group

## 2. Committees

- Skills (Jan-May 2023)
- Climate & Environment Advisory Committee (Since November 2023)



# SCDC Services

- Benefits
- Business support and development
- Council tax collection and support
- Environmental Health
- Housing
- Licensing (pubs, taxis)
- Planning Services (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)
- Waste collection and recycling (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)

You can find more details here: South Cambs District Council ([www.scambs.gov.uk](http://www.scambs.gov.uk))



# 2024/25 Budget & Council Tax Support

## Budget

- **Strong Financial Position**
- **Investing in improving resident lives**
- **Traditional funding methods can't keep up**
- **SCDC brings in £7 million thanks to its commercial investments**
- Without these investments, SCDC wouldn't so easily be able to continue to provide the high-quality services we do and wouldn't be in the strong financial position we are in.

## Council Tax

- The District Council's increase in Council Tax represents an extra 42p per month for Band D
- **The rise in Council Tax is below inflation.**
  - Inflation has been at record levels and is still at 4.1% (which is lower than it has been recently but is still far higher than it should be). This means that the Council is facing a real term budget cut.
- **Increasing the thresholds for support offered under the Council Tax Support Scheme in line with inflation so that people currently able to claim don't lose out.**
- **The poorest in our communities get up to 100% relief on their council tax bills.**
- Benchmark:
  - Across Cambridgeshire, South Cambs, Huntingdonshire and Cambridge City offer up to 100% relief, whereas East Cambs offers up to 91.5%, Fenland 80% and Peterborough 70%.



# SCDC Business Plan: Business, Housing, Environment, Modern & Caring

## 1. Business Support

- Advice to business, esp. SMEs
- Growth in jobs across South Cambs
- Support transition to net zero
- Supporting local highstreets & markets

## 2. Affordable Housing

- Building more across South Cambs than in the City (2022/23: City – 322; Scambs – 472).
- >1k housing completions every year in South Cambs since 2018
- We are an unambiguously ‘YIMBY’ Council:
  - ‘Yes in my backyard’
  - Address the skyrocketing house prices
  - Tackle the structural inequalities we face
  - Give people the agency to make decisions in their lives.
- Working to ensure housing across the district is built to the highest possible standards of energy efficiency
- Working to bring existing housing up to scratch
- Helping residents face rising energy costs
- Aiming to combat the devastating impacts of climate change



# SCDC Wide Activity: 4 Themes

## 3. Green to Our Core

- **Work on 20% biodiversity net gain:** pre-empted and gone further than Government goals
- **Contribution to the upcoming Local Area Energy Plan** will help Cambridgeshire set forth how to reach net zero
- **Active engagement** with Government, the water industry, Cambridge City for **solutions the water scarcity crisis**
- **Waterbeach Renewable Energy Network Project** reducing SCDC carbon emissions, landmark project countrywide
- Continue to improve the energy performance of our commercial buildings and other council owned assets
- **Zero Carbon Communities Scheme, EV Charging Point Scheme and other community engagement programmes**
  - Supporting local communities take steps to reducing emissions, becoming resilient to the effects of climate change
  - We are giving more staff support for the Zero Carbon Communities Fund. Over the past 4 years we have given out £500k in support of projects to help local communities. This year £125,000 will be available through the scheme.
  - Repair cafés, food waste redistribution schemes; helping reduce household waste, encourage recycling, development of a circular economy.
- **Two new Environmental Enforcement Officers: prosecute fly tippers.**
- **Creating two new posts, bringing in house our litter picking along highways** rather than contracting it out. This will save the Council approx. £25k a year - giving us a more reliable and cost-efficient service.



# SCDC Wide Activity: 4 Themes

## 4. Modern & Caring Council

- **Updating our website** to make them more easily accessible to residents
- **Tackling income tax and business rates fraud**
- **Safe & Secure Homes**
  - Landlord safety checks and provided targeted health and wellbeing support for vulnerable residents.
  - Training to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues.
  - Working to do all we can to support asylum seekers and refugees, including those from Ukraine
- **Homes for Ukraine Scheme**
  - Still very active.
  - Next Year £897,000 on support for Ukrainian guests, funded by central government, Council controlled
  - Support one of the largest numbers of Ukrainian guests of any district and the council provides support such as funding for hosts, employment support for guests, and small grants for activities to help guests to integrate.
  - The latest initiative is to provide support for guests moving on from hosts into independent accommodation via our landlord incentive scheme Neighbourhood Plans
- **New neighbourhood plans - local communities can take a leading role** in determining their future development.
- **In Northstowe**, this past year saw the opening of **The Cabin** (temporary community centre), and **Western Park Sports Pavilion**, and we will in the **next year be building the permanent Community Centre** and we are **advancing our plans for a Civic Hub and the Phase 2 Sports Pavilion**.
- **On a cross-party basis: Will treat care experience** as though it is a protected characteristic; **White Ribbon** accreditation.





# Cambridge 2050

- **Michael Gove announced his plans for ‘Cambridge 2040’ in July 2023.**
  - Since then, we have had little clarity from the government. **The figure of 250,000 homes has been revised down to 150,000 homes and 2040 has been pushed back to 2050.**
- **In March 2024 a ‘growth corporation’ was announced**, which will direct a lot of the initial work.
  - We had hoped that as the local planning authority we would have a seat on the board of this to try and direct the new development. Unfortunately, **local authorities will only sit on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners**, meaning we **won’t have a vote or decision-making powers.**
  - There is a lot we still don’t know about Cambridge 2050
  - We will keep parish councils informed as we learn more. **SCDC have been clear about the importance of having local voices involved in local planning decisions, as well as the need for new transport, new schools, and new health services.**
- We’ve also been **firm on the issue of the environment and water scarcity** - more work will be needed to realise the scale of growth within the SCDC local plan let alone Michael Gove’s plans.



# 4-Day Week Trial

- Keen media coverage of this groundbreaking initiative trialling a desk-based four-day week since January 2023.
- The Council undertook the trials because **acute recruitment and retention issues** amplified in Greater Cambridge due to the high cost of housing.
- Similar trials are taking place across the UK, Ireland, and US, as outlined by the 4 Day Week Global Campaign, notably both the Scottish and Welsh Governments are considering such trials.
- **SCDC has spent £434,000 less on agency staff** covering roles that were previously identified as hard to fill.
- **Initial results: No statistically significant negative impact** on services. In some areas, the services improved.
- **Health and wellbeing surveys of council staff:** significant **positive impact** on mental and physical health.



# 4-Day Week Trial

- Initial three-month trial and in May 2023
- Following independent assessment of performance data, Cabinet extended the trial by 12 months, meaning the trial period ended March 2024.
- Separately, a three-month trial for waste crews was approved in May 2023.
  - This followed the initial desk-based trial due to the complexities of reorganising bin collection rounds for around 128,000 households across Greater Cambridge.
- **Under a four-day week, officers carry out 100% of their work, in 80% of the time, for 100% of the pay.**
- In November 2023, the government issued a 'best value notice' to the council, stating its opposition to the four-day week.
- This notice asked the council to submit significant amounts of data to the government.
- In **December 2023, the Government published a four-week consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement**, setting expectations around local authority funding in future years. The Government reiterated that they **do not support a four-day week** for local authorities and **asked for views about the use of financial levers in future settlements** to disincentivise the practice.
- **The results of this consultation were overwhelmingly against the imposition of financial levers.**
- **The Council had expected**, subject to data showing performance had been maintained or improved and a member decision, **to consult on a four-day week shortly after the end of the formal trial. We cannot do that until the government tells us what financial levers it would use**, as we would not be able to explain the full financial impact on the Council.
- **Whilst we wait for the government to tell us what they will do so we can consult, staff are continuing to use a four-day working pattern.**
- Once a consultation has been carried out, and once all the evidence has been independently analysed, **councillors will at full council decide whether, or not, to keep the four-day week permanently.**
- We believe in **evidenced based decision-making** and have not pre-judged the outcome of the trial.





# South Cambs District Council

**Cllr. Natalie Warren-Green**

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