

East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Council Meeting

18 September 2025

**Agenda
Minutes and Recommendations**

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR VISITORS TO THE GRANGE

Parking

Limited visitor parking is available during the daytime at the access area to The Grange, for people making short visits on Council business of up to 30 minutes. Ample free public car parking is available nearby for longer visits and location plans can be forwarded on request. On-site car parking is available for evening meetings after 5.00pm.

Access and Security

If you are visiting The Grange during normal office hours you should report to the main reception desk, where you will be asked to fill in a visitor's pass that must be worn at all times whilst you are in the building. Please remember to return your pass before you leave.

This will not apply if you come to an evening meeting: in this case you will enter via the rear access doors in the glass atrium at the back of the building and a Facilities Assistant will direct you to the room in which the meeting will take place.

Emergencies

In the event of a fire or any other emergency during the day, you will hear a continuous alarm. The designated officer or their deputy as set out in the displayed plans for each floor will take charge of any evacuation and try to ensure that no one is left within the areas for which they are responsible.

You should leave the building by the nearest available exit and go to the assembly point near to the exit barrier in the front car park. **Do not** use the lifts, and **do not** re-enter the building until someone advises that it is safe for you to do so.

If you discover a fire immediately operate the nearest fire alarm call point, inform reception or another member of staff, leave the building and go to the assembly point.

In the event of a fire or another emergency during an evening meeting, a member of staff will direct you to the nearest available exit.

First Aid

If someone feels unwell or needs first aid, please let a member of staff know.

Access for People with Disabilities

The Council Chamber and majority of Committee rooms are accessible to wheelchair users via the lift. There are specially adapted toilets on the ground floor (in main reception) and on the first floor of the building.

In the event of a fire or another emergency, wheelchair users will be guided to an area near to an exit to await the arrival of the emergency services.

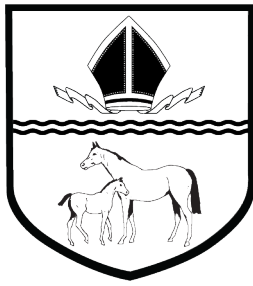
Toilets

Public toilets are on the ground floor in the main reception area.

If you are visiting The Grange for an evening meeting, the toilets in close proximity to the Chamber and Committee rooms are all clearly signposted.

Smoking

The Council operates a NO SMOKING policy in all its office buildings, including the car park to The Grange.



East Cambridgeshire District Council

NOTICE OF MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Annual Meeting of the **EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL** will be held on **THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2025** in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER** at **THE GRANGE, NUTHOLT LANE, ELY, CB7 4EE**, commencing at **6:00pm** with up to 15 minutes of Public Question Time, immediately followed by the formal business, and you are summoned to attend for the transaction of the following business

Agenda

- 1. Public Question Time** [oral]
The meeting will commence with up to 15 minutes Public Question Time (PQT) – questions/statements can be submitted in advance or placed in the PQT box in the Council Chamber prior to the commencement of the meeting – see Notes below for further information on the PQT scheme.
- 2. Apologies for Absence** [oral]
- 3. Declarations of Interests** [oral]
To receive declarations of interests from Members for any items on the agenda in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct.
- 4. Minutes – 22 May 2025** Page 1
To confirm as a correct record.
- 5. Chair's Announcements** [oral]
- 6. To receive Petition(s) (If any)** [oral]
- 7. Notice of Motions under Procedure Rule 10** [oral]

Local Government Reorganisation

The Council notes that:

1. Since the Government's White Paper on English Devolution was published in December 2024, Leaders and Officers of the six principal Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been working together to produce an agreed proposal, or an agreed set of proposals, in time for the final submission deadline in November 2025.
2. The initial work undertaken to support the business case includes a detailed analysis of the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on Adults, Children and SEND services; a financial analysis of the relative funding allocation from Government; analysis of demand across other services such as homelessness and environmental services; and analysis of the viability of the

tax base (business rates, Council Tax, and other income) to support each Unitary configuration.

3. This work has led to the development of three different options all of which are for a two Unitary solution across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. See below the three options.

Proposal A North-West/South-East

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

Proposal B North/South

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District along with County Council functions

Proposal C East/West

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

4. Each Council across the region has directly input into the development of a suite of baseline data to be used in each business case and is now directly inputting into a chosen business case. Based on the shared data and analysis undertaken to date, at this stage East Cambs District Council officers are inputting directly into the development of the Proposal B business case and indirectly (through sharing of data) into Proposals A and C.
5. The business case for Proposal A is being led by Cambridgeshire County Council. This proposal is currently the preferred option of the County Council's Administration. District Councils are not directly inputting into the development of this business case.
6. The business case for Proposal B is being led by Cambridge City Council and is the only business case that has direct input from all District Councils and an upper tier authority, namely Peterborough City Council.
7. South Cambs District Council and Cambridge City Council Leaders have given public support for the creation of a Greater Cambridge Unitary – The Greater Cambridge Unitary comprises of the geography covered by these two Councils only, which forms part of Proposal B.
8. The business case for Proposal C is being led by Huntingdonshire District Council but is not receiving direct input from either of the upper tier authorities or any other District Councils at this stage. For clarity, HDC offered to lead on this piece of work as collectively the Leaders felt it was too soon to narrow down the options to just two.
9. A fourth Unitary option, which proposes the creation of three Unitaries across the region, is being developed by Peterborough City Council, however this does not have the backing of any other Council within Cambridgeshire, as a three unitary option was shown to be unlikely to be a financially sustainable solution longer term.
10. The Council can only endorse one or none of the Unitary proposals at the point of submission to Government in November 2025.

The Council believes that:

1. Each proposal has benefits and disbenefits for our residents, businesses, visitors and communities in general; however the early analysis shows that some proposals will have a greater impact than others.
2. Proposal A
 - Appears to have a logical geographical alignment due to areas in the south of our district bordering Greater Cambridge.
 - However, this option could see East Cambridgeshire being folded into the Cambridge Growth Company which is required to build 150,000 new homes in the Cambridge area with the Government directing where those homes will be located, rather than local people.
 - Would see East Cambridgeshire residents grouped with the highest Council Tax charging areas and see the biggest increase in Council Tax of all Unitary options for our residents.
 - Would also mean East Cambridgeshire would be joining an area where the existing District Councils have decided to permanently adopt a 4 day working week for 5 days' pay funded by tax payers.
3. Proposal B
 - Protects our district from over development and handing over control of the planning of new homes to the Cambridge Growth Company.
 - Brings rural districts that share similar characteristics and challenges together, giving them a stronger voice, while still being economically underpinned by a vibrant city.
 - By virtue of its geographic and population size will need to maintain a council footprint presence and service delivery model in the northern Unitary, rooted in the local communities it serves, like the successful North Yorkshire Unitary established in early 2023.
 - Meets the Government's ambition to deliver growth by forming a Greater Cambridge region in a southern Unitary that has the scale required to be financially sustainable, given its high tax base and future growth.
4. Proposal C
 - Would align similar geographies and Councils with similar housing growth ambitions and constraints.
 - However, it may lead to a northern Unitary that has such a low funding base, it would struggle to support an aging population and increased demands in Social Care and SEND services.

The Council resolves to:

1. Continue to actively and directly participate in the development of the Proposal B business case.
2. Consider all three business cases (A, B and C) at a meeting of the Council on 20th November 2025 prior to submission to Government.

Proposer: Cllr Anna Bailey

Seconder: Cllr Julia Huffer

Motion to Oppose Proposed Changes to Council Tax Powers

Council notes:

1. The Government is considering proposals to allow local authorities to set their own Council Tax bands, rates, and property valuations.
2. These changes would dismantle the nationally consistent framework that currently governs Council Tax, introducing significant regional variation.
3. Council Tax already exhibits stark disparities across the UK:
 - a) The average Band D bill in England is £2,171 but varies from £829 in Westminster to £2,226 in Nottingham. (see note 1)

- b) Residents in poorer areas pay a higher percentage of their income on Council Tax — up to 10.3% in places like Blackpool and Teignbridge — compared to just 2% in wealthier boroughs like Westminster. (see note 2)
- c) The poorest 10% of households pay 7% of their income on Council Tax, while the richest 10% pay just 1.2%. (see note 1)
- d) Council Tax arrears have reached a record £8.3 billion, with 4.4 million people behind on payments — a third of whom live below the poverty line. (see note 1)
- 4. Nine out of ten councils in eastern England, including those in East Anglia, have already opted for the maximum allowable Council Tax increase of 4.99% for 2025–26. (see note 5)
- 5. If councils gain full control over rates and valuations, this could lead to even steeper increases, especially in areas facing financial pressure or service demand.
- 6. East Cambridgeshire District Council has frozen its share of Council Tax for the 12th consecutive year, maintaining Band D at £142.14. (see note 6)
- 7. This contrasts sharply with neighbouring districts, and under a decentralised system, such disparities could widen—leading to confusion and perceived unfairness among residents.

Council believes:

- A. Council Tax should remain a nationally regulated system to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability.
- B. The valuation of properties is a complex and sensitive process that should remain under the purview of an impartial national body, not subject to local political pressures.
- C. Local autonomy over tax bands and valuations risks deepening regional inequalities, as wealthier areas with high property values can raise more revenue, while poorer areas face greater financial strain. (see note 3)
- D. The administrative burden of implementing localised valuations and banding would be substantial, requiring new systems, staff training, and oversight — diverting resources from essential services. (see note 4)
- E. A fragmented system would confuse taxpayers, reduce public trust, and make it harder to compare services and costs across regions.

Council resolves to:

- A. Oppose the proposed changes that would allow councils to set their own Council Tax bands, rates, and property valuations.
- B. Write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government to express our concerns and urge the Government to retain a nationally consistent Council Tax framework.
- C. Request that our local MPs raise this issue in Parliament and advocate for a fair and transparent taxation system.
- D. Collaborate with other councils, the Local Government Association, and relevant stakeholders to build a coalition against these proposals and promote alternative reforms that enhance fairness without fragmenting the system.

Proposer: Cllr Keith Horgan

Seconder: Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith

Sources:

- 1. <https://moneyweek.com/personal-finance/council-tax-burden-highest-lowest-uk>
- 2. https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/mapping_britain_s_council_tax_burden
- 3. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=impact+of+local+Council+Tax+autonomy+on+regional+inequalities&toWww=1&redig=791556156BA44C6BABE461EA99D19A08>

4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax>
5. <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/national/24946349.analysis-shows-nine-10-areas-facing-maximum-council-tax-rise-england/>
6. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/finance-and-budget/council-tax/council-tax-bands>

New Homes Ombudsman

This council notes that

1. The New Homes Ombudsman Service exists to help customers resolve issues with their new homes, which the registered developer has been unable or unwilling to fix.
2. The remit of the New Homes Ombudsman Service covers the whole period from the reservation and legal completion of a property through to after-sales and complaints management for issues during the first two years of a new home purchase.
3. The primary purpose of the service is to provide a free and independent redress service to customers, which can impartially assess and adjudicate on issues that have arisen that fall within the Ombudsman's scope. This includes complaints around the reservation, legal completion and complaints management processes, or issues or defects that have arisen at or after occupation and which are not major defects.
4. The New Homes Ombudsman Service can resolve complaints through early resolution, negotiation, mediation, and adjudication.

This council further recognises that

- a) If a developer is not on the register of developers, or the customer reserved their property before their registration date, the Ombudsman will be unable to help.
- b) The New Homes Ombudsman is also unable to help with homes that are sold as affordable homes, or those under a shared ownership scheme or bought as part of a buy-to-let scheme.

This council expresses concern that

- i. Its own developer Palace Green Homes is not a registered developer for the purposes of this scheme, meaning that its customers will not be able to make use of the New Homes Ombudsman Service should they need to.
- ii. A number of other developers building homes locally are also not registered developers under the scheme.

This council therefore

- A. Calls upon its wholly-owned company East Cambridgeshire Trading Company to register its developer arm Palace Green Homes as a registered company with the New Homes Quality Board and agree to accept the New Homes Quality Code, thereby entitling their customers to use the services of New Homes Ombudsman.
- B. Resolves to encourage developers building in East Cambridgeshire to register under this scheme.

Proposer: Cllr Lorna Dupré

Seconder: Cllr Chika Akinwale

Ely Junction capacity improvements

This council expresses its grave concern that the Government's announcement in June of progress on fifty rail and road schemes once again failed to include Ely Junction.

The congestion at this bottleneck means it is unable to handle the demand for both freight and passenger services. Solving this would return £4.89 for every £1 spent; remove 98,000 HGV journeys; enable an additional 2,900 freight services a year from Felixstowe; reduce carbon emissions by 1.7 million tonnes of CO2 over sixty years; and reduce traffic congestion by 5.6 million hours a year.

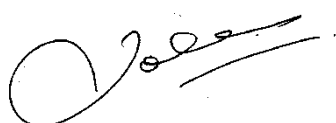
It is now twenty-three years since the first business case for upgrading the junction was made, and yet successive governments have failed to make the investment in this vital piece of infrastructure for our region and for the country.

This council calls on the Government to release funds for planning the project, conduct a rapid departmental review of the scheme and its benefits to present to the Treasury, and listen to the concerns of the local MP, businesses, and stakeholders including this council at the effect of further delay.

Proposer: Cllr Mark Inskip

Seconder: Cllr Christine Colbert

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|------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 8. | To answer questions from Members | [oral] |
| 9. | Schedule of items recommended from Committees and other Member bodies:
<u>Finance & Assets Committee – 26 June 2025</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2024/25 Treasury Operations Annual Performance Review | Page 29 |
| 10. | Appointment of Finance Director/Section 151 Officer | Page 49 |
| 11. | Establishment of a Chief Executive Appointments Panel | Page 51 |
| 12. | Corporate Plan | Page 53 |
| 13. | Local Government Reorganisation - Public and Stakeholder Survey Findings | Page 59 |
| 14. | Local Government Reorganisation Update | Page 263 |
| 15. | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority: <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Update report – June 2025(b) Update report – July 2025 | Page 271
Page 293 |



J Hill
Chief Executive

To: All Members of the Council

NOTES:

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting. Admittance is on a "first come, first served" basis and public access will be from 30 minutes before the start time of the meeting. Due to room capacity restrictions, members of the public are asked, where possible, to notify Democratic Services (democratic.services@eastcambs.gov.uk or 01353 665555) of their intention to attend a meeting.

The meeting will be webcast and a live stream of the meeting will be available. Further details can be found at <https://eastcambs.gov.uk/node/1406> Please be aware that all attendees, including those in the public gallery, will be visible on the livestream.

Public Questions/Statements are welcomed on any topic related to the Council's functions as long as there is no suspicion that it is improper (e.g. offensive, slanderous or might lead to disclosures of Exempt or Confidential information). Up to 15 minutes is allocated for this at the start of the meeting. Further details about the Public Question Time scheme are available at: <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/committees/public-question-time-scheme>

The Council has adopted a 'Purge on Plastics' strategy and is working towards the removal of all consumer single-use plastics in our workplace. Therefore, we do not provide disposable cups at our meetings and would ask members of the public to bring their own drink to the meeting, if required.

Fire instructions for meeting: The instructions in the event of a fire at the venue will be announced at the commencement of the meeting.

Reports are attached for each agenda item unless marked "oral".

If required, all items on the agenda can be provided in different formats (e.g. large type, Braille or audio tape, or translated into other languages), on request, by calling Main Reception on (01353) 665555 or e-mail: translate@eastcambs.gov.uk

If the Committee wishes to exclude the public and press from the meeting, a resolution in the following terms will need to be passed:

"That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining item no(s). X because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item(s) there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Category X of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 6.00pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor James Lay
Councillor David Brown	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Kelli Pettitt (Chair)
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Lee Denney	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Mark Goldsack	Councillor Mary Wade
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Kathrin Holtzmann	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Keith Horgan (Vice Chair)	Councillor Gareth Wilson

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Prayers were led by
Reverend Mike Banyard, Priest Vicar at the Cathedral.

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect following the death of
former Councillor Bill Pickess, District Councillor for the Ely South Ward from
2003 to 2007

Cllr Bill Hunt gave the following tribute:

"I first met Bill Pickess in this room in 2006. He was sitting on the Planning Committee and I was the county councillor for Haddenham, Wilburton and Stretham. A new town was being proposed called Mereham and all the population were against it. All the councillors were against it and the officer's recommendation was for refusal on this thing that would ruin the local area. I made my case that it should be thrown out and I could see nods everywhere. However, independent thinking Bill Pickess said that this was something that was going to happen anyway, so he might as well agree with it! So, although the Committee said no by 11 votes, it wasn't 12 votes and so I had a very low opinion of Bill and thought that he couldn't understand what the good arguments were. However, in 2012 my son was very interested in politics and

for that matter still is and he wanted to stand as a local councillor and he stood in Ely South. His co-conspirator, I would say, was Bill Pickess. So, a lot of my son's political education came from a fairly independent thinking man. Of course, Bill was generous with his advice and he helped my son, gave him good advice on many occasions and the net result was that my son got elected to Parliament.

"Bill was a lover of local government, and he gave his heart and soul to it. The last time I saw him he was still very active in local politics. He was a committed local man and a real lover of Ely. I think that he was one of those people who contribute to society. He was a real goer, a real gentleman and someone who was a real privilege for me to have met and known. I am sure he is looking down and being critical of us tonight."

1. Public Question Time

Question from John Setchell

"I am here on behalf of the Campaign for Unitary Authorities in Cambridgeshire, who have written to all councillors to set out some suggested principles for determining how the new unitaries should be formed.

"The key points are:

- There must be a genuine improvement in democratic accountability: changes must increase democratic accountability while being able to take difficult decisions;
- Each council should have a coherent economic area;
- Each council should contain a reasonably coherent culture;
- Each council should cover a single travel for work area;

"Additionally, we believe, unitaries should reflect coherent housing/rental patterns, have clarity about funding, that councils should be able to share services and work together and that councils must not be so large as to 'lose touch' with the people.

"We also believe there must be clarity of relations with a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Mayor. Although our organisation is opposed to the existence of a mayoral position, we recognise that government will likely retain it. It is not clear why it will be necessary in the context of say three unitary authorities to have an overarching authority. For instance, it would make little sense to have a unitary council, managing issues like housing, growth and transport, but have another body set the strategy for these.

"The question we have for the District Council is 'Do you agree with the principles we have set out? Will you push for a unitary authority that has clear powers to manage change effectively with strong democratic accountability, and which ending up looking in multiple directions?'"

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey

“Thank you very much for your question and for representing your organisation here tonight. The decision by government to fast track one of the most significant changes to local government in 50 years or more has brought with it many challenges, not least the nature of how we judge the merits of any new unitary proposal. All proposals need to evidence how they meet the governments key criteria, which includes:

- “Achieving average population sizes of 500k or more, and to be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, and withstand financial shocks.
- “The new unitary must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
- “Be a credible geography and identity, meet local need and demonstrate local support.
- “Support economic growth and devolution arrangements.
- “Increase housing supply (a key point for the Government).
- “Be of a sensible economic area, so we do not create advantage or disadvantage for other areas.
- “Enable stronger community engagement, neighbourhood empowerment and democratic accountability.
- “With a presumption that new unitaries will be built on existing council boundaries.

“Many of these criteria do correlate to the principles identified by the Cambs Unitary Campaign Group and while I believe some of the government criteria for success are utterly flawed, not least the proposal that unitaries should cover and provide services to populations of 500k or more, I do agree that we must ensure we retain or improve democratic accountability, keep our councils as local as possible, and ensure the identity and needs of our cities, towns and villages are reflected and nurtured equally within the new Unitary Councils.

“Any proposals put forward to Government must address a whole area and while there may be an argument for a strong single unitary in one part of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, this cannot and must not disadvantage other areas. Therefore, there is a significant and delicate balancing act between financial sustainability, identity, economic growth and housing that we must achieve to ensure that any new Unitary is put on a sustainable footing. We have gone out to consultation. I think we are the only authority in the area to have done this and got a significant response in a short period of time. They were very positive about this Council, I am pleased to say. We will be going back out to our residents, parishes and businesses soon to find out what really matters to them so that our proposals genuinely reflect their views where possible.

“I would just add that the best thing about East Cambridgeshire District Council is that we are small, nimble and close to the people and the businesses that we represent. I think that this is a huge asset and will be a huge loss when we are made bigger. I cannot support the dictat that councils should be 500,000 people or more. Most councils of that size in the country are failing. So in my opinion small really is beautiful in the world of local government. I am working with other

leaders across the county and chief executives. We are meeting regularly and doing our best to reach an agreement, although this may prove difficult. We are working to the deadline of November, when the area has to submit its final proposals to Government.”

Question from Vanessa Brammer

“The reason I am here is because I am hearing a lot of information from social media and village talk about the proposed crematorium. I am from Sutton and when I heard about this meeting on Monday, I tried to get others to attend, but they could not get here due to work. So, because I was off, I said that I would come. I really wanted to ask a few questions about this proposed crematorium. I have lived in Sutton for 30 years and I have seen information in the village about the Mepal Outdoor Centre that used to be on the premises. There have been some instances, with illegal raves and security had to come in. I do not agree with important decisions being made on social media and I do not agree with us finding out about it in the village a lot later than we should have done. £13 million is a lot of money, which is being discussed in Sutton. There is a petition, which I have signed, and many other neighbours have also signed, against the crematorium. I would not wish to say farewell to my loved ones and closest friends next to a biodigester, which is right next door, and it stinks. It is also right next door to the A142 with the lorries and heavy traffic. But the main point we are all trying to make is that £13 million is a lot of public money, that is money that was given to us – the community – to be built on infrastructure, such as parks, skate parks and places for children to go. We have to go to Haddenham to get to a skate park, which is a lovely thing for kids. We have nothing in Sutton. Now the money is obscene. £13 million being spent on a crematorium, when we already have plenty of them in the area. I also have heard rumours that this decision was taken in secret, behind closed doors. So, I would like someone to confirm whether it was or wasn't. We would also like to ask the Leader if there would be a public enquiry as to how public money is spent.”

Question from Charmaine Switsur, which was read out by the Chair

“Firstly, I support the decision to build the Bereavement Centre being near Mepal. The sooner the better.

Secondly, I believe the site is so much more than a beautiful, tranquil and desirable spot to rest -much more special than other nearby crematoria. I myself would like to rest there one day, when I die.

“This rich, biodiverse environment needs to be protected. My question to the Council is what are you doing to protect this wonderful biodiverse area? What assessment has the Council done in relation to its effect on the biodiversity and nature?

“I do hope that all the plans for this wonderful facility will soon be underway.”

Question from Drew Silver, which was read out by the Chair

“Can we have an independent public inquiry into council behaviour surrounding the repurposing of what was the site of Mepal Outdoor Centre?

"I, and many others in the East Cambs district, have raised concerns following the exclusion of the public during the first 18 months of the project's development and the unethical spending of funds.

"Development should be immediately halted until we can verify there is a genuine need for a crematorium that warrants £13 million expenditure in that location and whether or not it's what the public wants."

Question from Simon Hazeldine, which was read out by the Chair

"Please can you explain why you are trying to force through a Crematorium project when:

"1, The site is badly affected by an overpowering smell from the Biodigester Plant next door, as well as flies from the stagnant lakes. This makes the site totally unsuitable.

"2, Crematoriums nationally are seeing a downturn in business due to the popularity of 'no-fuss' cremations. This means the viability of the long-term business is extremely uncertain.

"3, Several posts on local social media have shown roughly 80% of people expressing an opinion are against the plans. The council is supposed to represent the local people!

"4, The costs have nearly doubled in just a few years and will almost certainly exceed the £13 million pounds currently being quoted. That is a shocking waste of public money that could be far better used in the community.

"5, Nobody asked for a crematorium! If no alternative use can be found for the land, why not just allow the site to return to nature?"

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey to those questions

"It is helpful for future reference if we can have questions in advance, so I can be more prepared. I thank you for coming and hope that you will stay for the debate, so that you can hear a much more rounded discussion, than perhaps has been taking place on social media.

"There were various questions. With regards the time it has taken, there was an ambition to have a crematorium well before the elections in 2019. It was included in the Council's corporate plan many years ago. At that time no site had been identified. We were advised by experts that it would be unwise to advertise the fact that the authority wanted a crematorium as it is a highly competitive and litigious field. However, the plans for a crematorium have been known for a very long time and the decision was not taken behind closed doors. Some information has been in exempt papers, but the covering report has always been in the public domain. The decision regarding the final business case was taken in open session in February 2024. When you are dealing with a commercially sensitive project it is normal to do preparatory work behind the scenes. This information cannot be openly shared with other commercial operators. This is the normal process and goes on at every other council in the country, when working on commercially sensitive projects.

"In relation to the costs, it was £9 million that was set aside when originally looking at this, but we hadn't got a price. We have been out to tender. It has been a very competitive process; we had a lot of bids. The framework contract

allowed the Council to select a preferred provider and then go line by line through each bit of public expenditure. It has been reviewed by the Council's independent quantity surveyors. It really matters that taxpayers are getting value for money, and I am assured that they really are. If it goes ahead, it will be a fixed price contract. The price will be set.

"This project is not just about a crematorium. It is more than that. The project is about securing, enhancing and protecting a very beautiful, much loved and special site for the community, now and into the future. The site is unique. It is a designated wildlife site. It is home to a nationally important species, and we have been working with the Wildlife Trust who are really pleased with the management plans that we have brought forward as part of this project.

"We want to offer a really supportive service. Mike Banyard talked about the necessity to support the bereaved. That is what we want to do. I think we can do it at this site. It is an eco-crematorium using electric cremators and there aren't many in the country. That matters to a lot of people. There is going to be a natural burials area, a pet cemetery area, woodland walks, a lakeside setting. The chapel looks out onto the lake. A beautiful vista on which to say goodbye to loved ones. Residents will be able to enjoy the site for walking, bird watching and controlled fishing through a fishing club. Those are the activities that the Wildlife Trust have said are compatible with the biodiversity and wildlife on the site. It will remain a site that will be available for our whole community.

"The electric cremator limits the crematorium to two services a day. What that means is that it is very different to other crematoriums, as people will be able to have time on the site to gather with loved ones at an event afterwards and have time there. I believe that most people don't go back to crematoriums, but this is a massive site with a huge lakeside walk and this will naturally encourage people to go back and reflect and think about their loved ones.

"The site needs to be secured and managed to protect the wildlife there. We had an ambition to deliver a crematorium. This will serve the vast majority of the population of East Cambridgeshire. Most people live in Ely, Littleport and Soham and the crematorium will be accessible to those people, who don't currently have facilities in the district.

"You asked about the use of CIL. The Community Infrastructure Levy is a pot of money that we collect from all CIL chargeable development. It is the best thing we did as a Council as we have received £35 million. CIL has supported a massive number of projects across the district, including new community centres, leisure centres, cycle routes, footpaths, bridges, schools, learning hubs, GP surgeries, new and improved roads, sports facilities, new car parks and land for cemeteries. Nearly £6 million has been allocated to parish councils and Sutton, having a neighbourhood plan, receives 25% of all CIL receipts for development that happens in Sutton. There are very few restrictions on how this money can be spent locally. The district council has much greater restrictions on what we can spend our CIL receipts on. The parishes don't, as long as they can show that it supports growth, so that

ambition for a skatepark would be a legitimate project for Sutton Parish Council to fund through its CIL receipts. The district council's portion of CIL funds is much more about strategic projects. We have supported the Ely southern by-pass, the A14 upgrade and the hive leisure centre. These are much bigger projects to support growth. The crematorium is a project that supports growth. The district is growing at 2%, one of the largest growth areas in the country and we need to cater for this, and we have an opportunity to do this really well.

"The site is near the bio-digester, but the buildings are some distance away and this never caused any issues in the past by people using the site. I don't think that this will be an issue.

"There was another question about nature biodiversity. Specifically, they were saying that they want us to get on with it and what we were doing to protect biodiversity. Over the past the year, the council has undertaken numerous ecology surveys and has been working closely with the Wildlife Trust to develop an ecology management plan and the layout of the landscaping. The natural environment has featured in every part of our design, including the retaining or restoring of the large natural sand dunes, in the planting additional native trees and grasses around the site and maintaining the natural burial area as a flower meadow. Residents will also be able to memorialise their loved ones with additional trees, and bat or bird boxes, as we really want to encourage nature into the site.

"In the coming months we will also be inviting expression of interest from fishing clubs to use the northern edges of the lake. The successful club will have to demonstrate how they will manage the lake carefully to protect the wildlife and ensure people fish there responsibly.

"The site will be open to the public for contemplative walks and bird watching, so that everyone will be able to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. When the time is right, we will be inviting the public to an open day to the new Bereavement Centre so that we can share with you the newly restored natural landscape.

"I really hope those people who have come here, will stay and listen to the debate. I think that you will hear a more rounded view on what our proposals are and why we think it is a good idea."

2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

3. Election of Chair 2025/26

Cllr Kelli Pettitt was nominated as Council Chair by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer. Cllr Bailey stated that Cllr Pettitt was the chair of Fordham Parish Council, had researched the role and had a calm head. She would make an excellent Chair.

Cllr Christine Whelan was nominated as Council Chair by Cllr Ross Trent and seconded by Cllr Christine Colbert. Cllr Trent stated that Cllr Christine Whelan was a fair and popular councillor.

A secret ballot was held in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.1. Cllr Pettit received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which he used to vote for Cllr Pettitt.

It was resolved:

That Cllr Kelli Pettitt be elected as Chair of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Pettitt then read aloud, and signed, the Declaration of Acceptance of Office for Chair of Council.

4. Vote of Thanks to Outgoing Chair and Presentation of Past Chair's Medallion and Scroll

The former Chair, Cllr Mark Goldsack, was presented with flowers, a medallion, given to all past chairs, and a commemorative scroll. Cllr Goldsack said how proud he was to have chaired Council for two years and have his name on the honours board, joining his late friend and former schoolteacher Mike Rouse. He was honoured to have attended numerous events on behalf of the Council, including the armistice day commemoration in Ely Cathedral. He had chaired the sometimes fractious and often friendly Council meetings with a smile and an open approach. He thanked members, officers and the public for their support. He thanked Cllr David Brown for his assistance as Vice-Chair. He concluded that he had set out to chair the Council in accordance with the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign by finding harmony where possible. He was grateful to all members for their support regarding this. He wished the new Chair and Vice-Chair all the best for the future and felt secure in the knowledge that they had the right support to succeed.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that it was a great responsibility to Chair the Council and that Cllr Mark Goldsack had carried out his duties with fairness and good humour for two years. She expressed her appreciation to Cllr Goldsack for representing the Council at many civic events. She thanked him for his service.

Cllr Lorna Dupré thanked Cllr Mark Goldsack for his work as Chair of the Council, for his fairness and that generally he had been an exemplary Chair.

5. Election of Vice-Chair 2025/26

Cllr Keith Horgan was nominated as Council Vice-Chair by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer. Cllr Bailey was pleased to propose Cllr Horgan, who was a stickler for detail and would make an excellent Vice-Chair.

Cllr Gareth Wilson was nominated as Council Vice-Chair by Cllr Christine Whelan and seconded by Cllr Christine Colbert. Cllr Christine Whelan stated that Cllr Wilson had a wealth of experience of serving as a councillor and would make an excellent Vice-Chair.

A secret ballot was held in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.1. Cllr Horgan received 14 votes and Cllr Wilson received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Horgan.

It was resolved:

That Cllr Keith Horgan be elected as Vice Chair of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Keith Horgan then read aloud, and signed, the Declaration of Acceptance of Office for Vice Chair of Council.

The Chair thanked Cllr David Brown for his service as Vice-Chair. Cllr Bailey praised Cllr Brown for his knowledge of the rules and for his calm support of the Chair over the last two years. Cllr Lorna Dupré thanked Cllr Brown for his service in his important duty of faithfully carrying out the role of Vice-Chair.

6. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Charlotte Cane declared an interest in agenda item 11, the motion on councillors' roles in planning applications. She explained that she would not participate in the debate or vote so that she could freely discuss and vote on this matter in parliament.

Cllr James Lay asked the Monitoring Officer for an explanation of what constituted a declarable interest. The Monitoring Officer replied that each councillor was responsible for deciding whether a matter under discussion constituted an interest and she could provide advice on any specific issue.

7. Minutes – 25 February 2025 and 20 March 2025

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 February 2025 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the word "residents" to "visitors" in the first sentence in the fourth paragraph on page 9.

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 March 2025 be confirmed as a correct.

8. Stretham Ward District By-Election Result

The Chair welcomed Cllr Lee Denney to the Council and looked forward to working with him.

It was resolved:

That the result of the Stretham Ward By-Election be noted, and Councillor Lee Denney be welcomed as a new District Councillor.

9. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Seminars on Local Government Reorganisation would be taking place on Tuesday 27 May and Thursday 29 May and the members should inform Democratic Services of which seminar that they would like to attend if they had not already done so.
- Ian Smith, Director Finance, had announced that he would be retiring and the Chair thanked him for his work over the years, which included presiding over some of the best financial management in the country and for delivering many large-scale projects. The Chair wished him a long and happy retirement.

10. Petitions

No petitions had been received.

11. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

(i) Councillors' Role in Planning Applications

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Bill Hunt seconded the following motion.

East Cambridgeshire District Council, hereinafter referred to as the 'Council', notes that:

- The Deputy Prime Minister has published a planning and infrastructure bill designed to liberalise planning rules
- The Local Government Association has written to ministers to express its reservations about this plan
- This Council has a commitment under its Corporate Plan to support community-led, affordable and sustainable development, with investment in infrastructure

The Council believes that:

- Whilst the Council places on record its admiration for the high-quality work of its planning officers, it is additionally the democratic role of

locally elected councillors to be involved in the decision-making process of selected planning applications which affect their residents' lives and land

- Such applications are not necessarily restricted to large or non-routine applications
- This plan could represent a further setback to community-led development
- Removing the ability for councillors to choose to debate and vote on specific developments in their localities could erode public trust in the planning system and local government more generally
- Regional Mayors will soon be responsible for strategic planning and will be given new powers to "call in" applications for decision
- Local Planning Authorities will be significantly larger and more remote from local communities after Local Government Reorganisation
- Ministers lack the level of localised information which councils and councillors have as to which decisions should be made by officers and by councillors
- These measures represent an erosion of local democracy and accountability

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to MHCLG and Charlotte Cane MP, outlining this Council's opposition to the proposals and inviting them to work with the Council to find appropriate solutions
- Instruct the Operational Services Committee, in consultation with relevant officers, to do all it can to ensure that robust mechanisms continue to exist for Councillors both to express views on and to determine planning applications related to their ward, in anticipation of the Bill becoming law
- Continue to encourage and provide advice and assistance to its parishes in the preparation and completion of local Neighbourhood Plans over the next three years, including those which are beginning the process of creating one, such as Wicken Parish Council

Cllr Lucius Vellacott spoke in favour of councillors being able to "call-in" planning decisions but lamented that the Government wished to curtail this. He doubted that ministers would be interested in relatively minor planning applications, even those of considerable local interest. He also expressed concern that, under the new proposals, the Mayor would be able to "call-in" decisions that he disagreed with.

Cllr Vellacott quoted a member of the planning team, who had advised that officers were for the land, but councillors were for the people. It was important that councillors were able to represent the concerns that residents had.

Cllr Vellacott stated that the Motion did three things. Firstly, it offered constructive engagement over what works. Secondly, it commissioned a review into how local councillors can continue to effectively determine planning

applications and thirdly, it committed the authority to supporting parish councils with their neighbourhood plans. He concluded that whatever the future of local government, it deserved to be able to determine future development and residents needed to be able to effectively voice their concerns on proposed development in their communities.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his support the motion, which sought to maintain democratic oversight of the development process. He and his group were enthusiastic supporters of Neighbourhood Plans, which engaged and involved local communities. He recognised that the Government's proposals threatened that democratic oversight. It was also unclear if adequate environmental protection would remain. He reported that Liberal Democrat MPs had voted against the bill's second reading in Parliament. He expressed particular concern over clause 46 that sought to remove power from local councillors and give it to officers, who would be expected to impose the will of the Secretary of State.

Cllr Mark Goldsack stated that the current "call-in" procedure ensured that councillors' local knowledge, including the views of the people, could determine planning applications. He expressed his support for the Motion and welcomed the fact that it had cross party backing.

Cllr David Miller spoke of the importance of having local, democratically elected representatives taking planning decisions, as they were accountable to the public.

Cllr Bill Hunt stated that the current system worked. The Planning Committee did an excellent job, partly because it was better to have 12 people examining a matter rather than just one person. Local councillors could use their local knowledge to determine applications and benefit from site visits before making a decision. He doubted that a unitary authority, serving 500,000 people, would be able to do such a good job. He regretted that under the Government's proposals we could be losing this service to the public. He welcomed the cross-party support for the Motion.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott thanked Cllr Inskip for his insightful comments and his support. He recognised the importance of Neighbourhood Plans and hoped that local representation would continue after local government reorganisation.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be unanimously carried, with one abstention.

12. To Answer Questions From Members

One question was received, and the response was given as follows:

1) Question from Cllr Mary Wade to Cllr Anna Bailey:

"Illegal on-street parking continues to be raised by residents in Ely and East Cambridgeshire as a problem.

“In my first council meeting I raised this question on behalf of my residents and received positive news from the Leader of the Council in terms of a plan for a police enforcement role to tackle the issue. This had been confirmed to residents through an article written by the Leader of the Council on the East Cambs Conservative group website with the title ‘A New Police Enforcement Role to Tackle Illegal Car Parking and Speeding in East Cambs’, in 2022.

“Further reassurance was provided a year later in 2023 when a council spokesperson told the Ely Standard that ‘East Cambridgeshire District Council has been developing the new road safety officer volunteer role with the county’s police force to address issues such as speeding and parking enforcement’.

“Eighteen months after that update provided to the residents via the Ely Standard and following positive progress reports to members in the council chamber following questions from myself and Cllr Vellacott, is the Leader of the council still confident that the new road safety officers will prove effective in addressing illegal on-street parking in the district.

“In particular, can she confirm:

1. The number of applicants to the Expressions of Interest run by the police last Autumn.
2. The number of road safety officer volunteers who have completed training.
3. The number of parking penalty tickets issued by road safety volunteers.”

Response from Cllr Anna Bailey

“Thank you for the question, which provides me with a very timely opportunity to give an update. I am aware that the Liberal Democrat and Independent members of this Council would like to spend public money bringing in civil parking enforcement to deal with the incredibly annoying issue of illegal on street parking in our district. However, as I have previously stated in this chamber, on street parking enforcement is a responsibility of the Police and the only authority that can take on the criminalisation of illegal on street parking is the County Council. Cllr Lorna Dupré is now the deputy leader of the County Council, and my sincere congratulations to her. The County Council is now be run solely by the Liberal Democrats and so the Liberal Democrat and Independent colleagues on this Council may want to pursue this issue with Cllr Dupré.

“I am as disappointed as Cllr Wade that the promised pilot of Cambridgeshire Police has not been forthcoming yet and I share the concern about the ongoing abuse of on street parking in hot spots around the district. I have regularly pushed the police for progress on this matter, but they are not in my control, unfortunately I have very little sway with the police force. I am pleased to say that responsibility for this has been taken over by Superintendent Adam Gallop who is acutely aware of public opinion on this. I met with Superintendent Gallop at the Council’s offices on 16th May to discuss the matter in a positive meeting. Cambridgeshire Police have now got a record

number of Police Constables in place and are recruiting more PCSOs and so Superintendent Gallop has proposed an alternative way of dealing with the illegal parking in the District, which had been suggested by the Council many years ago, to increase the police resource to deal with the matter and this can be set up quickly. I hope that this will finally improve the situation. Of course, this doesn't prevent Cllr Dupré from pursuing civil parking enforcement in her new role in the County Council, which I suggest could be run in a similar model to that of South Cambridgeshire District Council, where the County Council has taken on all responsibility for enforcing parking in the district of South Cambridgeshire, with no involvement by the District Council whatsoever."

Cllr Mary Wade stated that her question: "is the Leader of the council still confident that the new road safety officers will prove effective in addressing illegal on-street parking in the district" had not been answered. Cllr Anna Bailey replied that she was content that she had answered the question.

13. Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders

Council considered a report (AA1, previously circulated) containing details of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming year.

Cllr Anna Bailey was nominated as Leader of the Council by Cllr Julia Huffer and seconded by Cllr Lucius Vellacott. Cllr Huffer stated that Cllr Bailey had led the Council since 2019 with unwavering commitment and steely determination to ensure that services and facilities remain available to all our residents. She has already begun negotiations over the difficult issue of Local Government Reorganisation and continued to have the full support of the Conservative group.

Cllr Lorna Dupré was nominated as Leader of the Council by Gareth Wilson and seconded by Cllr Mark Inskip. Cllr Gareth Wilson stated that now that as the Council was politically balanced it was a good opportunity to make a change. He was pleased to support Cllr Dupré, who would do an excellent job in this role

Cllr Bailey received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Bailey.

Cllr Julia Huffer was nominated as Deputy Leader of the Council by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Lucius Vellacott. Cllr Bailey stated that she was enormously grateful to Cllr Huffer for her support as Deputy Leader, who worked well with her and other councillors.

Cllr Christine Whelan was nominated as Deputy Leader of the Council by Gareth Wilson and seconded by Cllr Mark Inskip. Cllr Gareth Wilson stated that Cllr Christine Whelan had proven leadership skills and he hoped that the

Council would agree that it would be inappropriate to have one party holding both the Leader and Deputy Leader position.

Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Huffer.

It was resolved:

To elect Cllr Anna Bailey as Leader and Cllr Julia Huffer as Deputy Leader;

That the details of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming municipal year, as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the Officer's report, be noted.

14. Political Proportionality

Council considered a report (AA2, previously circulated) detailing the political balance of the Council, and the implications for the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies. The Elections and Democratic Services Manager explained that any amendment to the allocation of seats would require a unanimous vote.

It was unanimously resolved:

That the political balance, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report, be noted, and the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

15. Membership of Committees and Sub-Committees (Including Substitutes) and Other Member Bodies 2023/24

Council considered a report (AA3, previously circulated) presented by the Elections and Democratic Service Manager which proposed the memberships of the Council's Committees, Sub-Committees, and other Member Bodies, as provided by the Group Leaders. The report also proposed amending the Constitution to allow equal political representation on the Council's sub committees, that were not subject to political proportionality. It also recommended the appointment of independent members, parish council members and a lay member, on various committees. It was noted that the report had been amended to include Cllr Lee Denney as a member of the Licensing Committee and a substitute member of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her thanks to all councillors and independent members for their service on the committees and her pride in the Council's committee system, which provided everyone with a role. Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- i. The membership of Committees, Sub-Committees, and other Member Bodies for 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.
- ii. The appointment of Stephen Joyce as Lay Member of the Audit Committee, be approved.
- iii. An amendment to the Constitution to allow an equal allocation of committee seats on the following sub-committees that do not fall under the political proportionality ruling:
 - Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee
 - Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee
 - Licensing Sub-Committee (Statutory)
- iv. The Council approve the appointments of 2 Independent Persons and 2 Co-opted Town/Parish Councillor Members, as set out in Appendix 1, on the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

16. Election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs for all Committees and Sub Committees 2025/26

Council considered an oral update recommending the election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs for all Committees and Sub Committees 2025/26.

Finance and Assets Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee.

Finance and Assets Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr John Trapp seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee.

Operational Services Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Chair of the Operational Services Committee. Cllr Christine Colbert nominated and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded Cllr Mark Inskip to the position of Chair of the Operational Services Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Inskip received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Chair of the Operational Services Committee.

Operational Services Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lucius Vellacott to the position of Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee. Cllr Christine Whelan nominated and Cllr Christine Colbert seconded Cllr Mark Inskip to the position of Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Vellacott received 14 votes and Cllr Inskip received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lucius Vellacott.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lucius Vellacott as the Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee.

Audit Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr David Brown to the position of Chair of the Audit Committee. Cllr Mark Inskip nominated and Cllr Charlotte Cane seconded Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated to the position of Chair of the Audit Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Brown received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr David Brown.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr David Brown as the Chair of the Audit Committee.

Audit Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lucius Vellacott to the position of Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee. Cllr Mark Inskip nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr Lorna Dupré to the position of Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Vellacott received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lucius Vellacott.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lucius Vellacott as the Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee.

Licensing Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Chair of the Licensing Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Chair of the Licensing Committee.

Licensing Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Martin Goodearl to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goodearl received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Martin Goodearl.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Martin Goodearl as the Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee.

Planning Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Bill Hunt to the position of Chair of the Planning Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Whelan to the position of Chair of the Planning Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Hunt received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Bill Hunt.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Bill Hunt as the Chair of the Planning Committee.

Planning Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Mark Goldsack to the position of Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goldsack received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Mark Goldsack.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Mark Goldsack as the Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee.

Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Colbert to the

position of Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Colbert received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as the Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee.

Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Colbert to the position of Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Colbert received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee.

Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as the Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Keith Horgan to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Horgan received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Keith Horgan.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Keith Horgan as Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lavinia Edwards to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Edwards received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lavinia Edwards.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lavinia Edwards as Vice-Chair of the Licensing Sub-Committee (Statutory) Vice-Chair.

Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Martin Goodearl to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Gareth Wilson seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goodearl received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Martin Goodearl.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Martin Goodearl as the Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Gareth Wilson seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Sub-Committee (Non-Statutory). A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee.

17. Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies

Council considered the report AA4, previously circulated, detailing recommendations from Committees as follows:

1. Audit Committee – 15 April 2025

a) Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/25

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Cllr David Brown presented the Annual Report 2024/25, as attached at Appendix A. He thanked all the members of the Committee who had contributed to the work carried out over the year, including the scrutiny of the Council's Risk Register. He was happy to report that there was only one outstanding action relating to 2024/25. He explained that the disclaimed audit opinion on the Statutory Accounts was due to national issues and outside the control of this Council. He thanked Stephen Joyce, the Independent Lay Member, for his invaluable contributions. He also thanked officers and the auditors for supporting the work of the Committee. Cllr Keith Horgan welcomed the fact that the Liberal Democrats had returned to the Audit Committee, as it was important that there was cross-party scrutiny of the issues discussed by the Committee. He thanked Cllr David Brown for the exemplary way that he chaired the Committee.

The recommendation in the report was proposed by Cllr David Brown and seconded by Cllr Keith Horgan.

It was unanimously resolved:

That the Audit Committee Annual Report be approved.

18. Bereavement Centre Budget

Council considered the report AA5, previously circulated, to consider the updated Bereavement Centre business case and supporting budget proposal. The Director Operations presented the report. She explained that the Council had approved the business case for the Bereavement Centre in February 2024. Progress had been reported quarterly to the Finance and Assets Committee, with further updates provided through member briefings.

The Chair explained that confidential figures were detailed in the exempt report and the debate would have to move into confidential session if councillors wished to discuss these figures.

Cllr Anna Bailey thanked officers for their work on this project, which was more than just a bereavement centre. It would enhance and secure a designated wildlife site for the community. The Wildlife Trust supported the Council's

proposed plans for the site. Residents will be able to enjoy the site for bird watching, walking and fishing. It was hoped that a room on the site would be made available for community use.

Cllr Bailey reported that the bereavement centre would offer a special service for residents. With a maximum of two services a day, mourners would have time after the service to gather in the function room and not be moved on. The majority of the population of the district were a short car drive away from the site.

Cllr Bailey explained that the cost of the crematorium was comparable to other crematoriums that had been built. The separate costs had been reviewed by the Council's independent quantity surveyors and were part of a fixed price contract. An income for the Council would be generated by the centre from its second year of operation. The project was funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions from developers, which existed to fund infrastructure in the district. The bereavement centre met the criteria to receive CIL funding. There was enough CIL funds left to support numerous other projects and just under £6 million was being awarded directly to parish councils to fund local projects. Further development in the district ensured more CIL funding in the future.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his opposition to the building of a bereavement centre on the site of the Mepal Outdoor Centre in a ward he had represented since 2019. He expressed concerns regarding the decisions taken to close the Mepal Outdoor Centre and build a crematorium, which had been taken in private and were first leaked to the Ely Standard in July 2020. He understood that these plans had been worked on in secret for 18 months before being revealed by the media. The first Council meeting to discuss this matter had been held in private session on 31 July 2020. It was after this meeting that the Council issued a press release confirming these plans. The results of the public consultation in January 2021 were not released until August that year. It showed that 85.4% opposed the plans. Nevertheless, the Council continued with the project and estimated that the total cost would be around £7 million. However, these projected costs have increased to nearly £13 million, with almost £2 million already spent. CIL funding was supposed to be used to fund community infrastructure and amenities. He asked if those who supported the project believed that the public supported using CIL funding for a bereavement centre instead of other facilities such as health, school, leisure facilities, foot paths and cycleways. He also questioned whether building a crematorium made sound business sense with other facilities in Huntingdon, Cambridge, Bury St Edmonds and March. Facilities in Peterborough and Cambridge reported that the number of cremations were falling, proving that there was insufficient demand for the proposed centre. This would drive down prices and result in operating losses that would have to be funded by the Council.

Cllr Keith Horgan stated that he previously examined the business case, with Cllr James Lay, using his experience of over 40 years of assessing company reports. Following the work, both he and Cllr Lay had voted in favour of the bereavement centre on 20 February 2024. He continued to support the project

as the business case was sound. It was a good investment and was the right decision for residents. If the business case no longer made sense he would vote against the project.

Cllr John Trapp stated that none of the parish councils in his ward supported the project. They would prefer to see the CIL money being used to fund more practical projects, such as the cycle way from Lode to Bottisham or walkways between equipment in play areas to make them more accessible, which could not be afforded. He expected that all parishes in the district faced similar issues. He suggested that water cremation would have been more sustainable, as it only used a quarter of the energy of more conventional cremations. He understood land had been offered in Soham for the bereavement centre, which would have been a more central location in the district. He noted that Cllr Bailey had acknowledged that the market for crematoriums was highly competitive and he questioned whether the project would ever be able to make a profit. He concluded that cancelling the project now made more financial sense than continuing to fund it.

Cllr Bill Hunt disagreed with the negative attitude of those who opposed the project. He stated that years ago he had served on a working party regarding the future of the site with the Leader of the Opposition, so the project should not have come as a surprise to her and her political group. Whilst canvassing, residents had informed him that they were concerned about development being built without infrastructure. The bereavement centre was infrastructure that people in the area needed. He explained that 80% of people were now being cremated, an increase from 50% around 50 years ago. Population in the district was also increasing. He stated that he could travel to the site from Ely in just under 20 minutes and he believed that people were usually prepared to travel much further to funerals. He believed that most councils would have to borrow money in order to fund projects of this size, whilst this authority could fund it entirely from receipts and was not reliant on the need to make a profit. Meanwhile, the derelict site was costing money to maintain. He suggested that local projects should be funded before local government reorganisation abolished this Council and moved all the CIL funds to a new authority which would focus on projects in urban centres outside the district.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith stated that she had served on the working group on the Mepal Outdoor Centre with Cllr Bill Hunt and Cllr Lorna Dupré. Cambridgeshire ACRE had the franchise, but they had given control back to the Council because they could no longer run it. The Council had attempted to find another agency to operate the centre, but this ultimately had been unsuccessful. As a result, the site had been left derelict. If this project was agreed, funding would continue to exist for parish councils to improve facilities in their areas.

Cllr Gareth Wilson explained that the Mepal Outdoor Centre had closed because it needed £1 million of investment, which the Council was not prepared to pay. However, the Council was now prepared to pay £13 million to build a bereavement centre on the site, which will not be able to compete against the

existing facility in March. He lamented the closing of the Centre, which young people from throughout the area used and greatly enjoyed.

Cllr Julia Huffer explained that CIL funding existed for accessible play areas and Fordham Parish Council would be using this to replace play equipment in the village. She suggested that a market existed for a bereavement centre, which only had two services a day, as it would allow mourners to spend more time at the centre, whilst other facilities had to move mourners on to make way for the next service. She said that it was untrue of Cllr Christine Colbert to state that the Council had deliberately closed the Mepal Outdoor Centre, as the charity had been running at a loss and no alternative organisation could be found that was prepared to run the Centre. This authority was not in the business of running outdoor centres and the County Council had just closed an outdoor centre in Stibbington.

Cllr James Lay stated that he believed that having two upmarket funerals a day at the proposed bereavement centre would work well. However, the market was changing. Larger companies were taking up more and more of the market share and according to a cost of dying report from Sun Life in 2025, the number of direct cheap cremations had increased from 2% in 2021 to 20% last year. The number of pre-plan funerals was also increasing, so that people could keep costs down and pass more money on to their relatives. He feared that the project would be a waste of money.

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that the project was communicated to the public in 2020. It was necessary to keep commercially sensitive information private, otherwise competitors would have been given an unfair advantage. The expected profit figures were a conservative projection, and any operating profit will go back to the Council. The authority had a good track record of operating commercially, as the success of the East Cambs Trading Company had shown. He concluded that the outdoor centre had been destroyed by arson, and something needed to be done with the site.

Cllr Christine Colbert stated that in the past, when a member had been named by another councillor they had been allowed to respond immediately. She agreed with the comments made by Cllr James Lay.

Cllr Lorna Dupré lamented that discussions during the first 18 months of the project had been held in private and that now the administration was ignoring huge public opposition and attempting to approve the project, even though costs had increased from £8 million and £13 million. She stated that this was a waste of money, which should have been spent on local community projects, such as education facilities in Littleport and North Ely or the health centre at Soham, instead of on a commercial venture that would have to compete with the private sector. The site was not ideal, as it was next to a smelly biodigester and a busy highway. It was located on the western edge of the district, which would be difficult for residents from the eastern part of the district to access. It was only 12 minutes' drive from the crematorium in March, which was operating under capacity and mourners do not consider council boundaries when considering where to hold a funeral. She explained that due to local government

reorganisation, the new unitary authority could end up with two or three crematoriums in its administrative area. She expressed doubt over the assurances of profit provided by the consultants, as the market was changing, with an increasing preference for cheaper cremations and so the demand for another crematorium in the area did not exist. She concluded that the proposed project was a waste of £13 million, which instead should be spent on the community facilities that it was intended for.

Cllr Charlotte Cane thanked those who had submitted public questions to the meeting and noted that only one had supported the project. She opposed the building of a crematorium that would deliver a poor return on the investment, increased carbon emissions and would be in competition with a number of other crematoriums in the area. She understood that there was currently no money in the CIL fund and projects such as the health centre in Soham could not be funded. She stated that a charity had wanted to take over the site, but its request had been rejected as it had not been given time to draw up a business plan. The cost of the project had increased from £8 million to £13 million and she estimated that it would take 40 years for the crematorium to pay back the original investment and this was not taking into account wear and tear maintenance costs. She concluded that this was a bad use of public money and asked how anyone who had any business sense could support it.

Cllr Chika Akinwale agreed with previous speakers that the funds being allocated to the crematorium project could be better spent on community facilities. In particular, play facilities accessible to disabled children should be funded to promote social inclusion.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott explained that the Conservative party had included the crematorium in its manifesto before winning the 2019 election. He praised the report which contained several assurances. A specific market analysis had been carried out, which indicated that the project would be profitable and in any case this was never the main driver for the initiative. He stated that the building of a crematorium on the site was the only solution that would protect the biodiversity in the area. He explained that he would prefer to have an outdoor centre on the site, but unfortunately this was not viable. He reported that the costs had risen to an increase in prices, particularly in the steel industry. He explained that the Council could pay for the crematorium without jeopardising other projects as it was being funded from the CIL budget for strategic infrastructure. Facilities in the future could be funded both by CIL and the profits from the project. Without this extra revenue there would be more pressure on the Council to increase Council Tax. He concluded that he wanted the Council to be able to give local residents the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones by the lakeside in the heart of fens and he hoped that at the end of his life his friends and family would be able to go back to the site, due to the decision that he had taken this evening.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that those opposed to the project had not provided an alternative proposal for the site. The Mepal Outdoor Centre had closed years ago and despite the best efforts of the Council, it had become clear that an outdoor centre on the site was not viable and so it was incorrect to argue that

the Council had either closed or abandoned it, in order to build a crematorium. She explained that the public engagement exercise, reported by Cllr Inskip, had only received 188 responses and 85% of them admitted to having strong allegiances to the closed outdoor centre. The Wildlife Trust had informed the Council that only low impact leisure use should be permitted and this was incompatible with an outdoor centre. She reported that whilst health and leisure activities were not the responsibility of this Council, CIL funds had been used for a variety of health centres and leisure initiatives. The funds from CIL were for infrastructure projects like the bereavement centre, which unlike the crematorium in Huntingdon, could be built without having to borrow any money. She stated that it would be an eco-crematorium using electric cremators and this would reduce carbon emissions as it was more efficient than other cremations.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded the recommendations in the report. Cllr Charlotte Cane requested a recorded vote and these were made as follows:

For (14): Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Against (14): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lee Denney, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Mark Inskip, James Lay, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Abstain (0)

With 14 votes in favour and 14 votes against the vote was tied. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote in favour of the recommendations.

It was resolved that:

- a) Note the updated revenue business case modelling as set out in Appendix 1.
- b) Approve a further allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) of £4,757,087 for the capital build of the Bereavement Centre.
- c) Authorise the Director Finance to secure alternative funding via internal borrowing where CIL is not yet available, in consultation with the Chair of Finance and Assets Committee (as detailed in section 5.5).
- d) Authorise the Director Operations, in consultation with Director Legal, to finalise and enter into the contract between the Council and Contractor A as set out in Appendix 2.

- e) Authorise the Director Operations, in consultation with Director Legal, to procure and enter into a contract with an electric cremator provider.

19. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

a) Appointments to the Combined Authority

Council considered a previously circulated report requesting that appointments be made to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was resolved unanimously:

1. That the following appointments and nominations to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the municipal year 2025/26 be approved:
 - a. That Cllr Anna Bailey be appointed as the Council's appointee to the Combined Authority with Cllr Julia Huffer appointed as the substitute member;
 - b. That Cllrs Lucius Vellacott and Christine Whelan be nominated as Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with Cllr Keith Horgan and Mark Inskip nominated as their respective substitutes;
 - c. That Cllr Mark Inskip be nominated as a Member of the Audit & Governance Committee, with Cllr Christine Whelan nominated as the substitute member.
2. That the Chief Executive be authorised to make any amendments to the appointments to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, in consultation with the Political Group Leaders, if the political balance is amended by the Combined Authority between now and the next Council meeting.

b) Update reports

Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's meetings in February 2025 and March 2025.

It was resolved:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

20. Actions Taken on the Grounds of Urgency

Council considered a report (AA6 previously circulated) to note the action taken on the grounds of urgency in relation to the Wentworth Parish Council – Council Tax.

It was resolved:

That the action taken on the grounds of urgency be noted.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Goodearl seconded that the meeting should go into private session. It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1 and 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

21. Partnership Working Through Section 113 Agreement

Council considered the report, AA7 already circulated, on whether Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) should enter into a Section 113 agreement with Maldon District Council to provide Fraud Services.

Cllr Keith Horgan proposed and Anna Bailey seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was resolved to:

Approve that Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) enter into a Section 113 Agreement with Maldon District Council, to enable ARP officers to provide Fraud Services to the Council.

The meeting concluded at 9:15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

TITLE: Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies

Committee: Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: Democratic Services and Elections Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Report No: AA49

Contact Officer: Jane Webb - Democratic Services and Elections Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer jane.webb@eastcambs.gov.uk, 01353 616278
Room 214B, The Grange, Ely

1.0 FINANCE & ASSETS COMMITTEE – 27 JUNE 2024

a) Treasury Operations Annual Performance Review

The Committee received a report (**AA21, attached in Appendix A & B**) containing the annual performance review of the Council's Treasury operations during the 2023/24 financial year.

The Principal Accountant presented the report and explained that there were currently no proper measures in place to assess the impact of investments and their carbon footprints, but this would be addressed in the future.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Sharp and seconded by Cllr Bovingdon.

Members unanimously **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL:**

That they approve this report detailing the Council's treasury operations during 2024/25, including the prudential and treasury indicators, as set out in the Annual Treasury Management Review at Appendix 1 to the report.

TITLE: 2024/25 TREASURY OPERATIONS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Committee: Finance and Assets Committee

Date: 26 June 2025

Author: Director, Finance

Report No: AA21

Contact Officer: Ian Smith, Director, Finance
ian.smith@eastcambs.gov.uk; 01353 616470; Room 104, The Grange, Ely

1.0 Issue

- 1.1 To report on the Council's treasury operations during the 2024/25 financial year.
- 1.2 This report reviews the Treasury Management activity during the financial year 2024/25 and reports on the prudential indicators as required by CIPFA's Treasury Management Code of Practice.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1. Members are asked to recommend to Full Council that they approve this report detailing the Council's treasury operations during 2024/25, including the prudential and treasury indicators, as set out in the Annual Treasury Management Review (Appendix 1).

3.0 Background / Options

- 3.1 This Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators each year; this is the report for 2024/25. This report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the Code) and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code).
- 3.2 During 2024/25 the minimum reporting requirements were that
 - (1) Full Council receive the following reports:
 - an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year (approved by Full Council on the 20th February 2024);
 - a mid-year treasury update report, (this was reviewed by Finance and Assets Committee on 28th November 2024 and approved by Full Council on the 25th February 2025);
 - an annual review following the end of the year, describing the activity compared to the strategy (this report).

(2) A further Member Committee receive

- reports at the end of quarters one and three (these were incorporated into the Finance Reports presented to Finance and Assets Committee on the 26th September 2024 and 30th January 2025).

4.0 Results

- 4.1 Cash investments totalled £32.288 million as at 31st March 2025, an increase of £0.709 million on the previous year. The Council's cash investments were all for periods of less than one year.
- 4.2 The increase in cash is mainly as a consequence of the Council's overall underspend in 2024/25 which has resulted in increased levels of earmarked reserves (particularly the Surplus Savings Reserve).
- 4.3 The Council's loan to ECTC increased from £5.0 million at 31st March 2024 to £5.825 million at 31st March 2025.
- 4.4 Interest received during the financial year was £2,190,932, which was £889,597 above the budget of £1,301,335. This figure was made up of £1,931,082 from investment in money markets and short, fixed term investments and £259,850 from the loan to ECTC.
- 4.5 There are two main reasons for this over achievement in interest receipts:
- While interest rates reduced during the year, they reduced at a slower rate than the prudent estimate built into the budget, which has resulted in greater interest receipts and
 - As a result of underspends on both the revenue and capital budget, cash holdings have been higher than assumed in the budget.
- 4.6 The average rate of return on cash investments held during the year (this excludes the loan to ECTC) was 5.288%.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The size of the Council's investment portfolio has historically been relatively small, meaning that investment decisions have had to be made primarily to accommodate cashflow requirements as opposed to optimising investment returns. While the value of the portfolio is now higher than in previous years, these disciplines have been retained, although opportunities for some pro-active investment decisions were taken during the year, with funds being moved to longer-term investments (three and six month) and away from overnight accounts.
- 5.2 During the financial year the Council operated within its approved treasury limits and prudential indicators.

6.0 Additional Implications Assessment

- 6.1 In the table below, please put Yes or No in each box:

Financial Implications Yes	Legal Implications No	Human Resources (HR) Implications No
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) No	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) No	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) No

6.2 **Financial Implications**

The additional income gained from interest receipts has contributed to the Council's net underspend in 2024/25, as detailed in the Yearend Finance Report also on this meeting's agenda.

7.0 **Appendices**

Annual Treasury Management Review 2024/25

8.0 **Background Documents:**

Treasury Management Strategy as approved by Full Council on the 20th February 2024.

Quarterly and half-year update reports as detailed in 3.2 above.

Annual Treasury Management Review 2024/25

East Cambridgeshire District Council



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

CE: Capital Economics - is the economics consultancy that provides MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited, with independent economic forecasts, briefings and research.

CFR: capital financing requirement - the Council's annual underlying borrowing need to finance capital expenditure and a measure of the Council's total outstanding indebtedness.

CIPFA: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy – the professional accounting body that oversees and sets standards in local Council finance and treasury management.

CPI: consumer price index – the official measure of inflation adopted as a common standard by the UK and countries in the EU. It is a measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services, such as transportation, food and medical care. It is calculated by taking price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods and averaging them.

MHCLG: the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government - the Government department that directs local authorities in England.

ECB: European Central Bank - the central bank for the Eurozone

EU: European Union

EZ: Eurozone - those countries in the EU which use the euro as their currency

Fed: the Federal Reserve System, often referred to simply as "the Fed," is the central bank of the United States. It was created by the Congress to provide the nation with a stable monetary and financial system.

FOMC: the Federal Open Market Committee – this is the branch of the Federal Reserve Board which determines monetary policy in the USA by setting interest rates and determining quantitative easing/tightening policy. It is composed of 12 members - the seven members of the Board of Governors and five of the 12 Reserve Bank presidents.

GDP: gross domestic product – a measure of the growth and total size of the economy.

G7: the group of seven countries that form an informal bloc of industrialised democracies - the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom - that meets annually to discuss issues such as global economic governance, international security, and energy policy.

Gilts: gilts are bonds issued by the UK Government to borrow money on the financial markets. Interest paid by the Government on gilts is called a coupon and is at a rate that is fixed for the duration until maturity of the gilt, (unless a gilt is index linked to inflation); while the coupon rate is fixed, the yields will change inversely to the price of gilts i.e., a rise in the price of a gilt will mean that its yield will fall.

IMF: International Monetary Fund - the lender of last resort for national governments which get into financial difficulties.

MPC: the Monetary Policy Committee is a committee of the Bank of England, which meets for one and a half days, eight times a year, to determine monetary policy by setting the official interest rate in the United

Kingdom, (the Bank of England Base Rate, commonly called Bank Rate), and by making decisions on quantitative easing/tightening.

MRP: minimum revenue provision - a statutory annual minimum revenue charge to reduce the total outstanding CFR, (the total indebtedness of a local Council).

PFI: Private Finance Initiative – capital expenditure financed by the private sector i.e., not by direct borrowing by a local Council.

PWLB: Public Works Loan Board – this is the part of H.M. Treasury which provides loans to local authorities to finance capital expenditure.

QE/QT: quantitative easing – is an unconventional form of monetary policy where a central bank creates new money electronically to buy financial assets, such as government bonds, (but may also include corporate bonds). This process aims to stimulate economic growth through increased private sector spending in the economy and also aims to return inflation to target. These purchases increase the supply of liquidity to the economy; this policy is employed when lowering interest rates has failed to stimulate economic growth to an acceptable level and to lift inflation to target. Once QE has achieved its objectives of stimulating growth and inflation, QE will be reversed by selling the bonds the central bank had previously purchased, or by not replacing debt that it held which matures. This is called quantitative tightening. The aim of this reversal is to ensure that inflation does not exceed its target once the economy recovers from a sustained period of depressed growth and inflation. Economic growth, and increases in inflation, may threaten to gather too much momentum if action is not taken to 'cool' the economy.

RPI: the Retail Price Index is a measure of inflation that measures the change in the cost of a representative sample of retail goods and services. It was the UK standard for measurement of inflation until the UK changed to using the EU standard measure of inflation – Consumer Price Index. The main differences between RPI and CPI is in the way that housing costs are treated and that the former is an arithmetical mean whereas the latter is a geometric mean. RPI is often higher than CPI for these reasons.

SONIA: the Sterling Overnight Index Average. Generally, a set of indices for those benchmarking their investments. The benchmarking options include using a forward-looking (term) set of reference rates and/or a backward-looking set of reference rates that reflect the investment yield curve at the time an investment decision was taken.

TMSS: the annual treasury management strategy statement reports that all local authorities are required to submit for approval by the Full Council before the start of each financial year.

VRP: a voluntary revenue provision to repay debt, in the annual budget, which is additional to the annual MRP charge, (see above definition).

Annual Treasury Management Review 2024/25

Purpose

This Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2024/25. This report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, (the Code), and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code).

During 2024/25 the minimum reporting requirements were that the Full Council should receive the following reports:

- an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year (this was presented to Full Council on the 20th February 2024)
- a mid-year, treasury update report (this went to Full Council on the 25th February 2025)
- an annual review following the end of the year describing the activity compared to the strategy (this report).

In addition, the Finance and Assets Committee has also received quarterly treasury management update reports on the 26th September 2024 and 30th January 2025.

The regulatory environment places responsibility on members for the review and scrutiny of treasury management policy and activities. This report is, therefore, important in that respect, as it provides details of the outturn position for treasury activities and highlights compliance with the Council's policies previously approved by members.

This Council confirms that it has complied with the requirement under the Code to give prior scrutiny to all of the above treasury management reports by the Finance and Assets Committee before they were reported to the Full Council.

Member training on treasury management issues was last undertaken on 5th October 2023 as part of the training for all members following the District Council elections earlier in that year.

Executive Summary

During 2024/25, the Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements. The key actual prudential and treasury indicators detailing the impact of capital expenditure activities during the year, with comparators, are as follows:

Prudential and Treasury Indicators	31.3.24 Actual £000	2024/25 Original £000	31.3.25 Actual £000
Capital expenditure	3,200	6,575	3,654
Capital Financing Requirement:	1,845	4,163	988
Gross borrowing	10,652	13,909	10,197
External debt	0	0	0
Investments (all under 1 year)	31,579	-	32,288
Net borrowing	31,579	-	32,288

Other prudential and treasury indicators are to be found in the main body of this report. The Director, Finance confirms that no external borrowing was undertaken and the statutory borrowing limit, (the authorised limit), was not therefore breached.

Introduction and Background

This report summarises the following:-

- Capital activity during the year;
- Impact of this activity on the Council's underlying indebtedness, (the Capital Financing Requirement);
- The actual prudential and treasury indicators;
- Overall treasury position identifying how the Council has borrowed in relation to this indebtedness, and the impact on investment balances;
- Summary of interest rate movements in the year;
- Detailed investment activity.

1. The Council's Capital Expenditure and Financing

The Council undertakes capital expenditure on long-term assets. These activities may either be:

- Financed immediately through the application of capital or revenue resources (capital receipts, capital grants, revenue contributions etc.), which has no resultant impact on the Council's borrowing need; or
- If insufficient financing is available, or a decision is taken not to apply resources, the capital expenditure will give rise to a borrowing need.

The actual capital expenditure forms one of the required prudential indicators. The table below shows the actual capital expenditure and how this was financed.

£000 General Fund	31.3.24 Actual	2024/25 Budget	31.3.25 Actual
Capital expenditure	3,200	6,575	3,654
Financed in year	1,355	2,412	2,666
Unfinanced capital expenditure	1,845	4,163	988

Capital expenditure in year was lower than forecast in the budget due to a number of reasons, the main ones being:

The funding for black bins to replace sacks will now be spent in 2025/26 so the new bins are available for the introduction of the revised service model in Spring 2026.

Work on the Bereavement Centre did not progress at the timescale forecast when the budget was set.

ECTC's cashflow resulted in it needing to drawdown less of its loan facility than forecast in the budget.

2. The Council's Overall Borrowing Need

The Council's underlying need to borrow for capital expenditure is termed the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This figure is a gauge of the Council's indebtedness. The CFR results from the capital activity of the Council and resources used to pay for the capital spend. It represents the 2024/25 unfinanced capital expenditure (see above table), and prior years' net or unfinanced capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue or other resources.

Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the capital expenditure programme, the treasury service organises the Council's cash position to ensure that sufficient cash is available to meet the capital plans and cash flow requirements. This may be sourced through borrowing from external bodies, (such as the Government, through the Public Works Loan Board [PWLB], or the money markets), or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council.

Reducing the CFR – the Council's underlying borrowing need (CFR) is not allowed to rise indefinitely. Statutory controls are in place to ensure that capital assets are broadly charged to revenue over the life of the asset. The Council is required to make an annual revenue charge, called the Minimum Revenue Provision – MRP, to reduce the CFR. This is effectively a repayment of the non-Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing need, (there is no statutory requirement to reduce the HRA CFR). This differs from the treasury management arrangements which ensure that cash is available to meet capital commitments. External debt can also be borrowed or repaid at any time, but this does not change the CFR.

The total CFR can also be reduced by:

- the application of additional capital financing resources, (such as unapplied capital receipts); or
- charging more than the statutory revenue charge (MRP) each year through a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP).

The Council's 2024/25 MRP Policy, (as required by MHCLG Guidance), was approved as part of the Treasury Management Strategy Report for 2024/25 on 20th February 2024.

The Council's CFR for the year is shown below, and represents a key prudential indicator.

CFR (£000): General Fund	31.3.24 Actual	2024/25 Budget	31.3.25 Actual
Opening balance	10,127	10,832	10,652
Add unfinanced capital expenditure (as above)	1,845	4,163	988
Less MRP	(319)	(586)	(593)
Less ECTC Loan Repayments	(1,000)	(500)	(850)
Closing balance	10,652	13,909	10,197

Borrowing activity is constrained by prudential indicators for gross borrowing and the CFR, and by the authorised limit.

Gross borrowing and the CFR - in order to ensure that borrowing levels are prudent over the medium term and only for a capital purpose, the Council should ensure that its gross external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the capital financing requirement in the preceding year (2023/24) plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current (2024/25) and next two financial years. This essentially means that the Council is not borrowing to support revenue expenditure. This indicator allowed the Council some flexibility to borrow in advance of its immediate capital needs. The table below highlights the Council's gross borrowing position against the CFR. The Council has complied with this prudential indicator.

£000	31.3.24 Actual	2024/25 Budget	31.3.25 Actual
Gross external borrowing position	0	0	0
Capital Financing Requirement	10,652	13,909	10,197
Under Funding of CFR	10,652	13,909	10,197

The authorised limit - the authorised limit is the “affordable borrowing limit” required by s3 of the Local Government Act 2003. Once this has been set, the Council does not have the power to borrow above this level. The table below demonstrates that during 2024/25 the Council has maintained gross borrowing within its authorised limit.

The operational boundary – the operational boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the boundary are acceptable subject to the authorised limit not being breached.

Actual financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream - this indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital, (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income), against the net revenue stream.

£000	2024/25
Authorised limit	10,000
Maximum gross borrowing position during the year	0
Operational boundary	0
Average gross borrowing position	0
Financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream	N/A

3. Treasury Position as of 31st March 2025

The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the treasury management service to ensure adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting detailed in the summary, and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

At the end of 2024/25 the Council's treasury position, was as follows:-

The Council had no external debt.

The Council's Investment portfolio was as per the table below

All Money Market investments and the amount held in the Council's main bank account with the NatWest are in cash and as such, can be recalled immediately.

The amounts held in call accounts have different call back dates, with the last date being 16th August 2024.

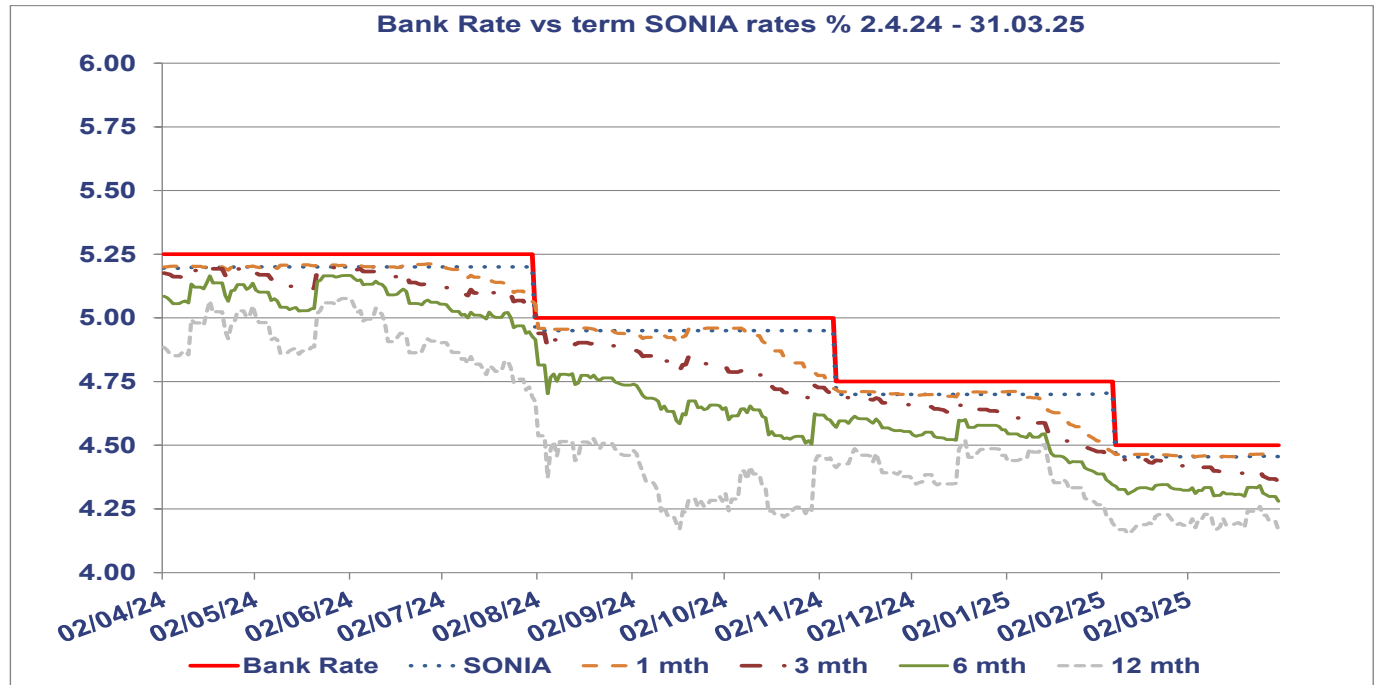
The loan facility to East Cambridgeshire trading Company runs until March 2027. However, the nature of the loan facility allows the Company to borrow and repay funding as their cashflow allows within the maximum facility of £7,500,000.

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO	31.3.24 Actual £000	31.3.24 Actual %	31.3.25 Actual £000	31.3.25 Actual %
Treasury investments				
Banks – main bank account	579	1.8%	187	0.6%
Banks – call accounts	22,000	69.7%	22,101	68.4%
Money Market Funds	9,000	28.5%	10,000	31.0%
TOTAL TREASURY INVESTMENTS	31,579	100%	32,288	100%
Non-Treasury investments				
Third party loans - ECTC	5,000	95.5%	5,825	95.5%
Third party loans – EC CLT	235	4.5%	277	4.5%
TOTAL NON-TREASURY INVESTMENTS	5,235	100%	6,102	100%
Treasury investments	31,579	85.8%	32,288	84.1%
Non-Treasury Investments	5,235	14.2%	6,102	15.9%
TOTAL OF ALL INVESTMENTS	36,814	100.0%	38,390	100.0%

4. The Strategy for 2024/25

4.1 Investment strategy and control of interest rate risk

Investment Benchmarking Data – Sterling Overnight Index Averages (Term) 2024/25



FINANCIAL YEAR TO QUARTER ENDED 31/03/2025						
	Bank Rate	SONIA	1 mth	3 mth	6 mth	12 mth
High	5.25	5.20	5.21	5.20	5.17	5.08
High Date	02/04/2024	03/05/2024	27/06/2024	17/04/2024	31/05/2024	30/05/2024
Low	4.50	4.45	4.45	4.36	4.28	4.15
Low Date	06/02/2025	12/02/2025	04/03/2025	31/03/2025	31/03/2025	10/02/2025
Average	4.95	4.90	4.88	4.82	4.72	4.54
Spread	0.75	0.75	0.76	0.85	0.89	0.93

Investment returns remained robust throughout 2024/25 with Bank Rate reducing steadily through the course of the financial year (three 0.25% rate cuts in total), and even at the end of March the yield curve was still relatively flat, which might be considered unusual as further Bank Rate cuts were expected in 2025/26.

Bank Rate reductions of 0.25% occurred in August, November and February, bringing the headline rate down from 5.25% to 4.5%. Each of the Bank Rate cuts occurred in the same month as the Bank of England publishes its Quarterly Monetary Policy Report, therein providing a clarity over the timing of potential future rate cuts.

As of early April 2025, market sentiment has been heavily influenced of late by President Trump's wide-ranging trade tariffs policy. Commentators anticipate a growing risk of a US recession, whilst UK GDP is projected by the Office for Budget Responsibility to remain tepid, perhaps achieving 1% GDP growth in 2025/26.

Looking back to 2024/25, investors were able to achieve returns in excess of 5% for all periods ranging from 1 month to 12 months in the spring of 2024 but by March 2025 deposit rates were some 0.75% - 1% lower. Where liquidity requirements were not a drain on day-to-day investment choices, extending duration through the use of "laddered investments" paid off.

That is not to say that investment choices were straight-forward. Concerns over rising inflation after the Autumn Statement in October led to reduced expectations for Bank Rate to fall. Indeed, the CPI measure of inflation is expected to reach c3.75% by the autumn of 2025, which could provide for some presentational issues for a Bank whose primary mandate is to ensure inflation is close to 2% on a two-to-three-year timeframe. At the end of March, only two further rate cuts were priced into the market for 2025 (4% at December 2025). A week later and sentiment has changed dramatically in the wake of the equity market sell-off to the extent that markets now expect three Bank Rate reductions between May and December 2025 (Bank Rate to fall to 3.75%).

4.2 Borrowing strategy and control of interest rate risk

During 2024/25, the Council maintained an under-borrowed position. This meant that the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), was not funded with by external loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow was used as an interim measure. This strategy was prudent as although near-term investment rates were equal to, and sometimes higher than, long-term borrowing costs, the latter are expected to fall back through 2025 and 2026 in the light of economic growth concerns and the eventual dampening of inflation.

The policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances has served well over the past few years. However, this kept under review to avoid incurring higher borrowing costs in the future when the Council may not be able to avoid new borrowing to finance capital expenditure.

Against this backdrop and the risks within the economic forecast, caution was adopted with the treasury operations. The Director, Finance monitored interest rates in financial markets and adopted a pragmatic strategy.

Interest rate forecasts initially suggested gradual reductions in short, medium and longer-term fixed borrowing rates during 2024/25. Bank Rate did peak at 5.25% as anticipated, but the initial expectation of significant rate reductions did not transpire, primarily because inflation concerns remained elevated. Forecasts were too optimistic from a rate reduction perspective, but more recently the forecasts, updated from November 2024 onwards, look more realistic.

At the start of April 2025, following the introduction of President Trump's trade tariffs policies, the market now expects Bank Rate to fall to 3.75% by the end of December 2025, pulling down the 5- and 10-year parts of the curve too.

This should provide an opportunity for greater certainty to be added to the debt portfolio, although a significant fall in inflation will be required to underpin any material movement lower in the longer part of the curve.

5. Investment Outturn

Investment Policy – the Council’s investment policy is governed by MHCLG investment guidance, which has been implemented in the annual investment strategy approved by the Council on XXXX. This policy sets out the approach for choosing investment counterparties and is based on credit ratings provided by the three main credit rating agencies, supplemented by additional market data, (such as rating outlooks, credit default swaps, bank share prices etc.).

The investment activity during the year conformed to the approved strategy, and the Council had no liquidity difficulties.

Resources – the Council’s cash balances comprise revenue and capital resources and cash flow monies. The Council’s core cash resources comprised as follows:

Balance Sheet Resources (£000)	31st March 2024	31st March 2025
Balances		
Earmarked reserves	14,972	17,632
S106 / CIL	16,169	17,669
Capital Receipts	1,786	1,759
Council Tax / Business Rates	4,689	1,425
Provisions	1,066	1,227
Cash (Debtors / Creditors)	3,549	2,773
Internal Borrowing	(10,652)	(10,197)
Total	31,579	32,288

Investments held by the Council

- The Council maintained an average balance of £36.520 million of managed funds.
- The managed funds earned an average rate of return of 5.288%.
- The comparable performance indicator is the average SONIA rate, which was 4.9%.
- Total investment income (including from ECTC) was £2,190,932 compared to a budget of £1,301,335.
- There are two main reasons for this over achievement in interest receipts:
 - While interest rates reduced during the year, they reduced at a slower rate than the prudent estimate built into the budget, which has resulted in greater interest receipts and
 - As a result of underspends on both the revenue and capital budget, cash holdings have been higher than assumed in the budget.

6. The Economy and Interest Rates

UK Economy

UK inflation has proved somewhat stubborn throughout 2024/25. Having started the financial year at 2.3% y/y (April), the CPI measure of inflation briefly dipped to 1.7% y/y in September before picking up pace again in the latter months. The latest data shows CPI rising by 2.8% y/y (February), but there is a strong likelihood that figure will increase to at least 3.5% by the Autumn of 2025.

Against that backdrop, and the continued lack of progress in ending the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the potentially negative implications for global growth as a consequence of the implementation of US tariff policies by US President Trump in April 2025, Bank Rate reductions have been limited. Bank Rate currently stands at 4.5%, despite the Office for Budget Responsibility reducing its 2025 GDP forecast for the UK economy to only 1% (previously 2% in October).

Moreover, borrowing has becoming increasingly expensive in 2024/25. Gilt yields rose significantly in the wake of the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement, and the loosening of fiscal policy, and have remained elevated ever since, as dampened growth expectations and the minimal budget contingency (<£10bn) have stoked market fears that increased levels of borrowing will need to be funded during 2025.

The table below provides a snapshot of the conundrum facing central banks: inflation pressures remain, labour markets are still relatively tight by historical comparisons, and central banks are also having to react to a fundamental re-ordering of economic and defence policies by the US administration.

	UK	Eurozone	US
Bank Rate	4.50%	2.5%	4.25%-4.5%
GDP	0.1%q/q Q4 (1.1%y/y)	+0.1%q/q Q4 (0.7%y/y)	2.4% Q4 Annualised
Inflation	2.8%y/y (Feb)	2.3%y/y (Feb)	2.8%y/y (Feb)
Unemployment Rate	4.4% (Jan)	6.2% (Jan)	4.1% (Feb)

The Bank of England sprung no surprises in their March meeting, leaving Bank Rate unchanged at 4.5% by a vote of 8-1, but suggesting further reductions would be gradual. The Bank of England was always going to continue its cut-hold-cut-hold pattern by leaving interest rates at 4.50% but, in the opposite of what happened at the February meeting, the vote was more hawkish than expected. This suggested that as inflation rises later in the year, the Bank cuts rates even slower, but the initial impact of President Trump’s tariff policies in April 2025 on the financial markets underpin our view that the Bank will eventually reduce rates to 3.50%.

Having said that, the Bank still thinks inflation will rise from 2.8% in February to 3¼% in Q3. And while in February it said “inflation is expected to fall back thereafter to around the 2% target”, this time it just said it would “fall back thereafter”. That may be a sign that the Bank is getting a bit more worried about the “persistence in domestic wages and prices, including from second-round effects”. Accordingly, although we expect a series of rate cuts over the next year or so, that does not contradict the Bank taking “a gradual and careful” approach to cutting rates, but a tepid economy will probably reduce inflation further ahead and prompt the Bank to cut at regular intervals.

From a fiscal perspective, the increase in businesses’ national insurance and national minimum wage costs from April 2025 is likely to prove a headwind, although in the near-term the Government’s efforts to provide 300,000 new homes in each year of the current Parliament is likely to ensure building industry employees are well remunerated, as will the clamp-down on immigration and the generally high levels of

sickness amongst the British workforce. Currently wages continue to increase at a rate close to 6% y/y. The MPC would prefer a more sustainable level of c3.5%.

As for equity markets, the FTSE 100 has recently fallen back to 7,700 having hit an all-time intra-day high 8,908 as recently as 3rd March. The £ has also endured a topsy-turvy time, hitting a peak of \$1.34 before dropping to \$1.22 in January and then reaching \$1.27 in early April 2025.

USA Economy

Despite the markets willing the FOMC to repeat the rate cut medicine of 2024 (100 basis points in total), the Fed Chair, Jay Powell, has suggested that the Fed. Funds Rate will remain anchored at 4.25%-4.5% until inflation is under control, and/or the economy looks like it may head into recession as a consequence of President Trump's tariff policies.

Inflation is close to 3% and annualised growth for Q4 2024 was 2.4%. With unemployment just above 4%, and tax cuts in the pipeline, the FOMC is unlikely to be in a hurry to cut rates, at least for now.

EZ Economy

The Eurozone economy has struggled throughout 2024 and is flat lining at present, although there is the promise of substantial expenditure on German defence/infrastructure over the coming years, which would see a fiscal loosening. France has struggled against a difficult political backdrop, but with a large budget deficit it is difficult to see any turn-around in economic hopes in the near-term.

With GDP currently below 1% in the Euro-zone, the ECB is likely to continue to cut rates, although the headline inflation rate is still above 2% (2.3% February 2025). Currently at 2.5%, a further reduction in the Deposit Rate to at least 2% is highly likely.

TITLE: Appointment of Section 151 Officer

Committee: Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: Chief Executive and HR Manager

Report number: AA50

Contact officer: Nicole Pema, HR Manager

nicole.pema@eastcambs.gov.uk 01353 616325, Room 118, The Grange, Ely

1.0 Issue

1.1. Appointment of the Council's Section 151 Officer.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are requested to

- (i) endorse the appointment of Mr Jude Antony as the Council's Section 151 Officer.

3.0 Background/Options

3.1. In accordance with the Council's Constitution (part 4, section 7), appointment of Statutory Chief Officers is the responsibility of the Council, following a recommendation from the Chief Executive.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusion(s)

4.1 Interviews for the post of Director of Finance and Section 151 officer were conducted on 19 August 2025. The interview panel, chaired by the Chief Executive recommends the appointment of Mr Jude Antony for the post.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

5.1 In the table below, please put Yes or No in each box:

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
No	No	No
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
No	No	No

6.0 Appendices

None

7.0 Background documents

Constitution (part 4, section 7)

8.0 Appendices

None

Background Documents

None

TITLE: Establishment of a Chief Executive Appointments Panel

Committee: Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: HR Manager

Report number: AA51

Contact officer: Nicole Pema, HR Manager

nicole.pema@eastcambs.gov.uk 01353 616325, Room 118, The Grange, Ely

1.0 Issue

- 1.1. Arrangements for the appointment of the Chief Executive.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1. Members are requested to:

- (i) establish an Appointments Panel to make a recommendation to Council on the appointment of the Chief Executive;
- (ii) appoint the Leader of Council, Chair of Council and Leader of Liberal Democrats and Independent Group to the above panel; and
- (iii) advertise the post on an internal only basis in the first instance.

3.0 Background/Options

- 3.1. The Chief Executive, who is also the Council's Head of Paid Service and Returning Officer, has rendered his resignation and given the requisite notice. His last day of employment will be 31 December 2025.
- 3.2. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989, requires that the Council designate one of its officers as the Head of Paid Service (usually the Chief Executive). The decision to appoint to this statutory role is by law, a decision for Council.
- 3.3. The Constitution (part 4, section 7) confirms the requirement for Council to establish an Appointments Panel to make a recommendation as to the person to be appointed following the interview process. The Constitution does not prescribe the composition of the Appointments Panel, so this is a decision for Council. This report recommends that the Leader of Council, Leader of Liberal Democrats and Independent Group and Chair of Council are appointed.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusion(s)

- 4.1 It is recommended to advertise the post on an internal basis only in the first instance. If a suitable internal candidate is successful, this will provide continuity without recourse to an interim and would allow a handover period with the existing postholder.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

5.1 In the table below, please put Yes or No in each box:

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
Yes	Yes	Yes
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
No	No	No

5.2 Financial Implications

The salary and oncosts of the Chief Executive are within existing revenue budgets, any interim arrangements may have an impact on the MTFs.

5.3 Legal Implications

The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 section 4 requires that the Council designate one of its officers as the Head of Paid Service (usually the Chief Executive). The decision to appoint to this statutory role is by law, a decision for Council. In addition, section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Council to appoint an officer of the Council to be the Returning Officer.

5.4 HR Implications

The Constitution (part 4, section 7) confirms the requirement for Council to establish an Appointments Panel to make a recommendation as to the person to be appointed following the interview process.

6.0 Appendices

None

7.0 Background documents

Constitution (part 4, section 7)

8.0 Appendices

None

Background Documents

None

TITLE: Corporate Plan

Committee: Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: Chief Executive

Report number: AA52

Contact officer: John Hill, Chief Executive

John.hill@eastcambs.gov.uk 01353 616274, Room 103 The Grange, Ely

1.0 Issue

- 1.1. The updated Action Plan for 2025-26 to support the implementation of the 2023-27 Corporate Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1. Members are requested to:

- (i) Approve the updated Action Plan for 2025-26 at Appendix 1.
- (ii) Note the completed actions and progress made during the past 12 months.

3.0 Background/Options

- 3.1. The Corporate Plan 2023-27 was agreed by Council on 13 July 2023 (ref Agenda item 9) together with an action plan for 2023-24. The Action Plan to support the implementation of the Corporate Plan is updated annually.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusions

- 4.1. The proposed Action Plan for 2025-26 is attached as Appendix 1. Paragraph 4.2 outlines the achievements of the Council in meeting the 2024-25 commitments agreed by Council in July 2024.
- 4.2. Significant progress has been made in 2024-25, specifically:
- A Council Tax freeze for a 12th consecutive year.
 - Construction of the Bereavement Centre has commenced.
 - Since the inception of the Planning Review and implementation of the findings the service has seen significant improvements in overall service delivery due to changes across our processes and policies, staffing, use of digital tools and adoption of a continuous improvement methodology. Headline figures include a 51% reduction in the use of Extension of Times and a 38% decrease in the number of applications held in the back log. There has also been an increase in income derived from planning performance agreements which will be reflected in the end of year 25/26 accounts (Circa £60,000 first 5 months) and an increase in income derived from pre apps from £29,726 in year end 2022/23 to £107,580 in year end 2024/2025.

- Solar panels have been installed on The Hive leisure centre. These are forecast to save at least c£18,500 in electricity running costs and generate 91MWh of electricity per annum, resulting in a c19tonnes CO₂e annual saving.
- Our refuse collection vehicles moved away from diesel to HVO fuel which should deliver up to 80% saving in emissions.
- Support has been given to Haddenham CLT regarding a potential extension to the CLT development at Ovins Rise.
- The Digital Inclusion project provided training to 35 participants and enabled 32 of those participants to obtain an accredited qualification.
- A new overarching Housing Strategy for the district has been approved
- A report setting out the strategic case for a network of agricultural reservoirs to improve water resilience has been produced.
- Parish councils have received an Inclusive Play Audit on play areas in their parish.

4.3 A number of actions will need to be carried over, specifically, development of an Inclusive Play Audit, city/town centre improvements, strategic transport priorities, Road Safety Volunteer Scheme and the strategic review of long-term waste infrastructure needs.

- Inclusive Play Audit - During 2024/25 the Council commissioned an Inclusive Play Audit. The audit first focused on areas owned or managed by the Parish/Town Council. The audit of District Council owned sites is underway and will conclude during 2025/26. The audit will inform the development of the Inclusive Play Strategy. Members will continue to receive updates on progress through the Assets Update report at the Finance & Assets Committee.
- Road Safety Volunteer Scheme – Officers are working with Cambridgeshire Constabulary to fund a PCSO on a part time basis to deliver parking enforcement across the district.
- Strategic review of long-term waste infrastructure needs - Existing work to review the Cambridgeshire County Council long term disposal contracts and Local Government Re-organisation will impact on the longer term needs of the region. Therefore, only background data and details being gathered to support a future proposal. When local government structures and the outcome of the County review are known, detailed work can begin.

4.4 The key issues affecting the delivery of the Action Plan and wider Corporate Plan will be the uncertainty around future funding and the English Devolution White Paper and local government reorganisation. The Council will continue to face

considerable challenges, most notably the cost of living and recruitment and retention of staff in key sectors.

4.5 The corporate actions for 2025 – 2026 are detailed in Appendix 1.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

5.1 In the table below, please put Yes or No in each box:

Financial Implications No	Legal Implications No	Human Resources (HR) Implications No
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) No	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) No	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) No

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Updated Action Plan 2025-26.

7.0 Background documents

[Council 13 July 2023 - Agenda Item 9](#)



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Corporate actions

2025 to 2026

Sound financial management

Priorities	Actions
<p>Ensure the Council is financially sustainable.</p> <p>Minimise the financial (cost) impact of the Council on its residents.</p> <p>Be more commercial, but within reason - 'commercial for community'.</p>	<p>Council to approve the 2026/27 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan in February 2026 only increasing Council Tax as a last resort.</p> <p>Work with other Councils in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region to ensure the transition to any new local government structures delivers the most financially sustainable outcomes for East Cambridgeshires residents possible.</p> <p>Engage proactively with the Fair Funding Review process, assessing potential impacts on the Council's income and planning accordingly to safeguard services and investment in the district</p>

Cleaner, greener East Cambridgeshire

Priorities	Actions
<p>Improve the public realm.</p> <p>Reduce environmental crime across the district.</p> <p>Enhance the natural environment and build on our sustainability goals.</p> <p>Design a resilient waste and street cleansing service fit for the future.</p>	<p>Deliver the Climate and Nature Top 20 actions for 2025/26 including a focus on nature improvements, reducing our carbon emissions, and adapting to a changing climate.</p> <p>Implement a new waste and recycling collection service for residents from June 2026.</p> <p>Support the development of a network of Agricultural Reservoirs across East Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>Produce a plan setting out how we will become a net zero council by 2036.</p> <p>Improve the look and feel of the city and town centres, including replacement street furniture.</p> <p>Secure funding for PV panels at the Bereavement Centre.</p>

Sustainable communities

Priorities	Actions
<p>Support our residents to live happy and healthy lives.</p> <p>Support our businesses to thrive in East Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>Improve our roads and local transport.</p> <p>Deliver genuinely affordable housing that enables people to live and work locally.</p> <p>Invest in community infrastructure.</p>	<p>Allocate the £100k Homes at Kennett.</p> <p>Support local businesses via our UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Business Grant Funds.</p> <p>Further develop the Council's Sustrans feasibility schemes for the Ely to Soham and Burwell to Fordham routes.</p> <p>Continue to work with partners to deliver the actions in the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</p> <p>Work with CPCA and partners to deliver improvements to active travel, road and rail infrastructure, including bus franchising, the BP Witchford Road Non-Motorised User (NMU) crossing, A10 Ely to A14 improvements scheme, support local rail improvements including Soham Railway Station phase 2.</p> <p>Continue to support existing Community Land Trusts (CLTs) across the district and work with communities to establish and develop new CLTs.</p> <p>Open the Bereavement Centre.</p> <p>Develop an Inclusive Play Strategy.</p> <p>Provide match funding to parishes producing Neighbourhood Plans of up to £5,000 per parish.</p> <p>East Cambs Trading Company will complete the development at Arbour Square, Ely, which will deliver 27 homes (100%) affordable housing as social rent properties.</p>

TITLE: Local Government Reorganisation - Public and Stakeholder Survey

Committee: Full Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: Director Operations

Report number: AA53

Contact officer: Isabel Edgar, Director Operations, Isabel.edgar@eastcambs.gov.uk

1.0 Issue

- 1.1. To provide the results of the Public and Stakeholder Survey undertaken as part of the Local Government Reorganisation business case development.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested

- 2.1. To note the survey and focus group findings is appendix 1, 2, 3

3.0 Background/Options

- 3.1. As part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) business case development, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Leaders working group commissioned an external consultant to undertake a public and stakeholder survey.
- 3.2. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued guidance on 5 February 2025. This sets out detailed criteria for the creation of new unitary authorities which the business case for any given proposal must address. The survey centred around themes relating to the criteria including connections people have to different areas; where they work, socialise or receive healthcare, for example. It also covered what priorities they thought new unitary councils should have and what is important to them when it comes to interacting with local government.
- 3.3. The Public survey achieved 3,174 responses during the four-week collection period (19 June - 20 July 2025), comprising 2,407 public responses and 767 council worker responses.
- 3.4. Other stakeholder groups such as parish councils and businesses completed a stakeholder survey that ran for the same period and received 231 responses.
- 3.5. Additionally, six online focus groups were held in each district and city council area, to further inform the findings from the survey.
- 3.6. Feedback from the survey will be used to help inform the business cases for each of the three preferred options and will look to address opportunities, challenges or concerns identified by respondents.

- 3.7. This exercise was designed as an engagement survey and not a formal consultation process, which will be the responsibility of the Government following the submission of the final business cases.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The detailed analysis of the surveys and focus groups can be found in Appendix 1 – Public Survey, Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Survey, Appendix 3 – Focus Group report.
- 4.2 Analysis is broken down into different demographic cohorts, as well as by Council area. East Cambridgeshire District Council consistently out performs all other council areas across a wide range of measures including trust, satisfaction, community and cultural alignment.
- 4.3 Notable findings include:
- a) East Cambridgeshire demonstrated the highest satisfaction at 63%, followed by Fenland at 53%, Huntingdonshire at 50%
 - b) Our residents expressed the highest sense of belonging to their local community at 76% (highest of all councils) and 53% felt that the Councils decisions reflected the cultural values of their community, compared with Cambridge at 38% and Peterborough at 32%.
 - c) Trust in council decision making varied significantly across the region, with East Cambs achieving a net positive score of +24, compared to Fenland +7, South Cambs +4, Huntingdonshire +3, Cambridge + 0 and Peterborough -32
 - d) East Cambs residents were more concerned about Local Government reorganisation than other areas (81%) - noting that the area may be overlooked in the reorganisation process, but most (78%) were supportive of change if it simplified council structures and improved services.
 - e) Residents across the region were sceptical that LGR would lead to financial savings, but most welcomed simplification of council structures.
 - f) Most residents felt that a new unitary council should serve a population of 500,000 or less. Within the focus groups, residents expressed understanding of the challenge that big local authorities may become too remote from local areas, but smaller authorities may struggle with officer capacity and ability to respond to issues.
 - g) Across the region the three main areas residents wanted new unitaries to focus on was; having local Councillors who understand the local area, increasing accountability and transparency, and reducing the complexity of council structures and processes.
 - h) East Cambridgeshire demonstrated the strongest agreement that a Councillor should know their local area with 70%.
 - i) While residents and stakeholders were not specifically asked about the different geographies for potential new unitaries, many residents expressed preferences or otherwise in the comments section of the survey. While the comments have been used to inform the conclusions of the surveys, further analysis of comments by area is currently being undertaken.

5.0 Implications

Financial Implications NO	Legal Implications NO	Human Resources (HR) Implications NO
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) NO	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) NO	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) NO

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Public Survey Report
Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Survey Report
Appendix 3 – Focus Group Report

7.0 Background documents

English Devolution White Paper December 2024
Local Government Reorganisation – Submission to Government – Extraordinary Council 20 February 2025

Executive Summary: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Government Reform Public Survey

Survey Overview

This public survey on local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough achieved 3,174 responses during the four-week collection period (19 June - 20 July 2025), comprising 2,407 public responses and 767 council worker responses.

Key Findings

Trust and Satisfaction with Current Services

Public trust in council decision-making represents a fundamental challenge, with residents showing a net negative score (-4) compared to council workers' positive assessment (+31). This 35-point gap constitutes the largest divergence between public and professional perspectives across all measures.

Current service satisfaction reveals similar patterns, with the public recording a modest positive net score (+10) compared to council workers' substantially more optimistic view (+44). East Cambridgeshire consistently outperforms other districts across multiple measures, whilst Peterborough, despite already operating as a unitary authority, records the lowest satisfaction levels at 30%.

Support for Change

Despite trust deficits, public support for structural change is overwhelmingly positive (net +77), conditional on service improvements. This strong endorsement crosses all demographic and geographic boundaries, with agreement ranging from 76% in Fenland to 88% in Cambridge and Peterborough. The conditional nature of this support emphasises that residents prioritise tangible service improvements over structural change for its own sake.

Reorganisation Concerns

Concern about areas being overlooked during reorganisation is substantial across both public (net +56) and council workers (net +53). This convergence masks significant geographical variation: rural districts including East Cambridgeshire and Fenland show 81% agreement with this concern, compared to 54% in Cambridge. This 27-point difference highlights fundamental anxieties about representation and resource allocation in any new structure.

Current Performance Assessments

Performance assessments reveal systematic patterns across service areas. Councils perform relatively well on digital service delivery (public net +44) and having councillors who know their area (public net +43). However, significant weaknesses emerge in accountability and

transparency (public net -45), service investment (public net -32), and reducing complexity (public net -46).

The assessment of single-point council contact reveals the current two-tier system's limitations, with negative perceptions across most districts except Peterborough, where 43% rate this positively compared to Cambridge's 9%. This demonstrates the practical advantages of unitary structures in simplifying citizen access to services.

Priorities for New Unitaries

Residents identify three top priorities for new unitary councils: **investing in council services**, **improving response capabilities**, and **ensuring councillors possess local area knowledge**. For future development, residents prioritise investment in health infrastructure, transport networks, and community facilities. The emphasis on maintaining local knowledge whilst improving service delivery presents a key challenge for larger unitary structures.

Unitary Size Preferences

Public preference centres on unitary authorities serving 400,000-500,000 residents, with 500,000 being the single most selected option. Council workers demonstrate stronger preference for the larger 500,000 population scale. Fenland shows 62% preference for authorities under 400,000, whilst South Cambridgeshire shows 48% support for authorities over 500,000. This 18-point difference reflects different perspectives on the balance between efficiency and local representation.

Community Belonging and Cultural Alignment

Community belonging shows generally positive sentiment (public net +43), though Peterborough records significantly weaker belonging at 47% compared to East Cambridgeshire's 76%. Perceptions of whether council decisions reflect cultural values are more mixed (public net +9), with council workers more optimistic (net +29). Younger residents consistently report weaker community connections across all districts.

Demographic Variations

Age-related patterns emerge consistently: younger residents (under 35) express lower satisfaction with services, weaker community belonging, and greater frustration with council complexity. Conversely, residents over 75 show higher trust in councils and stronger community connections. Gender differences appear primarily in reorganisation concerns, with women expressing greater anxiety about areas being overlooked.

Implications for Reorganisation

The findings reveal several critical considerations for developing unitary proposals:

1. **The trust deficit between public and council perspectives requires attention during transition planning.**

2. **Geographic variations in satisfaction, community connection, and size preferences necessitate careful consideration of boundaries** to ensure new authorities can maintain local identity whilst achieving efficiency gains.
3. **Movement patterns demonstrate that functional economic and service geographies already transcend current boundaries**, with some districts showing stronger connections to neighbouring areas than internal cohesion.
4. **The emphasis on maintaining councillor local knowledge whilst creating larger authorities** presents a key challenge requiring innovative approaches to democratic representation.
5. **Rural districts' heightened concerns about being overlooked** require specific safeguards and communication strategies to maintain confidence during transition.
6. **The conditional nature of public support** demands that proposals clearly demonstrate how reorganisation will deliver tangible service improvements rather than merely promising efficiency savings.
7. **Voice of the customer** many of the challenges arise from the fragmentary nature of government in the region and the lack of a robust consultative mechanism to tap into public attitudes which will become doubly important in the new unitary set up and the transition to get there

The research provides robust evidence that whilst residents are open to change, success will depend on addressing fundamental concerns about democratic representation, service quality, and local identity within new structures. The significant variations between districts in satisfaction, trust, and preferences indicate that a differentiated approach may be necessary, recognising that one size may not fit all communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Introduction and Methodology: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Government Reform Public Survey

Introduction

The Government has mandated that all county and district councils in England will be abolished in April 2028 and replaced with unitary authorities. This directive affects Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, where the current two-tier system of seven authorities comprising of:

- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cambridge City Council
- East Cambridgeshire District Council
- Fenland District Council
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Peterborough City Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Peterborough City Council already operates as a unitary authority, the only authority to do so, but will be included in the reorganisation process. These councils will be restructured into one or more unitary authorities serving the area's residents. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority will remain unchanged. Town and parish councils are not currently required to change under the Government directive.

The Government has established key criteria that proposals for new unitary structures must address. These criteria require that:

- proposals should achieve better outcomes and local service delivery for the whole area
- ensure unitary local government is the right size to achieve efficiencies and improve capacity
- prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services
- demonstrate how councils have worked together to meet local needs informed by local views, support devolution arrangements
- enable stronger community engagement with genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment.

Additionally, this report considers issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

This reorganisation represents a fundamental shift in local governance arrangements that have served the area for decades. The current system provides different services through different

tiers, with residents accessing county council services for education, social care, and highways, while district and city councils provide housing, planning, environmental services, along with waste and recycling. The proposed unitary structure will consolidate these functions under single authorities, potentially simplifying access to services while creating larger administrative units.

The Government has indicated that financial savings are expected through the process of reducing the number of councils, while also supporting improvements in service delivery through bringing services together. This creates a complex challenge of achieving efficiency gains while maintaining or improving service quality and democratic representation across diverse communities ranging from the urban centres of Cambridge and Peterborough to extensive rural areas.

The area's population is projected to grow to over one million residents within the next fifteen years, adding demographic pressure to the reorganisation challenge. The Government's guiding principle, not a target, is that unitary authorities should serve populations of approximately 500,000; and smaller where appropriate, which would indicate the creation of at least two unitary authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, though the final structure remains to be determined through evidence supporting proposals, and central government will make the final decision.

Methodology

The research employed an online survey methodology to gather public perspectives on local government reorganisation across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The survey was designed as an engagement exercise rather than a formal consultation, with the purpose of providing qualitative and quantitative data to inform the development of proposals for submission to Government by November 2025. The survey was also made available in paper versions to ensure that everyone could potentially take part and these were in libraries and various outlets across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

This public survey served as a companion piece to a parallel businesses and stakeholder survey that asked many of the same questions, enabling comparison between general public and stakeholder perspectives on reorganisation priorities and concerns. The dual survey approach recognised that members of the public who use local government services may have different insights and priorities compared to stakeholders who regularly engage with local government, while ensuring comprehensive coverage of community views across different levels of engagement with local government services. Council workers were also a key constituent group and their responses to the public survey have been extracted and presented separately in this report.

Survey Design and Implementation

The survey instrument was developed collaboratively by the seven affected councils working with Archangel to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Government's criteria for unitary authority proposals. The survey design prioritised brevity and accessibility, limiting the questionnaire to a smaller number of core questions to maximise response rates while gathering essential data on public priorities and preferences regarding local government reorganisation.

While designed as an engagement exercise rather than formal consultation, the approach went above and beyond standard engagement requirements by voluntarily aligning with the Gunning principles for fair consultation. This demonstrated a commitment to best practice standards, ensuring that the public were consulted at a time when proposals were still at a formative stage, sufficient information was provided to enable informed responses, and time was allowed for consideration and response.

No maps or visual representations of potential boundary options were included in the survey design, in accordance with the engagement rather than consultation approach adopted for this research. This neutral approach was particularly important for the public survey to ensure that residents could express their views without being influenced by specific boundary proposals that had not yet been finalised.

Public Engagement Strategy

The online survey was supported by comprehensive communications to residents across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough through established communication channels managed by the communications teams from the seven authorities. This multi-channel approach was designed to ensure broad public awareness and participation across the diverse communities within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This was further supported by digital marketing provided by CAN.

The communication strategy utilised existing council communication channels including websites, social media platforms, direct communication with residents but also offline channels such as newsletters, posters and flyers. Awareness was also raised through news articles, a video, and CAN boosted response through targeted programmatic online advertising reacting in real time to survey response levels. The heads of communications coordinated their efforts to ensure consistent messaging while leveraging the unique reach and audience characteristics of each authority's communication channels. This collaborative approach maximised the potential reach to residents across all areas while maintaining message consistency and professional standards.

The engagement strategy recognised the importance of reaching residents who might not typically participate in local government consultations but whose perspectives are essential for understanding community needs and priorities. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that communications reached residents across different demographic groups, geographical areas,

and levels of engagement with local government services. CAN's marketing strategy was designed to leverage these harder-to-reach groups.

Communications emphasised that the survey was open to all residents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, regardless of their current level of engagement with local government services. The messaging highlighted that local government reorganisation would affect all residents through changes to service delivery, democratic representation, and local identity, making broad public participation essential for informing the proposals process.

Data Collection Period and Procedures

The survey was conducted from 19th June 2025 to 20th July 2025, providing a concentrated four-week period for public participation while meeting the tight timescales required for proposals development. The online survey platform maintained a hard stop at midnight on the final day of the survey period, ensuring clear closure for the data collection period and enabling timely analysis for proposals development.

While the online survey closed at midnight on 20th July 2025, paper survey responses continued to be processed for the following week to ensure accessibility for residents who preferred paper survey participation methods or who had obtained paper copies during the survey period but required additional time to complete and return them. This approach balanced the need for timely data collection with accessibility considerations for residents who might face barriers to online participation.

The timing was coordinated with broader communications and engagement activities around local government reorganisation to maximise awareness and participation. The four-week period provided sufficient time for residents to become aware of the survey, consider the information provided, and formulate their responses, while meeting the constraints imposed by Government timescales for proposals submission.

The data collection procedures incorporated robust quality assurance measures to ensure data integrity and prevent duplicate responses. The online platform included validation checks and security measures to maintain the reliability of the data while protecting respondent privacy and confidentiality.

Response Profile and Participation

The survey achieved substantial participation from residents along with council workers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, representing diverse demographic groups, geographical areas, and levels of engagement with local government services. The response profile demonstrated broad public and council worker interest in local government reorganisation and willingness to participate in the engagement process. In just four weeks, there were 3,174 responses in total. This comprised of 2,407 responses from residents and 767 responses from council workers. These are healthy responses and mean that the public response, when weighted to the population, is in excess of 1000 which is the gold standard in market research. There is high engagement among council workers and so the survey results specifically include them in comparisons.

The public survey attracted participation from residents across all seven local authority areas, with representation from urban centres, market towns, and rural communities. This geographical distribution provided insights into how local government reorganisation might affect different types of communities and enabled analysis of potential variations in priorities and concerns across different areas. Further information on this can be found in the sample profile.

Demographic analysis of the response profile revealed participation across different age groups, gender categories, and other relevant characteristics, though as with all voluntary surveys, certain demographic groups were more likely to participate than others. This participation pattern necessitated the implementation of weighting procedures to ensure that the analysis appropriately reflected the demographic composition of the broader population.

The response profile included residents with varying levels of current engagement with local government services, from those who regularly interact with councils through to those who have minimal or no direct contact. This diversity of experience provided valuable insights into how reorganisation might affect different types of service users and enabled analysis of priorities across different levels of current engagement.

Analytical Approach and Statistical Framework

The analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine public responses across the range of survey questions. Quantitative analysis focused on response distributions and patterns across different demographic groups and geographical areas, while qualitative analysis examined open-ended responses and comments to identify key themes and concerns expressed by residents.

Particular attention was paid to identifying differences in perspectives between different demographic groups and geographical areas, recognising that residents in different circumstances may have different priorities and concerns regarding reorganisation. Statistical analysis was conducted where sample sizes permitted reliable comparison between groups, with appropriate confidence intervals calculated to support interpretation of findings.

The methodology incorporated weighting procedures to adjust for demographic differences between the survey sample and the broader population of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This weighting approach ensured that the analysis appropriately reflected the demographic composition of the area while acknowledging the voluntary nature of survey participation.

The analytical framework recognised both the strengths and limitations of the public survey approach. The substantial sample size provided statistically robust insights with calculable margins of error and confidence intervals. The broad geographical and demographic representation enabled analysis of variations in perspectives across different communities and population groups.

However, several limitations were acknowledged in the analytical approach. As a self-selecting sample, the survey may over-represent more engaged residents who actively choose to participate in local government processes, potentially under-representing less engaged residents.

Despite these limitations, the substantial sample size, systematic sampling approach, and broad representation across demographic groups and geographical areas provided confidence that the findings offered statistically valid and representative insights into public perspectives on local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Weighting Methodology

To ensure that the survey findings accurately reflected the demographic composition of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, weighting procedures were applied to adjust for differences between the survey sample and the broader population. The weighting approach addressed three key demographic dimensions: gender, age, and geographical location. Population benchmarks for weighting were derived from the most recent Office for National Statistics census data and mid-year population estimates for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, providing reliable demographic profiles against which the survey sample could be calibrated.

The weighting procedures were implemented using iterative proportional fitting techniques to simultaneously balance the sample across all three demographic dimensions. This approach ensured that the weighted sample matched the population benchmarks for gender, age, and location while maintaining the integrity of individual response patterns. While weighting procedures enhanced the representativeness of the survey findings, certain limitations were acknowledged, including that weighting can only adjust for measured demographic characteristics and cannot correct for other potential sources of bias such as differences in political engagement or attitudes toward local government.

In addition, weighting reduces the effective sample size as we take primary research sample to match the population. The public, after weighting, have an effective sample size of 1,411. This gives a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$ on the sample results at the 95% confidence level making the results highly accurate. This means that if a survey response is 50% the true population answer will lie between 47% and 53%.

For council workers, it is difficult to weight on demographic profile as this information is unknown so the only weighting adjustment was made for district location on the basis of population levels. This levelled out under and over representation of council workers by district. The effective sample size for council workers is 642. The consequent margin of error is $\pm 3.9\%$ on the sample results at the 95% confidence level.

In comparing differences between the general public and council workers on any issue, then it is necessary to calculate the difference between the two samples. On this measure, to be significant, the critical threshold is five per cent difference (4.7%).

Presentation of data

The following analysis presents findings from the survey data collected, with results presented both as individual response percentages and as net scores to provide a clear summary of overall opinion. The data has been weighted to ensure representativeness of the target population, and all percentages have been rounded to whole numbers for clarity of presentation.

Charts and tables throughout this section display the full distribution of responses to allow readers to understand the complete picture of opinion. Significant differences between demographic groups and other key variables are highlighted where they emerge from the data.

In survey, there were single code, single response questions and multicode, multiple response questions. For example, a multicode question would be a select up to three question and a single code question would be how much do you agree or disagree with something. Questions are classified as either single code (where respondents can select only one answer) or multicode (where respondents can select multiple answers). For multicode questions, percentages will not sum to 100% as respondents may give more than one response. Additionally, where figures do not sum to exactly 100%, this may be due to computer rounding of percentages, which can occasionally result in totals of 99% or 101%.

All charts show weighted data but bases are given unweighted.

Net Score Calculation

Net scores are calculated to provide a single summary measure of the balance of opinion on each topic. The net score represents the difference between positive and negative responses, excluding neutral or undecided responses from the calculation.

The net score formula used throughout this analysis is: $\text{Net Score} = (\text{Strongly Agree} + \text{Agree}) - (\text{Disagree} + \text{Strongly Disagree})$. For satisfaction measures, the calculation follows the same principle: $\text{Net Satisfaction} = (\text{Very Satisfied} + \text{Satisfied}) - (\text{Dissatisfied} + \text{Very Dissatisfied})$.

A positive net score indicates that positive responses outweigh negative responses, whilst a negative net score indicates the reverse. A net score of zero suggests opinion is evenly balanced between positive and negative views. Net scores can range from +100 (where all respondents give positive responses) to -100 (where all respondents give negative responses).

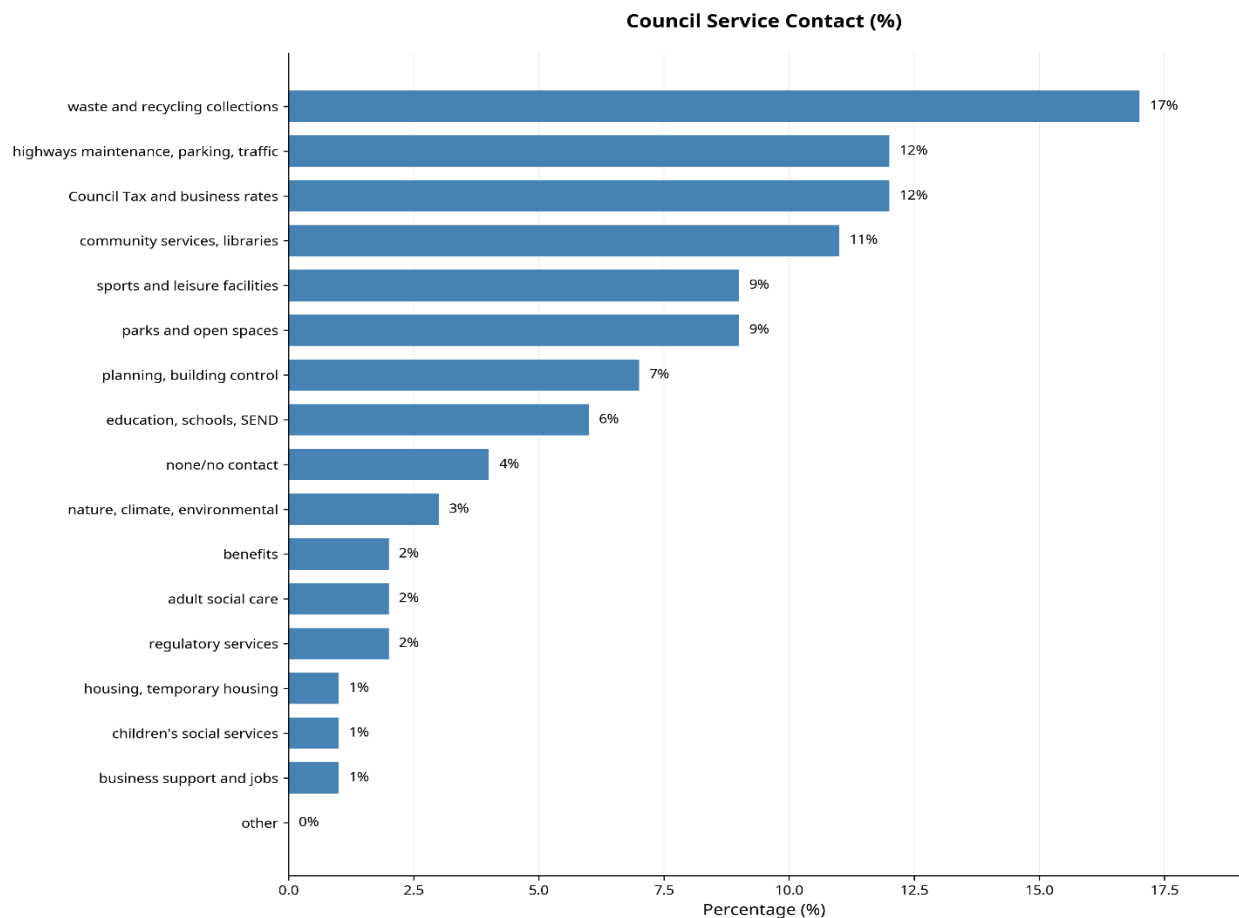
Net scores are particularly useful for comparing performance across different areas, identifying areas of strength and concern, tracking changes in opinion over time, and providing a clear summary statistic. They offer a single figure that encapsulates the overall direction and strength of opinion on any given measure. All net scores presented in the charts are clearly labelled and the underlying data showing the full response distribution is provided to ensure transparency in the calculation method.

Survey Findings

Council Service Contact

In terms of public responses, the survey reveals that waste and recycling collections represent the most frequently contacted council service, with 17% of all service interactions across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This reflects the universal nature of waste services and their visibility to residents, as every household engages with these services on a regular basis. The prominence of waste services in contact patterns demonstrates their fundamental role in daily life and the importance residents place on reliable collection schedules and recycling facilities.

Highways maintenance, parking, traffic management and street lighting account for 12% of contacts, indicating significant public engagement with transport infrastructure issues. This substantial level of interaction reflects the critical importance of road networks and traffic systems to residents' daily mobility and economic activity. The frequency of contact in this area suggests ongoing concerns about road conditions, parking availability, potholes and traffic flow management across the region.

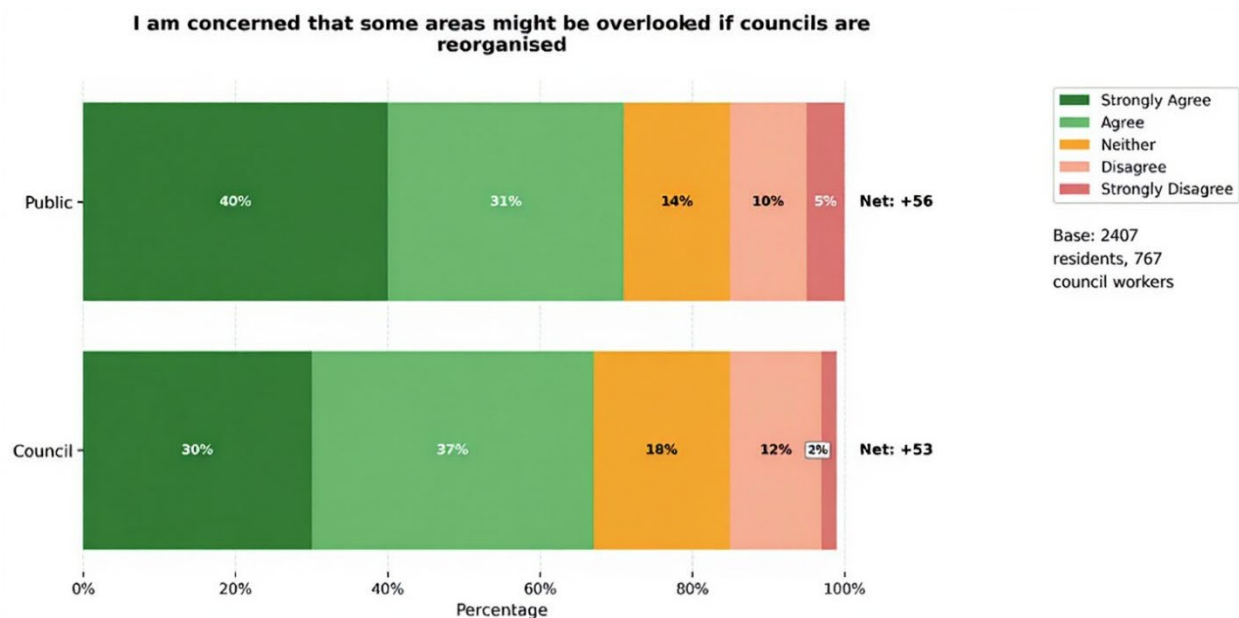


Council Tax and business rates generate 12% of service contacts, whilst community services such as libraries and community centres also account for 11%. These findings suggest that both administrative functions and community-facing services maintain substantial public interaction levels. The equal weighting between financial administration and community services indicates a balanced demand for both regulatory compliance support and access to cultural and social facilities.

Sports and leisure facilities attract 9% of contacts from the public. This uniformity suggests that recreational services maintain broad appeal regardless of employment sector, reflecting their role in community wellbeing and social cohesion. Parks and open spaces generate 9% of public contacts suggesting greater public utilisation of recreational spaces or potentially different awareness levels of available facilities.

Concern about reorganisation: I am concerned that some areas might be overlooked if councils are reorganised

The Professional Divide



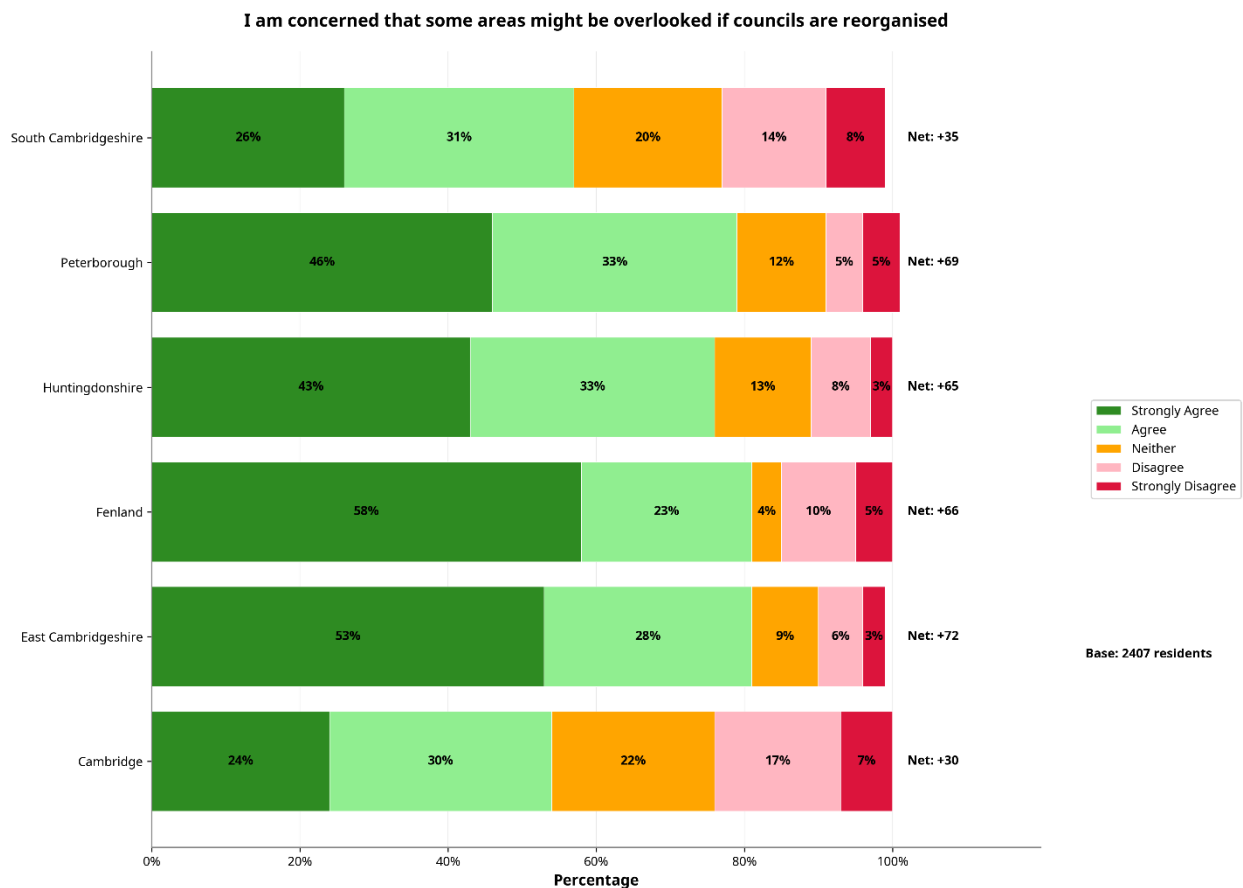
The analysis reveals remarkable convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +56 and council workers +53. Both the public and council workers' viewpoints are broadly aligned on their concern that some areas may get overlooked and there is substantial agreement with the statement.

Such convergence indicates that this concern about areas being overlooked indicates both groups sharing similar concerns and expectations about the proposed changes. This alignment provides a solid foundation for building consensus around reorganisation planning.

Geographical Perspectives

Concerns about areas being overlooked in council reorganisation show significant district-level variation. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland express the strongest concerns, with 81% agreement in both districts, compared to Huntingdonshire's 76%, Peterborough's 79%, South Cambridgeshire's 57%, and Cambridge's 54%. The 27-point gap between East Cambridgeshire/Fenland and Cambridge exceeds statistical significance thresholds.

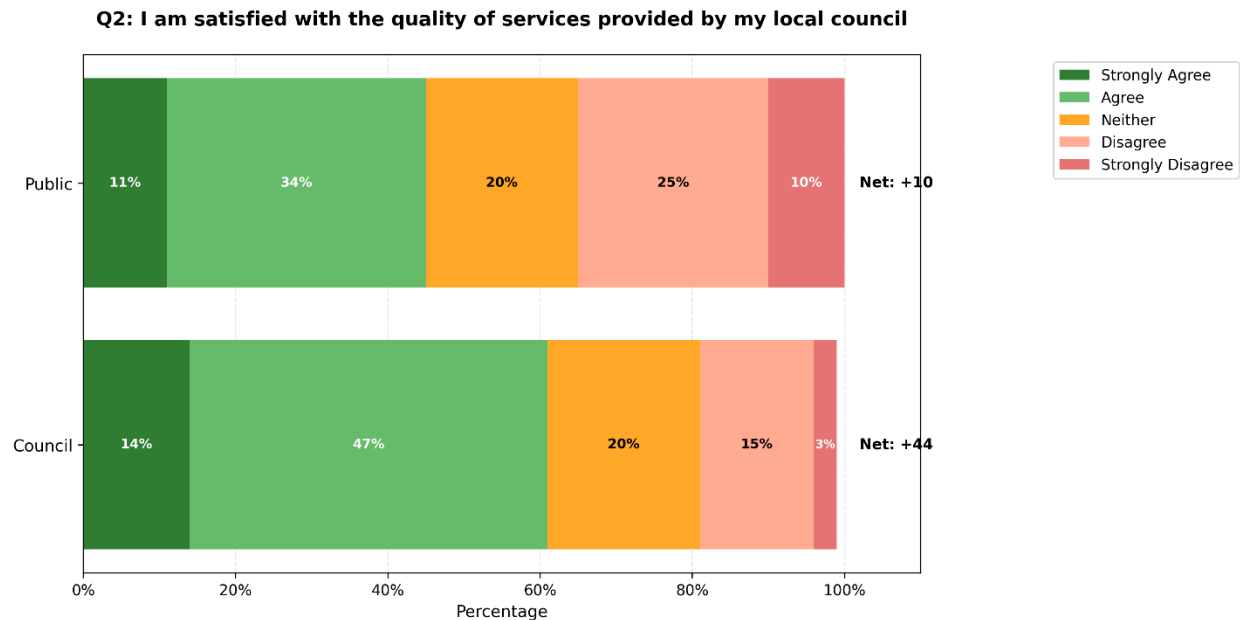
Disagreement remains minimal across all districts, ranging from 10% in Peterborough to 24% in Cambridge. The "neither" category varies from 4% in Fenland to 22% in Cambridge. These findings reveal anxiety in rural districts about potential marginalisation under reorganisation, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents expressing near-universal concern about being overlooked. The notably lower concern in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire suggests urban and peri-urban residents feel more confident about maintaining influence in any restructured arrangements.



Those aged 75+ tend to be more concerned about areas being overlooked (Net +57). Females tend to show more concern than males (Net +51).

Council satisfaction: I am satisfied with the quality of services provided by my local council

The Professional Divide

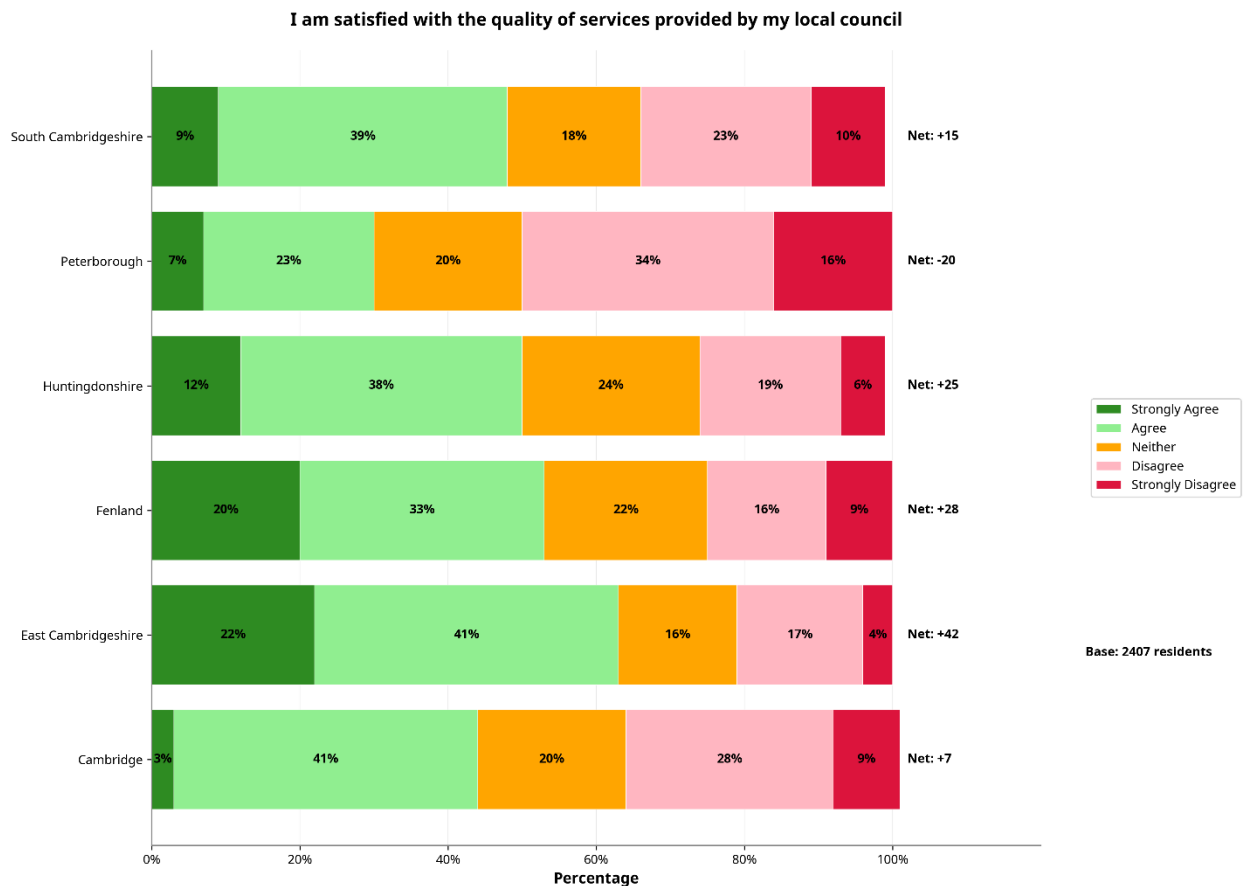


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +44) compared to public respondents (net score +10). This 34-point gap suggests that professional experience within local government shapes perspectives on reorganisation in meaningful ways.

Council workers' more optimistic outlook may reflect their direct experience with current governance structures and their professional understanding of potential improvements that reorganisation could bring. The public's more cautious stance reflects the natural uncertainty that accompanies significant institutional change, particularly when it affects services and representation that communities rely upon.

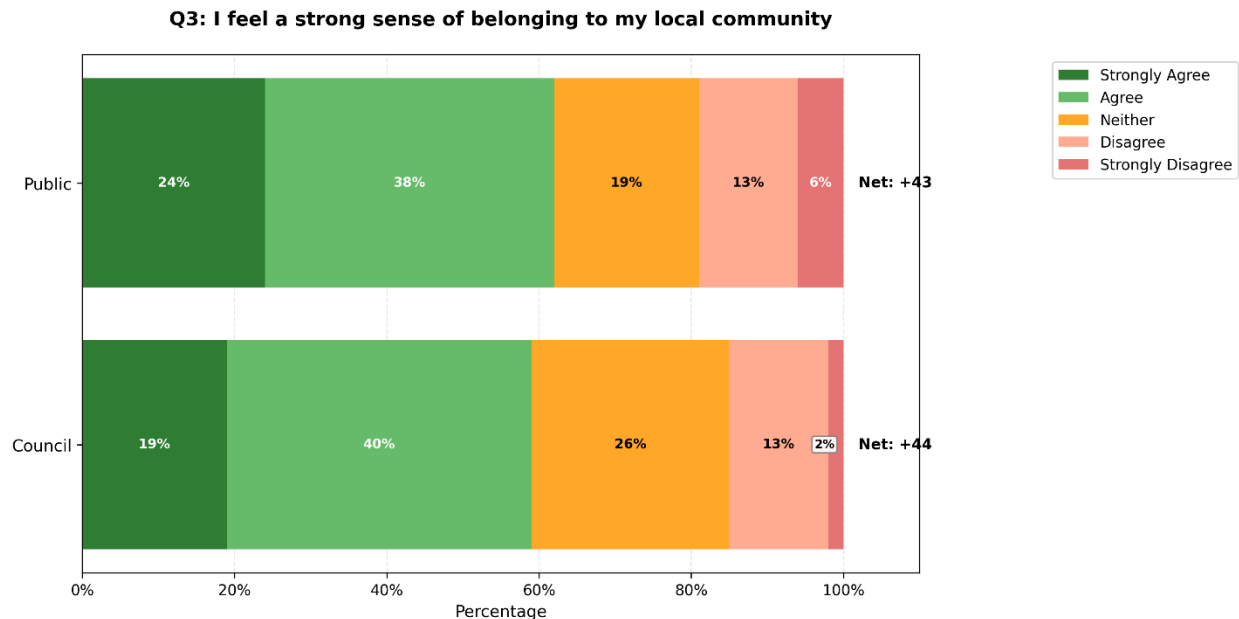
Geographical Perspectives

Satisfaction with local council service quality shows significant district-level variation. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 63%, followed by Fenland at 53%, Huntingdonshire at 50%, Cambridge at 45%, South Cambridgeshire at 48%, and Peterborough at 30%. The 33-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Dissatisfaction shows Peterborough at 50%, Cambridge at 37%, South Cambridgeshire at 33%, Fenland and Huntingdonshire at 25%, and East Cambridgeshire at 21%. The 29-point difference between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire in dissatisfaction is statistically significant. These findings reveal a clear performance divide, with East Cambridgeshire residents consistently reporting higher satisfaction across multiple measures,...



Community feeling: I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local community

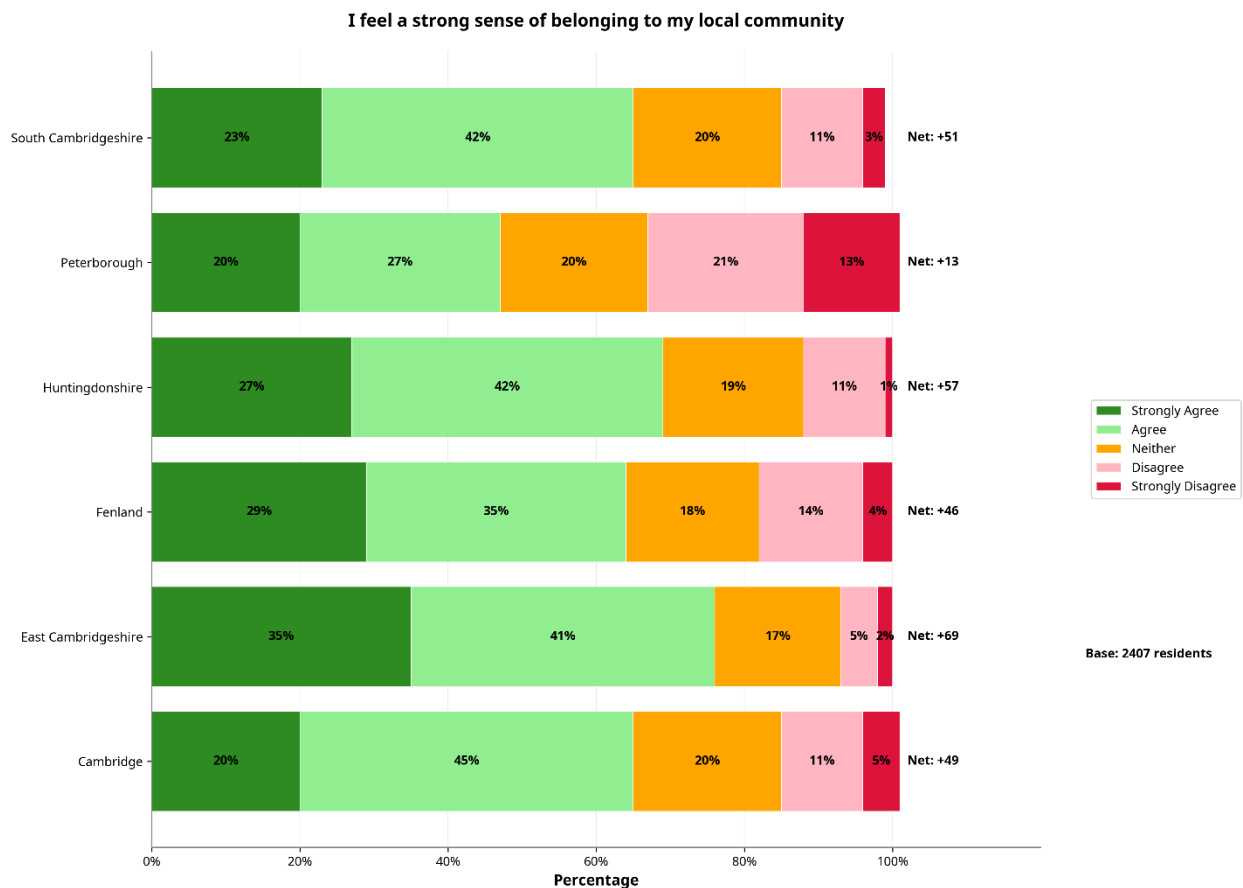
The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals remarkable convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +43 and council workers +44. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner viewpoints are broadly aligned on this aspect of local government reorganisation.

Geographical Perspectives

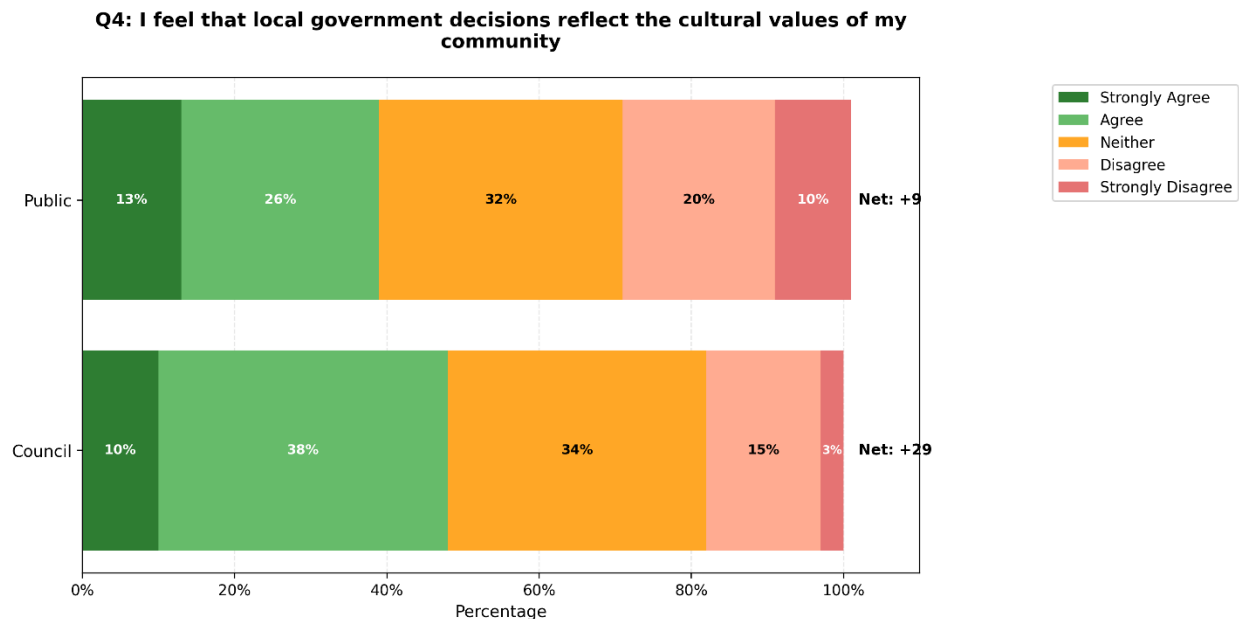
East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest belonging at 76%, followed by Huntingdonshire at 69%, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire at 65%, Fenland at 64%, and Peterborough at 47%. The 29-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Negative responses show Peterborough at 34%, Fenland at 18%, Cambridge at 16%, Huntingdonshire at 12%, South Cambridgeshire at 13%, and East Cambridgeshire at 10%. The 24-point difference between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire is statistically significant.



Younger people are less likely to agree with feeling a sense of belonging to the local community (net +25).

Government reflecting values: I feel that local government decisions reflect the cultural values of my community

The Professional Divide

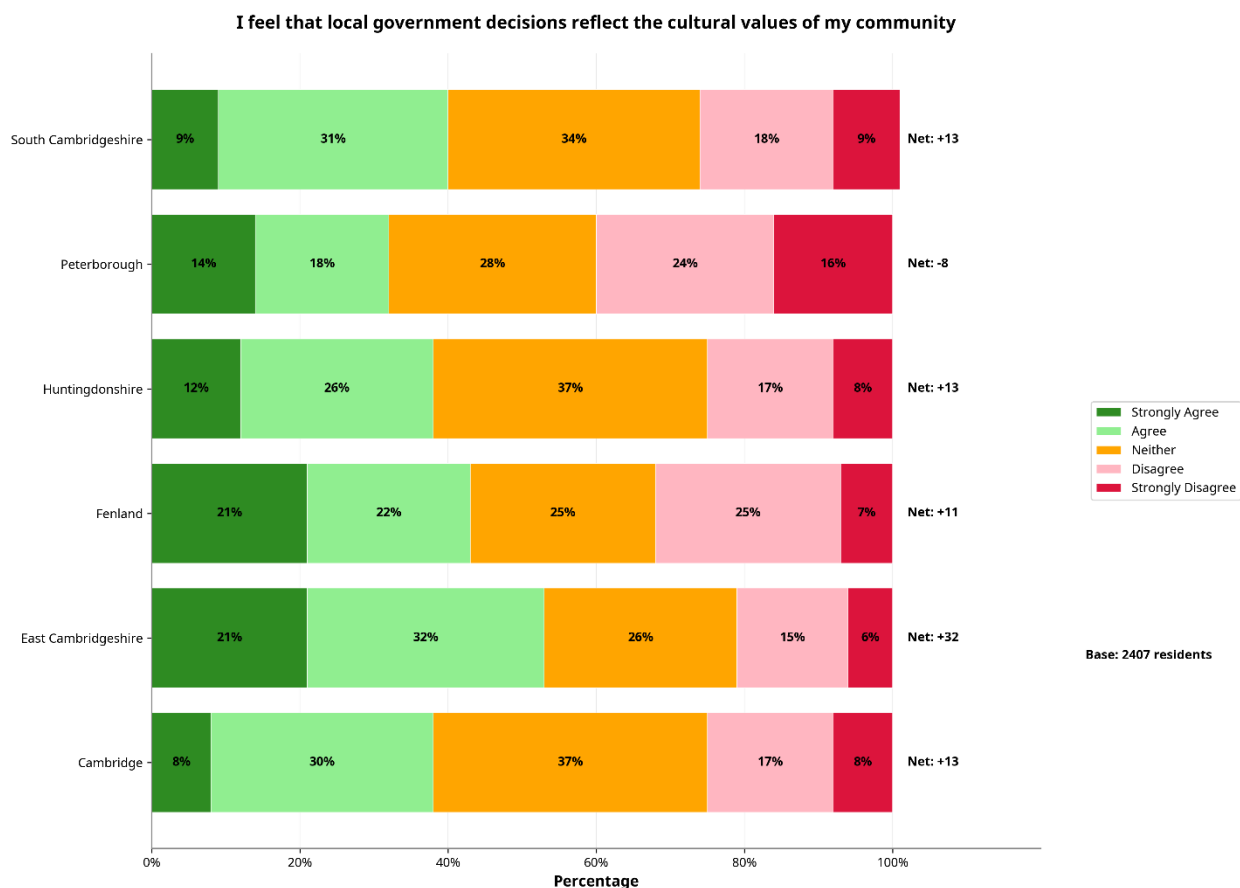


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +29) compared to public respondents (net score +9). This 20-point gap suggests that professional experience within local government shapes perspectives on reorganisation in meaningful ways.

Council workers' more optimistic outlook may reflect their direct experience with current governance structures and their professional understanding of potential improvements that reorganisation could bring. The public's more cautious stance reflects the natural uncertainty that accompanies significant institutional change, particularly when it affects services and representation that communities rely upon.

Geographical Perspectives

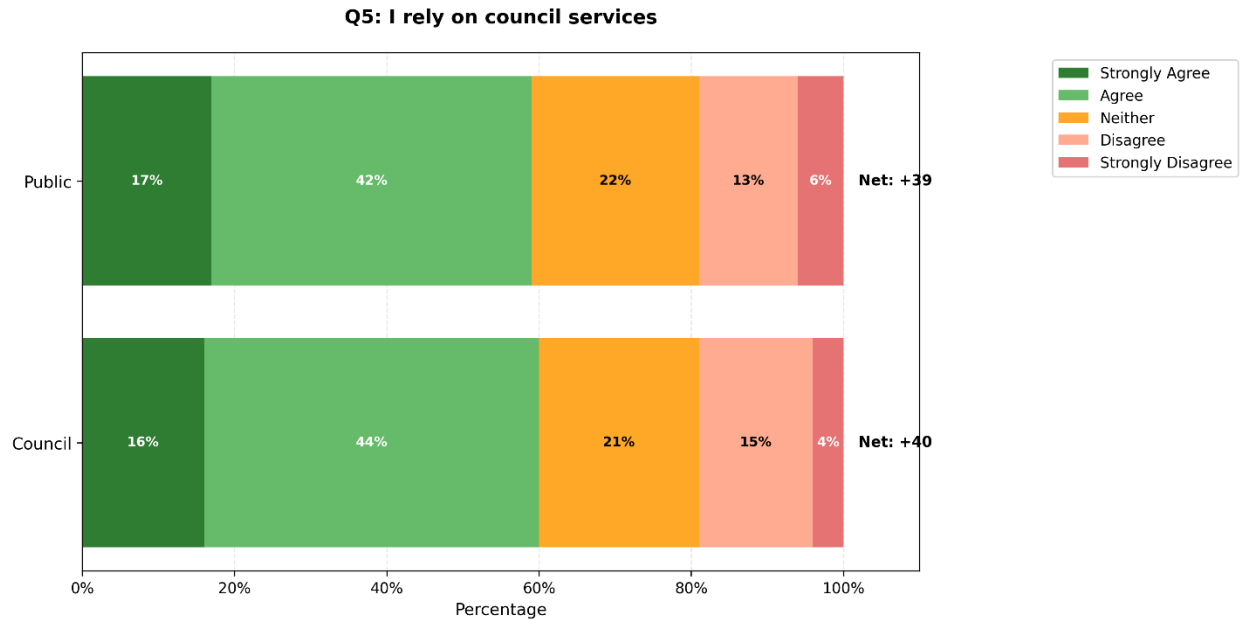
Perceptions of whether local government decisions reflect community cultural values show limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest agreement at 53%, followed by Fenland at 43%, South Cambridgeshire at 40%, Huntingdonshire and Cambridge at 38%, and Peterborough at 32%. The 21-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Disagreement ranges from 20% in East Cambridgeshire to 40% in Peterborough. The "neither" category shows considerable variation from 25% in Fenland to 37% in both Huntingdonshire and Cambridge. These patterns suggest moderate alignment between governance and cultural values across most districts, with no dramatic disparities.



Here, the under 35s and the 55-64s clearly feel a disconnect, though all the net figures are low (Net +4 and Net +4 respectively).

Council reliance: I rely on council services

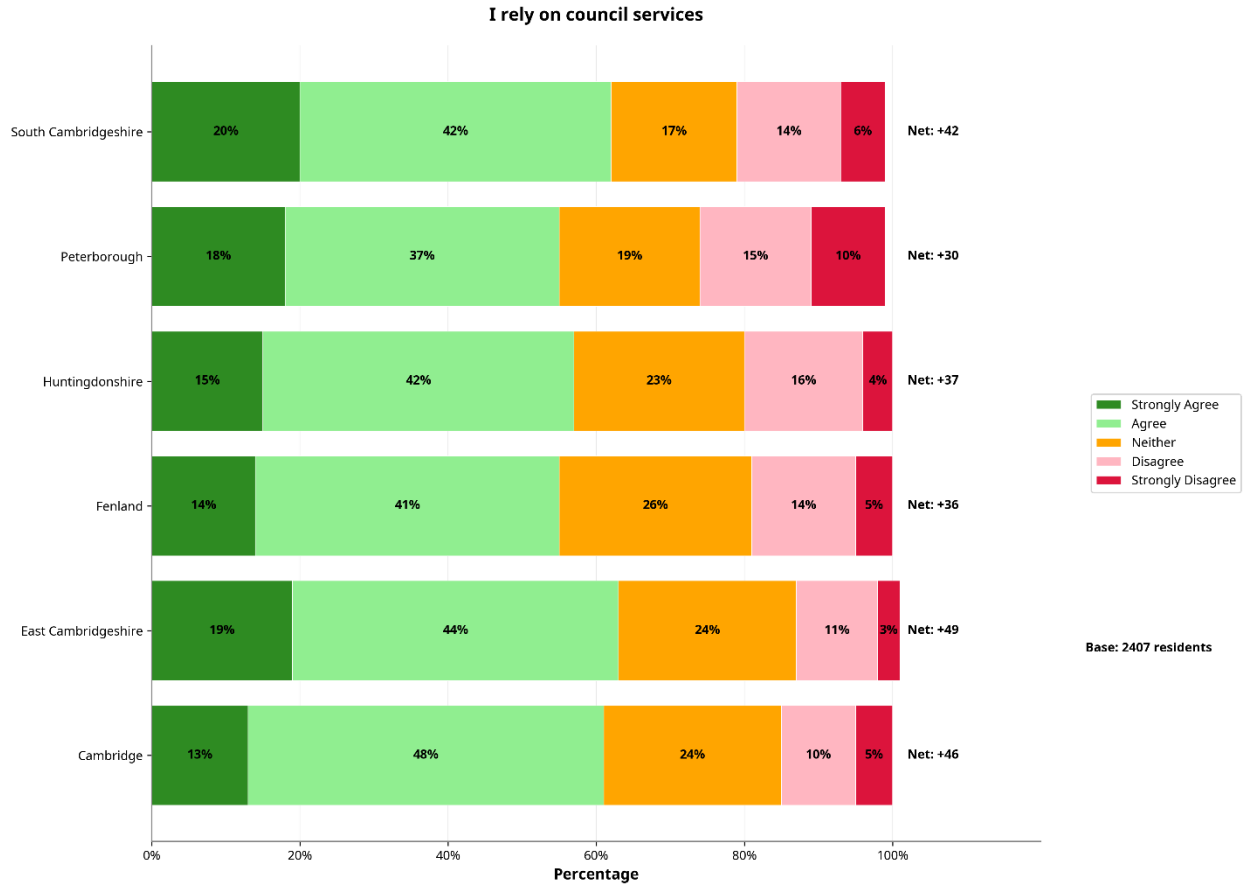
The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +39 and council workers +40.

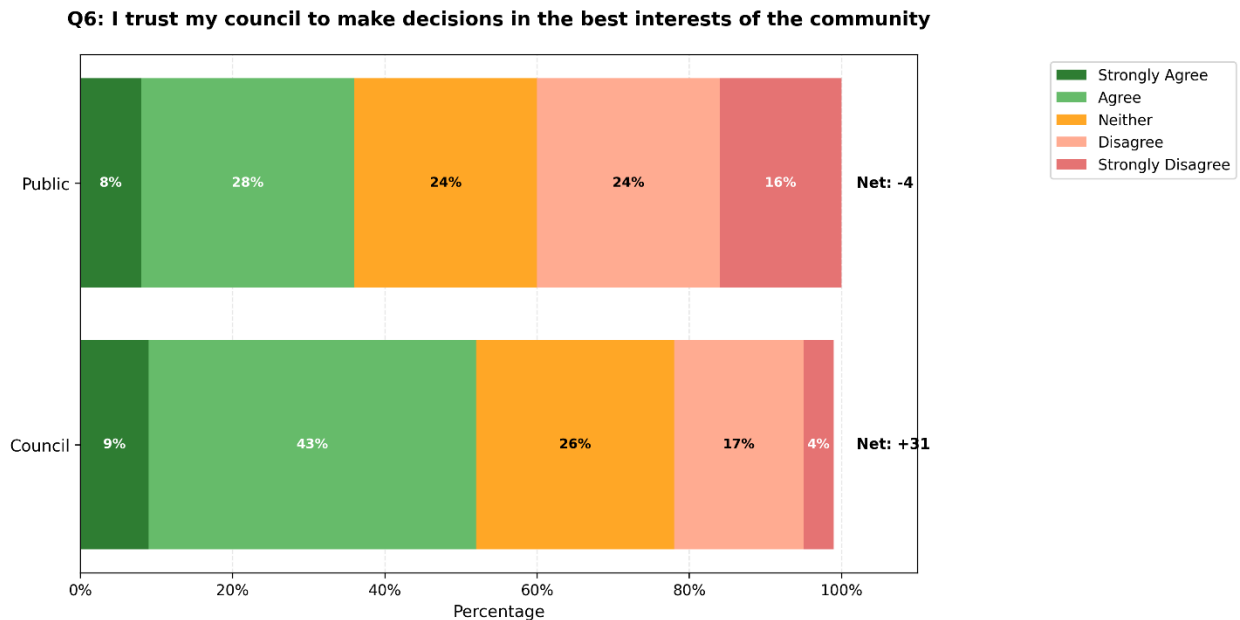
Geographical Perspectives

For the council services reliance question shown, there are no statistically significant differences between districts. All observed variations fall within the confidence intervals when properly accounting for sample sizes.



Trust in councils: I trust my council to make decisions in the best interests of the community

The Professional Divide

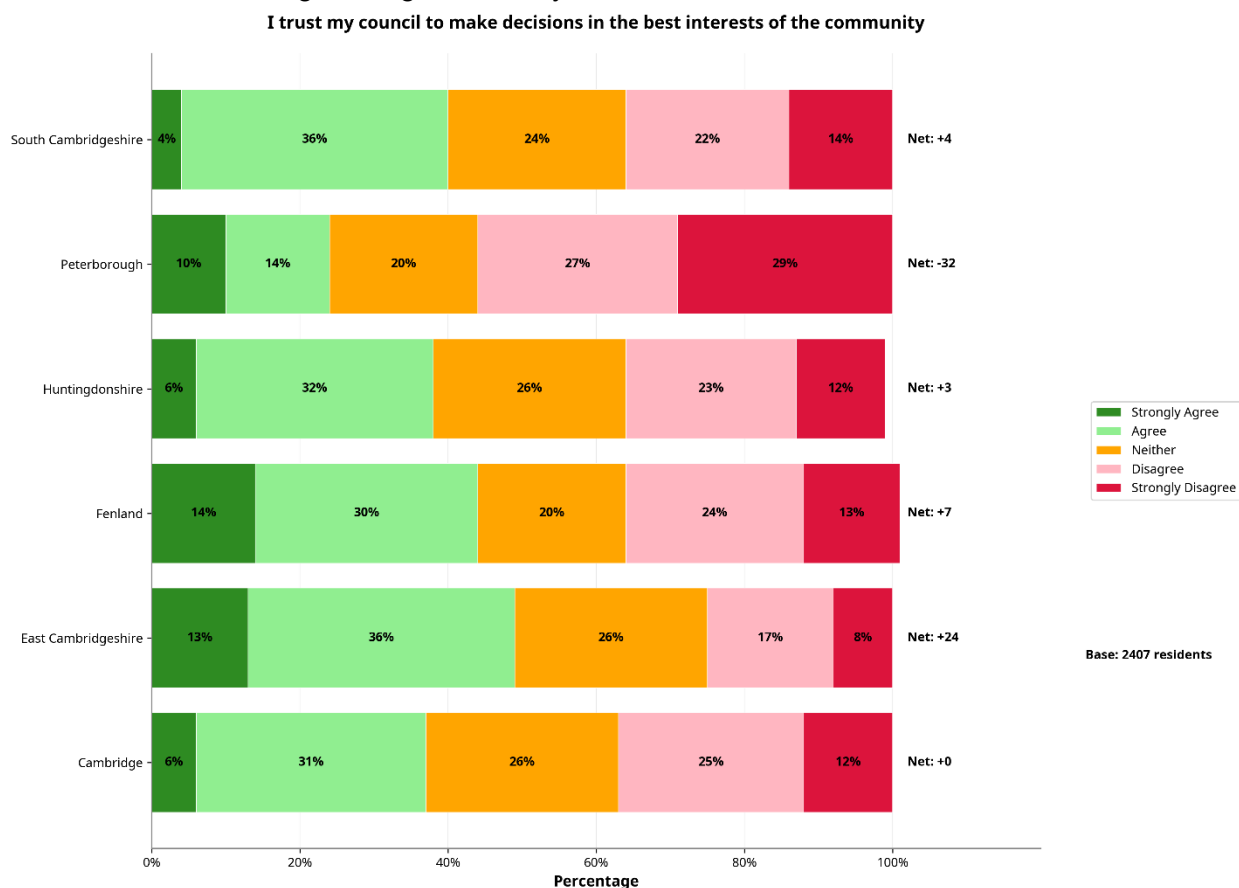


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +31) compared to public respondents (net score -4). This 35-point gap suggests that professional experience a real disjunct on the issue of trust.

It is notably that on the matter of trust, a key factor for councils, the public are net negative.

Geographical Perspectives

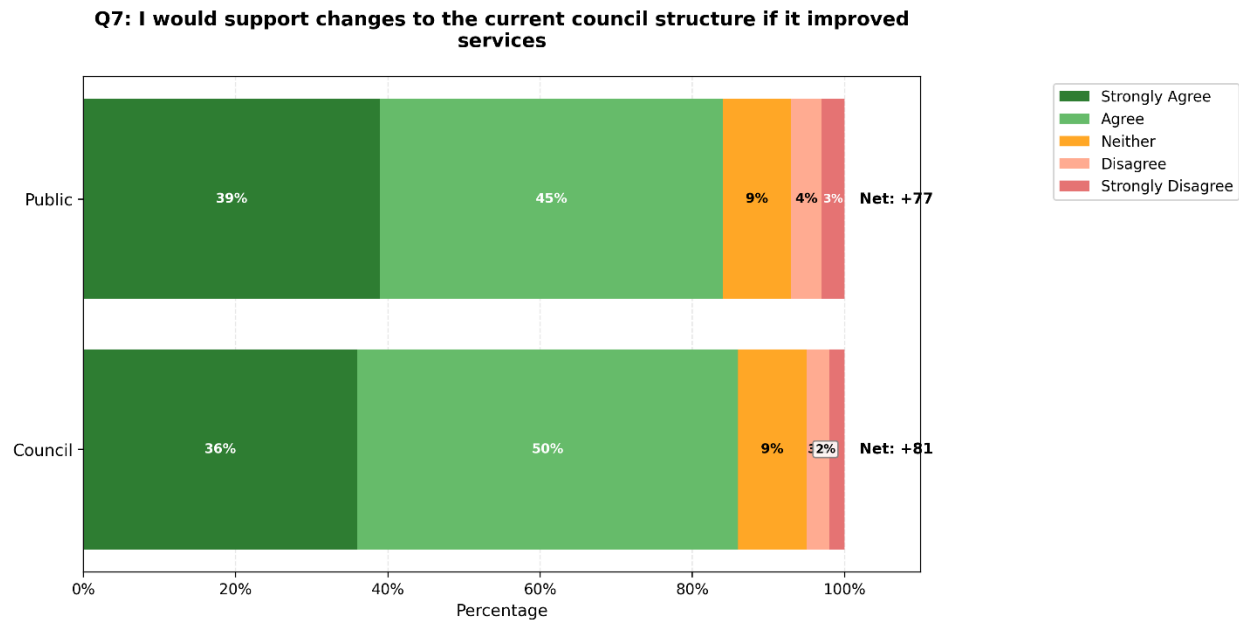
Trust in council decision-making varies significantly across the region. Peterborough shows 56% disagreement that their council acts in the community's best interests, compared to 37% in Cambridge and 35% in Huntingdonshire—differences of 19-21 percentage points that exceed statistical significance thresholds. At the other end, Fenland records 44% agreement versus Peterborough's 24%, a significant 20-point difference. The distinction appears most pronounced in the "strongly disagree" category, where Peterborough's 29% contrasts with South Cambridgeshire's 14%. These patterns indicate substantial geographic variation in council trust, with Peterborough residents expressing the lowest confidence levels whilst Fenland shows the highest agreement rates. Cambridge and Huntingdonshire occupy intermediate positions, though both still show more residents disagreeing than agreeing with the statement about council decision-making serving community interests.



Interestingly, it is 35-54s who are the most negative in terms of trust and the over 75s who are the most positive. Males show less trust in council decision making. The pattern for ethnicity is broadly similar.

Positive change: I would support changes to the current council structure if it improved services

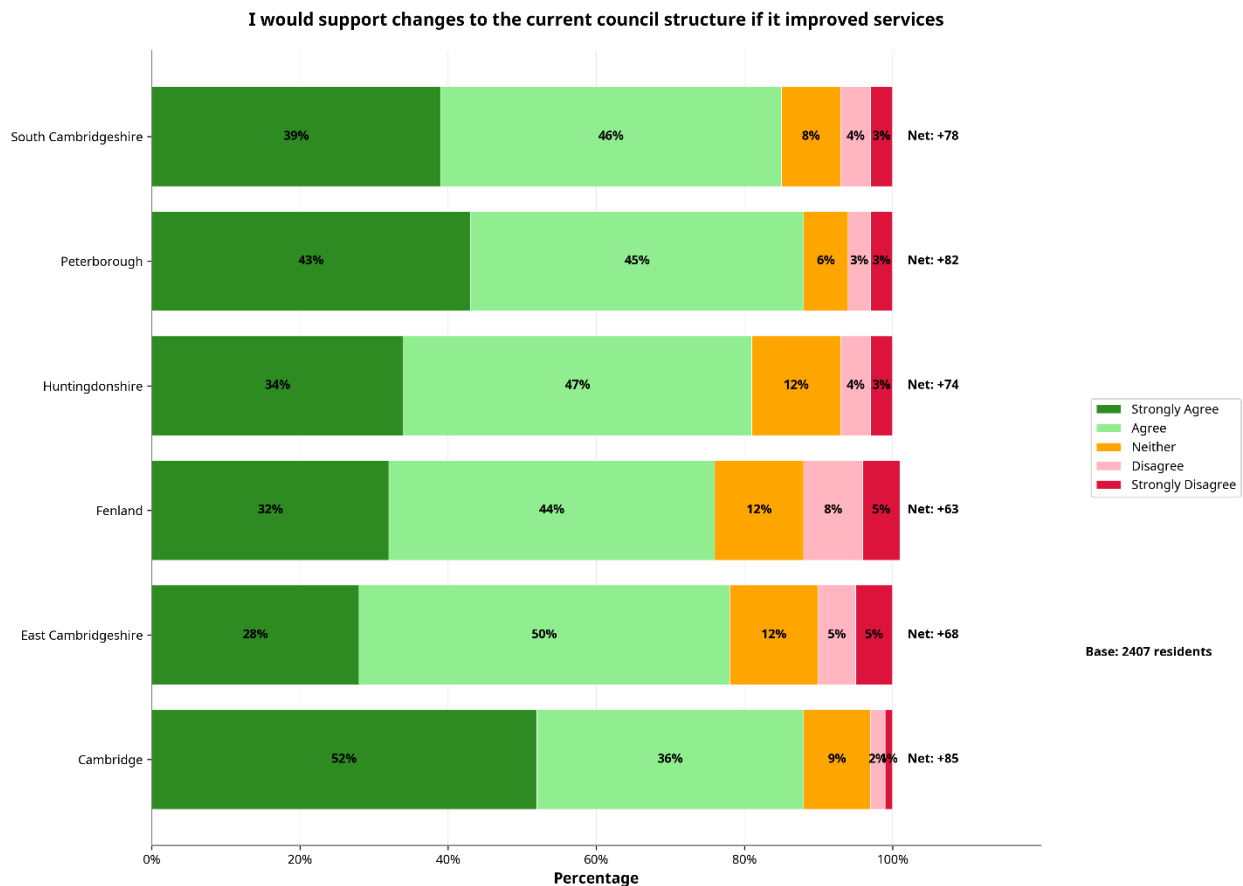
The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals both the public and council workers are responsive to change if it will improve services, with public respondents recording a net score of +77 and council workers +81. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner viewpoints are broadly aligned on wanting change conditional on improved services.

Geographical Perspectives

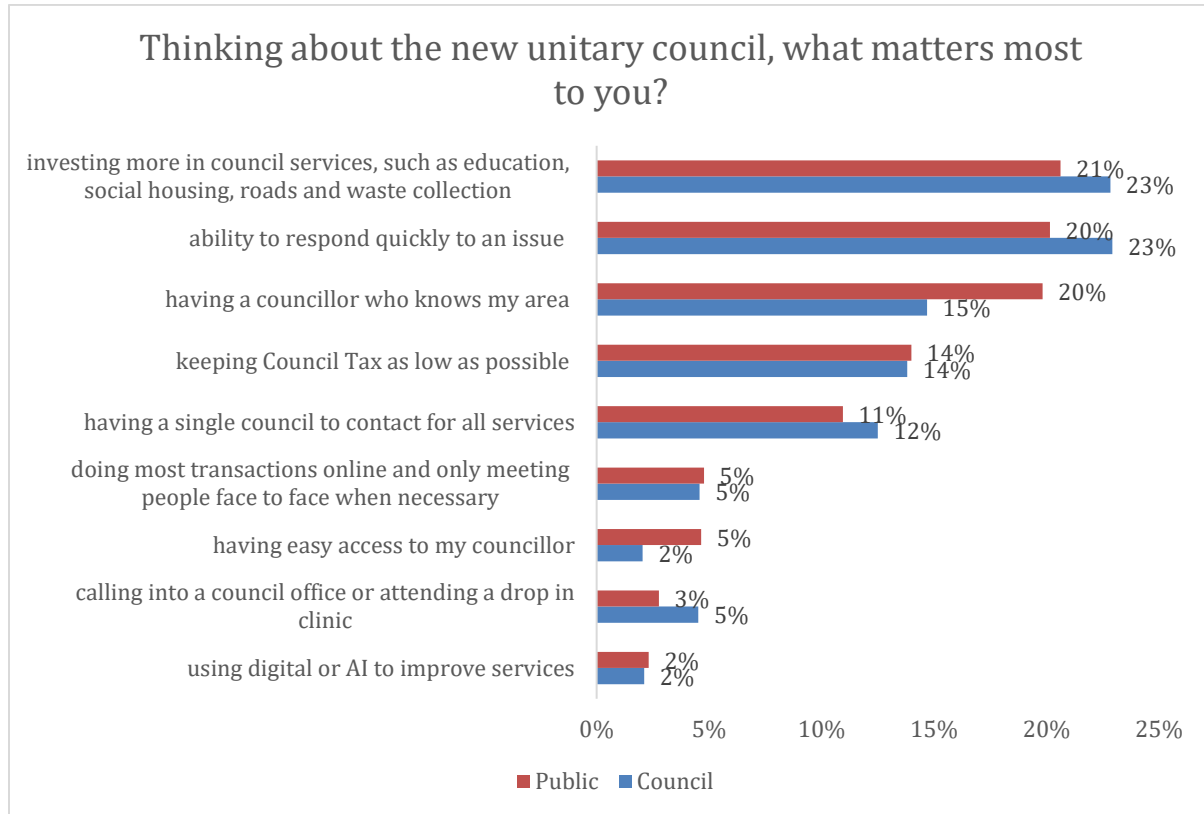
Support for council restructuring contingent on service improvement shows remarkable consensus across the region, with no statistically significant differences between districts. Combined agreement ranges from 76% in Fenland to 88% in Cambridge and Peterborough, whilst combined disagreement remains minimal at 3-7% across all areas. The "strongly agree" category varies from 28% in East Cambridgeshire to 52% in Cambridge, approaching but not exceeding significance thresholds given the sample sizes and confidence intervals. This uniformity suggests widespread openness to structural reform across all districts, provided it delivers tangible service improvements. The minimal disagreement and low neutral responses further emphasise this consensus, marking this as one of the few areas of genuine regional agreement in the survey.



The generational analysis shows broad positive agreement with 35-44s showing significantly less willingness to change. Ethnic minorities are more positive in terms of change.

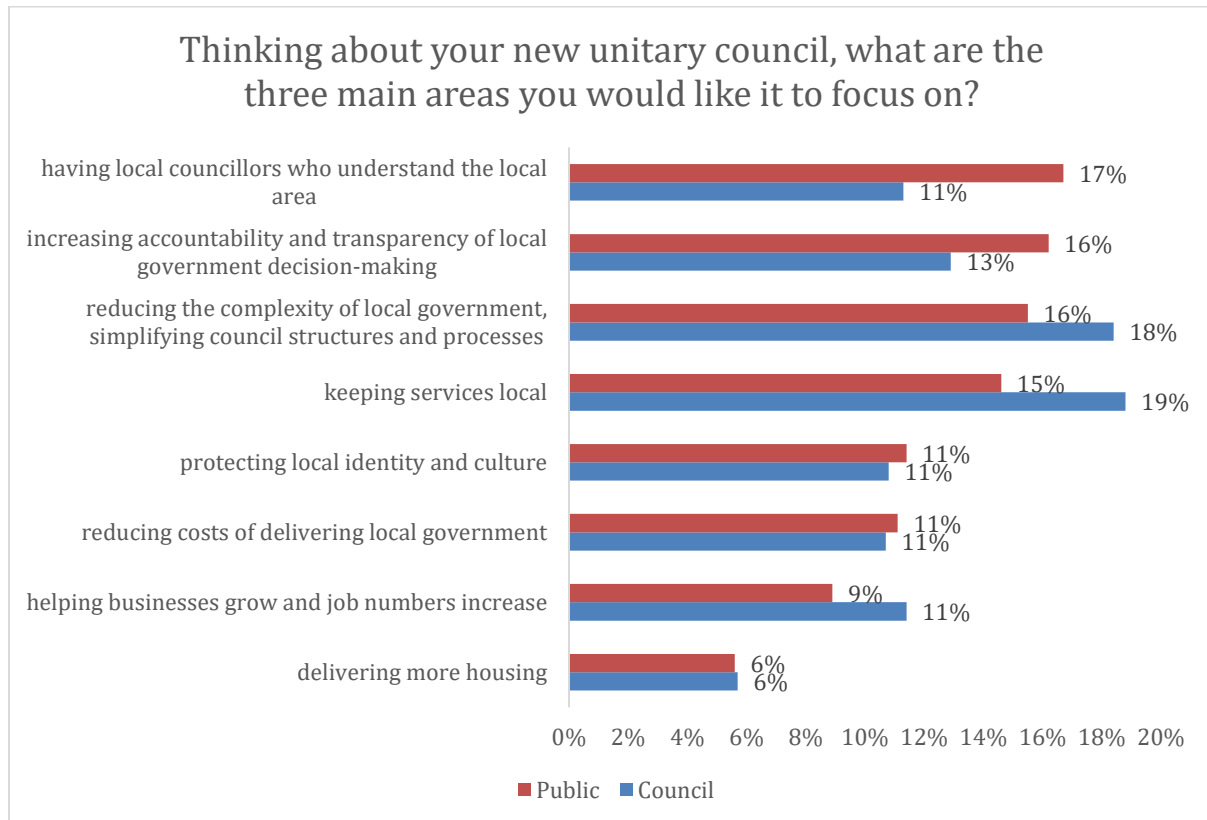
Unitary matters

The top three priorities for the new unitary council are investing in council services, ability to respond quickly and having a councillor that know the area.



The main areas of focus for new unitary councils

The public would like to see the new unitaries have councillors with local knowledge, increasing the accountability and transparency of local government decision-making and reducing the complexity of local decision-making.

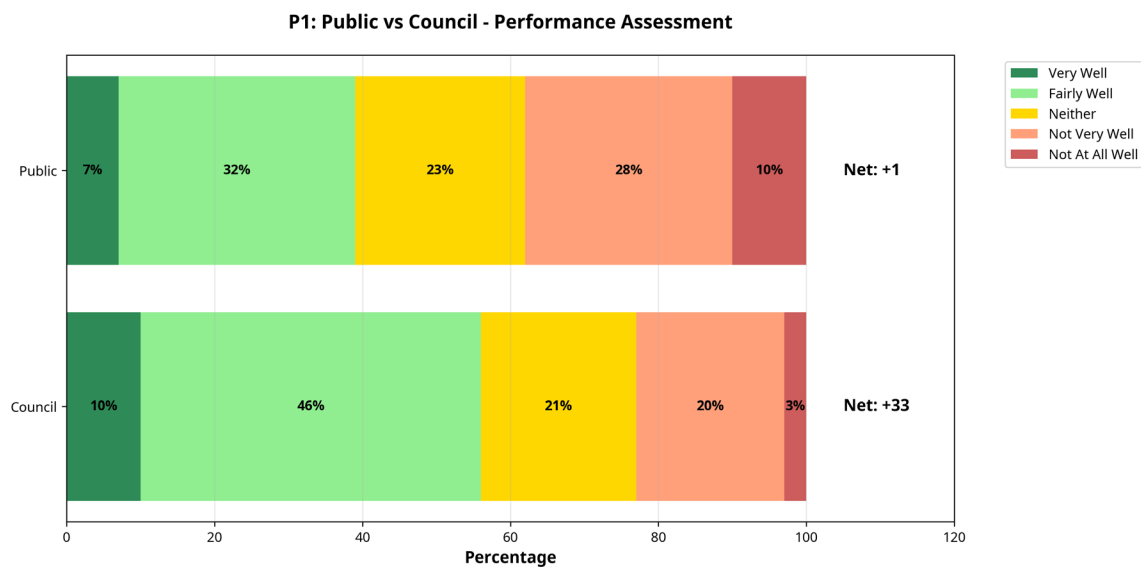


Current Performance

Next survey respondents were asked to rate their councils on a range of factors thought to be critical for unitary, indeed, all councils.

Responsive councils: Ability to respond quickly to an issue

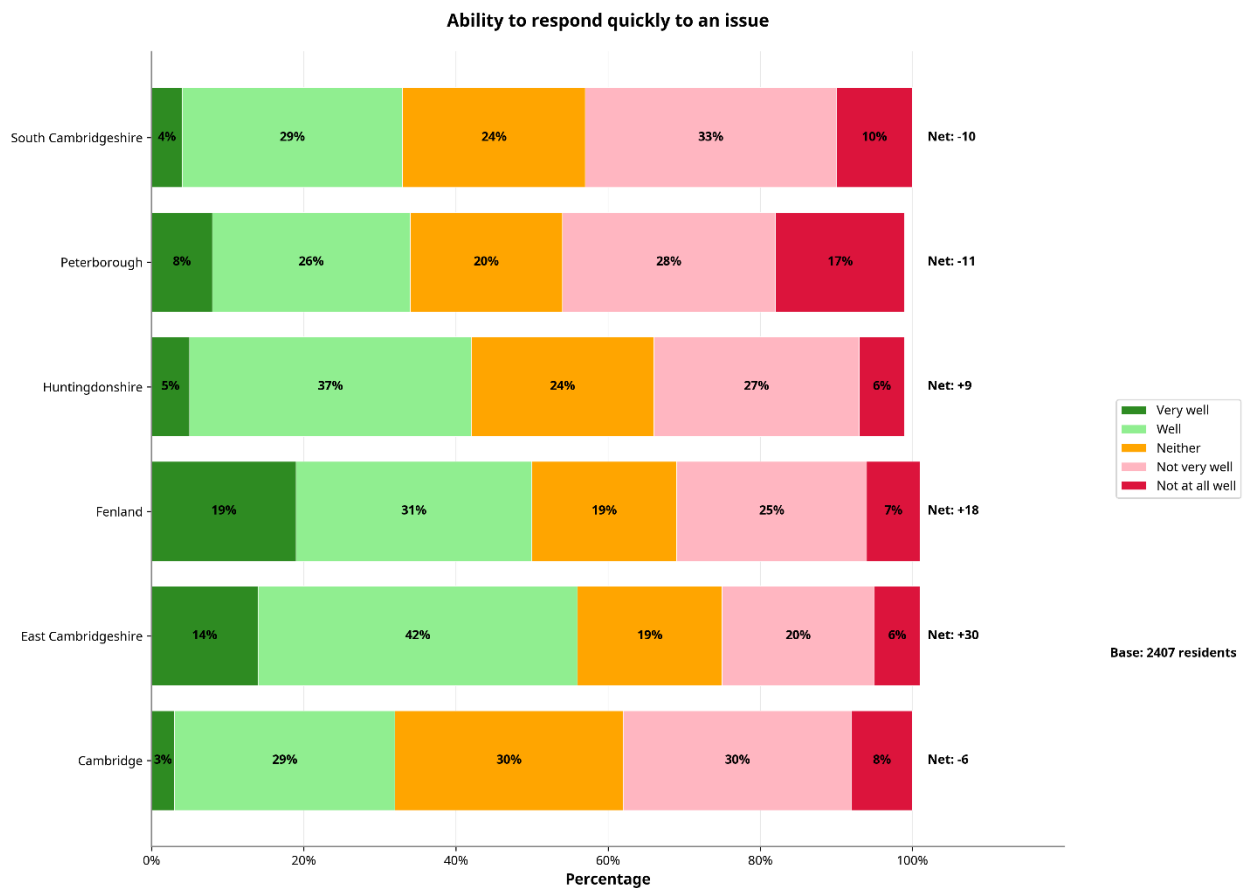
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +33) compared to public expectations (net score +1). This 32-point gap suggests that professional experience shapes performance expectations in meaningful ways. There is a perception gap in terms of being a responsive council.

Geographical Performance Expectations

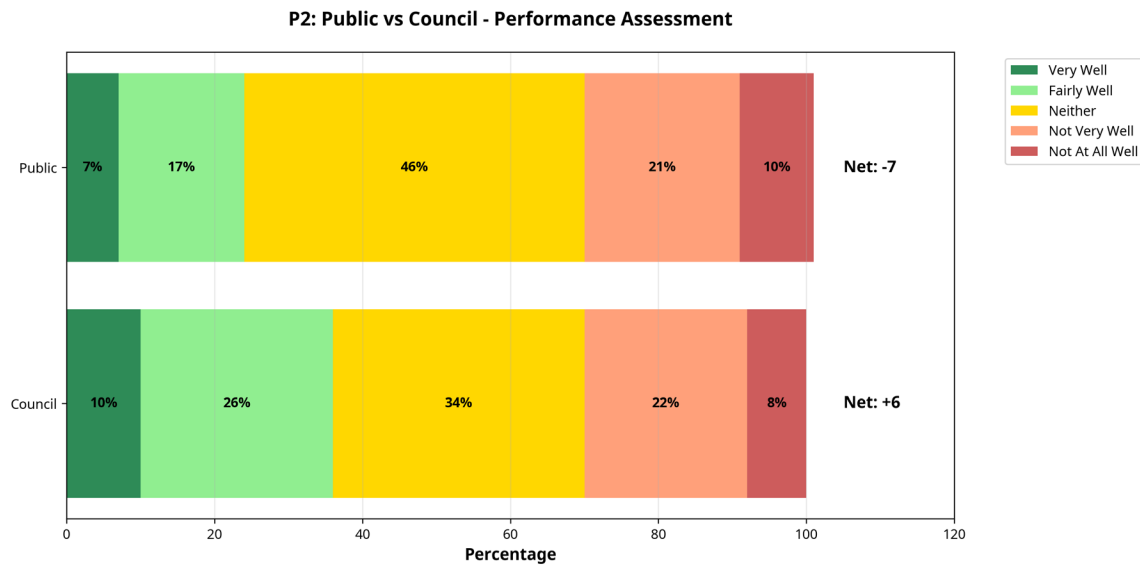
Perceptions of councils' ability to respond quickly to issues reveal significant district-level differences. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest confidence with 56% believing their council responds well or very well, compared to Fenland's 50%, Huntingdonshire's 42%, and Cambridge's 32%. The 24-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Cambridge exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, combined negative responses (not very well/not at all well) show Cambridge at 38% versus East Cambridgeshire's 26%, a 12-point difference approaching significance. Peterborough occupies a middle position with 34% positive and 45% negative responses. The "neither" category remains relatively consistent at 19-30% across districts, suggesting widespread uncertainty about council responsiveness. These variations indicate that residents' experiences of council responsiveness differ substantially by district, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents reporting notably better experiences than those in Cambridge.



From a generational perspective, all ages have similar views and this is broadly low. Males and minorities score councils negatively on council responsiveness.

Council sites: Calling into a council office or attending a drop in clinic

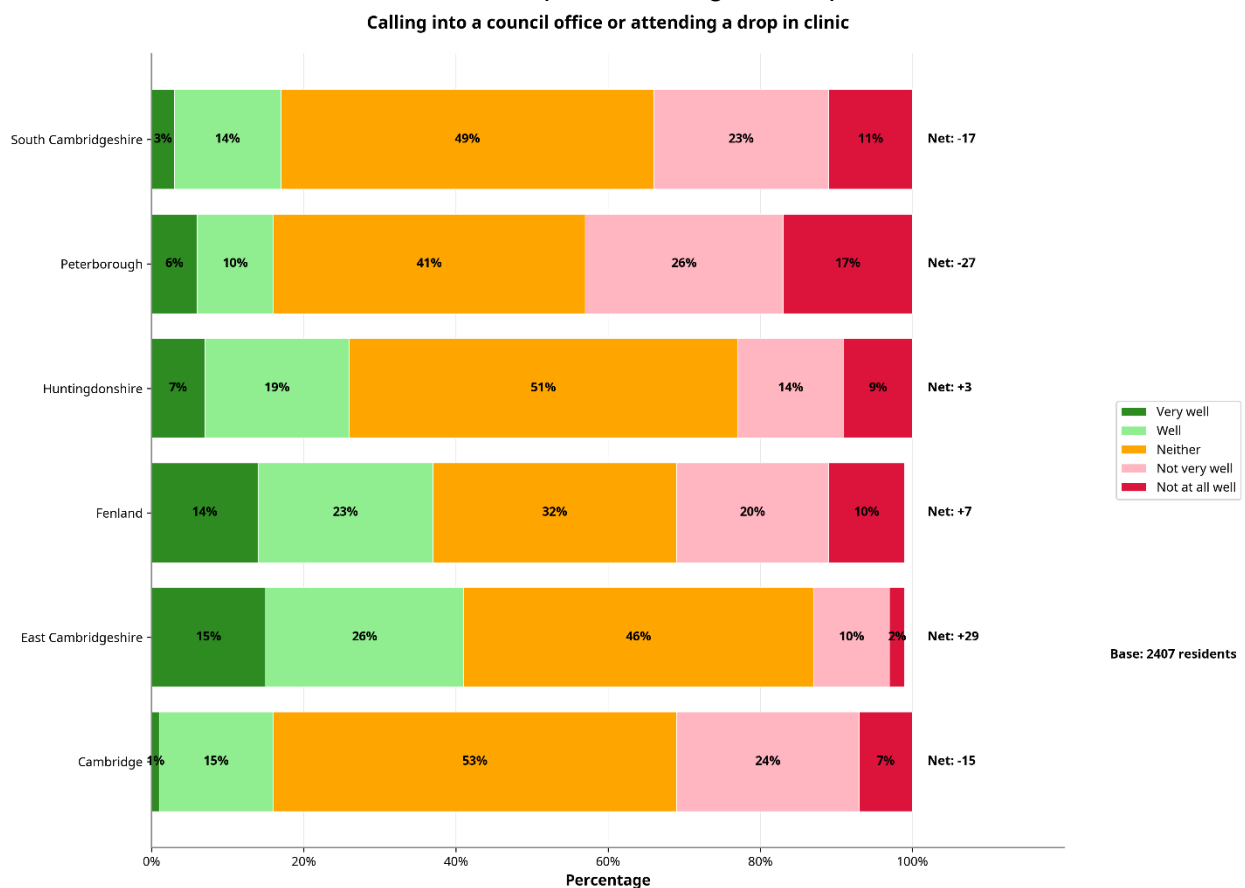
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in unitary council performance (net score +6) compared to public expectations which are negative (net score -7). This 13-point gap suggests that professional experience shapes performance expectations in meaningful ways.

Geographical Performance Expectations

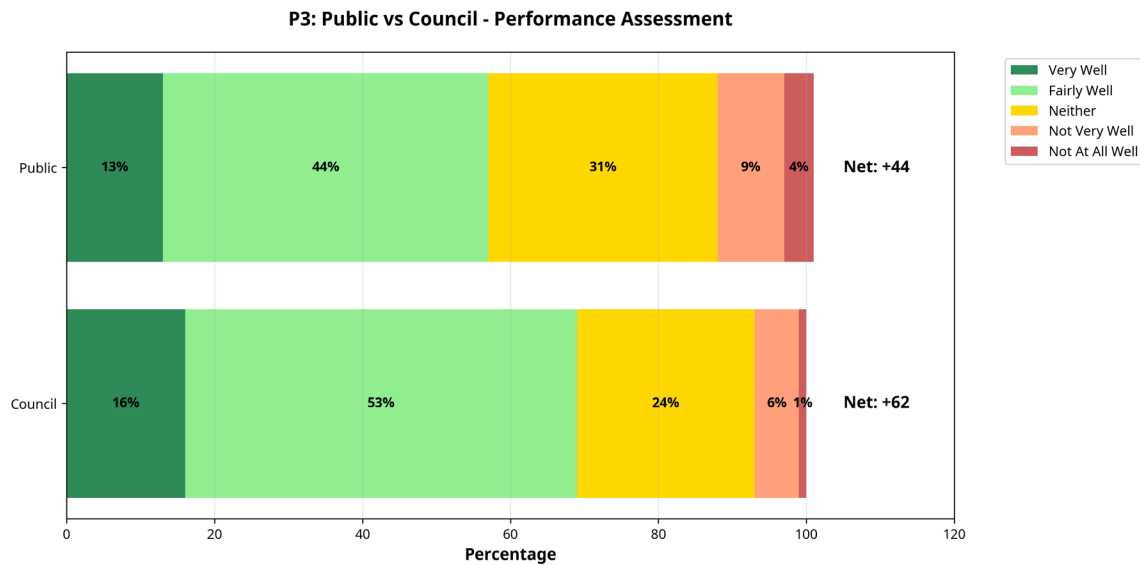
Satisfaction with calling council offices or attending drop-in clinics shows limited significant variation across districts. The most notable finding is the high proportion selecting "neither" across all areas, ranging from 32% in Fenland to 53% in Cambridge. Combined positive responses (very well/well) range from 16% in Cambridge and Peterborough to 41% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 37% and Huntingdonshire at 26%. The 25-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Cambridge/Peterborough exceeds significance thresholds. Negative responses remain relatively consistent at 12-43% across districts. The dominance of "neither" responses, particularly in Cambridge where over half of residents appear not to have engaged with these services, indicates that direct contact methods may be underutilised across the region. East Cambridgeshire again shows the highest satisfaction among those who have used these services, consistent with their positive ratings on responsiveness.



For the public of all ages, the current performance on this measure is low. Ethnic minorities tend to be more negative on this measure (-7 net).

Digital Councils: Doing most transactions online and only meeting people face to face when necessary

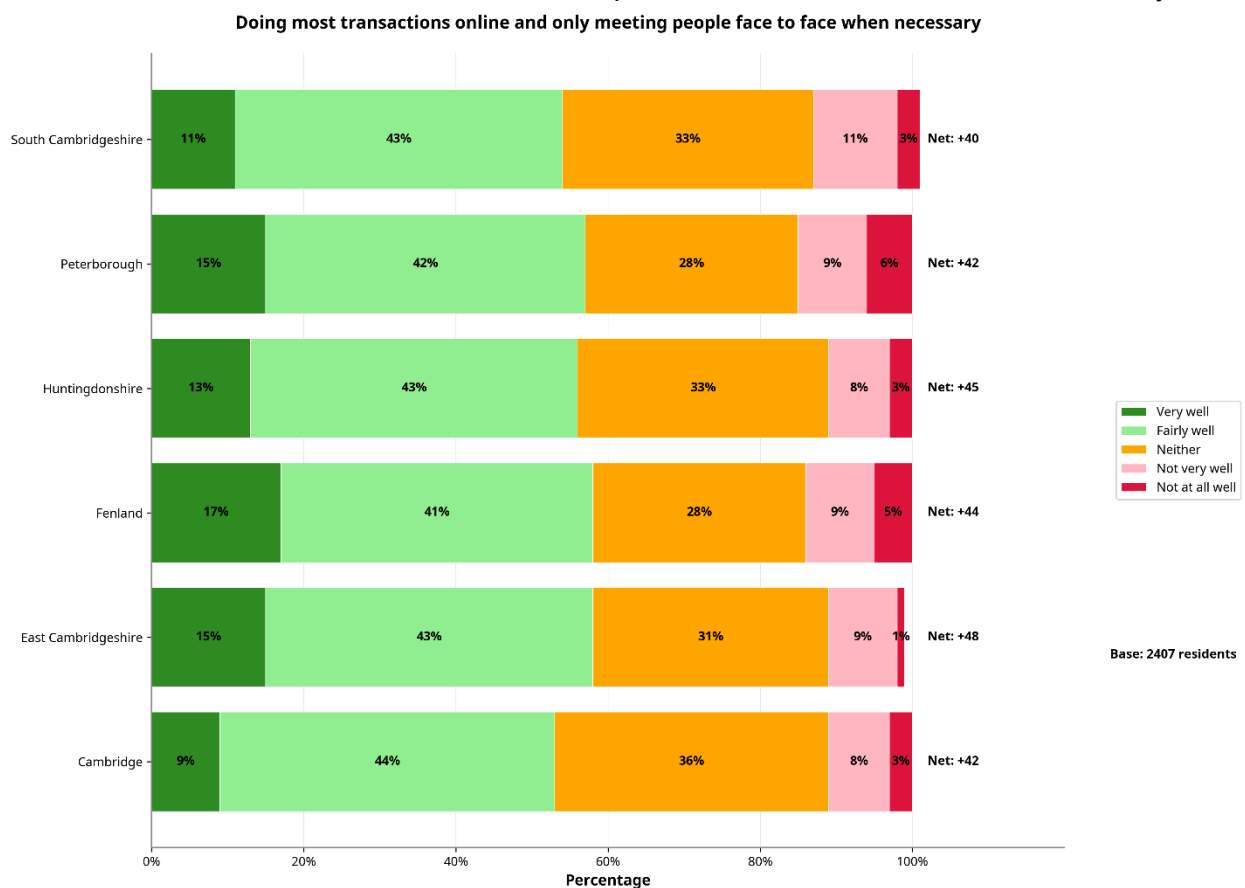
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +62) compared to public expectations (net score +44). This 18-point gap suggests more work is needed on this .

Geographical Performance Expectations

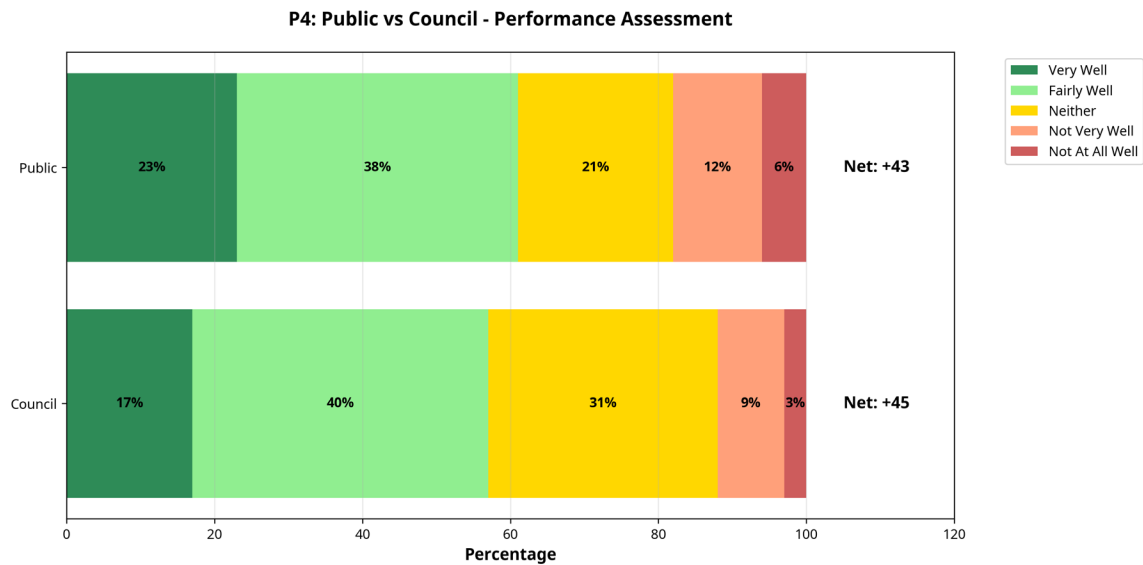
Performance for online transactions versus face-to-face contact show minimal significant variation across districts. Combined positive responses (very well/fairly well) range from 53% in Cambridge to 58% in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, whilst negative responses vary from 10% in Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire to 15% in Peterborough. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. The "neither" category shows consistency at 28-36% across all districts. The uniformity, with roughly half of residents across all areas supporting online-first approaches whilst maintaining face-to-face options when necessary. This consensus around digital transformation indicates that service delivery preferences are shaped more by individual circumstances and capabilities than geographic location. The substantial neutral responses may reflect mixed experiences or ambivalence about the trade-offs between convenience and personal contact in council service delivery.



There is a greater willingness to transact digitally by all groups except the over 75s (Net +23).

Local Councillors: Having a councillor who knows my area

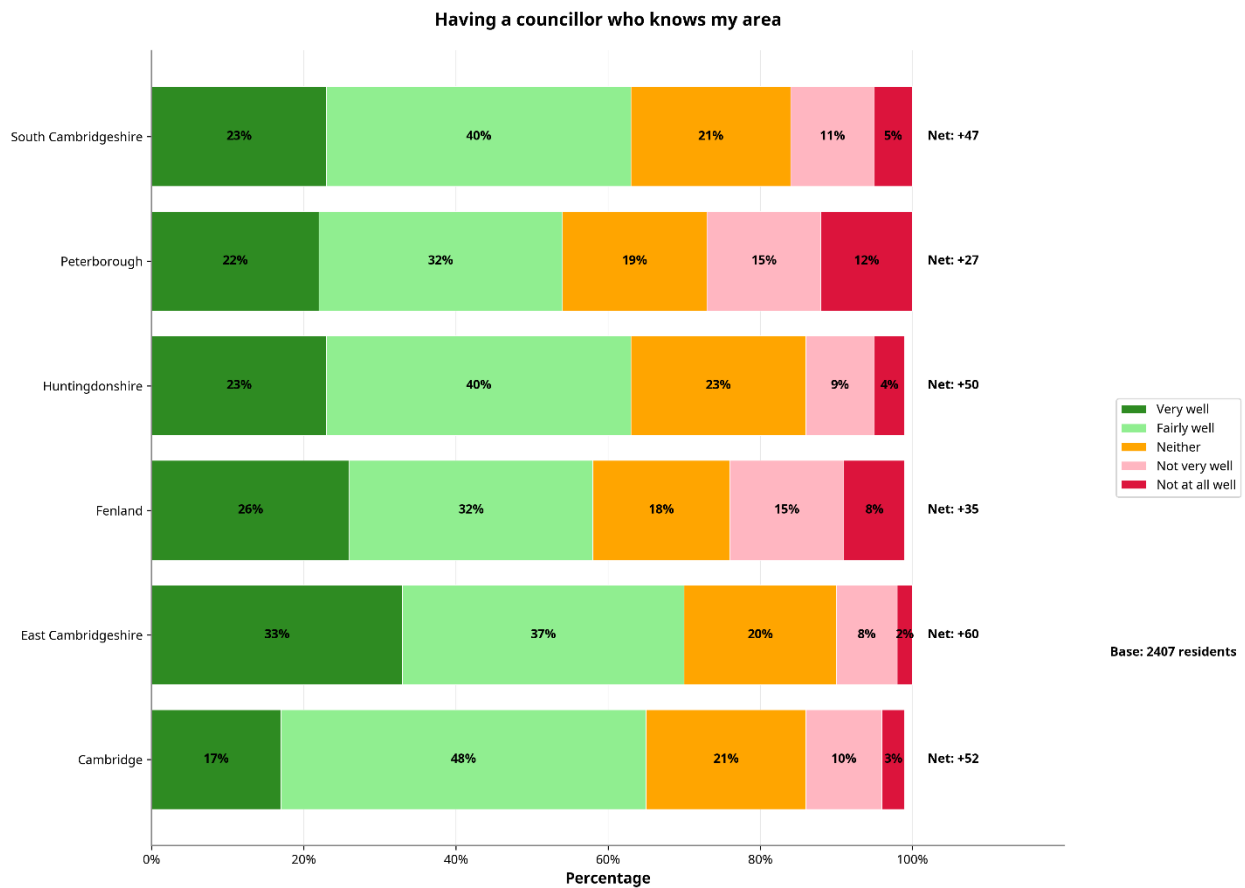
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals remarkable convergence between public expectations and professional assessments, with public respondents recording a net score of +43 and council workers +45.

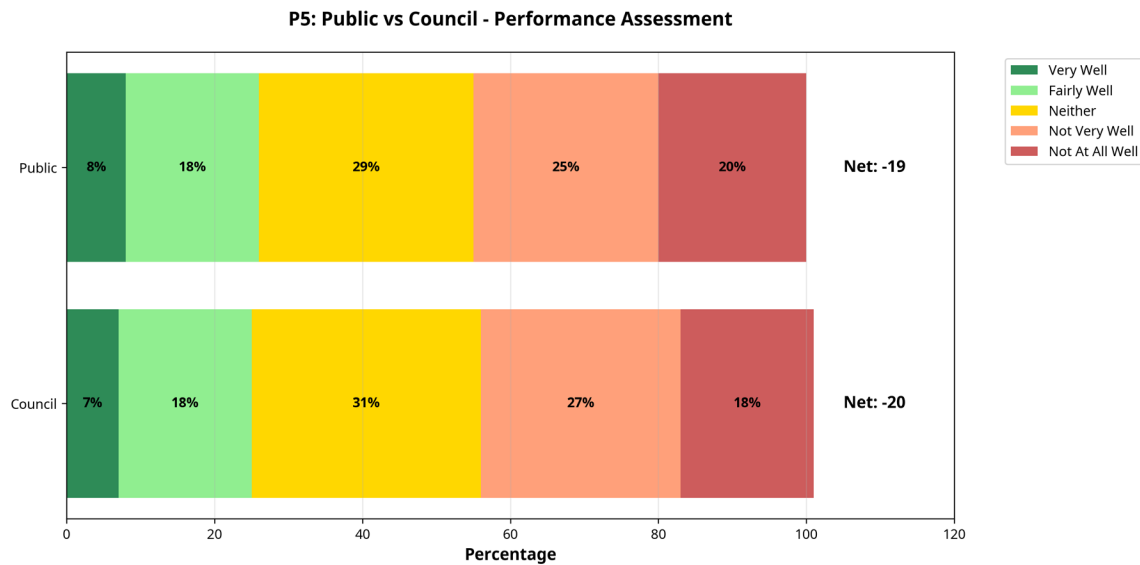
Geographical Performance Expectations

The performance of 'having a councillor who knows their area' shows notable variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the strongest support with 70% rating this as very well or fairly well, compared to Cambridge's 65%, South Cambridgeshire's 63%, Huntingdonshire's 61%, Fenland's 58%, and Peterborough's 54%. The 16-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses remain consistently low at 10-27% across all districts. The "neither" category varies from 18% in Fenland to 23% in Huntingdonshire. These results indicate broad consensus that local knowledge matters in councillor effectiveness, with over half of residents in every district valuing area familiarity. The slightly higher support in rural districts like East Cambridgeshire may reflect the particular importance of local knowledge in dispersed communities with distinct village identities, though differences remain within statistical margins of error.



Unitary Council: Having a single council to contact for all services

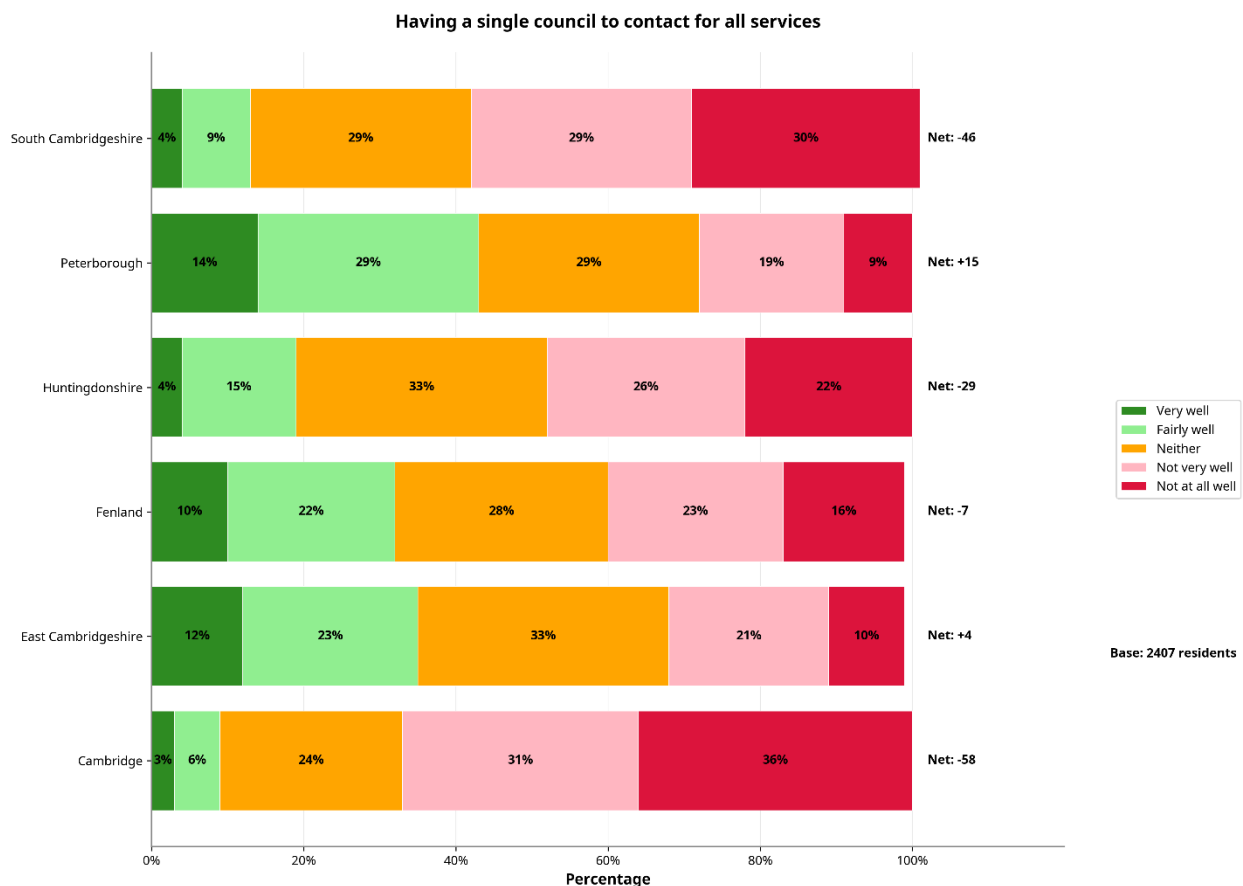
The Professional Assessment



On this both residents and council workers are negative but it is important to understand that this is about the current performance and both feel that councils are not acting as one stop shops which they are not except for Peterborough.

Geographical Performance Expectations

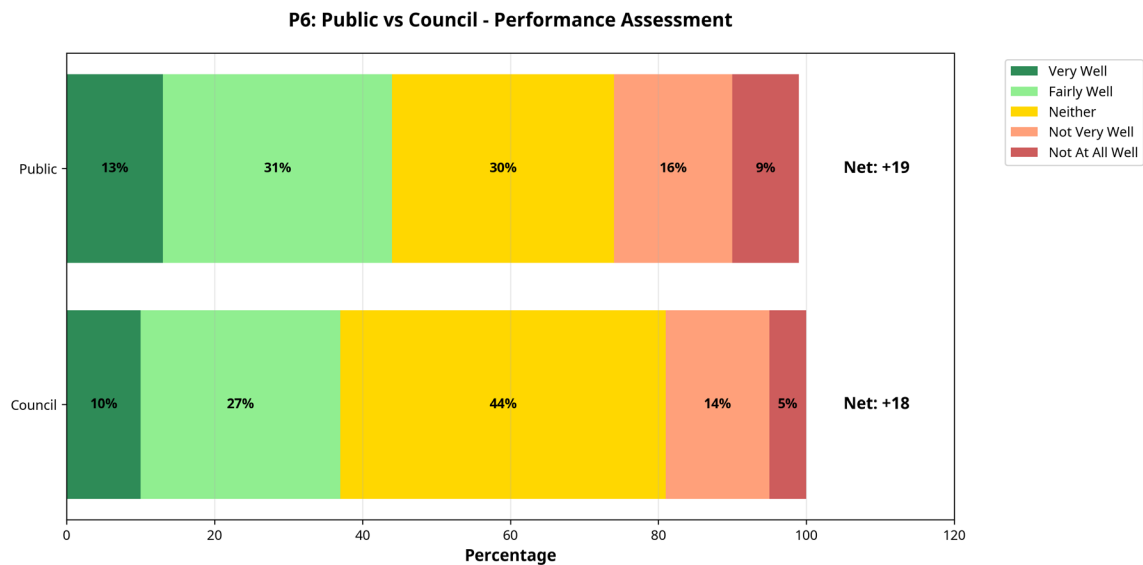
Peterborough is the only unitary council so this is an interesting question to see how all the councils are perceived in terms of being 'joined-up'. South Cambridgeshire shows the highest opposition with 59% rating this poorly (not very well/not at all well), compared to Huntingdonshire's 48%, Cambridge's 42%, Fenland's 39%, East Cambridgeshire's 31%, and Peterborough's 28%. The 31-point gap between South Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, Peterborough shows 43% support versus South Cambridgeshire's 13%, a significant 30-point difference shows one of the benefits of being a unitary council. Cambridge occupies an unusual position with only 9% positive responses but 24% neutral, the lowest support recorded suggesting complexity in interacting with it.



Here we observe the benefits of unitary government as Peterborough comes out on top in contrast to Cambridge which may have issues with people knowing which service to go to and who runs what. Again, we observe that younger residents tend to express more frustration with their council services not being a one stop shop (Under 35s Net -21 compared to 55-74 Net -11). Males are also more negative (Net-15).

Councillor?: Having easy access to my councillor

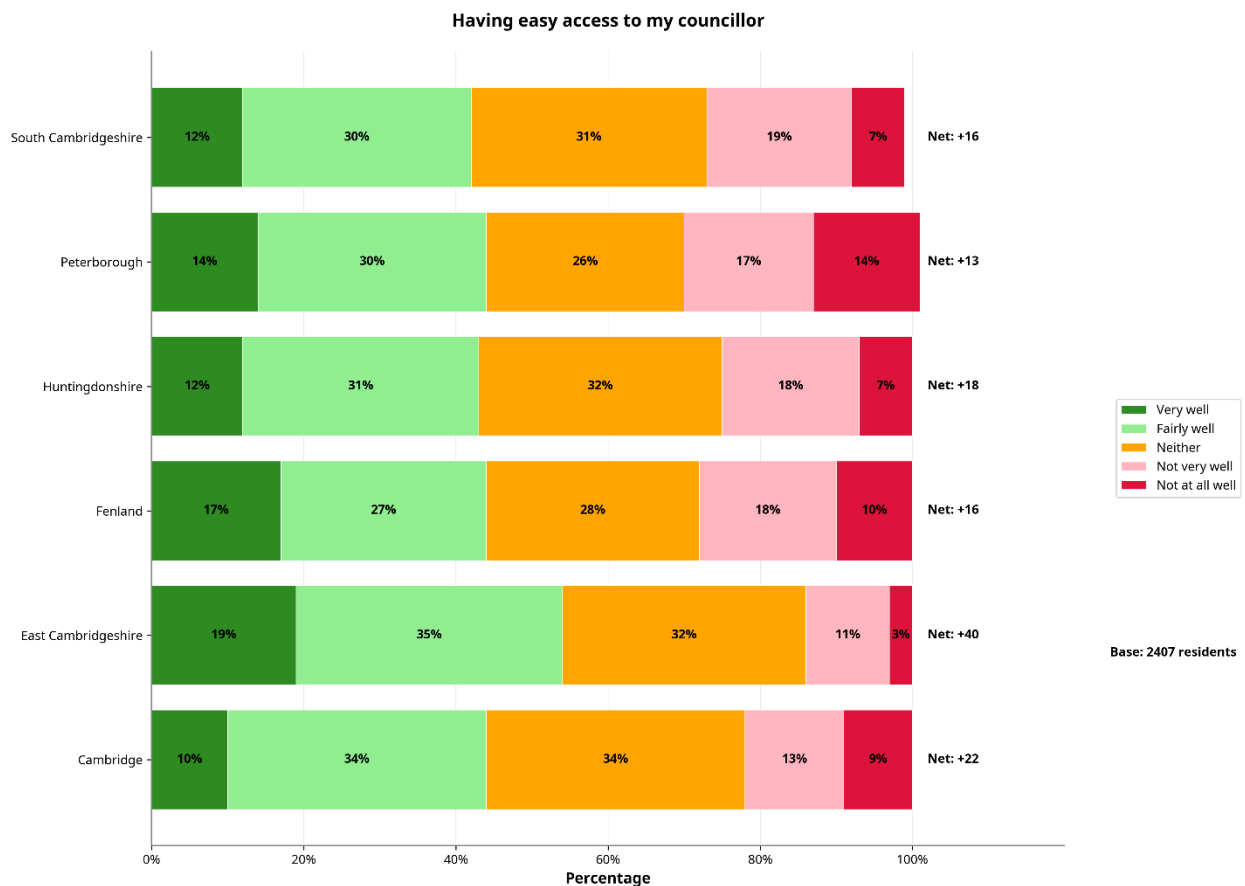
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals similarity between public expectations and professional assessments, with public respondents recording a net score of +19 and council workers +18. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner perspectives are broadly aligned on expected unitary council performance in this area.

Geographical Performance Expectations

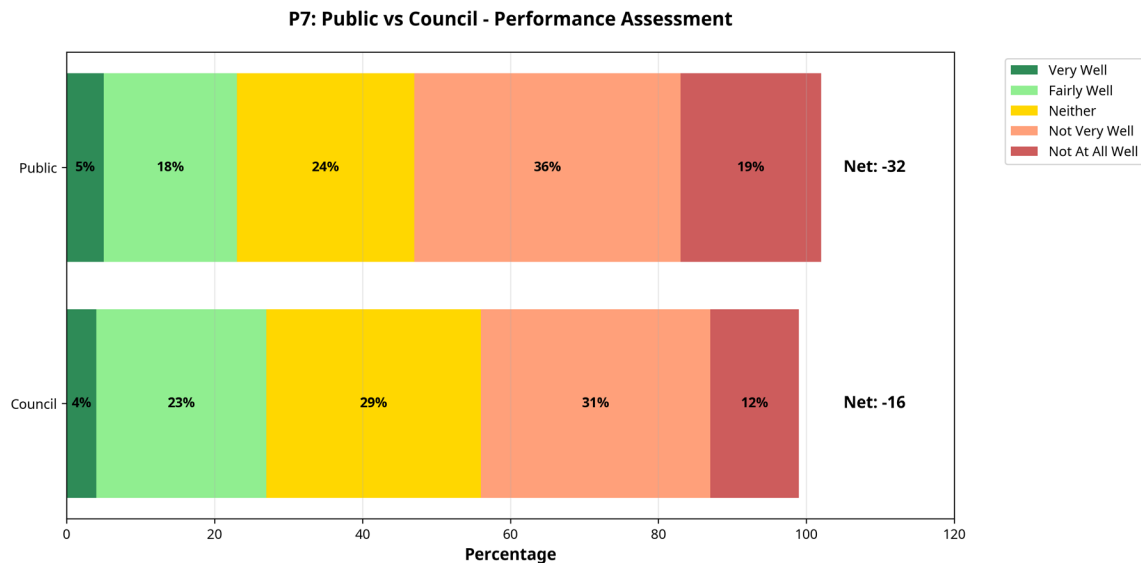
The performance on this 'easy councillor access' show limited significant variation across districts. Combined positive responses range from 42% in South Cambridgeshire to 54% in East Cambridgeshire, with Cambridge and Fenland at 44%, Peterborough at 44%, and Huntingdonshire at 43%. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. Negative responses vary from 13% in East Cambridgeshire to 31% in Peterborough, whilst the "neither" category ranges from 26% in Peterborough to 34% in Cambridge. The relatively uniform distribution suggests that councillor accessibility challenges transcend district boundaries, with roughly half of residents across all areas reporting satisfactory access whilst significant minorities experience difficulties. The substantial neutral responses, particularly in Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire, may indicate many residents have not attempted to contact their councillor, making evaluation difficult.



Older people are much more likely to say they have easy access to a councillor (55-74 Net +28 compared to Under 35s Net +8). White British residents say they are more likely to have easy access to a councillor (Net +28 compared to ethnic minorities Net +7) .

Council Investment: Investing more in council services, such as education, social housing, roads and waste collection

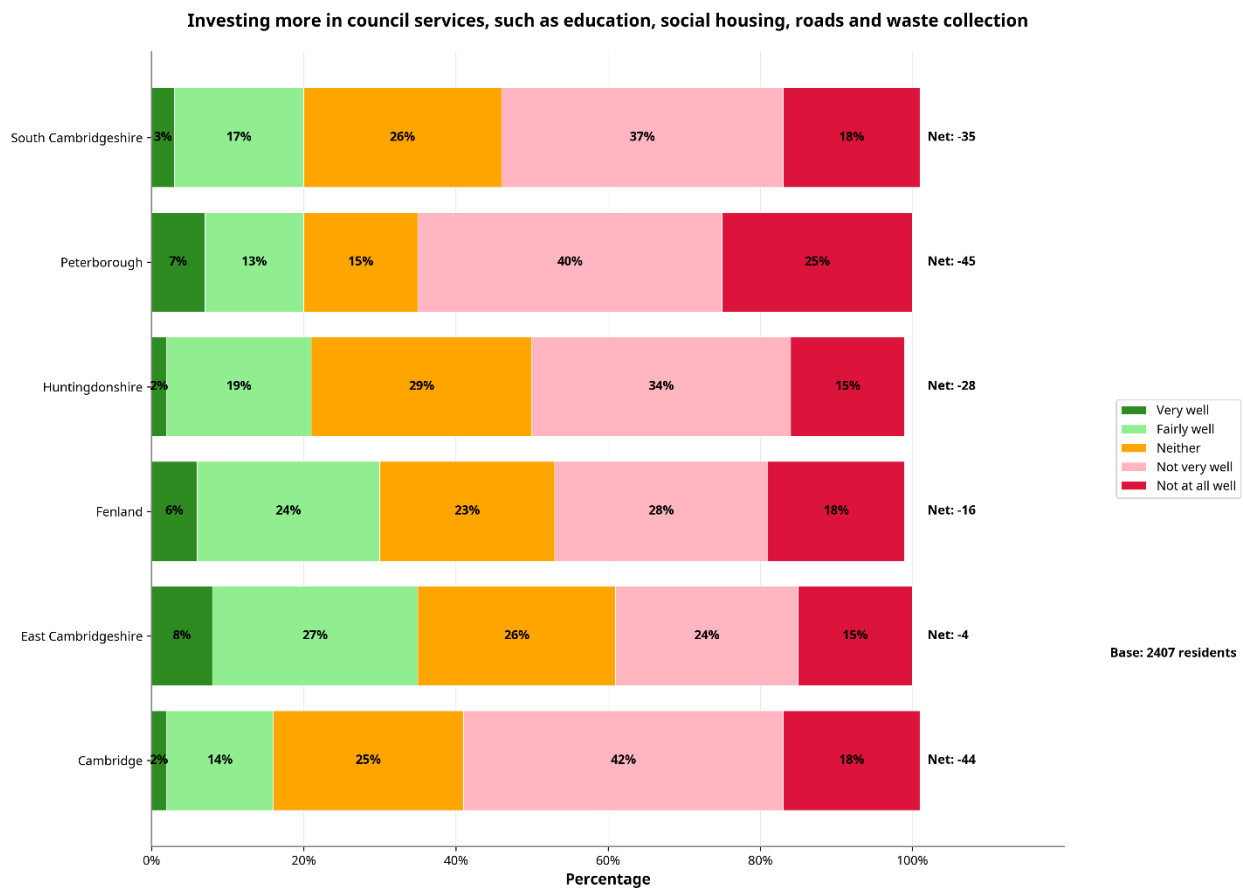
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in unitary council performance (net score -16) compared to public expectations (net score -32). This 16-point gap suggests that the public feel that more investment is required in key services.

Geographical Performance Expectations

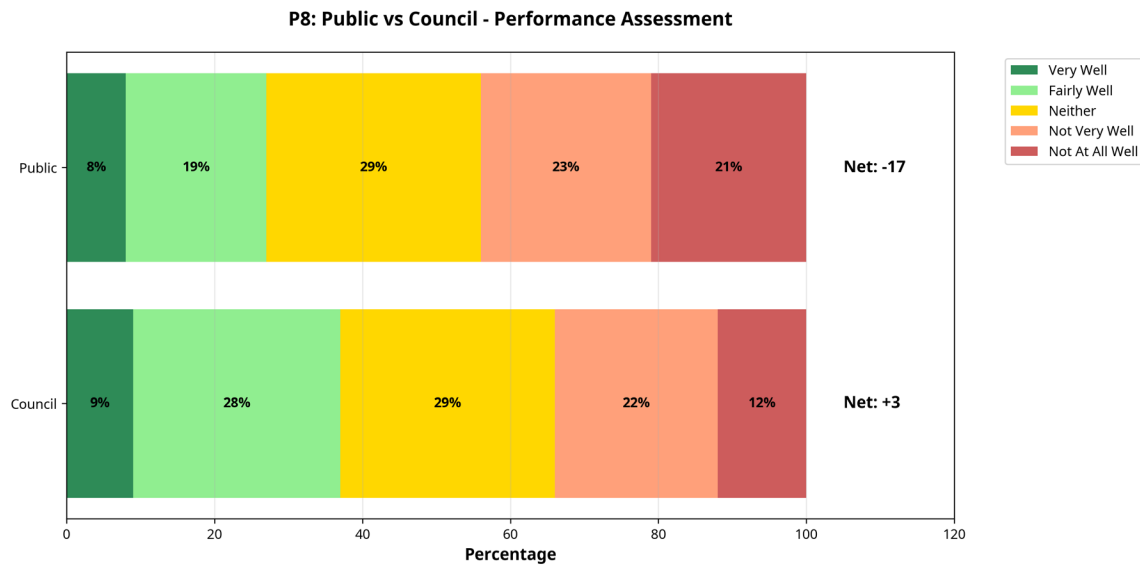
Residents' ratings of current council performance on service investment reveal significant district-level variation. Cambridge residents give the poorest ratings with 60% assessing current investment performance as not very well or not at all well, followed by Peterborough at 65%, South Cambridgeshire at 55%, Huntingdonshire at 49%, Fenland at 44%, and East Cambridgeshire at 39%. The 26-point gap between Peterborough's negative assessment and East Cambridgeshire's represents a statistically significant difference. Positive ratings remain consistently low, ranging from 16% in Cambridge to 35% in East Cambridgeshire. The widespread dissatisfaction with current investment levels across core services suggests systemic underfunding concerns, with urban areas showing particularly more dissatisfaction. These patterns indicate residents across the region perceive significant underinvestment in essential services, though the intensity of this perception varies considerably by district.



The working middle are most likely to be negative on this issue (Net -36).

Low Council Tax?: Keeping Council Tax as low as possible

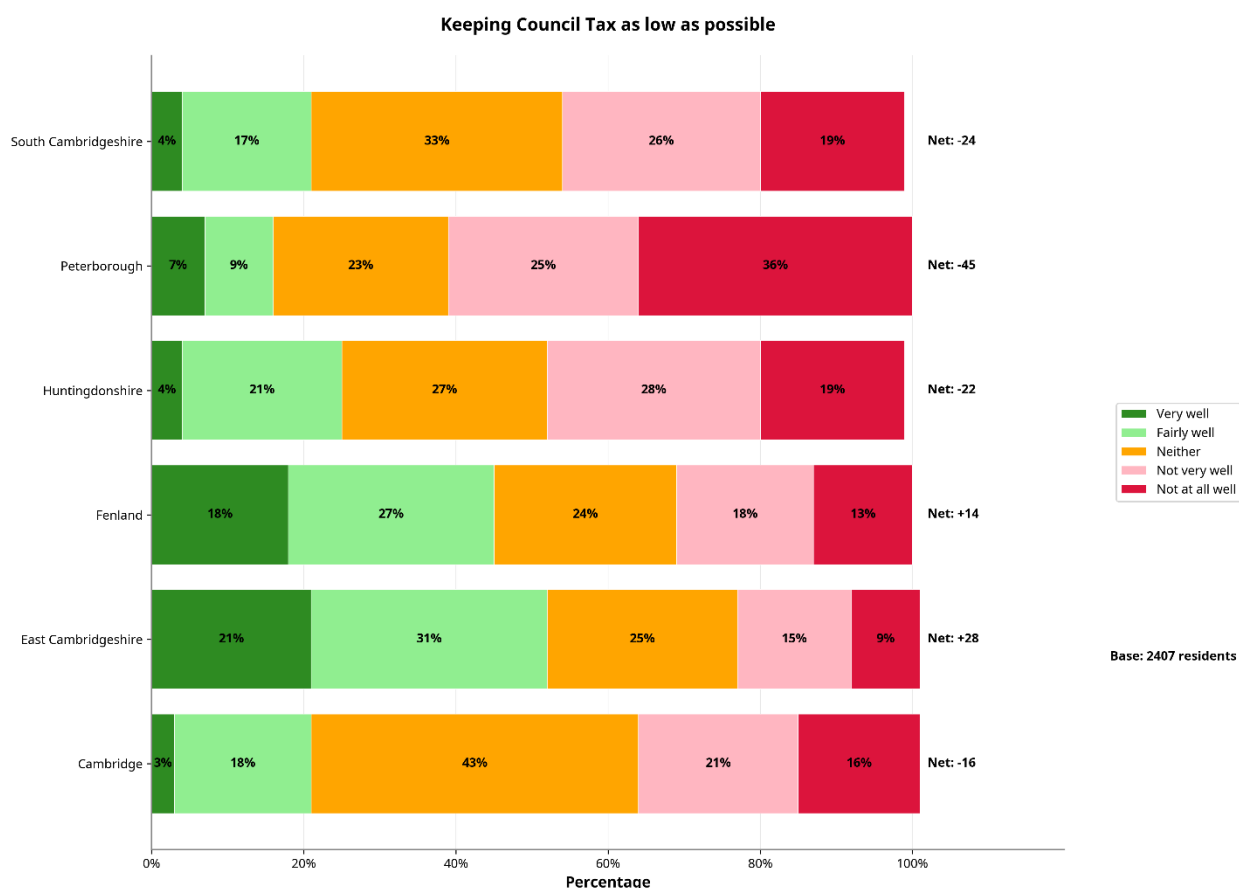
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +3) compared to public expectations (net score -17).

Geographical Performance Expectations

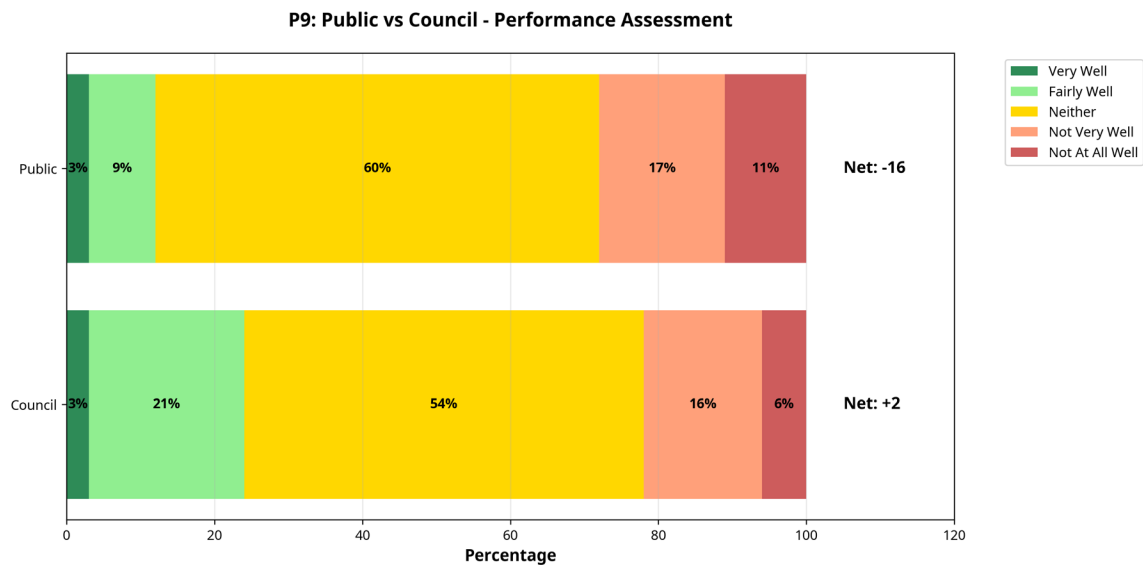
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on keeping council tax low reveals significant variation across districts. Peterborough residents rate their council most poorly, with 61% saying it performs not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 37%, South Cambridgeshire's 39%, Fenland's 31%, East Cambridgeshire's 24%, and Huntingdonshire's 47%. The 37-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings show East Cambridgeshire at 52%, Fenland at 45%, Huntingdonshire at 25%, Cambridge at 21%, South Cambridgeshire at 21%, and Peterborough at 16%. The 36-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in positive ratings is statistically significant. These patterns reveal a significant divide in perceptions of fiscal management, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents viewing their councils as relatively effective, whilst Peterborough residents express strong dissatisfaction with their council's tax performance, consistent with their broader distrust of council decision-making and service investment concerns.



Younger people tend to think that council tax is not kept as low as possible (under 35s Net -25). Ethnic minorities also tend to disagree with keeping council tax as low as possible (Net -20).

Using digital or AI to improve services

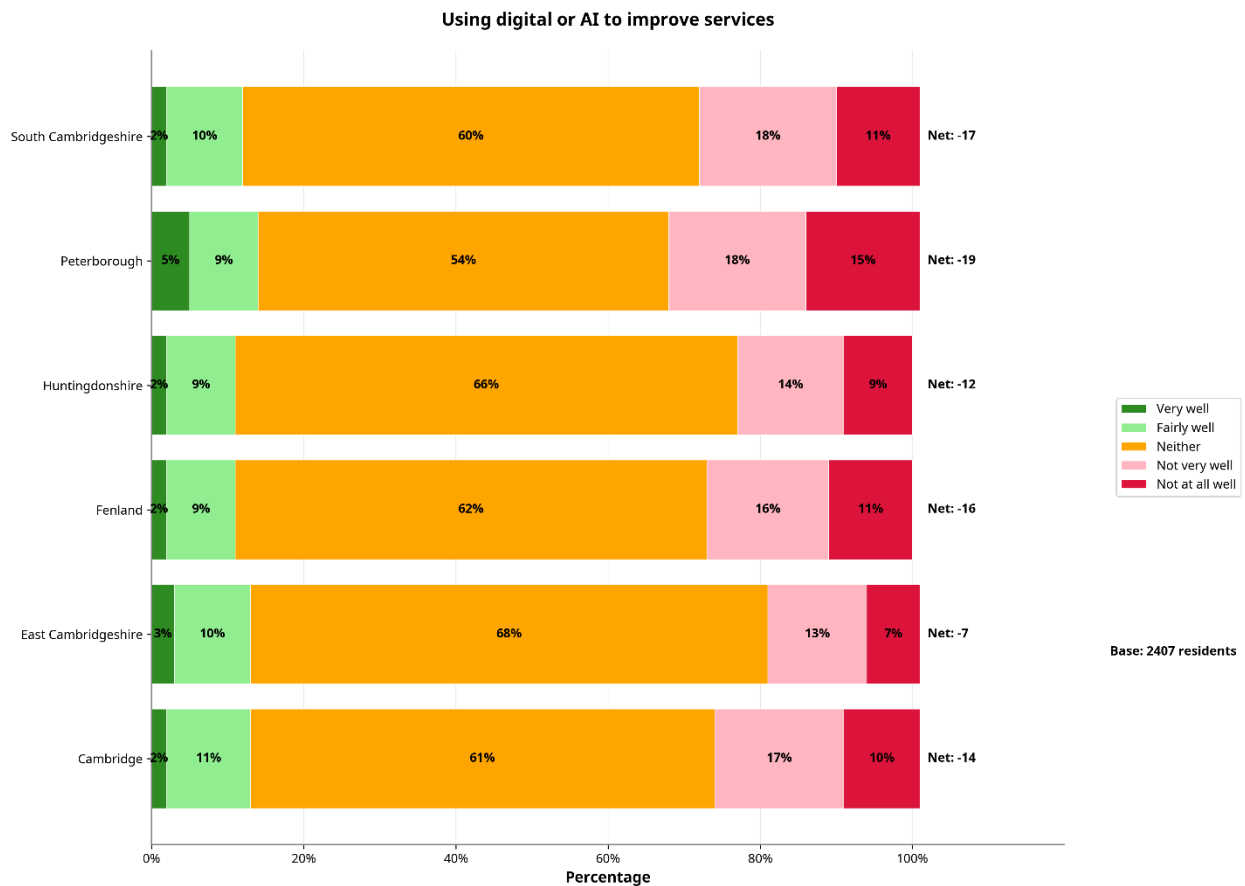
The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +2) compared to public expectations (net score -16). This 18-point gap that the public think councils have a way to go using digital.

Geographical Performance Expectations

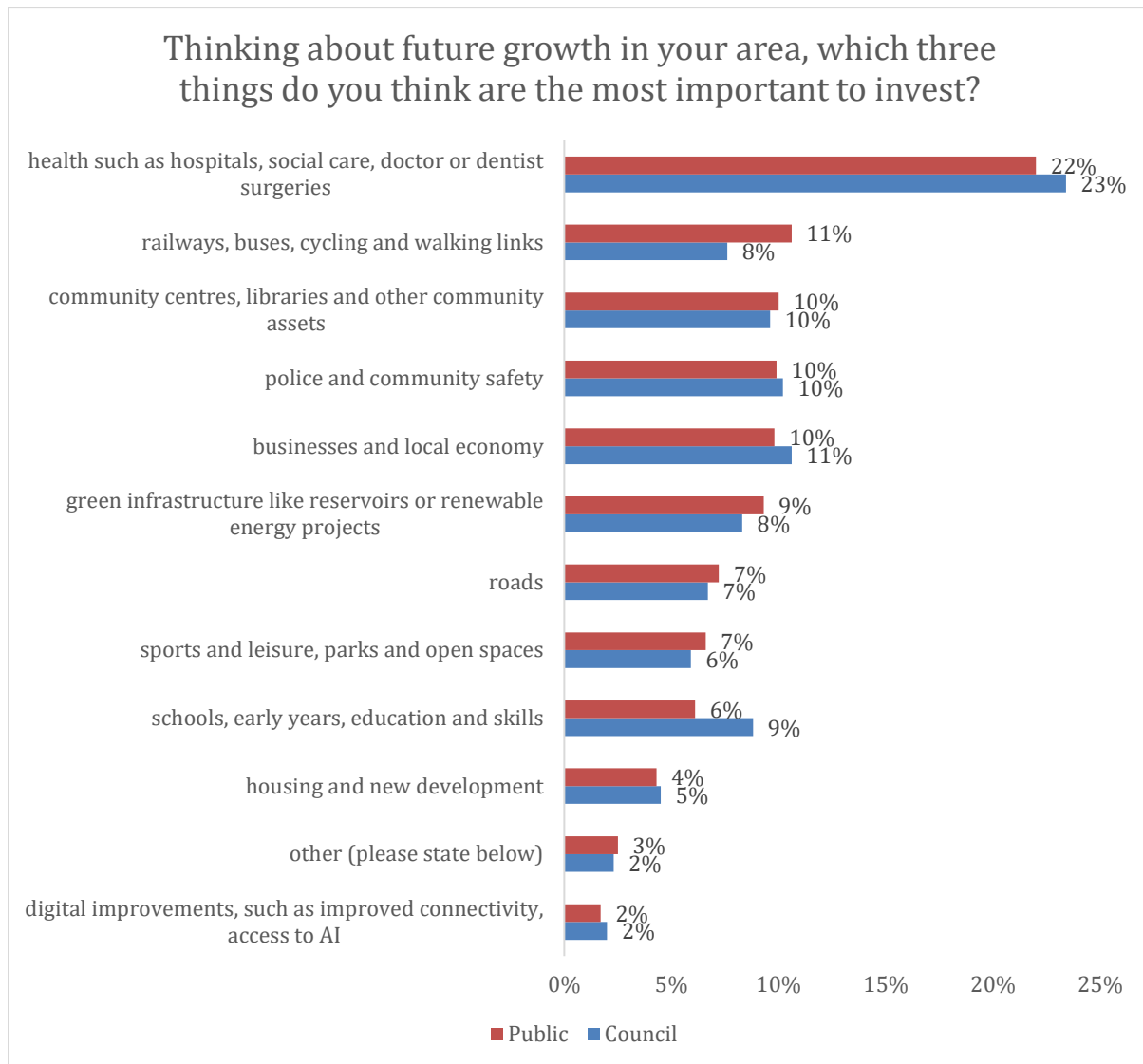
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on using digital technology and AI to improve services shows minimal significant variation across districts. The dominant response across all areas is "neither," ranging from 54% in Peterborough to 68% in East Cambridgeshire, suggesting widespread uncertainty about or unfamiliarity with councils' digital initiatives. Positive ratings remain consistently low, from 11% in South Cambridgeshire and Fenland to 14% in Cambridge and Peterborough, whilst negative responses range from 20% in East Cambridgeshire to 33% in Peterborough. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. The overwhelming neutral response indicates that digital transformation efforts either remain largely invisible to residents or have yet to demonstrate tangible service improvements. This pattern suggests councils across the region face similar challenges in implementing and communicating digital innovation, with residents unable to assess performance in an area where they may have limited direct experience or awareness of behind-the-scenes technological changes.



The 35-54s are most negative about the current performance in this area (Net -24).

Future growth

Residents would most like to see investment in health, transport and community infrastructure.



Housing Delivery

Again, respondents were asked to rate their councils on several different measures. On housing delivery, council staff are substantially more positive than residents.

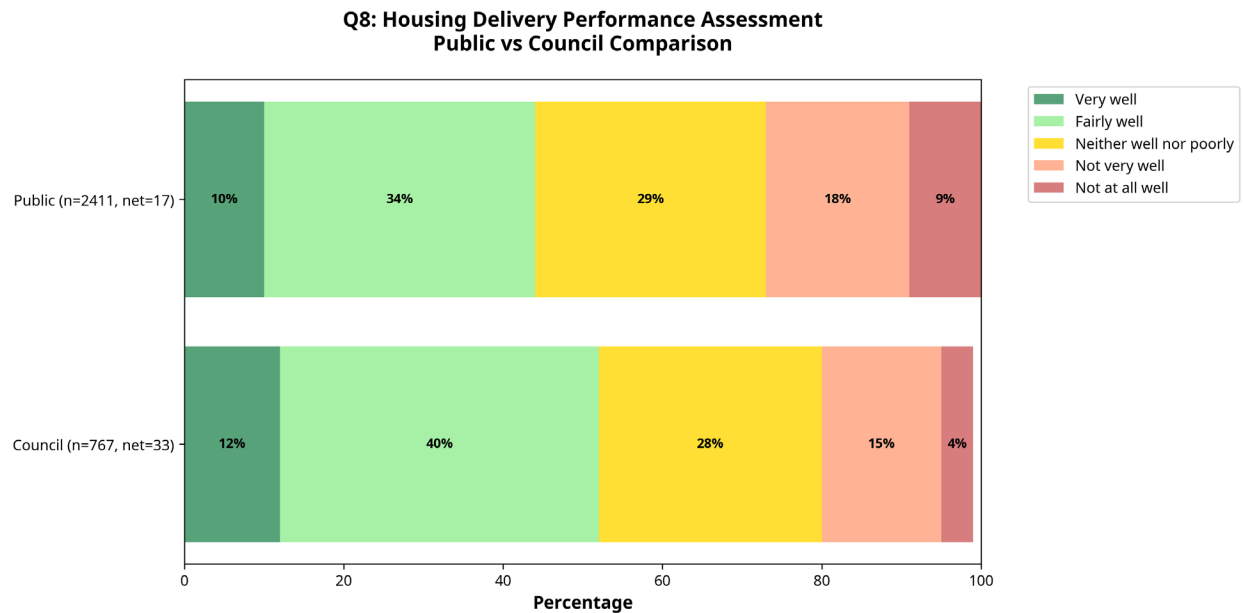
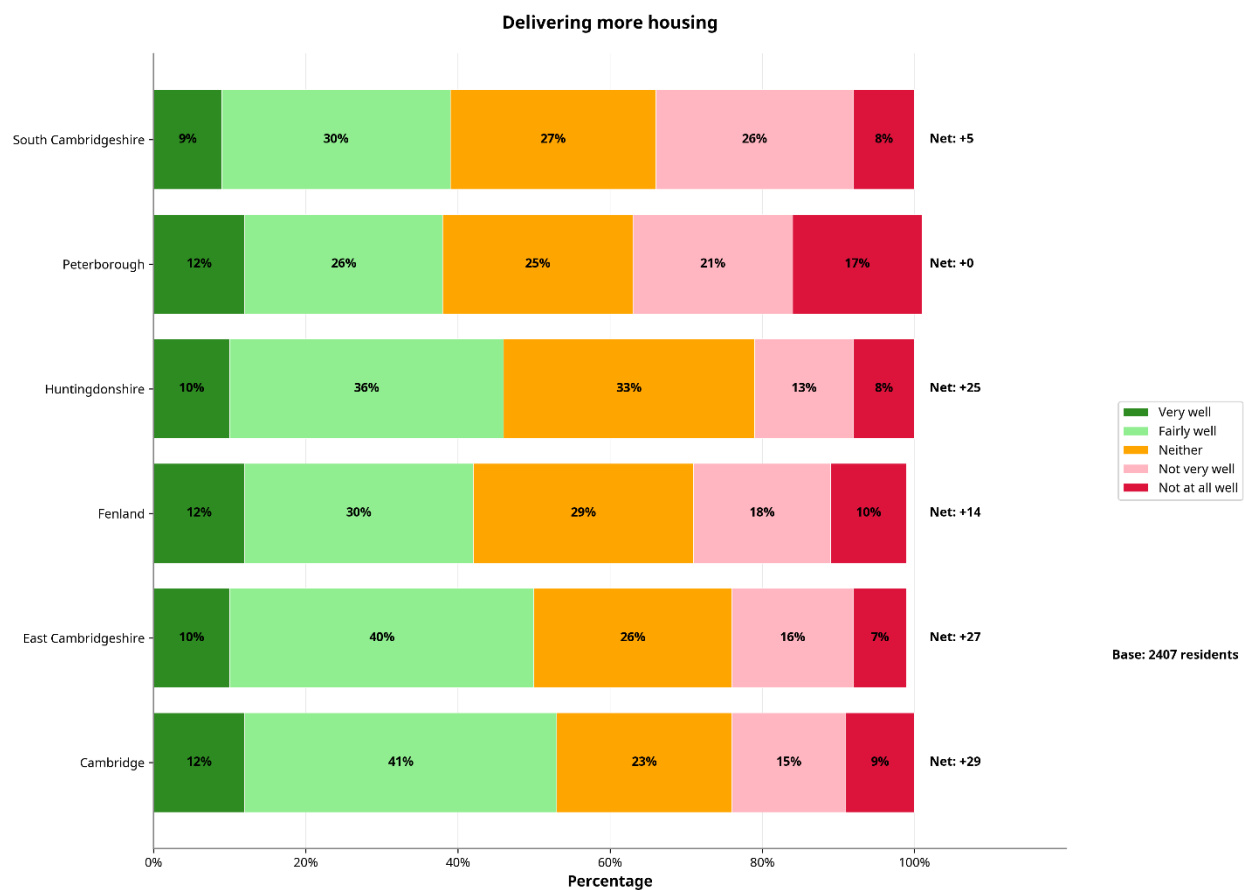


Figure: Housing Delivery Performance Assessment

Geographical differences

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on housing delivery shows limited significant variation across districts. Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire show the highest positive ratings at 53% and 50% respectively, whilst Peterborough shows 38%, South Cambridgeshire 39%, Fenland 42%, and Huntingdonshire 46%.

These differences approach but do not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses range from 21% in Huntingdonshire to 38% in Peterborough, with South Cambridgeshire at 34%. The "neither" category varies from 23% in Cambridge to 33% in Huntingdonshire.



Councillor local knowledge

The performance on this measure is similar for both residents and council staff.

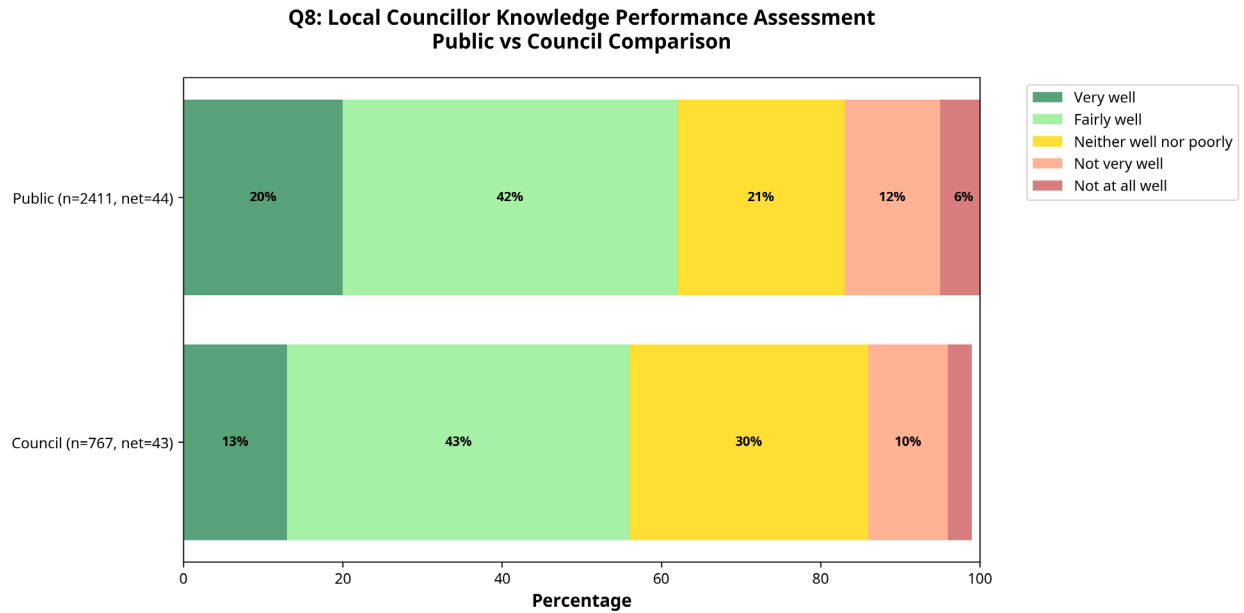
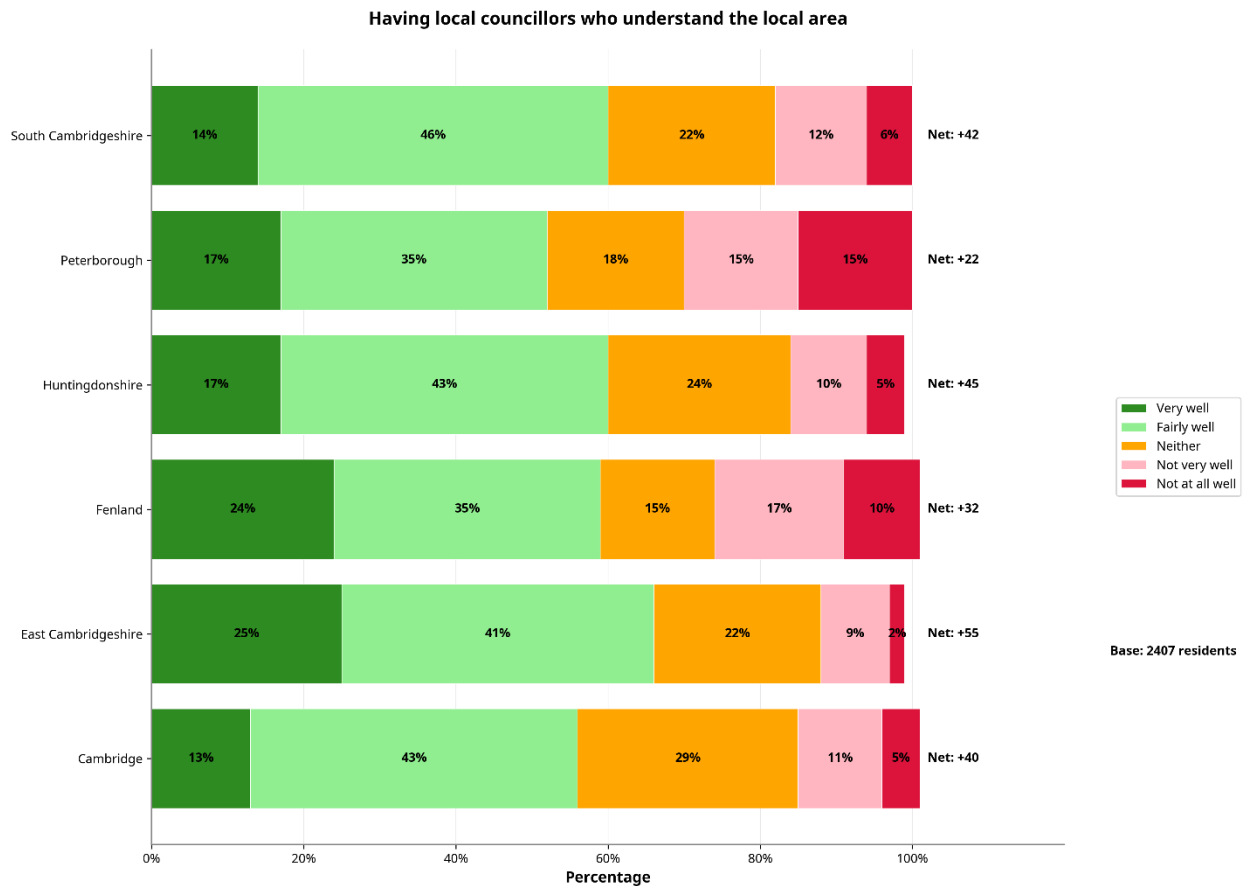


Figure: Local Councillor Knowledge Assessment

Geographical differences

Residents' assessment of having local councillors who understand their area shows significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 66%, followed by Huntingdonshire at 60%, South Cambridgeshire at 60%, Fenland at 59%, Cambridge at 56%, and Peterborough at 52%. The 14-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds. Negative responses remain consistently low across all districts, ranging from 11% in East Cambridgeshire to 30% in Peterborough. The "neither" category varies from 15% in Fenland to 29% in Cambridge.



Business growth

While the public are negative and the council are positive, there is not a substantial amount between them.

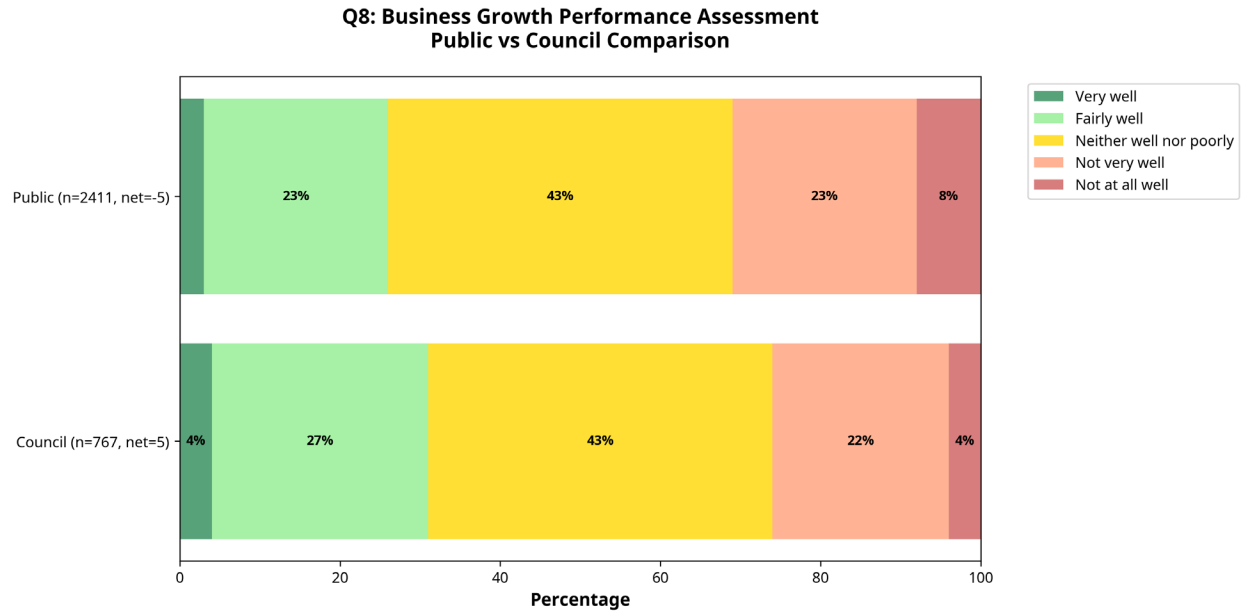
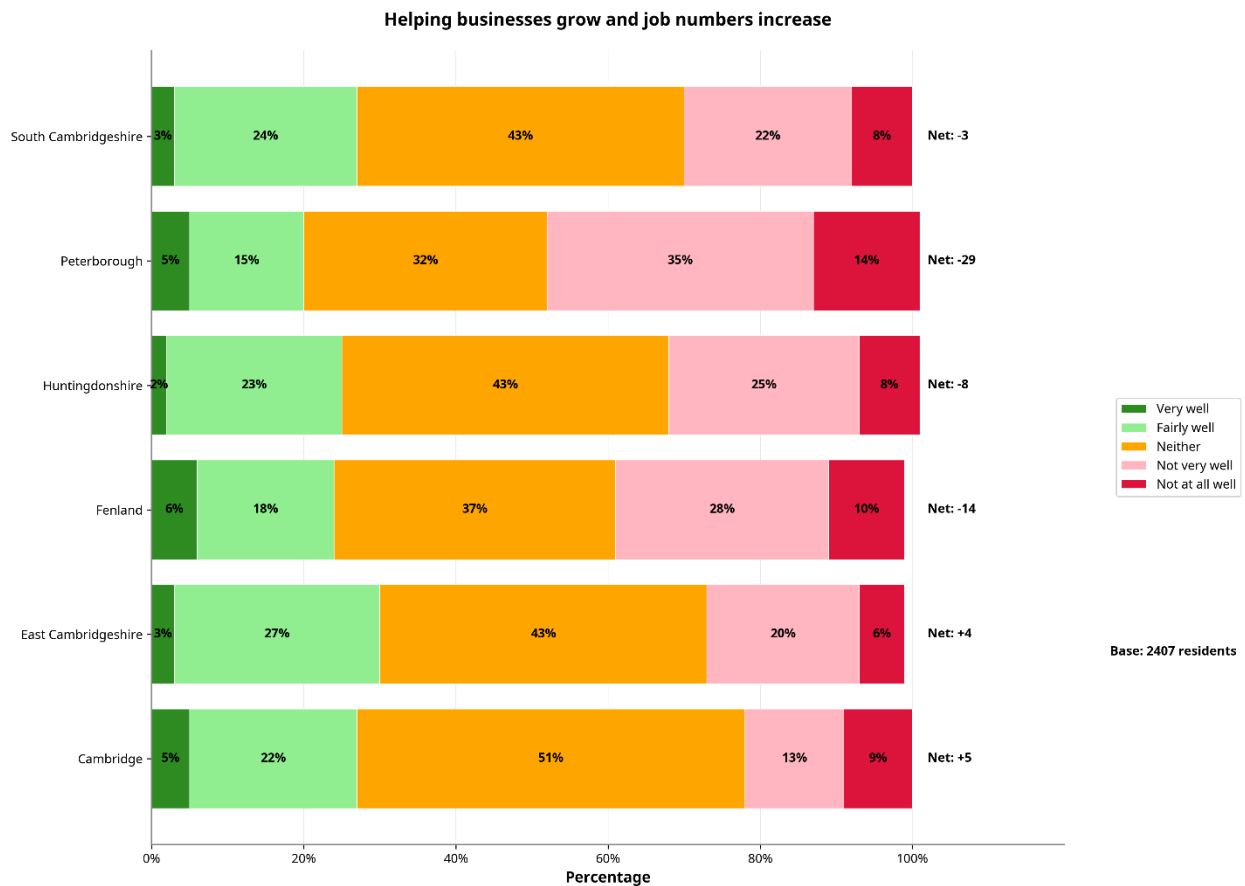


Figure: Business Growth Performance Assessment

Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on business growth and job creation shows minimal significant variation across districts. The dominant response across all areas is "neither," ranging from 32% in Peterborough to 51% in Cambridge, suggesting widespread uncertainty about councils' economic development impact. Positive ratings range from 20% in Peterborough to 30% in East Cambridgeshire, whilst negative responses vary from 22% in Cambridge to 49% in Peterborough. Despite Peterborough showing the highest dissatisfaction at 49% versus Cambridge's 22%, this 27-point difference approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds. The high neutral responses, particularly in Cambridge where over half cannot assess performance, indicate that economic development efforts remain largely invisible to residents or that attribution of business growth to council action proves difficult. This pattern suggests residents across the region struggle to connect council activities with tangible economic outcomes.



Accountability

This is an issue that separates the public from council staff with the public significantly more negative.

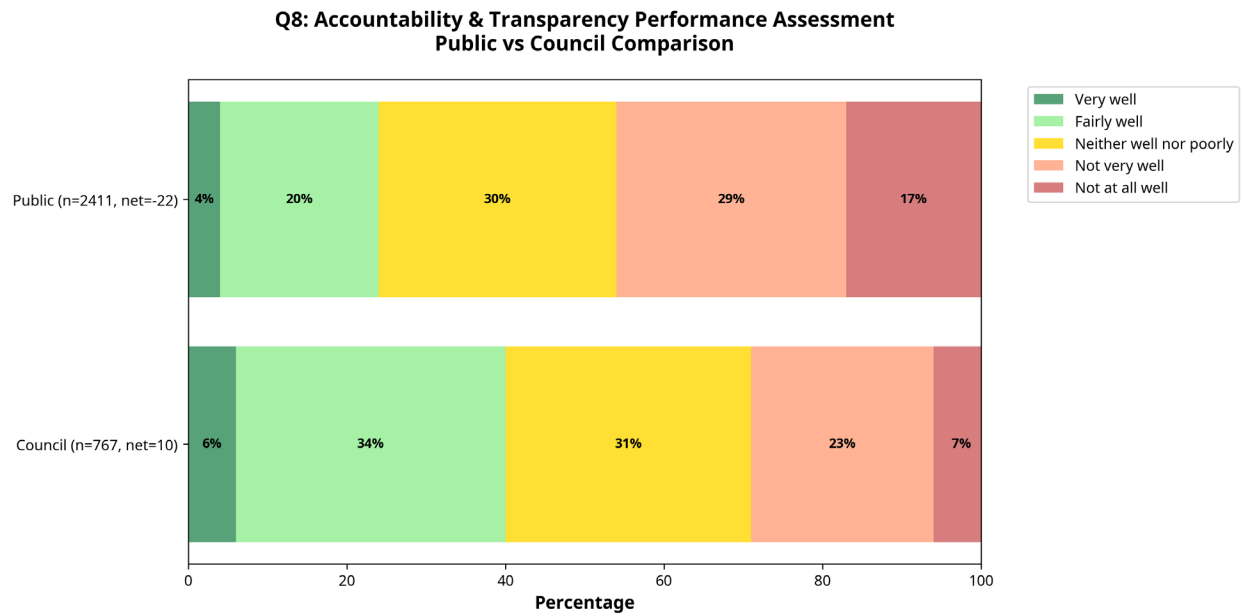
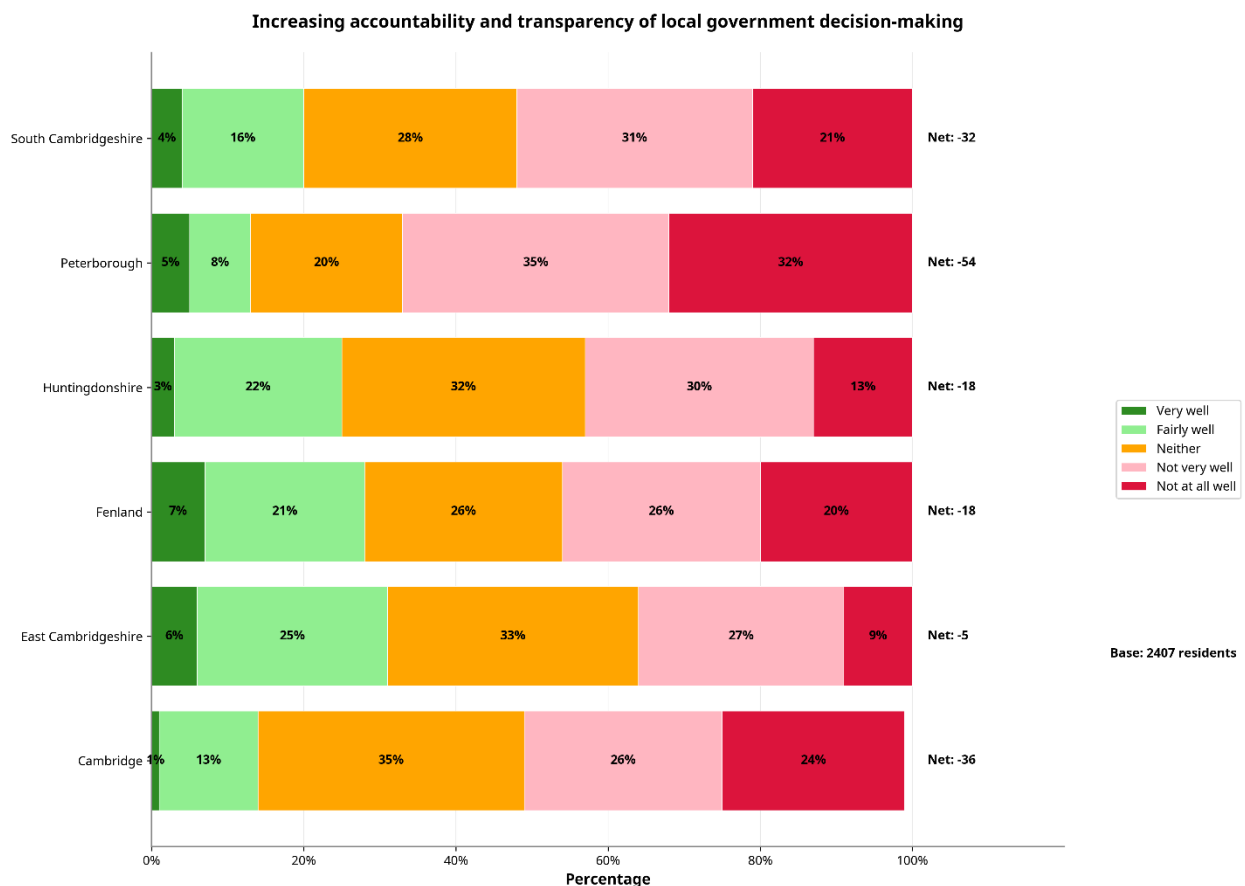


Figure: Accountability & Transparency Assessment

Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on accountability and transparency reveals significant district-level variation. Peterborough shows the highest dissatisfaction with 67% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 50%, South Cambridgeshire's 52%, Fenland's 46%, Huntingdonshire's 43%, and East Cambridgeshire's 36%. The 31-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain uniformly low across all districts, ranging from 13% in Peterborough to 31% in East Cambridgeshire. The "neither" category varies from 20% in Peterborough to 35% in Cambridge. These findings indicate widespread dissatisfaction with transparency and accountability across the region, with Peterborough showing particularly acute concerns consistent with their earlier expressed distrust in council decision-making. This same observation arose in the focus groups. The generally poor ratings suggest systemic challenges in communicating decisions and engaging residents effectively, though East Cambridgeshire performs relatively better, maintaining its pattern of higher satisfaction across multiple governance measures



Local services

Again on local services, the public do not believe that councils perform well while councils are more positive.

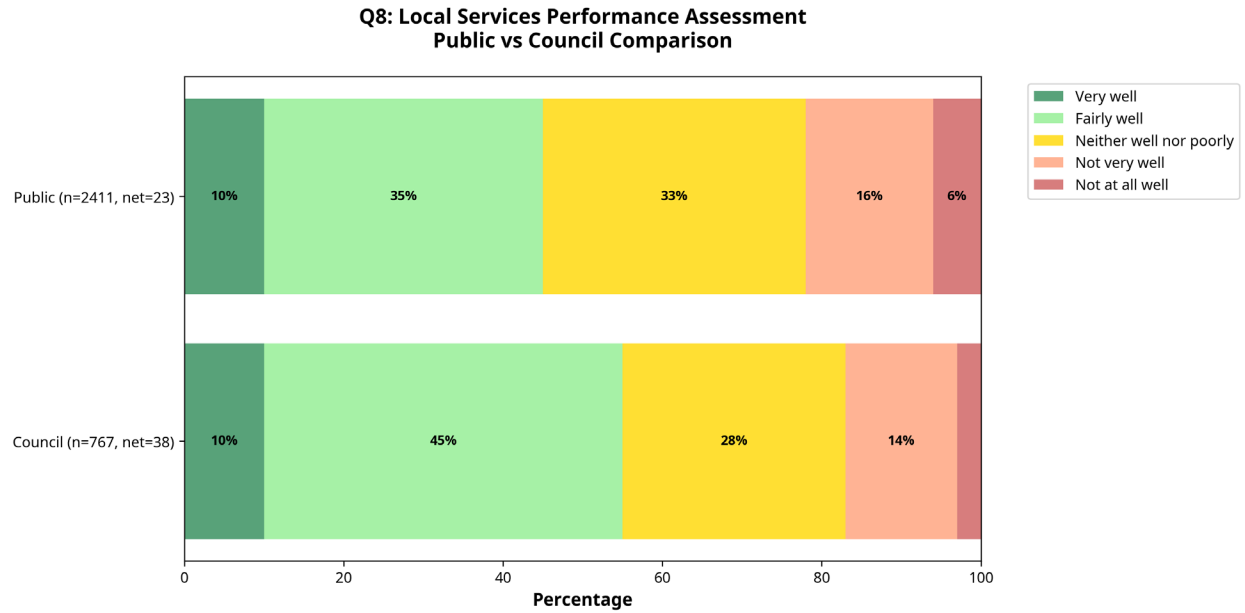
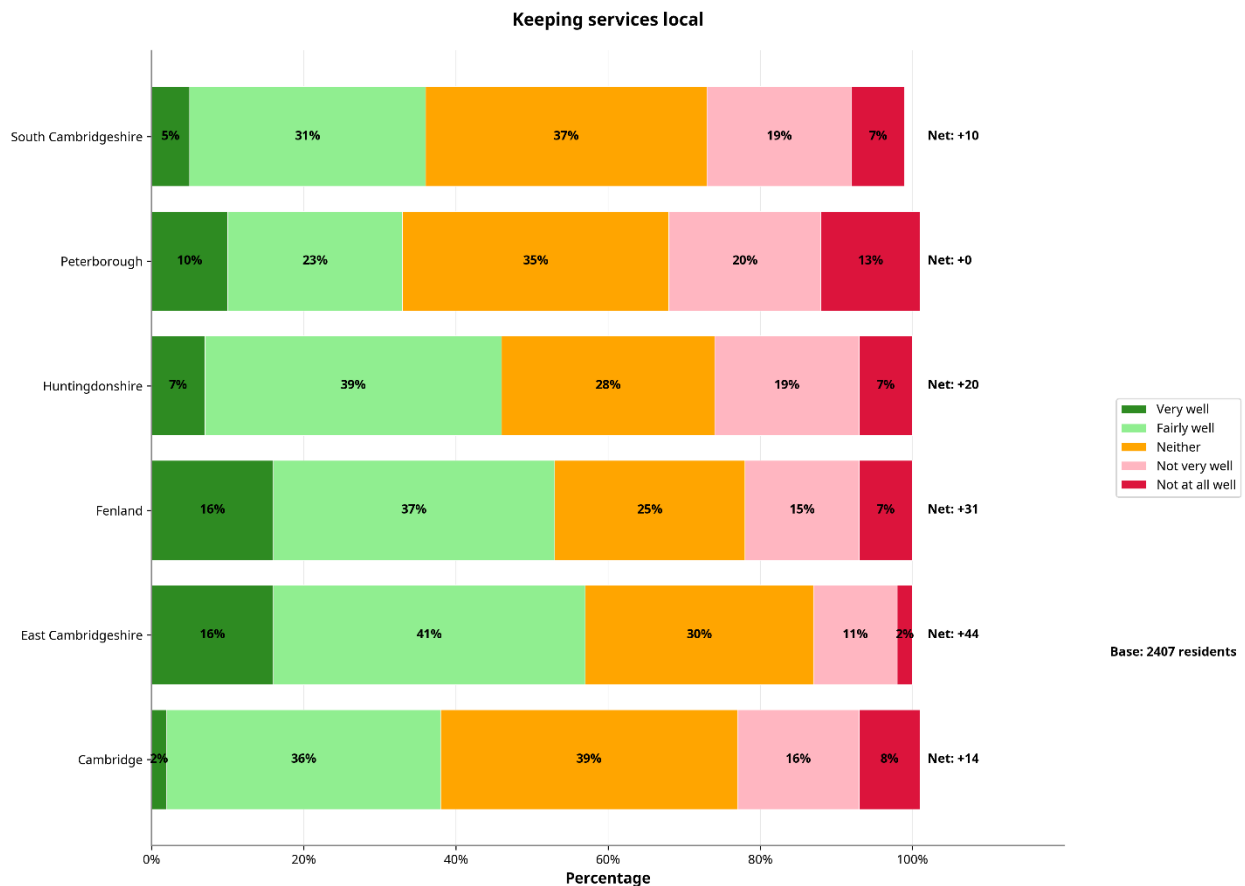


Figure: Local Services Performance Assessment

Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on keeping services local shows limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 57%, followed by Fenland at 53%, Huntingdonshire at 46%, Cambridge at 38%, South Cambridgeshire at 36%, and Peterborough at 33%. The 24-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses remain relatively low across all districts, ranging from 13% in East Cambridgeshire to 33% in Peterborough. The "neither" category shows considerable variation from 25% in Fenland to 39% in Cambridge. These patterns suggest moderate satisfaction with local service provision across most districts, with rural areas like East Cambridgeshire and Fenland showing higher ratings. Urban areas show lower satisfaction with 'keeping services local'.



Protecting local identity

The public are significantly less positive on this measure than council staff.

**Q8: Local Identity Performance Assessment
Public vs Council Comparison**

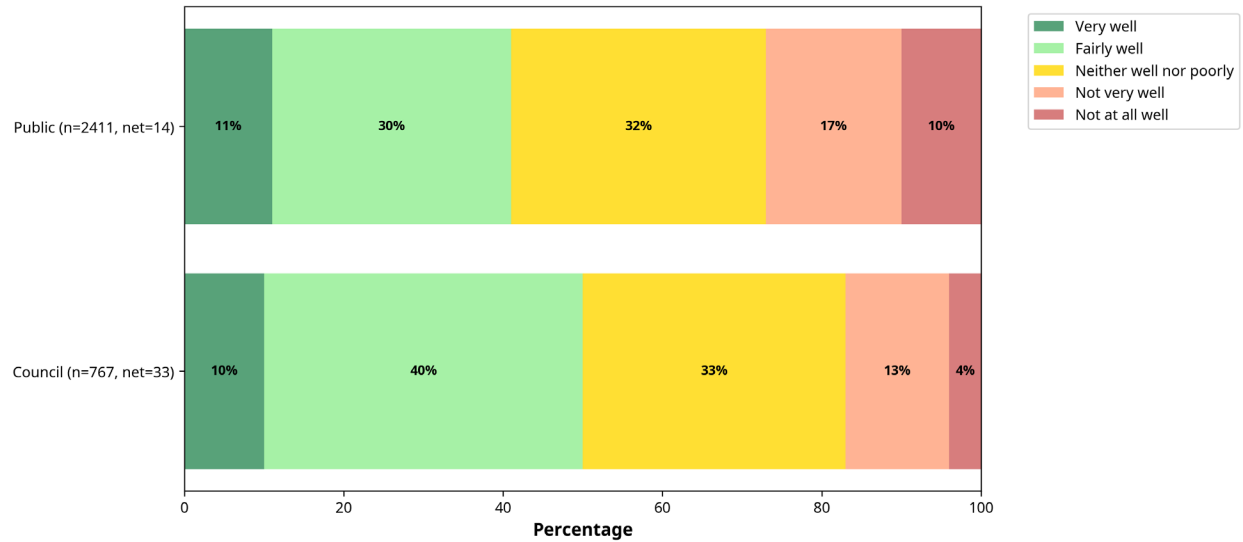
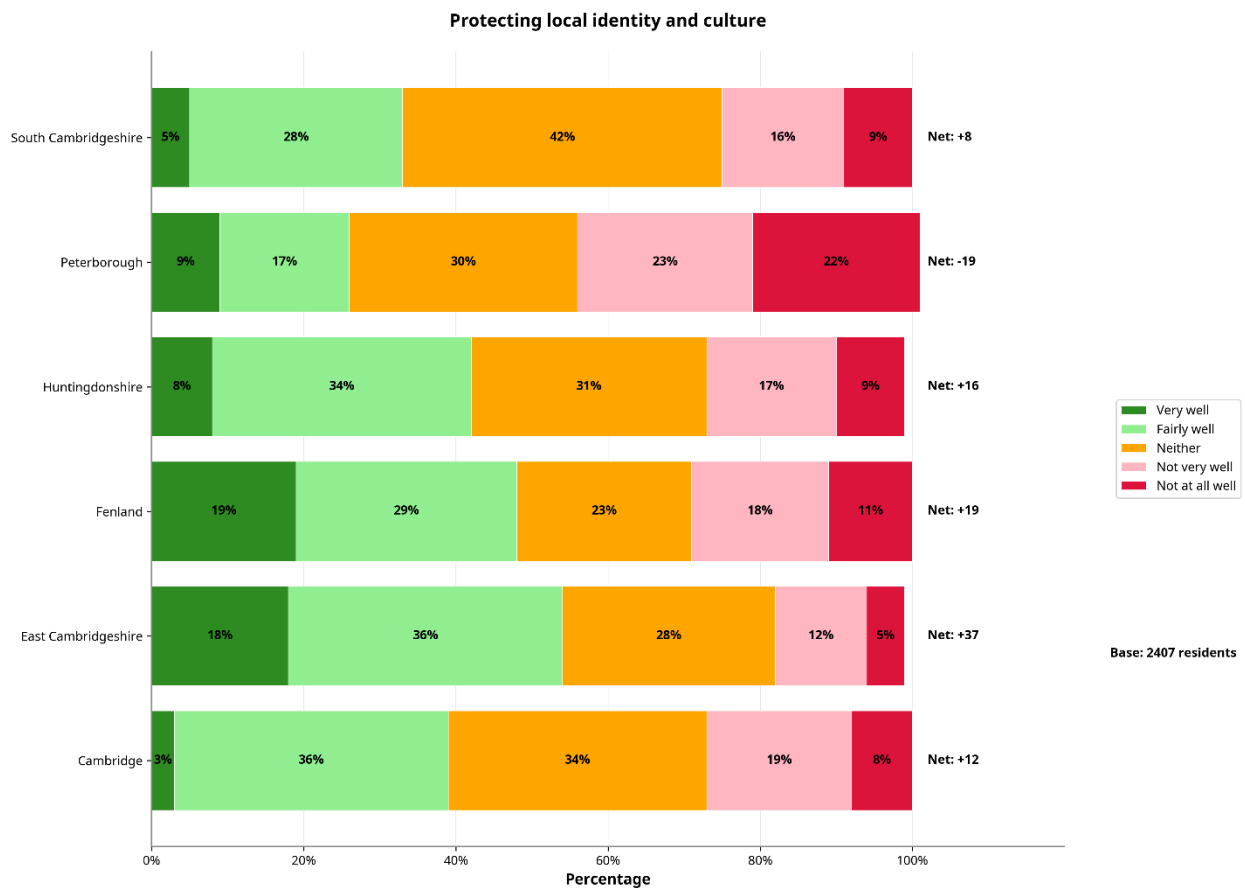


Figure: Local Identity Protection Assessment

Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on protecting local identity and culture shows limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest satisfaction at 54%, followed by Fenland at 48%, Huntingdonshire at 42%, Cambridge at 41%, South Cambridgeshire at 33%, and Peterborough at 26%. The 28-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches significance thresholds. Negative responses vary from 17% in East Cambridgeshire to 45% in Peterborough, with this 28-point gap also approaching significance. The "neither" category ranges from 23% in Fenland to 42% in South Cambridgeshire. These patterns suggest rural districts perceive better performance in cultural preservation, possibly reflecting stronger village identities and community cohesion. The high neutral responses, particularly in South Cambridgeshire, suggest many residents struggle to assess this somewhat abstract performance measure or feel disconnected from local cultural initiatives.



Cost reduction

Notably here the public are significantly net negative in their view of that local government is focused on cost reduction.

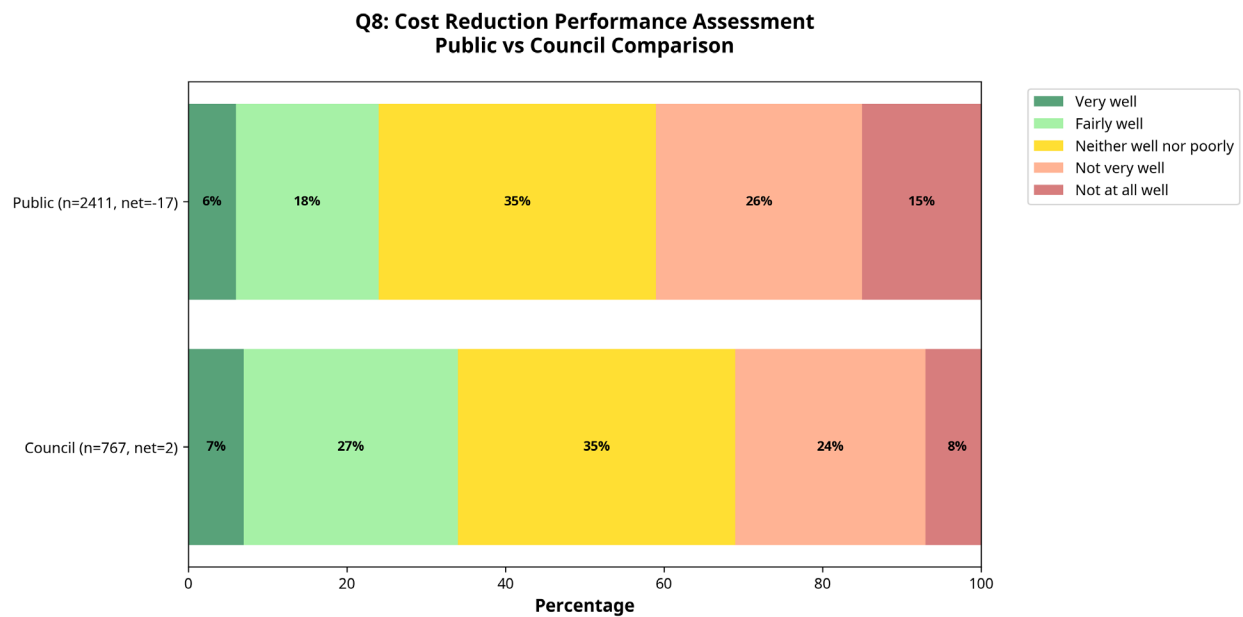
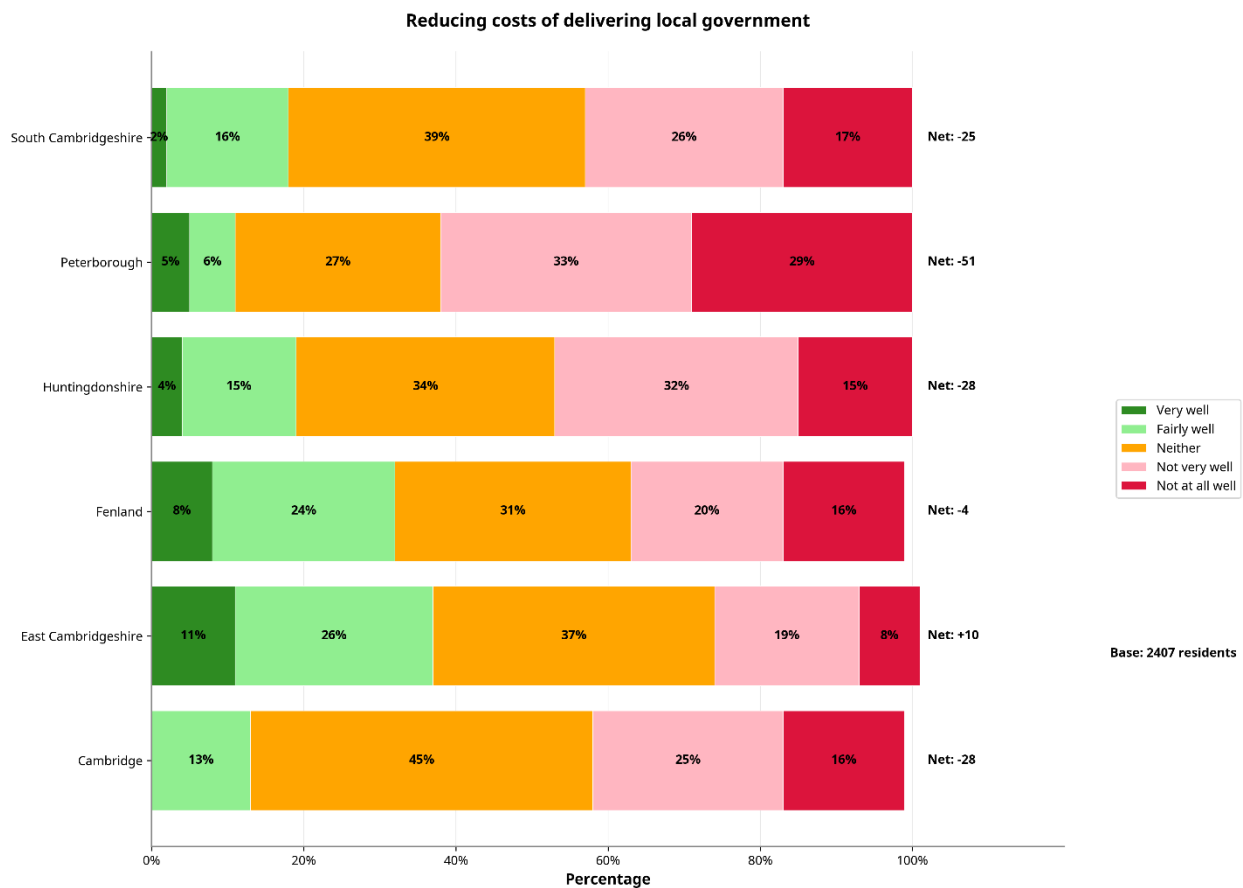


Figure: Cost Reduction Performance Assessment

Geographical performance

Peterborough shows the highest dissatisfaction with 62% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 41%, South Cambridgeshire's 43%, Huntingdonshire's 47%, Fenland's 36%, and East Cambridgeshire's 27%. The 35-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain consistently low, ranging from 11% in Peterborough to 37% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 32%. The "neither" category varies from 27% in Peterborough to 45% in Cambridge. These findings indicate widespread scepticism about councils' efficiency efforts, with Peterborough residents expressing particular dissatisfaction consistent with their broader governance concerns. East Cambridgeshire again shows relatively better ratings, suggesting residents perceive more effective cost management. The high neutral responses, especially in Cambridge, may reflect limited visibility of efficiency measures or difficulty assessing administrative cost-effectiveness from a resident perspective.



Reducing the complexity of local government

Both residents and council staff tend to disagree that the local government performs well in terms of reducing the complexity of government.

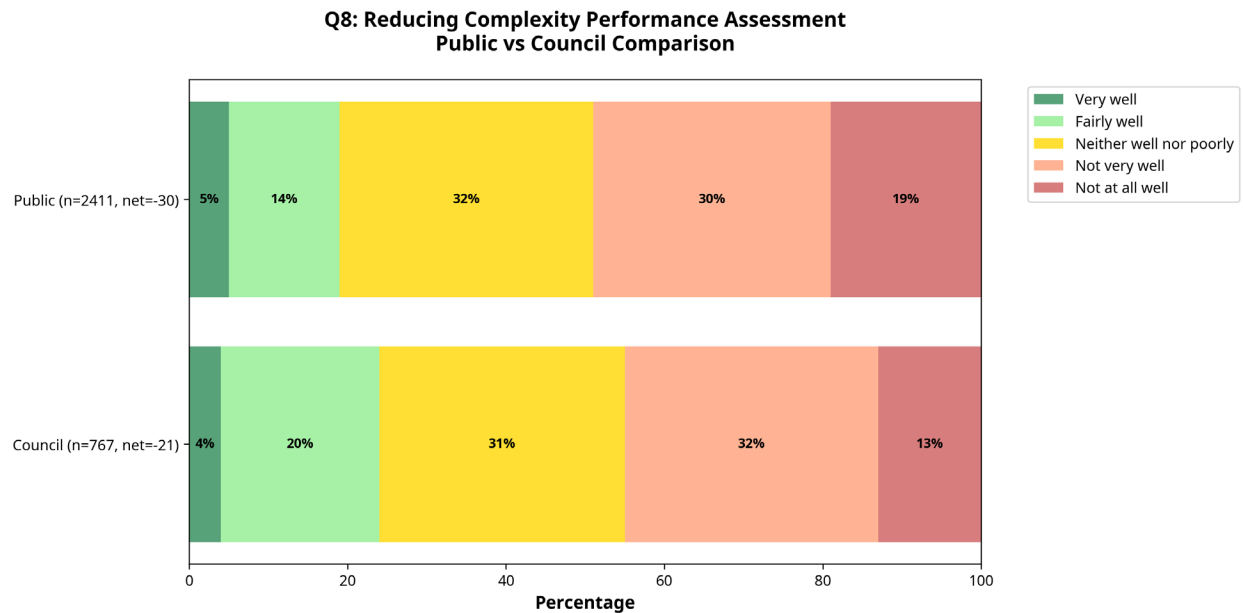
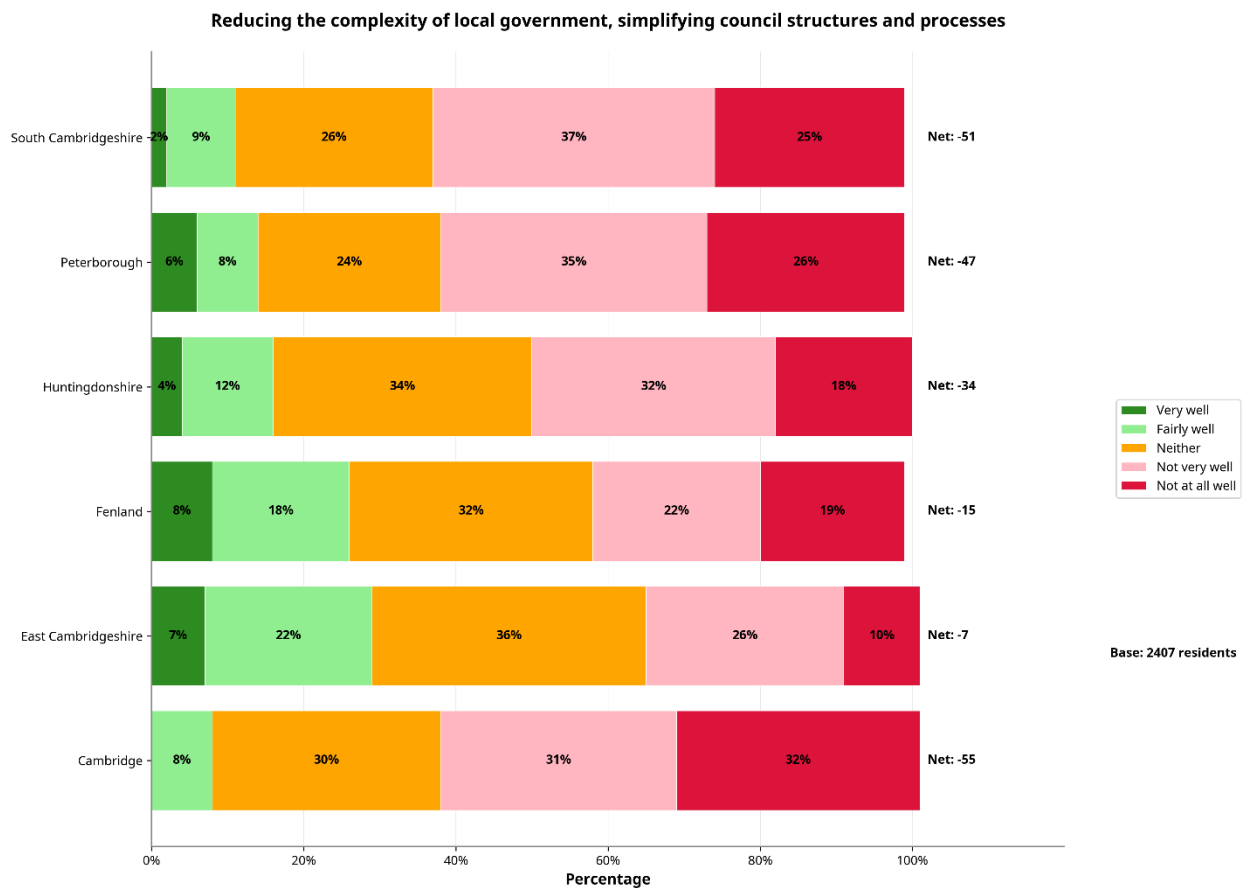


Figure: Complexity Reduction Assessment

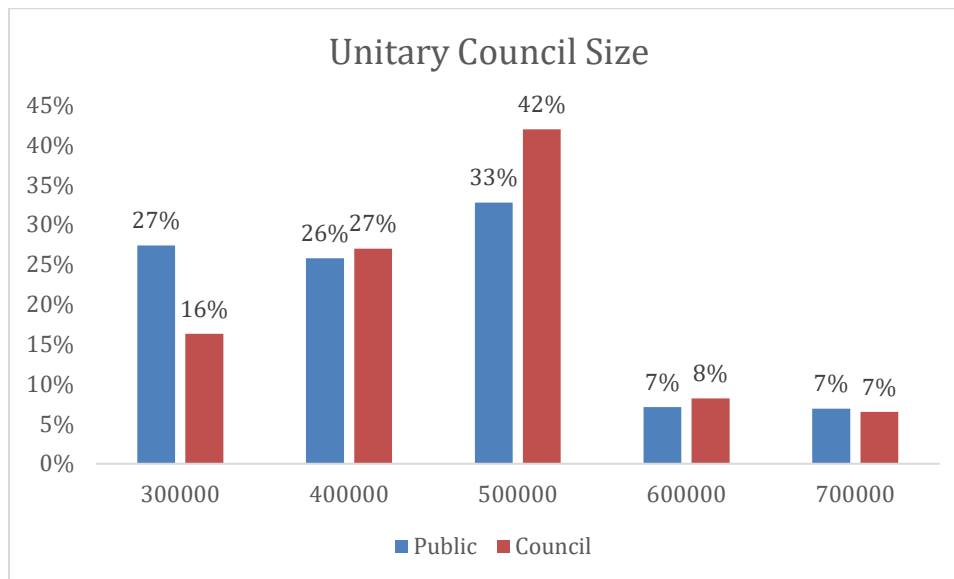
Geographical performance

Cambridge shows the highest dissatisfaction with 63% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, followed by South Cambridgeshire at 62%, Peterborough at 61%, Huntingdonshire at 50%, Fenland at 41%, and East Cambridgeshire at 36%. The 27-point gap between Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain uniformly low across all districts, ranging from 8% in Cambridge to 29% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 26%. The "neither" category varies from 24% in Peterborough to 36% in East Cambridgeshire. These findings reveal widespread dissatisfaction with current governance complexity, particularly acute in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire where the two-tier system may be perceived as especially cumbersome. Peterborough's poor rating despite its unitary status suggests complexity issues transcend structural arrangements. East Cambridgeshire's relatively better assessment maintains its pattern of higher satisfaction across governance measures, though even here the majority perceive room for improvement in simplification.



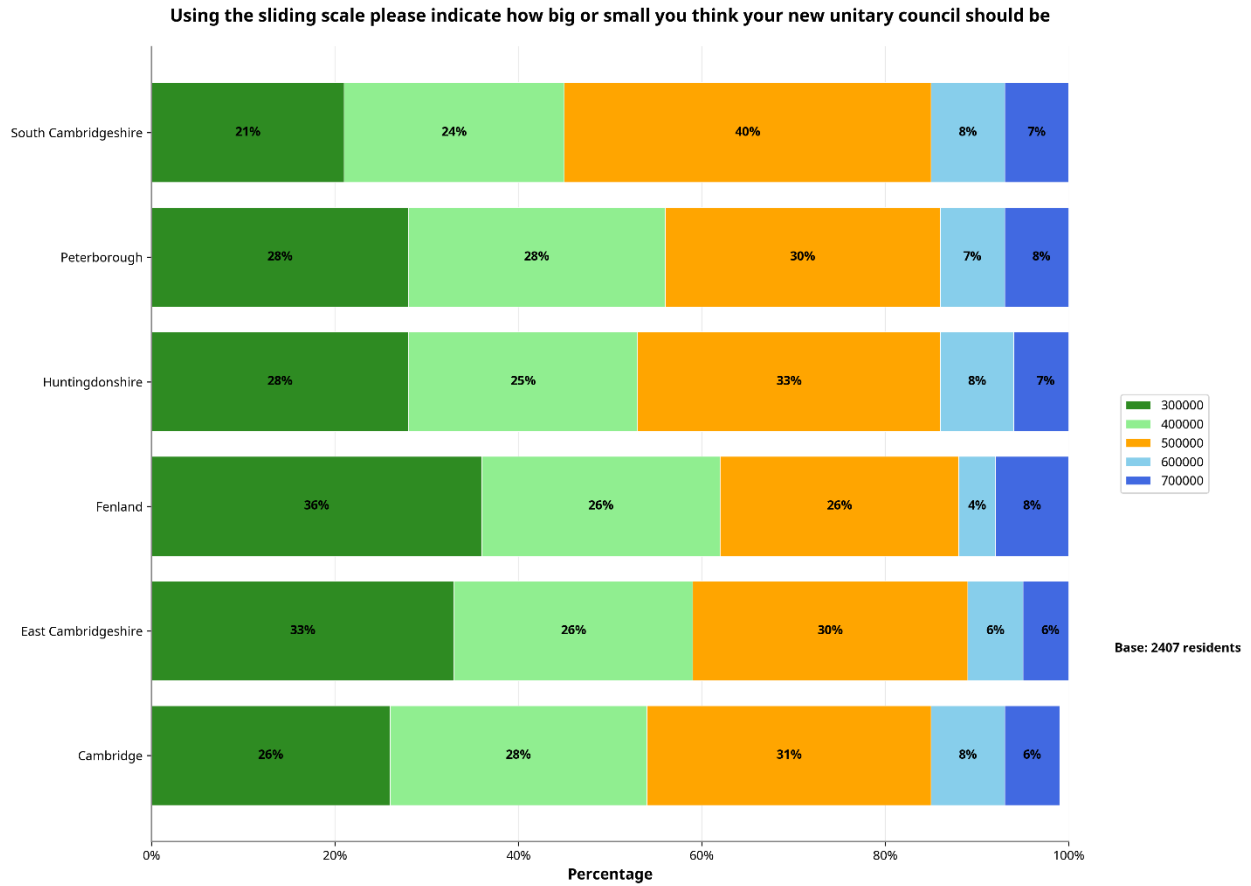
Unitary Council Size

The public mode is for 400,000 in terms of size, although the most picked option is 500,000. Council workers, by contrast, four in ten want to see 500,000 with lower agreement with 300 or 400,000. For both groups, larger than 500,000 is less attractive.



Geographical performance

Fenland shows the strongest preference for smaller councils, with 62% favouring populations under 400,000, compared to Cambridge's 54%, Peterborough's 56%, Huntingdonshire's 53%, East Cambridgeshire's 59%, and South Cambridgeshire's 45%. The 17-point difference between Fenland and South Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, South Cambridgeshire shows the highest support for larger councils, with 48% preferring populations over 500,000, versus Fenland's 30%, representing a significant 18-point gap. The 600,000-700,000 category shows minimal support across all districts at 4-8%. These patterns suggest rural districts like Fenland strongly favour smaller unitary authorities, potentially reflecting concerns about representation and local identity within larger structures. South Cambridgeshire's greater openness to larger councils may reflect recognition of the district's integration with Cambridge and acceptance of broader administrative units. The general preference for mid-sized authorities (400,000-500,000) across most districts indicates residents seek a balance between efficiency and local representation.



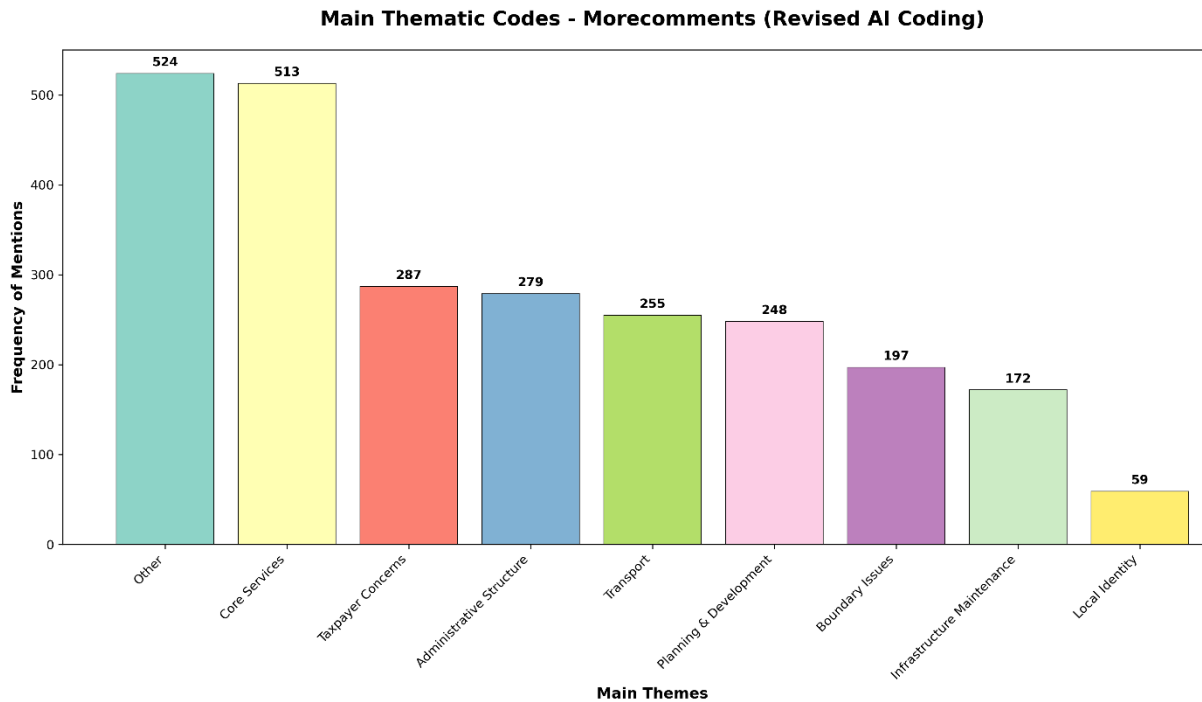
Hopes and concerns

As well as the quantitative questions, there was one open-ended question that asked Do you have any further comments, hopes or concerns you wish to make? Some comments were short and some were extended. Therefore, in terms of coding data, a multicode approach was taken i.e. one statement could make several points and so these have all been tracked. In addition, the districts have been supplied with their individual comments in order to look at individual responses in detail. There were 1,564 comments made in total, these come both from residents and council workers. It will definitely be worth investigating both groups of comments especially in terms of future planning.

In terms of sentiment, the responses were tilted to negative.

Sentiment	Percentage
Very Positive	2%
Positive	16%
Neutral	54%
Negative	26%
Very Negative	3%

The comments were tagged for main thematic content and the further tagged for the detail on those responses. With any coding process, there are likely to be a large amount of others that do not fit into a thematic category but instead make individual points. This is what we find in this survey. Next, people are concerned about core services along with taxpayer concerns, and how the administrative structure will work. These last two sit with planning and development, and transport infrastructure.



The detailed thematic coding reveals a striking hierarchy of public concerns, with service quality and delivery dominating the discourse, accounting for over a quarter (27%) of all coded mentions. This overwhelming focus on service standards suggests that regardless of structural reforms, residents remain fundamentally preoccupied with whether their bins are collected, their roads are maintained, and their local services function effectively.

Three substantial themes emerge in the second tier: longer-term planning comments (16%), transport adequacy (15%), and concerns about the functioning of local structures (13%). Together, these themes paint a picture of communities grappling with both immediate service needs and longer-term strategic challenges around development, connectivity, and governance effectiveness.

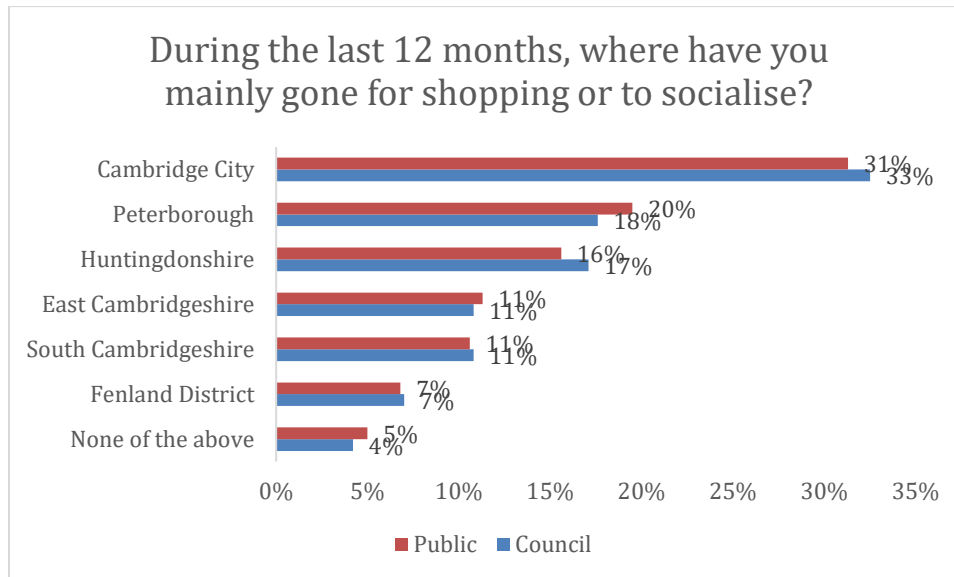
The middle range of the distribution reveals a cluster of interconnected concerns, each garnering between 8% and 9% of mentions. Here we find the cost-effectiveness of changes sitting alongside rural service maintenance and growth management issues, whilst budget allocation concerns and healthcare access each command roughly 8% of the discourse. Educational provision and housing development concerns follow closely, suggesting that residents view these issues as part of an integrated challenge facing local areas.

As we move through the lower frequencies, a tail of more specific concerns emerges, from environmental issues (5%) and protected services (5%) to community business areas and local identity questions (both around 3%). The presence of administration efficiency concerns, opposition to Cambridge-Peterborough combined authority proposals, and fears of losing local voice (each around 2%) speaks to underlying anxieties about democratic representation and administrative distance.

Location Preferences

Shopping and socialising

Residents are most likely to shop in Cambridge or Peterborough, and to a lesser extent, Huntingdonshire.



However, in the context of local government reorganisation, residents have emphasised that the new unitary councils should be located in places that they naturally travel to. Residents' decisions about what is a suitable place are complex and multi-faceted, but the travel time is a factor and it is therefore important to see where people travel for cultural activities, where they travel if they do not feel so well so under some level of duress and finally where they travel for work. We begin by sharing the shopping and socialising experience and then this is layered with health and work.

The analysis of shopping and socialising patterns across the six districts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough reveals complex patterns of movement and economic interaction that vary considerably by location. These data, collected over a twelve-month period, provide detailed insights into how residents navigate their region for retail and leisure activities, revealing both expected gravitational pulls towards major centres and unexpected patterns of local loyalty and cross-district movement.

Cambridge demonstrates the highest level of self-containment across all surveyed districts. When Cambridge residents were asked where they primarily shop and socialise, 71% indicated they remain within the city boundaries, a figure that significantly exceeds any other district's internal retention rate. This pronounced local focus suggests that Cambridge's retail and leisure

infrastructure adequately serves its population's needs. Secondary destinations for Cambridge residents include South Cambridgeshire at 14%, indicating some movement to retail parks and venues in the immediate surroundings, whilst East Cambridgeshire attracts 9% and Huntingdonshire 4%. Minimal interaction occurs with Peterborough and Fenland, each registering just 1% of Cambridge residents' activity, whilst 1% indicate they primarily shop and socialise outside all listed areas.

South Cambridgeshire presents a notably different pattern, with residents almost evenly split between staying within their district (35%) and travelling to Cambridge (40%). This near-equal division suggests that South Cambridgeshire maintains viable local centres—likely in market towns such as Cambourne, Sawston, and Melbourn—whilst simultaneously functioning within Cambridge's economic orbit. Huntingdonshire attracts 10% of South Cambridgeshire residents, possibly reflecting connections to St Neots and Huntingdon for those in the western parts of the district. East Cambridgeshire draws 8%, whilst both Peterborough and Fenland register just 1% each. The 5% selecting "none of the above" suggests some residents may be oriented towards locations outside the study area, potentially including Royston, Saffron Walden, or further afield to London.

Peterborough emerges as the second major urban centre, demonstrating strong internal cohesion with 63% of residents conducting their shopping and socialising within the city. This high retention rate positions Peterborough as a largely self-sufficient urban area serving its population's retail and leisure needs. Interestingly, 12% of Peterborough residents travel to Cambridge, matched exactly by another 12% who indicate they primarily use areas outside those listed, potentially including Leicester, Northampton, or Stamford. Huntingdonshire attracts 8% of Peterborough residents, likely those in the southern areas of the city accessing Huntingdon or St Neots, whilst Fenland draws 4%, reflecting connections with Whittlesey and March. East Cambridgeshire registers just 1%, and South Cambridgeshire shows no measurable interactivity from Peterborough residents, underlining the limited interaction between Peterborough and the Cambridge-centric southern districts.

Huntingdonshire displays the most evenly distributed pattern amongst the predominantly rural districts. With 46% of residents staying within district for shopping and socialising, Huntingdonshire maintains a moderate level of self-sufficiency, likely centred on its market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots, and Ramsey. Cambridge exerts considerable pull, attracting 28% of Huntingdonshire residents—the second-highest proportion of any external district population after East Cambridgeshire. This suggests that many Huntingdonshire residents, particularly those in the eastern areas around St Ives and the Hemingfords, look to Cambridge for major shopping and entertainment. South Cambridgeshire accounts for 10% of activity, whilst Peterborough draws 8%, indicating that Huntingdonshire sits at the intersection of both major urban spheres of influence. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland register 4% and 2% respectively, with 2% selecting none of the above.

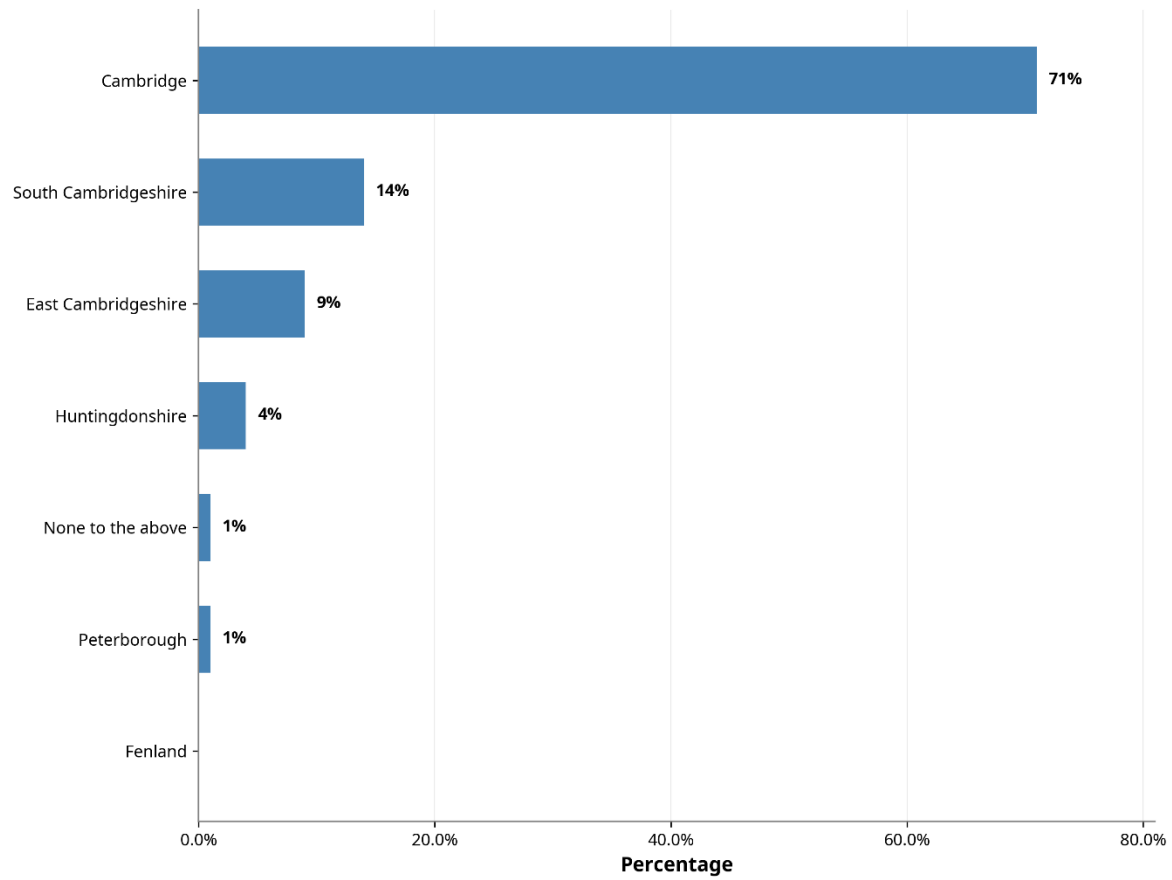
Fenland presents a distinctive pattern characterised by strong local orientation combined with significant links to Peterborough. The district retains 42% of its residents' shopping and

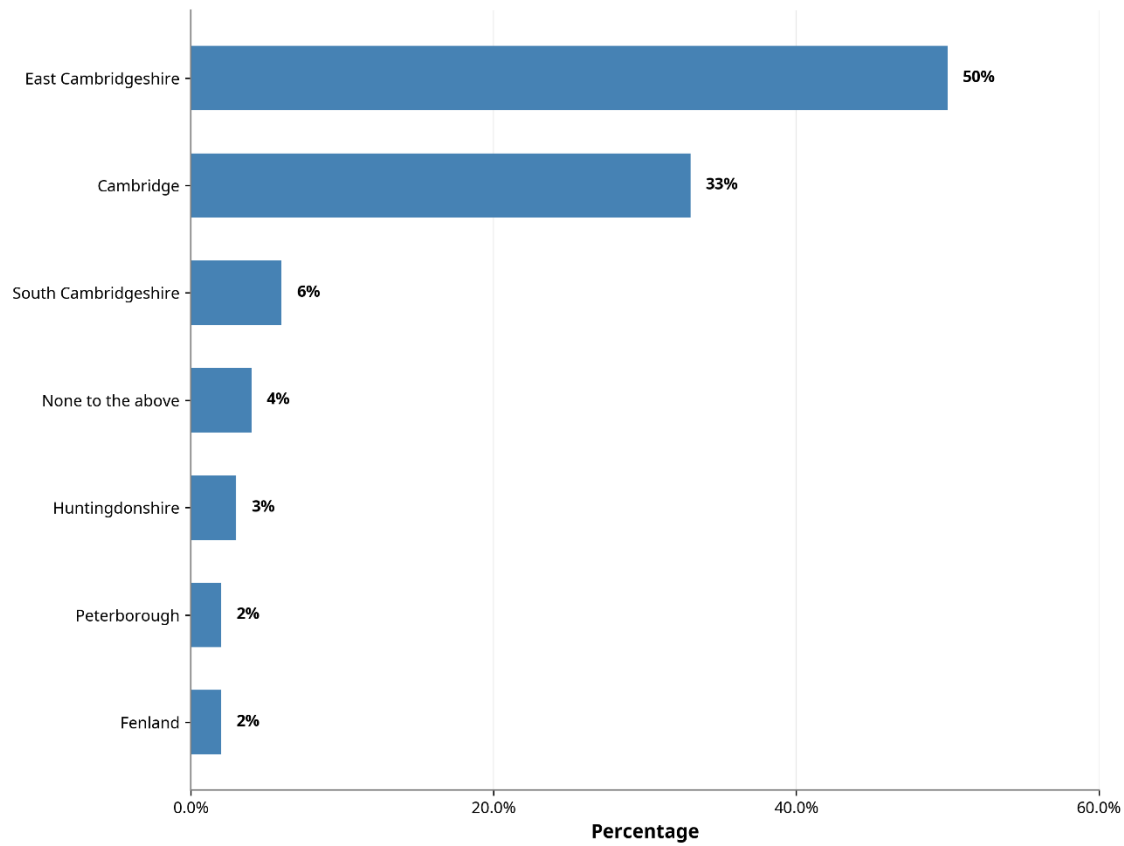
socialising activity, likely concentrated in the market towns of Wisbech, March, Whittlesey, and Chatteris. Peterborough serves as the primary external destination at 23%, reflecting both geographical proximity and transport links, particularly from March and Whittlesey. East Cambridgeshire attracts 13% of Fenland residents, possibly those from southern areas accessing Ely, whilst Cambridge draws just 11%—a notably low figure given Cambridge's regional dominance, suggesting that distance and potentially limited transport connections reduce Cambridge's appeal for Fenland residents.

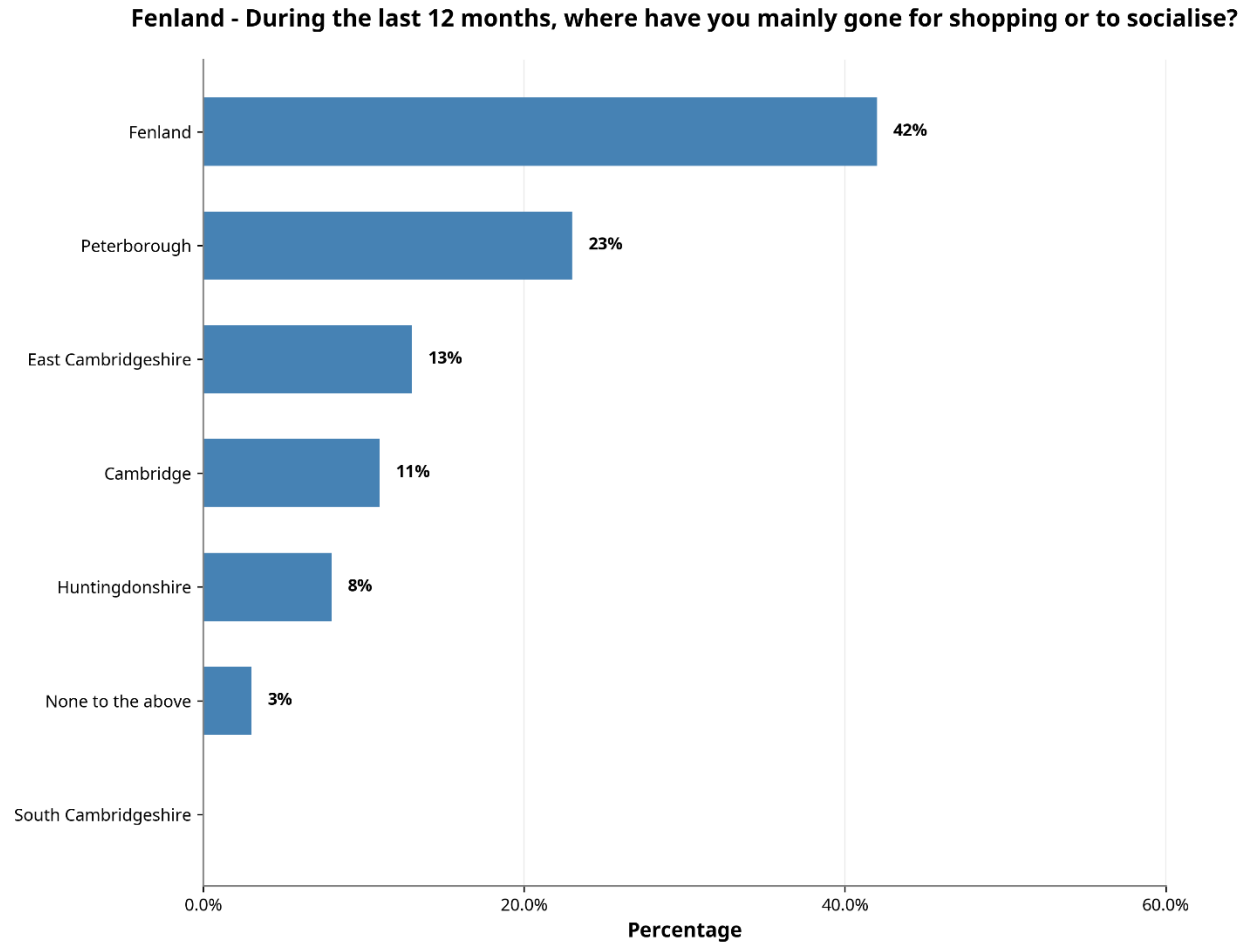
Huntingdonshire accounts for 8% of activity, whilst 3% indicate they shop and socialise primarily outside the listed areas, potentially in King's Lynn or Downham Market. South Cambridgeshire shows no recorded activity from Fenland residents, highlighting the minimal interaction between these geographically separated districts.

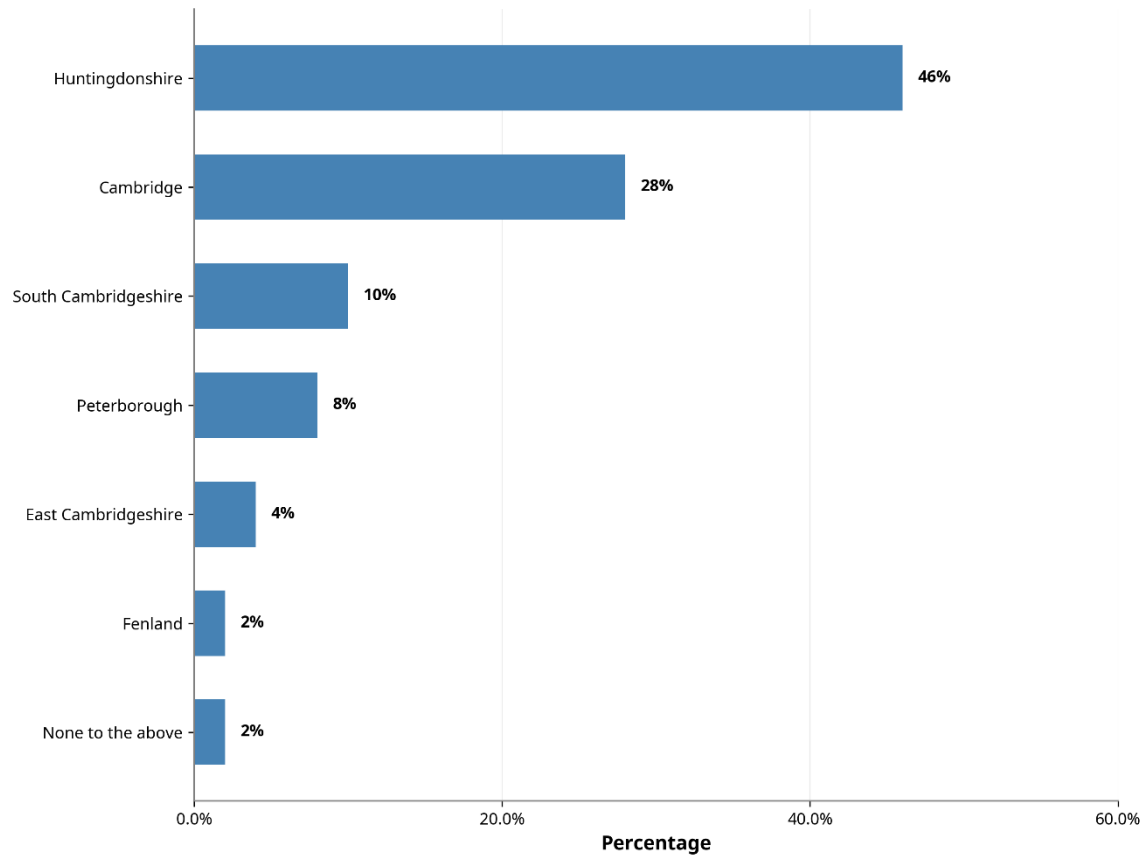
East Cambridgeshire exhibits the most pronounced external orientation of all districts, with an exact 50-50 split between internal and external activity. Half of residents remain within district, likely utilising Ely as the primary centre alongside smaller towns like Soham and Littleport. However, the other half of resident activity flows elsewhere, with Cambridge commanding 33%—the highest proportion of any district's residents travelling to Cambridge after Cambridge itself. This strong connection likely reflects both commuting patterns and the relative accessibility of Cambridge from much of East Cambridgeshire via the A10 and rail links which was supported in the focus groups. South Cambridgeshire attracts 6% of East Cambridgeshire residents, potentially those accessing retail parks or specific venues, whilst 4% indicate they primarily use areas outside those listed. Huntingdonshire draws 3%, and both Peterborough and Fenland register 2% each, indicating limited northward and westward orientation despite geographical proximity to Fenland.

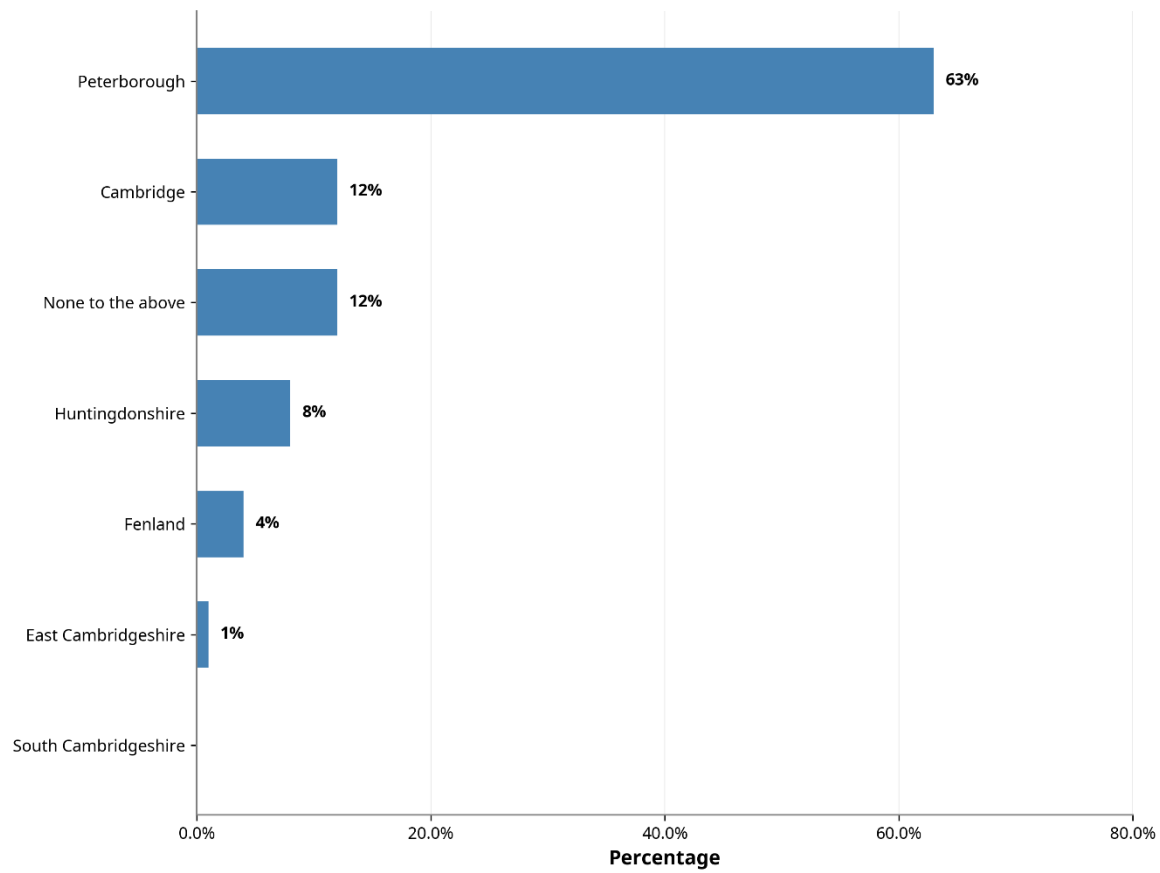
These detailed patterns reveal a region with two distinct urban poles—Cambridge dominating the southern and eastern districts whilst Peterborough serves the north—with varying degrees of self-sufficiency in the rural districts. The data indicate that administrative boundaries only partially reflect actual patterns of movement and economic activity, with some neighbouring districts showing surprisingly limited interaction whilst others demonstrate strong connections despite distance. The variation in "none of the above" responses, ranging from 1% in Cambridge to 12% in Peterborough, suggests differential orientation towards areas outside the study region, with Peterborough residents potentially maintaining stronger links to other regional centres whilst Cambridge residents find their needs met within the immediate area.

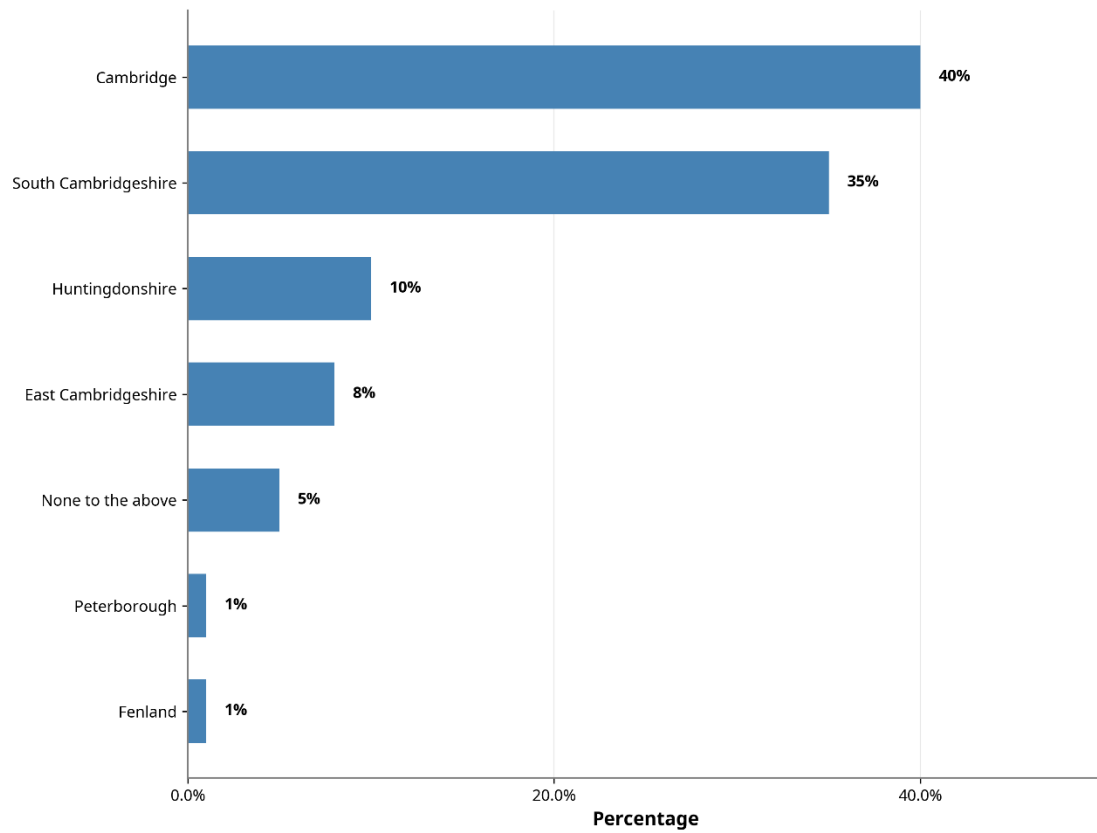
Cambridge - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?

East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?



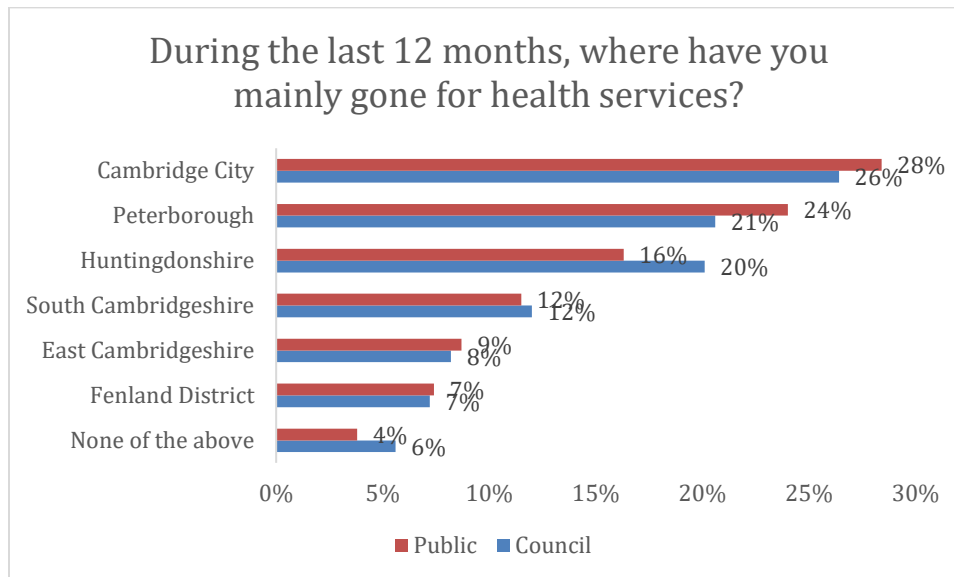
Huntingdonshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?

Peterborough - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?

South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?

Health services

Again, residents have mainly gone to health services in Cambridge, Peterborough or Huntingdonshire.



The analysis of health service utilisation patterns across the six districts reveals markedly different configurations from those observed in shopping and socialising behaviours, with far greater local containment and more pronounced disparities in cross-district healthcare flows. These data illuminates questions about healthcare accessibility, service provision, and the complex interplay between administrative boundaries and clinical commissioning arrangements. Cambridge demonstrates the highest level of healthcare self-sufficiency, with 88% of residents accessing health services within the city. This exceptional retention rate likely reflects the concentration of specialist services at Addenbrooke's Hospital and associated facilities, alongside comprehensive primary care provision. The remaining 12% of Cambridge residents' healthcare activity disperses thinly, with South Cambridgeshire accounting for 8%, East Cambridgeshire 2%, and Huntingdonshire 1%. No measurable healthcare flows occur to Peterborough or Fenland, whilst no respondents indicated accessing healthcare outside the listed areas, suggesting Cambridge's medical infrastructure comprehensively serves its population's needs.

Peterborough exhibits similarly high healthcare self-containment at 81%, anchored by Peterborough City Hospital and its network of primary care facilities. Cambridge attracts 15% of Peterborough residents for healthcare, substantially higher than the reverse flow and likely reflecting specialist service access at Addenbrooke's. Huntingdonshire accounts for 5% of Peterborough residents' healthcare activity, whilst South Cambridgeshire and Fenland each

draw 2%, and East Cambridgeshire 1%. The 6% selecting "none of the above" may access specialist services in Leicester, Northampton, or London.

Huntingdonshire shows moderate healthcare self-sufficiency at 64%, with Hinchingsbrook Hospital and local primary care serving the majority of needs. However, substantial healthcare flows occur to other districts, with Fenland attracting 16% of Huntingdonshire residents—a surprising finding given Fenland's limited acute hospital provision, potentially reflecting GP registration patterns or community service access. Peterborough draws 12% of Huntingdonshire residents, whilst Cambridge accounts for 10%, likely for specialist services. East Cambridgeshire attracts 4% of activity, with South Cambridgeshire at 2%. The 4% selecting "none of the above" may reflect healthcare access in Bedfordshire or further afield.

East Cambridgeshire demonstrates moderate local provision at 58%, with Princess of Wales Hospital in Ely serving as the primary acute facility alongside local GP practices. Cambridge commands 34% of East Cambridgeshire residents' healthcare activity—the highest external healthcare dependency observed in any district—reflecting both geographical proximity and the pull of specialist services. South Cambridgeshire accounts for 3% of healthcare activity, matching the proportion accessing services outside the listed areas. Notably, no East Cambridgeshire residents report accessing healthcare in Peterborough, Huntingdonshire, or Fenland, suggesting a strong southward orientation in healthcare pathways despite proximity to Fenland.

Fenland exhibits moderate local healthcare retention at 53%, served primarily by the North Cambridgeshire Hospital in Wisbech alongside primary care facilities in market towns. Peterborough emerges as the major external healthcare destination at 24%, reflecting both proximity and established patient pathways, particularly from March and Whittlesey. Huntingdonshire attracts 11% of Fenland residents, whilst Cambridge draws 7%—relatively low given Cambridge's regional specialist role, suggesting distance and transport barriers may limit access. East Cambridgeshire accounts for 3% of activity, matching the proportion accessing services outside the listed areas. South Cambridgeshire shows no measurable healthcare flows from Fenland, highlighting the minimal interaction between these geographically separated districts.

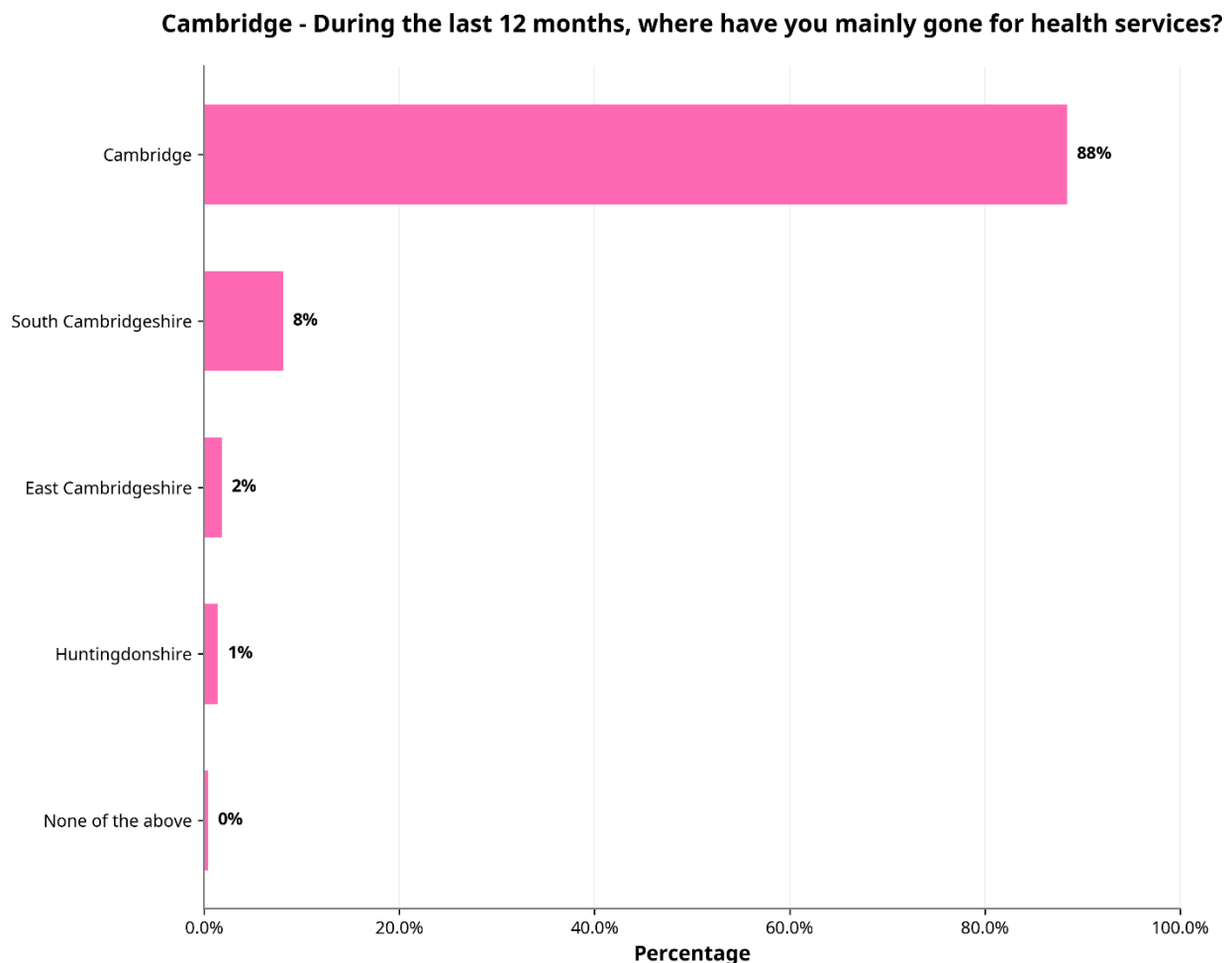
South Cambridgeshire presents the most dispersed healthcare pattern, with only 50% of residents accessing services within district—the lowest retention rate observed. Cambridge dominates external healthcare flows, attracting 37% of South Cambridgeshire residents, reflecting both proximity and the location of acute and specialist services. Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire each draw 4% of residents, whilst the 4% selecting "none of the above" may access services in Hertfordshire or Bedfordshire. Notably, neither Peterborough nor Fenland registers measurable healthcare flows from South Cambridgeshire, reinforcing the district's strong orientation towards Cambridge.

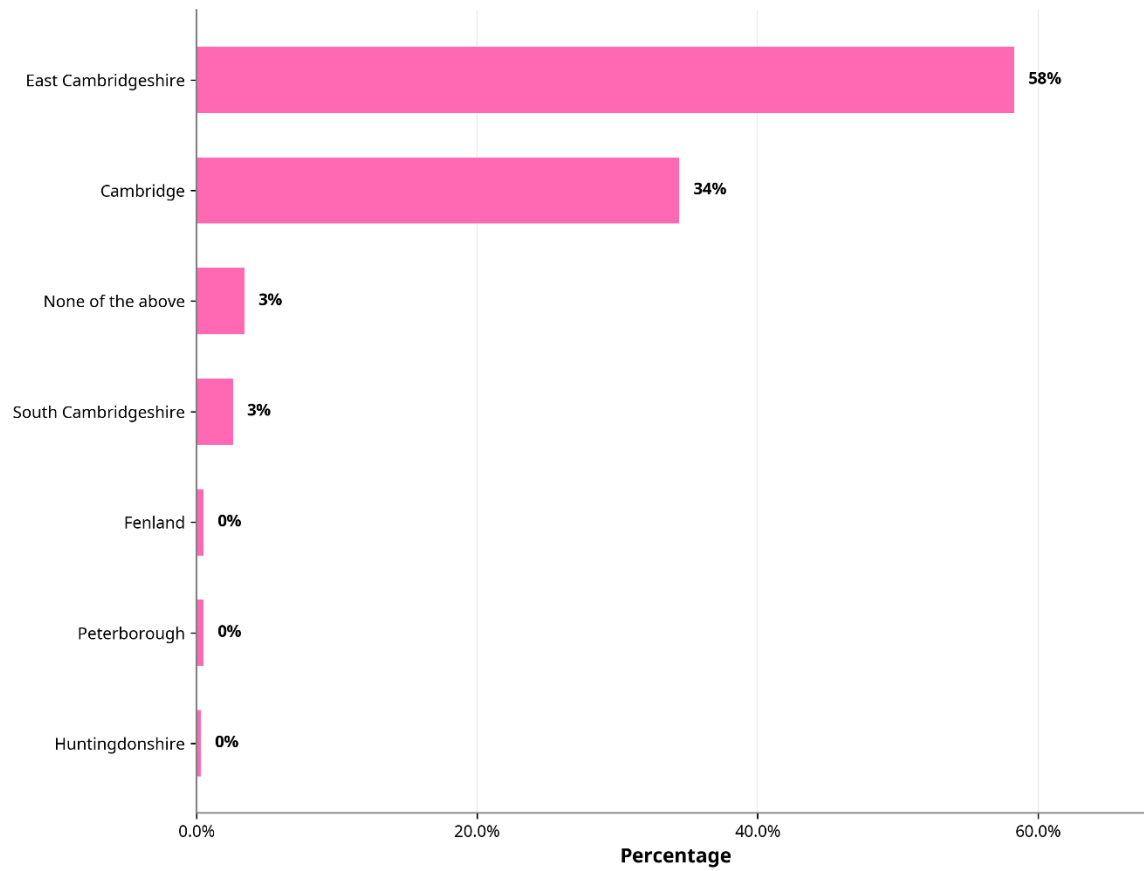
Comparing healthcare patterns with shopping and socialising behaviours reveals fundamental differences in how residents navigate their region. Healthcare shows consistently higher local

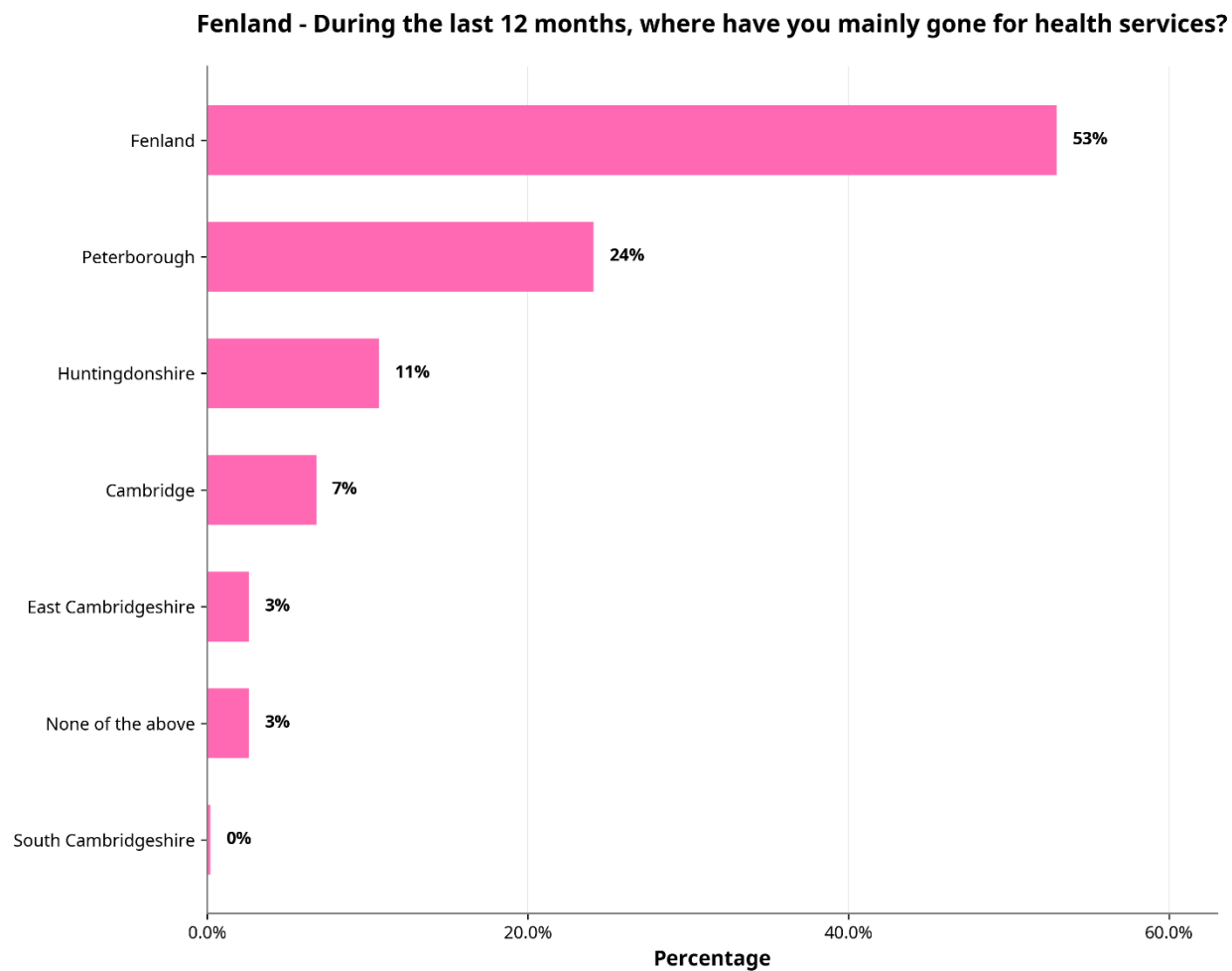
retention rates than shopping across most districts, reflecting the distribution of GP practices and the principle of local provision. However, the pull of specialist centres creates distinct healthcare geographies, with Cambridge commanding substantial healthcare flows from surrounding districts whilst Peterborough serves a more geographically constrained catchment. The absence of reciprocal flows in many cases—such as Cambridge residents rarely accessing healthcare elsewhere—highlights the hierarchical nature of healthcare provision.

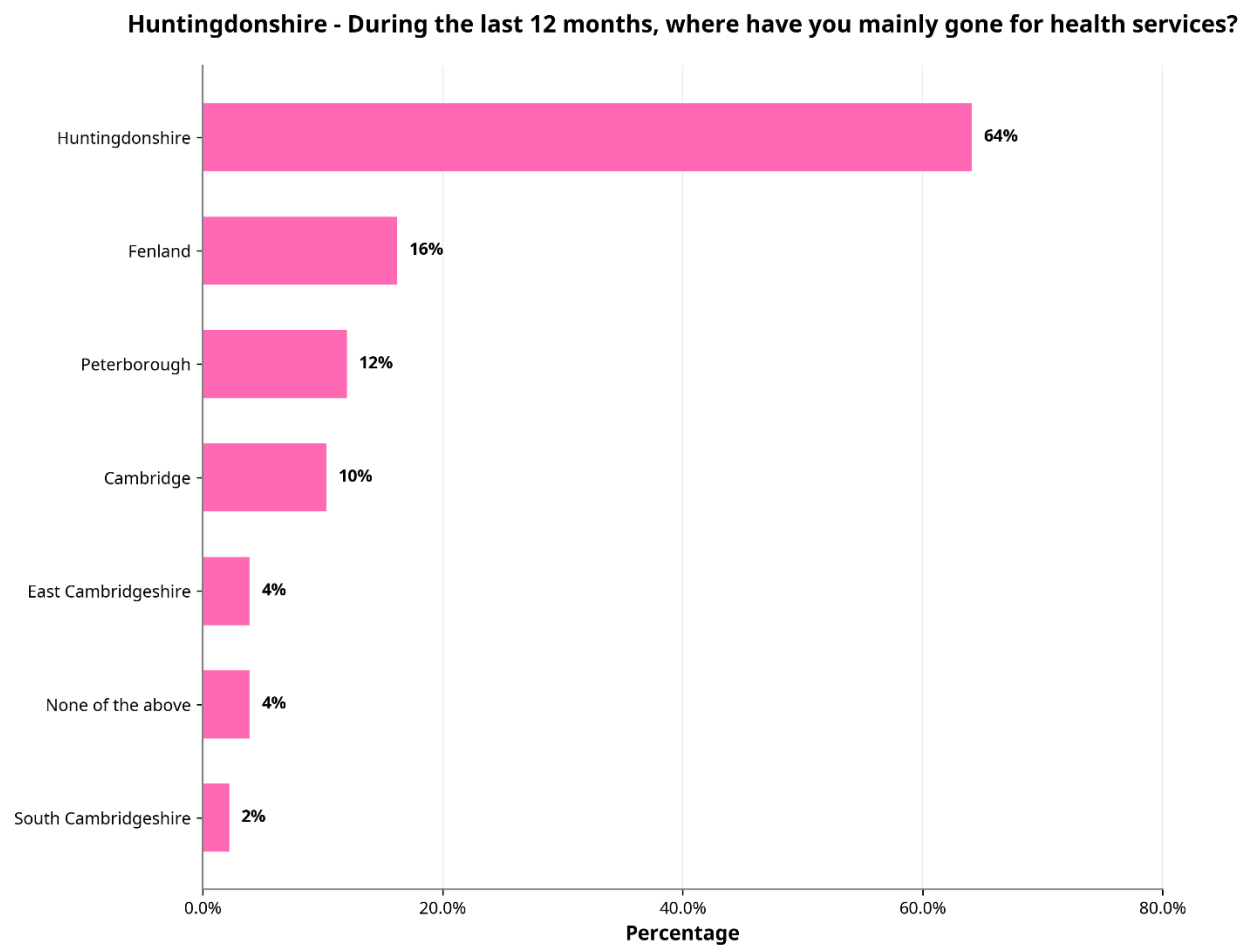
The data suggests that administrative boundaries poorly reflect actual healthcare geographies, with some districts showing stronger healthcare connections to neighbouring areas than internal cohesion. Any reconfiguration of local government must carefully consider these established healthcare pathways and the implications for clinical commissioning, ambulance services, and integrated health and social care provision.

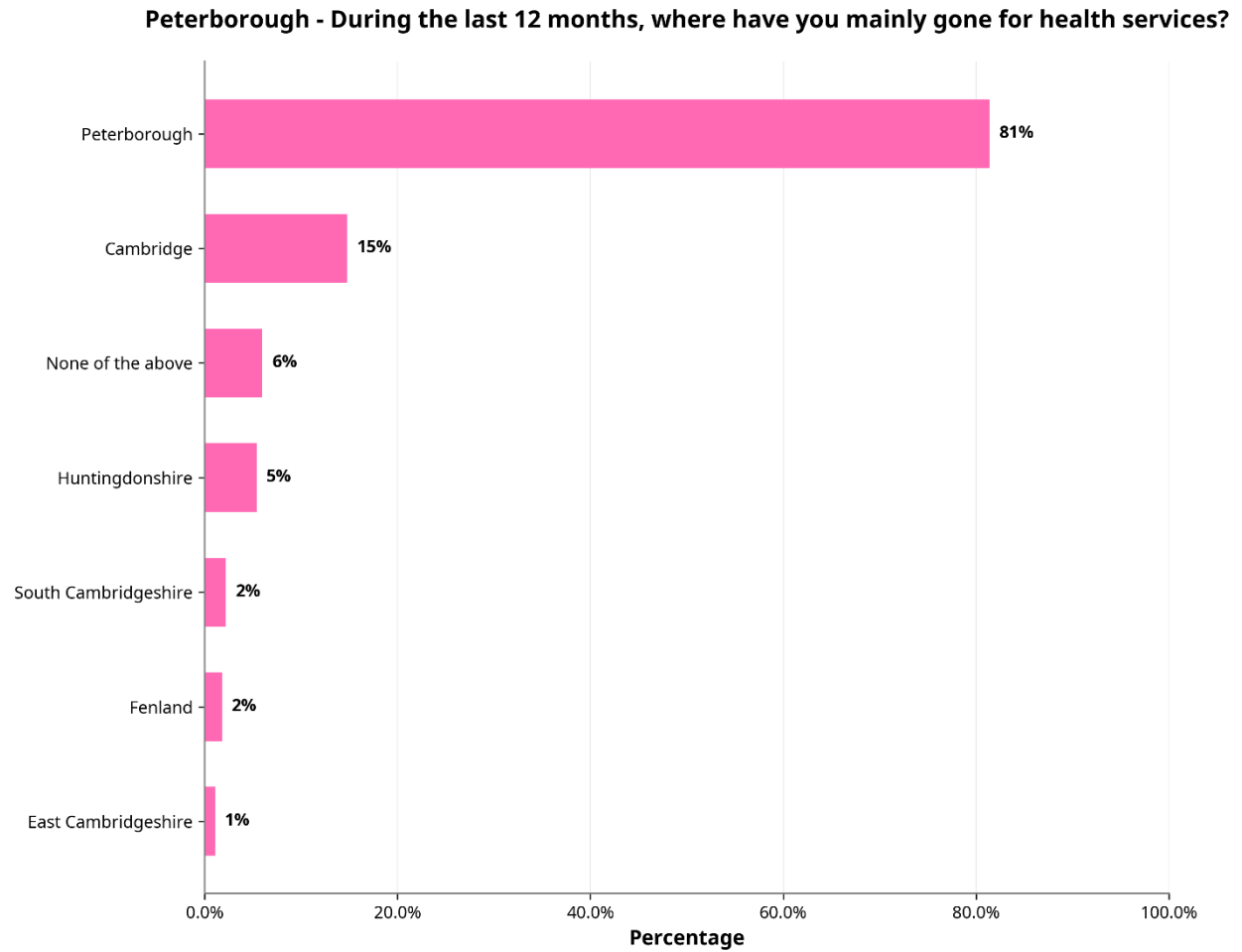
Here are the charts for each district which show where people travel for health services.

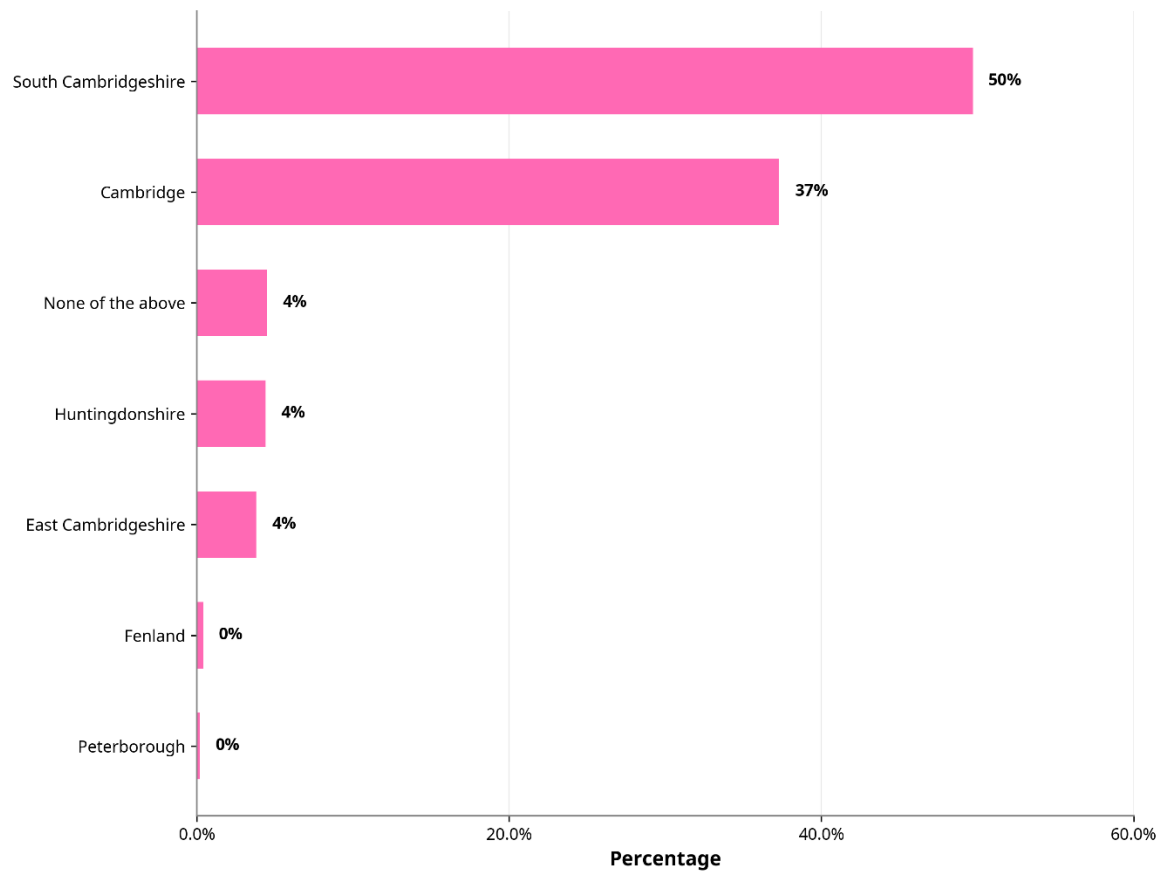


East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for health services?



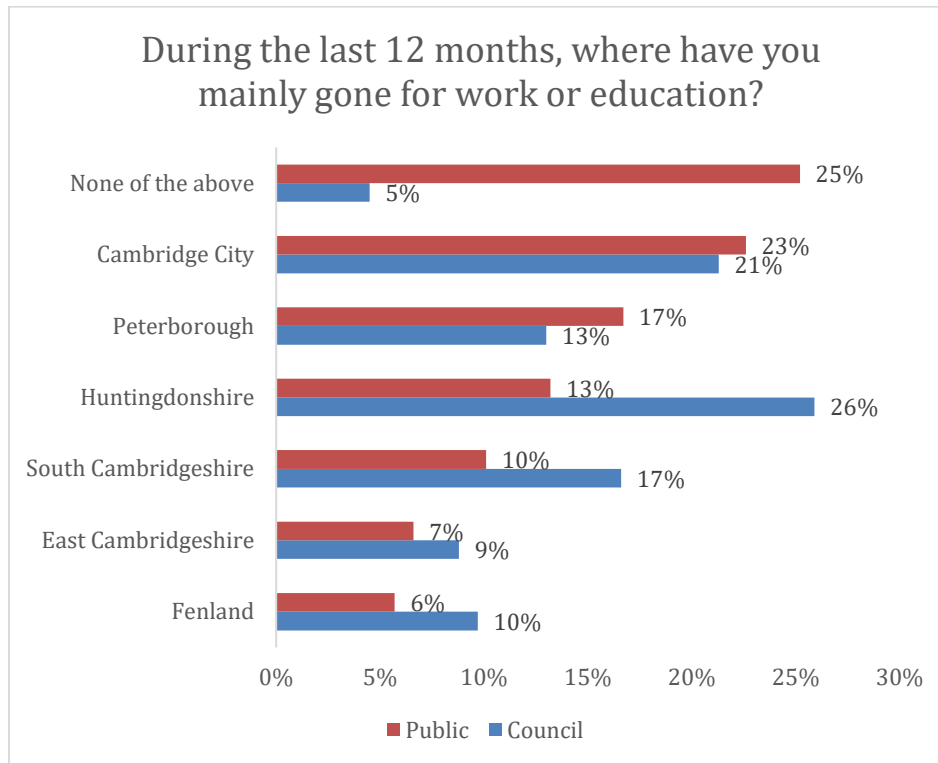




South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for health services?

Work or education

Many residents do not work in any of the districts and then it is a similar pattern with Cambridge, Peterborough then Huntingdonshire.



Cambridge demonstrates the highest work/education retention at 64%, yet this figure falls substantially below its shopping (71%) and healthcare (88%) self-containment, suggesting that even Cambridge's diverse economy cannot fully employ its resident workforce. The remaining 36% of Cambridge residents commute elsewhere, with South Cambridgeshire attracting 9%, Huntingdonshire 4%, East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough each 2%, and Fenland 1%. Notably, 18% work or study outside the region entirely, indicating significant connections to London, regional universities, or remote working arrangements.

Peterborough shows moderate employment self-sufficiency at 52%, considerably lower than its shopping (63%) or healthcare (81%) retention, highlighting the distinction between service consumption and employment provision. Huntingdonshire attracts 12% of Peterborough's workers—the highest cross-district employment flow from Peterborough—whilst Cambridge draws just 4%. Remarkably, 28% of Peterborough residents work or study outside the region, the highest proportion observed, suggesting limited local employment opportunities relative to the working-age population and potentially significant commuting to Leicester, Northampton, or remote working arrangements.

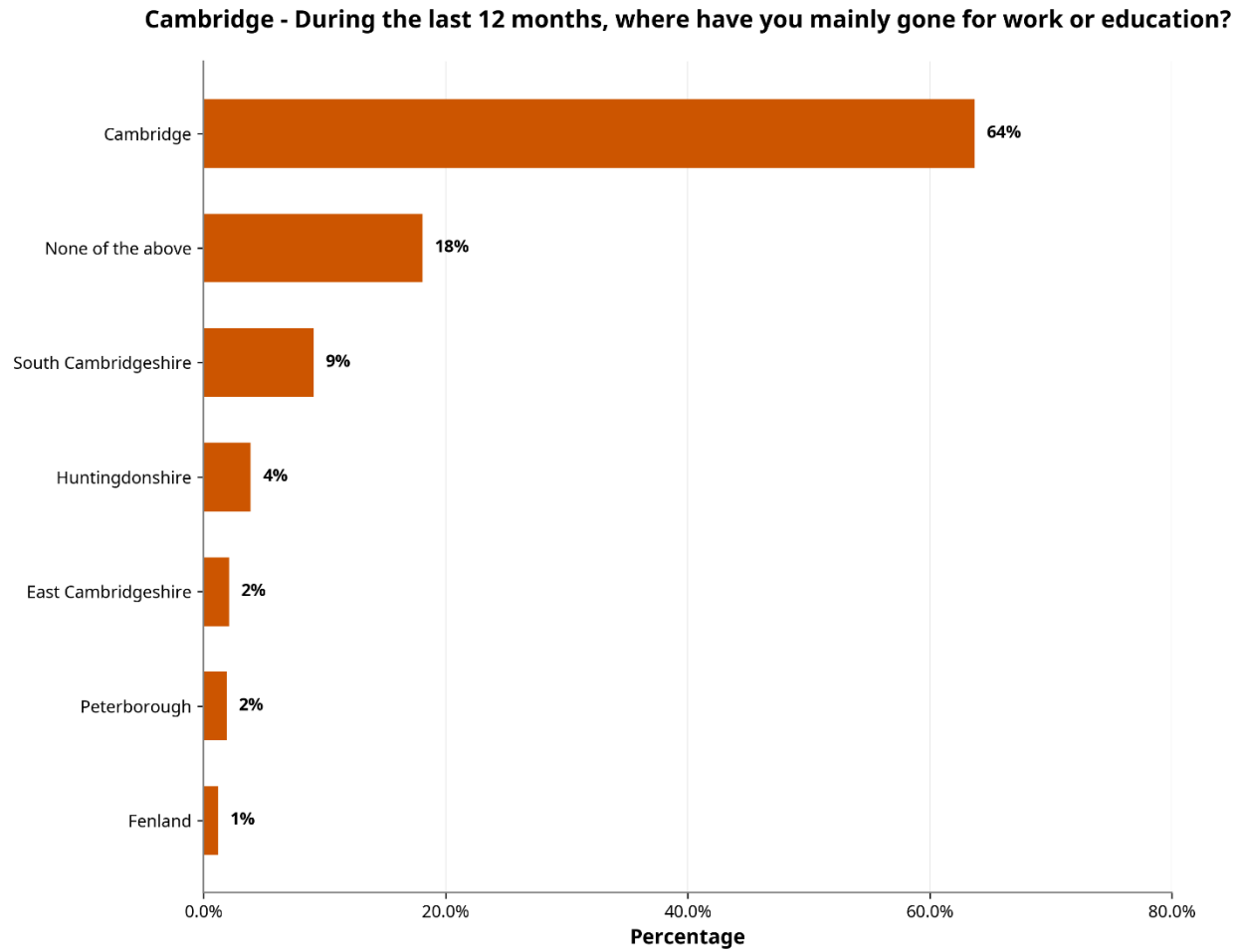
East Cambridgeshire exhibits the lowest employment self-containment at just 39%, with Cambridge attracting 24% of residents for work or education—demonstrating the district's role as a dormitory area for the Cambridge economy. South Cambridgeshire draws 8% of East Cambridgeshire's workers, whilst 23% work outside the region. This pattern, combined with minimal flows to other districts (Huntingdonshire 3%, Fenland 3%, Peterborough 1%), reveals a district whose residents predominantly look south for employment rather than to neighbouring rural areas.

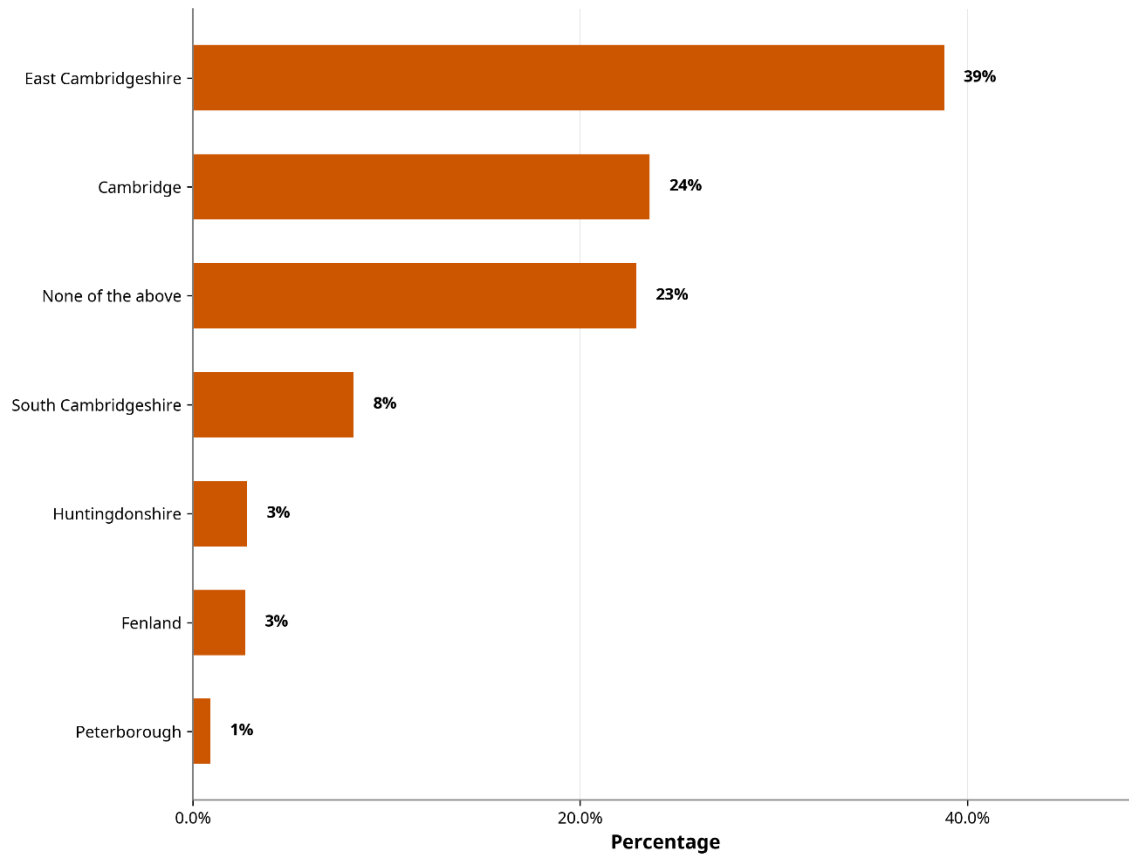
Huntingdonshire shows similarly low local employment at 38%, with residents dispersed across multiple employment centres. Cambridge attracts 13% of Huntingdonshire's workers, Peterborough 7%, and South Cambridgeshire 4%. The substantial 32% working outside the region likely reflects commuting to London, Bedford, or Northampton, highlighting Huntingdonshire's position at the intersection of multiple economic regions. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland each draw just 3% and 2% respectively, indicating limited cross-rural employment flows.

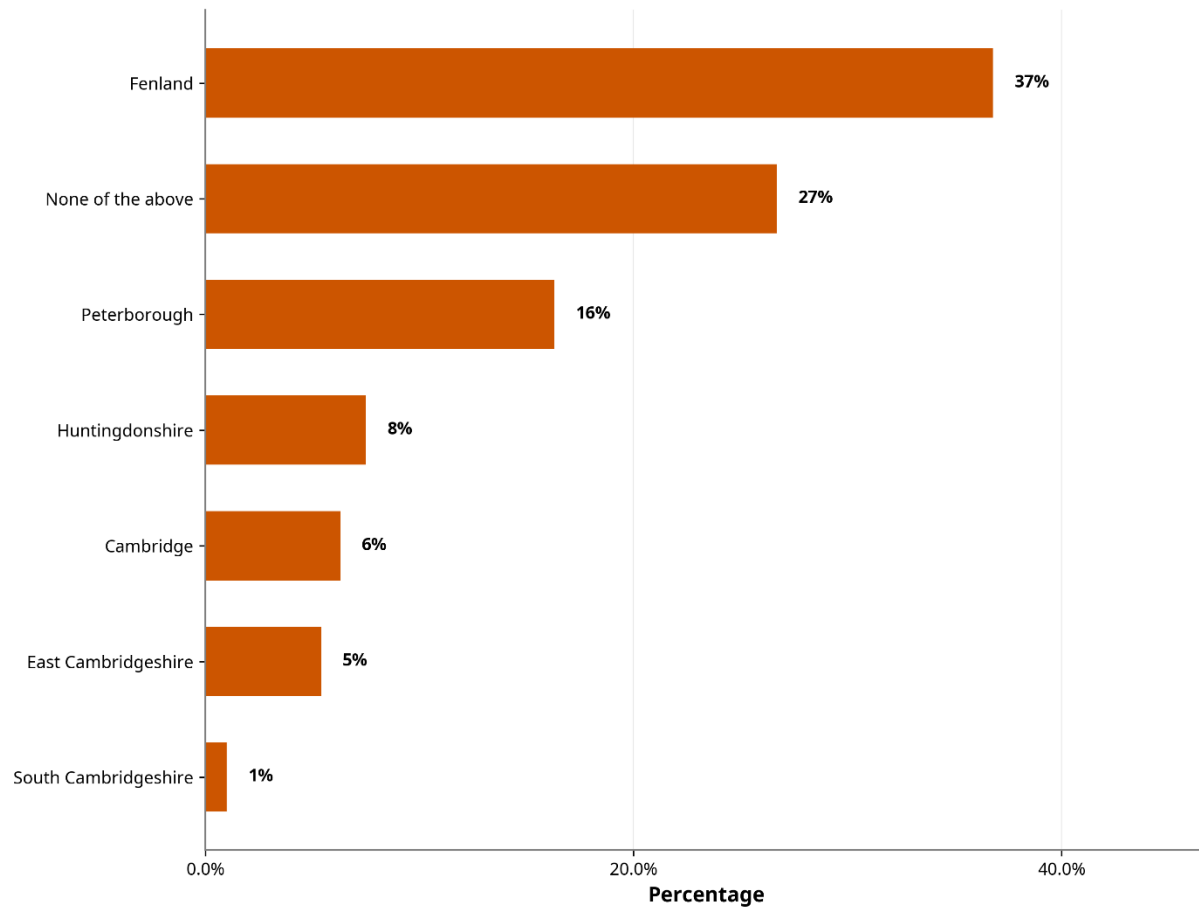
Fenland demonstrates marginally better employment self-containment at 37%, though this remains low by any measure. Peterborough serves as the primary external employment centre at 16%, reflecting established commuting patterns from March and Whittlesey. Huntingdonshire attracts 8% of Fenland's workers, whilst Cambridge draws just 6%, suggesting distance and transport barriers limit access to Cambridge employment. East Cambridgeshire attracts 5% of workers, with 27% working outside the region, potentially in King's Lynn, Wisbech's food processing extending into Lincolnshire, or agricultural employment crossing county boundaries.

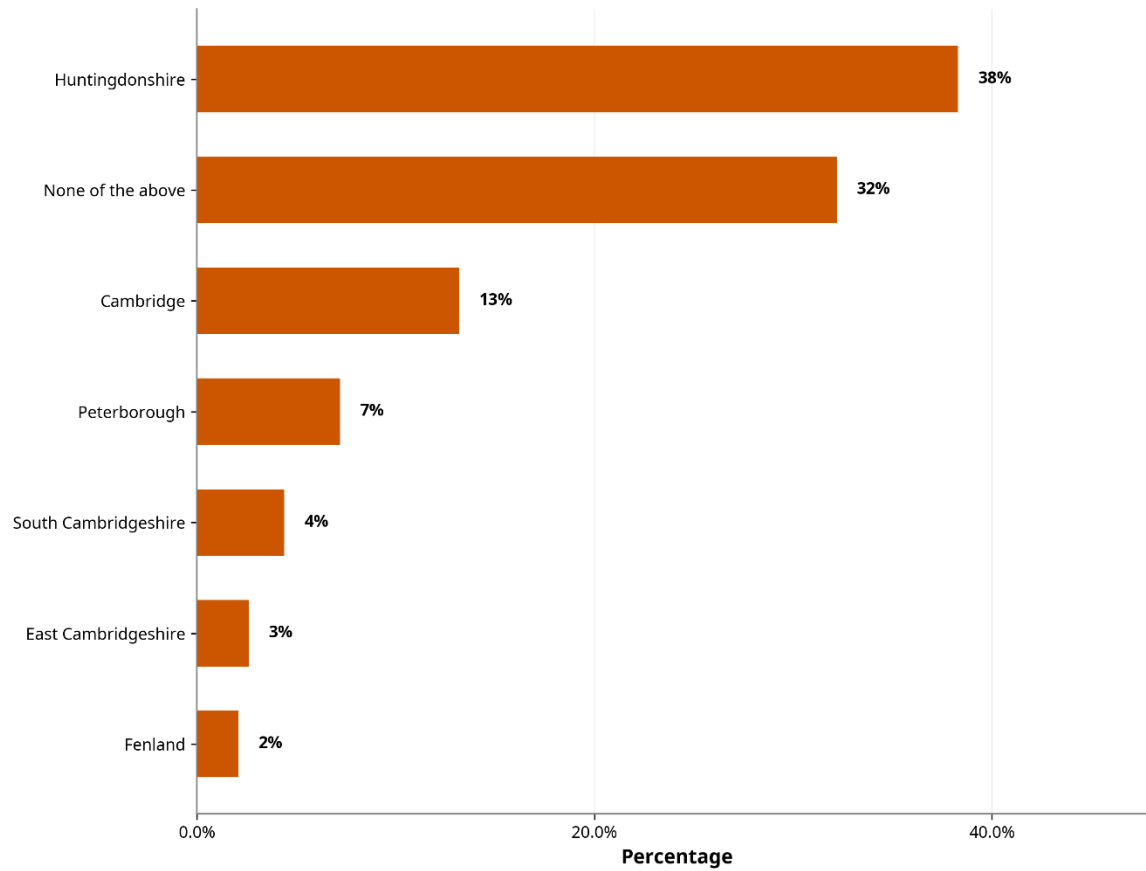
South Cambridgeshire presents the most dramatic employment dispersal, with only 34% working within district—the lowest recorded across all districts. Cambridge dominates external flows, attracting 31% of South Cambridgeshire's workers, confirming the district's role as Cambridge's primary dormitory area. Huntingdonshire draws 6%, East Cambridgeshire 3%, whilst Peterborough and Fenland each attract just 1%. The substantial 24% working outside the region likely includes London commuters, particularly from the southern settlements along the rail corridors, alongside remote workers and those accessing employment in Hertfordshire or Essex.

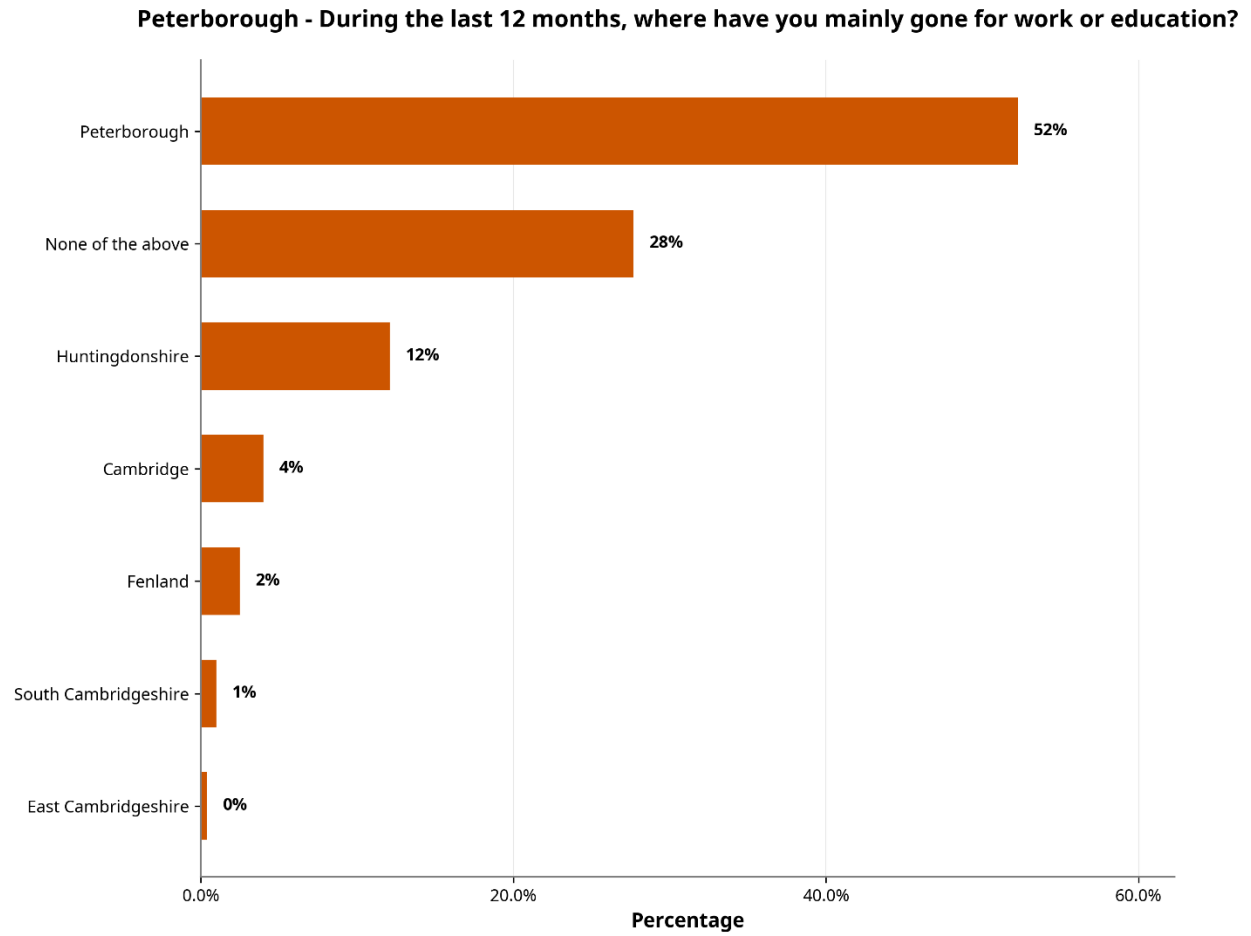
Comparing across all activity types reveals fundamental patterns in the region's functional geography. Work and education show the lowest local retention rates across all districts, averaging below 45% compared to over 60% for shopping and healthcare. Cambridge emerges as a key employment centre, whilst Peterborough's employment draw remains largely confined to its immediate hinterland. The rural districts function primarily as dormitory areas, with their residents travelling substantial distances for work whilst accessing services more locally. These patterns reveal a region where administrative boundaries bear little relationship to economic realities, where daily commuting flows create complex webs of interdependence. Here are the travel to work charts by district.

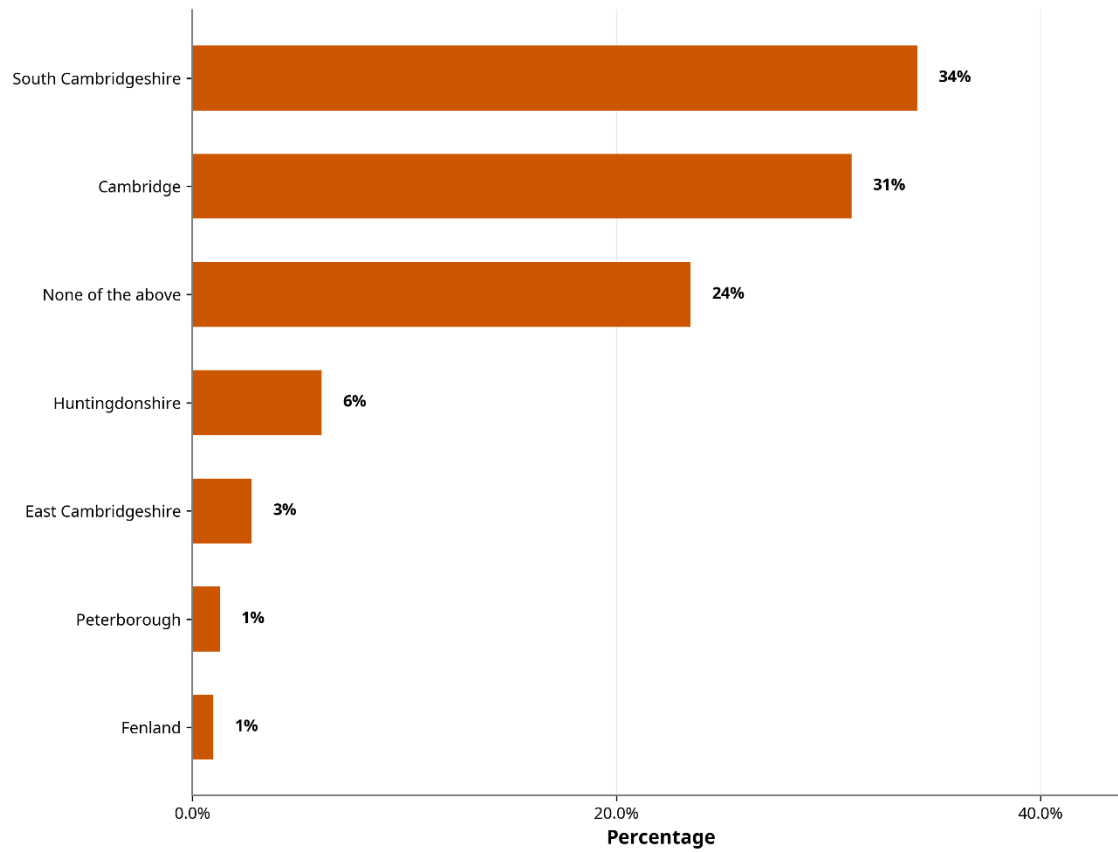


East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?

Fenland - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?

Huntingdonshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?



South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?

Sample profile

Below is presented the actual sample responses and the weighted sample responses. The demographic questions were optional and the count is for the unweighted totals.

Demographic Description	Count	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
Gender	2358		
Male		45	47
Female		50	48
Prefer not to say		1	1
Identify gender if another way		4	4
Age	2318		
18-24		1	4
25-34		8	24
35-44		17	15
45-54		20	18
55-64		22	14
65-74		20	13
75-84		7	8
85+		1	1
Prefer not to say		4	4
Ethnicity	2310		
Asian or Asian British		1	2
Black or Black British		1	1
Chinese		0	0
Mixed/multiple ethnicities		2	2
White British or Any Other White background		94	93
Other		1	1
Prefer not to say		1	1
Disability or long-term illness	2325		
Yes		29	30
No		65	64
Prefer not to say		6	7
Location	2407		
Cambridge City		10	16
East Cambridgeshire		24	10
Fenland		12	11
Huntingdonshire		25	18
Peterborough		15	26
South Cambridgeshire		15	18
Not given		1	1

Executive Summary

Survey Profile

The survey achieved participation from 231 stakeholders representing diverse interests across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The response profile included substantial participation from 83 parish and town councils, 76 businesses across multiple sectors and sizes, voluntary and community organisations, public sector bodies, and individual responses from councillors.

Success of Unitary Councils

Stakeholders identify three fundamental requirements for successful unitary councils: **local councillors with genuine local knowledge**, **operational efficiencies in service delivery**, and **sound financial foundations**. These priorities reflect stakeholder emphasis on maintaining local connection while achieving the administrative simplification that reorganisation promises to deliver.

The primary opportunities for service improvement through unitary councils centre on cost savings, streamlined services, and enhanced coordination between previously separate functions. Stakeholders particularly value the potential for economies of scale in contract negotiation, reduced bureaucratic layers, and single points of contact that eliminate current confusion over service responsibilities across multiple tiers of local government.

However, stakeholders identify significant risks, with over a quarter expressing concern about loss of local voice and representation. Service continuity during transition, financial challenges from inherited debts, and managing competing demands across rural-urban divides emerged as additional major concerns requiring careful management during the reorganisation process.

Organisational Perspectives

Stakeholders demonstrate strong local community identification and express greater concern than the general public about some areas being overlooked in larger unitary structures. Despite this apprehension, they would overwhelmingly support reorganisation if it demonstrably improved service delivery, with support levels remarkably similar to public opinion on this conditional basis.

Trust levels among stakeholders mirror public sentiment, with under half agreeing that they trust local government decisions, indicating significant credibility challenges that reorganisation must address rather than exacerbate. Stakeholders show slightly more confidence than residents that local government decisions reflect community values,

though this remains a minority position requiring attention in new governance arrangements.

The stakeholder community includes substantial numbers who rely on council services, creating direct interest in maintaining service quality and accessibility during and after reorganisation, reinforcing the importance of their engagement in transition planning and implementation processes.

Working Relationships and Governance

Stakeholders prioritise strengthened relationships with new unitary councils, with parish and town councils particularly seeking enhanced roles in local place-shaping and community voice functions. This reflects recognition that successful unitary authorities must maintain and strengthen rather than weaken local democratic engagement and community representation.

Key governance requests include meaningful consultation and engagement mechanisms, clear channels for parish and town council engagement with unitary authorities, robust scrutiny functions, and effective local committees with delegated powers.

Investment priorities focus on health services, transport infrastructure, and local economic development, indicating stakeholder recognition that successful reorganisation must deliver tangible improvements in big ticket items that directly affect community wellbeing and economic prosperity.

New Unitary Councils: What Matters Most

The ability to respond quickly to local needs emerges as the paramount stakeholder concern, aligning closely with public priorities and highlighting expectations that larger authorities should enhance rather than compromise responsiveness. This priority reflects current frustrations with bureaucratic delays and complex decision-making processes across multiple tiers.

Access to funding opportunities and councillors with genuine local area knowledge rank as additional critical factors, emphasising stakeholder expectations that reorganisation should improve both resource availability and local representation quality.

The emphasis on responsiveness suggests that stakeholders view bureaucratic efficiency as wanting without corresponding improvements in the speed and quality of local problem-solving, creating clear performance expectations for new unitary structures.

Future Focus

Stakeholder investment priorities centre on health services, transport infrastructure, and local economic development, reflecting recognition of fundamental service needs that affect quality of life and economic prosperity. These priorities indicate sophisticated understanding of the interconnections between different service areas and their collective impact on community wellbeing.

Business stakeholders specifically prioritise key infrastructure development—transport, connectivity, and digital services—alongside investment in high streets and town

centres. They emphasise the importance of straightforward communication and transaction processes with local authorities.

These priorities suggest that stakeholders view reorganisation as an opportunity to address long-standing infrastructure deficits and economic development challenges, creating expectations for strategic investment and improved service coordination that delivers measurable business and community benefits.

New Unitary Size and Boundary Considerations

While a minority of stakeholders favour the Government's suggested 500,000 population size for unitary authorities, almost half prefer smaller authorities of 300,000-400,000 residents. This preference indicates stakeholder concerns about maintaining local connection and responsiveness in very large authorities.

Geographic coherence and existing community identities and connections emerge as the most crucial factors in determining unitary boundaries, prioritising natural community networks over administrative convenience or population targets.

The boundary preferences indicate stakeholder recognition that successful reorganisation requires respect for existing community connections and geographic logic rather than imposing artificial arrangements that cut across natural networks of local life and economic relationship.

Stakeholder Participation and Transition

Three-quarters of stakeholders express willingness to participate actively in shaping future council services, with contact details provided for ongoing engagement. This high participation rate indicates strong stakeholder investment in reorganisation outcomes and readiness to contribute expertise and local knowledge to transition planning.

The substantial stakeholder willingness to engage provides valuable opportunity for transition teams to access local expertise, identify potential problems, and build support for reorganisation processes through collaborative approach to change management.

Communication with Stakeholders

Over ninety percent of stakeholders request ongoing communication about reorganisation progress, indicating high levels of interest and concern about transition processes and outcomes. This demand for information reflects stakeholder recognition that successful reorganisation requires sustained communication rather than periodic updates.

Preferred communication channels include direct email updates, consultation on specific service changes, and regular stakeholder meetings. The emphasis on specific

service consultation indicates stakeholder expectation for meaningful involvement in detailed implementation decisions rather than general information provision.

Further Comments

Stakeholder feedback consistently returns to three core themes: boundary concerns, local representation preservation, and implementation planning. These recurring themes indicate the fundamental issues that reorganisation must address to maintain stakeholder confidence and support.

Boundary concerns emphasise the importance of respecting existing community connections and geographic logic, with particular opposition to arrangements that force together areas with limited natural connection. Local representation concerns reflect fear that larger authorities will become distant and unresponsive to community needs, requiring innovative approaches to maintaining democratic accountability at scale.

Implementation concerns focus on service continuity, financial planning, and change management, indicating stakeholder recognition that good intentions must be supported by competent execution to avoid service disruption and public confidence damage during transition periods.

Conclusion

This stakeholder research reveals an understanding of reorganisation complexities and clear expectations for improved service delivery, maintained local connection, and competent change management. The high levels of engagement willingness, combined with specific concerns about local representation and service continuity, provide clear guidance for reorganisation planning that respects stakeholder priorities while delivering the efficiency and service improvements that justify structural change.

The convergence between stakeholder and public priorities on responsiveness, local knowledge, and service quality indicates broad consensus on reorganisation success criteria, providing a foundation for transition planning that maintains public and stakeholder confidence while achieving the strategic objectives that drive local government reform.

Introduction

The Government has mandated that all county and district councils in England will be abolished in April 2028 and replaced with unitary authorities. This directive affects Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, where the current two-tier system comprising Cambridgeshire County Council and six district and city councils will be restructured into one or more unitary authorities serving the area's 930,000 residents.

The Government has established six criteria that proposals for new unitary structures must address. These criteria require that proposals should achieve better outcomes and local service delivery for the whole area, ensure unitary local government is the right size to achieve efficiencies and improve capacity, prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services, demonstrate how councils have worked together to meet local needs informed by local views, support devolution arrangements, and enable stronger community engagement with genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment. Additionally, proposals must consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

The affected councils comprise Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and Peterborough City Council. Peterborough City Council already operates as a unitary authority but will be included in the reorganisation process. The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority will remain unchanged. Town and parish councils are not currently required to change under the Government directive.

This reorganisation represents a fundamental shift in local governance arrangements that have served the area for decades. The current system provides different services through different tiers, with residents accessing county council services for education, social care, and highways, while district and city councils provide housing, planning, and environmental services. The proposed unitary structure will consolidate these functions under single authorities, potentially simplifying access to services while creating larger administrative units.

The Government has indicated that financial savings are expected through the process of reducing the number of councils, while also supporting improvements in service delivery through bringing services together. This creates a complex challenge of achieving efficiency gains while maintaining or improving service quality and democratic representation across diverse communities ranging from the urban centres of Cambridge and Peterborough to extensive rural areas.

The area's population is projected to grow to over one million residents within the next fifteen years, adding demographic pressure to the reorganisation challenge. The Government recommendation suggests unitary authorities should serve populations of approximately 500,000, and smaller where appropriate, which would indicate the creation of at least two unitary authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, though the final structure remains to be determined through the business case development process.

Methodology

This research employed an online survey methodology to gather stakeholder perspectives on local government reorganisation across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The survey was designed as an engagement exercise rather than a formal consultation, with the purpose of providing qualitative and quantitative data to inform the development of business case proposals for submission to Government by November 2025.

Survey Design and Implementation

The survey instrument was developed collaboratively by the seven affected councils working with Archangel to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Government's six criteria for unitary authority proposals. The survey design prioritised brevity and accessibility, limiting the questionnaire to smaller number of core questions to maximise response rates while gathering essential data on stakeholder priorities and preferences.

While designed as an engagement exercise rather than formal consultation, the approach went above and beyond standard engagement requirements by voluntarily aligning with the Gunning principles for fair consultation. This demonstrated a commitment to best practice standards, ensuring that stakeholders were consulted at a time when proposals were still at a formative stage, sufficient information was provided to enable informed responses, adequate time was allowed for consideration and response, and feedback would be conscientiously considered in decision-making processes.

No maps or visual representations of potential boundary options were included in the survey design, in accordance with the engagement rather than consultation approach adopted for this research.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The online survey was supported by targeted communications to key stakeholder groups including businesses, parish and town councils, community organisations, and public sector partners. This multi-channel approach was designed to ensure

comprehensive representation across the diverse communities and interests within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Stakeholder lists were developed by the heads of communications from the seven authorities to include representatives from all sectors and geographic areas, with particular attention to ensuring rural communities and smaller organisations had opportunities to participate alongside larger urban centres and major employers. The engagement strategy recognised the importance of reaching stakeholders who might not typically participate in local government consultations but whose perspectives are essential for understanding community needs and priorities.

Data Collection Period

The survey was conducted from 19th June 2025 to 20th July 2025, providing a concentrated four-week period for stakeholder participation while meeting the tight timescales required for business case development. A time extension was provided for paper responses to ensure accessibility for stakeholders who preferred paper survey participation methods. The timing was co-ordinated with broader communications and engagement activities around local government reorganisation to maximise awareness and participation.

Response Profile

The survey achieved participation from 231 stakeholders representing diverse interests across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The response profile included substantial participation from parish and town councils, businesses across multiple sectors and sizes, voluntary and community organisations, public sector bodies, and individual residents responding in various capacities.

Parish and town councils provided the largest single stakeholder group with 83 responses, representing 36% of total participation. This high level of parish council engagement reflects the extensive network of local councils across the area and their direct interest in reorganisation outcomes. Business participation was also substantial, with 76 responses representing 33% of total stakeholders, demonstrating significant engagement from the economic community. A fuller profile of the stakeholder survey is provided in the report.

Analytical Approach

The analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine stakeholder responses across the range of survey questions. Quantitative analysis focused on response distributions and patterns across different stakeholder groups, while qualitative analysis examined open-ended responses and comments to identify key themes and concerns.

With 232 stakeholder responses, the survey achieved a substantial sample size that provides statistically robust insights with a margin of error of $\pm 6.4\%$ at 95% confidence level. This means that for any percentage reported in the findings, we can be 95% confident that the true value for the broader stakeholder population lies within 6.4 percentage points of the reported figure. For example, if 70% of respondents expressed a particular view, the true proportion among all stakeholders would lie between 63.6% and 76.4%. This enables reliable generalisation of findings to the broader stakeholder community in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough within established confidence intervals.

The sample demonstrated good representation across stakeholder types, with particularly strong participation from parish and town councils (83 responses, representing an estimated 40% or more of total parish councils in the area) and businesses (76 responses across diverse sectors and sizes). This coverage provides indicatively representative insights into wider stakeholder perspectives across the key groups engaged with local government.

However, several limitations were recognised. As a self-selecting sample, the survey may over-represent more engaged stakeholders who actively choose to participate in local government processes, potentially under-representing less engaged organisations.

The tight timescales for data collection, driven by Government requirements for business case submission, limited the opportunity for extensive iterative engagement that might have deepened understanding of stakeholder perspectives.

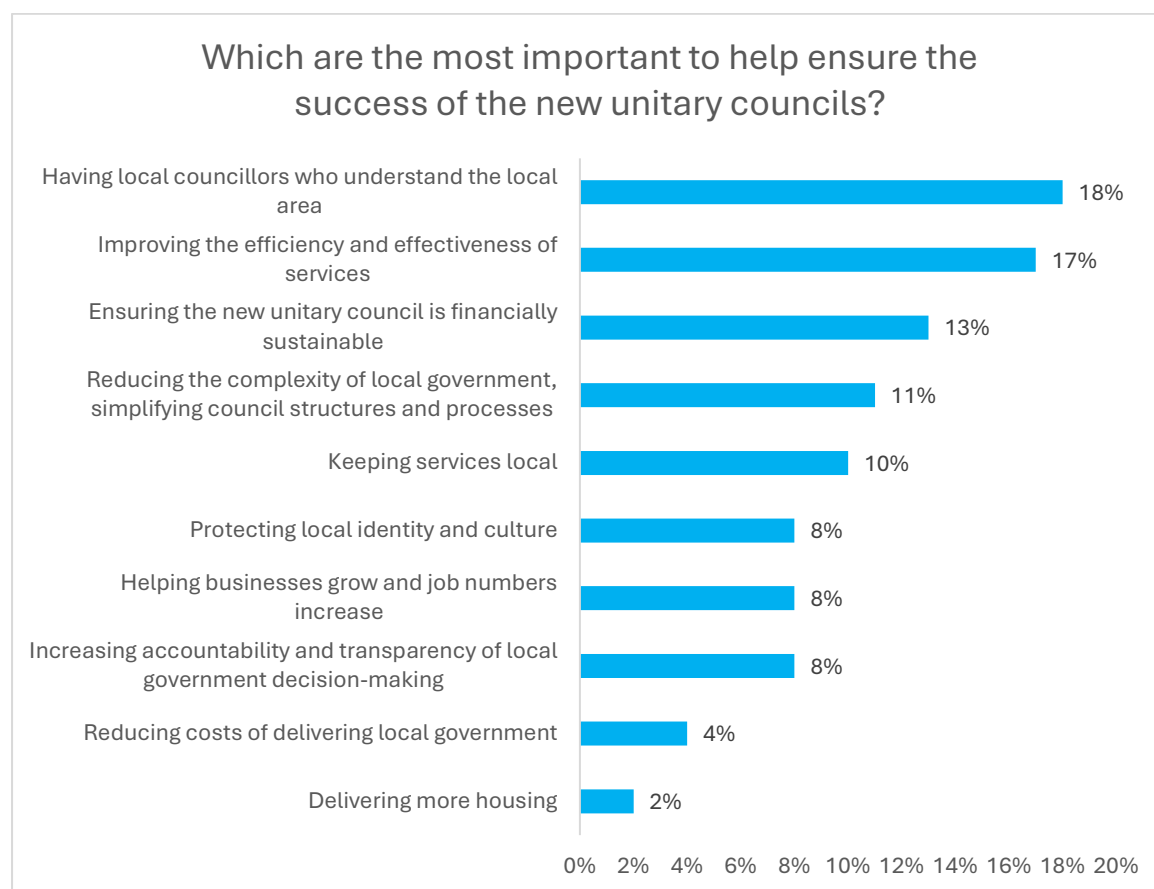
Despite these limitations, the sample size, systematic sampling approach, and good representation across stakeholder types provide confidence that the findings offer statistically valid and indicatively representative insights into stakeholder perspectives on local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The base for all the charts is 232 so all respondents except where they are given.

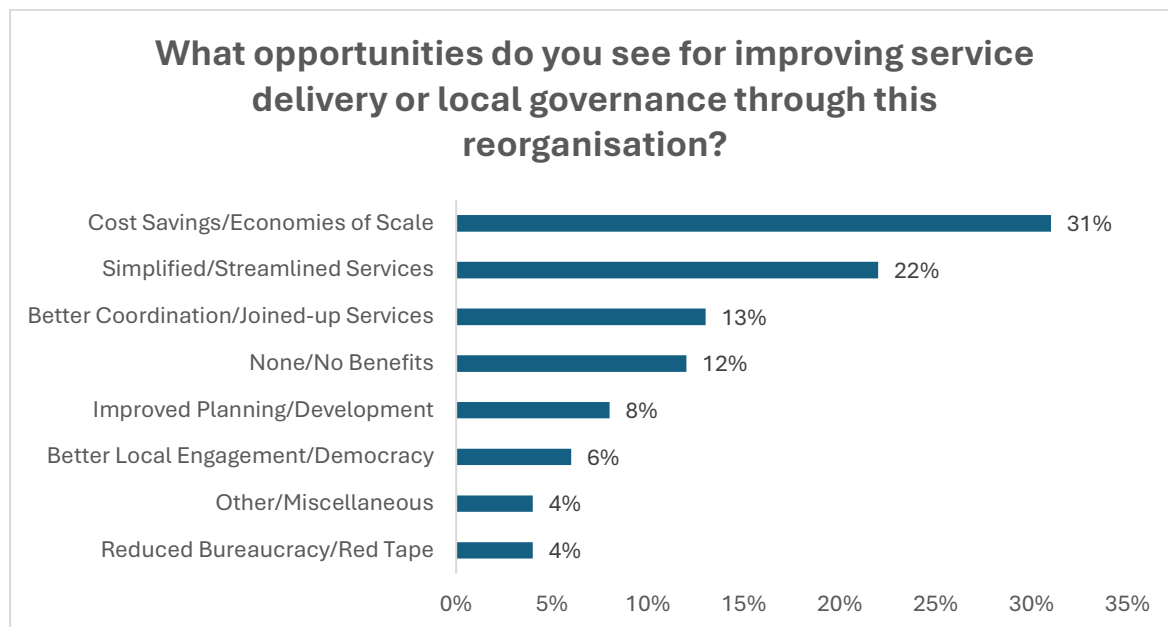
Survey Findings

Success of Unitary Councils

Stakeholders consider that fundamental to the success of the new unitary councils will be local councillors with local knowledge. They believe that for the unitary councils to be successful there will need to be efficiencies in the council services provided and that the unitary councils will need to be on sure financial footing. These views should also be seen in the context of using unitary councils to lever simplicity and reducing the complexity of current structures.



From a stakeholder perspective, the main opportunities for improving services through new unitary councils are in terms of cost saving, streamlined services and better co-ordination of services.



This was also a comment question so here is a sample of the feedback relating to the potential for cost saving. Noting that benefits are available if done correctly.

"There are many opportunities. By working together services can be streamlined, costs reduced, contracts negotiated harder to bring down both internal and external costs. The opportunity exists to completely reorganise to maximise efficiency and minimise costs of services and their delivery overall if managed correctly."

Owner, Real estate and property

"Bigger is normally better when negotiating contracts, with efficiency"

Director, Agriculture, Farm and Environment

"Having a single unitary council to deliver all services gives scope for economies of scale (if executed carefully)."

District councillor

Other stakeholders emphasised streamlined services:

"Stop the layers of bureaucracy and mean people know what services are operated by."

Director, Hospitality and Leisure

"Unitary Council as a single point of contact would be beneficial due to the confusion over the current roles of County/District/Parish/CPCA and the GCP."

Parish clerk

Better co-ordination is hoped for:

"Improved strategic linkages between housing, homelessness provision and adult social care"

Chief Executive, Public Sector body

"A joined-up approach where things happen - everything takes too long, discussions take years without any decisions being taken - we need to get on with things"

General Manager, Leisure and Hospitality

The biggest risk to the transition to unitary councils, mirroring the focus on local councillors with local knowledge, is if these factors are ignored - so a loss of local voice and representation are identified by over a quarter of stakeholders. Stakeholders also recognise issues of service continuity, financial challenges, and the competing demands with a rural/urban mix.



In terms of losing local voice, here are some quotes from the survey:

"Losing local and personal representation. Avoiding creating a faceless, anonymous council with no understanding of or empathy for local issues. Ensuring local communities have councillors who are known to them, who know them and who are accessible."

Parish Councillor

"The biggest risk is the loss of services to smaller parish councils. Parish councils generally are not able to take on more services, and there is a great risk they will struggle to be supported by the unitary authority. I have found county council much less supportive and responsive than the district council, and I have concerns that this will only get worse with a unitary council."

Chief Executive, Arts, Culture and Entertainment

"There is a general local consensus that a move to a unitary council will increase costs in travelling, slower response to urgent local problems, increase in delay making decisions due to more people having to be involved. Loss of local identity due to size of council and no local representation"

Chair, Voluntary Community Group

Concerns about service continuity are also expressed:

"One of the biggest risks during the transition to unitary councils is the potential disruption to service delivery—particularly in areas like planning, social care, and waste collection—if systems and responsibilities are not seamlessly integrated."

Director, Retail and E-commerce

"There is vast scope for chaos. A detailed, robust plan needs to be in place before the reorganisation goes ahead. The Government seems determined to rush through changes in an unrealistically short time."

Director, Health and social care

On financial challenges:

"Money. Without financial facts how can reasonable budgets be set and met. Additionally, closing offices and selling them is just a quick boost financially that will affect 1 year's accounts, this is not 'Sustainable' income."

Parish councillor

"The biggest risks are undoubtedly financial with some councils struggling, the new unitary area must not start its life with a debt burden inherited from its precursors."

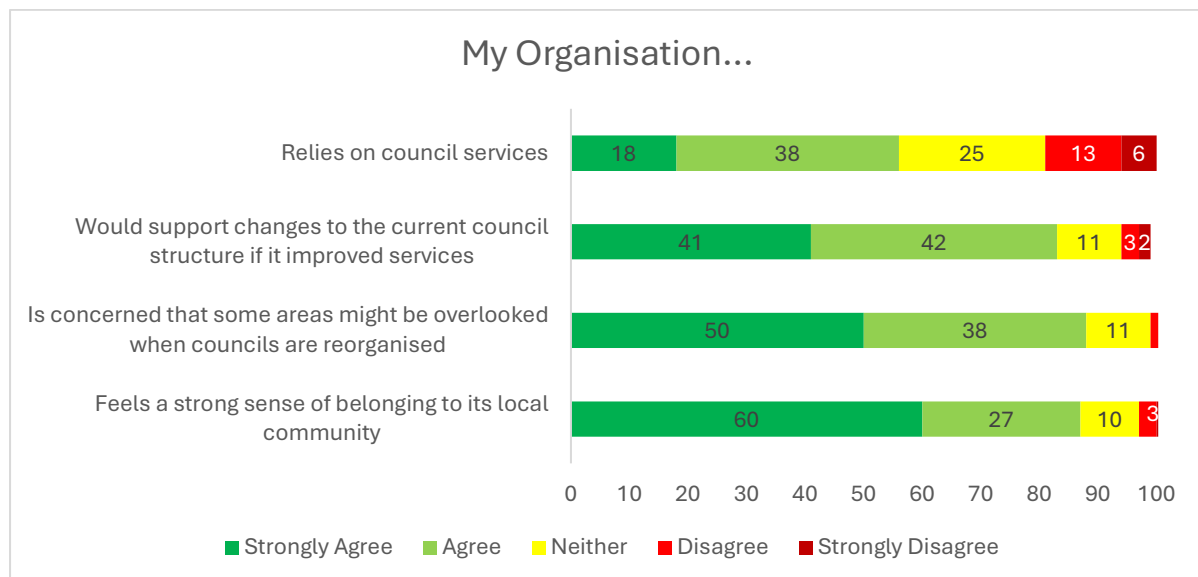
Company secretary, Hospitality and leisure

"Financial burden with debt being taken by its residents when joining an area that has a high borrowing and interest payments"

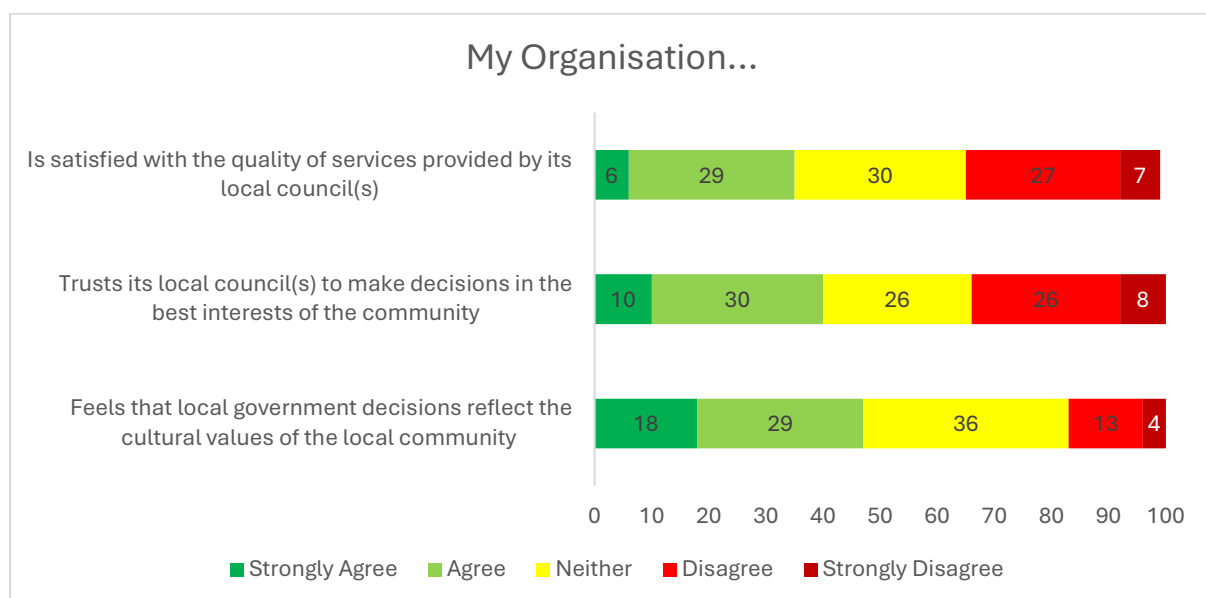
Director, Agriculture, Farming and Environment

Organisational perspectives

Stakeholders see themselves as being part of their local community and significantly express more concern than the public about ‘some areas being overlooked’. This said, they would overwhelmingly support change if, conditionally, it improved services and on this their scores are remarkably similar to the public. Given the mix of stakeholders, there is still a majority that say they rely on council services.



Conversely, stakeholders tend to be more positive about local government decisions reflecting the values of the local community than residents, with just under half agreeing with this statement. On the core value of trust, the levels of agreement are almost exactly the same as the public with under half agreeing with this statement.



Statistical analysis of survey responses from parish councils (n=83) and business representatives (n=77) reveals three significant differences in attitudes towards local government.

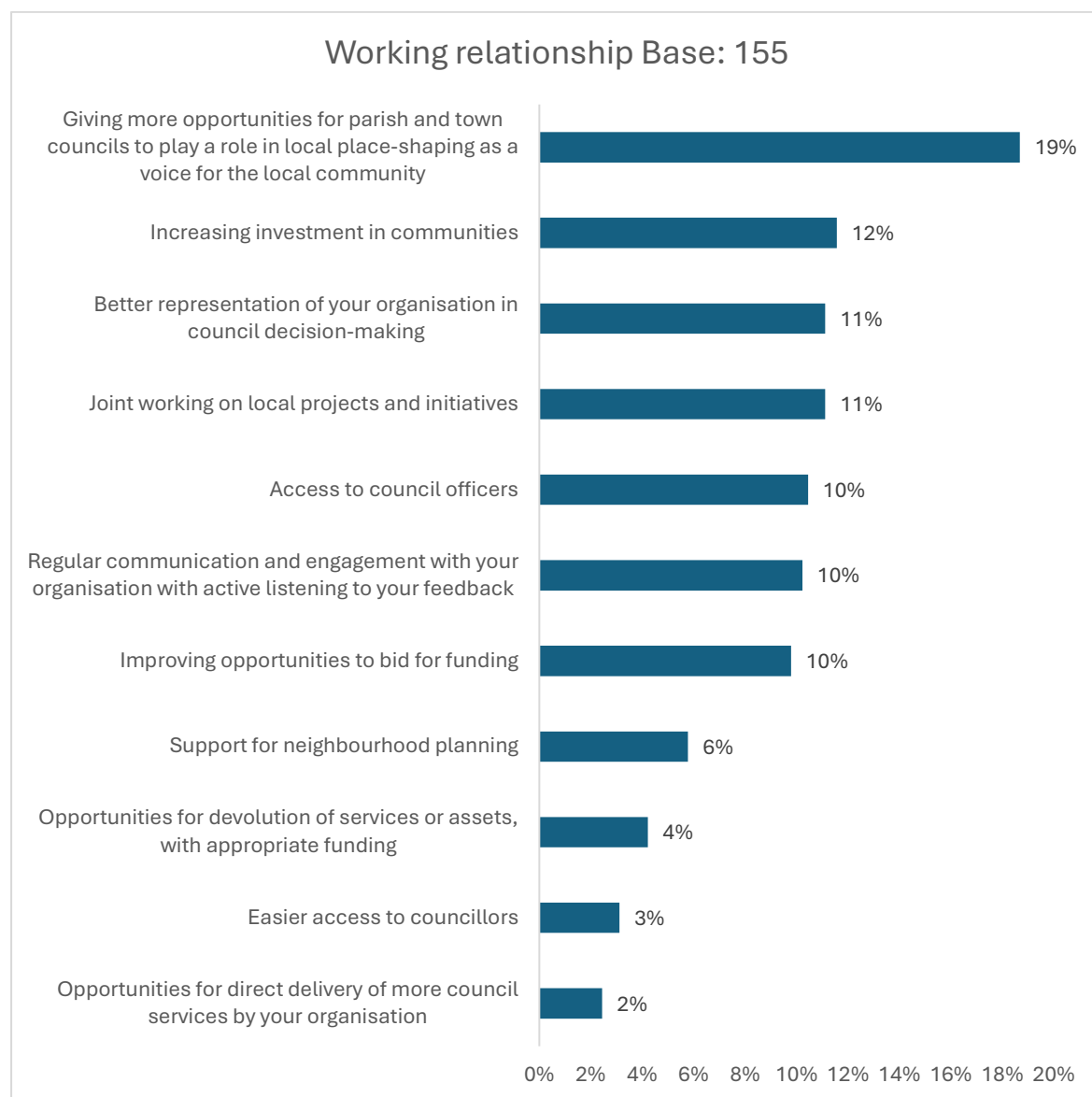
Trust represents the largest divide, with parish councils demonstrating substantially higher confidence in local councils to make decisions in the community's best interests (**75% positive responses vs 38% for businesses**). Service satisfaction shows a similarly pronounced gap, with parish councils expressing considerably greater satisfaction with the quality of local council services (96% vs 82%). Parish councils also feel significantly more aligned with local government decisions, believing they better reflect community cultural values (93% vs 82%).

However, both groups demonstrate remarkable consensus on three key areas: **concerns about potential oversight during council reorganisation, levels of reliance on council services**, and **support for structural changes that would improve service delivery**. These findings suggest that whilst businesses harbour genuine scepticism towards local government effectiveness and representation, there exists substantial common ground for collaborative policy development.

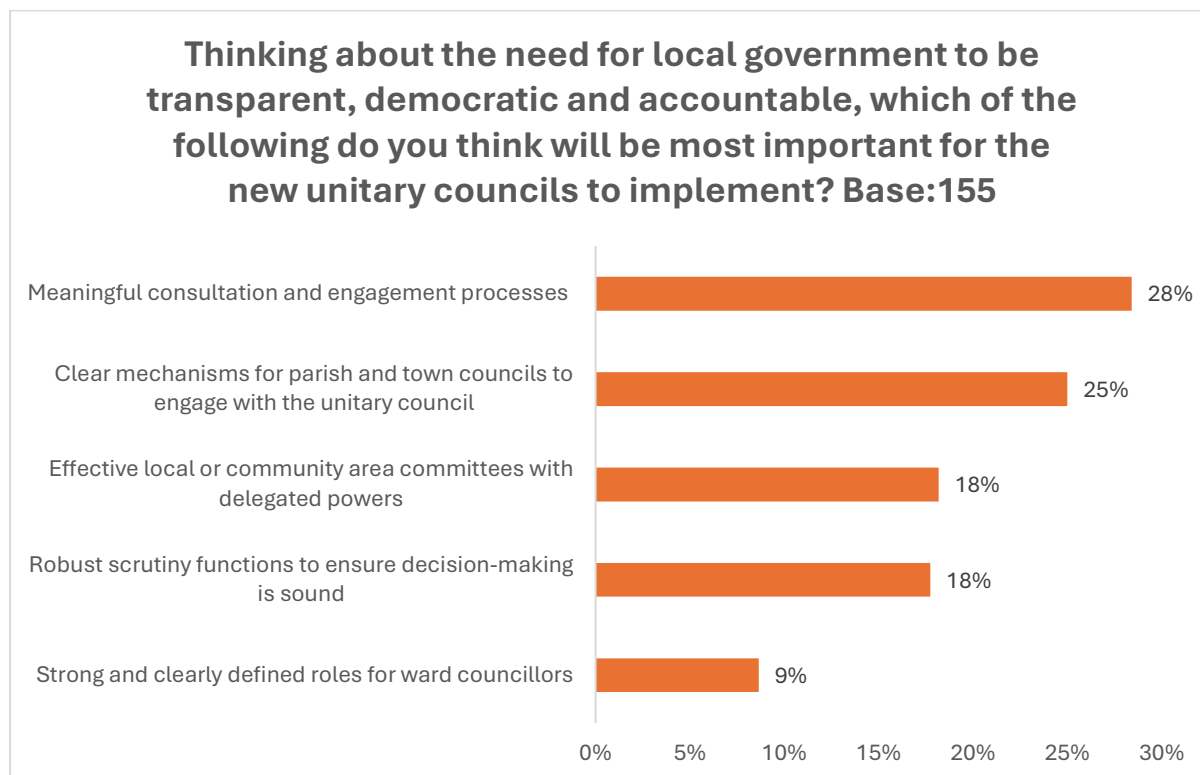
The results indicate that addressing business concerns about trust and representation should be prioritised, whilst leveraging the shared appetite for improvement demonstrated by both constituencies.

Working relationship and governance

Core to the success of the new unitary councils will be the relationship with stakeholders. In response, the leading request from stakeholders is to give parish and town councils more of a role in local place-shaping and acting as a voice for the community followed by more investment in communities and more representation in terms of their own organization in terms of council decision-making.



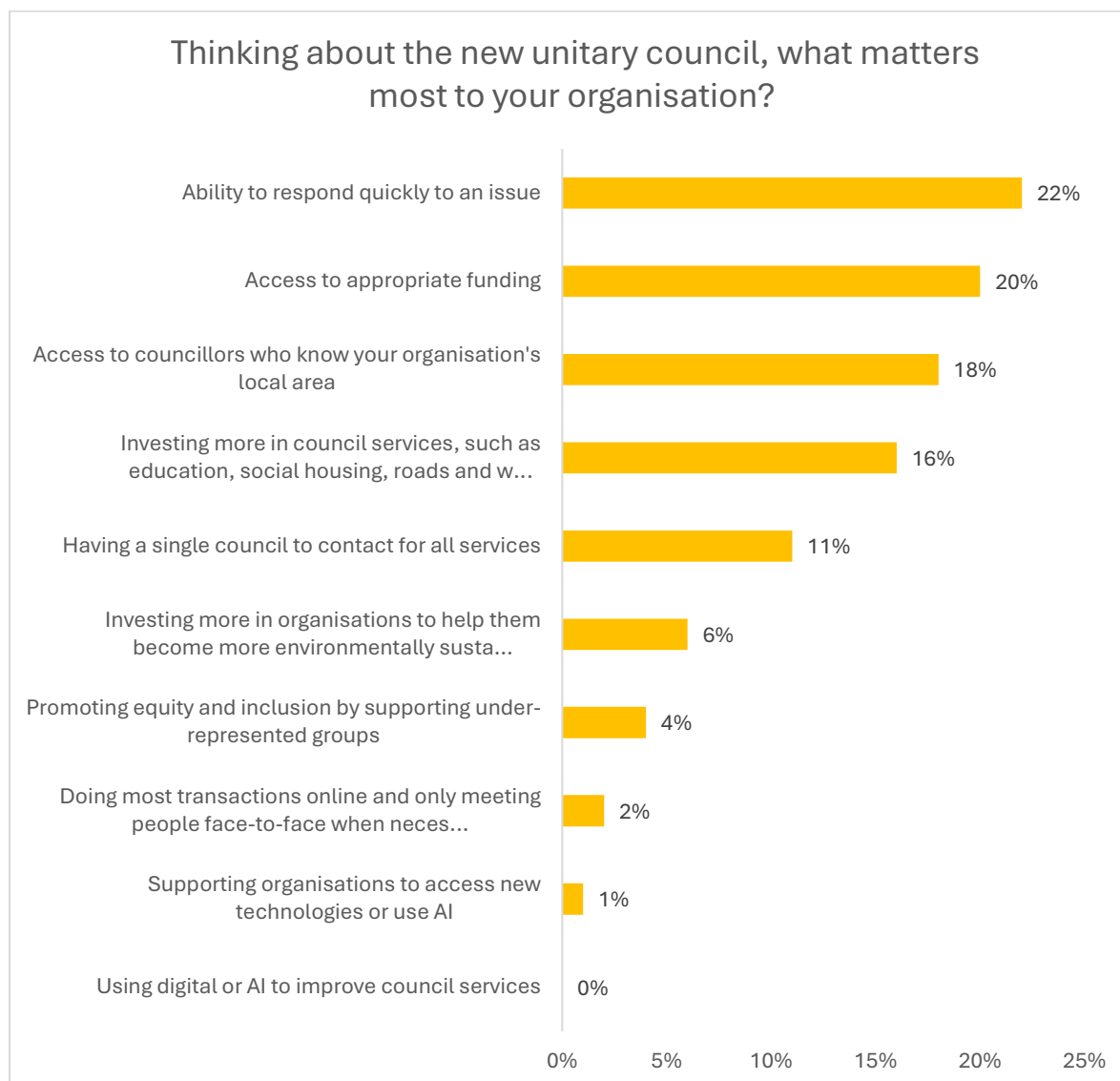
Fitting with their attitudes towards trust, stakeholders are looking for meaningful consultation and engagement and have responded well to further requests for engagement which will be discussed later in the report. There is a desire for clear mechanisms for parish and town councils to engage with the unitary council, robust scrutiny functions and effective local committees with delegated powers.



New unitary councils: what matters most?

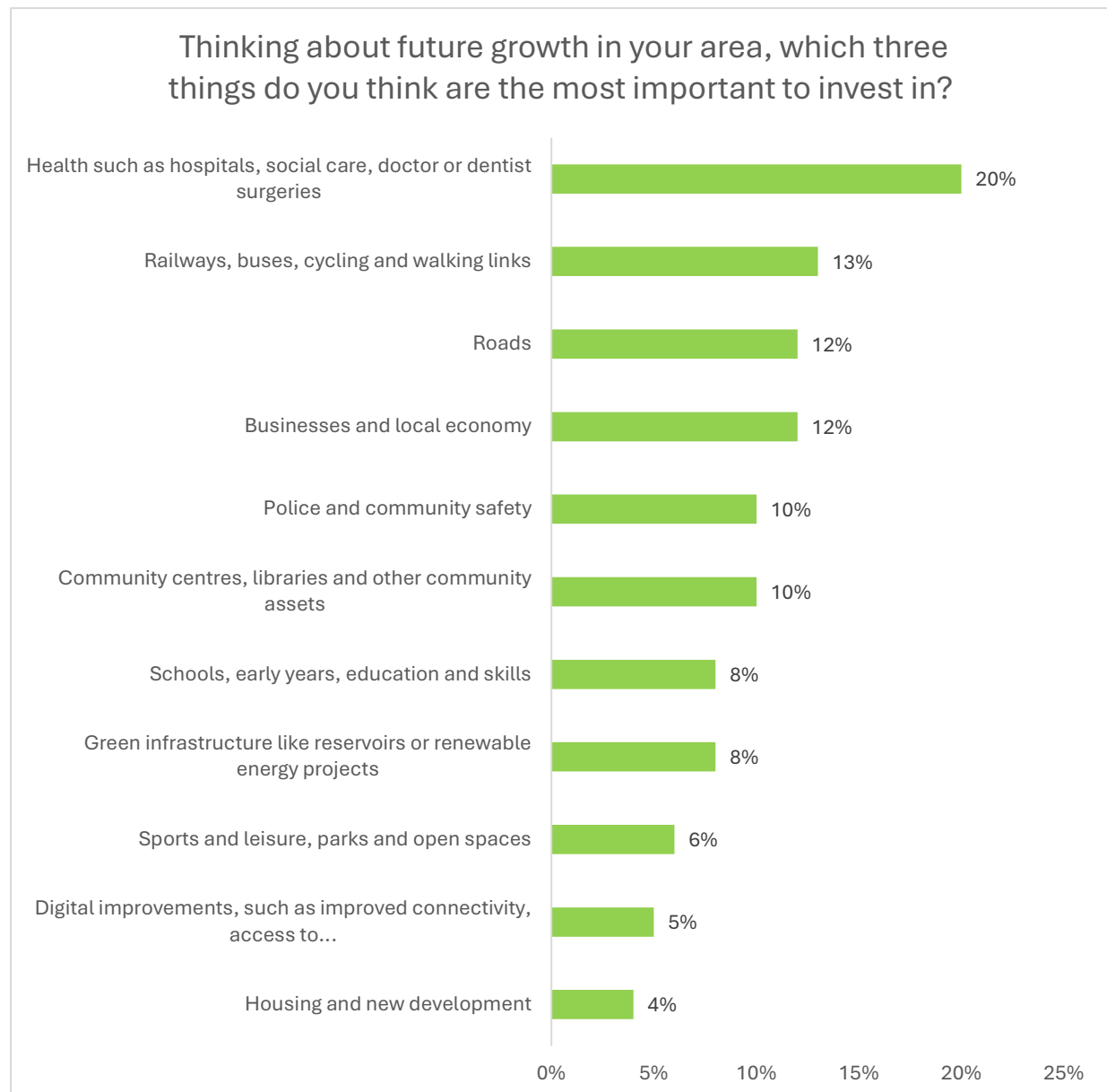
The 'ability to respond quickly' is what matters most to stakeholders. This is also a top priority for residents and a key perceived benefit of the new unitary councils.

Stakeholders hope that this provides access to funding and councillors who know their organisation's local area. Local knowledge again being elevated here.

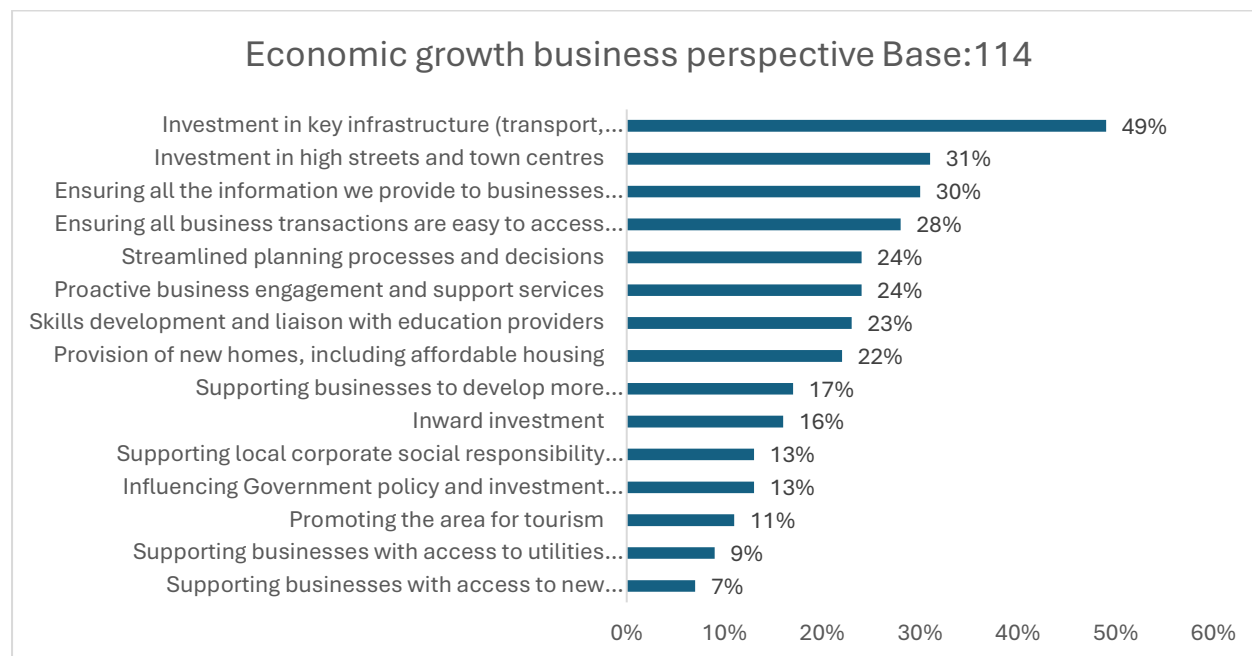


Future Focus

Stakeholders in terms of future investment prioritise health, transport infrastructure, and the local economy.

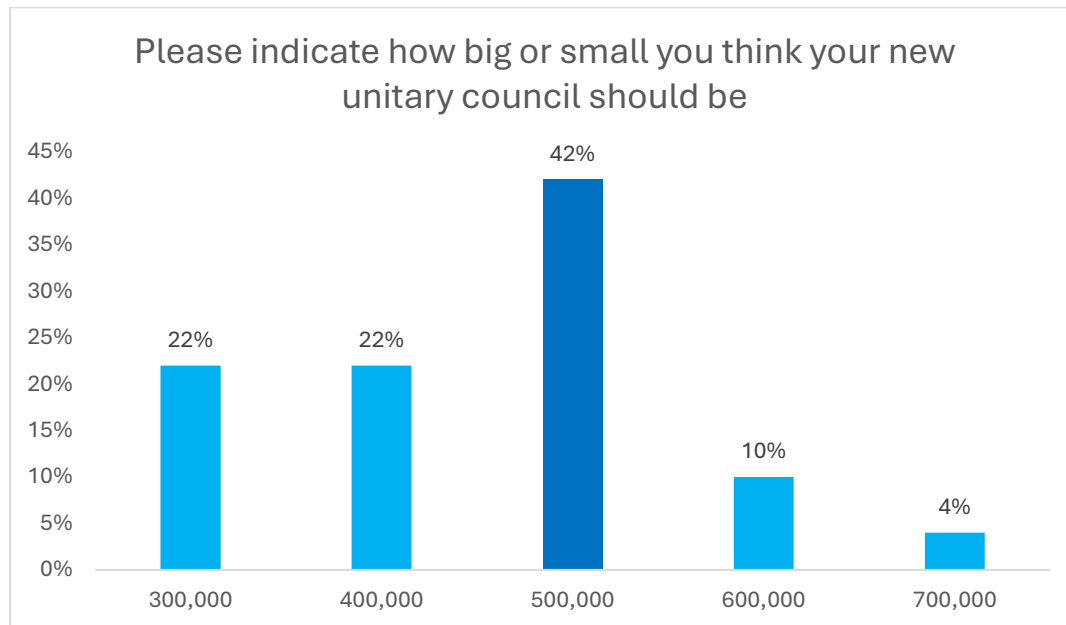


Businesses and others were also asked where the new unitary councils should be focusing in terms of economic growth. They overwhelmingly said key infrastructure – transport, connectivity and digital and investing in high streets and town centres, and that interacting with them is straight forwardly communicated and transacted.

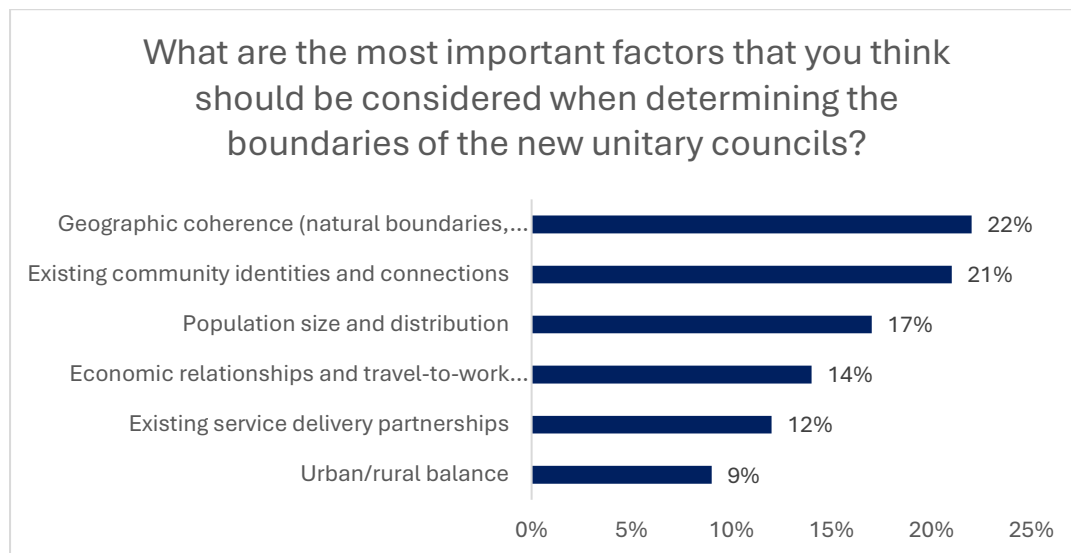


New unitary size and boundary considerations

The minority of stakeholders opt for the 500,000 size option. However, it is worth noting that almost half give three or four hundred thousand. There is much less appetite for any larger unitary of six or seven thousand people.

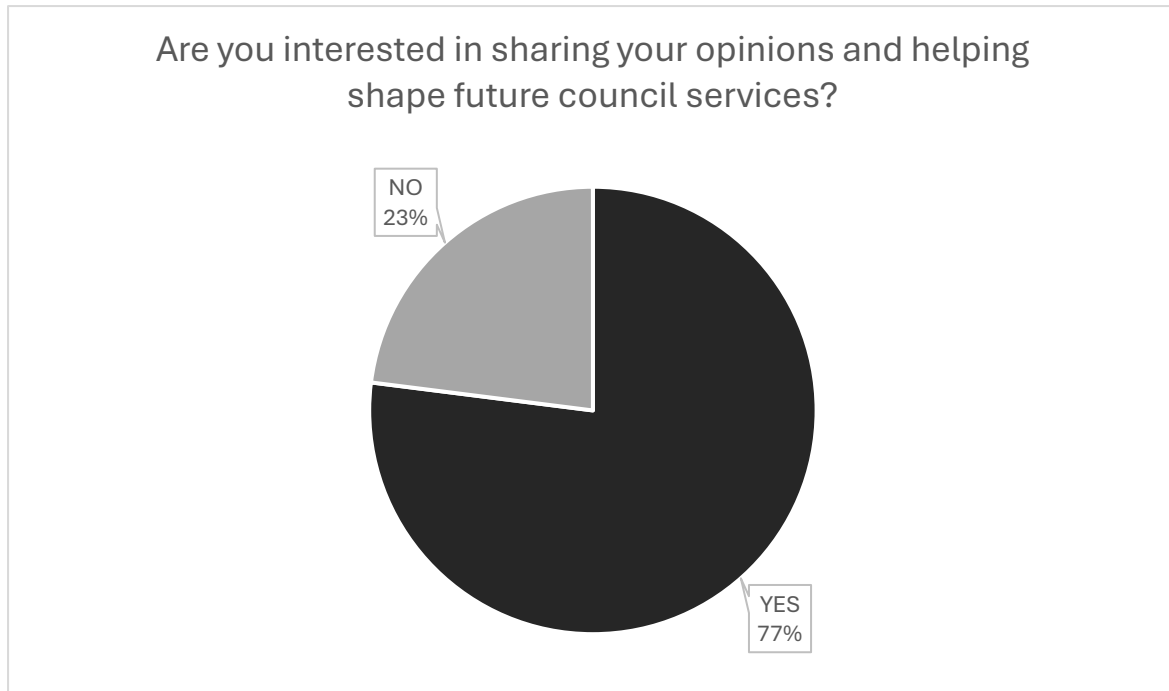


Stakeholders give primacy to geographic coherence and existing community identities and connections in terms of the most crucial factor in determining a new unitary council.

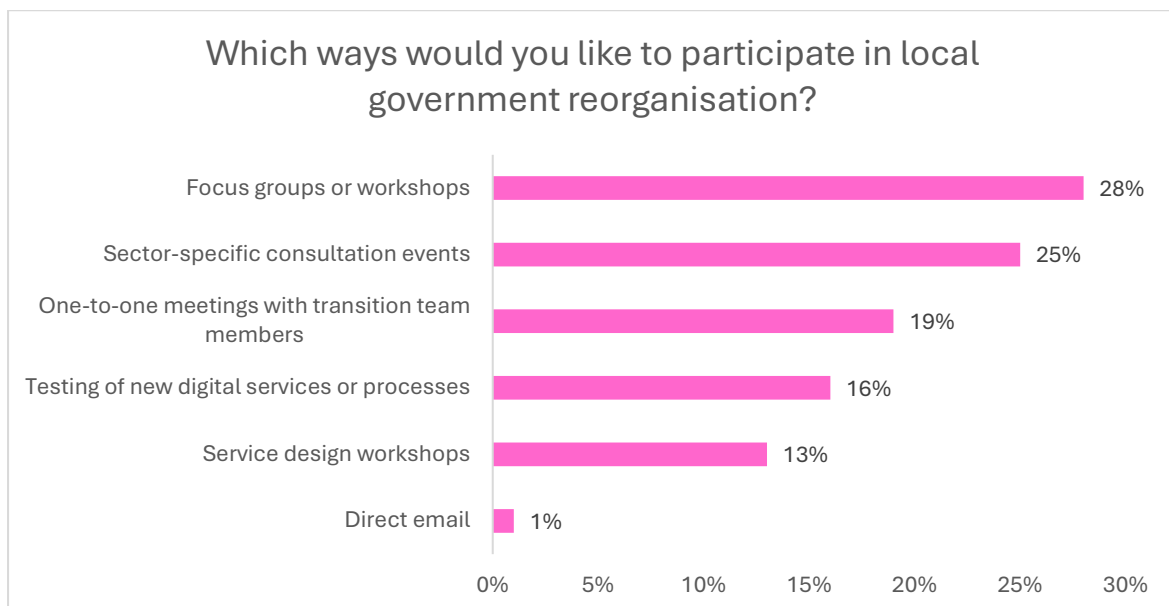


Stakeholder participation and transition

Three-quarters of stakeholders are keen to participate in sharing and shaping future council services and have provided their details.

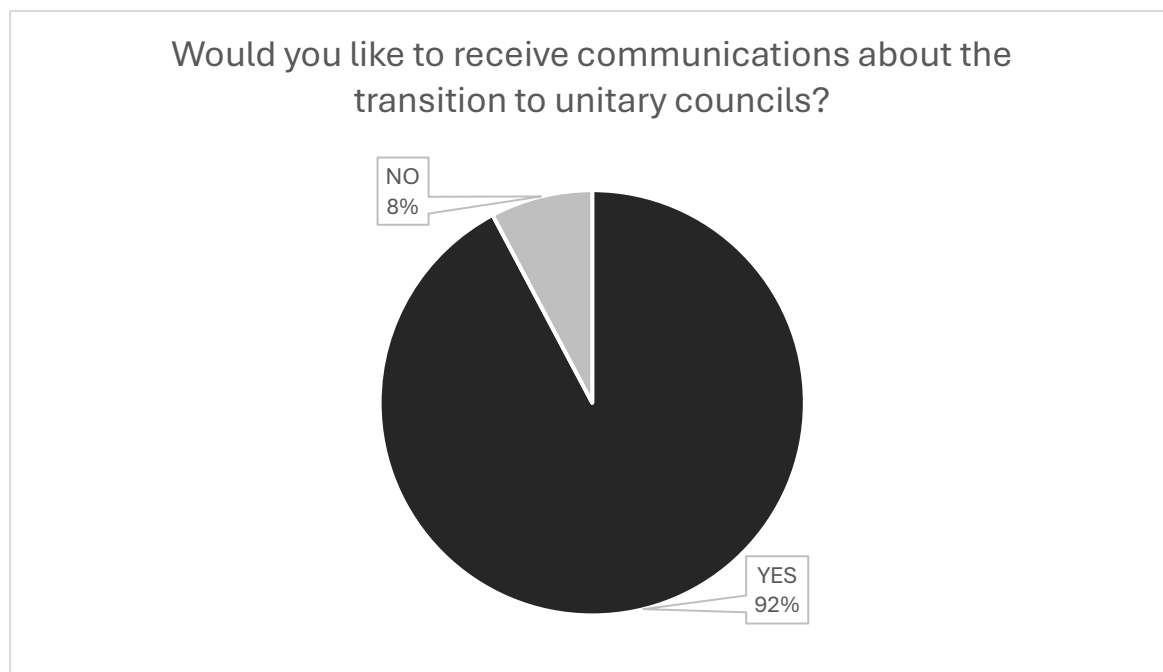


Stakeholders are most responsive to focus groups or workshops and sector-specific consultation events as a means of participating in the local government reorganisation. A smaller number would like one-to-one meetings with the transition team and again we have details of all those who would like this level of engagement.

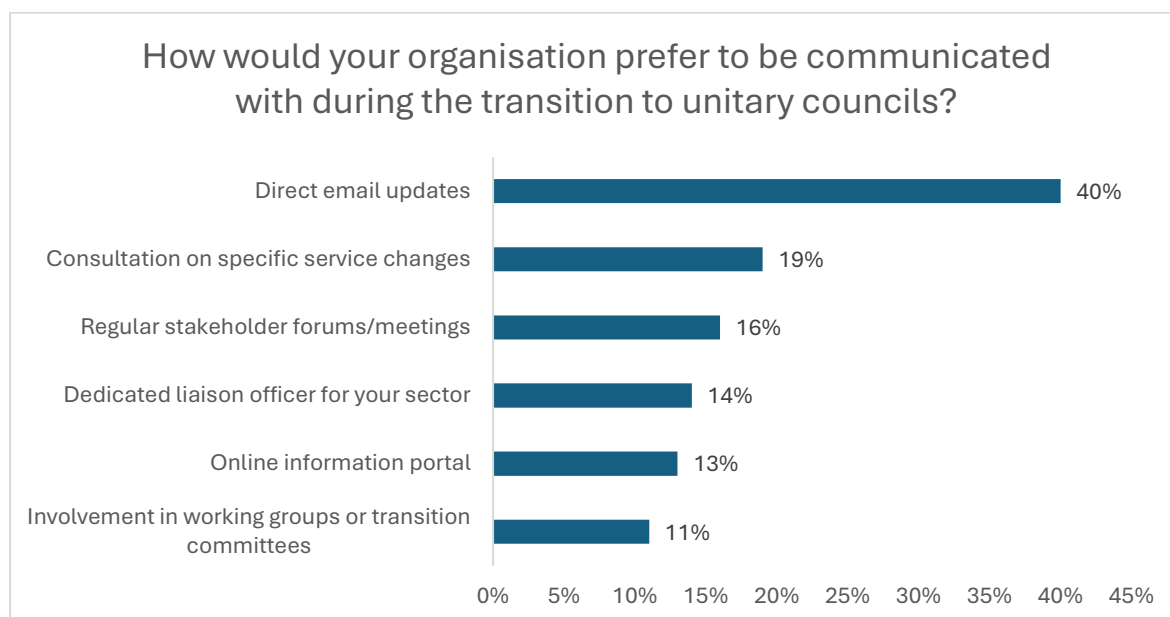


Communication with stakeholders

Positively, over ninety per cent of stakeholders would like to receive communication about local government reorganization.

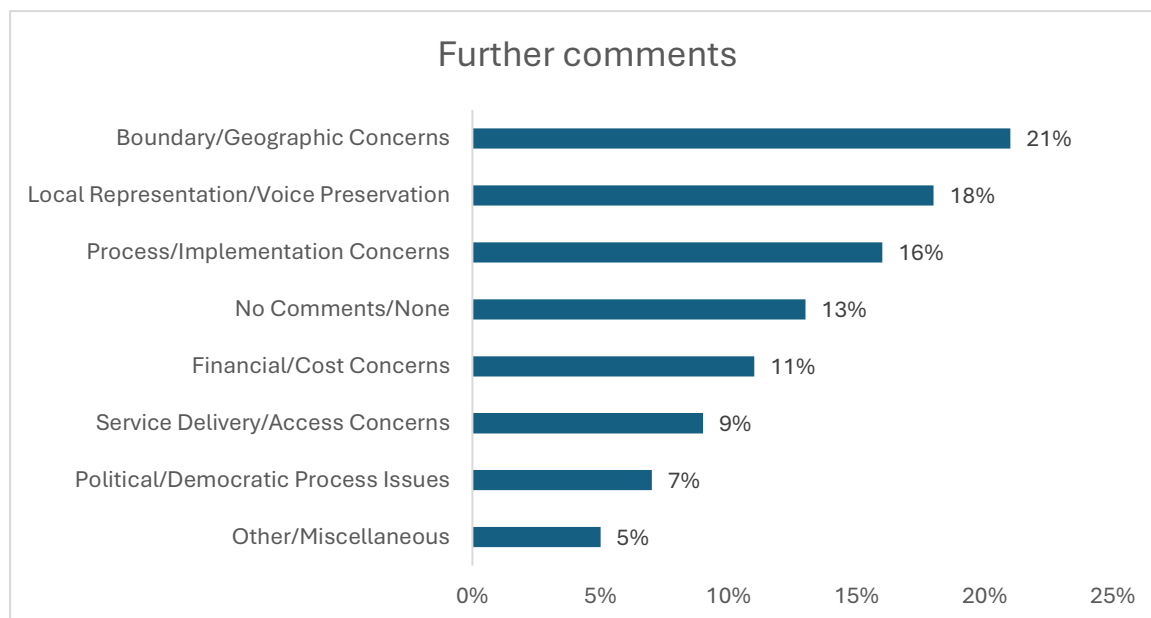


Stakeholders would prefer direct email updates and have provided their contact details, as well as consultation on specific service changes and a smaller group would like regular stakeholder meetings.



Further comments

Stakeholders in further comments return to key themes – boundary concerns, local representation and the how it the reorganization will actually happen.



On boundary concerns, here are a sample of quotes:

"We are currently undertaking a multi-parish Neighbourhood Plan which crosses local authority boundaries—reflecting the real-life connections, development pressures, and shared opportunities centred around St Neots."

Town clerk

"If this change of councils must go ahead, Cheveley Parish Council choose option A which is a merger with Cambs City Council, Cambs County Council and South Cambs. We have no links with Peterborough, Huntingdon or Fenland."

Parish councillor

"Peterborough is a very distinct place to the rest of Cambridgeshire. It would make no sense to create a unitary authority with them."

Business Owner, Retail and E-commerce

On loss of local representation:

"Smaller rural areas are concerned that their needs and priorities will go unrecognised. There needs to be a level of local representation and budget to support these communities rather than funds all going to large projects in city centres."

Parish councillor

"Fenland becomes an amorphous mass being managed by a large disinterested civil authority."

Chair, Voluntary Community Group

On implementation concerns:

"Don't let too many juggling balls slip whilst passing them from one set of hands to another! Make sure all the key things continue to work!"

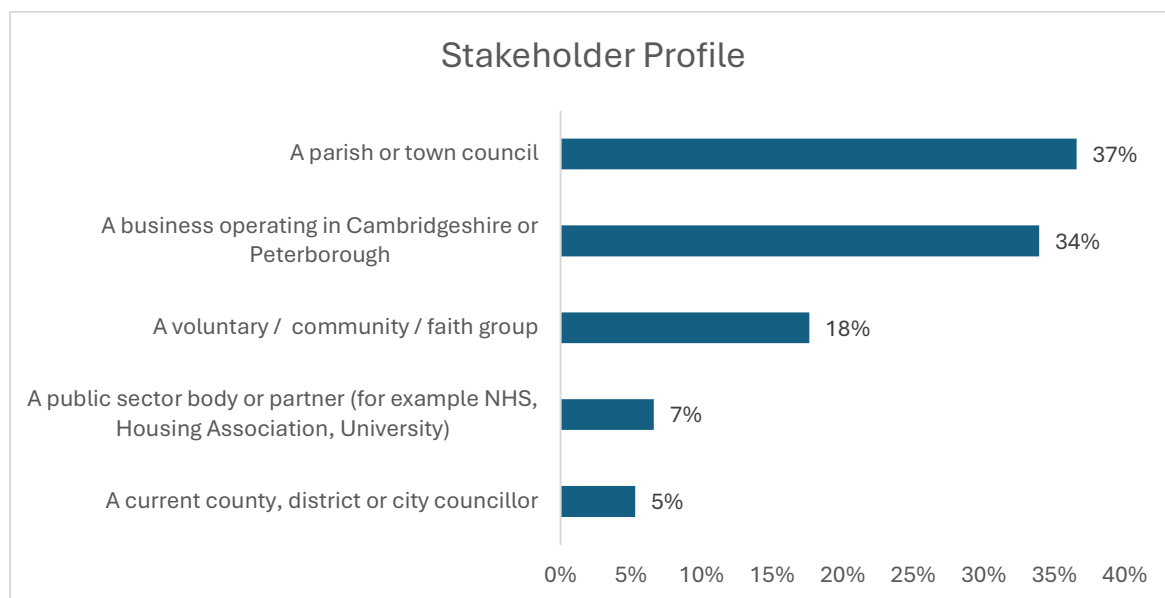
Chair, Voluntary Community Group

"Has this reorganisation been costed out locally and nationally? Do we have this money available, or will it come from central government?"

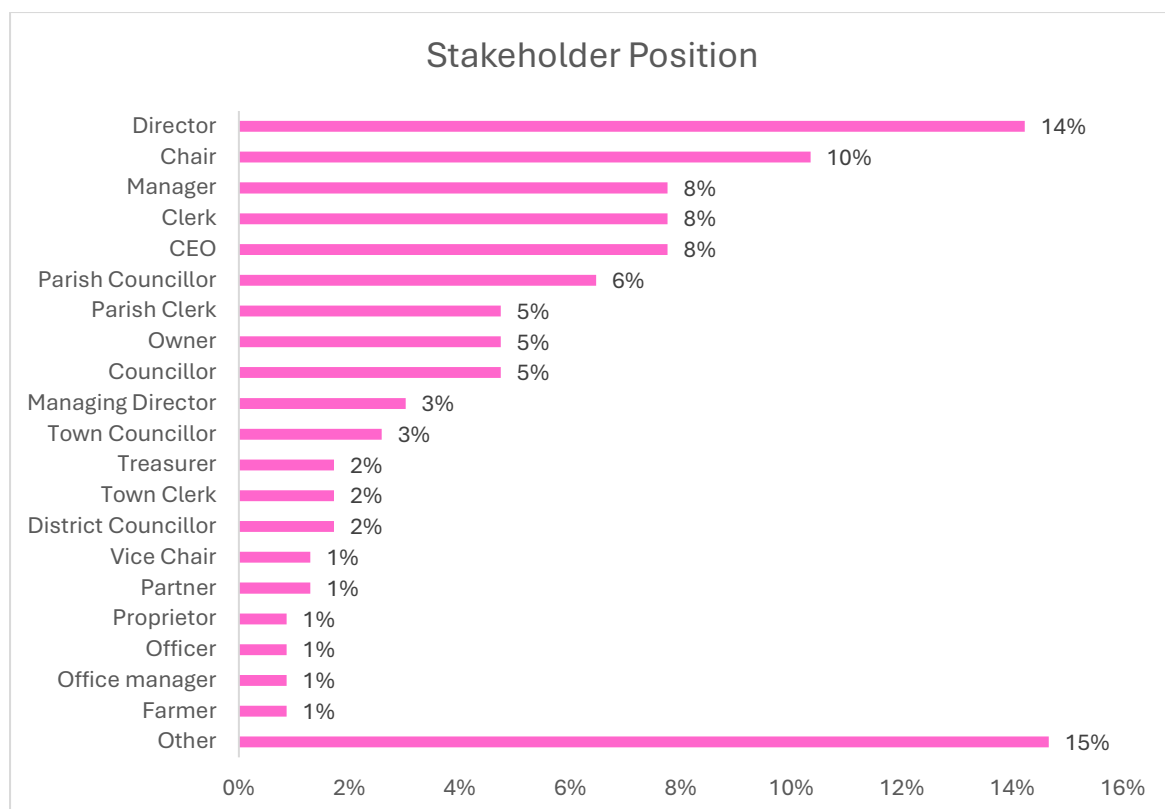
Parish councillor

Sample Profile

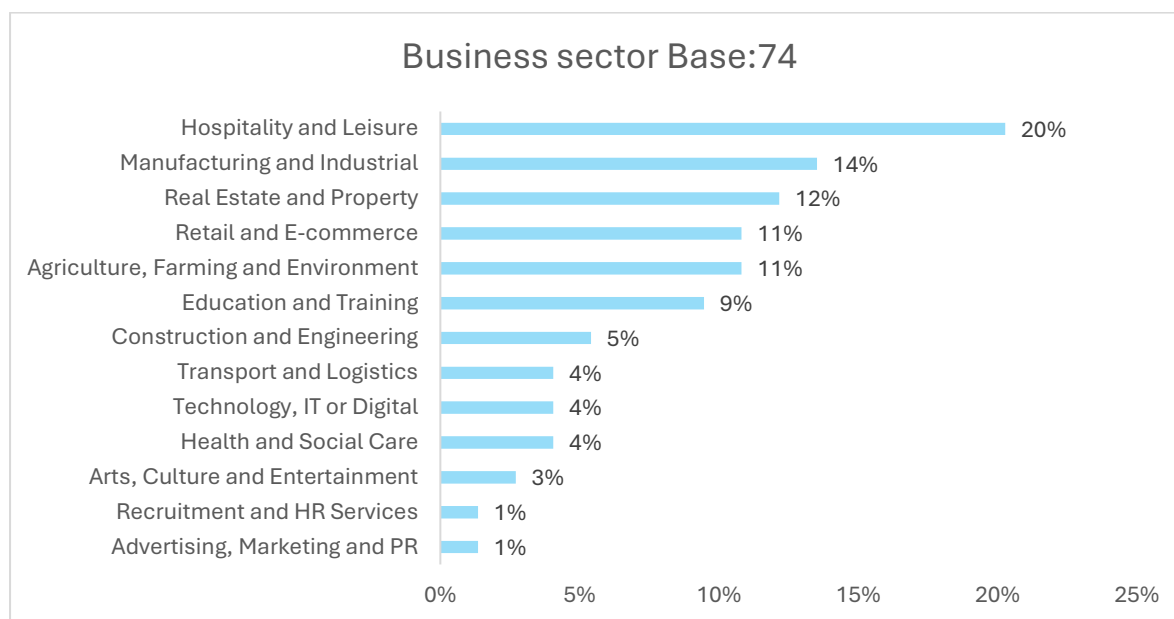
The stakeholders are largely composed of parish councils and businesses.



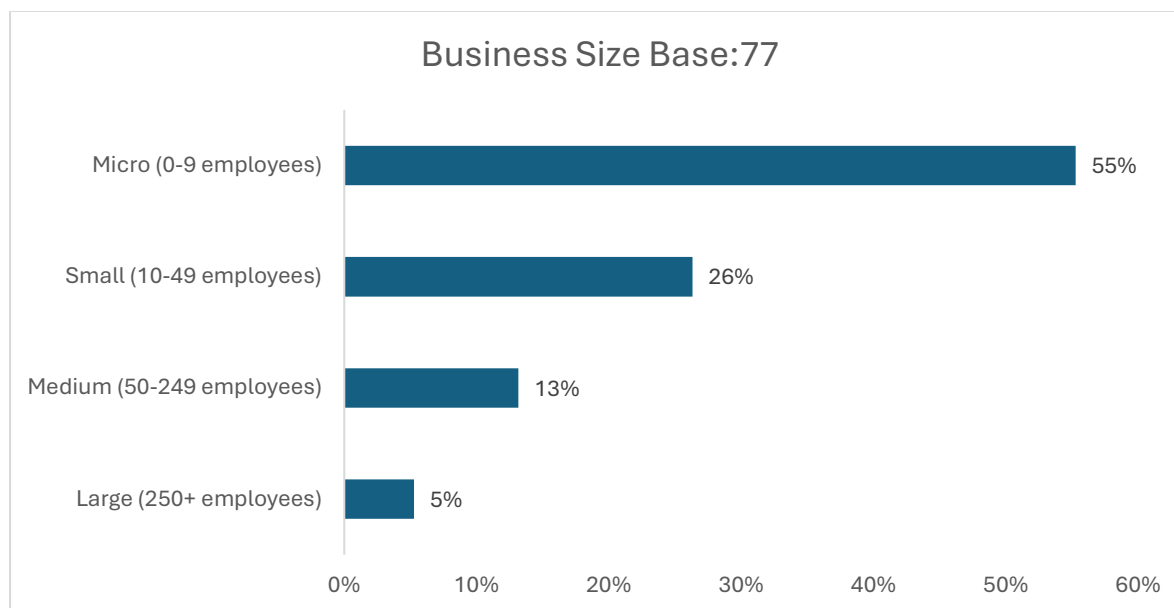
There is a wide range of expertise across the stakeholders.



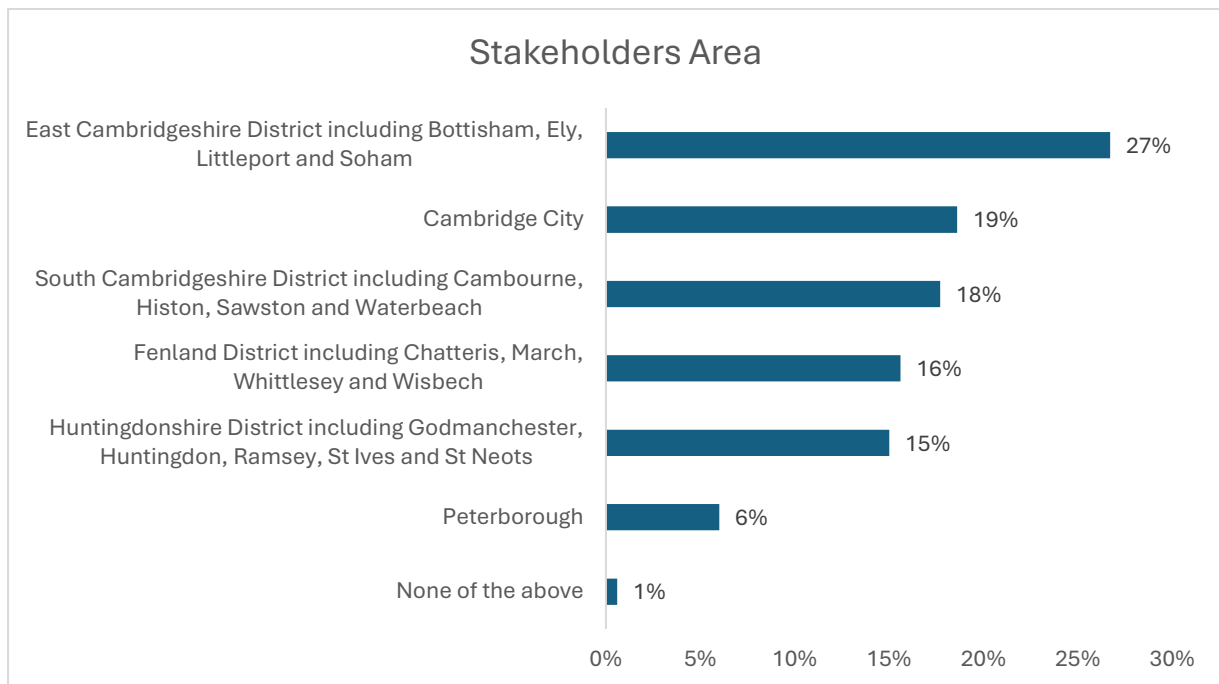
The businesses come from a full range of sectors with hospitality and leisure prominent amongst them.



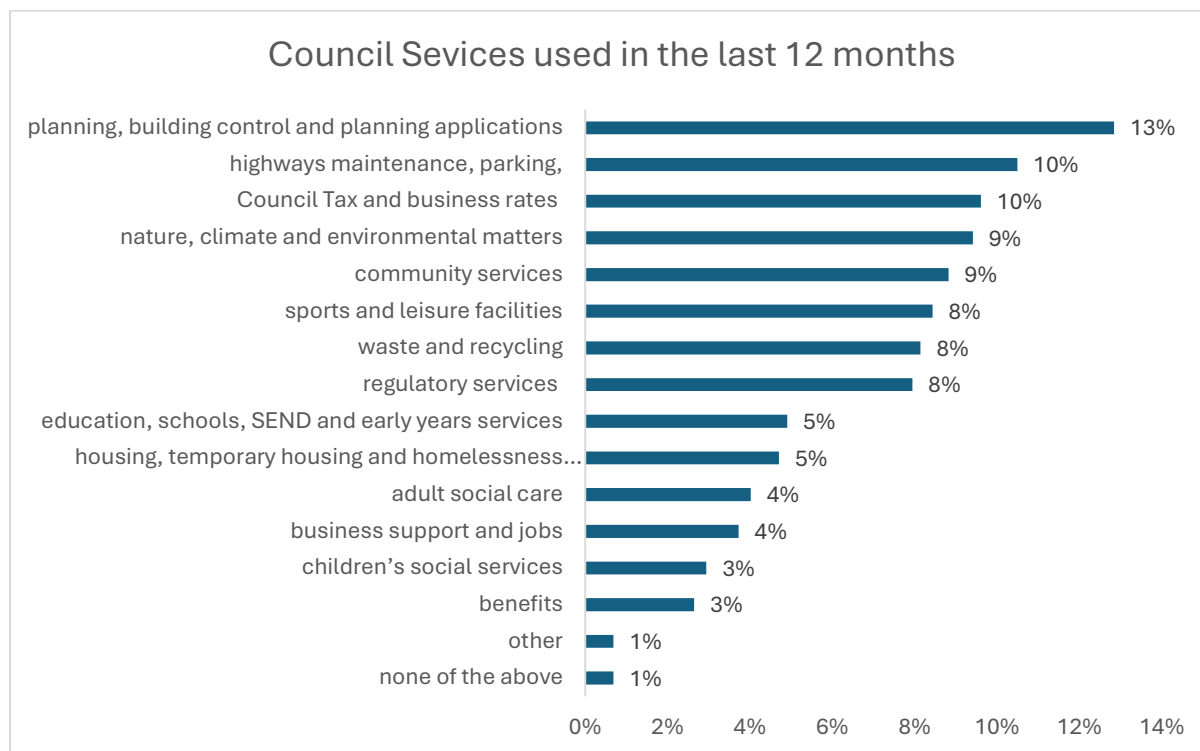
Businesses range in size with the majority from small businesses.



Survey responses are broadly representative with more from East Cambridgeshire and fewer from Peterborough.



The most common council services used by stakeholders were planning, highways and Council Tax and business rates.



Introduction and methodology

Methodology

This report presents findings from qualitative focus group research conducted across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between July and August 2025. Online focus groups tend to be slightly smaller to manage online but this creates more depth of insight. Six focus groups were conducted with a total of 38 residents across six locations: Cambridge City (5 participants), East Cambridgeshire (6 participants), Fenland (7 participants), Huntingdonshire (6 participants), Peterborough (5 participants) and South Cambridgeshire (9 participants).

Participants were recruited through the online surveys to ensure demographic and geographic diversity. The sample represented a range of ages from 18-24 to 75+, with balanced gender representation (19 female, 19 male participants). Length of residence varied from recent arrivals to lifelong residents, providing perspectives across different levels of community connection and council service usage.

Each focus group session lasted 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured discussion guide covering current service experiences, delivery preferences, local identity, development priorities, and reorganisation concerns. All sessions were conducted online via video conferencing, recorded with consent, and professionally transcribed. Analysis followed thematic coding principles, with direct quotations selected to illustrate key themes while maintaining participant anonymity through demographic categorisation.

The focus groups build on the survey findings and elucidate the key points made in the free text responses found in the public survey.

Participant Demographics

The research engaged 38 residents across the study area with the following demographic profile:

Gender Distribution: Female: 19 participants (50%), Male: 19 participants (50%)

Age Range Distribution: 18-24: 1 participant (3%), 25-34: 5 participants (13%), 35-44: 5 participants (13%), 45-54: 12 participants (32%), 55-64: 7 participants (18%), 65-74: 4 participants (11%), 75+: 3 participants (8%)

Geographic Distribution: Cambridge City: 5 participants, East Cambridgeshire: 6 participants, Fenland: 7 participants, Huntingdonshire: 6 participants, Peterborough: 5 participants, South Cambridgeshire: 9 participants

Participants included both frequent users of council services and those with minimal contact, providing perspectives across the spectrum of resident engagement. Length of

residence ranged from recent arrivals to lifelong residents, with many participants having lived in their areas for 15+ years.

Executive Summary

Service Access and Navigation

The complexity of navigating multiple council structures emerged as one of residents' most significant challenge with local government. Participants consistently reported confusion about service responsibilities across parish, district, and county councils, with many describing lengthy trial-and-error processes to identify the correct authority for their needs. This multi-tier confusion was particularly acute when issues crossed jurisdictional boundaries or when residents moved within the same area.

While the concept of a one-stop-shop approach held strong appeal in principle, residents expressed significant concerns about whether larger unitary authorities would maintain the responsiveness and local knowledge valued in smaller councils. Participants wanted assurance that simplification would enhance rather than compromise service quality, seeking streamlined access without losing the personal relationships and local understanding that made some current services effective.

The evidence reveals a fundamental tension between the desire for simplified access and fears about losing the human-scale governance that residents value, highlighting the challenge of delivering organisational efficiency while preserving local accountability and responsiveness.

Service Quality vs Cost

Residents demonstrated profound scepticism about claims that reorganisation would deliver cost savings, viewing such promises with cynicism based on previous experiences of public sector transformation. This disbelief was rooted in observations of NHS reorganisations, police restructuring, and other public sector changes that had promised efficiency savings but delivered increased costs and service disruption.

Despite this scepticism about transformation savings, participants expressed sophisticated understanding of the relationship between investment and service quality. Many indicated willingness to pay higher Council Tax for demonstrably better services, but this was conditional on seeing genuine improvements rather than funding reorganisation exercises that might not deliver benefits.

The concept of value for money was central to residents' thinking, with participants demanding concrete evidence that reorganisation would deliver genuine benefits justifying the disruption and cost. The challenge for reorganisation proponents lies in overcoming deep-seated public disbelief about efficiency savings while demonstrating that structural change can deliver measurable improvements in service quality and value for taxpayers.

Digital Transformation and Accessibility

Digital transformation revealed fundamental tensions between potential service improvements and serious accessibility concerns. While residents appreciated well-functioning digital services for simple transactions, they consistently emphasised the need for human contact and alternative channels, particularly for complex issues requiring judgement, discretion, or detailed explanation.

Significant barriers to digital adoption emerged, including age-related confidence issues, infrastructure limitations, accessibility needs for people with disabilities, and varying levels of digital literacy. Rural connectivity problems and reliance on mobile devices rather than computers created additional barriers that could prevent effective use of digital services even among willing users.

The evidence strongly supports a "channel choice" approach rather than "digital by default," with participants emphasising that digital services should complement rather than replace traditional channels. Successful digital transformation requires not just technological change but fundamental attention to user needs, accessibility requirements, and the maintenance of human contact for those who cannot or choose not to use digital services.

Place Identity and Community Connection

Place identity and geographic affinity emerged as fundamental considerations shaping residents' views about reorganisation arrangements. Particularly striking was the strong positive identification expressed by residents with Cambridge, contrasted with opposition to association with Peterborough based on perceptions of fundamental differences in character, priorities, and community needs. The more rural districts were concerned that the greater demands in urban areas would mean that they would lose out on services.

These geographic preferences reflected practical daily connections through transport, employment, shopping, healthcare, and cultural activities that create natural communities of interest extending across current administrative boundaries. The ease of travel to Cambridge compared to difficulty reaching Peterborough reinforced broader patterns of economic and social connection that residents see as appropriate foundations for governance arrangements. The conclusion drawn by participants is that they would like new unitary councils to be located in areas where they find it easier to get to.

The evidence demonstrates that successful reorganisation must work with rather than against natural patterns of connection and opposition, creating governance arrangements that reflect genuine community networks rather than administrative convenience. Forced associations that cut across fundamental differences in character and priorities risk undermining the place-based identities that residents value and depend upon.

Local Knowledge vs Professional Capacity

A fundamental tension emerged between valuing intimate local understanding and requiring technical expertise for effective service delivery. Residents highly valued local knowledge – geographical understanding, social awareness, historical perspective, and cultural sensitivity – seeing this as irreplaceable for effective governance and democratic legitimacy.

However, participants also recognised significant limitations in relying solely on local knowledge without adequate professional capacity, particularly for complex technical issues, legal compliance, strategic planning, and resource-intensive services. Smaller councils were seen as often lacking specialist expertise needed for modern governance challenges.

The challenge lies in designing structures that harness both local knowledge and professional capacity effectively. Residents want assurance that larger authorities will maintain local connection and understanding while providing technical expertise and resources needed for effective modern service delivery, requiring innovative approaches that preserve community knowledge while building professional capability. In this respect, participants, when thinking about a large authority think of Cambridgeshire County Council. While opinions of county services are mixed, there are examples of both positive and negative experiences, the concern is with them being seen as bureaucratic and utilitarian, and whether policies can be adjusted at local discretion.

Scale and Geography

Concerns about optimal authority size revealed nuanced understanding that effectiveness requires appropriate balance rather than simply maximising scale. While very small authorities might lack resources and expertise, very large authorities could become unwieldy, bureaucratic, and disconnected from communities, suggesting optimal efficiency at moderate rather than maximum scale.

Geographic accessibility emerged as a fundamental equity issue, with residents recognising that distance, travel time, and transport availability create real barriers particularly affecting elderly people, those without private transport, and families with limited resources. Rural-urban differences in service needs and delivery challenges required flexible approaches rather than standardised urban-focused models. Again, the perception and concern is that the unitary authority will not have the bandwidth to have one policy in one area and one policy in another, which might be more appropriate, but instead has an urban-based policy focus.

Democratic representation challenges were seen as fundamental threats when geographic scale becomes excessive, with participants emphasising that effective representation requires genuine local knowledge, regular community contact, and practical accessibility to constituents.

Democratic Representation and Accountability

It is important to recognise that the majority of people have limited direct contact with elected councillors, revealing a disconnect between theoretical models of local democratic representation and practical reality. Rather than engaging through democratic channels, residents overwhelmingly experienced local government through service delivery, with accountability operating primarily through service performance rather than representative relationships. But while the majority may be council service users, there are a minority who are more active citizens and from the focus group discussions, there do not appear to be any current voice of the customer mechanisms. These mechanisms will become doubly important with the new unitary councils.

This service-focused experience suggests that for many residents, changes to democratic structures may be less significant than impacts on service quality, accessibility, and responsiveness. Electoral behaviour reflected this service-centric approach, with voting decisions based on party competence in service delivery rather than knowledge of individual candidates or assessment of representation quality.

The implications for reorganisation are significant, suggesting that democratic legitimacy may depend more on effective service delivery than traditional measures of democratic engagement, requiring careful attention to how democratic structures can support rather than hinder service effectiveness. This said, the public do want local representation – they want councillors who know their ‘local patch’.

Trust and Confidence

Trust emerged as a fundamental prerequisite for effective governance, with development pressure and planning failures identified as major sources of distrust, particularly in areas experiencing rapid growth. Poor planning decisions, inadequate infrastructure provision, and lack of community consultation created lasting damage to public confidence in local governance.

Leadership and accountability failures were identified as fundamental barriers to trust, with residents expressing frustration about unclear responsibility structures and ineffective accountability mechanisms in the current system. Distance from decision-making centres exacerbated trust problems, particularly when decisions affecting local communities were made without adequate local understanding.

The evidence demonstrates that public trust operates as both prerequisite for and outcome of effective governance, requiring continuous attention to transparency, accountability, competence, and fairness. In areas experiencing substantial development, maintaining trust requires particularly rigorous standards as the scale and complexity of decisions create multiple opportunities for confidence to be undermined.

Transition Concerns and Opportunities

Residents demonstrated acute awareness that reorganisation represents significant undertaking with substantial implications for service delivery, democratic accountability, staff retention, and system integration. Primary concerns focused on managing transition risks and ensuring that change processes did not undermine service quality, accessibility, or continuity.

Service disruption during transition emerged as the most immediate concern, with anxiety about essential services being compromised while councils focused on reorganisation rather than delivery. Staff retention and knowledge preservation were identified as critical challenges, with risk of losing valuable local expertise during periods of uncertainty and change.

Despite concerns, participants recognised opportunities for improvement through well-managed reorganisation, particularly modernising systems, improving coordination, and creating capacity for better technology and specialist expertise. However, these opportunities were seen as dependent on effective implementation and careful preservation of existing strengths while addressing current weaknesses.

Concluding Remarks

This comprehensive qualitative research reveals a sophisticated and nuanced public understanding of the complexities surrounding local government reorganisation. Residents demonstrate clear awareness that structural change involves fundamental trade-offs between competing values and objectives, rather than simple technical adjustments that will automatically improve governance effectiveness.

Key Tensions and Trade-offs

The evidence identifies several fundamental tensions that reorganisation must address:

- **Simplification vs Responsiveness:** While residents desire simplified access through one-stop-shop approaches, they fear losing the local knowledge, personal relationships, and responsive service that characterise effective smaller-scale governance.
- **Professional Capacity vs Local Connection:** There is clear recognition that modern governance requires technical expertise and resources, but deep concern that larger authorities may become disconnected from local communities and lose the intimate understanding that enables effective problem-solving.
- **Efficiency vs Accessibility:** Although participants understand the logic of economies of scale, they are acutely aware that centralisation can create barriers to access, particularly for vulnerable groups, rural communities, and those without private transport.

- **Democratic Accountability vs Service Focus:** The research reveals that residents experience local government primarily through service delivery rather than democratic representation, suggesting that reorganisation success may depend more on maintaining service quality and instituting some kind of mechanism for local voices to be heard.

The Geography of Community Life

Perhaps the most significant finding concerns the importance of natural geographic connections and community networks in shaping residents' preferences for governance arrangements.

This suggests that successful reorganisation from a resident's perspective must respect the practical geography of community life: how people live, work, shop, and access services, rather than imposing arrangements based purely on administrative convenience or theoretical efficiency models. The evidence strongly indicates that governance arrangements work best when they build upon rather than cut across established networks of community life and economic relationship.

Trust as the Foundation of Legitimacy

The research highlights trust and confidence as fundamental prerequisites for effective local governance, particularly in areas experiencing rapid development and change. The distrust expressed by some residents, based on planning failures and accountability deficits, demonstrates how governance failures can create lasting damage to the social contract between councils and communities.

This has particular significance for reorganisation processes, which inevitably create periods of uncertainty, disruption, and reduced accountability. The evidence suggests that maintaining public trust during transition may be as important as achieving the long-term benefits of structural change, requiring exceptional attention to transparency, communication, service continuity, and accountability during reorganisation processes.

Implications for Reorganisation Design

The findings suggest several critical requirements for successful reorganisation:

1. **Preserve Local Connection:** Larger authorities must find innovative ways to maintain local presence, knowledge, and accountability while gaining the benefits of increased scale and professional capacity.
2. **Respect Natural Boundaries:** Geographic arrangements should reflect established patterns of community connection and economic relationship rather than administrative convenience or population targets.
3. **Maintain Service Focus:** Given that residents experience local government primarily through services, reorganisation must prioritise service continuity,

quality, and accessibility over structural considerations. This said, a mechanism of geographical voice of the customer will help with feedback on services.

4. **Manage Transition Risks:** Success requires exceptional attention to change management, communication, service protection, and accountability during transition periods that may extend over several years.
5. **Build Rather Than Assume Trust:** Public scepticism about reorganisation benefits means that trust must be earned through demonstrated competence rather than assumed based on theoretical advantages of larger authorities.

The Challenge Ahead

This research reveals that residents approach reorganisation proposals with informed scepticism based on realistic assessment of the complexities involved and observation of previous transformation exercises. Their concerns are not rooted in resistance to change but in understanding how difficult it is to achieve the promised benefits of structural reform while avoiding the disruption and service degradation that often accompany major organisational change.

The challenge for reorganisation proponents lies not in overcoming uninformed opposition. The public are not opposed to change, they see the benefit of simpler accountable government and their support is conditional on seeing improvements in services. But, instead, the proponents of reorganization should demonstrate that they have adequate understanding of these complexities and sufficient commitment to managing transition risks to justify the disruption that reorganization is perceived as bringing. This requires moving beyond simple assertions about the benefits of larger authorities to detailed evidence of how reorganisation will address the specific concerns and priorities identified by residents while preserving the aspects of current arrangements that work effectively.

Ultimately, the success of local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will depend not just on the theoretical advantages of unitary authorities but on the practical demonstration that larger authorities can deliver the local knowledge, responsive service, democratic accountability, and community connection that residents value while providing the professional capacity, strategic capability, and service resilience that modern governance requires. The evidence from this research provides a clear framework for understanding what residents expect and need from reorganisation, offering valuable guidance for designing and implementing structural changes that genuinely improve rather than compromise the relationship between local government and the communities it serves.

Service access and navigation

The complexity of navigating multiple council structures emerged as one of the most significant challenges facing residents across all five focus group locations. This complexity manifested in confusion about service responsibilities, difficulty identifying correct contacts, and frustration with being passed between different levels of government. The multi-tier system created confusion, with residents often unsure whether to contact district, county, or parish councils for different issues.

"I deal with the council quite a bit, actually, at the moment, on all three levels. And it really frustrates me that everything is so disparate. You know, you've got parish council, got East Cambridge Council, you've got Cambridge City, Cambridge County Council. It's quite difficult to find out exactly who you need to talk to to get something done, and sometimes the councilors are astride more than one council, right? It's a bit of a mess at the moment, and I think it does need sorting out."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

This confusion was particularly acute for residents dealing with issues that crossed jurisdictional lines or when moving house within the same area. The process of identifying the correct authority often involved lengthy trial and error, with residents being redirected multiple times before reaching the appropriate department.

"In regards to my contact with the council on a regular basis, it doesn't happen, but I do contact them regarding things like we had to have a tree [removed] which was oversized...because we've moved within Ely, I had to sort out the Council Tax. Who did I call? I have no idea, because I got put through to one person through to another. So I definitely think there is some improvements that could happen within the system."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

Even when participants knew which council to contact, finding the appropriate department or individual proved challenging. The system appeared to lack integration, with different departments operating in isolation even within the same building, creating additional barriers to effective service delivery.

"Finding out who provides a service can be quite tricky. Actually, getting hold of somebody in any of the councils can be a positive nightmare. It can take weeks sometimes to find a person who deals with the issue. Once you've found somebody, normally it gets resolved. But that initial trying to find somebody or phone the council and excuse me on the phone for an hour just trying to go through hoops to find out who's supposed to be dealing with your particular need, particularly when we're split over three different councils, depending on the service you're looking for."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

When participants did successfully navigate to the correct service, experiences varied dramatically. Some described exemplary service delivery that demonstrated the potential for effective council response, characterised by quick response times, clear communication, and proactive updates on progress.

"My positive experience a years ago near my home due to drought...that was the explanation given - there was severe deformities on the pavement, like dangerously severe for people who use mobility aids, or actually parents with the prams. I reported the problem, and I was really pleasantly surprised to see first thing, there were markings around the place - be aware that there is a problem. Those appeared like two days later, and after a week the situation was sorted, and I even received emails updating me on the progress that was to my opinion a stellar performance."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

However, these positive experiences contrasted sharply with other participants' encounters with prolonged delays, poor communication, and repeated unfulfilled promises. These negative experiences often involved more complex issues or situations where responsibility was disputed between different authorities.

"I'm paying Council Tax, therefore I'm expecting for them to deal with the fact that I have one brown garden bin outside my house that hasn't been used in at least seven years. And I've asked them, I don't want to say wrong thing, three or four times during those seven years, to finally take that bin away, because it's taking space, like literally taking space. And guess what, this summer, we finally managed to get that bin in the car and taken to the recycling centre, because they promised me to take it away every time. And as you figured out they never did."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

Given these navigation challenges and the inconsistency in service delivery, participants generally found the concept of a one-stop-shop approach appealing in principle. The idea of having a single point of contact for all council services resonated across all focus groups, with many seeing this as a potential solution to the current system's complexity. This appeal was evident across different locations and age groups.

"The divisions between responsibilities for various things are not quite as easy to understand as you would think, which makes me think that having one neutral council, where there was one place, one phone number, one set of offices, might make things easier."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

"I think the idea of having one council that you can go to for everything is really appealing. At the moment, you never know if you're calling the right place, and you end up getting passed around. If there was just one number to call, one website to go to, that would make life so much easier."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

"The one-stop-shop idea sounds brilliant in theory. I mean, when you need help with something, you just want to be able to call one place and they sort it out for you, rather than having to work out which of the three or four different councils you need to speak to."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

"I really like the sound of having everything under one roof. It would be so much simpler if you could just go to one place or call one number and they could help you with whatever you need, whether it's Council Tax, planning, or whatever."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

However, while participants welcomed the prospect of simplified access, they also expressed significant concerns about whether larger unitary authorities would maintain the responsiveness and local knowledge that some valued in smaller councils. These concerns were rooted in experiences with existing large authorities and fears about losing personal relationships and local understanding especially when participants made comparisons to the county council. The county council can appear remote and utilitarian in its outlook and key not taking responsibility for its decisions. Policies tailored to work for the majority of people can seem odd to those that they do not work for, especially where there is local context for difference. This is a key concern of residents with larger authorities.

"My issue is with Cambridgeshire County Council, which, it's the sort of size that we seem to be heading to. Oh, well, it's going to be half the size, very difficult. They are very bureaucratic. I think they're so large it's very difficult to find someone who will take responsibility for anything. And they pass you from pillar to post."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

Participants worried that larger authorities might become more impersonal and less responsive to individual concerns, potentially losing the local knowledge and personal relationships that made some current services effective.

"I think there's a danger that you lose that local knowledge and that local connection. And I think that's really important, particularly for things like planning applications and local issues where you need someone who really understands the area and the community."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

The challenge for reorganisation will be delivering the benefits of streamlined access while preserving service quality and local accountability. Participants wanted assurance that simplification would not come at the expense of responsiveness, blanket policies or local understanding but would genuinely improve their ability to access appropriate help when needed. The concern here is about a loss of discretion with local difference.

These navigation challenges were evident across participants' experiences, demonstrating both the frustrations and occasional successes that characterise current service access arrangements. These accounts reinforce the complexity of the current system whilst highlighting the importance of personal intervention in resolving service failures.

"Firstly, I've tried to put in planning permission. Yeah, and the service I got was appalling, no communications. After five months, I actually went to the council village councillor, I immediately get a response."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"I've only had positive experiences recently, though. Just last week I phoned up South Cambs, and I just phoned the standard number, and the woman was very, very helpful."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

Local Knowledge vs Professional Capacity

The tension between local knowledge and professional capacity emerged as one of the most fundamental and complex considerations in participants' discussions about local government reorganisation. This theme encapsulates a core dilemma facing modern local governance: whether to prioritise the intimate understanding that comes from lived experience within a community, or the technical expertise and institutional resources that enable sophisticated service delivery. Far from being a simple either-or choice, participants' discussions revealed this as a multifaceted challenge requiring careful balance and innovative solutions.

The value participants placed on local knowledge was deeply rooted in their experiences of effective local representation and service delivery. This is also observed in both the surveys of residents and stakeholders. Local knowledge manifested in multiple dimensions: geographical understanding of local infrastructure, environmental challenges, and community assets; social awareness of community dynamics, informal networks, and local leadership; historical perspective on previous decisions, ongoing issues, and community development; and cultural sensitivity to local values, priorities, and ways of working. This knowledge was seen as irreplaceable and fundamental to effective local governance.

"I think the local councillors do understand the area better. They know the issues, they know the people, they know what's important to the community. But sometimes they don't have the resources or the expertise to actually do anything about it."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"I've had really good experiences with our local councillor because they actually live in the area and understand what it's like. They know which roads flood, they know where the problems are. You can't get that from someone sitting in an office miles away."

Female, 65-74, Huntingdonshire

Participants provided numerous examples of how local knowledge translated into more effective problem-solving and service delivery. Councillors and council staff who lived locally were seen as having immediate understanding of issues, knowing the right people to contact, and being able to navigate local networks effectively. This local embeddedness was valued not just for its practical benefits, but also for the democratic legitimacy it provided.

"When I contacted my local councillor about the flooding issue, they knew exactly what I was talking about because they'd lived through it themselves. They understood the problem immediately and knew who to contact."

Female, 45-54, Cambridge City

"I like that our councillors live locally and shop in the same shops as us. They understand what it's like to live here day to day. That connection is really important."

Female, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

The importance of historical and contextual knowledge was particularly emphasised by longer-term residents who had witnessed multiple attempts to address local issues. This institutional memory was seen as crucial for avoiding repeated mistakes and building on previous successes. Participants valued representatives who understood not just current challenges, but the evolution of local issues over time.

"Local knowledge is invaluable. You can't replace someone who's lived in an area for 30 years and knows all the history, all the issues, all the personalities. That's worth its weight in gold."

Male, 65-74, Fenland

"There's something to be said for having councillors who've been involved in the community for years. They know the history, they know what's been tried before, they know what works and what doesn't."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

However, participants also recognised significant limitations in relying solely on local knowledge without adequate professional capacity. These limitations were most apparent in complex technical issues, legal compliance requirements, strategic planning challenges, and resource-intensive service delivery. Smaller councils were seen as often lacking the specialist expertise needed for modern governance challenges.

"The problem with smaller councils is they might know the area well, but they don't always have the professional capacity to deal with complex issues. You need both really - local knowledge and professional expertise."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"Our parish councillors are brilliant because they really care about the village, and they know everyone. But when it comes to bigger issues, they just don't have the power or the resources to make things happen."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

The professional capacity gap was particularly evident in technical areas such as planning, environmental assessment, legal compliance, and financial management. Participants recognised that good intentions and local knowledge were insufficient when dealing with complex regulatory frameworks or technical challenges that required specialist expertise.

"The smaller councils might be more personal, but they don't always have the technical expertise for things like planning applications or complex legal issues. Sometimes you need specialists."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

"The district council staff are lovely, and they try their best, but they're often out of their depth with complex planning issues. They need proper legal and technical support that they just don't have."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

Conversely, participants' experiences with larger authorities highlighted both the benefits and limitations of professional capacity without local knowledge. While larger councils were recognised as having greater resources, specialist staff, and technical capabilities, they were also seen as potentially disconnected from local realities and community needs. This disconnection could result in technically sound but practically inappropriate solutions.

"The county council has more resources and expertise, but they don't really understand local issues. They make decisions that might look good on paper but don't work in practice because they don't know the area."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"The county council has the resources to employ proper experts, but they're so removed from local communities that they don't understand the real impact of their decisions."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

The challenge of scale was a recurring theme, with participants recognising that larger authorities could afford to employ specialists but might lose the local connection that made services relevant and effective. This created a fundamental tension between efficiency and responsiveness, between technical competence and local relevance.

"The advantage of larger authorities is they can afford to employ specialists - planning experts, legal experts, technical experts. Smaller councils often have to rely on generalists who might not have the specific knowledge needed."

Female, 25-34, Peterborough

"I worry that with bigger councils, you lose that personal touch. The councillors won't know the area as well, they won't understand the local issues, and residents will just become numbers on a spreadsheet."

Male, 55-64, Huntingdonshire

Some participants attempted to reconcile this tension by advocating hybrid approaches that could combine local knowledge with professional capacity. These suggestions included maintaining local representation within larger structures, ensuring professional staff had local connections, and creating mechanisms for local input into technical decisions.

"I think you need a balance. Local knowledge is really important for understanding what the community needs, but you also need professional capacity to actually deliver services effectively and efficiently."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

"Professional capacity is important, but it's no good if the professionals don't understand the local context. You need both elements working together."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

The importance of community dynamics and informal networks was another dimension of local knowledge that participants valued highly. Understanding how communities actually worked - beyond formal structures and official processes - was seen as crucial for effective local governance. This social capital and network knowledge was viewed as particularly difficult to replicate in larger, more formal structures.

"Local councillors understand the community dynamics - they know which groups don't get along, they know the informal networks, they know how to get things done locally."

Male, 65-74, Huntingdonshire

Participants also recognised that the relative importance of local knowledge versus professional capacity might vary depending on the type of service or issue involved. Some services were seen as benefiting more from local understanding and personal relationships, while others required technical expertise and professional systems. The challenge was determining which approach was most appropriate for different functions.

"I think smaller councils are more responsive because they're closer to the community, but they're also more limited in what they can actually achieve. It's a trade-off."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

"The problem is that local councillors might understand the issues, but they don't always have the technical knowledge to solve them. You need professional expertise for things like environmental assessments or legal compliance."

Male, 45-54, Peterborough

The risk of losing local knowledge through reorganisation was a significant concern for many participants. There was worry that larger authorities would inevitably become more bureaucratic and less responsive, with professional staff who lacked local connection and understanding. This concern was particularly acute among participants who had positive experiences with local representatives.

"The danger with reorganisation is that you might get more professional services but lose that local connection and understanding that makes councils effective in the first place."

Male, 75+, Fenland

The challenge for reorganisation lies in designing structures that can harness both local knowledge and professional capacity effectively. Participants wanted assurance that larger authorities would find innovative ways to maintain local connection and understanding while also providing the technical expertise and resources needed for effective modern service delivery.

Participants echoed these concerns about maintaining local representation and connection within larger authority structures. Their perspectives revealed particular anxiety about the loss of accessible local representatives and the risk of creating governance arrangements that are neither truly local nor effectively national in scope.

"I would like to be able to have a representative who I have voted for, who can help me talk to the right person in the council to get whatever issue is resolved."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

"At the moment, the county council is in Alconbury, which, okay, it might be more central. It used to be at Castle Hill in Cambridge, which was brilliant for people in Cambridge."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

"My concern is we're supposed to have central government to do things for the nation and local government to do things for where I live."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"You're going to end up with governments in the middle. And I've neither got stuff accountable at a national level, nor stuff accountable at a local level, just a bunch of people in the middle who are not really close to anyone."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

The success of reorganisation may ultimately depend on how well this fundamental tension can be resolved, ensuring that the benefits of professional capacity do not come at the expense of the local knowledge and community connection that residents value so highly.

Service Quality vs Cost

The relationship between service quality and cost emerged as a central concern for participants across all focus groups, revealing not only sophisticated understanding about public sector finance but also profound scepticism about promises that reorganisation would deliver cost savings. This scepticism represents perhaps the most significant challenge facing proponents of local government transformation, as participants consistently expressed disbelief that structural changes would result in genuine financial benefits for residents or improved value for money.

The most striking finding was participants' widespread disbelief in claims that transformation would save money. This scepticism was rooted in previous experiences of public sector reorganisation, observations of other transformation exercises, and a general cynicism about promises of efficiency savings. Participants had heard similar promises before and remained unconvinced that reorganisation would deliver the financial benefits being claimed by its proponents.

"Every time they reorganise something, they say it's going to save money and improve services. But it never does. It just costs a fortune to reorganise and then everything costs more afterwards."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"I've heard all this before. They said the same thing when they reorganised the NHS, when they changed the police, when they merged other councils. It always costs more in the end, not less."

Female, 65-74, Huntingdonshire

This scepticism extended to specific claims about efficiency savings and economies of scale. While participants could understand the theoretical logic of larger organisations achieving better value through bulk purchasing or reduced duplication, they remained unconvinced that these theoretical benefits would materialise in practice or be passed on to residents in the form of lower costs or better services.

"They always talk about economies of scale and efficiency savings, but where are they? Show me one reorganisation that actually saved money for the taxpayer. I can't think of any."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"The problem is that any savings just get swallowed up by the bureaucracy. They might save money in one area, but they spend it on consultants and management and new IT systems."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

Participants were particularly sceptical about the costs of transformation itself, recognising that reorganisation exercises typically required substantial upfront investment in new systems, redundancy payments, consultancy fees, and management time. Many questioned whether these transition costs would ever be recovered through subsequent efficiency savings, viewing transformation as an expensive exercise that ultimately increased rather than reduced public spending.

"How much is this reorganisation going to cost? Millions, I bet. And they'll say it's an investment that will pay for itself, but it never does. We'll end up paying more Council Tax to fund the reorganisation and then paying more again afterwards."

Male, 45-54, Cambridge City

"They'll spend a fortune on consultants telling them how to save money. It's ridiculous. The money they spend on the reorganisation could probably fund services for years."

Female, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

The scepticism was reinforced by participants' observations of previous reorganisation exercises in other sectors or areas. Many could cite examples of transformations that had promised savings but delivered increased costs, leading to a general cynicism about the motives and competence of those promoting reorganisation. This historical perspective created a significant credibility gap that proponents of change would need to address.

"Look at what happened with the NHS reorganisations, or when they changed the police structure. Did any of those save money? No, they all cost more. Why should this be any different?"

Male, 65-74, Peterborough

"I remember when they merged other councils and said it would be more efficient. Council Tax went up, not down. Services got worse, not better. Why should we believe it will be different this time?"

Female, 55-64, Fenland

Despite this scepticism about cost savings, participants demonstrated sophisticated understanding of the relationship between investment and service quality. Many expressed willingness to pay higher Council Tax for demonstrably better services, but this willingness was conditional on seeing genuine improvements rather than simply funding reorganisation exercises that might not deliver benefits.

"I'd rather pay a bit more in Council Tax if it means getting better services. You get what you pay for, and if we want good services, we need to be willing to fund them properly."

Female, 45-54, Cambridge City

"We need to be realistic about costs. If we want professional services with proper expertise, that costs money. You can't expect Champagne service on a beer budget."

Male, 65-74, Peterborough

However, this willingness to invest in quality was undermined by frustration with current arrangements where costs appeared to be rising while service quality remained static or declined. Participants expressed particular concern about situations where Council Tax increases were not matched by visible improvements in service delivery, creating a cycle of declining trust in public sector efficiency.

"The problem is that Council Tax keeps going up, but the services seem to be getting worse. We're paying more but getting less, which doesn't make sense."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"I think people would be willing to pay more if they could see the benefits. The problem is when costs go up, but services don't improve or even get worse."

Male, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

The concept of value for money was central to participants' thinking, but their scepticism about transformation savings meant they approached promises of improved efficiency with considerable caution. Rather than simply accepting claims about economies of scale or reduced duplication, participants wanted concrete evidence that reorganisation would deliver genuine benefits that justified the disruption and cost involved.

"Value for money is what matters. I don't mind paying if I can see that the money is being used effectively and I'm getting good service in return. But I'm not paying for reorganisation that makes things worse."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

Participants recognised that some apparent inefficiencies in current arrangements might actually serve important purposes and were concerned that reorganisation might eliminate these without understanding their value. This nuanced understanding of organisational complexity made them more sceptical of simple claims about efficiency gains through structural change.

"Efficiency savings are fine as long as they don't affect the quality of services that people actually use and depend on. But usually when they talk about efficiency, they mean cutting things that people value."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"The problem with cutting costs is that it often means cutting staff, and then the remaining staff are overworked and can't provide good service. That's not efficiency, that's just making things worse."

Male, 45-54, Peterborough

The importance of transparency and accountability in spending decisions was emphasised throughout discussions, with participants wanting clear evidence that any investment in reorganisation would deliver genuine benefits. The scepticism about transformation savings meant that proponents would need to provide compelling evidence and robust accountability mechanisms to gain public support.

"The key is transparency. If the council can show me where my money is going and what I'm getting for it, I'm more likely to support it. But if they're just asking me to trust them that reorganisation will save money, forget it."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"I think people understand that good services cost money. What they don't like is waste and inefficiency. And reorganisation often looks like the biggest waste of all."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

Participants demonstrated similar scepticism about council spending priorities and efficiency, with particular concern about waste in current arrangements. However, their perspectives also revealed a more nuanced understanding of the need to balance service priorities and costs.

"I think my, one of my biggest concerns of local government and national government is they're trying to do too much, that they're doing things they don't need to do, and they waste vast amounts of money."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"Just recently, in the news, they had this thing about this sewage treatment plant north of Cambridge, which they've now mothballed and wasted 80 million pounds."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

The challenge for reorganisation proponents lies in overcoming this deep-seated scepticism about transformation savings. Participants' disbelief was not based on ignorance or resistance to change, but on informed observation of previous reorganisation exercises and realistic assessment of the costs and complexities involved. Success would require not just promises of efficiency gains, but concrete

evidence that transformation could deliver genuine value for money without compromising service quality or accessibility. Most fundamentally, it would require acknowledgement that the public simply do not believe that transformation saves money, and that this scepticism needs management and represents a major barrier to gaining support for reorganisation proposals.

Digital Transformation and Accessibility

Digital transformation in local government emerged as one of the most complex and contentious themes across all focus groups, revealing fundamental tensions between the potential benefits of online service delivery and serious concerns about accessibility, usability, and digital exclusion through the reorganisation. The discussions revealed that participants' preferences for service delivery channels varied significantly depending on the type of service, the complexity of their needs, and their personal circumstances. Rather than a simple preference for either digital or traditional channels, participants demonstrated an understanding of when different approaches were most appropriate, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to digital transformation that recognises the diversity of citizen needs and service requirements.

The quality and usability of existing digital services was a major source of frustration across all locations, with participants reporting significant problems with council websites, online portals, and digital processes. These negative experiences had created considerable scepticism about the potential for digital transformation to improve service delivery, with many participants expressing preference for traditional channels despite recognising the theoretical benefits of online access. The contrast between successful and unsuccessful digital experiences highlighted the critical importance of user-centred design and robust technical implementation.

"It's interesting, because before Council Tax, East Cambs has got this Anglia Revenue Partnership thing, which is a bit similar to what is proposed for the unitary thing. I think it's East Cambs, Fenland and I think there are some councils in Norfolk and Suffolk, basically. And they all got together. And if you want to, like, check your Council Tax, you have to go on that portal, this Anglia Revenue thing. You have to log in. It's not very good. It's like, all I want is get a PDF of my Council Tax, and you have to go to a website that's really complicated. You never know what your login is, and it's not very good. I just wish they sent me an email with PDF attached, because that's all I want."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

"Reflecting on that I'd absolutely agree -the Council Tax element - never faced anything like that in the Peterborough Council. But then, as soon as I moved here, all of a sudden, as you mentioned, there's this portal - so many different councils to reach out to. Eventually, I just gave up on the portal and ended up calling."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

However, where digital services worked well, participants were highly appreciative of their convenience and efficiency. The most successful digital interactions were characterised by simplicity, reliability, and clear outcomes, particularly for straightforward transactional services such as reporting environmental issues or accessing basic information.

"I actually have had really positive experiences with Fenland, really happy with them. I've reported fly tipping twice on my lane, and they literally picked it up within 24 hours. I reported to the county council of an overgrown footpath where I wanted to walk my dogs, and again, they organised for that to be all cut back within a reasonably short space of time. It's so easy online now, and actually, I reported it online. I've never actually had to speak to anybody, so everything that I've needed to contact them about, I haven't actually spoken to anybody. I've just filled in online, and it's just been dealt with."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

The preference for telephone and face-to-face services emerged strongly across all focus groups, particularly for complex issues, when problems arose with digital services, or when participants needed reassurance and human interaction. Participants valued the ability to speak to knowledgeable staff who could understand their specific circumstances and provide tailored advice or solutions. The importance of human contact was emphasised not just for practical reasons, but also for the reassurance and confidence it provided.

"I rang the council up. The bin was delivered within a week. I'd spoke to someone on the telephone. Had been perfect, but you just want there to be someone at the end of the phone, email or whatever when you need them. And I think the worry is that there won't be that person to speak to anymore. It will be like - we'll get back to you in five to 10 days, or whatever, and it might be a different person speaking to you each time."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

"I'm standing by their ability to avoid any sort of personal contact. You have to go to a website. You go to a form. You're sitting there going - is there anybody there? You know, press button one, press button two. They just try. And the councils are going the same way, you know, they just try to avoid any sort of human contact."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

Service complexity emerged as a crucial factor determining channel preference. Participants consistently distinguished between simple, transactional services that could work well online and complex issues requiring human judgement, discretion, or detailed explanation. Simple services such as bin collection requests, basic information queries, or routine payments were generally considered suitable for digital delivery, provided the systems worked reliably.

"I just need a simple system. I just need to know who I contact with that problem. I'm probably really naive, but I really don't understand the purpose of parish councils, and I'm sorry if someone sits on a parish council, I don't really know their function. I just want that if I have a problem, or my family has a problem, I

need to contact that person, and at the end of the day, I can contact them by email, Instagram, Facebook, in person. I really don't care, as long as I can speak to someone via that digitally or in person or by phone."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"Digital services are fine for simple things, but for anything complicated, you need to speak to a real person who understands your situation. Online services should be an option, not the only option. There should always be a way to speak to someone if you need to."

Female, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

Complex services involving social care, planning applications, licensing, or other issues requiring professional judgement were consistently identified as requiring human interaction. Participants emphasised that these services involved nuanced circumstances that could not be adequately addressed through automated systems or standard online forms.

"When we moved up from London, that was partially because of our kids...we have two adopted kids, just struggled with London, and so have a number of challenges. So, we wanted a slightly more manageable place to live, so I had to deal very quickly with social services and other things. So interestingly, it was relatively straightforward to work out who to talk to. So social services, family support, adoptions - Cambridge County Council, then stuff to do with the house and those practical things Fenland. But I guess the one sort of experience I had with everything was people change jobs quite frequently in all of the councils, the minute that happens, you start from scratch."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

"We want to do some minor works. We live in a listed property [so contacted] the conservation officer. They changed. So it was like rebooting...we had went through three social workers in three and a half weeks at Cambridge with the adoption support. And to be fair, that's not unique to here, [same in] London. I went through six social workers in eight weeks, and it was always the same thing -there was just no continuity."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

The importance of continuity and relationship-building was highlighted particularly in relation to complex services. Participants valued having consistent contact with the same staff members who understood their circumstances and could provide continuity of service and not having to endlessly repeat the details of their case. This was seen as particularly important for ongoing cases or where trust and rapport were essential.

"So, I deal with licensing, because I have a shop, so we've got a premises' license. I've got a license, basically. So I deal with their licensing department at East Cambs District Council. So, I actually just paid them my annual fee today. Actually, they sent me my premises license invoice today. I called them up and I paid by card over the phone. They're all right, but yeah, it is nice because it's a small department. And there's one lady that deals with me every year. Basically, she comes in, does the inspections, and, yeah, we've got a rapport. Basically, she knows the shop, she knows me, etc, so it's nice to have the same person to deal with."

Male, 25-34, Fenland

Digital exclusion emerged as a central concern, with participants highlighting multiple barriers to digital access and use. Age-related digital confidence was frequently mentioned, but participants also identified infrastructure limitations, device constraints, accessibility needs, and varying levels of digital literacy as significant barriers that could exclude substantial portions of the population from digital-first services.

"I do contact them digitally. But it is, it's a major problem, because in Fenland, in March anyway, there are huge numbers of retired people, quite old, who are not digitally aware or not on the internet. And I feel for them if they want some contact and services, they can't just do their report online because they don't use online things."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"Yes, I think that is a problem that you will find when you move to unitary councils, is everyone assumes that you've got a smartphone, everyone assumes that you've got access to email. And those assumptions are dangerous, because not everybody does."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

The generational divide in digital comfort was acknowledged, but participants emphasised that this should not lead to services that excluded older residents. There was strong feeling that digital transformation should enhance rather than replace traditional service channels, ensuring that all residents could access services regardless of their digital confidence or capabilities.

"My mum is 85 and she can't use the internet at all. What's she supposed to do if everything goes online? She needs to be able to phone someone or go into an office. The younger generation might be happy doing everything online, but there are lots of older people who aren't comfortable with technology."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

Infrastructure and access barriers were highlighted as significant constraints on digital service delivery. Rural connectivity issues, reliance on mobile devices rather than computers, and varying levels of internet access were identified as practical barriers that could prevent effective use of digital services even by those willing and able to use them.

"The council needs to remember that not everyone has good internet access. In rural areas, the connection can be really slow or unreliable. I don't have a computer at home, just my phone. Some of these websites don't work properly on a phone, so I can't use them."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

Accessibility for people with disabilities and learning difficulties was raised as a crucial consideration often overlooked in digital service design. Participants highlighted the need for digital services to accommodate different needs and abilities, including visual impairments, learning difficulties, and other conditions that might affect ability to use standard online interfaces.

"I've got dyslexia and some of these online forms are really difficult for me to understand. The language is too complicated. I tried to report a problem online and it took me ages to find the right form. Then when I filled it in, nothing happened. I had to phone them anyway."

Female, 35-44, Fenland

Security and privacy concerns were expressed by several participants, particularly older users who were worried about sharing personal information online. These concerns reflected both general anxieties about internet security and specific worries about how councils would protect sensitive data. Building trust in digital services would require transparent communication about security measures and data protection.

"I worry about security with online services. How do I know my personal information is safe? I'd rather deal with someone face to face. If they're going to have digital services, they need to make sure they're accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

The importance of user experience design was emphasised throughout discussions, with participants calling for digital services that were intuitive, well-tested, and designed with real users in mind. Poor website design, complicated forms, and unclear navigation were identified as major barriers to effective digital service use, even among digitally confident users.

"They should test these websites with real people before they launch them. It's obvious that whoever designed them doesn't actually use them. The best digital

services are the ones that are so simple you don't need instructions. Most council websites are the opposite of that."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

"I'm quite good with computers, but even I struggle with some of these council websites. They're not user-friendly at all. The council website is a nightmare. You can never find what you're looking for. It's like they've designed it to make it as difficult as possible."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

Participants provided additional insight into the practical realities of contact centre operations and innovative service delivery approaches. Users highlighted the tired messages when it takes time to deal with a call.

"So I did ring up the council, this week actually - the South Cambs [number] - about a situation. And I know a bit about contact centres and I would guarantee I could do that every day of the week. We'd make that phone call, and they would have that response that we're busier than normal."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

The need for digital support and training was highlighted as essential for successful digital transformation. Participants recognised that simply providing online services was insufficient if people lacked the skills or confidence to use them effectively. There was support for initiatives that would help people develop digital skills, but this was seen as a prerequisite for, rather than a consequence of, digital transformation.

"Online services can be great when they work, but there needs to be proper support and training for people who aren't confident with technology. Digital exclusion is a real problem. Not everyone has the skills, equipment, or confidence to use online services effectively."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

Reliability and availability of digital services were identified as crucial factors in building confidence and encouraging adoption. Participants emphasised that digital services needed to work consistently and be available when needed, with adequate backup support when technical problems occurred.

"I like the idea of 24/7 online services, but only if they actually work 24/7. There's nothing worse than a website that's down when you need it. If you're going to digitise services, you need to make sure the technology actually works and that people know how to use it."

Female, 25-34, Peterborough

The concept of channel choice emerged as a key principle, with participants emphasising that digital services should complement rather than replace traditional channels. The idea of "digital by default, human by exception" was acceptable only if the exception was genuinely available and accessible when needed.

"Digital by default is fine as long as there's still a human alternative for when things go wrong or when people need help. They keep pushing everything online to save money, but what about people who can't or don't want to use the internet? They're being left behind."

Male, 35-44, Fenland

"The problem is that when you phone them, they often just tell you to go online anyway. So, you're stuck in a loop. I don't mind using online services, but they need to be simple and straightforward. Some of these forms are ridiculously complicated."

Male, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

Navigation and service identification emerged as particular challenges in the current system, with participants struggling to understand which council was responsible for which services. Digital transformation was seen as potentially helpful in addressing this confusion, but only if it genuinely simplified rather than complicated the process of finding and accessing appropriate services.

"I find it took me a long time, years when I moved here, to get my head around which part of the council does what. I mean, there's a town in March. It's a town council, which, as far as I can see, doesn't need to exist. I work out and find who to report concerns or issues to amongst the three, and [but the issue] remains with loads of residents in March - they don't know whether the county council or district council, or even the town council."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"You just google your problem, really, it's like, okay, and you don't notice any difference, say, between East Cambs and Fenland, for example."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

Local provision and face-to-face access emerged as important values that participants wanted to preserve in any digital transformation. The preference for local services was not simply about convenience, but reflected deeper values about community connection, accountability, and the importance of human relationships in public service delivery.

"I would rather shop locally and have that contact with the person that's serving me; know that I have a good service and know that the money is being used in a

good way, whereas I would prefer not to shop on Amazon if I can, because of the ethics behind the company. And I think that's kind of the same thing I think the [council] service[s] should be like. So have someone at the end of a phone that you can speak to if you need to be listened to."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

The comparison with private sector digital transformation, particularly in banking, provided important context for participants' expectations and concerns. While participants recognised that digital transformation was inevitable, they were sceptical about claims that it would improve service quality, based on their experience of bank branch closures and reduced personal service in other sectors.

"What we've had at the moment in Ely is all the banks are saying, right, we're going to close our branches, we're going to save money, we're going to go online. Santander is one of our banks. They now only open three days a week rather than five days a week. So, trying to cut costs, which you understand why they're doing it, but it's how it's packaged to you, so that they're honest. They're saying they're going to cut costs."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

The relationship between local knowledge and digital service delivery was identified as a particular concern in the context of unitary authority development. Participants worried that larger, more centralised authorities would lose the local knowledge and relationships that enabled effective problem-solving, particularly for complex or unusual circumstances that did not fit standard digital processes.

"It seems very much you need an enabler, or politely, a fixer, to fix your problems to get you to where you need to get to. And certainly, the thing that I will say within Fenland Council, and I might be speaking out of turn here is, if you know the right fixer, your problem disappears very quickly. The problem, I can see us, when you move to a unitary council, when you base it out of somewhere, you're going to lose, well, to some extent, the brown bag sort of approach is going to disappear, which is good, but also you're going to get a disconnect with your local connections."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

The challenge for digital transformation in local government lies in balancing the potential efficiency and convenience benefits of online services with the imperative to maintain accessibility, choice, and human contact for all residents. Participants' experiences and concerns highlighted that successful digital transformation requires not just technological change, but fundamental attention to user needs, service complexity, accessibility requirements, and the maintenance of alternative channels for those who cannot or choose not to use digital services. The goal should be digital enhancement rather than digital replacement, ensuring that technology improves rather than restricts

access to public services. Most importantly, the evidence suggests that different services require different approaches, and that a one-size-fits-all digital strategy would fail to meet the diverse needs of residents and the varying complexity of local government services. The preference for local provision and human contact, particularly for complex services, represents a fundamental challenge to digital-first approaches that must be addressed if transformation is to gain public support and deliver genuine improvements in service quality and accessibility.

Place Identity and Community Connection

Place identity and community connection emerged as fundamental concerns across all focus groups, revealing not only deep attachments to local character and distinctiveness, but also strong patterns of geographic affinity and explicit opposition that shaped participants' views about potential reorganisation arrangements. The discussions revealed that residents' place identities operated at multiple scales simultaneously, encompassing both immediate local attachments and broader regional connections that created clear preferences for association with some areas and emphatic rejection of others. Most significantly, participants from East Cambridgeshire expressed strong positive identification with Cambridge while demonstrating profound opposition to any association with Peterborough, based on perceptions of fundamental differences in character, priorities, safety, and community needs.

The opposition to Peterborough was not simply a matter of administrative preference but reflected deep-seated perceptions of fundamental differences in community character, safety, and priorities. Participants with direct experience of working across the region were particularly emphatic about these differences, arguing that Peterborough represented a completely different type of place with different challenges, community dynamics, and approaches to local issues. Equally, residents make the point that these demands will call on public resources and this will be to their detriment.

"So, I've worked in Peterborough, Huntingdon, Fenland, East Cambs, Cambridge City. I'm out of the world, brilliant. So, I've worked the whole district, yeah in my previous occupation. Peterborough, and I'm really sorry if you come from Peterborough, is a completely different beast to Ely and Cambridge City. The residents, the communities are completely different...the groups of communities are completely different...their priorities are going to be completely different, to how East Cambridgeshire sort of approach their communities. It can be a really unsafe place as well, Peterborough. Ely, I consider a really safe place at the moment. So, I do have concerns. If we're going to be sort of lumped in, then I think it's probably going to hurt Ely more so than if we were to going to be lumped in with sort of Fenland or Cambridge City."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

This opposition was reinforced by practical considerations about distance, accessibility, and natural patterns of connection. Participants emphasised that the practical difficulties of travelling to Peterborough compared to the ease of reaching Cambridge reflected deeper patterns of economic and social connection that should inform governance arrangements.

"But if we go, if we go with Peterborough, which is, I think, is one of the favoured options. So Peterborough is a long way away, and they have very different priorities from around here. I think I want us to go anywhere [but] Peterborough."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Try and drive from Ely to Peterborough, then drive from Ely to Cambridge. Yeah, get a drive from Ely to Cambridge. Get a train from Ely to Peterborough. Another World."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

Participants demonstrated strong attachment to their local communities whilst also valuing connectivity to broader regional areas. Their perspectives illustrated how place identity encompasses both local distinctiveness and regional connectivity.

"I think I like living in Impington because it has all the amenities, Histon and Impington together, but it's very close to the city, so it's just very convenient in and out of the city."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

"I'm very keen on open spaces, and in particular, where I live [we have good], communications - A10, A14. I can get to anywhere in East Anglia in an hour, and there's big blue skies."

Male, 75+, South Cambridgeshire

The differences in community needs and priorities between areas were seen as fundamental barriers to effective joint governance. Participants working in education and social services were particularly clear about the different levels of need and different approaches required in different areas, arguing that combining areas with very different socio-economic profiles would inevitably lead to inappropriate prioritisation and resource allocation. This is a key insight about residents' reservations about going with Peterborough as they think Peterborough will absorb all the resources. They do not consider that there will be a mechanism to preserve budget allocations to different localities.

"So, I work within the education sector... the needs of the people are completely different. So, in Peterborough, there's high level of unemployment, there's low income households, there's high level of social needs. In like Cambridge centre, like East Cambs, all of these places, the level of need is different. So, for example, in Peterborough at the moment, they will be prioritising feeding children over the six weeks' holiday because the families can't afford to feed their children. In East Cambs, there's loads of activities that [are] being put on to support families for supporting their children during the holidays, and when you look at the two places, obviously, if you were merged together, you would prioritise feeding children over providing them with nice activities. But why should we have to go without to support another area?"

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

"It's not just about the total number; it's about the fact that the needs in Peterborough are totally different to the needs in Cambridgeshire. So, putting them both together, you actually cause a lot of disruption. It's difficult to actually offer this the same service to two different types of customer."

Male, 75+, East Cambridgeshire

Concerns about resource allocation and competing priorities were central to opposition to association with areas perceived as having greater needs. Participants worried that the resources and quality of services they currently enjoyed would be diverted to areas with higher levels of deprivation, threatening the community assets and quality of life that had attracted them to their current locations.

"What I see is there is a lot of money being put into Fenland and Peterborough. A lot of money. And if that has to continue, then where's that money come from? Is that then coming out of like East Cambs' budget? Are we then going to have to take a step back to allow that money to continue to be ploughed into Fenland and Peterborough? It makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"So, myself am expecting my first child the end of the year. The reason I live in Ely is because it has all of these resources around me, and the worry is, is that by having areas with higher levels of needs that that will be taken away from us, and it doesn't seem fair, we've not done anything."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

In contrast to the opposition to Peterborough, participants from East Cambridgeshire expressed strong positive identification with Cambridge, describing themselves as feeling "part of Cambridge" and "at home there" despite living outside the city boundaries. This connection was not simply about convenience or transport links but reflected a deeper sense of shared identity and belonging that extended across administrative boundaries.

"I find it quite friendly. I find it a comfortable size, and yes I feel part of Cambridge. I feel part of the city because we're so close to Cambridge, which is the sort of I mean, when I go to Cambridge, I do feel very much at home there, but I really like living in Ely."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

The practical connections to Cambridge through commuting, transport links, and daily life patterns reinforced this sense of shared identity. Participants described choosing their current locations specifically because of the balance they offered between rural or small-town character and easy access to Cambridge for work, services, and cultural activities.

"Before me and my husband bought our first home, he lived in the centre of Cambridge, I lived in a tiny village, which doesn't even have a village shop. And we kind of wanted something in between the two, and we found Ely was perfect with the train. It's great for commuting into [Cambridge] for working [in] Cambridge."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

The perceived quality and prestige associated with Cambridge was also seen as an important factor, with participants noting that the university presence and international profile of Cambridge created expectations and standards that benefited the broader area. This was contrasted with perceptions of other areas that were seen as lacking them.

"That I wonder if the fact that Cambridge is supported quite heavily by the university as well. You know, Cambridge is a little bit more prestige because it does have the university. And I think, you know, from my experiences, from family, you know, services in Cambridge, you know, such as those things we've talked about earlier, like grass cutting, that there doesn't ever seem to be an issue with those kind of things... because I don't know Peterborough that well, but I certainly think you know from here and family talk that that is not an issue. And I think the fact that we have the university, there has to be a level of keeping Cambridge that little bit nicer."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

Local shopping and service preferences also reflected broader values about community connection and local accountability. Participants expressed preferences for local businesses and personal contact that mirrored their broader concerns about maintaining human-scale governance and community connection in any reorganisation arrangements.

Within Cambridge City itself, participants' broader geographic connections reflected patterns of movement and migration that had brought them to the area from other parts of Cambridgeshire and beyond. These movement patterns created communities of people who had actively chosen Cambridge for particular reasons, strengthening attachment to local character and the broader Cambridge-centred region.

"I lived in South Cambs in Bar Hill for 13 or 14 years before that. Having moved from Suffolk originally, my local community, I think the local businesses, the diversity in local businesses [is what I like about the area]."

Female, 35-44, Cambridge City

"We moved here from London, where we lived for six years previously. What I like about the local area is that it's very active and it's very multicultural. It sort of

punches way above its weight with regards to that, or to being metropolitan and cosmopolitan compared to the city size."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

Family connections and life course considerations also shaped geographic identities and connections to the Cambridge area. Participants described how family considerations, educational opportunities, and quality of life factors had influenced their choice of location and their ongoing connections to the Cambridge-centred region.

"I moved here from London, which is where I was born and pretty much lived until I moved here. So I do have some family here that have lived here a bit longer than I have, probably maybe six years now, and they moved here because I got a little brother. He's 11, and my mum wanted to kind of bring him to a place that was safer and maybe had better quality of schools."

Female, 25-34, Cambridge City

Within immediate local areas, the importance of long-term community connections and local knowledge was consistently emphasised. Long-term residents spoke about the evolution of their communities while highlighting the enduring importance of local connections and the human-scale character that made their places distinctive and liveable.

"I live on Arbury Road in Cambridge, which is technically West Chesterton, but which feels like Arbury. I was born in Cambridge. I've always lived here, so I've kind of been aware of the council for 40 plus years. Having lived here a long time, it's still small enough that you can know people. It feels a lot bigger than it used to, a lot more transient families, but there's still a core of people who have known each other since way back."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"I live in Cambridge City. I've lived here for 40 years. About the community, I value the beauty of the area, and I worry about that being altered by overuse, over traffic and that sort of thing. So, the smallness and the historic importance of it, I value."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

The rural character and agricultural heritage of areas like Fenland and East Cambridgeshire were seen as fundamental to local identity and community connection. Participants emphasised the importance of connection to the land, traditional ways of life, and the distinctive character that distinguished rural areas from urban centres.

"I live in March town and have done for 20 years. What I value about this area is the rural character. We're surrounded by farmland, and that gives the place its

identity. People here have a strong connection to the land and to traditional ways of life."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"I live in Burwell, and I've been here for 39 years. It's a proper village community. Everyone knows everyone, and people look out for each other. The village has its own character and identity, and that's something we really value and want to preserve."

Male, 75+, East Cambridgeshire

Across all locations, participants expressed deep concerns about the potential for reorganisation to threaten local identity and community connection. There was widespread worry that larger authorities would not understand or value local distinctiveness, leading to standardised approaches that failed to recognise what made each place special and meaningful to residents.

"What worries me about reorganisation is that we'll lose that local connection. When decisions are made by people who don't know the area, who don't understand the local character and what makes each place special, you risk losing what people really value about where they live."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Each area has its own identity and character. You can't just lump them all together and expect it to work. Ely is different from March, which is different from Wisbech, which is different from Peterborough. Those differences matter to people."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

Even within Peterborough itself, participants recognised the distinctive character of their city and its difference from surrounding rural areas. The urban, multicultural character of Peterborough was valued by its residents, but this very distinctiveness reinforced the arguments of rural participants that different types of places required different approaches to governance and service delivery.

"I live in the Wistow area of Peterborough, been here for 15 years. What I value about Peterborough is its diversity. We've got people from all over the world living here, and that creates a really vibrant, multicultural community."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"I live in the Paston area, been here for 12 years. Peterborough has its own distinct identity as a city. It's got its own character, its own communities, and its own way of doing things. That's different from the rural areas around us."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

The evidence from all focus groups demonstrates that place identity and community connection are not simply matters of local attachment, but encompass complex patterns of regional affinity, explicit opposition, and practical connection that shape residents' understanding of community and their preferences for governance arrangements. The strong identification with Cambridge among East Cambridgeshire residents, combined with their emphatic rejection of association with Peterborough, reflects deep-seated perceptions of shared identity, common interests, and natural patterns of social and economic connection that extend across current administrative boundaries. These patterns are reinforced by practical considerations about travel, accessibility, service quality, and resource allocation that create clear preferences for association with some areas and explicit opposition to others. The challenge for local government reorganisation lies in recognising and respecting these multi-layered place identities and patterns of connection, ensuring that new arrangements build upon rather than cut across the geographic affinities and oppositions that residents have developed. This requires understanding not just what makes each local area distinctive, but also how different places relate to each other and the broader regional networks of connection and opposition that shape residents' sense of community and belonging. Successful reorganisation must therefore work with rather than against these natural patterns of connection and opposition, creating governance arrangements that reflect and strengthen the geographic identities and affinities that residents value while avoiding forced associations that cut across fundamental differences in character, priorities, and community needs.

The practical patterns of daily life - transport, shopping, work, healthcare, education, and social activities - provide compelling evidence of the natural geographic connections that shape residents' sense of community and belonging. These everyday connections create powerful bonds that extend across administrative boundaries while reinforcing opposition to forced associations that cut across natural patterns of movement and activity. The evidence from focus group discussions reveals that residents' preferences for governance arrangements are deeply rooted in the practical realities of how they live, work, shop, and access services, creating clear patterns of connection and opposition that reflect genuine community networks rather than administrative convenience.

Transport infrastructure and accessibility patterns create fundamental connections that shape community identity and governance preferences. The ease of travel to Cambridge compared to the difficulty of reaching Peterborough reflects and reinforces broader patterns of economic and social connection that participants see as natural and appropriate foundations for governance arrangements.

"We've got the train station in Ely which connects us directly to Cambridge. It's so easy to get into Cambridge for work or shopping or entertainment. That's one of the main reasons we chose to live here - we get the benefits of a smaller place but with easy access to everything Cambridge offers."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

"The A10 connects us straight down to Cambridge. It's a natural corridor. When people from Ely need to go somewhere for major shopping or services, they go to Cambridge, not Peterborough. That's just the natural flow of how people live and work."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

Shopping and retail patterns provide clear evidence of the natural catchment areas and service connections that bind communities together. Participants consistently described Cambridge as their natural destination for major shopping, specialist services, and retail activities, creating economic connections that reinforce broader community identity and belonging.

"When I need to go to a big supermarket or shopping centre, I go to Cambridge. When I need specialist services or want to go out for dinner or entertainment, I go to Cambridge. Peterborough might as well be on the moon for all the connection I have with it."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"All our major shopping is done in Cambridge. The Grand Arcade, John Lewis, all the shops we use are in Cambridge. We know Cambridge, we're comfortable there, we understand how it works. It's where we naturally go."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

Employment and commuting patterns create some of the strongest connections between communities, with many residents describing their work lives as centred on Cambridge despite living outside the city boundaries. These economic connections create shared interests and common concerns that participants see as natural foundations for governance arrangements.

"Most people I know who work outside Ely work in Cambridge. The train makes it so easy. There's a whole community of people who live here but work in Cambridge. That's the natural economic connection."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

"My husband works in Cambridge, I work in Cambridge. Our children go to school here but all our work connections, our professional networks, our career opportunities are in Cambridge. That's where our economic life is centred."

Female, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

Healthcare and specialist service connections provide another layer of practical connection that reinforces broader community identity. The role of Cambridge as a

centre for specialist healthcare, professional services, and expert advice creates dependencies and connections that participants see as fundamental to their quality of life and community wellbeing.

"For anything specialist - hospital appointments, consultants, specialist shopping - we go to Cambridge. Addenbrooke's Hospital is where we go for serious medical care. That's another connection that ties us to Cambridge rather than anywhere else."

Male, 75+, East Cambridgeshire

"When you need specialist services - legal advice, financial services, medical specialists - you go to Cambridge. That's where the expertise is, that's where the quality services are. It's a natural centre for the whole area."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

Cultural and social connections create emotional and identity bonds that extend beyond practical necessity to encompass lifestyle, values, and community belonging. Participants described Cambridge as their cultural centre, the place they turn to for entertainment, social activities, and cultural enrichment, creating connections that are central to their quality of life and sense of community.

"For culture - theatres, museums, concerts, restaurants - we go to Cambridge. It's our cultural centre. We feel part of that cultural life even though we live outside the city. That's where we go for entertainment and cultural activities."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

"Cambridge is where we go for a night out, for special occasions, for cultural events. We know the restaurants, we know the venues, we feel comfortable there. It's part of our social life and our identity."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

Educational connections and aspirations create intergenerational bonds that shape long-term community identity and planning. The role of Cambridge as an educational centre creates pathways and opportunities that bind families and communities to the broader Cambridge region, influencing decisions about where to live, work, and invest in community life.

"Our children's educational aspirations are tied to Cambridge. The university, the sixth form colleges, the educational opportunities - that's all Cambridge-focused. That's where young people from here look for their future opportunities."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"The educational ecosystem here is all about Cambridge. From primary school through to university, the pathways and opportunities all lead towards Cambridge. That's the natural educational centre for this area."

Female, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

Property markets and housing patterns reflect and reinforce broader economic and social connections, with participants describing their local housing market as fundamentally connected to Cambridge's economy and attractiveness. These economic connections create shared interests in maintaining and enhancing the Cambridge region's prosperity and quality of life.

"The property market here is tied to Cambridge. House prices, demand, the type of people who move here - it's all connected to Cambridge's economy and Cambridge's attractiveness. We're part of the Cambridge housing market, not Peterborough's."

Male, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

"People move here because they want to be near Cambridge but can't afford Cambridge itself, or they want more space but still want Cambridge access. The whole housing market and population movement is Cambridge-oriented."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

Business and economic networks create professional and commercial connections that bind communities together through shared economic interests and mutual dependencies. The role of Cambridge as an economic engine creates ripple effects that extend throughout the surrounding area, creating natural economic regions that participants see as appropriate foundations for governance.

"The business connections, the economic networks, the supply chains - they all run towards Cambridge. Local businesses here serve Cambridge commuters, Cambridge workers, people whose economic life is tied to Cambridge."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Cambridge is the economic engine for this whole area. The jobs, the opportunities, the economic growth - it all radiates out from Cambridge. We're part of that Cambridge economic region, not some separate entity."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

The absence of practical connections to Peterborough provides equally compelling evidence of the boundaries of natural community networks. Participants struggled to identify any practical reasons for connection to Peterborough, describing it as outside their natural area of activity and connection, reinforcing their opposition to governance

arrangements that would force association with areas outside their practical community networks.

"I can't think of a single reason why I would go to Peterborough for anything. Shopping, services, entertainment, work - there's nothing there that would draw me. It's just not part of my life or my community's life in any way."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

"Peterborough feels like a different world. Different shops, different services, different culture. I wouldn't know where to go or what to do there. It's not part of our natural area of connection or activity."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

From the perspective of Cambridge City residents, the role of Cambridge as a regional centre serving a much wider area than the city boundaries was clearly recognised and valued. This perspective reinforced the arguments of surrounding area residents that Cambridge represents a natural centre for regional governance that reflects genuine patterns of connection and dependency.

"People come into Cambridge from all the surrounding areas - Ely, the villages, South Cambridgeshire. You can see it in the traffic patterns, the train usage, the way the city fills up during the day. Cambridge is the natural centre for a much wider area."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

"Cambridge serves a much wider area than just the city itself. People come here for work, shopping, services, culture from all the surrounding areas. It's a regional centre, not just a local one."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

The comprehensive evidence of practical daily connections - from transport and shopping to work and culture - demonstrates that residents' preferences for governance arrangements are not based on abstract administrative considerations but on the lived reality of community networks, economic dependencies, and social connections that shape their daily lives. These patterns of connection create natural regions and communities of interest that extend across current administrative boundaries while creating clear boundaries of opposition and rejection. The challenge for local government reorganisation lies in recognising and respecting these natural patterns of connection and opposition, ensuring that new governance arrangements build upon rather than cut across the practical networks of community life. This requires understanding not just where people live, but how they live - where they work, shop, access services, seek entertainment, and build social connections. Successful reorganisation must therefore reflect the geography of daily life rather than the

convenience of administrative tidiness, creating governance arrangements that strengthen rather than weaken the practical connections that bind communities together and respecting the boundaries of opposition that reflect genuine differences in community networks, economic interests, and social connections.

Scale and Geography

The question of optimal scale and appropriate geographic boundaries emerged as one of the more contentious issues across all focus groups, revealing an understanding of the intricate relationships between authority size, geographic coverage, democratic representation, and service delivery effectiveness. Participants demonstrated clear awareness that decisions about scale and geography are not neutral technical considerations but fundamental choices that will determine whether reorganised authorities can effectively serve diverse communities across varied landscapes, settlement patterns, and socio-economic contexts. The discussions revealed deep scepticism about simplistic assumptions that larger authorities automatically deliver better outcomes, with participants identifying multiple ways in which inappropriate scale and geographic arrangements could undermine rather than enhance local government effectiveness, democratic accountability, and community connection.

Concerns about optimal authority size reflected nuanced understanding of organisational dynamics and the complex relationship between scale and effectiveness. Participants recognised that while very small authorities might lack resources and professional capacity, very large authorities could become unwieldy, bureaucratic, and disconnected from the communities they serve, suggesting that effective local government requires finding an appropriate balance rather than simply maximising size.

"There's definitely an optimal size for councils. Too small and you can't afford the expertise you need. Too big and you become this massive bureaucracy that can't respond to local needs. It's about finding the right balance."

Male, 55-64, Huntingdonshire

"Bigger isn't always better. Look at some of the massive councils - they're slow, bureaucratic, expensive to run. Sometimes smaller is more efficient because you're not carrying all that overhead."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

Geographic accessibility emerged as a fundamental equity issue that would determine whether reorganised authorities could serve all their communities fairly and effectively. Participants were acutely aware that distance, travel time, and transport availability create real barriers to access that disproportionately affect elderly people, those without private transport, people with disabilities, and families with limited financial resources, raising serious questions about the social justice implications of centralised service delivery models.

"If they centralise everything in one location, what about people who don't drive? What about elderly people? What about people who can't afford to travel long distances? It becomes really unfair."

Female, 65-74, Huntingdonshire

"The geography of this area is really important. You've got rural areas, market towns, urban areas - they all have different needs and different ways of accessing services. One size doesn't fit all."

Male, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

The fundamental differences between rural and urban areas were consistently highlighted as creating distinct service needs, delivery challenges, and governance requirements that could not be addressed through standardised approaches designed primarily for urban contexts. Participants from rural areas expressed particular concern that their voices and needs would be systematically marginalised in authorities dominated by urban populations and urban priorities.

"In a big authority dominated by urban areas, rural voices get lost. We have different priorities, different needs, different challenges. But we'll always be outvoted by the cities."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

"Rural areas need different services delivered in different ways. Mobile services, outreach, local hubs. Big urban-focused councils don't understand that. They think everyone can just travel to the city centre."

Female, 45-54, Fenland

Distance and travel considerations were seen as creating fundamental barriers to effective democratic representation and community engagement across large geographic areas. Participants questioned how councillors could maintain meaningful contact with and understanding of communities across very large authorities, particularly given poor public transport connections and the time and cost implications of extensive travel for both representatives and residents.

Participants articulated sophisticated understanding of how geographic and economic connections should inform governance arrangements. Their perspectives highlighted the importance of recognising natural patterns of connection and service delivery requirements that vary significantly across different areas.

"I would be very happy if it was like, you know, Cambridge, South Cambs and Huntingdon say; if that was the split rather than the whole of Cambridgeshire, because roads [feel] very different in Fenland than they do in Cambridge."

Male, 55-64, South Cambridgeshire

"I don't think there are any sensible solutions which separate Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, because so much of what happens, sort of, in the ring of the donut is affected by Cambridge."

Male, 55-64, South Cambridgeshire

"Yes, and we would naturally look to Cambridge. I work in Cambridge. I'm sure others have various reasons going in and things like that."

Male, 55-64, South Cambridgeshire

"The distances involved are enormous. From one end of this proposed area to the other could be an hour's drive. How can councillors properly represent areas they rarely visit?"

Male, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

"Public transport between different parts of this area is virtually non-existent. If you don't have a car, you're completely cut off from council services if they're centralised."

Female, 25-34, Huntingdonshire

The importance of maintaining local presence and accessibility was emphasised as essential for both service delivery and democratic accountability. Participants argued that local offices and service points were not merely conveniences but fundamental requirements for ensuring that all communities could access services and that councillors and officers remained connected to and accountable to the communities they serve.

"You need local offices, local presence. Not just for convenience, but for accountability. When councillors and officers are based locally, they're part of the community. They see the problems firsthand."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

"Even if the main offices are elsewhere, you need local service points where people can go for help, to drop off documents, to speak to someone face to face. You can't do everything remotely."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

Democratic representation challenges were seen as fundamental threats to local democracy that would result from excessive geographic scale and population size. Participants emphasised that effective representation requires councillors to have genuine local knowledge, regular community contact, and practical accessibility to constituents, all of which would be compromised by very large wards covering diverse communities across extensive geographic areas.

"How can one councillor properly represent a huge area with thousands of people? They can't know all the local issues, they can't be accessible to everyone. Democracy suffers when the scale gets too big."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"Local councillors need to be genuinely local. They need to live in the area, shop in the area, use the services themselves. If wards get too big, you lose that local connection."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

Natural boundaries and community connections were consistently emphasised as more important than administrative convenience in determining appropriate geographic coverage for local authorities. Participants argued that successful governance arrangements must respect and build upon existing patterns of community connection, economic relationship, transport links, and geographic logic rather than imposing artificial boundaries that cut across established networks of local life.

"You can't just ignore natural boundaries and community connections. Rivers, roads, historical boundaries - they exist for a reason. They reflect how communities actually work and connect."

Female, 25-34, Cambridge City

"Administrative boundaries should follow natural patterns - how people travel, where they work, where they shop, where they go to school. Not just be drawn on a map for administrative convenience."

Male, 45-54, Cambridge City

Service delivery complexity across large and diverse areas was recognised as requiring sophisticated understanding of local needs, community characteristics, and geographic constraints. Participants emphasised that effective service delivery requires flexibility and local adaptation rather than standardised approaches that ignore the significant differences between urban and rural areas, different demographic groups, and varied community contexts.

"Different areas need different approaches to service delivery. What works in a city doesn't work in a village. What works for young families doesn't work for elderly people. You need flexibility, not standardisation."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"Some services can be centralised efficiently; others need to be delivered locally. You need to understand the service and the community to get that balance right. One-size-fits-all doesn't work."

Male, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

Organisational capacity and infrastructure concerns reflected practical understanding of the enormous challenges involved in merging different authorities with different systems, cultures, processes, and ways of working. Participants questioned whether the necessary infrastructure, systems, and management capacity existed to support much larger authorities without significant disruption to service delivery and democratic processes during potentially lengthy transition periods.

"Do they have the systems and infrastructure to support a much larger organisation? Different councils use different IT systems, different processes. Merging all that is a massive undertaking."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

"The disruption of merging different organisations could go on for years. Different cultures, different ways of working, different systems. Meanwhile, services suffer while they try to sort it all out."

Male, 45-54, Peterborough

Communication and engagement challenges were seen as becoming exponentially more difficult across large geographic areas with diverse communities and varied communication needs. Participants questioned how larger authorities could maintain effective democratic engagement, ensure meaningful consultation, and provide accessible communication channels that reached all communities and enabled genuine participation in local governance and decision-making processes.

"How do you engage with communities across such a huge area? How do you consult people, how do you make sure everyone's voice is heard? It becomes much more difficult and expensive at that scale."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Local democracy depends on people feeling connected to their council, knowing their councillors, being able to participate. When the scale gets too big, people feel disconnected, and democracy suffers."

Male, 75+, East Cambridgeshire

Economic efficiency assumptions were challenged by participants who recognised that larger organisations could experience diseconomies of scale that offset theoretical efficiency gains. This reflected sophisticated understanding of organisational dynamics and recognition that optimal efficiency might be achieved at moderate rather than maximum scale, particularly when considering the full costs of democratic engagement, community consultation, and responsive service delivery.

"They promise economies of scale, but what about diseconomies of scale? When organisations get too big, they become inefficient, slow, bureaucratic. There's an optimal size for everything."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

"Smaller organisations can be more efficient because they're more focused, more responsive, less bureaucratic. You don't necessarily save money by making everything bigger."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

Population density and representation concerns reflected understanding that democratic representation requires more than simple population-based calculations and must account for geographic, economic, and community diversity. Participants from rural and smaller urban areas were particularly concerned that their voices would be systematically overwhelmed by larger urban populations, leading to governance arrangements that reflected urban priorities while marginalising rural and small-town needs and perspectives.

"In a large authority, the urban areas will always dominate because that's where most of the people are. Rural areas, market towns, smaller communities - their voices get drowned out."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

"It's not just about population numbers. Geographic representation matters too. A small rural area might have fewer people, but it still needs proper representation and understanding of its needs."

Male, 25-34, Fenland

The comprehensive evidence from all focus groups demonstrates that scale and geography are fundamental determinants of local government effectiveness, democratic accountability, and community connection that cannot be treated as technical details or administrative conveniences.

Participants showed sophisticated understanding of the complex relationships between authority size, geographic coverage, service delivery, democratic representation, and community engagement, recognising that these factors interact in ways that can either enhance or undermine the core purposes of local government. Their concerns about inappropriate scale and geographic boundaries reflect genuine understanding of how these factors shape the practical reality of local governance and its impact on community life, democratic participation, and social equity.

The challenge for local government reorganisation lies in finding optimal arrangements that balance the potential benefits of larger scale - increased resources, professional capacity, strategic capability, and service resilience - with the fundamental requirements

of effective local governance - accessibility, responsiveness, local knowledge, democratic accountability, and community connection. This requires careful consideration of natural boundaries, community networks, transport infrastructure, service delivery requirements, and democratic representation needs rather than simple application of population targets, administrative convenience, or theoretical efficiency models. Successful reorganisation must therefore respect the geography of community life while building sufficient scale and capacity to deliver effective services and strategic leadership, potentially requiring innovative governance approaches that combine larger strategic authorities with strong local delivery mechanisms, democratic structures that ensure effective representation across diverse geographic and community contexts, and service delivery models that balance efficiency with accessibility and local responsiveness.

Democratic Representation and Accountability

One of the most significant findings across all focus groups was the limited direct contact that most participants had with their elected councillors, revealing a fundamental disconnect between the theoretical model of local democratic representation and the practical reality of how residents experience local government. Rather than engaging with local government primarily through democratic channels and representative relationships, participants overwhelmingly described experiencing local government through service delivery, with councillors playing little or no role in their day-to-day interactions with local authorities. This finding has profound implications for understanding public attitudes toward local government reorganisation, as it suggests that for many residents, changes to democratic structures and representative arrangements may be less significant than impacts on service quality, accessibility, and responsiveness. The evidence reveals that accountability operates primarily through service performance rather than through traditional democratic mechanisms, with residents judging councils based on whether services work effectively rather than on the quality of democratic representation or the accessibility of elected representatives.

The extent of limited councillor contact was striking across all focus groups, with many participants unable to name their councillors or describe any direct interaction with elected representatives. This disconnect between residents and their elected representatives suggests that the traditional model of local democratic accountability through regular councillor-constituent contact may not reflect the reality of how most people experience local government.

Participants provided stark illustration of this democratic disconnect, with some expressing complete disengagement from electoral processes due to perceived lack of councillor engagement. However, their perspectives also revealed sophisticated understanding of accountability mechanisms.

"I generally won't vote. My view on life's really simple. If you want me to vote for you, you've got to at least make enough effort to engage with me."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"I have never voted for anything, any, any election at all. I've never met a parish councillor, district councillor, town councillor, county councillor."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"I think the link between what councils do and [what] Council Tax is paid to who has to be made more clear and more kind of transparent and accountable."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

"I don't really know who my councillor is. I've never had any contact with them. When I need something from the council, I just ring the main number or go online. I don't think about councillors at all."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

"I couldn't tell you who my local councillor is. I've lived here for years, and I've never heard from them, never seen them, never needed to contact them. The council is just the services they provide."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

"Councillors? I'm not sure I could name mine. When I have an issue with the council, I contact the department directly. I don't think about the political side of it, just whether the services work or not."

Female, 45-54, Cambridge City

"I've never contacted a councillor about anything. If I have a problem with bins or planning or whatever, I just contact the council directly. I don't really see what councillors are for in day-to-day life."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

Instead of engaging with local government through democratic representatives, participants consistently described a service-focused experience where their primary concern was whether council services functioned effectively rather than who was making political decisions or how democratic processes operated. This service-centric view of local government suggests that for many residents, the quality and accessibility of service delivery is far more important than the structure or accessibility of democratic representation.

"For me, the council is about whether the bins get collected, whether the roads are fixed, whether planning applications get dealt with properly. I don't really think about who's making the decisions, just whether the services work."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"What matters to me is whether I can get through to someone when I need help, whether they sort out problems quickly, whether the services are good quality. The political side of it doesn't really affect my daily life."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"I judge the council on whether they deliver good services efficiently. I don't really care about the politics or who's in charge, as long as they do their job properly and don't waste money."

Female, 65-74, East Cambridgeshire

"The council for me is about practical things - housing, benefits, planning, environmental health. I don't have much contact with the political side. It's all about whether the services work when you need them."

Male, 75+, East Cambridgeshire

Accountability mechanisms appeared to operate primarily through service performance rather than through traditional democratic channels, with participants describing how they held councils accountable through their experience of service quality, responsiveness, and value for money rather than through engagement with elected representatives or democratic processes. This suggests that effective service delivery may be more important for democratic legitimacy than traditional measures of democratic engagement and representation.

"I hold the council accountable through whether their services are good or bad. If the services are poor, I complain. If they're good, I'm satisfied. That's how I judge them, not through councillors."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

"Accountability for me is about whether they respond when you contact them, whether they fix problems, whether they provide value for money. That's how I judge whether they're doing a good job."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

"When services go wrong, that's when you notice the council. When everything works smoothly, you don't think about them at all. So, accountability is really about service delivery, not politics."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

"I don't vote based on who my councillor is, I vote based on which party I think will run services better. Local elections are about service delivery, not individual representatives."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

The disconnect between democratic representation and service delivery experience was consistently highlighted, with participants describing councillors and council services as operating in separate spheres with little connection between political structures and day-

to-day service delivery. This separation suggests that reorganisation debates focused primarily on democratic structures may miss the aspects of local government that most directly affect residents' lives and satisfaction.

"There's a big gap between the political side of the council and the service delivery side. I interact with the services all the time, but I never see or hear from councillors. They seem to exist in a different world."

Female, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

"The people who actually deliver services - the planning officers, the environmental health officers, the housing officers - they're the ones who matter to residents. Councillors are a bit irrelevant to most people's experience."

Male, 55-64, Huntingdonshire

"I think most people experience the council through services, not through democracy. We don't go to council meetings; we don't contact councillors. We just use the services and judge them on that."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

"The democratic side of local government feels quite remote from everyday life. What matters is whether you can get a planning application processed, whether your bins get collected, whether you can get help when you need it."

Male, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

When participants did express expectations about democratic representation, these were generally focused on ensuring effective service delivery rather than on traditional concepts of democratic engagement or political representation. Councillors were seen as having a role in ensuring services functioned properly rather than as primary channels for democratic participation or community voice, suggesting a more managerial than political view of local democratic representation.

"I suppose councillors should be there if you have a really serious problem that you can't resolve through normal channels. But most of the time, you just want the services to work properly without needing political intervention."

Female, 25-34, Cambridge City

"Good councillors should be invisible most of the time because the services are running smoothly. You only need them when things go wrong, and the normal processes aren't working."

Male, 45-54, Cambridge City

"I'd like to know who my councillor is and how to contact them if I needed to, but I don't want them bothering me with politics. I just want them to make sure the services work properly."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"Councillors should be making sure the council runs efficiently and provides good services. That's their job. The political stuff is less important than making sure things work for residents."

Male, 65-74, Cambridge City

The implications of this service-focused experience for local government reorganisation were significant, with participants suggesting that changes to democratic structures might have limited impact on their experience of local government as long as service delivery remained effective. This pragmatic approach to reorganisation prioritised service continuity and quality over democratic representation concerns, reflecting the reality that most residents experience local government through services rather than through democratic engagement.

"If councillors are already quite remote from most people's experience, making the wards bigger and the council larger will make them even more remote. But maybe that doesn't matter if the services still work."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"I'm not sure reorganisation will make much difference to how most people experience local government. We'll still just contact the council when we need services. The political structure is a bit irrelevant."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

"As long as reorganisation doesn't make the services worse, I don't really care about the democratic side. Most people don't engage with councillors anyway, so making the wards bigger might not matter much."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

"The risk with reorganisation is that it disrupts service delivery while they're sorting out the political structures. The services are what matter to people, not the number of councillors or the size of wards."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

Electoral behaviour and voting patterns reflected this service-focused approach to local government, with participants describing voting decisions based on party competence in service delivery rather than on knowledge of individual candidates or assessment of democratic representation quality. This suggests that local electoral accountability

operates primarily through judgements about service performance rather than through evaluation of representative relationships or democratic engagement.

"I vote in local elections based on which party I think will provide better services, not based on knowing the individual candidates. I don't know who most of the candidates are anyway."

Female, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Local elections are about service delivery and value for money, not about individual representation. I vote for the party I think will run things better, not for specific councillors."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"I don't really know the difference between what county councillors do and what district councillors do. I just know that some of them are responsible for the services I use, and I want those services to be good."

Female, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

"The current system is confusing because you don't know which councillor is responsible for what. At least with a unitary council, there would be one set of councillors responsible for everything."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

Service quality emerged as the primary accountability mechanism through which residents evaluated council performance and democratic legitimacy, with participants describing how service delivery standards provided the main evidence for judging whether councils were fulfilling their responsibilities effectively. This service-based accountability model suggests that democratic legitimacy may depend more on effective service delivery than on traditional measures of democratic engagement and representation.

"Poor service delivery is the main way I know when the council isn't doing its job properly. If services are good, I assume they're being well managed. If services are poor, I know something's wrong."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

"You can tell whether a council is well run by the quality of its services. Good services mean good management. Poor services mean poor management. That's the real accountability mechanism."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

"When I'm dissatisfied with the council, it's usually because a service has failed or been poorly delivered. That's when I complain or consider voting differently. It's all about service performance."

Female, 45-54, Fenland

"The best accountability is when services work so well that you don't need to think about the council at all. When you have to start contacting councillors, it usually means something has gone wrong."

Male, 25-34, Fenland

These findings reveal a fundamental challenge for local government reorganisation and democratic theory more broadly: the apparent disconnect between theoretical models of local democratic representation and the practical reality of how most residents experience and evaluate local government. The evidence suggests that for many people, local government is primarily a service delivery organisation rather than a democratic institution, with accountability operating through service performance rather than through representative relationships. This has significant implications for reorganisation debates, suggesting that arguments focused primarily on democratic representation, ward sizes, or councillor accessibility may be less relevant to most residents than concerns about service quality, efficiency, and responsiveness. The challenge for reorganisation is therefore to ensure that changes to democratic structures enhance rather than undermine service delivery effectiveness, recognising that democratic legitimacy may depend more on delivering effective services than on maintaining traditional models of representative democracy. This requires careful consideration of how democratic structures can support rather than hinder effective service delivery, how accountability mechanisms can reflect the reality of service-focused citizen engagement, and how reorganisation can strengthen the connection between democratic governance and service performance rather than treating them as separate spheres of local government activity.

Trust and Confidence

Trust and confidence in local government emerged as fundamental prerequisites for effective governance and democratic legitimacy, with participants demonstrating acute awareness of how transparency, accountability, competence, and responsiveness shape public attitudes toward local authorities and their capacity to secure support for major policy initiatives.

The discussions revealed that trust is not simply a desirable outcome but an essential foundation for effective local governance, particularly in contexts of significant change such as local government reorganisation or major development programmes. Participants consistently emphasised that trust must be earned through demonstrated competence, maintained through transparent communication and fair decision-making, and can be easily damaged by poor service delivery, lack of accountability, or perceived unfairness in resource allocation and policy implementation. The evidence suggests that in areas experiencing substantial development and change, such as Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the maintenance of public trust requires particularly high standards of transparency and accountability, as the scale and pace of change can create opportunities for decisions to be made without adequate public scrutiny, potentially engendering distrust that undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of local governance.

Development pressure and planning failures emerged as major sources of distrust across multiple locations, with participants expressing profound concerns about the quality of decision-making, the transparency of planning processes, and the apparent disconnect between development decisions and community needs. These concerns were particularly acute in areas experiencing rapid growth and development pressure, where participants questioned whether planning decisions were being made in the public interest or were unduly influenced by commercial considerations.

The evidence suggests that development-related decisions represent a critical test of local government credibility, with poor planning decisions, inadequate infrastructure provision, and lack of community consultation creating lasting damage to public trust and confidence in local governance. In Peterborough particularly, participants provided extensive evidence of how planning failures, questionable investment decisions, and lack of accountability had fundamentally undermined their confidence in local government.

"I have got very little faith in Peterborough City Council. As a resident of Peterborough City Council, I see different ventures entered...there's back handers going on here, because there's no common sense in the decisions that are made."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"The planners don't enforce any of this stuff. So, you know...it's so contradictory, they're never following through. They never hold themselves to account, and they've always got an excuse."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"They had a consultation about going to a four day week. They never published the data. They never showed what people's views were. They just said, Oh, it's perfect. It's making everything better."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

"They had the money to make capital investment in that hotel that has cost millions and millions, and that makes me boil, because that's capital that's tax money that's gone into a Hilton Hotel."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

The scale of distrust expressed by Peterborough participants was particularly striking, with detailed accounts of planning enforcement failures, questionable capital investments, and poor-quality development that had fundamentally altered their relationship with their local authority. These concerns extended beyond individual planning decisions to broader questions about governance competence, financial management, and democratic accountability.

"When you grant planning permission for like, 1100 houses, like, actually look at the people that are going to live there, and when you're making that decision, ensure the fact that they have to build a school in there, at least plan those into it, so they're not putting up thousands and thousands of houses putting increased demand on the limited services we already have available."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

"Some of the houses, especially over, like, in Paston, and then ones like that, like they're rushed up and things as well. And it then just kind of gets handed, or in this case, especially with like Cardia, not handed over to the council. And then there's nobody kind of holding them accountable then for the fact that all these houses have gone up in an absolute shoddy condition."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

"They allow a lot of companies into Peterborough to build warehouses, but then those companies don't integrate themselves with the community. So, you know, they don't necessarily, they just slap up the warehouse, fill it with people doing a job, but they then don't integrate into that community."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

The disconnect between planning promises and delivery emerged as a particularly corrosive factor in undermining public trust, with participants describing repeated experiences of development proposals that failed to deliver promised infrastructure, community facilities, or quality standards. This pattern of broken promises in the planning system appeared to create broader cynicism about local government commitments and competence, with implications extending far beyond planning policy to general confidence in local governance.

"If you go and read all the planning applications, boring enough...you read the plan and what's promised, it's never delivered."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

The physical deterioration of local environments emerged as a visible manifestation of governance failures that had profound impacts on residents' trust and confidence in their local authority. Participants described how the transformation of their local area through inappropriate development, loss of green space, and proliferation of warehouses had fundamentally altered their perception of their council's priorities and competence.

"The deterioration over the 31 years since I've lived here, I can't tell you how different it is. Peterborough was fabulous. It was green, you know, it was vibrant. It is full of warehouses now. It's monstrous. It's awful. It's horrendous."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"They do not think about infrastructure. And you know, I've lived here 15 years. I want to be proud of where I live, but when it ranks in the top three for obesity, the top three for the least favourite place in the country to live, all these really negative things, you've got to really look to the council and think, what are you doing?"

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"You have to ask, like, who's actually making those decisions? And thinking, yeah, this will be great for the residents. The library is massively underfunded. We're dealing with the regional pool, and that was basically left to run into the ground."

Male, 25-34, Peterborough

Leadership and accountability failures were identified as fundamental barriers to public trust, with participants expressing frustration about the apparent lack of clear responsibility and accountability within local government structures. The evidence suggests that trust requires clear lines of responsibility and accountability, with identifiable individuals who can be held responsible for decisions and their consequences. When accountability structures are unclear or ineffective, public trust is undermined and cynicism about local government increases.

"What does the chief executive actually do? Because when you write to him, he passes it down to the department you've been struggling to deal with for 18 months. He then won't take any responsibility. He doesn't seem to have any control over the council leaders."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"They put an email out going, oh, look at our budget. We're filling the gap. Going to our interactive piece. And you know, you help us. Well, you go in there and you go, geez, if you're spending that on certain things, it's just shocking. They don't manage their budget like a commercial business."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"Make people feel that they're really involved in the direction of the city. And I don't know, there probably is a medium-term plan for Peterborough. I don't know whether it's being shared with the public. No idea - you'd have to go and find it."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

Fenland participants highlighted how distance from decision-making centres can exacerbate trust problems, particularly when decisions affecting local communities are made by people with limited understanding of local conditions and needs. Their concerns about being marginalised within larger authorities reflected broader anxieties about whether reorganisation might further distance decision-makers from the communities they serve, potentially undermining the local knowledge and accountability that participants valued in smaller councils.

"I think it could, in many respects, be disastrous. And I can give you some examples around here where decisions are taken in Cambridgeshire about stuff that's happening in Fenland. Just locally, we have drainage ditches which become full of water, blocked, overflowing because of Fenland surface water. But it took ages for the councillors to try and sort out who's responsible, Cambridgeshire County Council or Fenland."

Male, 75+, Fenland

"If you say to someone at Cambridgeshire Council, I live in Fenland, they look at you and go, okay, and you tell them the village you live in, they go, okay. They're not going to care, right? Because they believe that their council's the centre of the universe."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

"Things like development - Wisbech is not the same as March. It's certainly not the same as Peterborough or Cambridge. And so, you need to come here. I don't think you need to live here and be here all the time, but you have to get away out from behind your desk and understand the impact of those activities."

Female, 25-34, Fenland

The comprehensive evidence demonstrates that trust and confidence are not peripheral concerns but central requirements for effective local governance, particularly in contexts of significant change and development pressure.

The findings reveal that public trust operates as both a prerequisite for and an outcome of effective governance, requiring continuous attention to transparency, accountability, competence, and fairness in decision-making and service delivery.

In areas experiencing substantial development, such as Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the maintenance of public trust requires particularly rigorous standards of transparency and accountability, as the scale and complexity of development decisions create multiple opportunities for public confidence to be undermined by perceptions of unfair influence, inadequate consultation, or decisions made without proper consideration of community impacts.

The challenge for local government reorganisation lies in ensuring that structural changes enhance rather than undermine the foundations of public trust, recognising that trust damaged during reorganisation processes may take years to rebuild and that loss of public confidence can fundamentally compromise the effectiveness and legitimacy of local governance. This requires careful attention to maintaining service quality during transition periods, ensuring transparent communication about reorganisation processes and objectives, demonstrating genuine commitment to public consultation and engagement, and establishing robust accountability mechanisms that can maintain public confidence in the integrity of decision-making processes.

The evidence suggests that successful reorganisation must therefore prioritise trust-building and trust-maintenance as central objectives rather than treating public confidence as a secondary consideration, recognising that without public trust, even technically sound reorganisation initiatives may fail to deliver their intended benefits and may actually undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of local governance.

The particular challenge in areas experiencing rapid development and change is that the disinfecting light of accountability and transparency becomes even more crucial when the scale and pace of change creates opportunities for decisions to be made without adequate scrutiny, potentially engendering the kind of profound distrust that can take generations to repair and that fundamentally undermines the social contract between local government and the communities it serves.

Transition Concerns and Opportunities

Transition concerns and opportunities emerged as central considerations in participants' evaluation of local government reorganisation proposals.

Participants demonstrated acute awareness that reorganisation represents a significant undertaking with substantial implications for service delivery, democratic accountability, staff retention, system integration, and community relationships, requiring careful planning, realistic timescales, and robust safeguards to protect essential services during periods of institutional change.

"I think the redesign, I can see it for financial reasons, economy reasons, and all the rest of it and cost cutting, but there's nothing written into it that says we will work more closely with our public, the people we represent."

Female, 65-74, South Cambridgeshire

The evidence suggests that while participants recognised potential opportunities for improvement through reorganisation, their primary concerns focused on managing transition risks and ensuring that the process of change did not undermine the quality, accessibility, or continuity of services that communities depend upon. These concerns were informed by observations of previous reorganisation exercises in local government and other public services, with participants drawing on experiences of NHS reorganisations, council mergers, and business restructuring to inform their expectations about the challenges and opportunities associated with major institutional change.

Service disruption during transition periods emerged as the most immediate and pressing concern, with participants expressing anxiety about the potential for essential services to be compromised while councils focused on reorganisation processes rather than service delivery. These concerns reflected understanding that major organisational change inevitably creates periods of uncertainty, confusion, and reduced effectiveness as new systems are implemented, staff adapt to new roles and procedures, and institutional relationships are reconfigured. Participants were particularly concerned about the impact on vulnerable service users who depend on consistent, reliable access to social care, housing support, and other essential services that cannot be easily interrupted or delayed without serious consequences for individual wellbeing and community safety.

"My biggest worry is that during the transition, services will suffer. We've seen it before with other reorganisations - everything gets disrupted while they sort out the new systems."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"The risk is that while they're busy reorganising themselves, the day-to-day services that people depend on get neglected. That's what happened with the NHS reorganisations."

Male, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

"Change is always disruptive, and it's usually the most vulnerable people who suffer most during transitions. They need to have proper plans to protect essential services."

Female, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

"That'll be even worse if there's less local accountability, and you have one larger authority, quite possibly."

Male, 45-54, South Cambridgeshire

Staff retention and knowledge preservation emerged as critical challenges requiring careful management during reorganisation processes, with participants recognising that experienced staff represent valuable repositories of local knowledge, procedural expertise, and community relationships that could be lost if reorganisation creates uncertainty, redundancy, or career disruption for existing employees. The evidence suggests that participants understood the importance of retaining institutional memory and local expertise while also recognising that reorganisation inevitably creates anxiety and uncertainty for staff that may lead to departures of experienced personnel at precisely the time when their knowledge and skills are most needed to ensure continuity of service delivery.

"When councils merge, you often lose experienced staff who know the local area and understand how things work. That local knowledge is really valuable and hard to replace."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

"There's always uncertainty for staff during reorganisations, and good people often leave rather than wait to see what happens. That's a real loss of expertise and experience."

Female, 45-54, Peterborough

"The people who know how to get things done locally might not fit into the new structure. You could lose all that practical knowledge about how the area works."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

System integration challenges were recognised as significant technical and operational obstacles that could create substantial disruption if not properly managed, with participants drawing on experiences of technology failures, data migration problems, and

procedural incompatibilities in other organisational mergers to inform their expectations about the complexity of bringing together different councils with different systems, procedures, and ways of working. These concerns reflected understanding that the technical aspects of reorganisation are often more complex and time-consuming than political discussions suggest, with potential for significant service disruption if integration processes are poorly planned or inadequately resourced.

"Merging different computer systems is always a nightmare. You see it in business mergers - nothing works properly for months while they try to integrate everything."

Female, 25-34, East Cambridgeshire

"Each council probably has different ways of doing things, different procedures, different systems. Bringing all that together is going to be incredibly complex."

Male, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

"The technical side of merging councils is probably much more complicated than politicians realise. It's not just about drawing new boundaries on a map."

Female, 35-44, Fenland

Cost and resource implications of reorganisation were viewed with considerable scepticism, with participants expressing doubt about official estimates of transition costs and timescales based on their observations of previous reorganisation exercises that had exceeded budgets and taken longer than planned. These concerns reflected broader scepticism about the financial benefits of reorganisation and anxiety that resources devoted to reorganisation processes would reduce funding available for service delivery during periods when budgets are already under pressure and service demands are increasing.

"Reorganisations always cost more than they say they will. Look at any major change programme - they always go over budget and take longer than planned."

Male, 65-74, Peterborough

"They'll spend millions on consultants and new systems and then claim they're saving money. The transition costs are always huge and often forgotten when they calculate the benefits."

Female, 55-64, Cambridge City

"While they're spending money on reorganisation, that's money that's not going on services. The opportunity cost is significant, especially when budgets are already tight."

Male, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

Democratic accountability during transition periods was identified as a particular concern, with participants recognising that reorganisation processes can create confusion about roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability that may leave communities without clear channels for raising concerns, seeking help, or holding decision-makers accountable for service performance. These concerns reflected understanding that democratic processes require clarity about who is responsible for what, and that reorganisation can create periods where these relationships are unclear or in flux, potentially leaving residents without effective recourse when services fail or problems arise.

"During the transition period, who's actually accountable? When everything's changing, it's easy for things to fall through the cracks and for no one to take responsibility."

Female, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

"The democratic process gets disrupted during reorganisations. Councillors are focused on the merger rather than on representing their constituents."

Male, 55-64, Fenland

"There's always a period where no one really knows who's in charge or who to contact about problems. That's particularly difficult for people who need help urgently."

Female, 35-44, Peterborough

Despite these concerns, participants also recognised significant opportunities for improvement through well-managed reorganisation, particularly in terms of modernising outdated systems, improving coordination between services, and creating capacity for investment in better technology and more specialist expertise. These opportunities were seen as potentially valuable but dependent on effective implementation and careful attention to preserving existing strengths while addressing current weaknesses in local government provision.

"If it's done properly, reorganisation could be an opportunity to modernise services and get rid of outdated practices. Sometimes you need a big change to break old habits."

Male, 25-34, Cambridge City

"Larger councils might be able to invest in better technology and more specialist staff. That could improve services if they get the implementation right."

Female, 35-44, East Cambridgeshire

"There's potential for better coordination between different services. At the moment, different councils don't always work well together, so unification could help with that."

Male, 45-54, Huntingdonshire

Learning from past experiences emerged as a crucial requirement for successful reorganisation, with participants emphasising the importance of studying previous reorganisation exercises to understand what works, what fails, and how to avoid repeating mistakes that have characterised previous attempts at major structural change in local government and other public services. This reflected sophisticated understanding that reorganisation is not a novel process and that there is substantial evidence available about effective and ineffective approaches to managing major institutional change.

"We need to learn from previous reorganisations and not repeat the same mistakes. There's plenty of evidence about what works and what doesn't."

Female, 55-64, Fenland

"Other areas have been through this process, so there should be lessons about how to manage the transition better and avoid the worst disruption."

Male, 35-44, Peterborough

"The key is proper planning and realistic timescales. Too many reorganisations are rushed and that's when things go wrong."

Female, 45-54, Cambridge City

Preserving existing strengths and effective practices was identified as a crucial requirement for successful reorganisation, with participants emphasising that change should build on what works well rather than disrupting effective services for the sake of standardisation or administrative convenience. This reflected understanding that different councils may have developed different approaches that work well for their particular circumstances and communities, and that reorganisation should seek to preserve and spread good practice rather than imposing uniform approaches that may be less effective in particular contexts.

"They need to identify what's working well in the current system and make sure that's preserved during the transition. Don't throw away the good with the bad."

Male, 55-64, East Cambridgeshire

"Some councils are better than others at certain things. The challenge is to keep the best practices and improve the weaker areas."

Female, 35-44, Huntingdonshire

"Local services that work well shouldn't be disrupted just for the sake of standardisation. If something works, leave it alone."

Male, 45-54, Fenland

Communication and engagement during transition periods were identified as essential requirements for maintaining public confidence and ensuring that reorganisation processes do not undermine community relationships or democratic accountability. Participants emphasised that uncertainty and lack of information create anxiety and reduce public confidence, making clear, regular, and honest communication about progress, problems, and timescales essential for maintaining public support and ensuring that communities can continue to access help and support during periods of institutional change.

"People need to be kept informed about what's happening and when. Uncertainty makes everything worse, so clear communication is essential."

Female, 25-34, Peterborough

"There should be regular updates about progress and any problems that arise. People can cope with difficulties if they understand what's happening and why."

Male, 35-44, Cambridge City

"Residents need to know who to contact during the transition and how to get help if services aren't working properly. Clear communication channels are vital."

Female, 45-54, East Cambridgeshire

The comprehensive evidence demonstrates that participants approached reorganisation proposals with sophisticated understanding of both the potential benefits and the substantial risks associated with major institutional change, recognising that successful reorganisation requires careful planning, realistic timescales, robust safeguards for essential services, effective communication, and genuine commitment to learning from previous experiences of structural change in local government and other public services.

The challenge for reorganisation proponents lies in demonstrating that they have adequate understanding of these complexities and sufficient commitment to managing transition risks to justify the disruption and uncertainty that reorganisation inevitably creates. This requires moving beyond simple assertions about the benefits of larger authorities to detailed planning for transition management, service protection, staff retention, system integration, and democratic accountability during periods of institutional change.

The evidence suggests that public support for reorganisation may depend as much on confidence in transition management as on belief in the long-term benefits of structural change, requiring reorganisation advocates to demonstrate competence in change management as well as vision for improved local governance. Without such

demonstration, reorganisation proposals may be viewed as creating unnecessary risk and disruption for uncertain benefits, potentially undermining public confidence in local government and democratic processes more broadly.

TITLE: Local Government Reorganisation Update

Committee: Full Council

Date: 18 September 2025

Author: Director Operations

Report number: AA54

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1.0 Issue

- 1.1. To update the Council on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested

- 2.1. To note the progress to date on LGR in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- 2.2. To note the three proposals being developed by individual Councils across the region.

3.0 Background/Options

- 3.1. On 16 December 2024, The White Paper on English Devolution was published, which proposes wide ranging changes to the framework of local government across England including devolution from central government to strategic authorities and local government reorganisation in two tier areas. The White Paper can be accessed here: [English Devolution White Paper](#).
- 3.2. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (C&P) already have devolved powers (through our Combined Authority); therefore, this report covers only the LGR.
- 3.3. The Government intends to implement LGR in two tier areas and for those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services for their residents.
- 3.4. On 5 February 2025, Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, invited proposals to establish unitary authorities across C&P. Final Proposals are required to be submitted to Government by 28 November 2025.
- 3.5. Six of the seven Council Leaders submitted a joint interim response to Government on 21 March 2025, that was endorsed at an Extraordinary Council Meeting on [20 March 2025](#). The Leader of Fenland District Council also submitted a letter. These responses did not commit the Councils to a particular course of action and do not fetter future decisions.
- 3.6. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued guidance on 5 February 2025. This sets out detailed criteria for the creation of new

unitary authorities, which the government will use to assess proposals it receives. The government requires proposals to provide a viable solution for the whole geography, not just the area that includes our own authority. The key criteria include:

- A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
- Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
- Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
- Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
- New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
- New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- 3.7. Government have stated that new unitary authorities should aim for a population of 500,000 or more. However, the Government recognises that this may not make sense everywhere. Where an area believes that is the case it should set out the rationale in its proposal. Informally, there has been an indication that the minimum population the Government would consider is between 300,000 - 350,000. This is consistent with the previous Government's criteria which expected proposals with a population 'in excess of 300,000'.
- 3.8. There are approximately 920,000 residents (ONS mid-year estimate 2023) in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Based on conservative assumptions the population of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is expected to grow to over 1,060,000 over the next 15 years. This forecast does not include, for example, the emerging Local Plans being developed throughout Cambridgeshire, or any potential population increases arising from plans to be developed by the Government owned Cambridge Growth Company or from East West Rail.
- 3.9. The guidance currently states that proposals should ideally use existing district areas as the building blocks for new councils. Although government has not ruled out boundary changes it has indicated there would need to be a strong justification, and the reorganisation process could take longer.

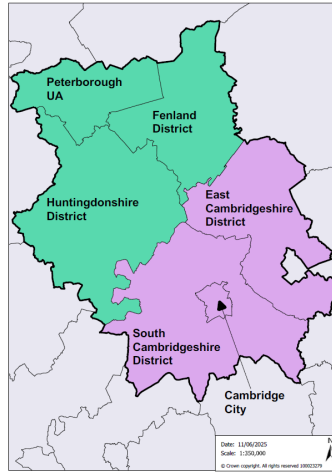
Progress to date

- 3.10. All councils in an area are expected to work together in the best interests of the whole area to develop and submit proposals by 28 November 2025. However, Government recognises that there will be some cases where agreement on a single proposal will not be possible despite best efforts. A Leaders and a Chief Executives LGR group has met regularly since the invitation from Government to develop proposals collaboratively.
- 3.11. Chief Executives commissioned chief finance officers and data analysts from each authority to develop a financial model to evaluate different unitary options. This is being supplemented by analysis from Pixel, a leading local government financial

advisor. The modelling to date is based on the existing approach to local government funding but is being updated to reflect the fair funding review changes. It is not anticipated that the new funding allocations will materially change the conclusions of the financial modelling undertaken by Pixel.

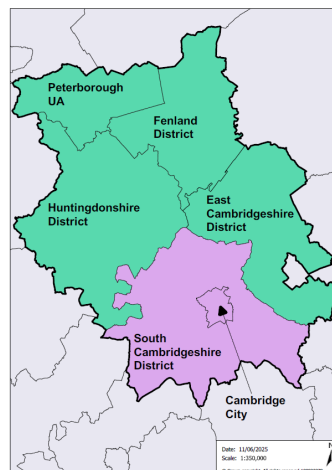
- 3.12. Leaders have considered the implications of several options for the geography of new unitary councils based on available evidence. Some of these options were excluded as they did not meet criteria set by the Government or because the financial analysis showed that they were less financially viable. Leaders also felt that three unitary authorities for the area would be less likely to meet the Government's financial resilience criteria.
- 3.13. On [11 June 2025 council Leaders announced](#) that they had identified three options to establish new unitary councils across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Each of these options would lead to the creation of two new unitary councils. In future, these new councils would be responsible for providing all local government services across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area and replace all seven existing local authorities.
- 3.14. The three options set out below are all based on existing authority boundaries. The Leaders working group recognise each option has different strengths or weaknesses and different implications for services, local communities, and businesses.
- 3.15. A lead authority is responsible for developing the business case for each of the options as follows: Proposal A is led by Cambridgeshire County Council, proposal B is led by Cambridge City Council, proposal C is led by Huntingdonshire District Council.
- 3.16. Some Leaders, such as the leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Leader of Cambridge City Council have expressed preference for different options, and therefore different Councils are inputting into each of the business cases, either directly or indirectly through the sharing of data.
- 3.17. The development of the business cases is well underway. With a first draft being shared with Chief Executives in September 2025. As agreed by the working group the business cases will be developed using a range of shared data and analysis to ensure reasonable comparisons and conclusions between each of the proposals can be drawn.
- 3.18. **Proposal A North-West/South-East option**

Unitary 1	Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
Unitary 2	Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions



3.19. **Proposal B North/South option**

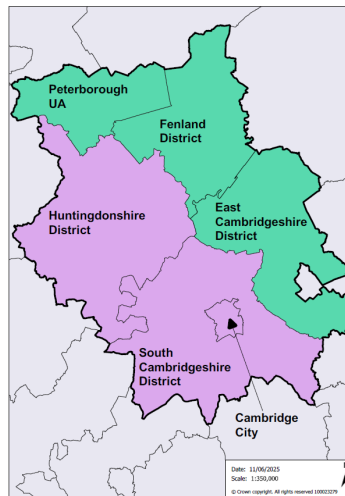
Unitary 1	Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils along with County Council functions
Unitary 2	Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District along with County Council functions



3.20. **Proposal C- East/West option**

Unitary 1	Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
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Unitary 2	Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions
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- 3.21. A further proposal put forward by MP's in Peterborough has been developed outside of the Leader's LGR working group. This proposal sets out three unitaries across the region. Peterborough City Council is developing a business case to support this proposal and this will also be submitted to Government in November 2025.
- 3.22. The preparation of the business case will enable Members to take an informed view in expressing their preference for a particular proposal prior to the submission date of 28 November 2025. Council will meet in November to decide on which submission to endorse or not endorse prior to submission to government.

Other activity

- 3.23. In June, a survey asking for views on the future of local government in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was launched and closed on 20 July 2025. Please see separate Agenda item for 18 September council meeting.
- 3.24. Analysis of the impact of LGR on People Services (Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, SEND, Housing and Homelessness) - This work was undertaken by Newton Impact, a leading consultancy providing specialist advice to national and local government. The analysis will help to inform decision making around the impacts on the financial resilience of the new unitary authorities going forward, the potential demands on these high cost areas and opportunities for service reform.
- 3.25. Future governance arrangements for the new Authorities – the Government requires each of the business cases to set out potential future governance arrangements. This includes the number of Councillors proposed for each unitary, and the warding or divisions arrangements. A working paper is being prepared and will be presented to the Leaders LGR working group.

- 3.26. An informal member working group at the Council has been established and has equal representation from the Conservative administration and Liberal Democrat and Independent group. The purpose of the working group is to receive more detailed information about the development of the business cases and provide input into the proposal at an early stage. Additionally, all members have been invited to member seminars which will continue to run throughout the LGR process.
- 3.27. It is vital that staff are kept informed and engaged on LGR, and several in person and online sessions have been arranged, giving the opportunity for staff to ask questions, submit ideas and raise concerns as appropriate. LGR is a significant concern for staff and their involvement at the appropriate times will help to ensure that the transition to the new Unitary Councils is successful.
- 3.28. The Local Government Minister wrote to all councils in two-tier areas in late July with a short update on LGR. The letter was accompanied by three new advice notes on different aspects of LGR: LGR process and timeline, financial decisions before LGR, Partnership working in social care in new unitary councils. The letter and advice note do not contain any new policy announcements but do clarify a number of points below.
- 3.29. Elections: The Government has previously indicated that ‘it has no plans to postpone any elections which councils are scheduled to hold’ and ‘the starting point is for all elections to go ahead unless there is strong justification’. We assume this remains the Government’s position; however, they have confirmed that Surrey, who is going through the LGR process ahead of all other two tier areas, will not hold the planned district or county elections in May 2026. There will only be elections for the shadow authority. This may be relevant for other Councils in Cambridgeshire.
- 3.30. The advice indicates that the Government intends to issue directions to give shadow unitary authorities significant control over district and county councils making new financial commitments before vesting day. These directions will only be made after the LGR Structural Changes Order is in place in the county area. This is the same approach used in previous instances of LGR.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 While a unified agreement across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is possible, more than one proposal is likely to be submitted. Consequently, there is no guarantee that any proposal endorsed by East Cambridgeshire District Council will be adopted by the Government. Furthermore, if the Council opts not to endorse a proposal, with partners, the Government retains the authority to proceed with reorganisation. Active participation ensures the Council may have a say in shaping the future outlook for unitary government within our area.
- 4.2 Currently Officers are directly engaged in the development of the business case for Proposal B. This also has direct input from Cambridge City and Peterborough City Councils, South Cambs, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils.
- 4.3 The Council can only endorse one or none of the unitary proposals that are submitted to government.

4.4 The latest indicative LGR timeline for our area is:

Activity	Period
Councils submit final LGR proposals	28 November 2025
Govt consultation	January to May 2026
Govt decision on proposals	May to August 2026
Legislation prepared, laid and made subject to parliamentary approval	September 2026 to December 2027
Shadow Unitary Elections (as soon as possible)	6 May 2027
New Unitaries Go – Live	1 April 2028

5.0 Implications

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
NO	NO	NO
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
NO	NO	NO

Financial Implications

- 5.1 At this stage, direct financial implications are minimal. However, extensive partnership working will be essential to inform reliable financial modelling, which is inevitably complicated as it requires both disaggregation of upper tier functions and aggregation of district functions into whatever unitary councils are proposed.
- 5.2 Evaluations of financially viable future structures will be necessary, along with assessments of the best value-for-money configurations for taxpayers. A crucial factor is the current level of debt across Cambridgeshire's local government. Any reorganisation proposal must adequately address financial liabilities to ensure sustainability.
- 5.3 Government announced funding for all Councils affected by LGR. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough received £318,000 which has funded the development of financial modelling, social care and health modelling and support for public engagement. Any residual funding amount will support the development of the 3 business cases. This pot of funding is being administered by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Legal implications

- 5.4 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides the key statutory framework for local government reorganisation. The Secretary of State can at any time invite proposals for reorganisation
- 5.5 The Government does not currently have power to direct local authorities to bring forward proposals as these expired shortly after the legislation was first introduced.

However, the Government has indicated it is planning to legislate to reintroduce the power to direct.

- 5.6 It is therefore prudent to assume that all existing Councils in Cambridgeshire are unlikely to continue in their current form, with new councils expected to operate in a shadow capacity from May 2027 before full implementation in April 2028, known as 'vesting day'.

Human Resources

- 5.7 There are no staffing implications associated with this report update; however, it is likely to be an unsettling time for some staff. It is important to note that all staff will transfer automatically to one of the new authorities under 'TUPE' regulations (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)). As the process is at such an early stage it is impossible to provide further information on this, however the Council is mindful of the valuable contribution Officers make in delivering services.

6.0 Appendices

None

7.0 Background documents

English Devolution White Paper December 2024

Local Government Reorganisation – Submission to Government – Extraordinary Council 20 February 2025



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

PAUL BRISTOW MAYOR
OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH

Reports from Constituent Council Representatives on the Combined Authority

The following meetings have taken place in June 2025

Combined Authority Board, 4 June 2025 - AGM

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Combined Authority Board \(June - AGM\)](#)

Combined Authority Board, 4 June 2025 - Ordinary

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Combined Authority Board \(June - Ordinary\)](#)

Skills Committee, 16 June 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Skills Committee \(June\)](#)

Growth Committee, 18 June 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Growth Committee \(June\)](#)

Audit and Governance Committee, 19 June 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Audit and Governance Committee \(June\)](#)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 24 June 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Overview and Scrutiny Committee \(June\)](#)

Funding Committee, 30 June 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Funding Committee \(June\)](#)



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1. The Mayor - Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Mayor Paul Bristow confirmed his acceptance of office.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Sarah Conboy, with Councillor Sam Wakeford substituting.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 19 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record. The action log was noted.

4. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Chris Boden declared an interest in agenda item 11 of the Ordinary meeting, as a trustee of FACT Community Transport.

5. Announcements

The Mayor expressed gratitude for the warm welcome received from Combined Authority staff and stakeholders. He emphasised a collaborative, inclusive approach to his term, highlighting shared ambition and the strong foundations for success across the region.

6. Appointment of the Deputy Mayor(s)

The Mayor announced the appointment of Councillor Anna Bailey as Statutory Deputy Mayor.

7. Membership of the Combined Authority

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Members and substitute Members appointed by constituent councils to the Combined Authority for the municipal year 2025-26 (Appendix A)
- B Confirm that the following bodies continue to be given co-opted member status

for the municipal year 2025-26:

- i. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire.
 - ii. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority.
 - iii. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board.
- C Note the named representative and substitute representative for each organisation as set out in the report.
- D Agree that any late notifications of appointments to the Monitoring Officer shall take immediate effect.

8. Appointments to Thematic Committees and Committee Chairs

It was resolved to:

- A Note and agree the Mayor's nominations to Chairs of committees for 2025-26 as set out in Appendix A
- B Note the Committee Members and substitute Members appointed by constituent councils to the Combined Authority's thematic committees for the municipal year 2025-26 (Appendix B).
- C Note and agree the Membership for the Investment Committee for 2025-26 (Appendix C)
- D Note that Audit and Governance members and Overview & Scrutiny members can attend Investment Committee as observers.

9. Appointment of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was resolved to:

- A Confirm that the size of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be 14 members; two members from each constituent council and two substitute members for the municipal year 2025-26.
- B To agree the political balance on the committee as set out in Appendix A.
- C Confirm the appointment of the Member and substitute Member nominated by constituent councils to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2025-26 as set out in Appendix B.

10. Appointment of the Audit and Governance Committee

It was resolved to:

- A Confirm that the size of the Audit and Governance Committee should be nine

members; one member and one substitute from each Constituent Council and two independent persons.

- B To agree the political balance on the committee as set out in Appendix A.
- C Confirm the appointment of the Member and substitute Member nominated by constituent councils to the Committee for the municipal year 2025-26 as set out in Appendix B.
- D Approve the appointment of Rhys Jarvis as the second Independent Person for the Audit & Governance Committee for a term of four years ending May 2029.
- E Appoint the Independent Person, Mr Rhys Jarvis as Chair for the municipal year 2025/26 and delegate the election of the Vice Chair to the Audit and Governance Committee.

11. Calendar of Meetings

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the amended calendar of meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

Notes:

Statements in **bold type** indicate additional resolutions made at the meeting.

Five Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may call-in a key decision of the Mayor, the Combined Authority Board or an Officer for scrutiny by notifying the Monitoring Officer, except for any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

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Democratic.Services@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk



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1. Petitions

No petitions were received.

2. Public Questions

Five public questions were received for the meeting. The questions and responses are published [here](#).

3. Forward Plan

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Forward Plan for June 2025.

4. Chief Executive Highlights Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the content of this report.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6. Updates to the Constitution

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the changes of each committee's Terms of Reference in the Constitution to reflect that Lead Members have not been recommended at this stage; and to amend the names for the Combined Authority's non regulatory committees as follows:

- Transport and Infrastructure Committee to become Transport Committee
- Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee to become Growth Committee
- Skills and Employment Committee to become Skills Committee
- Investment Committee to become Funding Committee
- Human Resources Committee to become Staffing Committee
- Business Board to become Business Panel

- B To approve the change to the Chief Executive's delegation to allow a referral to Investment Committee on decisions of a value of less than £1 million when considered appropriate.

- C To note the amendment to Chapter 5, Standing Orders, to reflect that amendments to the Constitution only require a majority vote.

- D To consider the changes to Chapter 13 Audit and Governance Committee proposed by the Monitoring Officer to eliminate inconsistencies with current practice.

- E To remove references to the Shareholder Board which was subsequently

replaced by the Investment Committee.

- F To delegate authority to the Director Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer to accept nominations if they are late or altered.

7. Member Attendance Statistics and Member Development Annual Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Member Attendance Statistics for 2024/25
- B Note the Member Development sessions held in 2024/25

8. Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

It was resolved to approve the recommendations as below:

- A The remuneration of the CPCA Mayor is reset at £93,000, subject to indexation going forward.
- B The allowance paid to the Constituent Council appointees to the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be set at £2,176, subject to indexation going forward.
- C The allowance for the Chair of the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be set at £5,900, subject to indexation going forward.
- D The allowance for the Vice Chair of the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be set at £2,950, subject to indexation going forward.
- E The Substitute Members of the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee are to be paid on the following basis, subject to any applicable indexation:
 - Full meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: £145
 - Working Groups, training and induction meetings: £73
- F An allowance should not be paid to Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Working Groups.
- G The 3 Rapporteurs appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are paid an allowance set at £2,611.
- H The allowance paid to the Constituent Council appointees to the CPCA Audit and Governance Committee should be set at £2,176, subject to indexation going forward.
- I The current allowance of £3,068 paid to the Independent Member appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee is maintained at £3,068, subject to indexation going forward.
- J The allowance for the Independent Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee is reset at £5,900, subject to indexation going forward.
- K The allowance for the Vice Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee is set at £2,950, subject to indexation going forward.
- L Council appointees to the Authority's Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees should not be able to claim travel and subsistence costs via the Authority, they should continue to claim via their appointing councils. The Mayor and Independent Persons should be able to continue to claim travel and subsistence costs directly from the Authority on the current terms and conditions and applicable rates.
- M The right of the Mayor to claim a DCA is maintained, also it is extended to the Independent Persons appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee. It is not recommending that Council appointees to the Authority's Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees are extended the same right. The maximum hourly rate claimable for the informal caring element of the DCA is reset and indexed to the National Living Wage.
- N The remuneration of the CPCA Mayor continues to be indexed at the NJC annual percentage salary increase. It also recommends that the same

indexation is applied each year all Members allowances who sit on the Authority's Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees. The applicable index is set specifically with reference to NJC agreed annual cost of living salary increase at Spinal Column Point 43. The maximum hourly rate for claiming the informal care element of the DCA is indexed to the National Living Wage. The indexation of allowances should apply to the same year that it applies to Officers, but rather than the applicable year being the financial year it should be the municipal year.

- O Note the current status of the Business Board including the removal of funding, consequent removal of allowances and review of the Business Board status.
- P Note that the Allowances section of the Constitution is to be revised by the Monitoring Officer for consideration and approval.
- Q The recommendations contained in this report are implemented with effect from the date of the Authority Board's Annual Meeting on 4th June 2025.

9. Development of a New Corporate Plan 2025-2029

It was resolved to:

- A Note and comment on the proposed approach and timeline for developing a new Corporate Plan 2025-2029.
- B Note and comment on the proposed new Corporate Plan Purpose to "Get Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Moving" and six new Objectives of Connectivity, Growth, Jobs, Homes, Resilience and Performance.
- C Note and comment on the proposal for the delivery of Annual Business Plans which will provide detail on the most significant activities and clear annual targets.

10. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Growth Plan Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note progress with the preparation and development of the Local Growth Plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

11. Bus Network - Service Options KD2025/027

It was resolved to:

- A Note the bus services which are planned to be withdrawn by the current operator as detailed at para 2.3 of this report and to note the ongoing engagement with the operator, particularly in relation to the most viable services (9 and 33)
- B Note the current position regarding the temporary local bus fare cap and Tiger pass and the financial unviability of both continuing in the current form and that a detailed recommendations paper will be brought to the Transport and Infrastructure Committee on June 25, 2025
- C Procure Bus Service 33 between March and Whittlesey to ensure continuity beyond August 31st, 2025.
- D Delegate authority to the Assistant Director, Public Transport, to lead the procurement and implementation process, including the award of contract.

12. Highways Maintenance Grant and Integrated Transport Block Funding 2025/26

Board members reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed approach to the allocation of the Highways Maintenance Grant and Integrated Transport Block (ITB) funding for 2025/26 and future financial years.

13. Q4 Corporate Performance Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Corporate Key Performance Indicators.
- B Note performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Most Complex Programmes and Projects.
- C Note performance information relating to the Combined Authority's Headline Priority Activities.
- D Note progress to evaluate the impact of the Devolution Deal Investment Fund in a Gateway Review.
- E Note plans to review and refresh the Combined Authority's Performance Management Framework.

14. Outturn Budget Monitoring Report - KD2025/017

It was resolved to:

- A Note the unaudited draft outturn position of the Combined Authority for the 2024/25 financial year.
- B Approve the requested carry forward on the revenue budget of £17.6m, and on the capital programme of £31.3m from 2024/25 into 2025/26 as set out in paragraphs 3.11 and 4.19 respectively.
- C Note the Mayoral Decision taken in March 2025 set out in section 6.

Notes:

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1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hemraj, Nestor and Petiitt. Councillors Jones, Divkovic and Jones were in attendance as their substitutes.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

On being proposed by Cllr Nethsingha and seconded by Cllr Wilson, Cllr Sam Wakeford was unanimously appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

5. Public Questions

One public question was received. The question and response is published here.

6. Forward Plan

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the CPCA's Forward Plan.

7. Director's Highlight Report

Agreed that a written update should be circulated to Members of the Committee after the meeting.

8. Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the progress made in the delivery of the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer.

B. To endorse the budget for the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer.

9. Local Skills Improvement Plans

RESOLVED:

A. To note the progress with the preparation and development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

10. Local Get Britain Working Plan

RESOLVED:

A. To note progress with the preparation and development of the Local Get Britain Working Plan.

11. Further Education Cold Spots

RESOLVED:

A. To note progress with the FE Cold Spots Skills Capital Programme.

12. Skills Bootcamp Performance Report

RESOLVED:

A. To note the update on the Wave 5 Performance and the Wave 6 (FY 2025/26) Skills Bootcamps.

13. Budget & Performance Report

RESOLVED:

A. To note the financial position of the Skills Division for the financial year 24/25.

14. Work Programme

RESOLVED:

A. To note the Committee's Work Programme.

15. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 28 July 2025 at 10am – Reserve date if required
Monday 8 September 2025 at 10am.

Notes:

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3 Election of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED:

On being proposed by Cllr Day and seconded by Cllr Tierney, Cllr Davenport-Ray was unanimously appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 26 February 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

6 Forward Plan

RESOLVED:

A To note the Combined Authority Forward Plan.

7 Director's Highlight Report

RESOLVED:

To note the Director's Highlight Report.

8 Local Nature Recovery Strategy

RESOLVED:

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Rosie Moore it was unanimously resolved to:

- A. Approve the Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy as set out in Appendix A and the associated Local Habitat Mapping for a period of 8 weeks public consultation commencing 18 July.
- B. Note the statutory 28-day period for Supporting Authorities to respond to the intention to consult (commencing 19 July).
- C. Approve that the Executive Director for Place and Connectivity, in consultation with the Chair of the Growth Committee, can make any minor edits to the draft strategy necessary for finalising the design and presentation of the consultation documentation.

9 Climate Programme Update

RESOLVED:

To note the progress and status on funded climate and nature projects following the direction of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee.

10 Budget and Performance Report

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the outturn financial position of the Committee for the financial year 24/25 and Board approved carry-forwards.
- B. To note the current budget for the next 4 years updated for approved carry-forwards pending any review of the Corporate Plan and Budget.

11 Work Programme

RESOLVED:

To note the Committee's Work Programme.

Notes:

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1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from

- Councillor G Christy, substituted by Councillor S Wallwork,
- Councillor M Inskip, substituted by Councillor A Whelan
- Councillor I Divkovic substituted by Councillor M Smart; and
- Councillor C Poulton substituted by Councillor P Fane.

2 Declaration of Interests

Councillor A Whelan declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 8 as a former Chair and current Vice-Chair of the Cambridgeshire Pension Fund Committee.

4 Election of Vice Chair

On being proposed by Cllr Wallwork and seconded by Cllr Stobart, Cllr P Hodgson-Jones was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st February 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

6 CPCA Update

The Executive Director for Resources provided an update on recent CPCA activities.

7 Corporate Risk Report & Deep Dives

The Committee endorsed the Corporate Risk Register, Dashboard and Heatmap for May 2025, including undertaking the respective risk deep dives and the deep dive schedule for the year.

The Committee undertook a deep dive into the Recruitment and Retention – Increased Turnover and the Equalities Legislation Non-Compliance Corporate Risk Items.

8 Draft Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

The Committee noted the draft Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 and the draft of the Statement of Accounts 2024/25.

9a External Audit - 2024/25 External Audit Plan

The Committee noted the External Audit – 2024/25 Draft Audit Plan.

10a Internal Audit - Progress Report

The Committee noted the Internal Auditor's progress report.

10b Internal Audit - Draft Annual Report

The Committee noted the draft Annual Report and Internal Audit Opinion.

10c Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26

The Committee approved the Internal Audit Plan and the associated Internal Audit Charter.

11 Internal Audit Action Tracker Report

The Committee noted and endorsed progress on the implementation of internal audit actions.

12 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Summary of Complaints

The Committee considered and noted the letter received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

13 Standing Items - Updates and Comments

There were no updates to report.

14 Work Programme

The Committee noted the draft work programme for 2025/26 municipal year.

15 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that their next meeting was scheduled for 10am on Tuesday, 15th July 2025 at Huntingdonshire District Council.

Notes:

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Decision Summary

Meeting: Tuesday, 24 June 2025

Published: 25 June 2025

Decision Review Deadline:



Any key decision/s set below will come into force and may be implemented after 5.00pm on the fifth clear working day after publication of the decision, unless they are called-in [see note on call in below], with the exception of any key decision on a matter dealt with under the special urgency provisions set out in the Constitution which may be implemented immediately.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologises from Cllr Hay, Cllr Wells and his substitute Cllr Harvey, Cllr Neish substituted by Cllr Hodgson-Jones, Cllr Meschini substituted by Cllr Bulat.

2 Election of Chair

Cllr Van De Weyer was elected Chair for the municipal year 25/26.

3 Election of Vice Chair

The election of the Vice Chair was deferred to the next meeting of the O&S Committee.

4 Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

5 Public Questions

No public questions were received.

6 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 12th March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

7 Appointment of Rapporteurs

Cllr Neish was agreed as the rapporteur for Transport Committee

Cllr Cahn was agreed as the rapporteur for Growth Committee with Cllr Davey to support.

Cllr Vellacott was agreed as the rapporteur for Skills Committee with Cllr Bulat to support.

8 Scrutiny Protocol Review Working Group

The Committee agreed to set up a working group to review their arrangements against the Scrutiny Protocol.

The following members were appointed to sit on the working group:

- Cllr Van De Weyer, Cllr Bradnam, Cllr Antunes.

9 Process for Review and Refresh of the Corporate Plan and the Settings of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (2026/27 to 2029/30)

The Committee received the report which provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to note and comment on the introduction of a revised corporate plan.

The Committee agreed to set-up a working group to reflect on the new corporate plan. The following members were agreed as: Cllr Van De Weyer, Cllr Davey, Cllr Vellacott and Cllr Clough.

The Committee also agreed to the approach to the pre-scrutiny arrangements for the budget which including setting-up a budget scrutiny working group. The following members were agreed: Cllr Antunes, Cllr Meschini, Cllr Clough and Cllr Hodgson-Jones.

10 Mayor Paul Bristow in Attendance

Mayor Paul Bristow attended and responded to questions from the Committee Members.

11 Corporate Performance Report Q4 2024/25

The Committee discussed and noted the report.

12 Bus Procurement & Communications Strategy Working Group Report

The Committee reviewed the Bus Procurement and Communications Strategy Working Group report.

The Committee discussed and noted the report.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Transport Committee that the team look to bid for further capital to allow more work to be done around innovated digital real-time information being made available.

13 CPCA Forward Plan

It was resolved to note the Forward Plan for the municipal year 2025/26.

14 Recommendations/Questions to the CA Board

The Committee did not make any recommendations for the CA Board

15 Work Programme

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Committee Work Programme.
- B Elect the Vice-Chair of the Committee for the September meeting.
- C Update on the Transport recommendation implementation to the November meeting.

16 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 9th September at 10.00am. The meeting venue is CPCA Meeting Room, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon.

The next informal meeting is scheduled for the 31st July. The meeting venue is Microsoft Teams (Online).

Notes:

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3 Election of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED: (Unanimous)

That Cllr Sam Wakeford be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on 10 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted.

5 Single Assurance Framework Business Case Approvals: Chief Executive Decisions

RESOLVED:

A. To note the Chief Executive business case decisions for projects less than £1m under the Single Assurance Framework.

6 Single Assurance Framework Business Case Approvals: Funding Committee Decisions and Recommendations

RESOLVED: (Unanimous)

A. To approve the business case for Youth Guarantee Trailblazer and funding of £4,920,000, and to approve delegation to the Assistant Director for Skills and Employment to enter into Grant Funding Agreements **and procure and appoint using Service/Consultancy Agreements, as appropriate, in consultation with the Chair**, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer.

Recommendations outlined in Appendix B of the report:

- 1. To endorse the budget for the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer
 2. To give delegation to the Assistant Director for Skills & Employment to approve all expenditure related to the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer.
 3. To endorse proposals to use Grant Funding Agreements to support swift mobilisation and delivery during the 12-month Trailblazer
 4. To endorse an Interventions Fund to be made available for front-line organisations, including the voluntary & community sector, independent training organisations, FE colleges and other statutory services.
 5. To give delegation to the Assistant Director of Skills & Employment to enter into grant funding agreements and consultancy agreements with selected providers on behalf of the Combined Authority. This includes, but is not limited to, agreements with the Learning and Work Institute who will lead a robust evaluation of the programme, Grant Thornton who will be supporting to administer the Local Interventions Fund and Youth Employment UK who will be working with the Authority to support a digital platform of advice and guidance along with other interventions.
- B. To approve the change request to cancel the Meanwhile at Coresite project and to

withdraw the funding allocation of £1,000,000.

- C. To approve the change request for the Regional Transport Model (CaPcam) and revenue funds of £230k, as well as the scope change, and to approve delegation to the Executive Director Place and Connectivity to enter into Grant Funding Agreements in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer.
- D. To approve the change request for the Huntingdonshire Biodiversity for All to extend the grant period for the programme to 31 October 2025.

7 Funding Committee Concept Papers

RESOLVED:

- A. To note and comment upon the concept paper for Adult Skills Fund prior to its presentation to the CPCA Board at its meeting on 22 July 2025.

8 Single Assurance Framework: Reporting of Most Complex Programmes and Projects

RESOLVED:

To note the performance report on the Most Complex Projects and Programmes.

9 Work Programme

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the Work Programme.

10 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 4 August 2025.

Notes:

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**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

PAUL BRISTOW MAYOR
OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH

Reports from Constituent Council Representatives on the Combined Authority

The following meetings have taken place in July 2025

Transport Committee, 8 July 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Transport Committee \(July\)](#)

Audit and Governance Committee, 15 July 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Audit and Governance Committee \(July\)](#)

Combined Authority Board, 22 July 2025

Councillor:

Decision Summary Link: [Combined Authority Board \(July\)](#)



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3 Election of Vice-Chair

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr McDonald, Cllr Alex Beckett was unanimously elected as Vice-Chair of the Committee

4 Minutes of the previous meeting and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 5 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.
The Action Log was noted by the Committee

6 Forward Plan

RESOLVED

To note the Combined Authority Forward Plan.

7 Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED

A. To endorse the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to instruct officers to look to bid for further capital to allow more work to be done around innovated digital real time information being made available.

8 Director's Highlight Report

RESOLVED

To note the content of the report

9 Bus Network Update

RESOLVED

A. ~~Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the revision of the local bus fare cap scheme and give delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to ensure the Combined Authority ceases the local bus fare cap with bus operators from 1 September 2025.~~

B. Recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the strategic objective of **a more sustainable, long term public subsidy** ~~for the a new, permanent Tiger Pass set out in 2.2.~~

C. Recommend to the Combined Authority Board:

a) to approve the proposal as set out in section 2.1 for the extension of the temporary Tiger Pass scheme ~~with the removal of cross boundary journeys to~~

31 March 2026, **with further consideration to be given to funding.**

~~funded by a virement of £1.4m from the Local Fare Cap budget, subject to the approval of recommendation A, and a drawdown of c£0.3m from the Passenger Transport Operational Reserve.~~

- b) to give delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to ensure the Combined Authority implement the proposals from 1 September 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- D. To note and comment on the three options for the permanent Tiger pass scheme (post March 2026) for feedback and discussion to inform further development work for proposals to be presented in the autumn aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 to 2029/30.
- E. To note the 2024/25 assessment of contracted bus services and the proposed further framework to be developed for services above a defined benchmark to be conducted by officers prior to the Transport Committee in September 2025.
- F. To note the review of implementation pathways on bus franchising. G To note the progress of the Board approvals from 4 June 2025.

10 Local Electric Vehicles Infrastructure (LEVI) Update

RESOLVED

- A. To take note of the progress on Electric Vehicles (EVs) and Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI).

11 Ely to Cambridge Corridor Study

RESOLVED:

- A. To note progress on the Ely to Cambridge Corridor Study.

12 Transport Strategy Update

RESOLVED

- A. To take note of the progress on transport strategy workstreams.

13 A141 - Consultation Update

RESOLVED

- A. To note the update on A141 & St. Ives Improvement Study project progress including the next stage of public consultation exercise.

14 Budget and Performance Report

RESOLVED

- A. To note the outturn financial position of the Transport Division for the financial year 2024/25 and Board approved carry forwards.
- B. To note the Transport Division budget for the next 4 years updated for approved carry forwards.)

15 Work Programme

RESOLVED

A. To note the Work Programme

Notes:

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1 Apologies for Absence

Apologises from:

Cllr Christy and Cllr Wallwork substituted by Cllr Nawaz

2 Declaration of Interests

No declaration of interests were made.

3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

The Chair advised members that they would need to move into an exempt session for the final item of the agenda.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

The Action Log was noted by the Committee.

5 Presentation on Bus Franchising Implementation

The Committee noted the presentation from the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity on Bus Franchising Implementation.

6 2024/25 Treasury Management Outturn Report

The Committee noted the 2024/25 Treasury Management Outturn Report.

7 Internal Audit - Progress Report

The Committee noted the Internal Auditor's Progress Report

8 Standing Items

The Committee received no updates on Fraud Prevention.

The Committee received no updates on Health and Safety.

9 Work Programme

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

The Committee requested a further update on the Bus Franchising implementation be added to the work programme for a future meeting.

10 Corporate Risk and Deep Dive

The Committee endorsed the Corporate Risk Register, Dashboard and Heatmap for June 2025

The Committee undertook the respective risk deep dives and the deep dive schedule for the year.

11 Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the next report contains exempt information under Part 1,2 & 5 of Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that their next meeting is scheduled on Thursday 18th September 2025 at 10am in the CPCA Meeting Room, Pathfinder House, Huntingdonshire District Council.

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Combined Authority Board: Decision Summary

Meeting: Tuesday, 22 July 2025

Published: Wednesday, 23 July 2025

Decision Review Deadline: Wednesday, 30 July 2025



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1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Darryl Preston, Police and Crime Commissioner.

2. Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on 4 June 2025 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Mayor.

3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Announcements

The Mayor wished all a very wonderful summer and expressed hope that the current attitude of working together is moved forward and continued.

5. Public Questions

Four public questions were received. The questions are published [here](#).

6. Petitions

One petition was received and presented to the Combined Authority Board in accordance with section 5.34 of the Constitution.

7. Forward Plan

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Forward Plan for July 2025

8. Combined Authority Membership Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note the (temporary) appointment of a member from Peterborough City Council on the Combined Authority's Skills Committee.
- B Note the change in membership from East Cambridgeshire District Council on the Combined Authority's Skills Committee.
- C Note the (temporary) substitutes at the Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee on 19 June 2025.
- D Note the (temporary) appointment of a member from Peterborough City Council on the Combined Authority's Growth Committee.
- E Note the appointment of a member and a substitute from Fenland District Council to the Combined Authority's Funding Committee.
- F Note the (temporary) appointment of a member from Cambridgeshire County Council on the Combined Authority's Funding Committee.
- G Note the confirmation of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority as their representative and substitute on the Combined Authority Board.
- H **Note the confirmation from Peterborough City Council of their substitute members on the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

9. Appointments to Outside Bodies

It was resolved to:

- A Confirm the existing appointments to outside bodies outlined in para 2.1 and 2.2.
- B Note the log of officer appointments at appendix A.

10. Chief Executive Highlights Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the content of the report

11. Audit and Governance Annual Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Annual Report of the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee for 2024/25 (Appendix A).

12. Local Growth Plan - KD2025/25

It was resolved to:

- A Note progress with the preparation and development of the Local Growth Plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

13. Local Remediation Acceleration Plan KD2025/037

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the Local Remediation Acceleration Plan 2025 (LRAP) as the strategic framework for remediation activity across the region.
- B Approve the drawdown of the £225,000 grant allocation to support staffing, data monitoring, and regulatory coordination as outlined in the LRAP (see appendix) and include it within the Authority's budget. The funding is intended to be used in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years and aims to support the vital role of coordinating regulatory activity to deliver the LRAP. This includes access to the Joint Inspection Team, guidance, training, and engagement.
- C Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Place and Connectivity to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer and oversee implementation and reporting, including quarterly updates to Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and strategic partners.
- D Note the alignment of the LRAP with the Combined Authority's strategic objectives on resilient communities, good growth and high performance.

14. New Corporate Plan 2025-2029, Progress Update

It was resolved to:

- A Note and comment on progress to develop a new 2025-29 Corporate Plan
- B Approve the Corporate Plan covering a four- year period, the duration of the Mayoral term.
- C Approve the integration of previously separate "Mayoral Ambition" and "Strategic Vision" into one new "Purpose" – "Getting Cambridgeshire & Peterborough moving"
- D Approve six new headline objectives: Connectivity, Growth, Jobs, Homes, Resilience and Performance, with descriptions and deliverables to be developed.

15. Corporate Risk Report

It was resolved to:

- A Note the Corporate Risk Register, Dashboard and Heat Map
- B Note progress of Audit & Governance Deep Dives schedule for the year

16. Get Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Working Plan

It was resolved to:

- A Note progress with the preparation and development of the Local Get Britain Working Plan

17. Review of Funding Committee Papers - KD2025/024

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the concept paper for the Adult Skills Fund
- B Note the Chief Executive Approval decisions from June 2025.
- C Note the decisions from Funding Committee held on 30 June 2025.

18. Process for Review and Refresh of the Corporate Plan and the Settings of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (2026/27 to 2029/30)

It was resolved to:

- A Approve the proposals for the review and revision of the Combined Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 alongside a review and refresh of the Authority's Corporate Plan as summarised in this paper, which have been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- B Note the proposed scrutiny proposals relating to the development of a new Corporate Plan and MTFP, including member task and finish working groups for the Corporate Plan and MTFP respectively.
- C Note that there is a detailed report elsewhere on the agenda regarding the revision of the Corporate Plan on which this report draws.
- D Note the timeline for the setting of budget and that this may be subject to change in line with Government announcements or other factors.
- E Note the draft terms of reference for the budget task and finish working group as attached as appendix B.
- F Note the draft terms of reference for the Corporate Plan working group as attached at appendix C.

19. Bus Network Update – KD2025/033

It was resolved to:

- A **Approve the revision of the local bus fare cap scheme and give delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to ensure the Combined Authority ceases the local bus fare cap with bus operators from 31 October 2025.**

~~Approve the revision of the local bus fare cap scheme and give delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to ensure the Combined Authority ceases the local bus fare cap with bus operators from 1 September 2025.~~

- B **Approve the proposal for the extension of the temporary Tiger Pass scheme without the removal of cross boundary journeys to 31 March 2026, funded by the remaining local fare cap budget, underspend from concessionary fares and a use of reserves if applicable.**

~~Approve the proposal for the extension of the temporary Tiger Pass scheme without the removal of cross boundary journeys to 31 March 2026, funded by a virement of £1.4m from the Local Fare Cap budget, and a drawdown of c£0.3m from the Passenger Transport Operational Reserve.~~

- C **Note the options for a permanent Tiger pass set out in the paper, and the content of the discussion at the meeting, and ask that a wider set of options be developed over the summer and be presented to workshops for Board and Transport committee members in the autumn.**

~~To note the three options for the permanent Tiger pass scheme (post March 2026) for feedback and discussion to inform further development work for proposals. Consideration will~~

~~also be given to a scheme to support cheaper bus fare options for adults on the lowest incomes to be presented to Transport Committee in the autumn aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 to 2029/30.~~

- D Approve a strategic objective for a more sustainable, long term subsidy for a new permanent Tiger Pass.
- E Approve the proposal as set out in section 2.1 of the report for the extension of the temporary Tiger Pass scheme to 31 March 2026, with further consideration to be given to funding.
- F Give delegated authority for the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to ensure the Combined Authority implement the proposals from 1 September 2025 to 31 March 2026.

20. Proposals for Bus Route 9 and 31 [KD2025/038]

It was resolved to:

- A Note that officers have not been able to date to secure solutions for the No 9 and No 31 bus route within existing budget and contracts.
- B **Support the procurement of routes 9 and 31 with effect from December 2025 to be funded from within existing budgets and reserves and to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place and Connectivity, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to make the necessary arrangements. To note that the current, high-cost bus services, including but not limited to the South Cambridgeshire DRT and the No. 15 and No. 8A routes, will be subject to ongoing review and the Combined Authority will present the results of an interim review no later than November 2025.**

~~To delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place and Connectivity, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to take the contractual steps required to cease the following three services which show the highest costs per passengers in the 2024/25 table attached. Estimates are that termination of these contracts could annually save up to £531,000:-~~

- ~~• South Cambridgeshire DRT~~
- ~~• No 15 Haslingfield to Royston~~
- No 8A March to Cottenham

- C Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place and Connectivity, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to commence procurement of replacement services for:
 - No 9 Littleport via Ely to Cambridge
 - No 31 Ramsey to Whittlesey

which were notified by Stagecoach to cease by 31 August 2025. The estimated costs for these services are £0.5m. The board should note that these services would likely commence late in 2025 with a successful tender process.

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