

Section 1 – Vision and Priorities

Introduction

We are publishing this Business Plan at a very tough time. We are required to make yet more significant cuts to our services, cuts that will inevitably hit our communities – the sting of austerity is really starting to kick in now. At the same time we face a substantial increase in demand for our services, both as a result of the substantial growth seen in Cambridgeshire and our changing demographics – particularly relating to our ageing population.

Obviously this is not a sustainable position, and over the next few years we need to take some very tough decisions to get ourselves into a sustainable position. We need to be bold and show leadership. We need to do what our residents and businesses are relying on us to do to ensure that Cambridgeshire remains a great place to live, work and do business. We need to reduce our dependence on Government funding – which is becoming a much less reliable source of money – and instead take greater control of our own local destiny.

It will not be easy, and it will only get tougher, but hiding from the challenge is not an option; we have to deal with it head on. Through changing circumstances we have to be clear that what is most important is delivering the best possible

outcomes for the people we serve, therefore our priorities remain:

- Developing the local economy for the benefit of all.
- Helping people live healthy and independent lives.
- Supporting and protecting vulnerable people.

What we've done over the last year

We have already made substantial savings. We have cut away the low-hanging fruit and delivered some tough savings in recent years, including saving £32m in 2013-14. We have slimmed down our management structures and reduced senior officer pay increases. We have done all of this so that we can continue to invest in Cambridgeshire's future and make sure that we are spending public money in areas where the public sees the benefits.

There has been a lot of focus on infrastructure and on investing in projects that will make a substantial difference to the lives of our residents and the operations of our businesses for decades to come. We have led the formation of a local consortium that includes a range of different organisations to help bring forward the A14 upgrade by committing to a local contribution – we remain extremely grateful to our partners and we are proud of the way we have all come together to do what is right for Cambridgeshire. This is proof of our ability to

innovate and our determination to unlock benefits for the county that we would not otherwise experience.

We have agreed in principle with Government to work towards a City Deal for Greater Cambridge, and are working out the finer details. This should help us to take greater control of driving economic growth and quality of life for our residents, in particular, by improving our transport infrastructure.

We have finally reached the end of the protracted legal dispute around the Busway, arriving at a deal that – whilst clearly not perfect – offered the best available outcome for Cambridgeshire’s taxpayers. Had we simply rolled over, taxpayers would be feeling the pain for years because we would have to make larger savings than we already need to. It is not just about infrastructure though. We have also delivered transformational ways of working that bring real benefits to the people of Cambridgeshire. The best example of this is our move to the ‘Unit Model’ in social care, which brings a more innovative approach to delivering support to the most vulnerable children in Cambridgeshire, and which is proving extremely popular with our very important social workers. We also launched the ‘Community Navigators’ scheme, working with our third sector partners, which is already proving successful in dealing with social isolation amongst vulnerable older people.

Whilst we have a particular focus on economic outcomes, it is important to stress that success in this area helps us to deliver on our other priorities too – and they overlap in many ways. For example, the programme of improvements we anticipate being able to deliver through our City Deal proposals would

make a strong contribution to helping people to live healthy and independent lives, by opening up access to services, employment and leisure opportunities that both improve their quality of life and help them to remain independent for longer.

Cambridgeshire County Council has every right to be proud of these achievements, but I am also looking forward to building on them in future years.

Looking forward

Whilst we have made significant savings already, they are small compared to what is needed in coming years. Current forecasts show a £149m funding gap in 2018-19 if we take no action. Having made the easier savings, this shows just how tough the decisions we have to make in future are. We have to become a smaller organisation. We need to work very differently and we will have to withdraw some services. All the while we have to make sure that this has the minimum possible impact on the people we serve, but we can no longer deliver cuts without having some impact and without people feeling the pinch. Unfortunately, that is the way things are with local government finance at the moment – but we will continue to make the case about the unfairness of the level of cuts compared to other Government departments.

In this context we have to make sure that we are continuously fighting Cambridgeshire’s corner effectively – and I do not just mean for the County Council, but for the whole of Cambridgeshire. We have to look across organisational boundaries for this. A prime example is schools funding, where Cambridgeshire receives less money per pupil than

any other part of the country. We have to continue to lobby for a fairer distribution so that we can give our children the best possible education. Cambridgeshire is an area that the UK can be proud of, and we need to make sure that both Civil Servants and Ministers know just what it is our area has to offer, because Cambridgeshire has tremendous potential in terms of economic growth and quality of life; no one benefits from restricting that potential.

One thing I am keen to make sure we do in the coming years is to spread the benefits of economic growth that are particularly witnessed in and around Cambridge so that these reach the wider county. The Greater Cambridge area is a jewel in the UK's economic crown, yet parts of our county suffer from serious deprivation. We need to spread the benefits whilst not killing the golden goose.

We are not precious about the way we do things, and we know we will have to make a lot of changes in the coming years. That is why we invited colleagues from within the Local Government Association to undertake a peer review of the Council in the autumn. This highlighted things we need to be aware of – like making sure that our changing governance arrangements can still deliver results for our residents and businesses, and needing to ensure that our ambitions, particularly relating to our capital investment programme, are realistic. It also highlighted how very slim our management structures are and the risks we carry as a result of that.

All of this tells us that we need to be both ambitious and bold, but also careful. It will be no use to anyone if we cannot deliver services that people rely on because we do not have the staff, or if we have to cut vital services because the cost of borrowing to fund our capital programme is too high. Ambition, leadership and the ability to react flexibly to change will be the key for us in coming years, tempered with a dose of responsibility. We will not shy away from the challenges facing us, but we also cannot hide the fact that they will have an impact on people. What we have to do is make sure that the negative impacts are minimised as much as possible, whilst delivering the savings that we need to deliver. Despite the tough financial circumstances, we must remain ambitious for Cambridgeshire and its residents.



Cllr Martin Curtis
Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council