
REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS

NEW VISION REVEALED FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIBRARIES

Communities will be at the heart of running and managing libraries to help protect Cambridgeshire services. The Library service is having to find £3.2 million in savings over the next five years. The proposals are based on the feedback given by thousands of Cambridgeshire residents. They emphasise that library closures will only be considered as a last resort but these can be avoided if communities come forward and help support their local services. The plans include the setting up of a Cambridgeshire Trust to look after the running of the libraries, but still the responsibility of the County Council. This would unlock funding and savings the Council currently does not have access to.

Libraries will be reorganised into groups with a main library supporting the others in its area and sharing a reduced level of staff. This will also see the roll-out of more self-service technology and more community engagement and volunteers in libraries. This idea is also backed by the public in the recent consultation. Some 69 per cent of respondents in the public consultation said they support an alternative Service Delivery model rather than closing libraries. This would maximise the use of self-service facilities in libraries, while reducing staff and increasing volunteers. Where it is already used in Cambridgeshire, self-service accounts for more than 85 per cent of normal library transactions.

Libraries have hundreds of volunteers as well as friends groups. The new model would extend this and see communities helping to manage the library as well as support initiatives such as IT buddying or children and older people's activities. Nearly half (48 per cent) of the 5,600 survey respondents said they would volunteer to help libraries, and 1800 people have already registered their interest in volunteering. Cambridgeshire will also join up with four other local authorities to provide backroom library services to drive down costs. Communities with least need will be approached to see if they could run the service themselves, with the support of the Council and the new Trust. This would be similar to the library access points which are already run by volunteers. Libraries could also look to merge or share facilities with other services to reduce costs or move to other, more cost effective, buildings in the same area. Some 77 per cent of survey respondents said they wanted to see libraries used as community hubs where various agencies and community groups could use the buildings. Communities are asked to take the lead in helping support their library to meet the savings targets.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "Cambridgeshire County Council is clear that libraries are vital community hubs that we need to support as much as we can and work together to keep them open. That is why we have come up with proposals that are based on what residents have said to us, that keep services but still make the savings needed. "There are much we all can do together to reduce costs and transform the library service but communities must be encouraged to continue to play their part if they want services to remain. Due to the tremendous challenge we are facing we could have made the decision to close libraries but that would not be the right thing to do. We have put forward a plan that will change the delivery of services and put communities at the heart of that transformation.

COUNTY ON LINE PLANNING COMPLAINTS FORM

Cambridgeshire County Council, as the local minerals and waste planning authority, has recently introduced an on-line form for reporting breaches of planning control. You can use this form to report breaches of planning control which relate to minerals or waste activities, and County Council developments within Cambridgeshire. To access the complaint form please follow the steps below. Log onto the County Council's web site at <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/> Alternatively click on the following link or copy it into your web browser

<https://forms.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/customer/servlet/ep.app?ut=X&type=404092>

You can still report breaches of planning control which relate minerals or waste activities and County Council developments by telephone or in writing using our contact details below.

ZERO COUNCIL TAX INCREASE AND A RADICAL NEW APPROACH TO SERVICES IN COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET

There will be no increase in the County Council's element of Council Tax in the next financial year, and probably no increase for a further four years, proposals released have reveal. The County Council has unveiled its budget plan covering the next five years, which aims to save £50.4 million in 2011/12 and £160.6 million over the life of the plan. The proposals were considered as the Council's answer to the most difficult financial situation in its history as the Council deals with the increasing pressures of demand, an increasing and ageing population and inflation coupled with a 14 per cent reduction in the core funding received from Government.

They are defined by a new set of Council priorities - supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most, helping people to live independent and healthy lives in their communities, and developing the local economy for the benefit of all. The proposals also contain radical changes to the way the Council works. Four principles will guide the way the Council work - being a genuinely local council, making sure the right services are provided in the right way, investing in prevention, and working together. Savings proposed cover all aspects of the Council's business.

In Children's Services, 2011/12 budget £121 million, a fundamental shift from universal to targeted services, which over the next four years would save £1 million from youth services, £761,000 from home to school transport and £600,000 from children's centres. Direct support to some children and young people will end, saving £1 million from disability services, £527,000 from specialist teaching, £315,000 from budgets for educating looked after children and £301,000 from the Racial Equality and Diversity Service. The Council aims to save £950,000 from children's social care, £240,000 from early year service, and £3 million from mainstream and special educational needs school transport.

In Social Care, Libraries & Community, 2011/12 budget £195 million, promoting prevention and localism will save £2.9 million, adopting reablement approach a further £4.75 million, and decreasing the cost of high cost and complex placements will save £1.3 million.

In Environment Services, 2011/12 budget £42 million, a restructuring of Trading Standards will save £641,000 over four years, reducing spending on environment and climate change £492,000, a restructuring of waste services will save £159,000 and a reduction in senior management will save £100,000. Further efficiencies from the highways services contract will save £2.4 million, and restructuring Highways and Access £1.1 million. In public transport, phasing out subsidised bus services will save £2.7 million but there will be an extra £1 million invested in supporting community transport schemes over the next five years as well as a summit on how to make public transport more locally focussed and value for money. There will also be a £1.4 million saving in revenue funded highways maintenance but an extra £3.85 million investment in this area from capital funds.

In Corporate Directorates, Shared and Professional Service, current budget £43 million, over a four-year period, reducing properties and maximizing office space in retained buildings will save over £1 million, reducing the contact centre opening hours and moving more services being accessed and delivered online £426,000, reducing IT functions and delivering services in different ways will save £989,000 and reducing communications and marketing activity will save up to £550,000. Budget decisions have and are being made in conjunction with Community Impact Assessments, which consider the impact of our services on communities, with particular reference to ensuring equality and cohesion. These will continue as changes are made to services.

Councillor John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, said: "These are unprecedented times. We know that rises in VAT, fuel prices and living costs in general are impacting on family budgets. So the first thing to get right is to make sure we don't add to that, and so we propose not to increase our portion of council tax in the next year. To deliver our proposed plan, The Council will have to work in a completely different way. We will be a genuinely local council. We'll hand decisions about spending and service provision to people at the most local level wherever possible. We know that a lot of people are already actively involved in their local areas, and we want to free up communities to do even more and support themselves. We will focus on prevention - helping people early on, increasing their independence and choice, and helping them to help themselves. We will make sure that every penny in every pound counts. We will protect the frontline and will be as efficient behind-the-scenes as possible. We will work even more closely with voluntary organisations, and communities to make sure we're joined up and providing the best value possible."

"The reduction in our grant reflects the part public services have to play in repaying the nation debt. There is no escaping the fact that there will be cuts to services. Cambridgeshire was already a lean authority and that has made for difficult decisions. "We will focus more than ever on our priorities, so our proposals will protect the most vulnerable, help people to live independent and healthy lives, and promote economic growth."

COUNCIL PLANS IN PLACE TO FIX BAM NUTTALL'S BUSWAY DEFECTS

The Council plans to fix defects on the Busway and charge the cost to BAM Nuttall if it continues to dispute there are problems between St Ives and Cambridge. Busway contractors BAM Nuttall were notified of six defects on the route more than a year ago and despite a public statement by the firm saying the problems would be fixed months ago they still remain.

BAM Nuttall's own surveys have shown some of the gaps between the guideway beams that allow them to expand during hot weather are narrower than the contractor's accepted design - one of the defects. BAM Nuttall's view is the narrow gaps are not a problem but refused to carry out calculations to show this. As a result the Council has had to carry out independent surveys which have shown that the narrower gaps could cause damage to the beams. To correct the problem the Council plans to grind fractions from the ends of the beams where necessary to even up the gaps.

BAM Nuttall has failed to document that the use of shallower foundations than specified on some short sections of the route will not cause the track to move over time affecting the ride quality. BAM Nuttall will be liable for the defect if any work was needed in the future. If BAM Nuttall fails to rectify the defects to the Council's satisfaction after the contract has been completed, and they have had a period of 28 days as set out in the contract, the Council can bring in a new contractor as planned.

BAM Nuttall will be liable for the Council's costs which will be deducted from monies being held back from BAM Nuttall (called retention) that should be paid to them after completion. Bus operators who will run services have echoed the Council's view that defects that could cause the Busway to close again once it is open need to be rectified before passenger services begin. The Council will continue to deduct almost £14,000 a day from BAM Nuttall for late delivery of the project until the contractor completes the contract - almost £9 million has already been deducted.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "Whilst we would still welcome BAM Nuttall making good on their earlier pledge to residents to fix all of the notified defects, they have had months to get the work done and I would be shocked if they had a change of heart now. We now have plans in place to correct BAM Nuttall's defective works and the costs of doing this will be deducted from the contractor and not paid for by taxpayers. It is frustrating that the Council has had to do extra checks on BAM Nuttall's works, and correct what they have got wrong - but the route will be in tip-top condition when it opens. All residents really want to see is construction completed so the rest of the process to open the route can finally begin - that entire process hinges on BAM Nuttall at this stage and the Council will keep residents up to date with their progress."

ADULT SOCIAL CARE SERVICES PERFORMING WELL

The annual assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has concluded that Adult Social Care Services in Cambridgeshire are performing well above expectation and in some cases have been rated as excellent. The CQC report praises staff at all levels for their 'clear vision in respect of adult social care' and the authority's commitment to tackling inequalities across the county and its work with partners to provide services and support to the diverse Cambridgeshire community. Of the seven assessment areas, the services provided by Cambridgeshire County Council and in partnership with other agencies were universally rated as performing 'well' with two highlighted as excellent.

Performing well ratings were achieved for:

- Improved health and well-being - Increased choice and control
- Freedom from discrimination and harassment - Economic well-being
- Maintaining personal dignity and respect

Excellent ratings were awarded for:

- Improved quality of life - Making a positive contribution

The CQC reports states: "The Council has a clear vision for the delivery of adult social care services and has made significant progress on transformation (of services).

RECYCLING NEWS

New banks to collect old CDs, DVDs, PC games, hard and soft backed books and board games for reuse and recycling have just been put in place at all 9 of the County Council's household recycling centres across Cambridgeshire. The recycling centres are now operated by Waterbeach based waste management company Donarbon Ltd, as part of the Council's 28 year PFI household waste management contract, and a section of the contract requires Donarbon to establish new recycling facilities where ever possible.

The new large blue 'media banks' have been delivered to all the recycling centres. Residents are being urged to put as much material in the banks as possible. The banks will be emptied by West Midlands based company Wilcox Reprocessors, who trade extensively in north east and north west Africa, where the books are used mainly in education, and the CDs, DVDs and the computer and board games are sold for reuse where possible. Any materials not suitable for reuse are shredded in the UK and paper from the books is recycled into new paper, and the plastics from the CDs, DVDs etc. and their cases are recycled into new items.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES CONTINUE TO PERFORM WELL

Children's services in Cambridgeshire are continuing to perform well, according to Government inspectors. The team from OfSTED - the Office for Standards in Education – said the large majority of services, settings and institutions were found to be good or better. "The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good, as is much of the early years and childcare provision. Provision for children in council care has improved over the last year and now five of eight local authority homes are good," said their assessment.

Inspectors found a very large majority of the county's nursery and primary schools to be good. They said secondary schools and sixth forms do not do quite as well - apart from one sixth form college which was outstanding and another which was good. However, inspectors also reported that "Standards continue to rise in secondary schools and by the age of 16 more than half of young people gain five or more good grades at GCSE - this is better than elsewhere. Those from most minority ethnic groups often do well," they added.

They praised three out of the county's four pupil referral units, but said the fourth - which was judged as inadequate in 2009 - was not improving quickly enough. The assessment found that parents of disabled children showed higher than average levels of satisfaction with local health services.

Cambridgeshire has a low rate of teenage conceptions, and the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally," it added. Safeguarding was also praised - inspectors said ongoing improvements to safeguarding arrangements and service delivery had impacted positively on outcomes for children and young people.

Inspectors also said child carers, nurseries, secondary schools and colleges were good at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. The assessment said the number of students achieving good qualifications is similar to elsewhere, but noted that young people from low-income families do not do as well at the age of 19. "Almost all outcomes for children and young people are good or improving," the assessment concluded.

Yours John Reynolds

Should you have any queries on the above or if I can help with any local issues, please contact me at the address below.

County Councillor: John Reynolds, 4 Hollytrees, Bar Hill, CB23 8SF. Telephone 01954 200571
john.reynolds@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

John Reynolds Jan 2011