

Report from Councillor John Reynolds

## REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS.

The County Council has recently discussed the issue of reducing its carbon emissions.

The government has committed Britain to an 80% cut in carbon emissions by 2050 and at least 34% by 2020. However, these government figures relate to the period starting from 1990.

There have been significant reductions in carbon emissions since 1990, so that to meet the government's target in 2020, there needs to be a reduction of 18% over the period 2008 – 2020.

Friends of the Earth in their *Get Serious about CO2* campaign are calling on councils to commit to at least a 40% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in their local area by 2020.

The **County Council's** Carbon Management Plan is **more ambitious** than any of the schemes mentioned above and has a target of a 30% reduction in carbon emissions in the next five years.

The County Council's Carbon Management Plan automatically includes all its schools, and the Cambridgeshire Environmental Education Service is currently working with over 100 local schools. School buildings and school transport account for over 70% of all the County Council's carbon emissions, so working with schools is vitally important.

The County Council's plans and targets are broad, strategic and more ambitious. This is because our existing targets are based on a much broader range of emissions sources, including schools.

## ECO-TOWNS

Housing Minister has announced proposals for a second wave of world leading eco-towns and pledged to double the money to a total of £10m to support councils in developing their plans.

In July, Mr Healey announced that four locations had met the tough standards to become eco-towns. The Housing Minister announced that a further nine local authorities are considering plans to develop new communities to eco-town standards.

These major new developments will need to meet the pioneering green standards set out in the eco-towns planning policy statement published in July. Proposals for sustainable developments need to include 5,000 homes and demonstrate innovative ideas for how jobs, schools and services are delivered in low carbon ways that will help in the UK respond to climate change.

The question is will these proposals include the upgrading of Northstowe to the new eco-town standards.

In July, he said that £5m would be made available to help councils develop a second wave of proposals. Today, he gave another boost to councils and announced that a further £5m is available to fund low carbon demonstrator projects. He also announced a new 'Eco Town Network' would be set up in conjunction with the Town and Country Planning Association, acting as an eco workshop for councils to come together and share ideas.

Possible second wave bids are still at an early stage and will be subject to further, widespread consultation on proposals, before public consultation and local planning approval to meet the following standards.

- the toughest standards for sustainability, with smart meters to track energy use, community heat sources and charging points for electric cars

- smart, efficient, homes - at least 30 per cent of the homes must be affordable - taking their energy from the sun, wind and earth. The possibility of being able to control the heat and ventilation of their homes at the touch of a button; and sell their surplus energy into the grid
- all homes located within ten minutes' walk of frequent public transport and everyday neighbourhood services
- Greenspace, including parks, playgrounds and gardens making up two fifths of the towns. Children will attend local zero carbon schools, making use of the paths and cycle ways
- zero carbon developments, not just homes, including shops, restaurants and public buildings. Car journeys should make up less than half of all journeys. And all the homes will reach at least level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes - including higher standards for energy efficiency, and water efficiency. These measures, including those for recycling and waste could save a typical home £200-500 a year in energy bills.

This announcement comes days after Mr Healey announced the toughest ever standards for greener buildings, including the future zero carbon standards of new non-domestic buildings, such as offices, shops, hotels and warehouses, and the energy efficiency levels for new homes from 2016. He also pledged £3.2m to boost research into energy efficient homes.

The question is will these proposals include the upgrading of Northstowe to the new eco-town standards.

## DISAPPOINTMENT AT GOVERNMENT REFUSAL TO TACKLE PRIMARY PLACES DEMAND

The County Council has expressed disappointment that the Government has refused Cambridgeshire extra funding to provide more primary school places.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced £300m to help local authorities under pressure from increases in pupil numbers which are higher than expected. A total of 34 local authorities received funding ranging from £1m to over £24m each - but Cambridgeshire's bid was rejected.

Primary schools throughout the county - particularly in Cambridge City - are facing unprecedented pressure from rising birth rates and an increase in primary-aged children moving into new housing. But the County Council was told it did not meet the DCSF criteria for the extra funding despite a 20% increase in births in Cambridgeshire between 2001 and 2007.

The DCSF states that the money was awarded to those local authorities' facing exceptional growth in the number of four and five-year-olds. Cambridgeshire quite clearly meets this criterion.

## INSPECTION of CHILDREN'S SERVICES

An inspection of Children's Services run by Cambridgeshire County Council has concluded that the service performs well. Inspectors from OfSTED - the Office for Standards in Education - said children got off to a good start with a higher than average proportion of childminders and childcare settings being good or better.

"This is also true for nursery and primary schools, with the proportion judged to be good or better, above both similar areas and nationally. Almost no provision is judged inadequate," they said. The inspection found that performance in fostering and adoption agencies and private fostering arrangements were good. Inspectors said one children's home was judged to be outstanding.

Overall, they said effective action was being taken to safeguard children. Educational achievement at the age of 11 and 16 is high, but the difference in performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their peers becomes wider as they get older.

"Overall achievement at 19 is good and a high proportion of young people are engaged in education, employment or training," the inspectors' report added.

The 'performing well' rating contributes to the County Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which is published on December 9.

## GOVERNMENT GRANT OFFER LITTLE CHRISTMAS CHEER FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

Cambridgeshire is having to face up to the challenge of dealing with a tough budget after Government have given the county one of the lowest county council settlements in the region. The Government has given the County Council a rise of 2.2% on last year's settlement as compared to Norfolk county council being handed a 5.3% increase in grant, Suffolk's 4.4% and 3.3% for Essex.

The County Council will do everything it can to work with partners and communities to protect frontline services but warns tough decisions will have to be made. The Council, which has a strong record for management of resources, is already putting in place plans to save £113 million over the next five years. Although expected, the provisional grant means, Cambridgeshire – the fastest growing county in the country – will receive an increase of just £2.06 per person.

With a growing population and people living longer, together with higher utility bills, providing services for Cambridgeshire costs more and more. The settlement represents just a third of the overall budget of the Council and the authority will be keen to hear what is happening to other grants due to the people of Cambridgeshire.

It is right and proper that we tighten our belts during a recession and we are up to the challenge of doing that. Work has already begun to save £113 million over the next five years. However, although inflation is low the cost of delivering some services is high and set to grow even further. The £2.06 extra given per person will have to meet the cost of any increases in road maintenance, social care, respite care for children and libraries at a time of rising unemployment, when spending in the public sector is being expected to support the economy and bailing out the banks.”

The Council will face similar pressures to neighbouring authorities but seem to be the poor relations when it comes to being given money, despite being one of the fastest growing Counties in the country. We are committed to working with communities to protect frontline services but this settlement and any future bad news from the Government means we will inevitably have to make some tough decisions.

## CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PERFORMING WELL - SAYS WATCHDOG

A report by independent Government watchdogs says Cambridgeshire County Council is performing well and improving most things that matter to local people.

The Oneplace report, which was published on December 9, looks at the Council's objectives and how well it is meeting them. The report is a new way of looking at how public services across the country are working and has a different scoring system than previous measures.

Cambridgeshire was given three out of four for the key indicators of managing performance and use of resources - therefore an overall score of performing well.

It says that many public services perform well and effective action is taken to improve services. It added that indicators show that in 2008/09 the Council improved over three quarters of issues it identified as most important. Residents enjoy good access to Council services and this is getting better.

The Council works well with partners to improve the area. Leadership is strong and there is an increasing focus on improving the lives of those people in the county who need it most and councillors have also effectively championed community issues.

According to the report, the Council is good at managing its money and financial planning is very good. Appropriate funding is provided to address Council priorities. It is improving most things that matter to local people. Children's services, waste management and transport planning are good services.

Recycling rates remain among the best in the country and are improving. Services for adults who need care are improving well.

Educational achievement is generally good. Educational achievement at the age of 11 and 16 is high and overall achievement at 19 is good with a high proportion of young people either in education, employment or training.

The Council works well with other local organisations to improve the area, particularly in relation to health improvement. Levels of crime are rising but antisocial behaviour is not perceived to be a major problem, although this varies across the county. The report says too many people are killed or injured on Cambridgeshire's roads, but this is reducing.

Leadership from councillors and senior managers is strong. Better planning is helping to put resources into important areas such as addressing inequalities and building better communities.

Changes in management arrangements have helped to further improve services for adults and communities. The Council now is working better with local people to understand their needs and helping to improve people's lives in poorer areas of the county

The Council has recruited and developed capable people. This, together with a good understanding about what needs to get better, means that continued improvement is likely. Spending is comparatively low and services are good. The Council manages its money well and financial planning is very good, supported by detailed research. Funding is clearly set against Council priorities. The Council understands and watches its costs and links this to performance. Efficiencies and savings have been achieved. Key projects are allocated appropriate finances. Financial reporting is accurate, reliable and timely.

The Council buys services based on identified local needs. Value for money is achieved when buying goods and services and the Council works with other councils to improve value for money. The Council is relatively well prepared to understand the impact its use of natural resources has on the environment.

## CAA Organisational Assessment - key findings

### **General**

- \* Overall, Cambridgeshire County Council performs well. The Council achieves what it sets out to achieve. Many services are improving.
- \* The Council provides good value for money. Services are good and expenditure is comparatively low. Good information helps councillors to make better decisions and monitor performance.
- \* Value for money is achieved when buying goods and services. and the Council works with other councils to identify ways to improve value for money.
- \* The Council knows what works well and what needs to improve. Major projects and programmes are kept on track. The Council sets itself challenging but realistic improvement targets.
- \* Leadership from senior managers and councillors is strong.
- \* Councillors have shown a clear commitment to supporting communities. In the recession, £500,000 was given to voluntary agencies to help them support communities, individuals and businesses facing the effects of the recession. Councillors have also effectively championed community issues.
- \* Libraries are better. Redevelopments have improved services available. Whilst satisfaction dropped below average in 2008/09, this was whilst redevelopments were taking place.

### **Children and Young People**

- \* Children get off to a good start. A higher than average proportion of childminders and childcare settings is good or better. This is also true for nursery and primary schools.
- \* Educational achievement at the age of 11 and 16 is high and overall achievement at 19 is good. A high proportion of young people are engaged in education, employment or training.
- \* However, Too much secondary school and sixth form provision is only adequate. Fewer young people from low income families go on to university; those whose circumstances make them vulnerable do less well than others as they get older.

## **Tackling inequality and improving outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances**

- \* Services for adults who need care are performing well and improving well. Support for carers increased during 2008/09 and adults have more choice about the care services they receive. However, only 28% of local residents believe that older people can get access to the services and support they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to.
- \* Provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is satisfactory, but only half of special schools or pupil referral units are good or outstanding and one pupil referral unit is inadequate. Performance in fostering and adoption is good; although too many children's homes are judged as satisfactory, one is outstanding.
- \* The Council treats people fairly. Residents enjoy good access to Council services and this is improving - the contact centre has been recognised as the best public sector call centre. The Council's website has improved and there are an increasing number of on-line services.
- \* More work is needed, but the Council is beginning to address inequalities in how services are provided across the county.

## **Sustainable communities**

- \* The Council works well with partners to deliver growth. The Council is ensuring new communities will have the facilities they will need, with provision for new libraries, schools and health and community facilities in growth areas.
- \* The Council is successfully encouraging people to use public transport; with a website providing better information and 40 % more rural parishes served by regular public transport. The council promotes alternatives to car usage to tackle congestion, such as the Guided Busway. But satisfaction with transport information is below national averages and is worse than in 2006/07.
- \* Too many people are injured or killed on Cambridgeshire roads, but this is reducing
- \* Waste is well managed; high levels of waste are recycled and composted and the amount of waste going to landfill is reducing. New facilities offer the opportunity to increase recycling further.

## **Promoting improved skill levels and economy prosperity**

- \* The Council is now paying more attention to the local economy, and has responded to the recession by making economic prosperity a new priority for 09/10.
- \* Prompt action has lessened the effect of the recession on local businesses and communities. New businesses registration in the County is achieving council targets. However, due to the recession, targets to reduce the number of people receiving Jobseekers Allowance in Fenland have not been achieved.
- \* The Council has begun to address low aspirations in young people in less wealthy areas.
- \* Effective advice and guidance on employment is given to disadvantaged groups, in partnership with other councils and the voluntary sector.

## **Meeting the challenges of climate change and enhancing the natural environment**

- \* The Council is clear about how it will address climate change, and has developed some of the necessary policies to address climate change. Some good work is reducing carbon emissions, although more is needed. More schools have travel plans, and the number of children travelling to school by car has reduced by 1.6%. But the Council did not meet its target to reduce the mileage travelled by employees.
- \* The natural environment is better protected, and the Council now manages 166 sites to increase the diversity of plants, animals and insects found there, exceeding its target of 155.

*Yours,*

*John Reynolds*

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*I wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year*