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**Business plan consultation:
Findings from focus groups**

**Cambridgeshire County
Council**

**Summary report v2
November 2017**



Project details

Title	Business Plan Consultation: 2017 Focus Groups & Public Survey
Client	Cambridgeshire County Council
Project number	PR17147
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Executive summary

An increase in demand for services is affecting Cambridgeshire County Council alongside reductions in funding from central government. Having already delivered £215 million of savings over the past six years, it faces a further £100m of pressure on budgets over the next five years.

As part of the Council's Business Planning process it consults annually with the public. M·E·L Research is carrying out this consultation, through a household survey and focus groups with residents across the county, to understand public awareness of the Council and the financial challenge it is facing, and attitudes towards proposals for addressing that challenge. This report summarises the responses from these five focus group discussions.

Most participants did not know that core funding from central government (the Revenue Support Grant) would no longer be available after 2019-20. Furthermore, many people saw the County Council as a public sector body, confusing it with district-level or national government responsibility.

People generally preferred to keep Council-owned assets rather than sell them for short-term gain or invest for longer-term return, such as the Soham solar farm. Prevention was also favoured, though some awareness that this didn't solve the shortfall in the years ahead. There was also support for campaigning, such as to bring in extra funding from business rates (the example we discussed), providing it didn't detract from day-to-day services and didn't use too many resources.

There were mixed views about community spirit and therefore community resilience. Participants liked the idea of the Innovate and Cultivate Fund (the example we discussed), particularly larger grants, and others liked time-banking. In contrast, there were some misgivings about the impact of immigration, placing pressure on services.

Even with the background and context information provided as part of the discussion, people questioned why there were paying more in taxes but getting reduced services. The overwhelming response was not in favour of an increase in council tax. Instead, some participants believe more efficiencies could be found, including through the use of technology.

Introduction

Background

In the past six years Cambridgeshire County Council has successfully delivered £215 million of savings. But with increasing demand, it faces a further £100m of pressure on budgets over the next five years. Demand is increasing from older people living longer with complex needs, for example, and more children needing to be Looked After by the Council.

In response to this, over the past two years the Council started an ambitious programme of transformation which puts community outcomes firmly at the centre of all that it does, it took a lead in the East on the County Council's Network Fairer Funding campaign, designed to encourage the government to update a funding formula for local government which to address the needs of shire counties, and it sought to build on its income generating potential.

As part of the Council's Business Planning process it consults annually with the public to gain insight into residents' views on their priorities, how they feel services should be funded in the future and their views on the council's future budget proposals – through a household survey.

This year in addition the Council sought even more detailed information about public awareness of the Council and the financial challenge it is facing, and attitudes towards proposals for addressing that challenge. It sought to gather views from people across Cambridgeshire and from different age groups and backgrounds.

Two stages of engagement activity were planned as part of the council's consultation on priority setting and budget planning for the coming financial year (2018/19). Stage One was undertaken during October, involving five focus groups, whilst Stage Two is a door-to-door survey with the public taking place in November and December 2017.

This document provides a summary from the Stage One activity – five focus groups held in:

- Cambridge City - Cambridge, Wednesday 25th October
- East Cambs - Ely, Wednesday 25th October
- Fenland - Wisbech, Wednesday 25th October
- Huntingdon - St Neots, Tuesday 24th October
- South Cambs - Cambourne, Tuesday 24th October

A broad range of participants was required, by age, gender and working status. Each group typically shared similar characteristics (e.g. age, life stage, etc.) to broadly represent the area in which the group was held to ensure a level of homogeneity, though they may have had differing views on the subject matter being discussed. In total, 44 residents took part in the focus group discussions.

Main findings

This report summarises the main findings from the five focus groups, including to inform the public survey. We carried out the following five focus groups in October:

- Young professionals / young families (Cambridge)
- Young professionals / young families (Cambourne)
- Middle age / older families (Ely)
- Middle age / older families (St Neots)
- Empty nesters/older people (Wisbech)

General points

Most participants confused the responsibilities at county and district/city level and often at national or local government level. People readily spoke about bin collections, for example, or welfare benefits; neither are county level responsibilities. Residents reported that they pay their taxes and simply expect services to be there, regardless of which agency provides them.

“We have a street light that has gone out but who owns the street light? Wait for it, it could be the parish council who own that street light or it could be the district council that own the street light, or it could be the county council that own the street light, wait for it, it could even be part of the main trunk road route in which case it’s the highways agency that owns that street light. So when you come to things like that you have no idea who owns what.” (Male, Wisbech)

Although participants were aware that Councils had to ‘tighten their belts’ (Male, Cambourne), most participants did not know that **core funding** from central government (the Revenue Support Grant) would no longer be available after 2019-20. Many were therefore shocked at the level of savings needed.

“I wasn’t aware until you said that that money is finishing.” (Male, Ely)

“Councils, so they’re always asked... they’re asked to provide a service but also asked to cut their expenditure.” (Male, Cambourne)

“I keep seeing and hearing that this country is... not the richest in Europe... but the second richest in Europe... and why is this happening then if we’re so rich?” (Female, Wisbech)

Equally, people had trouble distinguishing between **statutory and discretionary spend**, such as over libraries.

*“They’ve cut the hours haven’t they? But the mobile library used to come to our village every 2 weeks and April this year it’s been reduced to once a month”
(Female, Wisbech)*

It was generally hard for many participants to think of the **longer-term** impact of a reduction in funding from central government coupled with increased demand for services, such as among older people living longer with complex needs or the growth in children needing to be Looked After. Equally, it was hard for some participants to recognise that a reduction of funding for services or increase in demand in one area may **increase costs elsewhere** or to other agencies.

However, there was some recognition that this might be the case. A reduction in waste collection services (District services) were identified as potentially having knock-on impacts, as demonstrated in the quotes below.

“You do have to pay council tax but we don’t get what we used to... like garden waste is now an additional cost... the ramifications of that now are if you try to go down the dump, they’ve shut the gates now while they’re changing the bins so people don’t wait, they go round the back and chuck their waste.” (Male, Wisbech)

“I don’t think they should touch waste management... and if people are going to have to pay for it then there’s going to be all sorts of fly-tipping... and that will cause more costs.” (Female, Ely)

Universal services

Most participants **didn’t understand** the nature of council provided universal services, particularly at the County level. The most widely recognised universal service cited by residents in each of the groups was the NHS. They found it hard to give County Council examples. For example, on seeing the breakdown of the 2018-19 budget, a few (Cambourne, Ely) were surprised at how little was spent on **(public) health**, confusing funding spent by the NHS more widely.

“Health seems quite low to me, just 3%.” (Male, Ely)

After discussing whether tax payers should support all services, particularly where they were only being used by key groups or parts of a community. Some participants in the older group felt that it was right for more of the costs to be picked up by service users – however not all agreed. Again, health care was a particular area of focus for this group, with adult social care and independent living being a particular talking point.

“Why should the tax payer pay for your care?” (Male, Wisbech)

“If they’re going to (provide care) they should pay for everybody’s care.” (Female, Wisbech)

For the middle age/older families groups, **school transport** was one issue raised. The Ely group spoke about a village where one road gets free travel provided, while the next road does not. Although they recognised the need for a cut-off, they felt this didn’t seem fair. There were two suggestions to target this service (Ely and Cambourne): **means-testing**, such as those benefiting from the pupil premium; and **geographically isolated communities**, e.g. where bus routes have been reduced or cut.

“If you live in an outlying village, then without a doubt, yeah, a bus service to commute you in. If you live within the locality, a reasonable locality, I don’t know, 5, 3, 4, 5 miles, I don’t see that being such a problem.” (Male, Cambourne)

Another universal area that was highlighted by the older group as having services reduced was **libraries**. It was felt by some that this was impacting on the ability for educational study for children and that to keep services running, a greater reliance was being put on volunteers.

“All services and all councils... be it nationally... is they haven’t got any money... So County Councils are going to shut libraries, the most important thing for young people.” (Female, Wisbech)

“They expect the likes of people in the community to pick up the cost, the pieces... and volunteer.” (Male, Wisbech)

Alternative views on library services were held by some in the other focus groups and this is discussed in the ‘selling land and assets’ section later in this summary report.

Prevention

There was a mixed understanding about this, though feedback was **positive**. However, participants highlighted that this wouldn’t solve the budget/funding shortfall now but instead **provided longer-term gains**. There was also concern that there was a limited budget altogether, so investing in prevention would limit resources to pay for existing services, and also that existing demands on services limited the time and resources available for prevention.

“It’s harder to justify as you are putting money into things that aren’t going to be getting things out of now.” (Male, Cambridge)

“Doctors don’t have enough time to fit people in because there’s too many people. So people with any worries tend to leave it until it’s too late.” (Female, Ely)

"You never get told about the help. It's normally told by a friend or another mum. It's never the authorities that tell you what help is out there. You have to fight for everything." (Female, Ely)

The Cambridge (young professionals/young families) group raised the need to **educate earlier** at school age, e.g. with healthy eating, managing money and non-smoking.

"Educating children to eat healthy and live an active life is going to benefit their health and lead to a longer life." (Female, Cambridge)

The Cambridge group also discussed ideas around encouraging/incentivising the use of public transport, but particularly around bikes and bike schemes (such as the Ofo sharing scheme) which will keep people healthier and reduce the pressure on roads and local infrastructure.

The Ely group discussed innovative solutions used in the private sector, such as health insurers incentivising healthy behaviours.

"Could you incentivise people? [Friend] he has a Fitbit. The health insurance company reduce his monthly cost if he goes for a jog."

Community resilience

We explored this through the **Innovate and Cultivate Fund**. The Cambourne (young professionals/young families) and Wisbech (empty nesters/older people) groups felt that larger grants were better. The Cambourne group particularly liked the idea of funds to support people with learning disabilities to move into employment. However, there was a feeling from several groups about long-term **sustainability** of projects and at what point council funds would stop.

"Those little things just don't tend to last long, short-term things aren't they? 6 or 7k [is] not going to go far." (Male, Cambourne)

The St Neots (middle aged/older families) and Cambridge group linked this approach back to the **prevention** and early help approach. Time-banking was discussed in St Neots, with several people here participating in this type of community support network. It was generally felt to be a positive way of engendering community support.

"But what a good idea 'cos that's everybody coming together isn't it?" (Female, St Neots)

"Where I live, they're all friendly. It's a community. I think it's online. You have to look round for fliers and everything, still. I've lived there for nine years and I think they... It depends where you live." (Female, Cambourne)

In contrast, most groups (Cambourne, Wisbech, Ely) questioned how much of a **community spirit** there was nowadays, with few knowing who their neighbours were.

"[When the kids were growing up] A lot of neighbours we'd all talk... but now you probably don't know who lives 2 doors away from you." (Female, Ely)

"I wouldn't trust my neighbours [to take my kids to school] but you used to years ago." (Female, Cambourne)

Immigration was an issue that came out of the Wisbech (empty nesters/older people) group as a (perceived) pressure on services and having an impact on community cohesion.

"I think, in this area, we've got major immigration, and they I have to say this they do have a lot of children and they're sapping the services." (Female, Wisbech)

"We had to pay in with our National Insurance...before we took anything out, but they're coming with 2 or 3 children and they're getting everything." (Female, Wisbech)

By contrast, one respondent felt that aiming for a better life for themselves and their children was understandable.

"I've looked at it from both sides, if you had a child or you were about to have children and the opportunity was there to come to England to better your life and your children's life, then you'd grab it. So I do not blame them in any way." (Male, Wisbech)

The theme of migrants and the impact on services also came up in the Cambridge but was not directly attributed to issues around community resilience.

Selling land and assets

The background information provided an example of developing housing projects on land the council owns, creating more housing in Cambridgeshire and generating £7.2m in income to protect frontline services.

Most participants felt this was a **short-term option** that provided income immediately but lost assets for the long-term.

"Well, if you sell off your family silver, you can only do it once." (Female, Wisbech)

"Short term fix." (Male, Cambridge)

"Like council houses, sell the council houses and put the money into a central pot and use it to rebuild houses but it never got done." (Female, Wisbech)

"The only problem with that is once you've sold it, it's gone." (Female, Cambourne)

Instead, the Wisbech, Ely and Cambridge groups suggested the Council should consider selling land, but on a **leasehold** basis, therefore retaining some income.

“Could they lease the land in some way or get involved with the developer to get involved in some way with affordable housing...actually retain control over the land in some way.” (Female, Ely)

“It seems like renting or leasing is more of a sustainable solution.” (Male, Cambridge)

With any extra housing, though, there was recognition of the need for **wider infrastructure**, such as schools and GP surgeries.

“They should build doctors surgeries and they should build roads. I’ve just moved to Soham and it’s getting bigger and bigger but there’s no infrastructure. All the village children are not going to be able to go to Soham village college anymore... you talk about health but in Soham you have to book an appointment 2 weeks in advance, well how do I know that I’m going to be ill in 2 weeks? Or I can book you in 2 weeks after you’re better. So in one way it’s good that they’re building houses but they’re not building anything else.” (Male, Ely)

Some of the groups (Cambourne and Wisbech) questioned why the Council would sell **arable land** when we need to provide food for ourselves in future (most likely linked to Brexit).

Some participants considered **selling derelict buildings or even old airfields**, particularly if they’ll be used for housing, which is in short supply. Of course, the Council may not own such assets. A few of the groups (Cambourne, Cambridge, Ely) suggested the Council should develop houses themselves. One participant (Cambourne) spoke about the many homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation, which is also seen as a high cost.

There was some debate over **libraries**. In Ely (middle aged/older families) there were questions asked on perceived dwindling usage of the libraries, linked to the increase in digital technologies and downloadable content.

“I know they’re trying to shut the libraries, but how many people actually still use the libraries?” (Female 1, Ely)

“I think it’s the older people.” (Female 2, Ely)

“I’m amazed they’re still free.” (Male, Ely)

Again, statutory provision was not widely understood, even where redesigned service provision was being made available. For example, those in the Wisbech group mentioned changes to the mobile library service. The Cambourne (young professionals/young families)

group suggested getting rid of traditional libraries (buildings) altogether, taking their books to schools and providing mobile libraries instead.

The Cambourne group suggested merging libraries with other community hubs. One participant in Cambridge was against this, but they work in a library. The Cambridge group thought that council buildings should be available for other activities and community use when they are not being used for their traditional purpose/function – this would help keep and maintain assets and generate money for the council.

“I don’t think selling is always the best idea. Reusing or multi-purposing buildings so for say if a library isn’t used at certain times, use that space for something else...” (Male, Cambridge)

The Cambridge group also felt that if there was sufficient evidence that some buildings or land would lose the council money in the short to long term, then they could **look to sell these off** to make short term gains.

“If it’s considered and there’s some analysis that this is going to lose us money over time, then yes.” (Male, Cambridge)

Invest in revenue generating schemes

Most participants **supported** this approach and particularly liked the example of the **Soham solar farm**. Some wondered whether residents would get cheaper energy. Others suggested also installing panels on Council-owned buildings.

“That’s a much better idea... 9 years really isn’t very long [to make a return].” (Female, Ely)

“It’s an incredible return rate.” (Male, Cambridge)

“[In terms of impact] It’s not quite as ‘not in my back yard’ as wind turbines... it’s interesting that they are getting involved in energy things when it’s not on their list of things they do.” (Male, Cambridge)

However, people realised that this was a **long-term plan**, taking a number of years to pay back. More information about this would help them make more informed comments.

“Is this profit? Because the initial investment is £9m and if they’re getting £1m a year then it’s going to take them 9 years to cover the costs.” (Female, Wisbech)

The Wisbech and Cambridge groups suggested investing to **attract new businesses**, which will eventually increase business rates. Although this is mostly a district/city level initiative, providing the infrastructure for new businesses would most likely fall at County level, so this is seen as an area for joined-up working.

“Gives employment to the community and then they’re getting taxed... the governments getting tax and everything, which is generating money and stopping the councils having to pay benefits and things to the people that haven’t got a job because there’s nowhere to work”. (Male, Cambridge)

“Investing in to these things, then it generates more into the community in terms of jobs, employment and all the rest of it.” (Male, Wisbech)

The Cambridge group suggested the council should be **building houses themselves** rather than relying on developers, using their own land rather than selling and if it were to be used to rent or sell social housing, it would be beneficial across many policy areas.

“Build more houses, social houses... and then rent them at a fairly low cost and in the not too near future they can pay themselves back and you also get to build more house.” (Male, Cambridge)

Increase council tax

Even with the background and context information provided as part of the discussion, people questioned why there were paying more in taxes but getting **reduced services**. Waste and recycling (district service) was often cited, as were pot holes and the wider road and highways infrastructure. The older groups (Wisbech and Ely) did recognise the **growing cost of social care**, so increased pressure on budgets.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming response was **not in favour of an increase** in council tax. In fact, the Cambourne (young professionals/young families) group suggested cutting the tax instead.

The Cambridge (young professionals/young families) group suggested that any increase be targeted towards higher earners, such as the top council tax bands, as they feel that budget cuts often disproportionately affect young people.

“I think it would be better [if higher earners only had raises]... if you are on a really good salary and have this really lovely house that’s probably paid off, it would be affordable.” (Female, Cambridge)

“I live right in the centre of Cambridge and work the other side of Cambridge. I pay a hell of a lot of council tax as I live in the centre of Cambridge. I pay a hell of a lot of car tax as I’ve got a fairly big car. I feel like I’m being robbed left right and centre – business taxes are going up, so everyone who lives here, this is me you are hitting the most with what you are suggesting, to be fair.” (Female, Cambridge)

While those still working felt they shouldn’t pay any more, Wisbech older participants felt they’d already paid in **throughout their lives**, so shouldn’t pay more now. Any increase to council tax would be paid from their pensions, so simply taking from one central pot (e.g. state pensions) and into another (e.g. council tax).

"You shouldn't be penalised for working." (Male, Cambourne)

"We get our pension and then they shove the poll tax up 2%, that 2% they shove up we have to spend out of our pension." (Female, Wisbech)

"But as a government, if you like, to a certain extent with pensioners particularly, you're giving them with one pot and taking with another." (Male, Wisbech)

The Cambridge group felt that if any increases were going to happen, then **communication** is vital to let people know what the rises were going to go towards, to make them more tangible for people to understand:

"If you communicated what the raise was going towards people would be more sympathetic. If you said we were going to raise it by 2% and it would go towards building a school in the north... or whatever metric you were going to use, people would be more sympathetic." (Male, Cambridge)

Campaigning

People were supportive of this option, e.g. to bring in extra funding from business rates (the example we discussed), providing it didn't **detract from day-to-day services** and didn't use too many resources. Some participants suggested this could be done in **partnership**, e.g. other shire councils or even centrally for all councils.

"I think anything you get back is worth having but it just depends what you take to get it." (Male, Wisbech)

"I think it's a good idea but seeing as they've done so many staff cuts, how are they managing? They can't do everything can they?" (Female, Ely)

"I think canvassing by going to the government to get £500,000 just by asking rather than by generating it themselves, then it's got to be worth it hasn't it?... If you say government funding is going to stop in 2 years, then extracting what they can before that has got to be a good thing." (Male, Ely)

"You don't need teams and teams of people, you just need a couple of people who know the area." (Male, Cambourne)

While there was general support for this approach, and praise for the example provided, some participants in Wisbech and in Ely questioned what the cost would be if this approach was unsuccessful in securing funds. It was therefore felt that any activity of this type needed to bring in sufficient additional funds to ensure the time spent was not a cost and detracting from day to day service delivery.

There were also a number of questions (in the Cambridge group) as to how large these pots of money were. Who else could bid for them and why there were other central government

pots of money available when local government budgets were being cut and that money should be treated as coming from one larger pot.

“It’s not free money – it comes from somewhere.” (Male, Cambridge)

A number of participants in the Cambridge group felt that the council should be trying to be **self-sufficient**, rather than relying on central government.

“The council should be more independent, self-dependent, rather than rely on government.” (Male, Cambridge)

Efficiencies

With background information provided, in the main residents recognised that, like other public sector organisations up and down the country, the County Council have had to make extensive efficiencies and savings. As identified in the council tax section above, they were now starting to see how the ongoing budget pressures were impacting on services – paying more but getting less.

By comparison, some of those in the Wisbech group (empty nesters/older people) spoke far more critically about **wastage** and inefficiencies. One respondent felt like they were paying for a lot for Council time, including councillors going on an overseas trip to see a service in action.

“We had a case recently I heard, of Cambridge County Council sending an investigation team how they were doing X, Y, Z was it in the Bahamas, I can’t remember now but it was somewhere nice and warm! If I want to go on holiday I have to pay for it... that’s what it is, it’s a jolly.” (Male, Wisbech)

For some of those in the young professionals/young families group in Cambourne, there were questions on whether cost savings could still be achieved, linked to senior management roles.

“It would be interesting to know what the salaries are of some of the top officials are.” (Male 1, Cambourne)

“And actually know what jobs they’re doing, like many places it’s top heavy and they don’t do half the work of the people on the ground floor.” (Male 2, Cambourne)

The Cambridge group felt that tackling the larger areas of spend, particularly under the ‘**people and communities**’ budget should be the focus to see where further cost savings could be made, as this looked to have the most potential.

“They need to look at the biggest costs and look at whether there are cost savings to be made there – these have the biggest gains.” (Male, Cambridge)

While the older groups were more critical of using technology to make efficiencies, in contrast, the younger Cambridge group suggested using **technology** and even artificial intelligence or automation to improve and make cost savings in service delivery. Several suggested digital and self-serve models (Ely). One group (St Neots) discussed turning off **street lights** at 2am or putting them on sensors for safety.

In Japan they have an ageing population and use robotic healthcare assistants and use them in old people homes to reduce requirements for real people...It could be skype calls to people’s homes rather than robots to check they are okay.” (Male, Cambridge)

“A lot of it can be done online. I mean we’ve all filled in forms that seem to take forever. I think they could spend a bit of money so we can do a lot more online.” (Female, Ely)

One participant in the Cambridge group, who worked in **adult social care** herself, spoke of significant inefficiencies and excessive costs borne by councils in this area. She spoke about the high cost of care homes, agencies and the money made by these organisations, instead suggesting that services are taken in-house. Some participants (Wisbech and Ely) questioned what was included in ‘back-office’ functions and how much this could be reduced, however others recognised the savings that had already been made.

“I think something needs to be done about some of these companies charging as much as they do... I know what the companies earn and what the staff earn ...they are charging up to £1,000 a week and councils have to fund this. You could have 24 hour care for what they are charging.” (Female, Cambridge)

“Back office functions get 9%, that’s ridiculous.” (Female, Wisbech)

“Social care it says here. Adult health residential placements per year one person £38,000. It’s all run by different private companies and they are obviously pushing the council into doing it for their own monetary gain.” (Female, Wisbech)

Participants felt they had **limited information** on what had already been saved through efficiencies and therefore could only comment on what they were aware of.

Priority areas

Participants in all of the groups struggled to prioritise which of the approaches they felt would best help move the council forward. This was mainly due to the wider support for many of the investment and prevention type approaches, but with the recognition that benefits from these were much longer term.

Only the selling of assets or potential increase of charges for services appeared to provide any income in the short term, but this was not liked if it meant that this did not protect the longer term viability of any assets (e.g. a leasehold approach to housing development).

In terms of improving community resilience, participants could not see how this would provide any short term gains.

All groups rejected increasing council tax.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Topic guide

Appendix 2: Focus Group Handouts

Appendix 1: Topic guide

Welcome and introduction (5 minutes)

- ◆ Introduce self and M·E·L Research, an independent market research company
- ◆ Housekeeping - H&S, fire exits, fire alarm, etc. toilets, mobile phones switched off
- ◆ Consent to take part, be recorded, transcription, use of data in report (sign in sheet for signatures)
- ◆ No right or wrong answers
- ◆ No names given in the report or for quotes
- ◆ Discussion will last approximately 1½ hours

Background and warm up

The study is being conducted on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council to help them better understand residents views on living in Cambridgeshire, the council services used by residents , how important these are to residents and what approaches to saving money the council could take into account. All information provided will be treated in the strictest of confidence and you will not be identifiable within the results.

- ◆ **ROUND TABLE:** Please introduce yourself (first name) and tell us a little bit about how long have you lived in Cambridgeshire?
- ◆ What do you think is good about living in Cambridgeshire? Why is that?
- ◆ And what is not so good? Why?

THANK AND MOVE ON

Council services

Before we get fully underway I would like to quickly remind the group of the types of services that the County Council are responsible for and what your local council is responsible for – [refer to sheet].

- ◆ How closely did this information match your understanding of the different services provided by the two councils?
 - ◆ Where there any surprising services? Which ones/why?
- ◆ Who can tell me how councils are currently funded to allow them to deliver these services?
 - ◆ Central government grants
 - ◆ Business rates (but partly redistributed by Central Government)
 - ◆ Council tax (including precepts)
 - ◆ Fees and charges
- ◆ Quick show of hands, how many people were fully aware of this?
- ◆ What challenges are you aware of, if any, that are affecting how much money a council has to provide services in the future?
- ◆ Which services do you think the County Council spends most of its budget on? Any others?
- ◆ Why these services?

We will now be focusing only on the services provided by the County Council. The County Council provides both statutory Services, which are those it has to provide by law, such as Education, and discretionary services which it doesn't have to provide, such as [home to school transport].

HAND OUT INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT CAMBRIDGESHIRE – HOW MANY OLDER PEOPLE, SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN, HOW MANY MILES OF ROADS, HOW THIS WILL CHANGE IN NEXT FEW YEARS, COSTS OF DIFFERENT SERVICES – WHAT'S SPENT ON A RESIDENTIAL BED FOR AN OLDER ADULT, CHILDREN IN CARE, BUILDING OR MENDING ROADS, RUNNING A LIBRARY, ETC.

- ◆ How closely did this information match your understanding of the cost of services provided by the County Council?

- ◆ Where there any surprising services? Which ones/why?

The County Council has so far made £215 million in efficiency measures and savings since 2013/14. Like all council's up and down the country, Cambridgeshire County Council is continuing to have its budget reduced due to the reduction of Central government grants. The reduction in funding since 2013/14 in Central government grants has been £60.5m and this is due to fall further, actually becoming negative in 2019-20.

- ◆ Based on this information what do you think the council can do to meet these budget pressures? Why is that?

USE ANSWERS TO COVER FOLLOWING TOPICS. INTRODUCE THOSE NOT MENTIONED AFTERWARDS.

The council is considering a range of cost saving and revenue generating options. One of these could be a move away from the provision of universal services, which is aimed at all residents, to focusing on those most in need.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ Which services do you think this would apply to? Why is that?
- ◆ How would you define those as 'most in need'? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that? And what about the impact on the wider community?

A further option could be to consider spending more on prevention and early help, looking at what could be done more to prevent people needing more expensive services later on.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ Which services do you think this would apply to? Why is that?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be to increase community resilience and for greater support to be provided by local communities.

- ◆ What do you think is meant by increasing community resilience?
- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ Which services do you think this would apply to? Why is that?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be to increase income by selling land, or by increasing charges for services.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ What other things could the council consider?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that? HANDOUT - COUNTER ARGUMENT IS HOUSING OR OTHER DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD – HOW WOULD PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT THIS?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Alternatively, the council could invest in revenue generating schemes, such as Soham solar farm.
HANDOUT

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ What other things could the council consider?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?

- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be to increase council tax.

HANDOUT WHAT VARIOUS BANDS PAY PER WEEK/PER MONTH, WHAT AN EXTRA 1% MEANS. INCLUDE INFORMATION ON NEED FOR REFERENDUM IF INCREASE OVER CERTAIN PERCENT (2%/5%).

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ What other things could the council consider?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be for the council to spend some of its time and energy campaigning for additional national funding.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ If it were seen as a good idea, who in the council should do this?
- ◆ How do you think that this might impact on the council delivering services? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be for the council to look at further efficiencies.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ What areas should the council consider? Why is that?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Another option could be for the council to work more closely with partners, perhaps delivering services in a different way.

- ◆ What do you think about this option? Why is that?
- ◆ What areas should the council consider? Why is that?
- ◆ Which are the most important areas that the council should consider when working with other organisations? Why is that?
- ◆ How could this work in practice? How likely do you feel this would work in practice? Why is that?
- ◆ What impact would this approach have for you? Why is that?
- ◆ And what about the impact on the wider community? Why is that?

Are there any other suggestions or thoughts on how the council can best manage its budget in the coming years we haven't so far covered?

Of all of the options we have discussed, which one should the council focus on initially? And which ones should follow?

THANK AND CLOSE: Thank you, that's all the questions I have.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Handouts

Cambridgeshire County

Like many parts of England, Cambridgeshire has 2 tiers of local government:

A County Council, plus:

District, Borough or City councils

County councils are responsible for services across the whole of a county, like:

- education
- transport
- planning
- fire and public safety
- social care
- libraries
- waste management
- trading standards

District, borough and city councils cover a smaller area than county councils. They're usually responsible for services like:

- rubbish collection
- recycling
- Council Tax collections
- housing
- planning applications

Parish, community and town councils

These operate at a level below district, borough and city councils. They're elected and can help on a number of local issues, like providing:

- allotments
- public clocks
- bus shelters
- community centres
- play areas and play equipment
- grants to help local organisations
- consultation on neighbourhood planning

They also have the power to issue fixed penalty fines for things like:

- litter
- graffiti
- fly posting
- dog offences

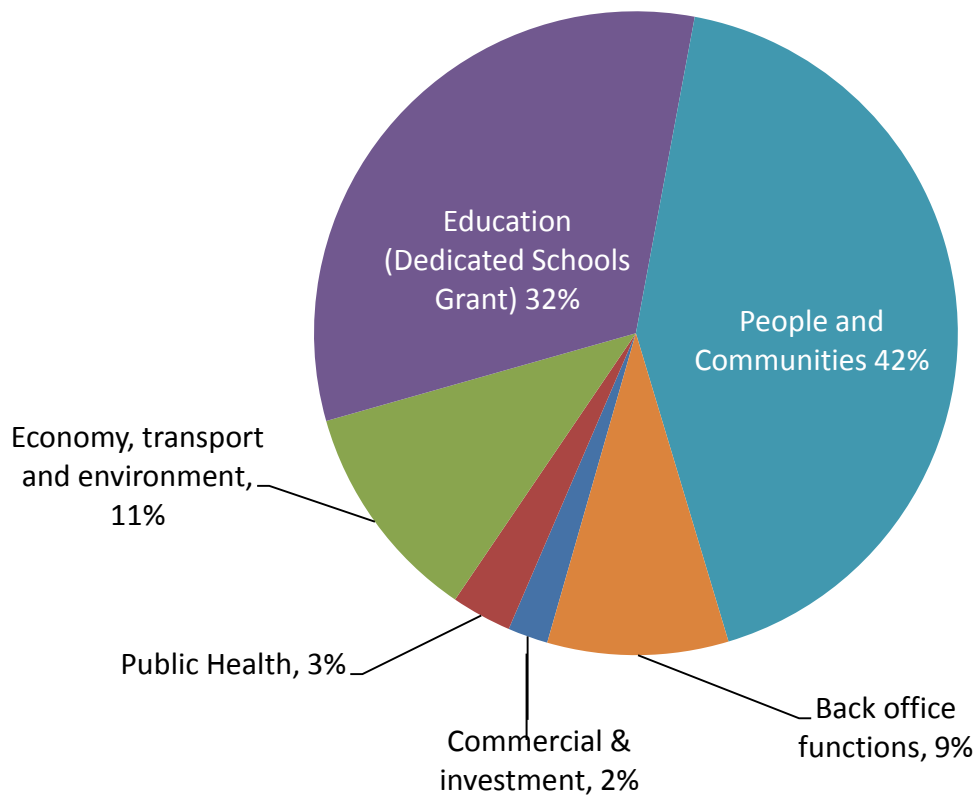
County Council budget

How the council spends money on services is laid out each year in their Business Plan. Over the previous five years they have had a reduction, in real terms of £124 million in the budget. At the same time the population has grown by 92,500 people placing more demands on services.

Cambridgeshire also has an aging population (a forecast increase in 16% for people aged over 80) which means that the demands for care are increasing each year.

The chart below shows how the current £780 million budget is divided amongst the various services:

Net budget for the Council for 2018-19:



People and Communities

- Support over 10,000 young children aged 0-5 through our network of children's centres
- Work with more than 250 schools to ensure over 80,000 children get the high quality education to which they are entitled
- Support more than 3,000 children with statements of special educational need and help support those who have some level of special educational needs
- Provide more than 1,000 disabled children and young people with short breaks, including more than 65,000 hours of individual support and around 4,300 overnight stays
- Safeguard children at risk of harm and support vulnerable families to improve their situation
- Look after children in care, finding them adoptive parents and supporting around 475 children at any one time in foster and residential care
- Care for over 7,500 people in their own homes
- Commission over 1.8 million hours of care for older people in their own home
- Provide social care services to over 10,500 people
- Provide social care services to over 2,700 people following discharge from hospital

Economy, Transport and Environment

- Oversee the strategic plans for economic and housing growth in Cambridgeshire
- Lead the work on transport strategies for the county as a whole
- Maintain 2,800 miles of roads, 2,400 miles of footways, 1,500 bridges and 55,000 street lights
- Invest £1.5 million in community developed transport schemes
- Provide for approximately 3.7 million single Park and Ride bus journeys and 3.2 million journeys on the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway
- Transport 15,000 children to school every day
- Manage over 300,000 tonnes of waste, of which over 53% is recycled
- Intervene in rogue trader cases involving over 180 victims and in excess of £500,000
- Grit around 1,300 miles of roads and footpaths
- Help 20,000 people benefit from adult learning
- Deliver 60 highway improvement schemes working with local communities
- Welcome 2.5 million visitors each year to our libraries
- Register 15,000 births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths

Corporate Services (back office)

- Handle 450,000 enquiries
- Handle 84,000 non phone contacts
- Receive 2,460,000 unique web site visitors
- Manage 900 Freedom of Information Requests and 100 Subject Access Requests (an individual's request to see their personal information that we hold)
- Manage the Legal, IT, HR, Finance, Property and Payroll services that keep the council functioning.

Public Health

- Commission NHS health checks for about 21,000 people
- Help nearly 3,500 people to quit smoking
- Commission about 19,000 appointments with NHS services to test for and treat sexually transmitted infections
- Provide public health advice to the local NHS and the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Work with Public Health England to prevent the spread of communicable diseases

Social care costs

Placement type:	Weekly average	Annual average
Residential care (average of both dementia and non-dementia)	£506	£26,320
Looked After Children (LAC) – independent fostering	£800	£41,616
Special Educational Needs (SEN) placement for a service user autistic spectrum disorder	£1,365	£71,000
Community placement for a service user across Adult Physical and Learning Disability	£534	£27,778
Adult Mental Health residential placement	£736	£38,272

Budget shortfall

In the past six years, Cambridgeshire County Council has successfully delivered £215 million of savings while still providing good quality services, but over the next five years it faces a further £100m of pressure on budgets.

Delivery of £31m of savings in 2017/18 is on track, and the Council is now working on plans to deliver further savings in 2018/19.

Taken together the Council goes into its budget planning round this Autumn with a £37.5 million gap between the money it receives from the government, from council tax, business rates and the income it makes – and the amount it needs to spend on services. This includes additional pressures, such as:

- A sharp increase in the number of older people needing care.
- Increasing numbers of children needing home to school transport.
- Increased numbers of vulnerable children needing protection.

Council Tax

Council tax is collected by one of the district or city councils on Cambridgeshire County Council's behalf. Of the total gross spend of £780 million that the council had budgeted to spend in 2017-2018, the council will raise £263 million from council tax.

Band D Council Tax for 2017 to 2018 is £1,190.43. This is a 2% rise in the County Council element of Council Tax compared to 2016-2017.

Any increase above 2% would need a local referendum. However council's providing social care, such as Cambridgeshire County Council, are allowed a further increase for social care costs. In December 2016, this was up to an additional 2%, so 4% overall without triggering a local referendum.

County Council contribution (Precept)			
Increase	Additional funding in 2018-19	Weekly cost to band D	Annual cost to band D
1%	£2,640,000	£0.23	£11.96
2%	£5,287,000	£0.46	£23.92
3%	£7,941,000	£0.69	£35.88
4%	£10,602,000	£0.92	£47.84

County Council	Band D Council Tax 2017-2018
Norfolk	£1,190.79
Suffolk	£1,149.03
Hertfordshire	£1,186.62
Cambridgeshire	£1,167.12
Essex	£1,130.13
Lincolnshire	£1,128.83
Northamptonshire	£1,111.25
Shire county average	£1,175.09

Soham Solar Farm

A new 12MW solar farm built by Cambridgeshire County Council was officially launched in Soham on 19 June 2017. With 45,000 photovoltaic panels across 70 acres, the solar farm will generate enough electricity to supply more than 3,000 homes each year – and has the option of sheep grazing to keep the grass low. It will also avoid the release of 123,000 tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime.



This is the first Local Authority project in England to receive Contracts for Difference (CfD), a finance incentive for the energy generated, and will create £1million revenue a year from an initial investment of £9million.

The success of the solar farm has inspired the County Council's ambitious Corporate Energy Strategy, which can change the way services are designed and change how they manage their buildings and land assets to generate income, reducing both energy usage and carbon emissions.

Selling land for housing

One example of this is developing housing projects on land we own – creating more housing in Cambridgeshire and generating £7.2m in income to protect frontline services.

One of the first of these initiatives – for 350 homes in Burwell – got the development green light in September 2017.

Campaigning

Cllr Steve Count – Leader of the Council led negotiations on a ground breaking pilot deal with Government to retain additional growth in business rates, making Cambridgeshire one of only two areas in the UK to have successfully secured this concession (as at June 2017).

The retained business rate pilot is initially for three years, rewarding the county for any growth in business rates above forecast. In years two and three the forecast is increased by inflation and a stretch target of 0.5%.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has recently released the payments for the first year of the pilot, which saw Cambridgeshire as a whole generate £2.5 million.

£453,207 (18%) goes to Cambridgeshire County Council, with the County's five District or City councils retaining 80% of the additional growth generated in their area, and the remaining 2% going to the Fire and Rescue Service.

The County Council's General Purposes Committee has agreed to use this additional income as a resource to support services that care for vulnerable children and adults in the county.

The council are also looking to the future, and working with the County's MPs and the national body The County Council's Network to take a strong message to Government, that historic underfunding of large rural counties cannot continue, via the 'Fairdeal4Cambs' campaign.

Community resilience

On September 27th, around 60 community groups, social enterprise and voluntary organisations interested in the Council's Innovate and Cultivate Fund came together at a workshop in St Ives to see how they could apply for funding for projects and ideas that help address the need of local residents.

Previously known as the Cambridgeshire Communities Innovation Fund, the refreshed fund makes it easier for groups to apply for small grants of £2,000 - £10,000 and which help deliver Council priorities locally - helping innovative ideas to grow. The Innovate and Cultivate Fund has two funding streams:

Cultivate - small grants of £2,000 - £10,000 aimed at encouraging local networks where people help themselves and each other

Innovate - larger grants of up to £50,000 for big projects with big ideas that demonstrate an innovative approach within one of the seven funding priorities for Cambridgeshire

More than £170,000 has already been allocated from the fund, with successful applicants to date including a group supporting parents of children with disabilities and another which supports people with learning disabilities to move into employment.



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