

CAREER EDUCATION – WRITTEN Q&A: Ed Groome

1. What is your job role and organisation?

Executive Officer to the Chief Executive and Leader at Cambridgeshire County Council.

2. What do you do in this job?

In this job, I provide direct support to the Council's Chief Executive and Leader, while also managing projects on their behalf. I also manage and oversee a Business Officer within our team and facilitate and co-ordinate meetings and events.

3. Why did you choose this career?

I wanted to work in Local Government as it provides me with the opportunity to tangibly benefit the lives of people within local communities. Councils also provide such a wide variety of services so there is always a diverse range of work to suit your interests and passions. I initially joined the Council on a Graduate Scheme and did placements in various services which provided me with that variety. When looking for a post-scheme role, I pursued a role in the Chief Executive's Office as it gives me the opportunity to see decision making in action and to get experience working more closely with senior officers, councillors, and other significant stakeholders.

4. What background education or training do you have?

I did A-Levels in History, Economics, and IT, subjects I was passionate about and I felt that had real world applications. Following the completion of my A-Levels, I went on to University and got a BA Degree in History.

5. What has your career path been?

I left school in 2014 and attended University for 3 years. During my degree I held various temporary and seasonal roles, including as a Student Ambassador and as a guide in a Stately Home. On completion of my degree, I joined a Finance Graduate Scheme at Milton Keynes Council and was there for 18 months. I got a good range of experience working in different Finance teams across the authority and completed part of my finance training with CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting). While I loved worked at the Council, I realised that Finance was not the avenue I wanted to go down, so I decided I wanted a change. I'd come across another Local Government Graduate Scheme during my time at Milton Keynes, the NGDP (National Graduate Development Programme), and I decided to apply. I was successful in my application and started as a National Management Trainee at Cambridgeshire County Council in October 2019. During my time on the NGDP, I completed placements in the Climate Change and Energy Team, the Transformation Team and most recently in the Education Service. While in these placements, I became very embedded in the services, picking up my own responsibilities and projects, with a real focus on developing my competencies for the future. In July 2021, I was successful in applying and interviewing for my new permanent role at the Council and that is where I am now.

6. What does a typical day involve?

Days are very varied and rarely the same. Depending on the current priorities of the Administration and Chief Executive, I could be organising and facilitating an emergency meeting or writing a briefing note for a senior officer or member on a significant issue that they need to be aware of. Most days however, I will check in with my team and try and keep on top of my emails, requests and project work and answer urgent queries where I can. I've found some days that it's hard to stick to a plan or a to do list as something urgent will often crop up that you have not been able to foresee and prepare for.

7. What is your work environment like?

Due to the ongoing pandemic, most Council staff have not been based in an office since March 2020. I have been going into the office a couple of days a week recently, but we are predominantly home based currently. Including myself, my immediate team is made up of five people and we remain in regular contact with one another, but I also work closely with senior officers, members and external stakeholders who I have regular meetings and interactions with. The Council employ a flexible working policy so providing you complete your hours and attend core meetings, they are happy for you to work in the way that best suits you. This allows for a great balance between your home and work life, particularly if you're working from home when that barrier can become blurred. This allows me to give more time to things I enjoy such as exercising, travel, and seeing family. Having worked in various teams across the Council, I think it's worth highlighting that team sizes, flexibility of work hours, and working environment is all dependent upon the service you are working in as all will work differently and have separate priorities.

8. What aspects of your job are most challenging?

As with most roles I've held within the Council, I think the most challenging aspect is managing and prioritising a significant workload. As you pick up more responsibilities, more is expected of you and that means you have competing priorities. As I also work with senior officers and members who do not necessarily have time to answer questions about pieces of work, I often must work on my own initiative and decide what should take precedence. I will often look at colleague's calendars to check when pieces of work should be completed and that seems to work well. However, colleagues are very aware of each other's workloads, are very understanding, and will also offer support if capacity allows.

9. Can you give an example of a project or piece of work that you have been most proud of?

During my final placement of the Graduate Scheme, I project managed the Holiday Activity and Food Programme across Cambridgeshire, a DfE (Department for Education) funded project aiming to provide free childcare provision for free school meal children during the school holidays. I oversaw the first round of delivery of the project during the Easter Holidays in 2021; we were able to mobilise childcare, activity, and food providers across the county to deliver activities, support and food to and families who needed it most. The feedback we received from parents, children and providers alike was excellent and the model we implemented over Easter is in use again during the 2021 Summer Holidays where we were able to expand the number of places available for children across the county. I was complimented by both officers



and members for my work on this and it was a fantastic legacy to impart upon the Education Directorate when I left to start my new role.

10. How do you hope your career will progress?

I hope to continue my development and progress to positions of more senior leadership in time. I thoroughly enjoy working in the world of local government and see myself staying in it – whereabouts though and in what role is yet to be seen!