

CABINET

16 December 2025
5.00 - 7.15 pm

Present: Councillors Holloway (Chair), Wade (Vice-Chair), Bird, Moore, Smart, A. Smith, S. Smith, Thornburrow and Todd-Jones

Officers Present:

Chief Executive: Robert Pollock

Chief Operating Officer: Jane Wilson

Chief Finance Officer: Jody Etherington

Biodiversity Manager: Guy Belcher

Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits: Naomi Armstrong

Democratic Services Manager: Dan Kalley

Deputy Democratic Services Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

Other Councillors present:

Councillors Bick, Hauk, Payne and Porrer

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

25/52/Cab Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Nestor.

25/53/Cab Declarations of Interest

Name	Agenda Item	Reason
Councillor S Smith	25/56/Cab, 25/57/Cab 25/58/Cab	Personal: Member of Adams Road Bird Sanctuary Club
Councillor Moore	25/56/Cab 25/57/Cab 25/58/Cab	Personal: Member of Birdwood Area Residents Association
Councillor A Smith	25/56/Cab 25/57/Cab 25/58/Cab	Personal: Member of Coldham's Brook and Cherry Hinton Brook

25/54/Cab Minutes

The Leader of the Council informed those present of the following:

- i. Following the November Full Council and Cabinet meetings, where it was agreed to submit a proposal for the local government reorganization the submission has now been made.
- ii. Looked forward to hearing further updates from the Government in the new year and to the upcoming public consultation.
- iii. Extend a huge thank you to all the officers involved as this was an enormous undertaking, and their hard work was greatly appreciated

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November were then approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25/55/Cab Public Questions

There were no public questions.

25/56/Cab Biodiversity Strategy (Mid-term review)

The Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Space and City Services presented the report.

The report referred to the draft revised Strategy which proposed to retain the existing vision, themes, and support for the Cambridge Nature Network, while introducing alternative actions and projects to align the new statutory Biodiversity Reporting Duty, the draft Urban Forest Strategy (UFS), and wider initiatives. These included the statutory Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS, proposed for submission to the Secretary of State in December 2025), the BIG Chalk partnership, and the Council's ambition to collaborate towards achieving future Nature City Accreditation.

The Cabinet Member responded to questions from Cabinet and Councillors in attendance as follows:

- i. The strategy was ambitious in scope, aligning with national legislation and regional priorities such as the Cambridgeshire Doubling Nature vision, which set a target for measurable biodiversity net gain by 2031. It embedded biodiversity across all Council services, committed to enhancing local nature reserves, to restore chalk streams, and achieve 20% biodiversity net gain for Council-led developments. These actions went beyond compliance, aiming to create a resilient, connected nature network and integrate nature into urban planning, housing, and community spaces.

- ii. This was a midterm review of the current strategy updates, legislation and initiatives which aligned with the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- iii. The updated national legislation under the Environment Act embedded LNRS actions into planning and service delivery, while retaining the original vision, themes, and objectives. The draft review proposed new projects, designations, and initiatives, including the Council's aspiration to work with external partners to achieve Nature City Accreditation.
- iv. The consultation would ensure these objectives and projects were supported, while seeking additional ideas and partners to help address the biodiversity emergency declared by the Council in 2019.
- v. The Nature City Accreditation would provide an additional funding stream, much of the work required for this accreditation was already being done. Securing it would not only validate that the Council were taking the right actions but provide extra impetus to continue and expand the Council's efforts, encouraging greater outcomes for nature and biodiversity to be delivered.
- vi. While the cost-of-living crisis was a critical issue, the need for a healthy environment was equally important. Access to open spaces and nature played a vital role in mental health, helping people feel connected and supported.
- vii. Noted the comment made by Councillor Thornburrow who thanked Officers for their work on city projects with resident groups and partners, including Friends of Logan's Meadow. The chalk stream project also engaged stakeholders such as Anglia Ruskin University, providing an academic input to inform future initiatives. Biodiversity net gain was being directed into these projects, allowing the Planning Services and Greater Cambridge Partnership schemes to support long-term environmental improvements for residents and visitors.
- viii. Welcomed the comment from Councillor S Smith on the importance of harnessing local professional and amateur expertise to address environmental issues. Groups such as the Adams Road Bird Sanctuary Club had provided valuable data and survey work supporting designations and protection of key spaces. The consultation would explore how these groups could further contribute with their ongoing commitment to nature and biodiversity. It was important to acknowledge this work and was greatly valued.
- ix. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (item 7 on the agenda) was a core part of the Biodiversity Strategy. Nature and biodiversity, while related and were distinct. Experiencing them was vital for wellbeing, such a need had been highlighted during COVID, if these opportunities were absent, the impact would be significant.

- x. Resident involvement was essential, with Nature Towns and Cities Accreditation promoting a bottom-up approach which ensured that actions were taken together rather than imposed. This shared responsibility was vital to the success of the strategy.
- xi. To provide recreation and social space for people was very much about management planning and managing the resources available. When usage increased and pressure built, it was an important need to adapt and manage those spaces to ensure they remain functional and accessible. It was the Council's goal to make these resources work for everyone, maintaining them, so they can support the level of usage required over time.
- xii. Acknowledged Councillor Thornburrow's comment that evidence was being gathered for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan on sports facilities across the city and South Cambridgeshire, assessing current provision, future needs during the Plan period, and the pressure on existing facilities.
Planning Policy Officers were very much involved in working with the relevant officers on various policies regarding biodiversity as part of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

The Biodiversity Manager said the following:

- i. The principles behind the Nature City Accreditation were around collaboration and community empowerment. This aligned well with the new City Services and Communities structure and was viewed as an ongoing process rather than a final goal. The aim was to reach out to new groups and individuals, encouraging them to engage with nature close to home, right on their doorstep.
- ii. The Council's focus was on effective management and planning for green and open spaces. A review had been undertaken on 13 core nature sites, including local nature reserves and commons, and were proposing zoning for certain activities.
- iii. A key part of the strategy was education helping users of these open spaces understand the pressures and threats on these sites, such as the impact of dogs swimming in chalk streams, an example. While this may seem harmless, research had shown flea treatments could have catastrophic effects on chalk stream invertebrates. The aim wasn't to stop people enjoying these spaces, but to guide them to use them responsibly.
- iv. The 13 core sites referenced were the city's largest sites which were essentially the Commons, with a long history of use, including grazing, with the aim to retain this. However, with increasingly dry summers and current stock levels, overgrazing was becoming a major cause of site

decline, as noted in the report. To address this, the strategy proposed a review of grazing practices with licensed grazers to restore these sites.

- v. The strategy was built around three themes:
 - Core sites which concentrated along rivers and watercourses.
 - Nature in your Neighbourhood, working with communities to enhance smaller spaces like parks, supported by the Council's biodiversity toolkit. For example, St. Thomas's Park had successfully engaged residents to shape and deliver biodiversity features with council support.
 - Broader engagement, encouraging action in workplaces and private gardens.
- vi. The aim was not only to manage these sites but to promote a city-wide approach to nature and biodiversity.

Cabinet **unanimously resolved** to:

- i. Approve the progression to public consultation to inform a midterm review of the Cambridge City Council Biodiversity Strategy (2022 – 2031)
- ii. Note that the public consultation will run alongside the approved Urban Forest Strategy public consultation
- iii. Delegate finalisation of consultation documents and proposals to the Director of City Services
- iv. Note that following the proposed consultation the amended Biodiversity Strategy is on the Forward Plan to return to Cabinet for approval in March 2026, along with the Urban Forest Strategy and Climate Change Strategy.

25/57/Cab Biodiversity Duty Reporting

The Cabinet Member and Biodiversity Manager presented the report.

The report referred to the new Biodiversity Reporting Duty and sought approval for the first report covering 2022 to 2025 to be submitted to central government and be published on our website.

In response from questions from the Cabinet Members and other Councillors present the Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Spaces and City Services and the Biodiversity Manager said the following:

- i. The Council's preference was to always achieve biodiversity on-site within the city, as close as possible to the development location, rather than offsetting it elsewhere.
- ii. The offset site used for planning was large, attractive, and offered significant space, however it was a distance from the city. Despite this,

- the site contributed to the wider environmental objectives, including climate change mitigation.
- iii. Compliance with the Environment Act 2021 required the Council to report biodiversity actions in line with published guidance. The first reporting deadline was March 2026.
 - iv. The Equality Impact Assessment indicated that completed and planned actions in the Biodiversity Duty Report were likely to have positive socioeconomic and equality impacts by improving access to high-quality green spaces. Benefits include better mental and physical health, reduced stress, and increased climate resilience, particularly for children, older adults, disabled people, pregnant women, residents in deprived areas, and ethnic minority communities.
 - v. Evidence showed greener neighbourhoods reduced health disparities and provided the greatest benefits for disadvantaged groups; prioritising improvements in areas with low access to nature was essential.
 - vi. The assessment noted risks if projects failed to address barriers such as safety, accessibility, and cultural relevance.
 - vii. Research had highlighted that women and girls often felt unsafe in poorly lit or neglected areas, and ethnic minority communities may underuse green spaces if not designed inclusively.
 - viii. To mitigate the risks mentioned, the strategy included accessibility audits co-designed with diverse communities

The Biodiversity Manger said the following:

- i. The Biodiversity Duty Report included biodiversity net gain, with a section prepared by Planning Officers addressing this mandatory requirement. It covered sites within the area, including private land and a County Council-owned habitat bank.
- ii. A habitat bank operated by setting an agreed baseline, registered with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFR) and assigning biodiversity units to achieve a target condition. These units could be sold commercially, but once established, the site must be managed and monitored for 30 years. Each site had a defined biodiversity level required for credits to be sold.
- iii. The baselines had been calculated for each core site in the city, assessing both habitat area and condition (quality). This followed the same system used for habitat banks, even though the Council were not trading credits.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport said the following:

- i. Currently, the official biodiversity net gain site through planning was the County Farm. Additional sites were expected, with organisations such as

Cambridge Past, Present & Future and the Wildlife Trust considering options. These sites had to meet strict criteria to guarantee 30-year investment commitments. It was hoped that city-based biodiversity projects, such as chalk stream initiatives, could meet these criteria and would be ideal if Section 106 contributions through planning could be directed towards city biodiversity projects.

Cabinet **unanimously resolved** to:

- i. Approve the content of the draft Biodiversity Duty Report for final document design and publication by the statutory submission deadline of 20th March 2026.

25/58/Cab Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Biodiversity Manager presented the report.

The report referred to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which was a new statutory plan as required under the Environment Act 2021. A LNRS agreed priorities for nature recovery and proposes actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities.

Following questions, the Cabinet Member for Nature said the following:

- i. The production of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, and Peterborough was mandated by Government and developed in line with official guidance, with support from Natural England. There were 48 of these strategies across England, each covering a distinct region, typically aligned with county or combined authority boundaries.
- ii. The strategy provided an evidence-based plan agreed by stakeholders to reverse biodiversity decline and restore habitats at a regional scale. It integrated nature recovery into land use planning, climate adaptation, and community priorities, ensuring coordinated and effective action.
- iii. It was expected to inform funding opportunities, including Environmental Land Management payments and future government grants. This area was one of the most nature-depleted in the country, largely due to extensive arable land, therefore it was important to restore nature wherever possible.
- iv. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridge and Peterborough were vital as it set out a coordinated plan to restore habitats and biodiversity across the region. It would ensure nature recovery was

embedded in local development and climate resilience efforts and would help shape future government funding priorities.

- v. Biodiversity did not stop at city boundaries, so collaboration with regional partners was essential to achieve the best outcomes, particularly with upcoming changes such as the move to a unitary authority. Working together was key to delivering meaningful improvements for biodiversity.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport stated:

- i. Had asked planning officers how the Local Nature Recovery Strategy would impact proposed development sites and proposed protected green areas in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This was demonstrated by overlaying the Greater Cambridge Local Nature map onto the site plans, confirming that selected sites would not compromise nature objectives. Once finalised it was hoped the public would be able to access this information.

The Cabinet **unanimously resolved** to:

- i. Provide Cambridge City Council 'supporting authority' approval for the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to submit the final Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to the Secretary of State by 31st December 2025.
- ii. Note the CPCA proposals for supporting implementation and delivery of the LNRS, following submission
- iii. Authorise Officers to continue to represent Cambridge City Council as a 'Supporting Authority' at future LNRS steering group or alternative forums as they collectively move towards delivery and monitoring phase of the LNRS.

25/59/Cab Council Tax Reduction

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources presented the report.

The report referred to the annual review of the Council's working-age Council Tax Reduction (CTR) schemes to ensure they met residents' needs and aligned with corporate objectives, particularly tackling poverty and inequality. The scheme supported over 9,000 of the city's poorest and most vulnerable residents by linking council tax relief to ability to pay and offered additional benefits such as discounted leisure cards and discretionary reductions.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member and Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits, said the following:

- i. Some Local Authorities had set a starting point of 60%, which was considered too onerous for the poorest households. This level often made payments unaffordable, which lead to indebtedness and associated stress and mental health issues. Furthermore, the cost of recovering such small debts was disproportionate and ineffective, making this approach neither practical nor appropriate.
- ii. Did not have the exact figures available but just under half the local authorities were now operating the same scheme as the Council. South Cambridgeshire District Council had recently completed its consultation and was considering a very similar scheme, confirming the Council's model was setting a benchmark.
- iii. It was important to revisit the budget allocation for taxi cards to determine if continuity of this support for eligible residents was possible.
- iv. Extend thanks to the Benefits Manager, who had led on this work and the amount of effort that had gone into it. Being able to say that the Council were the benchmark in this service was highly commendable. The way in which the benefits system operated was both efficient and effective, delivering real impact for those who needed it most.

Cabinet **unanimously resolved** to:

- i. Universal Credit Scheme Upating
To uprate the income bands and contribution levels within the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for households in receipt of Universal Credit in line with the annual percentage increase in the National Minimum Wage and better equalise earnings disregards.
- ii. Non-Universal Credit Working-Age Scheme
To retain a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working-age households not in receipt of Universal Credit, and to apply:
(a) Department for Work and Pensions applicable amounts and premiums where these continue to be published; or
(b) where such figures are unavailable, to uprate scheme allowances annually in accordance with the September Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- iii. Council Tax Liability Basis
That 100% of the Council Tax liability shall continue to be used as the starting point for the calculation of entitlement under both Council Tax Reduction Schemes.
- iv. Delegated Authority and Duration
To delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer to carry out the annual review and uprating of the Council Tax Reduction Schemes in Page 149 Agenda Item 8 accordance with legislative changes and the uprating principles set out above; and to confirm that the Schemes shall remain in operation (subject to any such annual uprating) until 31 March 2029.

- v. Where the household was on universal credit to retain a flat rate scheme for non-dependence of £8.36 for 2026/27 with an annual uprating in accordance with the September consumer price index and annually increased by September CIP thereafter. Non-dependents who received disability income or pension credit or a war pension or armed forces independent payment or were the charge payer and or partner have a disability or receive a carer's benefit will not have a non-dependent deduction.

25/60/Cab Quarterly Performance Report

The Leader and the Chief Operating Officer presented the report.

The report provided an overview of the Council's first presentation of what would be a regular quarterly performance over the period 1 July to 30 September 2025 (Q2).

In response to questions the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing said the following

- i. Noted the following comments made by Cabinet Members:
- There was an error in the italicised baseline description on page 211, it should have stated the time to determine planning household applications, not validate them, The average time now close to seven weeks, compared to the eight-week expectation, and some applications were being processed even faster.
 - Pleased to acknowledge the newly established pipeline for maintenance and compliance contracts and the Regulator's comments which praised the Council's respectful, fair, and positive culture toward tenants, as well as its effective, efficient, and timely repair service.
 - The Park Street development had been delivered on time and under budget.
 - Welcomed the higher-than-budgeted income from car parks.
 - The new Operations Hub was a significant improvement for staff and service delivery.
 - Pleased to note the secured funding of £2.3 million from National Highways.
 - Welcomed the mention of bin collection rates, currently at 99.9% despite extensive roadworks across the city. Currently the waste services collected three bins per household every fortnight, by this

time next year would be collecting five, including the new food waste service.

- Highlighted the work of the Environmental Health teams who ensured resident safety while helping local businesses thrive.
- The use of amber as a colour code could give the impression that targets haven't been met, when in fact the baseline has been achieved but not the stretch target. Suggested a different visual approach, such as two shades of green would make this clearer.
- It was important to recognise Officers' efforts and note their exceptional work, stated by all Councillors present.
- Thanks to the Chief Operating Officer for leading on this piece of work, which supported accountability and transparency in local democracy. The report enabled Members to see both areas of success and areas requiring improvement which reflected the Council's commitment to openness and responsibility.

ii. Agency fees for the grounds maintenance and street cleaning teams had contributed to the £1.7 million overspend due to long-term sick leave. This was an issue that could not be planned for or avoided. There was also the additional cost for the increased payment for the national living wage. Other factors that contributed for the overspend was:

- Lion Yard Rental Income, this was declining due to reduced retail footfall and changing shopping habits, the rent was linked to footfall. A one-off £700,000 repayment had made to the leaseholder due to an accumulated sum of rent paid at the previous rate. The income was expected to fall by approximately £400,000 annually due to the change in the rental income.
- Housing Benefit Subsidy, this full subsidy could not be reclaimed for homelessness providers who were not registered. Work was underway to support the two main providers (representing 80% of the issue) to become registered to claim full subsidy.
- Crematorium income had reduced due to market changes, new providers, online direct cremation services, and cost-of-living pressures. Income appeared to be stabilising, and capital investment would be recommended to maintain facilities and improve the mourner experience.

iii. The next budget would consider more significant and strategic investment to address damp, condensation, and mould as these issues were recognised as a critical area of work. Additional surveyors were being recruited in the budget to speed up the progress to resolve these issues.

iv. Education for tenants on prevention of mould was ongoing through Cambridge Matters and other Council communications.

- v. Regarding voids, delays were partly due to staff sickness and changes in pre-vacancy inspections. Processes were being improved to ensure properties were checked before tenants left. While work was taking around 11.5 days, extra time was needed to re-let properties, compounded by recent tenant moves into new homes. Work continued to reduce empty homes as quickly as possible.

The Chief Finance Officer said the following:

- i. Over the past 12 to 18 months, the Leadership Team had worked hard to tighten financial management practices. Significant recurring savings were delivered in the previous year's budget, which had encouraged more disciplined budget management and surfaced some in-year overspends.
- ii. Introduced a business partnering approach, with finance team members working closely with budget holders to identify savings and additional income opportunities, reinforcing the principle that budgets should not be spent unnecessarily.
- iii. It was important to note the context, while the figures were reporting an overspend against budget, there was an original forecast of a £3.4 million general fund surplus. This was now expected to be £1.7 million but remained a surplus which was an enviable position compared to many Local Authorities.
- iv. Thanked all staff who continued to deliver excellent services for residents despite significant changes and challenges, including long-term sickness. Their commitment and pride in serving the city was evident every day. The new Operations Hub reflected the Council's investment in the staff who made the Council work for their residents.
- v. It was noted that the financial pressures facing the Council were not unusual nationally, with recent regulatory changes such as Awaab's Law which had increased costs particularly for damp, condensation, and mould repairs, and highlighted wider housing maintenance issues.
- vi. Approximately 50% of the current overspend related to one-off costs, including wake-and-watch costs and historic property issues, which were expected to fall away.
- vii. External consultants had been engaged to review the 30-year Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan during the current budget-setting process to ensure budgets reflected the required level of repairs and maintenance and to assess the impact on long-term capital investment.
- viii. The HRA remained financially sustainable, operating within a statutory ring fence that protected tenant income for housing purposes.
- ix. Despite the overspend, the HRA was forecast to deliver a net operating surplus of around £10 million after interest costs this year, which would

support capital investment in redevelopment, new builds, net-zero measures, and retrofitting. Updated proposals would be brought forward through scrutiny in January and Cabinet in February.

The Cabinet **unanimously resolved** to:

- i. Note the contents of the attached Quarterly Performance Report for the period 1 July to 30 September 2025

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

CHAIR