

**SERVICES, CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

2 December 2025

5.30 - 8.30 pm

Present: Councillors Young (Chair), Gardiner-Smith (Vice-Chair), Bick, Divkovic, Gawthrope Wood, Glasberg, Griffin and Payne

Leader of the Council: Councillor Holloway

Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Space and City Services: Councillor Smart

Cabinet Member for Communities: Councillor A Smith

Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources: Councillor S Smith

Officers:

Director of Communities: Sam Scharf

Assistant Director Public Realm & Environment: Alistair Wilson

Head of Economy, Energy and Climate: Jemma Little

Head of Climate, Environment & Waste: Bode Esan

Strategic Enabling Communities Lead: Vicky Haywood

Waste Policy Officer: Rebecca Weymouth Wood

Project Officer: James Ogle

Deputy Democratic Services Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

25/1/SC&C Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Pounds and Swift, Councillor Gawthrope Wood attended as a reserve.

Councillor Hauk also gave apologies and Councillor Bick attended as a reserve.

25/2/SC&C Public Questions

There were no public questions.

25/3/SC&C Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

25/4/SC&C Community Wealth Building Strategy Implementation

The Director of Communities presented a report on the delivery of the Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy, approved in 2024.

The report brought together progress across procurement and social value, the inclusive economy programme, community grants and investment, neighbourhood working, meanwhile use, and whole system partnership work.

Members were invited to comment on progress, identify areas where additional assurance may be helpful and advise on priorities for the next phase of the programme. Particular attention should be paid to several areas that were being developed and proposed more immediately, with Scrutiny feedback helpful in directly informing these considerations

- Social Value Policy
- Community Grants
- Meanwhile Use of Assets
- Performance Measures

The Scrutiny's guidance on these areas would help shape the ongoing work and ensured that the Community Wealth Building programme continued to deliver practical benefits for residents and communities.

In response to questions, the Director of Communities, Head of Economy, Energy and Climate and Strategic Enabling Communities Lead said the following:

Social Value Policy

- i. When a contract was first set up the weighting attributed to between price and quality; first split of 100% with 10% of the social value sat in the quality aspect of the contract.
- ii. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 required public authorities to consider the economic, social, and environmental well-being in the procurement processes, promoting broader social value in public services.
- iii. There were challenges, for example, when 30% of the quality weighting focused on social value that did not directly contribute to delivering the core elements of the commission. It required careful balancing to ensure internal practices were still properly followed.

- iv. There were some Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME) within the community wealth-building strategy, which had struggled with the 10% social value requirement as they were unsure how to answer and demonstrate their contribution in this area.
- v. Therefore, a balanced approach was required, increasing the social value weighting to 30% could further deter some suppliers. The 10% set would go into all procurement.
- vi. There were minimum standards for employment practices: all contractors were required to pay the Living Wage and comply with sustainability, equality, and modern slavery standards. Beyond these baseline expectations, there was also recognition of the inherent value offered by social enterprises and charities, which could meet their social value obligations through the very nature of their organisational purpose.
- vii. The Match my Project platform allowed for smaller SMEs to easily contribute social value.
- viii. Evidence of previous social value competition were favourable.
- ix. Contract management processes were in place to monitor the successful contractor's delivery of their social value commitments throughout the duration of the contract.
- x. If the bench mark of the social value was set too high this could potentially add to the cost of the contract.
- xi. The Match My Project framework should enable high-quality, high-value businesses, particularly those without significant costs to achieve stronger quality scores based on their organisational values and behaviours and not to submit through the 10% social value low-quality responses.
- xii. Match My Project had been procured alongside Cambridgeshire County Council, a joint exercise.

The committee discussed:

- i. Possible task and finish group.
- ii. Employment practices.
- iii. The Employment and Work Plan policy outlined in the Emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan.
- iv. Cambridge Investment Partnership Social Value Framework.

The Cabinet Member for Communities said the following:

- i. Community Wealth was seen as a Cabinet priority.
- ii. It was important to have a social value framework in place to prevent undercutting by companies that were unwilling or unable to demonstrate social value.

- iii. Regarding Match My Project, it served as an important mechanism that was highly valued by the voluntary and third sectors and should be viewed positively.
- iv. It was important to challenge the assumption that high-quality products cannot be delivered by good-quality employers who already demonstrated strong employment practices.
- v. There were examples where social value requirements had opened new procurement pathways for strong social enterprises.

Noted the following:

- i. Members supported the 10% social value requirement.
- ii. Work was required to improve the Employment practices
- iii. Members welcomed the Inherent Value being recognised.
- iv. Recommended that further work be undertaken to assess how many contract award decisions fell within the 10% margin, and to determine the extent to which social value influenced a change of contractor.

Community Grants

In response to questions, the Director of Communities, Head of Economy, Energy and Climate and Strategic Enabling Communities Lead said the following:

- i. Proposing a tiered approach for the multi-year grant platform for a three period with review points throughout the period, which would need to be renewed.
- ii. Had carried out some market testing under a procurement exercise for the larger charity organisations, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau; the services this organisation offered could only be matched in part. Further work could possibly be carried out.
- iii. The Grants Team had been restructured as the Community Investment Team, and Officers have been asked to consider how this sector could be supported more broadly, moving beyond a narrow focus on the dependency of the Council's grants and build resilience.
- iv. Officers were also working with charities to support long-term planning and to develop a pipeline of potential investments under the Greater Cambridge Impact programme.
- v. It was needed to be made clear that grants whether awarded by the Council to local or national charities must fund activities or services that directly benefit residents across the city.
- vi. New guidance had been produced regarding Community Interest Companies (CIC).

The Committee discussed:

- i. Digital platform for grant applications and multi-year grants.

The Cabinet Member for Communities said the following:

- i. Work was currently underway on a paper to develop a wider multi-year funding trial model, building on the success of the initial pilot. This included exploring the potential for an unrestricted grant model. The paper would be taken to a future meeting of the Cabinet for consideration.
- ii. There was so much need within the city; lot of work with partner organisations around resilience was to expand what could be done beyond the grant.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources said:

- i. Greater Cambridge Impact operated as an asset-based model, supported by funding from organisations that required interest payments on their investment.
- ii. The main constraint on Greater Cambridge Impact was the availability of equity funding, which was intended to support the growth and development of social enterprises.
- iii. As Greater Cambridge Impact expanded, the release of equity finance was dependent on reaching a first close of £4 million, at which point the first viable investment could be made.
- iv. The Council's funds would not be drawn upon until this threshold has been met.

Noted the following:

- i. The Committee fully supported the multi-year grant platform.
- ii. To encourage Officers to review the approach for charities that received regular annual funding from the Council, looking beyond a narrow focus on grant dependency and working towards building long-term resilience.

Meanwhile Use of Assets

In response to questions, the Director of Communities, Head of Economy, Energy and Climate and Strategic Enabling Communities Lead said the following:

- i. Important to reach a balance to ensure that the Council had a robust policy for the Council's own assets (many of which were leased, but there were some vacant) while facilitating these principles across the city.
- ii. The emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan Requirement would have Meanwhile Use policy and an Affordable Work Space policy.

- iii. There were vacant spaces within the Guildhall, but it was difficult to determine potential uses for them while the Civic Quarter project was still in development.
- iv. There were some new units which were built to first fix only which presented financial challenges for new businesses to come forward to take these on.
- v. There were twenty Council owned properties which were leased to charities, these were separate to Meanwhile Use.

The committee discussed:

- i. The importance for the Council to concentrate on areas where it could add the most value to the Meanwhile policy, rather than spreading its resources too thin.
- ii. Would encourage the Council to be active on the empty commercial properties but should consider whether these should be Meanwhile spaces.
- iii. The consideration of the financial implications for the Council if a unit or property required upgrading for Meanwhile Use, as well as the duration for which it will be occupied.

The Cabinet Member for Communities said the following:

- i. Supportive of using the Council's assets for social good.
- ii. Have asked the question that when income is generated from the Council's assets, should this be directed to a third-sector group, or should the Council instead inform the first sector group that there is a Council asset available for potential collaboration.
- iii. Charity Leaders in North Cambridge had stated that they would like to see a permanent space to bring charities together that benefited the whole of the city; have asked Officers to investigate the viability.

Noted the following:

- i. Members asked Officers to look at the cost benefit and the total number of vacant units.
- ii. The Committee expressed support for the Meanwhile policy but emphasised that Officers should avoid taking on more responsibilities than necessary.

Performance Measures

In response to questions, the Director of Communities, Head of Economy, Energy and Climate and Strategic Enabling Communities Lead said the following:

- i. Staff absences, combined with the need for additional work and investigation on performance indicators influenced by factors outside the Council's control, had resulted in some gaps in the reporting; this led to questions being asked as to what revisions need to be made.
- ii. Would be running the State of the City report for the third year in a row.
- iii. Greater Cambridge Impact would also produce a report that could be monitored as investments began to be deployed.
- iv. Work was ongoing to develop alongside public health and the Council's health partners, a neighbourhood level of data which would show local level what the community needs were.

The committee discussed:

- i. Important to Focus on the most tangible impacts first and then expand these, for example by starting with procurement.
- ii. Important to assess whether the Social Value Policy had led to a change in behaviour among the Council's suppliers, or if it had resulted in an increase in social value through the contracts over time.
- iii. Would welcome a clearer understanding on the reporting of the Council's employment and workforce.
- iv. Important to note the purpose of the data was to assess the impact of the Council's work; for example, issues such as deprivation cannot be fully addressed by the Council's efforts alone.

Noted the following:

- i. To have a discussion outside of the Committee to compare data sources.
- ii. Further discussion to form a task and finish group with the new Senior Scrutiny Officer who will start in January and how to take this forward.

25/5/SC&C Task and Finish Work on Bin Fill Levels and Scheduling

The Assistant Director Public Realm & Environment and the Project Officer provided an update on the agreed task and finish activity under the Litter Strategy for Cambridge (2023–2030).

The focus was to:

- i. Trial bin fill-level sensors and digital scheduling tools to assess whether technology can improve efficiency.
- ii. Reduce costs and support cleaner public spaces.
- iii. Review the type, number, location, and collection schedules for litter and dog waste bins.

From 28 November 2024, sensors and digital scheduling technology had been installed and trialled across Trumpington and Queen Ediths and from March 2025 to Cherry Hinton, this had then extended from 28 July 2025 to all suburban wards and arterial routes but did not include the city centre.

In response to questions and statements from Members, Officers said the following:

- i. The report referred general waste, recycling and dog waste bins in the public realm, not residential bins.
- ii. Dog waste could be placed in general waste bins. These bins were usually placed in close vicinity to one another which often meant duplication of the same waste stream. General waste bins were of a larger volume than dog waste bins. Dog waste bins were small and therefore required emptying more frequently.
- iii. One of the intentions of the review was to consider whether both bin types were required and if dog waste could be disposed of in nearby general waste bins, this would reduce the number of trips required to empty the bins. If this scheme did go ahead, Officers would work with the Communication Team to publicise these changes and label affected bins.
- iv. The bin sensor trial monitored both fill levels and fill rates, indicating how quickly bins reached capacity. As an example, when a bin reached 80% full, the bin would automatically be scheduled on the scheduled rounds for a visit. This optimised Officer time and reduced unnecessary vehicle trips to low % filled bins. Additionally, the data provided an understanding whether the number and placement of bins were appropriate.
- v. Monitoring would continue on those bins highlighted as low usage, and further data assessment would be done to establish whether they were needed in their current locations or whether they could be repropose elsewhere.
- vi. The trial aimed to free up staff capacity for other tasks. If resource time required for bin-emptying rounds could be more efficient and reduce the resource needs of the bin emptying rounds.
- vii. By reducing the forty-four bins in Fitzroy Street and Burleigh Street, which staff had to walk down to service (no vehicle access) had saved staff time.
- viii. No other bins had been removed in the City Centre.
- ix. The trial would continue for another year.
- x. It was likely that in two years' time there still would be bin sensors, these would likely be in areas where the bin levels were unpredictable.

- xi. It was unlikely that bin sensors would be used in the city centre, these bins regularly used and therefore frequency of visits to empty the bins was well known and did not need to be changed.
- xii. On sensed bins each time the bins were emptied, their fill levels should be recorded by operatives, creating an additional rich source of data. Over time, this process would reduce reliance on the sensors.
- xiii. It was probable that relocation or rationalisation of unneeded bins would be in consultation with Councillors.
- xiv. The total cost of all the two hundred and sixty-three sensors amounted to £25,000 per year.
- xv. There were a total of 1898 public bins across Cambridge.

The committee discussed:

- Behavioural changes required for placing dog waste in general waste.
- The style and design of bins to match their location, especially in the city centre which had an impact on the visual experience to visitors and residents.
- Reduced vehicle movements that impact on the open spaces in the city centre.
- Alternate waste collection such as underground bin storage.
- Discussion, consultation and opinions from Ward Councillors when making any changes, particularly on the location and number of bins in the city centre.

The Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Space and City Services said the following:

- i. Acknowledged what had been said, particularly the conversation around the city centre.
- ii. Would encourage people to recycle their litter at home which reduced the risk of cross contamination of on-street bins.
- iii. A location map of all the bins across the city had been produced by Officers approximately ten years ago; this had provided the basis to determine where additional bins were required at the time.
- iv. It was imperative that the trial continued to determine if all these bins were in the correct location and were of the right type.
- v. The additional bins added 10 years ago in many cases added recycling bin containers whilst the intention was to increase recycling they have often been misused and the material collected contaminated; it would be more appropriate and effective if recycling waste is taken home and put into the household recycling stream. As these bins are paired with general waste and often underused it would seem appropriate to consider whether two bins are required at such locations.

- vi. Acknowledged the work of former Councillor Rod Cantrill and Councillor Glasberg to reduce the 39 bins on Laundress Green.
- vii. No bins were removed as part of the trial. Any bins that needed to be re-purposed would be considered in consultation with Councillor's until a policy was in place in regard the data collection.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the outcomes of the bin sensor and digital monitoring trial as an agreed task and finish work under the Litter Strategy Action Plan.
- ii. To endorse the principle of using sensor data and digital tools to guide bin placement, type, and collection schedules in line with the "Right Bin, Right Location, Right Reason" policy.
- iii. To support the immediate use of evidence from the trial to:
 - Consider duplicated usage or underused bins (general, recycling) utilising the digital data technology information
 - Adjust routing to maintain the reduction from six to five collection rounds, with further efficiencies explored as data builds.
 - Remove low-capacity dog bins that are underused or with nearby alternatives as appropriate, accompanied by clear signage that dog waste can be placed in general bins.
- iv. To agree that requests for new bins should be supported only where sensor data and usage evidence demonstrate genuine need, and proposals align with Litter Strategy principles.
- v. To request officers to report back in Spring 2026 with:
 - A summary of proposed bin rationalisation and re-purposing.
 - An update on cost savings, carbon reduction, and operational benefits delivered.
 - Proposals for extending the approach to the city centre.

25/6/SC&C Work Programme

Prior to the meeting the Chair of the Services, Climate and Communities Overview Scrutiny Committee had sent the following list to the Deputy Democratic Services Manager to update the work programme.

February 2026

Climate Strategy

Urban Forest strategy

Homelessness

Heat Network

Biodiversity

March 2026

Fees and charges

Effect on services of the internal reorganisations

Other potential items

Fleet decarbonisation

After summer

Folk Festival

Culture strategy

25/7/SC&C Cambridge City Council Report MRF Update Dec 2025

The Head of Climate, Environment & Waste and the Waste Policy Officer provided a briefing note giving an update on contract performance and observations from the Officers visit on 22 September 2025. The Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service began its contract for sorting recycling with Re-Gen in March 2025.

Key points highlighted:

- i. Monthly reports from the contractor provided the amounts collected and composition information were being provided on time for meet the national data reporting deadlines.
- ii. Material was being sorted and recovered to a high standard, and the plant continued to extract and send for sale 96% of the material it sorts.
- iii. The commodity prices being reached over the last six months were largely above the typical values of the market indices which was testament to the high standard of sorting achieved and quality of the products.
- iv. Recycling was being sent to UK and European destinations for recycling.
- v. Operations continued to be compliant with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency requirements.
- vi. There had been no health and safety or welfare related issues including any RIDDOR reportable incidents. (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, Dangerous Occurrences Regulations.)
- vii. There was now the ability to recycle additional items, cardboard Pringles TM tubes (with inner foil lining) and toothpaste tubes.
- viii. Officers observed how well the site was being run on a recent site visit. The Environment Agency in Northern Ireland had confirmed that operations were compliant.

- ix. It remained Re-Gen's intention to build another MRF on the mainland, but there was no further information to share on this point currently

In response to questions and statements from Members, the Waste Policy, Change and Innovations Manager said the following:

- i. Officers held regular meetings with Re-Gen, where the establishment of a new recycling plant on the mainland was a standing agenda item.
- ii. The Enforcement Notice issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) on 25 July 2025 was unrelated to the Council's contract, and the issues raised had been resolved.
- iii. Work was underway to reduce recycling contamination. Refuse crews could immediately record any contamination they observed, enabling officers to monitor reports and write to residents to provide guidance on what could and could not be recycled.
- iv. The contract was due to run for five years.
- v. Peterborough City Council also held a contract with Re-Gen.
- vi. Huntingdonshire District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, and Fenland District Council had contracts with Biffa, which used a MRF in London.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Action said the following:

- i. There were disputed claims of conflicting information, lack of transparency, or councillors being misled.
- ii. Contracts had been approved and agreed in April 2025 with the final version actually signed in August 2025.
- iii. The contract involved several complexities, including a requirement for a transfer station.
- iv. Recycling had been collected by Re-Gen before the new contract was signed. The existing transfer station was at the MRF in Waterbeach, where all recycling was delivered before being collected by Re-Gen vehicles.
- v. Agreement was reached in August 2024 that the new contract would be signed as a shared service based in Newry, Northern Ireland.
- vi. The previous contract had been extended to allow recycling to continue at the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) in Waterbeach between August and March.
- vii. Recycling at Newry had produced a 16% increase.
- viii. Although recycling travelled a considerable distance, it was sent to UK and European destinations, not worldwide.
- ix. The contract was considered value for money; the quality of the products meant they were purchased by businesses recycling waste into new products.

- x. Under the previous contract, recycling was transported to Waterbeach for sorting. It was now sent to Northern Ireland, which increases mileage but remained within the UK.
- xi. The new facilities were modern, energy-efficient, and markedly different from the former site. As a result, the quality of recycling had significantly improved, with the benefits outweighing the additional cost.
- xii. Under the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), higher levels of recycling equated to increased income for the Council.
- xiii. The contract had been through a public procurement process in which Councillors did not have input.
- xiv. Although there were initial concerns about recycling being transported to Northern Ireland, the contract had since proven entirely positive and was fully supported.
- xv. Re-Gen was a UK family-run, award-winning business in waste management and recycling.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note and accept the update given by the briefing.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIR