

Cambridgeshire County Council

Strategic Framework 2026-29



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Leader's Foreword



Cllr Lucy Nethsingha
Leader of the Council

Our vision for Cambridgeshire over the next three years is to create a healthy, fair and sustainable place to live. The next three years will be a time of great change for local government in Cambridgeshire, and our new Strategic Framework aims to set the direction for the county and this council to ensure Cambridgeshire is well prepared for both the changes and challenges to come.

Our Quality of Life Survey has been crucial in giving us real insight into the priorities of our residents here in Cambridgeshire. Through it, we can see the positive progress the council is making, with trust in the council rising, and residents recognising improvements to our key services. It is also through this engagement that we can stay alert to the struggles that residents are encountering and areas where we can help or further improve as a council, whether that is highways maintenance, the cost of living challenge or the isolation and loneliness felt by young people in the county. We know that times remain tough for families, and we are determined to do what we can to improve lives and opportunities for people across Cambridgeshire.

Whilst we are seeking to improve outcomes and deliver stronger services for the residents of the county, we are also having to navigate and respond to a range of national policy and legislative changes being implemented by the Government. These national changes include: the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, national reforms to local government funding and SEND services and the Families First and Best Start in Life programmes. In Cambridgeshire all these national changes are impacting on us locally and are creating a series of complex public sector reforms, many of which are happening at the same time. That includes reforms to the National Health Service, proposed reforms to Policing and the drive for greater powers for Mayoral Combined Authorities, like our partners in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

As a county of significant growth, and as one of the few county areas which generates national economic return, we are also seeing increasing Government attention. With the advent of the Cambridge Growth Company and the potential for a Government controlled Development Corporation leading the growth of Greater Cambridge, as well as the reinvigoration of the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor, we continue to operate in a highly complex local system. Navigating these reforms and changes to maximise opportunities and to ensure the best possible outcomes is both complex and time consuming. While this places pressure on our existing structures, we remain determined to work collaboratively with all our partners in the best interest of Cambridgeshire residents.

As the need for our services continues to grow, the cost of essential services such as children's services and adult social care continues to skyrocket. There are very constrained public finances to support these essential services which remain under acute pressure, and council budgets have become even harder to balance. We are committed to enhancing both the effectiveness and efficiency of our service delivery, ensuring we meet our statutory obligations while maximizing the positive impact we can achieve with the finite resources available to us.

I remain both grateful and impressed by the people who work for Cambridgeshire County Council and who deliver services for our residents 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, whatever the weather or circumstance. Whether it is our drivers who take gritters out on the dark winter nights, or our social care workers who are always on-call for a young person in trouble, or the many others who go above and beyond, I am endlessly impressed by the stories of their amazing work. It is thanks to their hard work that we have been able to improve, and it is through them that we will keep improving the way we serve our residents and achieve our vision for the beautiful county we are lucky to live in.

Chief Executive's Foreword

Achieving the council's vision for a healthy, fair, and sustainable Cambridgeshire will take commitment and ambition, especially at a time when people, families and communities continue to face cost of living pressures.

What we do as a council and how we provide or commission services from others matter to the residents of Cambridgeshire, irrespective of these being universally accessed services like highways or more targeted services like children's social care. That is why the Quality of Life survey remains critical for us to listen to and learn from our residents and why we have undertaken this for three consecutive years. During the summer of 2025, we heard from over 5,500 people across the five districts of the county council area, who broadly represent the population of Cambridgeshire.

From this research we know that people are happy in Cambridgeshire, they feel safe and well connected to their local communities. Importantly, we also know that residents think Cambridgeshire is a good place to bring up their children. However, these findings were not equally true for everyone. Younger people, people with disabilities and people struggling economically all rate themselves lower in these areas. People also told us they feel lonely or isolated, and mental health concerns remain high amongst our younger residents. These incredibly rich insights have been used to inform the development of the refreshed vision, ambitions and priorities for Cambridgeshire County Council, which form the core of our business plan and budget.

Even with these clear ambitions, as a taxpayer-funded public body, we must still live within our means. Achieving best value for our residents and continuing to drive sustainable improvements to services, whilst ensuring we are a well-led council, which consistently gets 'the basics' right, must come before we can progress further investments. As a council we have a range of statutory duties to meet, but we have no statutory services that we must deliver. As we move forward, we will continue to review everything we do, including our work with partner agencies such as the Combined Authority, the NHS, Police, Fire and other local authorities, to make positive changes and become more efficient and effective. As a part of this, we will continue to evolve as a council, accelerating our use of new and emergent technologies and bringing more of our teams closer to and based in our communities.

At the same time, we will advance our preparations to deliver the Government's requirement for Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This once in a generation change to the form and function of local government will require both detailed planning and bold innovation. Over the coming years, we will work hard to ensure that our organisation, our people and Cambridgeshire's residents are prepared for and supported through these large-scale changes ahead. Providing reassurance and stability to our workforce as we navigate this major change will be vital in ensuring we can still recruit, retain and develop the right people, with the right skills and values to deliver both our services for today and for our future councils of tomorrow.

Working together, I believe that residents will see the county council continue to make progress with our refreshed vision to create a healthy, fair and sustainable Cambridgeshire, as we continue to address the dual challenges of being a rapidly growing county and needing to tackle the deep-rooted inequalities that still exist in our communities. How we achieve this will be very much driven by our values: Collaborative, Accountable, Respectful and Excellence, known as CARE, and by working as One Team and One Council.



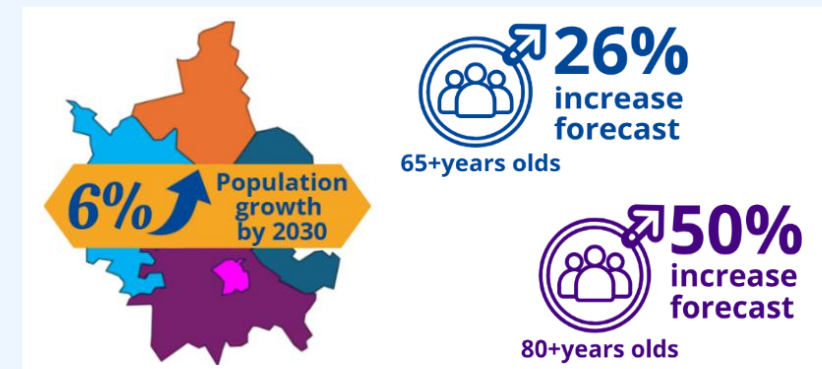
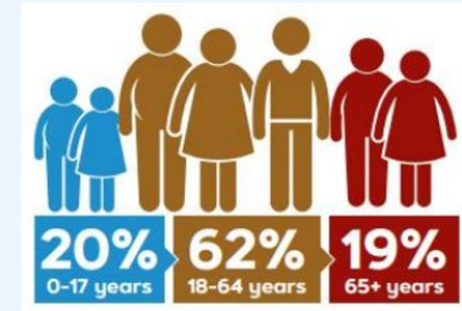
Dr Stephen Moir
Chief Executive



Our county

Population

- Cambridgeshire has a resident population of 678,850.
 - 20% of residents are aged 0-17, 62% are aged 18-64 and 19% are aged 65 and over.
- Between 2011 and 2021, our resident population grew by 9%.
 - Our rural districts have seen much higher growth in the 65 and over population (21-34%) and smaller or no growth in the under 65 population (0-5%).
 - The city of Cambridge is the second fastest growing local authority area in the East of England. Much higher population growth was seen in Cambridge (18%) than in our rural districts (5-9%).
- By 2030, our resident population is forecast to grow by 6%:
 - The greatest population increases are forecast to be in number of the adults over 65 years (26%) and over 80 years (50%).



Environment

- Cambridgeshire covers an area of over 3,397 square kilometres.
- Cambridgeshire is home to 27% of England's total peatland stock. Peatlands are amongst the most valuable ecosystems on Earth, owing to their role in preserving global biodiversity, providing safe drinking water, minimising flood risks and helping to address climate change.
- Cambridgeshire has a key role to play nationally in food security, as 30% of the country's Grade 1 agricultural land is located here.
- Cambridgeshire's carbon emissions as a whole county in 2023 were 6.45 million tonnes CO₂e, with the highest emissions coming from transport (27%), and use, land use change and forestry (24%) and agriculture (17%).



Economy

- Cambridgeshire's economy is diverse and varied, including contributing significantly to the national agriculture, packaging, manufacturing and science and technology sectors.
- The agricultural sector concentrated within the northern parts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough provides 5% of England's total agricultural workforce.
- The Greater Cambridge area competes internationally in the science and technology sectors, with specialist clusters in life sciences, agriculture, advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and defence, as well as clean technologies.
- In 2023-24, Cambridgeshire generated £34 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), whilst the total turnover was £43 billion, including:
 - £9.6 billion life sciences and healthcare
 - £8.4 billion manufacturing
 - £6 billion wholesale and retail distribution.
- Since 2011, Connecting Cambridgeshire, in partnership with the county council, have enabled access to superfast broadband services to 38% more premises, totalling 98% of premises across the county in 2025.
- 5% of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's total economy is based in the agriculture sector, generating £1.4 billion GVA in 2023-24.
- The Global Innovation Index 2024 ranked Cambridge as the world's leading science and technological cluster by intensity for the third consecutive year.
- The Centre for Cities Outlook for 2025 report placed Cambridge within the top 10 UK cities for the highest GVA per hour, within the top five UK cities for the highest average weekly workplace earnings, and within the top three for UK cities with the highest percentage of people with high level qualifications.

Education

- Cambridgeshire is home to a broad range of state funded education settings including:
 - over 200 primary schools
 - 30 secondary schools
 - 12 special schools
 - 20 schools and colleges providing access to Further Education.
- The county is home to two internationally renowned universities.
- Cambridgeshire education settings, including schools and colleges, demonstrate strong academic performance:
 - Most primary school pupils meet the national standards.
 - Secondary school results are above average with nearly half (49.4%) of secondary school pupils in 2025 achieving Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSEs.
 - Post-16 results have an average grade of B- in A-levels and Merit in T-levels.
- Cambridgeshire students completing post-16 education in 2023 included 35% entering employment and 42% remaining in education.



The Quality of Life Survey

In each of the three years from 2023-25, the council conducted an annual Quality of Life Survey to better understand the experiences and perceptions of residents across Cambridgeshire. These revealed both positive experiences and concerns among residents:

Positive experiences

- There was an increase in levels of happiness (up to 84% of residents reported high or very high levels of happiness).
- Many residents (up to 85%) feel safe in their local community.
- An average of three quarters of residents (75%) feel they belong to their local community.
- More residents feel that Cambridgeshire is a good place to raise children (increasing to 79% by 2025).
- There was increased satisfaction with several council services, including services for older or vulnerable people, libraries and communities.

Concerns

- Over three quarters of residents were concerned about climate change – with similar numbers of residents open to changing their own behaviour – but also look to local government to play a prominent role in tackling climate risks.
- The cost of living has been a consistent concern of many residents (around 87%), with over half of residents taking action to cut back on expenses.
- There was a growing concern about investments and jobs, reaching a height of 62% of residents.
- Certain groups of residents – especially renters, unemployed people, disabled and older people – were more likely to have taken action due to the cost of living or need support to improve their quality of life.

Health and wellbeing

- In 2023-24, 68% of five year olds had a good level of development (GLD), but this lowered to 41% for five years olds on Free School Meals – the lowest level in the country for that year.
- Although the Quality of Life Surveys 2023-25 saw parents and carers increasingly report children eating healthy and being physically active (both measures increasing to 92%), 17% of Year 6 children were identified as obese in 2023-24 (from Public Health profiles data, Dept Health and Social Care 2024).
- Fewer residents reported struggling with their mental health in the Quality of Life Survey 2025, decreasing to 28%. However, younger people (18-25 years) were more likely to struggle with mental health and loneliness. As part of the Mental Health Needs Assessment (2022-2024), a survey of Year 8 and Year 10 pupils across Cambridgeshire in 2024 found that 8% of girls and 19% of boys reported having high wellbeing, and 9% of girls and 22% of boys reported high resilience.
- Through the Quality of Life Surveys 2023-25, residents reported a steady decline in unhealthy adult habits such as drinking more than 14 units of alcohol per week (from 17% to 10%), smoking (from 13% to 11%) and vaping (from 12% to 10%).

Average life expectancies across Cambridgeshire (2021-2023)

| District | Men | Women |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| Cambridge | 80.2 years | 84 years |
| East Cambridgeshire | 82 years | 84.2 years |
| Fenland | 77.6 years | 81.9 years |
| Huntingdonshire | 81.1 years | 84 years |
| South Cambridgeshire | 82.5 years | 86.4 years |
| Cambridgeshire average | 81 years | 84 years |
| England average | 79 years | 83 years |

- In 2023-24, the rate of falls leading to an emergency admission to hospital in over 65 year olds in Cambridgeshire remained at a similar level to the national average. However, the falls rate was significantly higher in Cambridgeshire for those over 80 years old – an age group that is forecast to have a larger population growth in coming years.

Demand for council services

- Much of our resources go towards services helping residents who need additional support. The rising demand for these services puts pressure on our capacity and budget, but it is an essential part of what we do.
- For example, between 2023 and 2025 we saw:
 - 18% more children with Education, Health and Care Plans – part of a 70% increase over 2020-2025
 - over 1,000 more pupils with special educational needs in schools who receive ‘SEN Support’ rather than an EHCP – a 9% increase
 - around 100 more children in care between 0-17 years old – a 17% increase
 - around 17% more children with a recorded disability
 - over 360 more pupils in schools with caring responsibilities – a 29% increase
 - 60% more carers supported during a year
 - around 700 more adults receiving long term social care in one year, either fully or partially funded by the county council – a 9% increase.
- In addition to helping those who need additional support, our work impacts the lives of everyone living, working, learning and travelling through Cambridgeshire every day.
- For example, we repair around 60,000 potholes each year and are responsible for maintaining:
 - over 4,600 km of carriageway
 - 2,936 km of footways and cycleways
 - 950 road bridges
 - 142 pedestrian and cycle bridges
 - 108,751 gullies
 - 54,286 streetlights.

What we will deliver

Our commitment to Cambridgeshire

Our primary commitment to Cambridgeshire is to **do our core business well**, because it is what residents expect from us first. It also gives us a firm footing to pursue our vision, ambitions and priorities for Cambridgeshire. We will deliver **high-quality** and **cost-effective services** that:

- are close to or based in communities and give residents a voice
- are delivered in ways that are convenient for residents and not just for us
- increase public trust in us to spend taxpayer money wisely

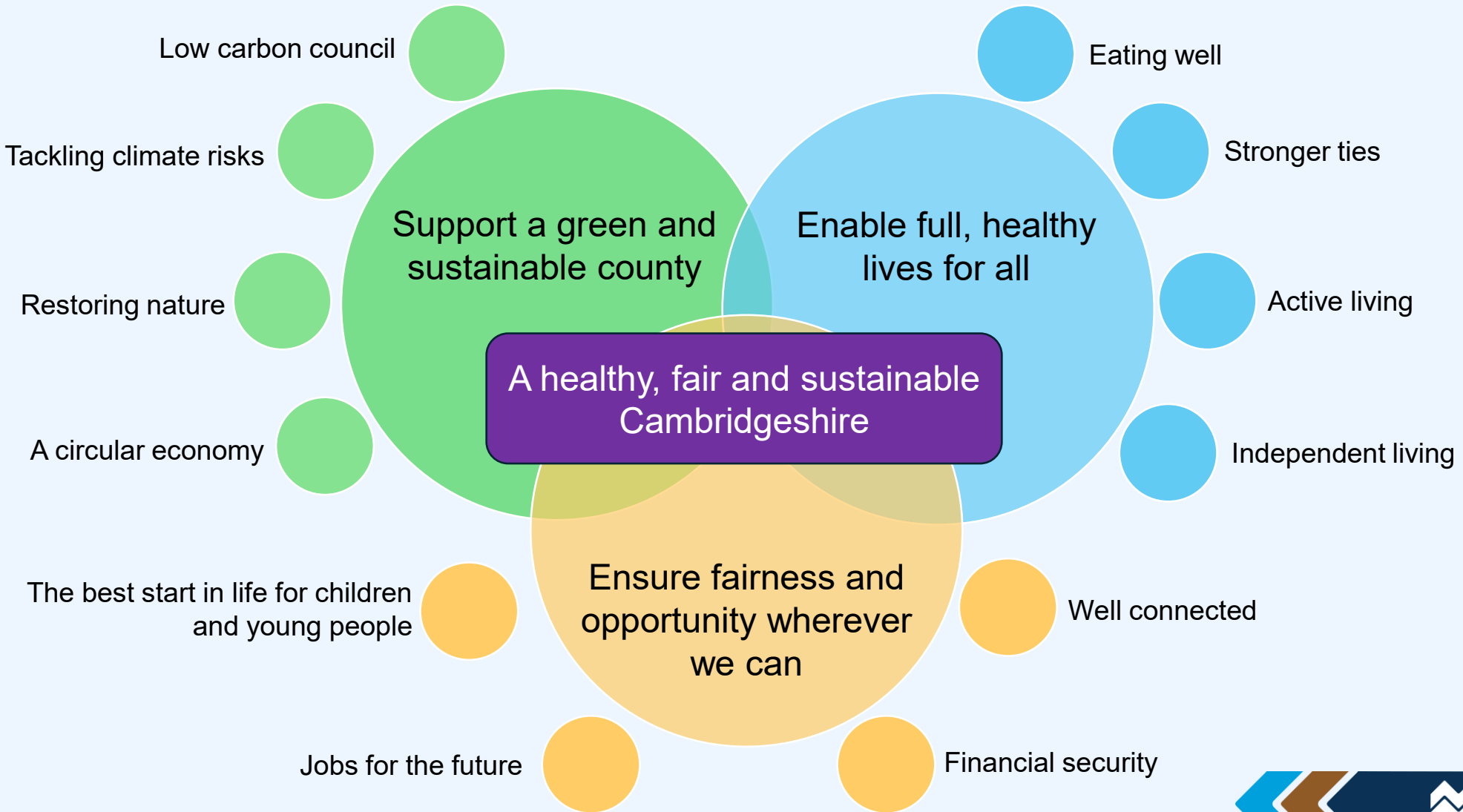
As part of our core business, we deliver services as diverse as:

- protecting children and young people at risk of harm
- social care for older people and those with learning disabilities
- highways maintenance
- education, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- strategic planning for community infrastructure, education, waste and transport
- waste disposal
- public health
- improving the local natural environment
- community-based services, such as libraries
- maintaining the historic archives of the county.



Our vision, ambitions and priorities

Our vision is composed of three interconnected ambitions, which are influenced by what our residents have told us matters to them. Our ambitions are elaborated through 12 mutually reinforcing priorities, which reflect what we can do as a county council to achieve our ambitions, working to the strategic direction of our services and working with our communities and our partners.



Our priorities for supporting a green and sustainable county

We will

Low carbon council
Reduce the council's carbon emissions by 38% by 2027-28 (excluding forestry, land use and agriculture) and support wider climate action in Cambridgeshire.

We will

Tackling climate risks
Support community energy projects and local area energy planning, and work with communities to understand and manage the effects of a changing climate, from the threats of flooding and fire to securing the future of water, food and farming.

We will

Restoring nature
Create and connect green spaces, restore natural habitats on council land and support community-led nature recovery projects.

We will

A circular economy
Support local communities to create and promote options to reduce waste, repair or reuse materials and live more sustainably.

Support a green and sustainable county

Our priorities for enabling full, healthy lives for all



Eating well

Work with partners on targeted interventions that help provide enough good food for every home, aiming to have no family hungry or under-nourished.

We will

Stronger ties

Support people to build strong connections with their families, communities and the natural environment to combat loneliness and improve mental and physical health.

We will

Active living

Create more safe cycling and walking routes and work with partners and communities to promote accessible ways to get active.

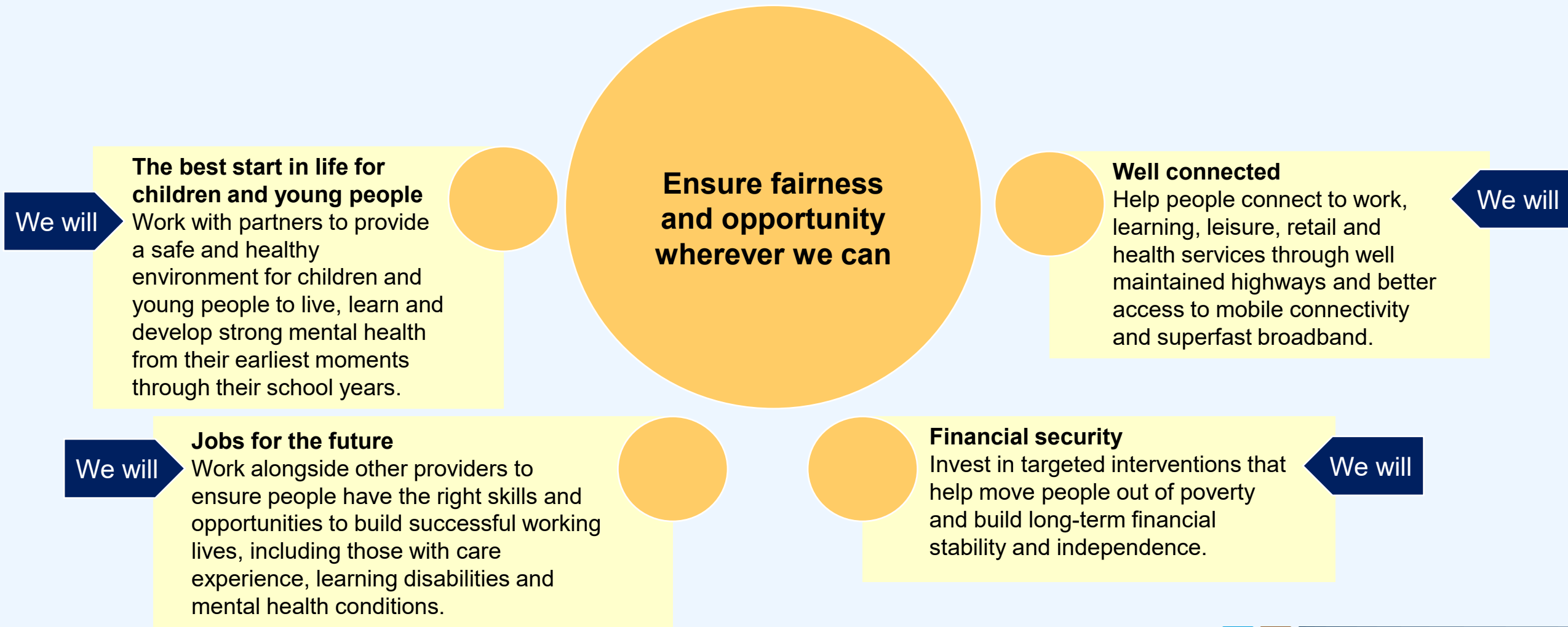
We will

Independent living

Provide social care that supports adults and unpaid carers to live safely in the way they choose and prevents the need for more intensive support and care where possible.

We will

Our priorities for ensuring fairness and opportunity wherever we can





How we will deliver

Working as One Council to deliver our vision

Strategic Framework

- Our commitment to Cambridgeshire
- Our vision, ambitions and priorities
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy

Our vision, ambitions and priorities guide almost everything we do. To make this possible, our strategies set out the approaches the organisation will take, and our planning and performance detail what our individual services and employees will do, to help realise our vision. In this way, our vision, ambitions and priorities are built into all levels of the organisation, so we can deliver them for residents.

Enabling strategies

Key organisational strategies

- Our Future Council Change Strategy
- People Strategy
- Land and Property Strategy
- Digital Strategy
- Communications Strategy
- Engagement and Consultation Strategy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Key ambition-focused strategies

- Climate Change and Environment Strategy
- Public Health Strategic Plan
- Active Travel Strategy
- Adults, Health and Commissioning Strategy
- Economic Strategy
- Corporate Parenting Strategy

Enabling strategies

These strategies explain how the council is prepared to deliver our ambitions (organisational strategies), and how parts of the council will work towards certain ambitions (ambition-focused strategies).

Service planning and delivery

- Budgeting and delivery planning
- Risk management
- Project management
- Performance management
- Partnership working

Service planning and employee performance

We use several mechanisms to ensure services are planned to make the best use of resources, and our staff are supported to deliver services that meet our commitment and achieve our vision.

Employee performance

- Individual outcomes
- Team outcomes
- Development outcomes
- CARE values
- Impact evaluation

Future proofing delivery

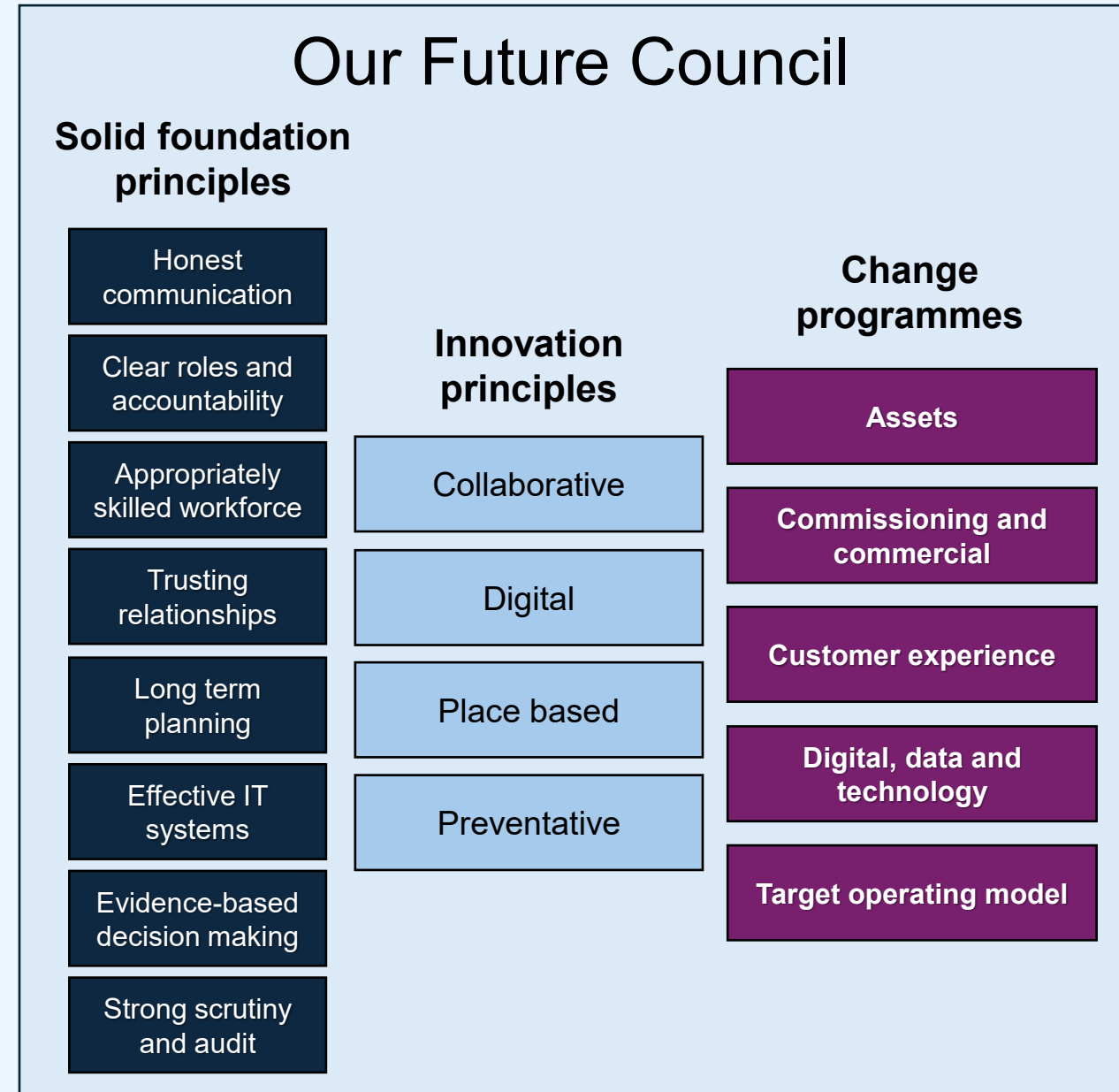
Like most councils across the country, we must do our core business and pursue our vision alongside complex, and often unpredictable, changes in the world around us as well as increasing financial pressures on our budget. We therefore need to be responsive to those changes and pressures to be able to deliver our commitment and vision.

This is what makes the **'Our Future Council' Change Strategy** essential for our Strategic Framework and the council more generally. Setting out the key principles to inform decision making and organisational change, Our Future Council is our main approach for future-proofing our capacity to deliver our vision and meet our commitment within a balanced budget.

The strategy sets out **solid foundations** – principles that ensure we do our core business well by consistently performing our essential responsibilities of good governance, organisational culture, resource management and statutory requirements.

Building on these foundations, Our Future Council has four **innovation principles** that ensure we are continually shaping our organisation, services and partnerships toward innovation, in readiness for the changing circumstances we operate within.

Our Future Council is implemented through **change programmes** that apply the solid foundations and innovation principles to five key areas of change across the council. These programmes help us to get the basics right and prepare for the future by driving our services to be closer to communities and customers, upskilling our workforce, increasing value for money, enhancing our use of data and technology, and preparing for a safe and legal transition through Local Government Reorganisation.



The way we work

Underlying our commitment and vision are the organisational values that describe how we work every day and how it feels to work for us – our CARE values. Our **Customer Care Standards** reflect the CARE values we hold as an organisation and we are committed to delivering consistent standards of customer service and ensuring that all members of our community can access the information and support they need, in accordance with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. We aim to provide services that are simple to use and cost effective.



We are **Collaborative** with our partners, our communities and each other.



We will listen to your experiences and learn from them. We review all comments, suggestions or concerns you share, to help us understand what we're doing well and where we can do better. We will use your feedback to make meaningful improvements to our information and our services.



We are **Accountable** to our residents and each other for delivery of outcomes.



We are committed to meeting the timelines we set with you. If, for any reason, we're unable to deliver on time, we will keep you informed with timely updates and a clear explanation. We will ensure the personal information you share with us is kept in safe accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).



We are **Respectful** of each other, the environment and our communities.



We believe digital services offer efficient and accessible ways to connect with us, however we will always consider alternative access routes to our services, including making reasonable adjustments, to ensure they meet the needs of our customers. We will value you as an individual and treat you with care and respect.



We are focused on **Excellence**, delivering the best we can and always improving.



No matter how you connect with us – whether in the community, in our buildings, by phone, or online – we aim to deliver the same consistent, customer experience. We will listen to you and respond with respect, compassion, and empathy.

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