

Annual report

Foreword

The past twelve months have been a period of further change in Cambridge, with both the legacy of the global pandemic and the continuing war in Ukraine causing instability and continued economic uncertainty.

The past year also saw significant inflation making it even harder for many Cambridge residents facing the challenge of making ends meet in the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

Cambridge City Council has continued to meet these challenges and adapt itself to the new demands, working together with partners to address pressures in the city, including housing, climate change and the cost-of-living crisis, as well as the continuing growth of the city.

This report sets out some of the main highlights and issues from the past year. It is structured in a way that reflects the priorities in the council's [Corporate Plan](#).

The report, alongside the KPI data published with it can be read alongside the financial outturn report and the annual customer feedback reports, as well as the [State of the City](#) report published last year.

We hope you find this report useful and welcome any feedback.

Priority 1: Leading Cambridge's response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and creating a net zero council by 2030

We are working at all levels to deliver on this priority, from significant infrastructure projects to local repair cafes. Many of these activities are delivered in partnership working alongside organisations from across the city and beyond, from the University of Cambridge and its constituent Colleges, through to community groups.

Climate

During 2023/24, we progressed a number of major projects to **reduce carbon emissions from council buildings, land and vehicles**, with the aim of achieving net zero carbon emissions from these assets by 2030.

Building on our Asset Management Plan, we have started work to develop an **Asset Management Strategy & Decarbonisation Plan** to reduce the carbon emissions for all council buildings.

We have continued to work with our partners at South Cambridgeshire District Council on the **Waterbeach Renewable Energy Network (WREN)** Solar Project. The WREN project team is working closely with the Food Waste project team to ensure changes to our depot meet the needs of both projects.

With the University of Cambridge, we are working on the potential for a **city centre heat network**. An initial feasibility study has opened the way to further government funding to move the project forward. Partner colleges are contributing additional funding (circa £300,000).

Council homes

Our **External Wall Insulation Programme** for council homes continued with 58 homes with poor energy efficiency getting external wall insulation installed alongside improved ventilation and when necessary, replacement external doors and loft insulation top ups. This programme will run for two years and install energy efficiency improvements in 260 homes. A contractor has been selected for the **Net Zero Carbon Homes** pilot project and works on the 51 council homes in that project will commence from June 2024. We also completed the development of 21 **Passivhaus certified** homes. This included two wheelchair-adapted homes, with lifts already included.

Private sector homes

We continued to support energy efficiency improvements to privately-owned homes through our **Action on Energy scheme**. Leading a partnership of all the Cambridgeshire local authorities, we used a total of £2m in Government funding to retrofit 235 energy efficiency and clean heat measures in 131 homes for low-income families across Cambridgeshire, with 11 of these homes in Cambridge. A further 232 Cambridge

households were provided with wider support through home energy interventions in partnership with other organisations working with Action on Energy.

Transport emissions

We have taken forward a number of projects to help **reduce carbon emissions from transport in Cambridge**, with a particular focus on providing new charge points for electric vehicles (EVs). We are working with Connected Kerb to provide a network of publicly accessible EV charging points across our 14 car parks. During 2023/24 we had 75 active EV charging points. We also worked with Cambridgeshire County Council and UK Power Networks to deliver 38 fast 7kw **on-street residential charge points** and four rapid 50kw chargers, using government funding. These have been operating in the Riverside and West Chesterton areas since June 2023. The units operate as part of the BP Pulse network.

Reduce, reuse, recycle

Greater Cambridge Shared Waste service (GCSWS) continued the expansion of its **Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) collection service**. With eight permanent bins spread out around the city and district, and several mobile bins, around 60 tonnes of WEEE were collected. A collaboration between GCSWS and Cambridge Carbon Footprint resulted in 22 repair cafes promoted in the financial year with over 600 items repaired.

The **route optimisation** carried out by GCSWS made collections more efficient with reduced mileage per round. In addition, we used HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oils) biofuel in about a third of our refuse collection vehicles fleet to reduce our carbon emissions, and our third electric refuse collection vehicle was brought into operation in May 2023. GCSWS also transitioned to a **four-day collection service** (part of an ongoing trial) without any reduction in the levels of service and very few complaints during the switchover. The new working arrangements are expected to result in increased staff wellbeing, improved recruitment and retention of operational crews, amongst other benefits.

Food sustainability

We continue to **support the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance** and its campaign to achieve food justice for residents in the city. In March, Cambridge Sustainable Food Partnership was awarded a prestigious **Gold Award from Sustainable Food Places**. This award recognises Cambridge as leading the way in transforming local food systems to better serve our communities, the environment and the local economy. Cambridge is one of only three cities in England to have achieved this award. Food security formed an integral part of this application, which was prepared by Cambridge Sustainable Food. It is the result of ten years' hard work by local organisations, businesses, local authorities, volunteers and community groups, coordinated by Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC and the Cambridge Food Partnership

Biodiversity

Our work to address the biodiversity crisis has continued at pace over the past year. Our strategic objectives in relation to biodiversity are set out in our Biodiversity Strategy. During 2023/24, we have reduced cattle stock numbers and trialled the use of **NoFence technology to improve conservation cattle grazing** on our commons and completed restoration work along Coldham's Brook on Coldham's Common.

Seasonal **dogs on leads orders** have been introduced for many of our local nature reserves to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and **biodiversity training** has been provided for our operational teams.

We have worked closely with the Wildlife Trust to deliver **habitat enhancement projects** on Coldham's, Stourbridge and Midsummer commons and supported the Cambridge Nature Network, including the successful **Cambridge Nature Festival**.

Section 106 funded access enhancements were completed at Byron's Pool to mitigate against increased recreational pressure on the Local Nature Reserve while new deadwood features were installed in several parks, including a large installation at Jesus Green.

We delivered multiple **biodiversity themed Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) projects** on our open spaces, including new tree planting, meadows, bird, and bat boxes and embedded new statutory Biodiversity Net Gain into our shared planning services.

A suite of projects to provide data driven case studies within the detailed project plan for delivery of the **Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project** over 24/25 and 25/26 is being planned.

Hobson's Park was designated as a new **City Wildlife Site**, primarily for the breeding and wintering bird assemblages that have established since the park and sustainable drainage schemes were designed and laid out as part of the Great Kneighton development.

We planted 519 **trees**, gave away 194 trees as part of the Trees for Babies scheme, maintained 14,711 city council trees directly, 10,659 street trees/groups and inspected 9,701 trees.

Priority 2: Tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need.

Community Wealth Building Strategy

Over the past year we developed and approved a **Community Wealth Building Strategy** that sets out how we will help address poverty and inequality in the city. An implementation plan is being prepared and will focus on using our resources and powers to build community wealth and a more inclusive and sustainable economy; empowering residents and communities, and working collaboratively with communities, partner organisations and businesses to develop joint approaches to reduce poverty and inequality.

We started using community grants and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation from Government to support Allia to deliver a programme for **social enterprises, charities and social impact businesses**. These new businesses will help assist those in the greatest need in the city.

Single Equality Scheme

Through our **Single Equality Scheme**, we have continued to work towards enabling all residents to have equal access to public activities and spaces in Cambridge and enable full participation in the community and in making decisions about the places where they live. Actions delivered during the year have included the development of a **three-year Youth Strategy** for young people aged between 11 and 18.

Events

We also worked with local organisations and communities to support **events** marking Black History Month, Disability History Month, International Holocaust Memorial Day and International Women's Day and provided small amounts of funding and support for events for Caribbean, Chinese, East Asian and Southeast Asian communities that took place at different times throughout the year.

We used some of our community grants budget in the year to fund 31 voluntary and community sector organisations explicitly organising activities for **protected characteristic groups that reduce social and/or economic inequality**. We also continued to provide a **Shopmobility** service at the Grand Arcade and Grafton East car parks to support disabled people to access the city. The service was used 3,707 times in 2023/24.

Asylum Seeking and Refugee service

During the year we expanded its **Asylum Seeking and Refugee service** to support those with newly granted refugee status from the Bar Hill hotel following positive asylum decisions. The service also commissioned employment support for refugees from various refugee cohorts. 381 people were supported and settled in total at the end of the year.

This included continuing support for the national Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family visa schemes and Afghan and Syrian refugees as part of resettlement schemes.

Racial Harassment Service

We continued to provide a **Racial Harassment Service** and took action to tackle discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The service worked to help people from different backgrounds living in the city respect and value each other and continue to get on well together. We have carried out a range of activities to tackle and highlight **domestic abuse**, including the marking of White Ribbon Day and the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, in partnership with local services such as Cambridge Women's Aid.

We also worked with Cambridge BID and Cambridge Business Against Crime (CAMBAC) to secure re-accreditation for Cambridge under the **Purple Flag scheme** to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour at night.

Cost of living

During the year we continued to work with partner organisations to **support residents struggling with the rising cost of living**. We worked with Foodbank to deliver events to help local people manage their costs and supported food hubs and other venues set up by volunteer and community partners during the pandemic to transition to more sustainable models of operation that will continue to provide fresh, nutritious food and affordable food to vulnerable people at a time of crisis in their lives. This work is being delivered by Cambridge Sustainable Food and Cambridge Food Bank. Through our five community centres, we also provided **warm and welcoming spaces** where local people came together and participated in activities or simply chatted. Nearly 118,000 people from "priority groups", including low-income households, attended our community centres in the year.

We delivered a range of planned activities to **help people on low incomes** to maximise their incomes and minimise their costs. We continue to offer tailored advice on the **take-up of benefits** to help maximise incomes and assist with budgeting to help reduce debt and prevent eviction. This work also prevented or relieved homelessness for 410 households in the year. We also sought to raise awareness of the DWP's programme to migrate people to Universal Credit and encouraged them to utilise a "checker" tool to help assess if they will be better off.

We provided **Council Tax reductions** for 7,247 households in the year and provided £28m of housing support to 4,000 plus households from the Housing Support Fund.

Grants

We also worked closely with partner organisations to allocate **over £1m of Community Grants** to over 50 organisations for projects aiming to reduce social and economic

deprivation. We continued to support and work with Cambridge Council for Voluntary Services to help maintain our thriving and vibrant community and voluntary sector. Under the **Action on Energy** scheme, with Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) and Groundworks East, we provided tailored energy advice to 232 low-income residents in Cambridge and supported a further 11 Cambridge low-income households to have fully funded improvements installed through council led Home Upgrade Grant 2 funding. We continued to promote **Living Wage accreditation** to employers in Cambridge.

We have taken steps to strengthen families and communities and **support people who are more likely to experience poverty, inequality and vulnerability**. We provided a Holiday Lunch programme during school holidays for low-income families and several 'community days' and 'skip days' to save residents money by disposing of bulky waste and to develop a sense of pride among residents in their neighbourhood.

We continued to **fund Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS)** in the year to promote volunteering and to build the capacity of local organisations to work with volunteers. We also funded **Tempo** to provide time credits as an incentive for residents to volunteer.

We continued to take a range of steps to make sure that everyone **shares in our city's success** by promoting an inclusive economy, by raising skills, and by improving access to a range of employment opportunities for people on low incomes. **Region of Learning** is a flagship skills project bringing external partnership funding in to invest in the recognition of skills through digital badges to evidence formal and informal learning and promote an inclusive economy by raising skills.

During the year we have taken steps to **improve health outcomes**, including mental health, for people on low incomes. To support **physical activity**, we have continued to provide 50% reductions on entry prices at our leisure centres for people receiving means-tested benefits, leading to just over 58,000 discounted entries during 2023/24. As part of an **exercise referral scheme** in the year, 366 people have been referred by health professionals for 12-week subsidised exercise programmes at local gyms and sports centres, with a 74% completion rate. We also continued to provide free music and events in local open spaces and promoted the involvement of low-income households in cultural activity.

We continue to work with the **Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)** and secured during the year funding for wider work to address health inequalities.

Priority 3: Building a new generation of council and affordable homes and reducing homelessness

Council homes

Our **council tenancy audit programme** continued with just under 10% of tenancies audited during the year. As a result, we have provided 27 victims of domestic abuse with support and given advice and support to 195 households on moving to more suitable accommodation. The audits are also an important part of maintaining the condition of our property, with 70% of homes visited having some property condition issue.

Condensation, damp and mould issues have been a priority. We received 608 reports of damp and mould in the year - a significant increase - and a team has been put together to inspect these properties and ensure any issues identified are resolved. We have a dedicated **Damp, Condensation and Mould Policy** with clear timescales and we have been trialling environmental sensors to assist with our property surveys.

Empty council homes (“voids”) took an average of 60.9 days to let. This is considerably higher than our target of 28 days and we are going to be commencing a **Void Improvement project** to look at the total end to end process, which will result in our void times being improved over the coming months.

Private sector homes

We have received and investigated 312 **complaints around private sector housing safety, suitability, and management during 2023/24**. 332 Houses in Multiple Occupation, (HMOs), both licensable and non-licensable, have been brought up to required safety and suitability standards. Some 212 HMOs were licensed with the council, 158 of these were licence renewals and 54 were new licensed properties that were added to the licence register in 2023/24.

Preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

Performance against **homelessness prevention** and relief targets fell short of our target 418 cases against a target of 450. Our work to incentivise private landlords and lettings to accept referrals of low-income households has had a positive impact as we successfully met our target of 120 cases for homelessness prevention and relief into the private rented sector. Our success in this area of work accounts for the overall improvement in homelessness prevention and relief.

We identified 24 **rough sleepers** in the November 2023 annual street count, an increase of one from the count the previous year. The increase reflects a national trend. Although numbers dropped immediately following the opening of our winter provision at the start of November, an influx of non-locally connected rough sleepers reversed this drop. With government funding, we continue to put measures in place to help tackle the issue. More

targeted support for people with multiple and complex needs through the Team Around the Person approach is being extended to try and reduce evictions from supported housing.

Our work to support the significant numbers of **Ukrainian households** accommodated by Cambridge-based hosts with rehousing continues. Although demand has decreased this year, we have given advice to more than 100 Ukrainian refugee households on their housing options in and around Cambridge.

Increasing affordable housing delivery

We completed **248 new council homes during 2023/24** primarily through the Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP). This makes up the majority of all new affordable homes completed in the city in the year.

Additionally, 21 existing properties were bought into council stock to serve **Afghan and Ukrainian refugees**, part funded through the LAHF. We have started building work on a further 84 new council homes, including 43 which will be let at 80% of market rents to help people who are a low priority for social housing but for whom renting or buying on the open market is a challenge.

Achieving a high standard of design and quality in new homes and communities

All council houses delivered through CIP are designed following our **Sustainable Housing Design Guide**. 21 of the homes completed in 23/24 were Passivhaus certified.

All 84 homes which have started on site in the period received planning approval targeting **Passivhaus** performance standards. All sites completed in the year provided Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) enhancement.

Four sites with planning applications dated 2020/2021 were subject to specific measurement against the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric Calculation in accordance with new requirements. Biodiversity Net Gain percentages varied across the sites and included a mix of on and off-site provision.

Priority 4: Modernising the council to lead a greener city that is fair for all

Transforming the council so we can continue delivering our priorities and provide quality services despite reduced funding and income

Our transformation programme, **Our Cambridge**, is a multi-year programme, with three main strands: how we work with our communities and partners, how we are organised internally, and how we deliver our services.

Across the year, major strategic changes to how we operate were launched, including our **target operating model** (which sets how we want to work as part of a 21st century council), our new values and behaviours, changes to City Services management structures to support more effective service delivery to keep Cambridge safe clean and accessible, and more.

This year has seen significant savings being achieved towards our three-year £6 million savings target. This supports us to be able to protect services our residents value the most. In 2023-24 we also carried out work on a **new design for our website** and the process of changing our **governance structures** began.

We have kickstarted the process of **digitisation** and becoming a truly digital council, so that those who want to access services virtually, are able to. Further changes were introduced to how we run services across the whole council to truly reflect a purpose-led approach to delivery for the residents we serve.

Supporting sustainable business development

Following the success of our Green Business Grant Fund last year, we launched our **Green Business Impact programme** with South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire District Councils. This is a support programme to help businesses become more energy efficient and reduce their carbon emissions by taking simple steps like switching to LED lighting, improving insulation, reducing waste, or changing transport modes.

Local companies are being given access to **expert support** to help measure their current environmental impact, understand which activities to prioritise to significantly reduce their carbon footprint, and adopt eco-friendly, sustainable practices. Participation in the programme is completely free and comes with an opportunity to apply for a £5,000 grant to invest in energy-efficient equipment.

We have also supported local and independent business owners through a new partnership with Indie Cambridge and social enterprises and charities to start and grow their organisations through grant funding to support Allia's work in the city.

Promoting vibrancy in the city centre

In January 2024, we announced plans to bring the Market Square project into a wider **Civic Quarter** project. This is a once-in-a-century opportunity to make improvements to the Market Square, the Guildhall (our historic headquarters), the Corn Exchange, and the public areas in between, to secure the continuing success of the market and to make the ageing buildings fit for the future.

In the meantime, to make best use of our buildings and generate revenues to fund public services, we have **let both the ground and top floors of the Guildhall** to Allia as a Future Business Centre, offering flexible and reasonably priced workspace for start-ups and community enterprises. We have also commissioned two programmes to **support market traders** in partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council, offering grants and advice to market traders and a youth enterprise programme to help young people who want to become market traders to get started.

The **visitor economy** has been a key focus of our partnership work this year, leading to a proposal by the Cambridge BID (Business Improvement District) to establish a new Accommodation BID for Greater Cambridge funded by a visitor levy. We are also working with the BID and our Visit Cambridge partners, King's College and Curating Cambridge on a Destination Management Plan which is due to complete in Autumn 2024. This will provide a strategic vision and joint plan with wider stakeholders to manage and develop Greater Cambridge as a destination with a focus on the needs of visitors, businesses and residents and improving economic, social and environmental impacts.

Other important areas of **work with the BID** include community safety such as retaining Cambridge's Purple Flag status and offering free events to bring vibrancy to the city. These include the organising and funding of the Cambridge Christmas lights and switch-on event and support for our City Events' Out of the Ordinary Street Arts Festival.

Driving down long-term inequalities

Our Abbey ward community wealth project – '**Focus On Abbey**' – began this year and has brought together people from the community, voluntary, charitable, public and private sectors to support community-led projects aimed at empowering local people to improve quality of life in the area. By working collaboratively, investment has been secured to provide additional support to the residents of Abbey who have been unable to work due to long term health conditions. This project sees us piloting an approach to empowering local communities to help address local poverty and inequality issues, working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders.

Other **community-led projects** being developed with partners include one for local parents to help ensure their children get a fair chance in their education and future careers, and another building a business model to support the work being done across the ward to give people better access to healthy, affordable food that is sustainably produced.

Linked to the Our Cambridge transformation programme and the community wealth building approach, we have provided seed funding to establish an **independent Social Impact Investment Fund** to help tackle systemic inequalities that lead to unacceptable differences in life chances in our communities. The fund will bring together capital from business, social finance, philanthropy, institutional investors and the public sector which can be invested in long term projects helping those who are most disadvantaged. Major milestones for the Fund were the appointment of an Executive Director and the announcement at the Innovate Cambridge Summit of the plan for a Cambridge Pledge, as a vehicle for successful entrepreneurs to invest in the fund.

Sharing in our city's success

We launched a 24-month pilot aiming to **support 35 refugees** to secure employment. The pilot aims to harness the skills and knowledge the individuals already hold by providing the opportunities and resources to access employment. One-to-one casework is combined with financial support, which comes from public donations. Individuals get an online profile where they can share their story and raise funds for the items that are a barrier to progressing their career, such as training courses and equipment.

A varied cultural offer

We continue to have a broad and accessible programme for city residents that offers a vibrant cultural experience to all. This includes the **Cambridge Corn Exchange** and Guildhalls programme, which held 307 shows/events in 2023-24 and the City Events programme, which oversaw inclusive outdoor events such as Mayor's Day Out, Music in the Parks, and Fireworks Night, a key landmark in the city's calendar with over 20,000 attendees on historic Midsummer Common. Additionally, in 2023, the City Events team launched its new street arts festival entitled '**Out of the Ordinary Festival**' to huge success with a return this summer.

Cambridge Folk Festival, which continues its great legacy as one of the world's longest-running and most prestigious festivals, attracted approximately 13,000 people each day for a four-day festival. It retained its Outstanding award for another year as A Greener Festival, ensuring its green credentials are consistently being developed.

Our work on **arts development and advocacy for the role of arts and culture**, delivered another successful sold-out Cambridge Arts Network conference. A wealth of experience, insight, illuminating statistics, practical advice, and new approaches were shared by experts through keynote addresses, breakout sessions, and panel discussions. Key aspects of 'placemaking' were approached from a variety of angles. This vital event shares knowledge and best practices within the industry and advocates for the role of arts and culture in the life of the city