



PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL
A year of achievement



**ENTRY FOR THE MUNICIPAL JOURNAL BEST ACHIEVING
COUNCIL OF THE YEAR AWARD 2010**



A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENT

Ambition

Plymouth is an ambitious city. Partners share an ambition to transform it by 2020 into one of Europe's finest and most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by all. The Council's own ambition for the authority is to be rated as 'excellent' by 2012.

In 2009 the City Council delivered an unprecedented programme of change to deliver these ambitions and transform services for local residents.

All these changes were delivered in the context of an increasingly difficult economic environment and few local authorities can have carried out so many challenging projects at the same time.

Many of the issues addressed in 2009 had previously been seen as too large, difficult or contentious to take on. The fact that they were carried out at the same time, and in a difficult economic climate, reflects the scale of the Council's ambition for itself and the community.

A key driver has been the ambitious growth agenda for the city. The vision is to make Plymouth the economic hub for the South West. This involves making the most of its natural setting, expanding the population of city and surrounding area by 100,000 and creating 42,000 new jobs and 30,000 new homes by 2026.

ABOUT PLYMOUTH

Plymouth has a population 252,000

A further 100,000 live in the travel to work area

Plymouth City Council is the 15th largest urban authority in England

79 per cent of Plymouth residents are satisfied with their local area

Streets in Plymouth City Centre were awarded a five-star rating in the 2009 Clean Britain Awards

Plymouth is home to the biggest naval base in Western Europe

Smeaton's Tower, a former Eddystone lighthouse that stands on Plymouth Hoe, celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2009

Transforming housing

Perhaps the biggest change for many residents was the transfer of more than 15,000 Council owned homes to a new landlord, Plymouth Community Homes, unlocking £160 million of investment into housing in the city. Sixty-seven per cent of tenants voted in favour of the transfer and tenants are now seeing their homes transformed and brought up to a higher standard, with a programme of works that includes new kitchens, bathroom and windows.

Citybus

At the same time as delivering the huge housing stock transfer project, the Council carried out an exercise to value a council-owned bus company Plymouth Citybus. The aim was to assess its value, raise capital funding and minimise future risks as the company needed significant investment to remain competitive. This was a very contentious issue, with the trade unions at the company launching a vociferous campaign to try and stop a potential sale. However, the Council presented a very compelling case and the company was sold to the highly regarded bus operator Go Ahead for £20 million. Negotiations resulted in a deal that meant drivers' jobs were guaranteed for 12 months – a big achievement in the current climate – the continued operation of the school routes and a commitment to reduce the average age of the bus fleet by March 2011. Go Ahead also committed to providing easy access buses to help disabled passengers by March 2011.





The Life Centre

An even bigger scale project was under way at the same time. We planned, consulted on and gained planning consent for a £46.5 million Life Centre project, which will provide new sports and leisure facilities aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Plymouth residents and putting the city on the national and international sporting map. It will be a regional centre of sporting excellence and will provide the only 50 metre swimming pool in the region. The new diving facilities will replace the council facilities currently used by world champion diver Tom Daley. Work has now started on site and the centre will be open by the end of next year.

We also started the process of putting the management of its leisure facilities out to tender, a process that will be completed in 2010.



Developing high quality places to learn in

There was an unprecedented amount of change for thousands of Plymouth school children in 2009. Not only did pupils in the city – including looked after children – achieve their best ever GCSE results, many are now enjoying some of the best learning environments in the country.

Three new schools opened in Plymouth over three days in September. These schools, which are already winning awards for their environmentally-friendly designs, bring the number of new schools opened in Plymouth over the last few years to nine.

Last year work also started on a £36 million new community campus in Estover, which is the second community campus in the city. The local community is looking forward to a new library on the campus and being able to use new leisure and sports facilities which include floodlit sports pitches and a four court sports hall.

In December 2009, it was confirmed that Plymouth had successfully bid for up to £80 million Building Schools for the Future funding to continue to transform education in the city.

Planning a future waste solution and increasing recycling

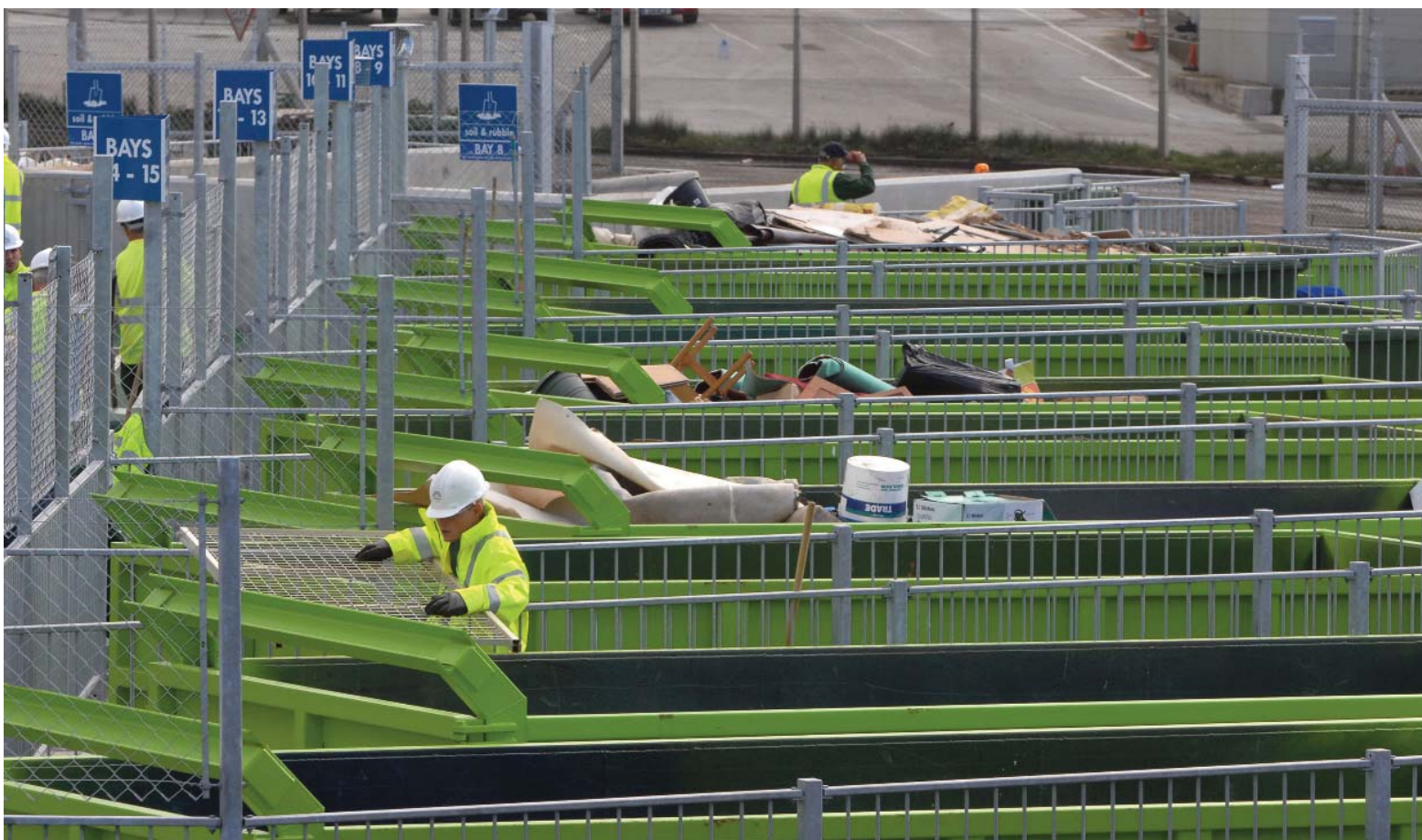
The Council has taken major steps forward in its plans to deliver a sustainable solution to the future disposal of the city's waste. It has formed a partnership with neighbouring authorities in Devon and Torbay to build an energy from waste plant. The partnership has secured a £85 million PFI credits for a new plant and an extensive public consultation and tendering exercise is now under way.

We also tackled long standing problems and inefficiencies in the city's rubbish and recycling collections through a huge refuse collection rezoning project that started in Autumn 2008 and completed in 2009. It introduced new rounds across the city, using a new fleet of vehicles, improving efficiency and significantly reducing complaints about missed collections.

Recycling facilities for Plymouth residents were also dramatically improved with the opening of a £3.2 million improvement scheme at the Chelson Meadow Civic Amenity site. This is helping improve recycling rates and has won praise from customers for making it easier to recycle household waste.

Delivering a permanent gypsy and traveller site

As the sale of Citybus showed, we have not been afraid to tackle controversial issues. In 2009 we took plans for a new permanent gypsy and traveller through an often stormy public consultation and planning process with the aim of fulfilling our duty to provide a site when there's a clear need for one. The new permanent site identified and approved in 2009 will help us address a problem of unauthorised encampments that cost us £160,000 in legal and clean up costs the previous year.





Supporting the economy

The recession had a deep impact on the Council and the local economy in 2009. Plymouth City Council was one of the first councils to put together a comprehensive package to support the local economy and local businesses during the recession. Its Market Recovery Action Plan was designed to encourage investment to continue in the city by allowing a more flexible approach to planning.

We also supported the local economy directly by delivering a a £3.2 million scheme to regenerate the West End of the city. The scheme has breathed new life into the district by reintroducing on-street parking and providing high quality landscaping.

The severe challenges in funding the capital programme meant pressure was mounting to delay or abandon the scheme but we considered that the recession meant it was more important than ever that we supported the local economy. It was opened in December 2009, in time to help retailers make the most of Christmas trading.

We also supported the economy by carrying out a £500,000 refurbishment of the city's main Theatre Royal multi-storey car park. The new look car park contains a range of customer friendly features including prepayment for theatre goers and trained staff on standby to help, whether it is by providing directions, loaning an umbrella or charging a flat battery. The refurbishment supports the regeneration of the West End and the car park has already won an award for safety.

Improving culture and leisure

There have been numerous improvements in other areas. For example, in January the City Museum and Art Gallery reopened after a £1.5 million refurbishment. It is currently hosting its biggest ever exhibition – a celebration of the Plymouth born artist Joshua Reynolds, which has grabbed national attention.

Last year we also opened a spectacular new library in Plymstock as part of a joint development with a housing association that delivered 12 shared ownership apartments and 15 rented homes, including some designed for people with disabilities. The scheme has already won a national award for 'Best National Contribution to the Community'.

Work on another new library in Devonport was started and the scheme will bring a former Georgian church back to life. Another new library is planned in Plympton, as part of a scheme that will also include health facilities.



A beautiful place to live

We take great pride in our city and we are increasingly working with the local community to deliver environmental improvements. A reflection of its success in this area is the annual Plymouth in Bloom campaign, which hundreds of residents, community groups, schools and businesses take part in.

In 2009, the city won a clutch of top awards in both the South West in Bloom and Britain in Bloom competitions.





World Cup Host City Bid

The Council demonstrated its ambition for the city when it joined a bid for Plymouth to become a potential World Cup host city if England secures the tournament in 2018. The Council worked hard with its partners, including local authorities across the South West peninsula, to pull together a high quality bid and in December it was confirmed that had been successful. It was particularly heartening that the quality of Plymouth's bid was highlighted for praise by the FA.

The Council's improvement journey

The Council's ambition to be excellent is a bold one, given that only five years ago Plymouth City Council was still in a state of some turmoil, following a series of difficult Audit Commission assessments and languishing at the bottom of the league tables of council performance. In 2002 it was rated as weak, before being downgraded to poor the following year. The Council was not well regarded by its partners and management was weak.

The Council worked hard to improve but struggled as the depth of the some of the problems in some areas meant that overall performance was slow to rise above an overall CPA rating of two stars and 'improving well'. It narrowly missed out on a three star rating in December 2008 due to some remaining performance issues in adult social care, which have now been resolved. Adult social care is now rated as a three star service, which is 'improving well'.

Improving performance and building partnerships

The Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Organisational Assessment published in December 2009 reflected the success the Council has had in transforming its services, building partnerships and delivering improvements to the people of the Plymouth.

The Area Assessment reflected the very strong relationships the Council has built with partners in the city. It was awarded a green flag for its exceptional performance in protecting local people and the Assessment said the Council and partners work 'extremely well' together to protect people in large scale emergencies.

The strength of the partnerships was put to the test when Vanessa George was arrested for abusing children in a privately-run day nursery in August 2009. The Council worked very effectively with its partners in the police and primary care trust to support the community and the parents who were affected by this appalling case.

The Organisational Assessment of the Council showed the extent to which it has improved in some key areas and it concluded that overall the council now 'performs well'. It now scores three out of four for managing finances and three out of four for managing performance.

The report says that 'since 2006 the Council has made significant progress from a low position' and that it is 'delivering real change and improvement on the ground.'

In a few years the Council has been on an improvement journey that has taken it from being one of the worst councils in the country to one boasting a green flag, assessment scores averaging three out of four and an Audit Commission assessment that it is 'improving well'.

Internal change

In 2009 dramatic changes were happening within the Council as well. A large job evaluation exercise involving more than 8,000 staff was completed in 2009, with all appeals heard and a new scheme implemented. A new competency framework for all employees was also introduced.

A senior management restructure was also started and completed in 2009 and it has strengthened the management team to take on the challenge of achieving its ambition to be excellent by 2012.

The future

We believe that Plymouth has a very bright future. The city will be well placed to emerge from the recession and continue to expand its economy thanks to the work the we are doing with our partners.

This year we will be holding another Summer Festival and a 'Futureversity' will involve hundreds of children in all sorts of activities that will expand their horizons. We will also employing 60 young adults as part of Plymouth Futures Partnership. The new High View Primary will open and children will be able to sample the new facilities at the new Estover Community Campus.

We will be expanding our garden waste service, starting work on a £9.8 million scheme to improve transport in the East End of the city and building the Life Centre. This year we have already agreed a new approach to locality working that will transform the way local services are delivered in partnership and we are planning exciting joint working and local co-location of offices with our partners in health. We will also be transforming the way we do things internally and we will be working with our partners to market the city nationally and internationally.





Conclusion

There are many more changes that we delivered over the last year but those outlined above give a flavour of the main achievements. We believe that there are few councils that have delivered so much in such a short space of time and this makes Plymouth City Council worthy of consideration for the Best Achieving Council of the Year award.



Councillor Viven Pengelly
Leader of the Council



Barry Keel
Chief Executive