

**Budget Speech**  
**to be delivered by the Leader of the Council**  
**Councillor Tony Briggs**  
**19 February 2014**

The last few years, more than any other in the council's history, have been a time of innovation, creativity and change.

Over the last few years we have achieved things that will stand out as landmarks in the history of Havant Borough Council. Through bold decisions and innovations we have changed the way we work and the way we are seen.

Some of our achievements stand out, obvious and proud. In 2011 we moved into the Public Service Plaza, a state-of-the-art building that has revitalised the way we connect with our community.

But not all the changes we have made are so visible. In fact some are remarkable for the fact that our residents may not have noticed them at all.

In 2009 our annual budget stood at £18.6m, now it has been reduced to £14.4m. It is a huge decrease in budget and has been brought about without any impact on frontline services.

That is an incredible achievement and one we are rightly proud of.

We have been able to do this only because of the bold changes we have made to the way we run, how we look at problems and how we find solutions.

We have forged partnerships and found savings, we have become flexible and light on our feet. We have created more ways of delivering the same excellent services with fewer resources.

The challenges are not over, of course. They keep being set and they must keep being met. But when I look forward to the future I have confidence in the knowledge that Havant Borough Council has shown itself to be tough enough and talented enough to thrive under any conditions.

We will need that resilience because as I look to the future I believe our council will undergo more dramatic changes than ever before.

We must ask ourselves fundamental questions about what our council is for. What do our residents want from us? How are we going to provide it to them?

As people change the way they think about their local council and the way they want their services delivered we will have to change too. Local Government is evolving at speed and we must adapt if we are to continue to inform public behaviour and reflect public demand.

Of course we will continue to review our ways of working and examine new ways of delivering our services – but this will only take us so far.

Simply changing what we do may not be enough. We may have to change what we are.

As councillors we will have to create a new vision of the future by being bold and making brave decisions focussed on our customers' needs.

We will have to reconsider, not just how we deliver services, but which services we deliver and, just as importantly, which ones we no longer deliver. We will have to be enablers rather than service providers. We will have to lead the community to solutions but not carry its burdens.

Partnerships will be increasingly important and our alliances with East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire County Council and many other organisations will be crucial.

We must also forge stronger links with our communities. We must talk with residents and understand their needs. We must ensure what we are offering is what they want from their local authority.

Using insights and data we can create a personal service for our residents, tailoring the services we provide to the individual.

The community itself will be at the centre of modern local government, taking on more authority and being more hands-on. Residents will be more involved in setting the agenda and delivering a service - their service – than ever before.

In the future our role may not be to drive projects forward but to pave the way and allow the community to take control.

But equally we must not forget our duty as community leaders and our responsibility to keep the borough safe, clean and more prosperous.

We need to make sure we articulate our needs to PUSH and the Solent LEP to ensure that Havant is not ignored. Investment will bring more affordable homes and greater employment opportunities to bolster our economy and maintain the area's financial sustainability.

The ready delivery of affordable homes is vital for a thriving borough and I am delighted to see we had exceeded the entire target of homes in 2013/2014 by the half way point of the year.

We have helped promote economic growth in the borough. The Dunsbury Hill Farm development is a flagship development, which will create more than 6,600 jobs and adding £44.3m to the local economy and £72.5m regionally.

These successes can not be achieved with good working practices alone. To have a truly excellent council you must have an excellent team.

We acknowledge the valuable contribution that the staff have made in very difficult circumstances. The advances we have made as an organisation would not have been possible without their determination, flexibility and attention to detail.

The quality of our staff as a body can not be better exemplified by their efforts over the winter to stave off the threat of flooding from so many of the borough's homes.

You learn about people in testing times. And throughout December and January we saw our staff dealing with this difficult situation in a professional and sympathetic manner.

Our progress was further demonstrated in January when a delegation of respected councillors and chief executives visited the council. They carried out a Peer Review, examining in close detail our systems, structures and strategies.

The visiting team were impressed with our commitment to innovation and commented on our desire to push the boundaries of local government.

They praised our focus on the residents and local businesses and the clear political direction provided by the Cabinet.

We have achieved these successes in a difficult financial climate and without an impact on public services or placing a heavy burden on the borough's taxpayers.

And that principle will be in evidence again in 2014/2015 when we are looking to once again freeze Council Tax at its current level.

The Government settlement is down again, and our forecasts for the next few years show that it will continue drop by about £1m over the next four years. To accommodate this we must prepare to reduce our budget by £1.3m by 2018.

We can do this partly through using the New Homes Bonus, which rewards the council for each new property delivered to the borough. And we can improve our position through asset acquisition and generating income. We must become more commercial in our approach to increasing our income base and in the way we deliver our services.

But we must also continue our work to find the right ways to provide the right services to our residents and we must not be afraid to abandon old methods and embrace new ideas to do it.