

FULL COUNCIL

Changes to composition of the council – councillors were sad about the announcement at the start of the year of the death of Cllr Mac McGuire, the councillor for Yaxley & Farcet in Huntingdonshire and the longest-serving member of the County Council. Mac served on Cambridgeshire County Council from 1985 to 1992, and then again from 1997 until his death over the Christmas holidays. An election to fill the vacancy on the council will be held in due course.

Meanwhile Cllr Ryan Fuller (St Ives North & Wyton) and the Conservative Party have parted company with one another. Cllr Fuller will remain on the council as an independent councillor.

The composition of the various committees on the council will be adjusted to take account of these changes, and then readjusted once Cllr McGuire's replacement in Yaxley & Farcet is known.

STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

Budget

The county council's budget will be debated by Full Council on Tuesday 13 February. Previously the county council's various policy committees have scrutinised the draft budget proposals, and three of them—Communities Social Mobility & Inclusion, Environment & Green Investment and Highways & Transport Committee—asked that the council give consideration to increasing the funding available for Emergency Planning, in view of the increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather leading to flooding.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Measles

Measles cases have been rising since last November, with the West Midlands seeing more than 200 confirmed cases, the largest outbreak outside London. The UK Health Security Agency declared the outbreak a national incident on 19 January 2024.

Measles is highly infectious. Nine out of ten unvaccinated children can catch measles if someone in their class has it. It can be severe, particularly in the immunosuppressed and infants, and can be more severe in pregnancy. It can be mild for some children, but one in five will require a hospital visit. At its worst it can lead to complications such as meningitis and pneumonia and can in rare cases be fatal.

Currently there are no confirmed cases in Cambridgeshire and in 2023 there were only eight confirmed cases across the East of England. But there is a strong likelihood that it will spread to Cambridgeshire. Uptake of childhood vaccinations has been low in Cambridge and parts of Huntingdonshire and Fenland. A target vaccination rate of 95 % is considered necessary to prevent outbreaks, and both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have rates lower than this.

If the outbreak spreads to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, control measures such as isolating unvaccinated school contacts for 21 days may be necessary. This will have an impact on school staff, parents and the economy, and an outbreak of any size will stretch health care capacity at the busiest time of year. Parents should have their children vaccinated if they have not already done so. Residents should call their GP or 111 if measles is suspected or if someone who is at risk has been in contact with a confirmed case. Typical symptoms include a high fever, sore red watery eyes and a blotchy red- brown rash. Isolating when asked to do so is important to contain any outbreak. Measles myths should be ignored (eg it is a good idea to deliberately infect children with the disease at 'measles parties').

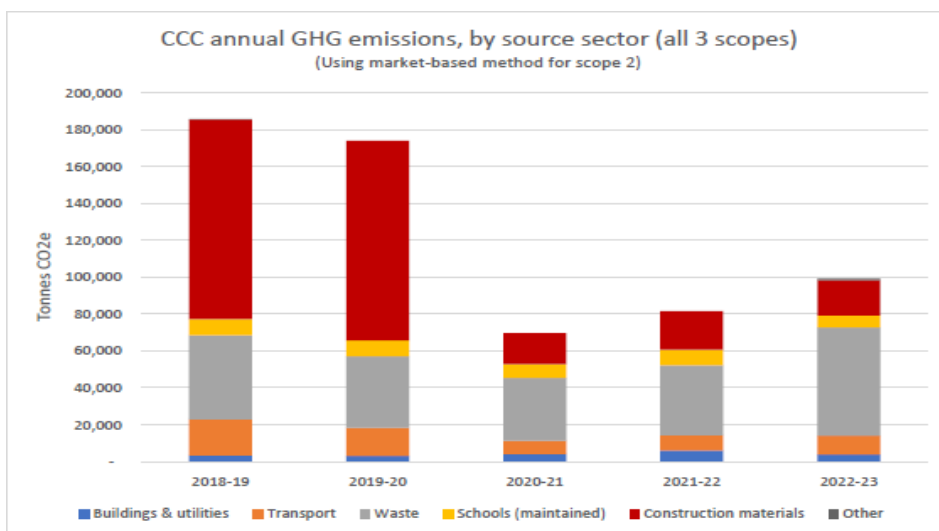
Information about vaccine outreach clinics can be found at <https://www.cpics.org.uk/measles>

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

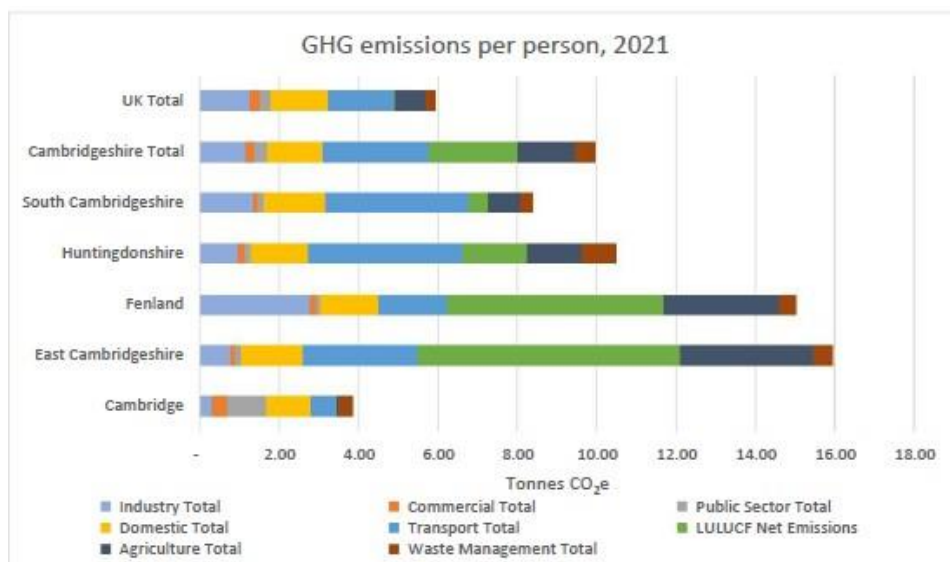
Carbon footprint

The Environment & Green Investment Committee last month received the council’s carbon footprint report for 2022/23. As usual, this reports on the council’s carbon emissions, and the carbon emissions of the county of Cambridgeshire as a whole.

The Council’s total known greenhouse gas emissions in 2022-23 amounted to 99,104 tonnes CO₂e. The largest share, nearly 60%, was from waste, with construction materials second at 19%, and transport third at ten per cent. This is 46% lower than the council’s baseline year of 2018/19.



For Cambridgeshire as a whole, the most recent year of data is 2021—the figures are published by government. Total greenhouse gas emissions for Cambridgeshire that year were 6.78 million tonnes CO₂e. Transport was the highest emitting sector in the county, accounting for 27 % of emissions, followed by land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), at 23 %.



East Cambridgeshire produced the highest volume of greenhouse gas emissions per person in the county, mostly from land use and agriculture followed closely by Fenland. South Cambridgeshire was one of the areas where transport contributed highly to GHG, although less came from LULUCF, obviously. Interestingly Cambridge was very low in these figures and the only area to be below the UK average.

There has been a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Cambridgeshire between 2005 and 2021. However, there was a 6.1% increase in 2021 compared to 2020, because of the effect of covid in 2020.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Weeds policy

The council's Highways & Transport Committee has changed its policy on highways weed spraying. It will now be reverting to regular twice-yearly weed killing in the places where it used to do this before last year's policy change. Communities which do not want chemical weed spraying in their area will however be able to opt out in favour of manual weed removal by volunteers.

Cllr Alex Beckett, chair of the Highways and Transport Committee at Cambridgeshire County Council, said:

"I know we didn't get this change right, which is why I asked for a review of the policy. While some communities really appreciated the reduction in chemical weed killing, a large number did not. Local decision making is important, we have listened to that feedback and hope these new changes, if approved, will allow those communities who wish to continue without chemical weed killing to do so whilst allowing those who preferred the previous regime to go back to that."

Active travel maintenance

The Highways & Transport Committee has approved changes to the Highways Operational Standards to improve recognition of, and response to, faults on cycleways and footways. These changes will help ensure a safe environment for cyclists and pedestrians, encouraging and facilitating active travel.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Mayor has proposed to increase his precept on the council tax from £12 to £36 per year for the average Band D property. This is intended to enable the funding of a number of new or improved bus services.

The Government has issued a revised Best Value Notice in respect of the Combined Authority. The revised notice recognises the significant progress the Combined Authority has made as an organisation since January 2023, and also that some elements need further work. More importantly it makes clear that it wants Board members to work together with common purpose.

I have been the lead member for Governance and can attest to the fact that there has been a remarkable improvement in overall governance with some initiatives being highly regarded within local government. The main issue now is to ensure that all the new terms of reference, clarification of roles and responsibilities, processes etc, are embedded and become day to day reality.

Councillor Edna Murphy

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