

Leader's speech – Budget – 2016

Since we became Wiltshire Council in 2009, I have delivered a budget speech each year that has focused on the vision and purpose of this council and what we are all here to do for the people of Wiltshire that we represent.

Our vision and values have been the constant in the past six years and these have helped us to remain focused on what really matters; particularly when we have needed to make tough decisions.

A budget doesn't drive our values nor does it drive success.

A budget enables us to deliver and to take action and do what is needed to deliver our vision – to help our communities across Wiltshire become stronger and even more resilient.

Six years ago, we developed a clear vision and a set of priorities that are still our focus today. This vision and the three priorities remain the drivers for how we allocate resources and how we propose to spend the budget for this coming year.

We will continue to protect those who are most vulnerable in our communities; especially older people, disabled people, and those children who need our care and protection. Our previous investment in the development of our MASH – the multi-agency safeguarding hub – has led to a highly effective approach to information-sharing between partners to quickly identify and act on safeguarding concerns.

We will do all we can to make sure that we boost the local economy by creating new jobs and safeguarding existing jobs; with particular emphasis on higher value jobs, and we will make sure that working with schools and further and higher education, we have a skilled workforce to meet the needs of employers and that we have the infrastructure to support local businesses.

In the current financial climate we know that we need our local communities to do even more for themselves.

We will provide the support and resources to enable them to become stronger and more resilient so that they can manage the pressures and problems that they face. Our communities are unique: vibrant, engaged, and proactive and they can determine what they need and how best this can be provided. This partnership between the council and communities needs to continue to flourish and grow so that together we can provide the services that are needed and improve the health and wellbeing of our residents as an outcome.

Let's not forget that we are a complex business that spends £900 million each year on more than 350 services. The changing demographics, such as people living longer, are driving up the demand for our services. This, combined with inflation and the reducing grant from central government means that we have to find savings in the coming year's budget of over £25 million.

And, whilst we are becoming more adept at saving money – each year it gets tougher.

In the early days of becoming a unitary council making the savings that were needed was easier - we had the opportunity to merge support functions, reduce our management costs and streamline some services and functions. In fact, we saved more than £120 million in the first five years by doing just this.

Today, the reality of having to make further savings is not easy – it is tough and it is challenging. Difficult choices need to be made – and, we know that local government will continue to be targeted for some years to come and by 2020 it is looking likely that we will have no grant funding from central government. We will be expected to raise funds from our tax payers and local businesses to support the services that need to be provided.

It is important that we use the transition funds recently made available for this purpose, to ensure that our organisation is well prepared for the new challenges we face.

We have openly shared this situation with our local residents and communities and there is broad awareness of the need to make choices and to prioritise spend. We discussed the need, for the first time in six years, to increase the Council Tax (by 1.99%) and to implement the levy for the provision of social care (2%). People are becoming aware that this will mean an increase of 3.99% on their council tax bill, which will generate £15.9 million in total. This income is vital if we are to meet the demands for key services. At the public meetings held last October, and more recently, local people have been extremely helpful in conveying their views and ideas and almost all have appreciated that this is not an easy task that we face.

I'm not sure if it makes the situation any better, but it's not only Wiltshire Council that is affected and having to review what it does and how it can continue to focus on and deliver its priorities. Across the country, councils are making savings and cutting and reducing vital front line services. In other counties – it has been well publicised – that there will be no children's centres, no funding for young people's activities, no support for the arts, no grants for voluntary and community groups and vastly reduced services in libraries, leisure and other community services.

This won't be the case in Wiltshire.

The savings we need to find will come from reducing the number of managers across the organisation, better procurement of supplies and services, generating more income, reducing some service areas where the impact is less on local people and communities, reducing grants to voluntary groups and by looking at different ways to provide services working with our partners and communities.

And, unlike many other local councils we will continue to invest to improve facilities and services that matter to our local residents.

I'm proud that we have a track record of being innovative and of being a pioneer in the way we do things. We continue to lead the way in how we work with communities and the role of our area boards in engaging local people and seeking their views on what they need and what's best for them in their local area is still unique to Wiltshire.

The government is talking about devolution - our devolution started more than six years ago. We always recognised the need to change and to amalgamate if we were to deliver savings and improvements. We also knew that public sector organisations could either seize the opportunity to work together for mutual gain and the benefit of local residents; or they could retrench and struggle to make savings and deliver services at the detriment of local need.

In Wiltshire we seized the opportunities and we now consider it the norm to share buildings, resources, and front desks with other organisations in both the public sector, such as the Police and the Fire Authority, and the voluntary sector, for example Citizens Advice Wiltshire; and to work together to solve issues and deliver actions that make a difference.

And, we will continue to push further on devolution and look for greater sharing of assets and resources. Our communities will be encouraged to do more locally and to have the assets and resources they need to do this. Services that can be provided locally, wherever it's possible, will be.

But for me the real devolution card is the joining up of health and social care. Whilst in Wiltshire we have very few delayed social care transfers from our acute hospitals – due to the excellent work of our social care teams. We need now to work harder together to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, recognising that more can be done to assist people to live independently and to be able to access the support and services that they need in their local communities.

As you are all aware in Wiltshire we have 15 per cent more older residents than the UK average and whilst this presents a huge opportunity – as many older people are healthy and fit and willing to volunteer to support the delivery of our services – but it also places a huge demand on both social care and health services.

Our health and wellbeing board has made great strides and working together we are integrating health and social care to deliver better and more local services. We are focused on prevention and support.

Wherever possible we want our older residents to be more active, to not be lonely or isolated and to be part of their local community. I am delighted that Wiltshire is fast

on its way to becoming the first Dementia friendly county where people living with Dementia and their carers can lead an active life in a safe environment.

Work to establish a single approach to sharing information between organisations is also well underway and is part of delivering more efficient digital channels to deliver efficiencies and to meet customer expectations.

Our programme to invest is aligned to our priorities and we need to continue to meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Children and older people will see budgets being allocated to meet the increasing demand.

Working with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership we have seen the benefit of investment; in particular the improvements to the A350 at Chippenham, the growth in the south of county – the new science park at Porton, the improvements at Malmesbury to support the expansion of Dyson, and funding to support the training and reskilling of people to meet the requirements of Wiltshire's employers; this will assist the military as the Army basing programme will see 4,000 more armed forces relocate to the Plain. Many of these personnel and their families will be seeking employment and will have a bank of valuable skills to offer.

By 2026 it is anticipated that 40,000+ new jobs will be created and 31,000 new homes delivered in the county.

In Wiltshire last year there were 2118 new homes, of which 635 were affordable. We realise the need to provide more affordable housing as well as extra care and sheltered housing to meet demand, and we will continue to invest to deliver these.

Investment will continue to improve Wiltshire's roads. We are spending £21 million per annum on improving roads across the county until 2020. We recognise how important this is to local people and as I mentioned previously the right infrastructure is critical to supporting the local economy.

Last year the first community campus opened in Corsham and it has been a huge success. In the first six months of opening the new fitness suite almost 2,000 inductions were undertaken and there was a 25% growth in membership. More than double the number of people use the library and there has been an increase in the

booking of space for community use. I am delighted that Corsham health clinic will also be moving into the centre this spring and I am in no doubt that there will be huge benefits all round for users and the centre.

This year will see delivery of other health and wellbeing centres and community hubs across the county. Five Rivers in Salisbury will open in March and it will be the home for the newly merged Dorset and Wiltshire Fire service. The Nadder Centre will open this year in Tisbury and will offer a range of services and facilities for the community including leisure, start up business units, a library and community space.

In total – over the next two years - £80 million will be invested to deliver centres and hubs across the county providing a range of public services and facilities that our communities need and the space for them to gather and participate in events and activities. These new buildings are more efficient and have replaced costly inefficient and deteriorating buildings.

Wiltshire Council has been ambitious since the day it was formed.

We have made huge strides towards delivering our vision; to create stronger and more resilient communities, and this won't stop...

This year will be a year of delivery.

We will see the outcome of major investment in many communities across the county, we will devolve more, we will encourage more volunteers, we will enable our communities to do more and by improving our digital channels we will improve how people can communicate, interact and do business with us.

As Henry Ford once said; “coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success”.

I think this reflects Wiltshire Council and how by working together and with our partners and communities we will continue to be a success.

This year's budget once again reflects the ideas, views and positive challenge of local residents, all of you - as elected members, our staff and our managers.

I would like to say a special thank you to the finance team, in particular our Head of Finance Michael Hudson for the production of this year's budget and all the supporting papers. I would also like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to the three corporate directors and my cabinet and particularly to Dick Tonge as the lead member for finance.

This is a robust, yet tough budget. It builds on our ambitions and our pioneering approach to delivering services and how we work with our local communities. It will help to ensure that we can continue to make Wiltshire an even better place to live and work in and visit and most importantly a place that knows its vision and priorities and keeps focused on these.

I would like to pass over to my colleague Dick Tonge, who will take you through the details of the budget.