

Baroness Scott – Full Council speech, 21 May 2019

Ten years on and I would like to start my annual council speech with a quote.

I make no excuse for quoting someone else as often the words of others can succinctly and adeptly sum up a situation better than your own words.

The quote penned by Warren Bennis - a renowned leadership expert is that:

Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality ...

In my view these words are a reflection on each one of us here today –

As individuals, and perhaps more so, as a powerful collective.

This time ten years ago – in 2009 – Wiltshire Council was just a month old and had just elected its first set of councillors. Our brand new council had a clear vision ...

To deliver strong and resilient communities.

So, ten years on – have we – as the elected leaders turned this vision into reality?

On 1 April 2009, the ninth largest unitary authority - Wiltshire Council - was formed to deliver more than 350 services with an annual spend of around £1 billion.

A decade on and many things have changed...

But - some things have remained a constant:

- Strong collective leadership
- A clear vision
- Robust financial management; and,
- Delivering services that make a positive difference

If you recall the bid to become a unitary council was predicated on three main themes:

1. Devolution and working with local communities
2. Improving customer focus and reducing confusion – and;
3. Being more efficient – we said we would save tax payers millions of pounds

In May 2009, the first unitary election saw 98 new unitary councillors elected replacing the former 252 county and district councillors.

At the first full council meeting, the vision and priorities for this council were decided.

The vision - to deliver strong and resilient communities – has underpinned and remained steadfast in every decision and action that we have taken throughout the ten years.

And, our priorities also stand firm ten years on:

To protect those who are most vulnerable; and,

To support the local economy – creating and safeguarding jobs.

I want to reflect on our collective and collaborative working since 2009 and the difference that we have made to the people we serve.

There is no doubt that our local communities have become stronger.

The introduction of 18 community area boards in 2009 has seen more and more responsibilities, services and funding devolved to local areas to enable decisions and actions to be implemented based on what's needed and what's right for each of these very different communities.

So far, we have allocated more than £15 million to support the delivery of local projects and schemes. For every £1 that we allocate £7 in match or additional funding is secured.

The total investment in local communities over the 10 years is more than £100 million.

Funding has been allocated for highway improvements, young people's activities, older people's wellbeing schemes, footpaths and high street enhancements, and to support hundreds of local clubs and groups to grow and prosper.

Evidence and data is collated to identify local issues.

Funding is targeted to make a difference and to combat these issues.

From tackling obesity in children, to chlamydia testing for teenagers, to reducing levels of air pollution and speeding across the county's roads - particularly in rural villages - we have worked with local communities to deliver real outcomes and improvements over the past 10 years that matter to people and that make a positive difference.

And, we know that Wiltshire is rich in community spirit.

In the last decade we have seen thousands (more than 6,000) volunteers helping to deliver services and provide support to help make our county even better.

Today, almost 900 volunteers support our 31 libraries.

Many others give their time to assist in our children's centres, work with refugees to help with their settlement, keep the many public footpaths open and accessible so that people can enjoy our beautiful countryside, support

walking and cycling groups across the county, and many other sports and activities - and we have many – especially young people – that help older people - to use digital technology and keep connected – which today is essential.

Across Wiltshire there are many community groups that step up to help in the event of extreme weather conditions.

They have plans for snow and ice, and flooding, and they can respond quickly and effectively in a local area.

We recognised that as a large unitary council our focus needed to be on strategic decision making and delivery of services.

Services that are best delivered locally should therefore be devolved to town or parish councils.

We have transferred, and continue to transfer, a range of assets and services that reflect this.

The largest transfer of assets and services to Salisbury City Council both in 2009 and 2016 is the model of devolution that is being applied across the county.

Last year saw a package of services transfer to Devizes Town Council and there are many other towns currently in negotiation.

This approach will ensure the future sustainability of these vital local services that matter to our communities.

This council and its collective leadership has always focused on robust financial management.

Since 2009 we have saved and invested millions.

The move to unitary afforded us the opportunity to deliver significant financial savings and efficiencies.

In 2009, we inherited a property estate of more than 105 premises.

These have now been rationalised.

We invested in the refurbishment of three main office and community hubs – creating modern, flexible, fit for purpose space, and considerably reducing our annual running costs.

We have learnt to use this space well – and we were ahead of the government on the One Public Estate programme.

By 2010 we were already co-located with Wiltshire Police in Monkton Park.

We now share space in all our main hubs and campuses with a range of partners and businesses - Wiltshire Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service, health services, pre-school nurseries, Visit Wiltshire, Good Energy, Wiltshire Probation, AONB and Citizen's Advice.

This approach of co-location not only generates income but improves our partnership working.

Local community groups and visitors are welcome to all our hubs and many are used by groups outside of service delivery and opening times.

In the early years as a new authority we were fortunate to reap the financial benefits of the merger.

I'm sure that none of us will forget the economic downturn and the austerity measures that hit the country in 2010.

It resulted in a huge impact on local authority grant funding.

These challenging austerity measures combined with increasing demand for some vital services meant our resilience and ability to adapt and adjust was truly tested.

We had to find additional savings and each year this got tougher as we realised we had already reaped the financial benefit from becoming a unitary.

We knew we had to do things differently.

We needed to transform how services were delivered so that we could meet the increasing demand and reduce cost. I am proud of what we have achieved in challenging times.

The number of children needing our care and support is increasing.

I am proud to say we are rising to that challenge. It's not always been an easy journey by any means, but following a disappointing inspection of children's social care in 2012 we successfully turned that around and received a Good outcome from Ofsted in 2016. – which is no mean feat. We're due another inspection imminently on our children's services, and even though it's always an intense experience, we're looking forward to showing the inspection team how far we've come again over the last few years.

We continue to invest in social care and in particular social workers, as their expertise and skills will drive our service forward. We held a successful recruitment campaign to attract the very best social workers to Wiltshire, and create a culture that allows them to flourish, grow and have a long successful career with us. Together with our existing staff we have a highly skilled and motivated workforce absolutely committed to supporting vulnerable children and their families.

Working with Wiltshire Police, NHS Wiltshire CCG and the voluntary sector the Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) programme was launched to also help us respond to increasing demand.

With the focus on early intervention and prevention, the programme is already making a difference for children, young people and families in Wiltshire.

A new Case Management System (CMS) for social care and keyworker staff is complete and following consultation with partners the Early Help Module has been implemented to improve partnership working.

Wiltshire's No Wrong Door service will provide wrap around support and care for young people who are at risk of coming into our care or who have recently left our care, but are considered vulnerable.

A new care leavers package was launched last year that makes sure that those leaving our care have the support they need. This covers many aspects of their future life including further education, apprenticeships, employment, housing, transport assistance, access to advice and all round support for their health and wellbeing.

Working closely with families we are gaining a better understanding of their experiences and issues and new processes co-designed with their input will be implemented.

Adult social care has been, and continues to be, a huge challenge – not just for us – but across the country.

The population is ageing and life expectancy is increasing, bringing with it rising demand and cost.

In Wiltshire 21% of our population is over 65, with more than 103,766 of our 496,043 residents aged over 65, and is projected to rise to around 25% by 2027.

We had to transform our adult social care services and change the focus to enable people to live independently in their local communities.

Our approach is to do what's right for older people; particularly those who need these services.

Working with Wiltshire Police and other partners, the Multi-Agency Service Hub, the MASH, now manages adult safeguarding issues as well as children.

We can never relinquish our role and responsibility for protecting those who are most vulnerable and in need our support.

We have done our utmost to support adults getting out of hospital as quickly as possible back to the comfort of their own home. Last year we launched our own reablement service and we are already seeing improvements in the delayed transfer of care statistics. There are still challenges to overcome but we're recruiting good staff to an already quality workforce who are all committed to supporting people.

We must strive to deliver the best and most sustainable services that offer the level of protection that's needed.

Within the last decade, the responsibility of Public Health moved to Wiltshire Council and logistically it was a big transition but it has really supported and complimented our vision of seamless working between health and social care services. In that time we have seen an increased life expectancy in Wiltshire, a reduction in teenage conceptions and taken great strides to provide even more support to victims of domestic abuse through an approved housing scheme. We have also recently introduced local area coordinators to provide vital one

to one early intervention support which has already seen individuals be empowered to do more for themselves.

Wiltshire, like everywhere, has encountered change over the last decade.

The landscape, high streets, main arterial routes, towns and some villages have seen change, growth and development.

The core strategy for Wiltshire was adopted in 2015.

It sets out the future growth for housing and employment across the county. During the period of 2016 to 2036 more than 40,000 new homes will be provided to match the changing demographics and requirements.

Wiltshire has built its reputation as a good place to do business and to live in. We have a continuing low unemployment rate and here at the council we have the highest number of under-25s working for us since 2015 and this is in no small part thanks to our EPIC staff engagement scheme.

We are home to many internationally recognised and growing companies - Dyson, Boeing, Qinetiq, Apetitio, TJ Morris, Hermann Miller, and Babcock to name a few.

Working with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership more than £500m has been invested over the years to deliver projects and improvements across the county.

We have seen the A350 widened and made more efficient, the investment into Porton Science Park that now houses leading science and technology companies that will shape future medicine and industry, and more recently the plans to redevelop the Maltings in Salisbury City Centre – a much needed step forward after the events of last year.

The south of the county is seeing significant change with the preparation for more than 4,000 troops and their families relocating from Germany.

The development plans have been underway since the re-basing was announced in 2013.

New houses, schools, infrastructure, medical facilities and community centres are either in place, or under construction in Ludgershall, Bulford, Tidworth and Larkhill, in readiness for the troops as they start to arrive from May this year.

I have been a passionate advocate of schools taking very high proportions of military pupils, and I think members of Central Government might roll their eyes a little when they see me approaching as I have been regularly asking them to provide resources for those schools during the rebasing period. It's absolutely key the troops and their families have what they need.

We look forward to welcoming them to Wiltshire - which, as I always promote - is proud to be a military county. We're particularly proud to have been chosen as the national host for Armed Forces Day this year and I hope to welcome many of you to the three-day weekend in June.

We're now in a digital age, where we expect to communicate and access services and our business transactions via digital channels. That's very different to 10 years ago, when the i-phone hadn't been launched!

The council must respond to this demand and expectations and it needs to shift to digital.

Our digital programme will introduce faster and more efficient processes and services, and our tax payers need to be able to self-serve when they choose to.

To enable this, we've provided superfast broadband to almost 95,000 homes and businesses and Salisbury is set to become a smart city with work already started on making fibre broadband accessible to every home in the city.

As well as helping residents our investment in technology has transformed our staff into a mobile workforce, no longer tied to our own desks, but able to hot-desk at any of our hubs across the county, work from home, indeed work from anywhere. This has helped us to work more in the communities we serve, has freed up expensive office space, and has helped staff with their work-life balance.

Salisbury is moving forward and I am pleased that one year on the city and Amesbury are getting back to normal.

There is no doubt that Salisbury needs to focus on its regeneration and the opportunities to attract tourists and visitors back to the city.

The two incidents last year placed Salisbury and Amesbury in the international spotlight.

No council has faced this type of crisis and the impact of the incidents has been enormous.

We can now draw a line under the events of last year and focus on the future and, having led the recovery, we should recognise that we have the agility and expertise to respond, react and restore.

Ten years is a long time, but it has gone quickly.

Each year we have collectively remained focused on what really matters – the people of Wiltshire.

Our role – whether at our local area board, or as a member of overview and scrutiny committees and task groups, or other boards and meetings – has resulted in change and improvement.

Together we have revised policies, developed strategies and implemented programmes that have transformed what we do and how we do it.

We have helped to improve people’s lives and the environment and place that they live and work in.

We should be proud of the robust financial management that has unpinned what’s been achieved, and we should all acknowledge that ten years on we are a strong, financially sound, well reputed and resilient council.

Since our formation three separate peer reviews have independently endorsed Wiltshire Council and its leadership and approach.

They said:

“We experienced a positive and community focused organisational culture”.

“The Council’s vision for its community is permeating across the council”.

“Helped by a clear vision and strong leadership, there is an emerging single view of change across the organisation among members and staff.”

“A solid track record of financial management.”

“The new Business Plan sets out an ambitious agenda for the next 10 years and there remains a resolute focus on strong communities”.

In 10 years there is no doubt that we have made huge progress. I must thank all of our officers, both past and present for their continued hard work and dedication to providing great service to Wiltshire’s residents, businesses and visitors.

We have translated our vision into reality. The time is now right for me to hand over the leadership to another. On July ninth I will be formally standing down as Leader of Wiltshire Council.

The council must continue to focus on what’s important.

We need to support and work with our communities so that they can be even stronger.

We must support those who are most vulnerable – that’s our role

And, we must continue to support the local economy and safeguard and create jobs.

To end with a quote from author Simon Sinek ...

Leadership is not about the next election – it’s about the next generation

The time is right for the next generation to take up the mantle and I hope the next ten years of this council will continue to focus on what's best for the people of Wiltshire and that as a collective working together the leadership team will continue to be a force to be reckoned with.