

REPORT: COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Report to	Services, Climate and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	December 2 nd 2025
Lead Cabinet Member	Cllr Anna Smith, Lead Cabinet Communities
Lead Officer	Sam Scharf, Director of Communities

1. Purpose of this report

This report provides a full update on the delivery of the Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy, approved in 2024. It brings together progress across procurement and social value, the inclusive economy programme, community grants and investment, neighbourhood working, meanwhile use, and whole system partnership work.

The intention is to give Scrutiny a comprehensive view of delivery to date, areas of strength, areas of development and opportunities for deeper partnership over the coming year. Summary boxes are included throughout to support readability and help residents and councillors understand what the work means in practical terms.

Scrutiny is 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 a number of areas that are being developed and proposed more immediately, with Scrutiny feedback helpful in directly informing these considerations.

Scrutiny is specifically asked to consider:

- Social value policy – whether the current approach and weighting are sufficient and how the Council should strengthen consistent, proportionate monitoring.
- Community grants – the balance between long-term, multi-year investment in key organisations and maintaining flexibility for small, grassroots grants.
- Meanwhile use of assets – the principles that should guide a clearer, fairer approach to temporary use of underused buildings for community and cultural benefit.
- Performance measures – whether the developing indicators provide a meaningful view of outcomes and how reporting can best support political oversight (Appendix 1)

Scrutiny's guidance on these areas will help shape the ongoing work and ensure that the Community Wealth Building programme continues to deliver practical benefits for residents and communities.

2. Background

The Community Wealth Building Strategy was adopted by the Council in 2024 to set out a long-term approach for creating a fairer, more inclusive and more resilient local economy. The Strategy builds on the principles of community wealth building that have been developed across the UK, where a growing number of local authorities have adopted similar approaches to strengthen local economies, support communities and ensure that public value is maximised through local assets and local spend.

The Strategy states that its purpose is to use the Council's assets, resources and influence to ensure that economic prosperity in Cambridge is more widely shared, that local people and organisations benefit from growth, and that communities are supported to thrive. It aims to reduce inequality, strengthen the role of local organisations, and create the conditions for long-term wellbeing and opportunity across the city.

The Strategy focuses on four core ambitions:

- using the Council's assets, spend and powers to secure greater social, economic and environmental benefit for residents
- supporting a more inclusive and sustainable local economy
- investing in the capacity of communities and local organisations
- working with partners across the system to prevent crisis and improve outcomes

This report updates Scrutiny on progress in delivering these ambitions and seeks views on several areas that will shape the next phase of work.

3. Overview of progress

The Council has made significant progress in delivering the Strategy, with strong work emerging in procurement, community development, grants, economy and neighbourhood partnerships. The Council's work has been enhanced by findings from the Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission (2024)¹, which endorses many of the areas of focus and delivery already achieved.

This report provides detailed updates under each of the four themes.

4. Theme 1 – Using our assets, powers and spend

4.1 Procurement and social value

The Council has strengthened its approach to social value through a draft Social Value Policy, Social Value Framework² which is live and in use alongside the implementation of Match My Project³ platform. This has created a coherent and consistent approach across the organisation to support the organisation with (a) better understanding of how and where we spend our money regarding charities, social enterprises and locally (b) work in collaboration with contractors to enhance what they do and impact they have in the community (c) make it

¹ [Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission final report](#)

² [Social Value Framework - Cambridge City Council](#)

³ [Match my Project - Cambridge City Council](#)

clear and easy to direct resources across the City from the over £100million a year spent through the Council.

Key developments include:

- Through transformation we have dedicated officer time to develop and implement this programme.
- Social value is now embedded in procurement activity. With recent examples being City Homes planned works programme, approval of CIP Social Value Framework and within the Leisure Contract Tender (currently live)
- A proposed minimum ten percent weighting is proposed across tenders, with Director approval required for any exceptions
- The proposed implementation of TOMs⁴ (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) to provide a structure for monitoring to allow for consistency in reporting
- A growing number of suppliers are using Match My Project to offer community benefit. We have 60 VCSE on site and 49 business. Currently we have 50 live projects, with 7 matches completed, 11 matches in progress.

Examples of the outcomes from this work include:

- Apprenticeships across the supply chain, with for example 13 through the current CIP programme for schemes on site
- Activity delivered through skills programmes
- Local supply chain commitments
- Contributions to Match My Project, enabling new support for voluntary organisations

Challenges:

- Engaging with current contract managers and suppliers.
- Working with suppliers to ensure delivery is meaningful locally and can be secured through contractual specificity.
- Nationwide challenges from Social Value Benchmark report by Social Value Portal identifies environmental commitments as lagging.

Next Steps: To support contract managers to make confident requests for social value commitments and to develop robust monitoring and recording of Social Value delivery for reporting.

What this means for residents and communities

- The Council is using its annual procurement spend of over one hundred million pounds to deliver even more benefit for residents
- More opportunities will arise for local employment, apprenticeships and training

⁴ [Measurement | Social Value TOM System™](#) | [Social Value Portal](#)

- Local voluntary organisations will receive new forms of support through Match My Project
- Local businesses, social enterprises and charities will have opportunities to deliver within Council supply chains
- Case Study: Newly procured Planned Works contract will include apprenticeships and work experience, volunteering in homeless provision in the City, funding for feasibility studies, tree planting, financial commitment to MMP projects, promote and support events such as Black History Month, Refugee Week and Pride Month and the Armed Forces Covenant.

4.2 Meanwhile use of assets

Meanwhile use refers to temporary occupation of underused buildings for community or cultural activity.

Although a formal programme is at an early stage, with work by Cambridge Ahead contributing to the thinking, Cambridge City Council already enables community access to space through:

- Reduced rents for community, cultural and landlord tenants
- Discretionary rate relief to charitable organisations
- Short-term or flexible rental arrangements where appropriate

The Council is exploring how this existing practice can be developed into a clearer framework, with transparent criteria and stronger alignment to the CWB Strategy. This work is currently being procured and expected to take about six months (as part of a wider review of strategic assets). Currently over 20 of our properties are utilised by charitable organisations.

Asset availability will influence opportunities, as will the condition of buildings and timescales for redevelopment. Partnership opportunities are likely to emerge with landowners, developers and anchor institutions such as that with the Crown Estate. The Council's role to promote this practice and support of Cambridge Ahead in the development of the work will hopefully leverage further opportunities across the City.

Requirement for meanwhile use being included in the local plan, currently out for consultation

What this means for residents and communities

- More buildings can be activated for community, cultural and social activity. For example offering longer term security of tenure where this supports groups to secure funding; or reducing rents to groups that work with local communities.
- Local groups and charities can access space as meanwhile space. For example the Crown Estate provision for CCVS and other Charities at Byron House.
- Underused assets are used for public benefit while long term decisions are made. For example the Social Supermarket in Barnwell within a County Council property.

- Community activity helps make neighbourhoods safer and more vibrant. For example in the use of meanwhile space around The Kite and Grafton Centre over recent months.

Theme 2 – Building an inclusive and sustainable local economy

The project overview and performance measures highlight a range of work that supports a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

4.3 Inclusive growth programmes

A number of programmes across the Council and through partners are set to help build a fairer and more resilient local economy, grounded in local organisations, local talent and shared prosperity. Some of these are dependent on external grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which is due to close at the end of March.

Key programmes include:

- Region of Learning, widening access to learning and skills
- Green Business initiatives, supporting sustainability in the local economy
- Grow Your Business, offering support for market traders, start-ups and small enterprises
- Support and partnership working with local business networks that support independent businesses and facilitate links between the community sector and business
- Living Wage promotion across Cambridge
- Food justice initiatives and social supermarket support
- Work with Cambridge Ahead and local employers on inclusive hiring and progression pathways
- Investment in VCSE across Abbey and the North of the City, focusing on capacity building and long term sustainable development

4.4 Social procurement research

We have commissioned research from a consortia led by Middlesex University with Judge Business School and Social Enterprise UK, into the opportunity to explore how we could strengthen our partnership with other local organisations around social value in procurement, learning from best practice and seeking feedback via interviews with key stakeholders. We are expecting the final report in December which will:

- discuss key insights gathered from interviews and share a Good Practice Guide, which draws from both UK and international case studies.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration, such as developing shared procurement systems and metrics to streamline processes for suppliers.
- Define actionable next steps that can drive social value, reduce unnecessary complexity, and align procurement with organisational goals.

4.5 Pledge and Greater Cambridge Impact

Greater Cambridge Impact (GCI) is a new social investment vehicle which has been set up to bring innovation to tackling poverty and inequality in a way that is lasting and meaningful. It brings together funding from the Council and other partners to invest in projects that make a real difference to people's lives.

The Council has agreed to invest £800,000 subject to final due diligence which is now underway, in addition to the £200,000 seed funding it provided. The Council's £1m commitment has already leveraged significant investment including £1m from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and £1m from the Cambridge Building Society.

The Cambridge Pledge Foundation is also an equity investor in GCI and is being set up to make it easier for entrepreneurs and others benefiting from the Cambridge innovation and business ecosystem to help improve the life chances of individuals and communities in the area. The Pledge will provide a vehicle for businesses and individuals to contribute a percentage of their future wealth and make donations, helping to grow the amount that can be invested by GCI over time, paving the way for future rounds of investment in social innovation projects to benefit the community.

Greater Cambridge Impact is on track to hit its initial £6m target for a first close in the next few months, with discussion already underway on investments that would take it to £10m and pave the way for much more investment in the future.

The goal is to support projects that address inequality, improve life chances, and create a fairer, more inclusive Cambridge.

GCI will focus on supporting:

- Disadvantaged young people, including those struggling at school or out of work
- Children in care and care-experienced young people
- Families facing crisis or poverty
- People who are homeless

What this means for residents and communities

- Access to new projects and services that will address systemic problems not easily solved by standard models of funding
- Increased access to long-term patient finance for charities and social impact businesses that complements grants and other funding streams and helps to strengthen our local community and voluntary sector
- Stronger links between entrepreneurs, employers and local communities across Greater Cambridge

- Opportunities to improve economic and employment outcomes for local people and business owners

Theme 3 – Empowering residents and communities

5.1 Community grants and investment

The Council invests around £1.2 million pounds per year through the Community Grants Programme. In 2024 the Council piloted multi-year grants for three core organisations, responding to feedback from Scrutiny⁵ and in line with the Cambridgeshire Compact commitment to support a sustainable voluntary and community sector.

The developing work on our community grants for 2027 is looking to continue this development based on three funding tiers:

- Tier one: small, flexible grants up to five thousand pounds for innovation, local projects and emerging need
- Tier two: multi-year project based grants supporting regular activity across the city or in specific neighbourhoods
- Tier three: multi year core grants for established organisations delivering the majority of their activity in Cambridge and strongly aligned to the Communities Group outcomes

This model also responds to the Poverty Commission recommendation for longer-term investment in trusted local organisations, reducing administrative burden, improve staff stability and support organisations to plan well, adapt to need and focus on long-term outcomes.

Feedback from organisations in the pilot support this direction. The Chief Executive of Cambridge Citizens Advice commented:

“Moving to a three year funding cycle has had a significant impact on staff retention and financial planning. Knowing we have longevity of funding has allowed us to assure staff their roles will be maintained for three years which has reduced the impact of staff starting to look for other jobs towards the end of the funding. Additionally, being able to forecast our budgets and spending over a longer period has provided greater certainty for longer term spending.”

The Council will refine eligibility criteria, engage further with the sector and risk assess the processes and monitoring expectations ahead of Cabinet consideration in early 2026.

What this means for residents and communities

- More stable organisations providing advice, support, culture and youth activity
- Stronger staffing and fewer service disruptions within the sector
- Support for new and small groups who want to test ideas

⁵ [Agenda for Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 16th January, 2025, 6.00 pm - Cambridge Council](#)

- Funding aligned to the Council's long-term outcomes and neighbourhood needs

Scrutiny is invited to comment on the direction of travel for the Community Grants Programme and the proposed balance between multi-year investment, organisational stability and ongoing support for small grassroots projects.

5.2 Neighbourhood working and community engagement

In the previous Scrutiny a refreshed approach to community and democratic engagement was presented and subsequently being further developed following Scrutiny feedback.

Neighbourhood working continues to develop across Cambridge, aligned with the Cities primary health structures and looking to bring together community development, housing, environmental health, community safety and multi-disciplinary case work. This integrated approach helps create consistency in how the Council engages with residents and is set up to support an approach to early intervention in service delivery.

The forerunner for this work has been in Abbey, and has been recognised nationally through the Government's Civil Society Covenant⁶ case study, which highlights the Council's collaboration with community groups and residents in shaping the future of the area. This aligns with the CWB commitment to place communities at the centre of decision making and build community power.

What this means for residents and communities

- A more coordinated presence in neighbourhoods
- Earlier help and clearer routes to support
- A stronger sense of community voice and partnership
- National recognition of the approach taken in Abbey

Theme 4 – Working as a whole system with partners

The Council continues to develop a whole system (working across agencies) approach across its services and partnerships, strengthening the way organisations work together to prevent crisis, respond earlier and improve outcomes for residents. This approach is practical, place-based and increasingly aligned with the way the health system is organising itself at neighbourhood level through Integrated Neighbourhoods.

Alignment with health and Integrated Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhood working in Cambridge is now directly aligned with the Integrated Care System at Primary Care Network level. This enables joint work across the Council, GP practices, health visiting, community nursing, social care, mental health, and the voluntary sector. Shared priorities are emerging in areas such as frailty, early help, complex case management, homelessness prevention, housing-related health barriers, anti-social behaviour, family resilience and wider determinants of health.

⁶ [Civil Society Covenant: Cambridge City Council - Case study - GOV.UK](#)

This alignment has strengthened cross-organisational case management, with regular joint meetings between community development staff, environmental health, community safety, housing, PCNs and VCSE partners. This has already resulted in more coordinated support for households with multiple needs and earlier identification of vulnerability.

Community Safety Partnership and city-wide coordination

The Community Safety Partnership continues to provide system leadership across partners including the police, county council, health, fire, probation and the voluntary sector. The partnership plays a key role in addressing anti-social behaviour, community harm, exploitation and safeguarding.

The Council's contribution to maintaining a safe, welcoming city centre was recognised through the retention of the Purple Flag accreditation, demonstrating continued excellence in night-time economy management, community safety, and coordinated partnership working with the Cambridge BID, businesses, transport providers and police.

Alignment with wider system initiatives

The Council continues to work closely with key regional partners including Cambridgeshire County Council, the Combined Authority, the Greater Cambridge Partnership, local colleges, Cambridge Ahead, Innovate Cambridge, The Cambridge BID, Universities and major employers. This helps support shared priorities in economic inclusion, housing, public safety, skills, community spaces and health. An example of how this is working is our partnership with Innovate Cambridge and the shaping of a vision and strategy for a globally successful innovation eco-system that drives inclusive growth and benefits people locally. Underneath this strategy we have been able to garner support for the establishment of the Cambridge Pledge and to promote the need for inclusive innovation to government, investors and businesses.

What this means for residents and communities

- More coordinated and earlier support and resolution of support from services that work together
- Stronger links between the Council, health partners and voluntary organisations
- Better prevention of crisis and more consistent support for households with multiple needs
- Shared responsibility and joint working to achieve socially inclusive economic growth that improves quality of life and addresses inequality

7. Summary of progress and remaining challenges

The Council has made strong progress across all four themes of the CWB Strategy. Key achievements include:

- Embedding social value in procurement and major contracts
- Developing Match My Project and strengthening supplier engagement

- Progressing inclusive economy programmes across skills, business support, food justice and innovation
- Piloting multi-year grants and setting out a refreshed three tier framework
- Strengthening neighbourhood working and achieving national recognition for Abbey
- Developing regional work on meanwhile use
- Aligning with the Poverty Commission and building stronger whole system partnerships

Remaining challenges include:

- Embedding the Community Wealth Building performance measures into the Councils developing performance framework
- Developing consistent and proportionate contract management for social value
- Establishing a clearer and more strategic framework for meanwhile use
- Managing budget pressures linked to expansion of multi-year grants
- Continuing to stabilise and build capacity within the VCSE sector

8. Next steps for 2026

- Finalise contract management and assurance mechanisms for social value
- Develop a formal framework for meanwhile use
- Complete modelling and consultation on the Community Grants Programme, multi-year, tiered structure
- Support the next phase of the Pledge and Greater Cambridge Impact
- Continue to build the neighbourhood model and deepen partnerships with health
- Continue to build partnerships around the inclusive economy with a focus on improving skills and economic opportunity for young people