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Tough challenges facing Cambridgeshire are being explored in [a unique link-up between the County Council and the University of Cambridge](#).

This month, a second round of reports have been announced by Cambridgeshire County Council and researchers from the Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE). The four topics being explored are the factors that influence parents when choosing a school, the impact of rurality on the life chances of young people, moving beyond financial measurement and the effects of changes to mental health assessment.

The collaboration comes after a successful 'Policy Challenges' pilot in 2016, launched by Cllr Ian Manning to improve links between the County Council and the University by creating a space for academics and elected officials to collaborate and improve public policy through the use of evidence and expertise.

County Councillors were asked to put forward a list of longstanding policy issues that the Council faces which were then matched against the research interests of the applicants from CUSPE.

Cllr Ian Manning said: "There are other projects that allow academics to engage with central government policy but we are not aware of any other County Councils working with a university in this way to explore local challenges.

"The project is delivering benefits for researchers by allowing them access to real life policy challenges to enhance their knowledge. For the Council we are getting access to high quality reports and evidence to inform and support our decisions and impact.

"We are looking forward to working with the researchers over the next six months and taking their recommendations to committee."

In the first round the researchers looked at the next generation of models to transform organisations, the cause of the county's educational achievement gap and what actions can help to reduce deprivation inequalities in Cambridgeshire.

From this, the researchers devised reports on transformation, educational outcomes, deprivation and the definition of school readiness and came up with a set of recommendations that have influenced policy and decision making.

Simon Bywater, Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee said: "The educational outcomes report

revealed some interesting findings, including that the progress of children eligible for free school meals is generally better in schools in deprived areas than in schools in more affluent areas. It looked in detail at how schools are spending the Pupil Premium funding they receive to support disadvantaged pupils and identified several areas that are worthy of further investigation. It was agreed by the committee that we would work with the researchers to develop a template for schools to consistently report how they are spending Pupil Premium money to help us to identify the strategies that have the most impact.”

CUSPE researchers involved last year said, "It's been fascinating to see how social science is employed in local government, and the impact that it can have on policymaking." "The Policy Challenges bridge the worlds of science and policy in a way that researchers from different disciplines work together to make a significant social impact."

