

Corporate Plan 2019/2024.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE – THE DISTRICT AND ITS OBJECTIVES

OUR VISION: Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper.

The Council is committed to working with its local communities to continue delivering good quality services that reflect the local priorities and resources which we and our partners have available to us. We use a range of information to identify priorities and planning for the future such as consultation with our residents, local businesses, population and other data as shown in the Appendix “Our Community”.

This Corporate plan considers the nature of North Hertfordshire District, its residents, potential changes in the future, challenges and policies and principles designed to meet the needs of our community now and in the future.

There are three objectives for the Council for 2019/2024 which are:

- **To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and disadvantaged people are supported.**
- **To promote sustainable growth both within and where it affects our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage.**
- **To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints.**

We continue to deliver a wide range of services both ‘statutory’ and ‘non-statutory’ on a day to day basis.

Among the numerous ‘statutory’ duties, some of which are provided at levels beyond the statutory minimum are:

- Waste collection from over 57,000 households
- 57% of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting
- Street cleansing over 400¹ miles of roads
- Food inspection of around 1,000 premises²
- Collecting council tax and Business rates from almost 57,250 homes and 4,400 businesses
- Planning for the second largest district in Hertfordshire at 145 square miles.
- Issuing of approximately 2,150 licences to premises and licenced individuals, around 550 licences to taxi and private hire vehicles and drivers and in the region of 850 temporary licenses to premises/individuals
- Homelessness provision
- Housing Benefit to around 6,800 claimants
- Regulation e.g. Parking, Fly-tipping

Among the numerous ‘non statutory’ services we provide are:

- Leisure centres in Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston
- Five swimming pools including 2 outdoor pools
- Maintenance of 100 hectares of parks and gardens
- ‘Splash’ parks in the four towns.
- Museum provision in the new North Hertfordshire Museum in Hitchin
- Local information and signposting to other services and providers

¹ North Hertfordshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan to support the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031

² <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/authority-search-landing/en-GB/159>

- Active Communities events
- Collection of garden waste

Underpinning the provision of these services are the following considerations:

- Providing value for money to residents.
- Actively engaging in partnerships, shared services or alternative delivery models.
- Seeking new service provision which can generate income for re-investment by the Council to protect long term delivery of non statutory and other Council services.
- Prioritising consideration of the impact of any service changes or introductions on service users.

None of these objectives can be addressed in isolation as each impacts upon the other, as described below.

OBJECTIVE 1. Attractive and Thriving

To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents where diversity is welcomed and disadvantaged people are supported.

An Attractive Environment.

The Council has a large public realm in both the rural and urban areas of the district. Considerable resources are used to maintain and improve these areas and we are committed to working with organisations such as Groundwork, the Countryside Management Service, community and 'Friends' groups to ensure that North Hertfordshire remains an attractive and thriving place to live.

Illustrative of this policy are:

- Ensuring that our renewed waste and street cleansing contracts continue to provide as efficient and effective a service as possible whilst continuing to maintain recycling rates
- Providing joint delivery of waste, street cleansing and recycling service including the most efficient means of transportation and disposal with East Herts District Council
- Delivering identified improvements to green spaces to include
 - Construction of pathway and roadway, Wilbury Hills Cemetery, Letchworth.
 - Renovation of play area, District Park, Great Ashby
 - Improvements to car parking and bridge access at Walsworth Common Hitchin
 - Replacement of items of play equipment at Chiltern Road Baldock
 - Review of investment in green space across the district to ensure it is properly aligned to usage
- Investigating a range of options to improve the use of Council assets
- Designating air quality management areas in Hitchin to address the improvement of the air quality of the area – Stevenage Road and Payne's Park.
- Grant funding organisations sharing in the delivery of our objectives

A Safe Environment

The residents of North Hertfordshire have identified low levels of crime as the most important consideration. The Council helps build a safe environment through our Community Safety Partnership. North Hertfordshire has the third lowest crime figures compared to the rest of the county with 55.8 crimes per 1,000 of the population compared to 69.7 per 1,000 of the population for Hertfordshire.³

Whilst the recorded crime rate has increased across the districts; with North Hertfordshire experiencing a considerably lower crime rate than most, the reporting of domestic abuse is on the rise. This may

³ <https://www.police.uk/>

represent an increase in real terms or a reflection of a greater confidence to report incidents knowing their concerns will be taken seriously.

- We will continue to work closely with our Community Safety Partnership and support providers. Regular consultations with Hertfordshire Police with members through the committee structure
- Support for community groups such as 'Street Angels, Hitchin' (who patrol Hitchin Town Centre at weekends assisting late-night revellers) and others concerned with community safety also assists in creating and maintaining a safe environment.

Welcoming Diversity

North Hertfordshire has good community relations and works closely with and provides financial support to the North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum to ensure that our various ethnic groups integrate into the area.

As part of the Council's zero-tolerance approach to hate crime, North Hertfordshire District Council has recently become a third party reporting centre (This third party reporting centre is a safe place where victims and witnesses to a Hate Crime, or incident, can safely and confidentially make a report without going directly to the police) by:

- Designating Hate Crime Champions who are on hand to assist any member of the public wishing to make a report of hate crime through the Council.
- Maintaining the framework instituted for dealing with issues relating to vulnerability, radicalisation and exposure to extreme views. The Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation guidance acknowledges that we are well placed to be able to identify safeguarding issues and this guidance clearly sets out how the council will deal with such incidents and identifies how our vision underpins our actions.
- Conducting an annual review of all relevant council decisions which have equality implications and ensure the annual cumulative equality assessment is publicly available.

The substantial increase in the number of residents over the age of 70 requires consideration of future services supporting older people to live independently. The Council developed 'Careline' which provides assistive technology for North Hertfordshire residents and works in partnership with a number of other organisations in the region to support independent living services. We are working with our partners to consider how best to support carers and those living with dementia. The new multi-agency Dementia Alliance and Hertswise collaboration with Age UK [Herts] is in the early stages of development and aims to maintain and develop support for those affected by dementia over the medium and longer term. We are active members of this development and will -

- Continue the expansion of independent living services
- Continue the work with Dementia Alliance and Hertswise

The combination of the Better Care Fund and the Disabled Facilities Grant by central government supports the provision of better conditions and services for the elderly and disabled.

Locally, we provide support through our Careline scheme which has continued to expand across and outside Hertfordshire and enables older residents to live at home longer independently. Satisfaction with this service at over 99% is exceptionally high.

Supporting Disadvantaged People.

North Hertfordshire is a prosperous area, however, it does contain three areas classified as 'most deprived'. North Hertfordshire is also an expensive place to live. The Council is committed to tackling housing need through the provision of affordable housing through the planning process. We are also committed to working with our health and other partners to identify and address homelessness, recognising the link between poor living conditions, rough sleeping and mental and physical health conditions. Partners in this include 'settle' (previously known as North Hertfordshire Homes) and the Sanctuary, a homeless hostel in Hitchin. The Council seeks to minimise the use of bed and breakfast and works with its housing partners, such as North Herts Homes, to secure high quality temporary accommodation.

We will

- Provide access to debt and budget management advice including through the Citizens Advice service which we continue to significantly fund to address the pockets of deprivation. We also provide support to the Black Squirrel Credit Union, a local volunteer credit union who provide low cost loans.
- Continue to offer apprenticeship and work experience in a range of services to provide a step on the career ladder.
- Use the Planning process to deliver affordable housing
- Continue work with partners to address homelessness.
- Improve on-line benefit claims and payments to better serve those most in need.

OBJECTIVE 2: Prosper and Protect

To promote sustainable growth both within and where it affects our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage.

Sustainable Growth

The Submission Local Plan was subject to an extensive Examination in Public, potential sites were subject to individual and group representations made to the Inspector. The forthcoming Modifications put forward by the inspector will be subject to a further consultation process.

We recognise that tensions exist in creating opportunities for growth both to sustain the local population and to meet the growth aspirations of neighbours, including the impact on rail and road networks and the green and open spaces so important to our residents.

- We will review both existing and future green space provision.
- We will represent the authority with regard neighbours plans, policies and aspirations such as with the expansion of London Luton Airport, the growth envisaged within the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge Arc and London.
- Conclude the review of the Council's Car Parking Strategy to ensure it supports our corporate objectives.

We will continue to promote schemes with our partners to increase energy efficiency of residents' homes and reduce use of water, generated power and increase our sustainability for the longer term.

- We will maintain the six electric charging points for vehicles and install more where funding permits

The refurbishment of the District Council Offices will substantially reduce its carbon footprint by

- the incorporation of renewed Curtain walling to improve thermal performance and
- new low energy cooling & ventilation to significantly reduce energy consumption in the building
- increased usage of energy efficient LED lighting in our buildings where feasible.

Economic and Social Opportunities

The district has a considerable daily outflow of commuters to both London and increasingly to Cambridge.

Johnson Matthey, NHDC, Altro and the retail and hospitality sectors constitute our largest employers. We work with the Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEP], the business sector, three Business Improvement Districts [BID] companies to identify opportunities for inward investment to increase our employment base and encourage new enterprise.

We will

- Continue to implement our Economic Development Strategy for the district including the provision of an Economic Development Officer to work closely in partnership, increasing inward investment and business development opportunities.
- Exploit the opportunities offered by new enterprise zones
- Continue to support local business through our Go Local Policy – for 2017/18 38% of our total spend on goods and services was spent with suppliers with an NHDC postcode.
- There is a changing environment within our Town Centres. We will be specifically looking at working with our relevant stakeholders to find sustainable solutions.

Three of our four towns have BID companies. These companies use the additional business rate levy and individual memberships to contribute to various activities including:

- Community cinema in Royston
- Tourist information
- Street wardens
- Trade recycling
- Food fairs
- Street entertainment
- Festivals

We will continue to work with these companies.

Cultural and Physical Heritage

We aim to ensure North Hertfordshire is a place where people can prosper and we protect our heritage.

This aim is delivered through:

- Progressing the Local Plan through to adoption
- Following the redevelopment of the Council's office accommodation, explore opportunities to share that accommodation with other partners to increase financial and resource efficiency.
- Support North Herts Homes' regeneration of John Barker Place, Hitchin to provide new homes and better shops.
- We will be reviewing the provision of social housing with all of our social housing providers. Our aim is to ensure good provision within the context of the emerging Local Plan
- Agree projects for delivery of improvements to urban and rural community facilities through the £1m Capital Enhancement Fund.
- Support Community events and local organisations through provision of relevant officer support.

OBJECTIVE 3: Responsive and Efficient.

To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints.

Cost Effective and necessary services

Over the last few years the percentage of our overall funding that we receive from government has fallen from around 40% to under 20% (forecast for 2019/20). This means that we are increasingly dependent on Council Tax to support the Council's activities but even this is subject to government constraints. We have a statutory requirement to balance our budget and to do this, we can either increase income from fees and charges, seek ways to reduce the cost of providing the services that we deliver as part of our general activities or cease providing some non-statutory services where they are no longer affordable. This means that we continuously review the services we provide to ensure that they remain necessary and are delivered as efficiently as possible. We also seek to develop new income streams through our commercialisation agenda where we believe that these will be of value to our residents

A Responsive Council

The Council's 'districtwide survey' shows:

- 83% of respondents believe the way the Council runs its services remains high against the latest Local Government Association benchmark of 67%
- 79% believe that the services provided by NHDC are of good quality

The Council is responsive to local and developing need currently through partnership working e.g. membership of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) encompassing Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire Centre for Voluntary Services, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, North Hertfordshire Minority Ethnic Forum, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, North Herts Homes, Citizens Advice and the East and North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Council will seek to enhance community engagement with residents, Parishes and local organisations through surveys of local residents and through the work of local elected Members.

Commercialisation.

The Localism Act and the Deregulation Act provide opportunities for 'commercialisation' such as Careline. The Council believes that commercialisation is a key component to providing the Council with the resilience it needs in the light of the expected continuing reductions planned cuts to local government funding from 2020.

Over the past 3-4 years NHDC has altered the way in which it works and undertaken new activities based on maintaining and/or improving customer service, providing efficiencies and increasing the resilience of our services.

These include:

- Leisure Centres: contracted out to Stevenage Leisure Ltd. Reversal of financing from -£500k to +£500K during the contract period

- Waste: Outsourced initially in 2003/4. Shared waste service with East Herts is starting to deliver a substantial saving to NHDC.
- Careline: Established by NHDC approximately 35 years ago this service was provided at a net cost of between £100K -£330K per annum. As part of a business transformation plan, the Council entered into a strategic partnership with Hertfordshire County Council; it now operates at no net direct cost to the Council and helps over 220 new clients per month. Careline currently support in excess of 16,000 people in Hertfordshire.⁴
- Building Control: a building control business has been established in conjunction with six other local authorities to deal with both local authority and private sector work. This is providing resilience and staff retention benefits.
- Legal Services: legal services have been offered to other local authorities for 18 months. This brings income to the Council and provides career development opportunities for staff hence assisting our recruitment and retention service.
- Refurbishment of the Council's offices providing the potential for lettings and room hire income.

Potential future development:

- Provision of a crematorium: Working with the private sector to provide and develop the provision.
- Creation of a Property company. Over 30 LAs currently have property development companies where the Local Authority can use the amounts generated to support ongoing service delivery.

The Council has appointed a new Commercialisation Service Director and that Directorate will explore these opportunities and others as they arise.

The Council owns a number of local assets and will continue to achieve best consideration from them in maintaining and managing them and may choose to do this through:

- Direct and indirect service provision
- Commercial Rental
- Operation by local groups
- Transfer to local, viable community organisations
- Exploring opportunities to share assets through the county-wide Hertfordshire Property Partnership which brings District and County Council, Police and Health colleagues together to look at optimal use of property,

We will work with our partners in Public Health Hertfordshire to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities by integrating health into the work of all our services, continuing to offer opportunities for physical exercise and use of outside space and monitoring food hygiene and air quality.

We aim to ensure North Hertfordshire is responsive and efficient and aim to deliver this objective by:

- Continuing to explore alternative options for effective and more efficient service delivery wherever possible, including through on-line self-service opportunities, partnership, joint working or 'commercial' models where they are appropriate.
- Working with our contractors Stevenage Leisure Ltd.
- Continuing to extend Careline.
- Working with health partners to optimise opportunities for older residents to remain living independently but well supported at home including a programme to provide nutritional education for single older people in sheltered accommodation
- Working with community and voluntary sector partners to facilitate appropriate integrated services for those being cared for and their carers.

⁴ <https://www.care-line.co.uk/services/community-alarm.aspx>

- Working through our leisure providers, schools and Sports England funded schemes to ensure that children/young people are offered the opportunity to increase activity to prevent long term ill health.
- Continuing to play a full part with Smoke Free Hertfordshire to reduce the incidents of smoking in adults and young people.
- Continuing to progress the Building Control Company ‘ Hertfordshire Building Control’ with six other Hertfordshire authorities.
- Optimising use, management and profitability of the Council’s assets.
- Reviewing resources, including management structure, to ensure the Council continues to deliver key services cost effectively.
- Increasing awareness of opportunities for volunteers [formal and informal] through:
 - The Council’s Outlook magazine
 - The Council’s website
 - Social media
 - Working with partner agencies
- Reviewing how the Council and its partners can be better engaged with and build capacity for its communities and in doing so increase awareness of how to become more engaged with and in the democratic process.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND REPORTING.

- All projects will be subject to a sound business case being provided
- Specific targets will be established as projects are introduced and the Councils performance against these monitored and reported.

This will be done quarterly through the Council’s Senior Management Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Any exceptions in regard to delivery of a top risk project are reported to the Council’s Cabinet as necessary under their terms of reference. General project risks are reported via the Council’s Risk Management Group and onward to Finance Audit and Risk Committee. Details of dates, times and agenda for meetings are available at www.north-herts.gov.uk

Our Community.

- Population ONS mid year 2016 132,700
- Population density 3.54 per hectare [Hertfordshire average 7.16]
- Large rural area
- Four main towns Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston
- 24 wards
- The population projections suggest an increase of approximately 32,600 (24.89%) in population in North Hertfordshire District over the 25 year period from 2014 to 2039. The biggest increases in population are estimated to be the age ranges for those over 70 and over all the way through to those 90+ years of age.
 - Factors influencing this are increased longevity, social patterns, and the attractiveness of district.
- The median age of both the UK and North Hertfordshire population is 40
- The life expectancy at birth for a resident in the North Hertfordshire District between 2013-2015 was 80.8 years for men and 83.1 years for women. (ONS).
- Lowest life expectancy area for males Hitchin Oughton, 76.1 years⁵
- Highest life expectancy for females Royston Meridian, 89.1 years
- In 2016, the smoking prevalence in Adults was recorded as 8.1% as compared to 15.5% in England⁶
- The percentage of overweight and Obese Children aged 10-11 in north Hertfordshire is 28.2%; this compares to 29.4% average of Hertfordshire and 34.2% for England
- 54.4% of adults are physically active. 57% of Adults are active in England.
- The mortality rate for cardiovascular disease for people aged 75 and under in North Hertfordshire (between 2013-2015) was 65.75 per 10,000 slightly above the Hertfordshire average(65.57) and below the England average of 74.65%.
- In 2011, 1,030 people in North Hertfordshire District stated that their general health was "very bad". That was 0.81% of the resident population. Also 19,182 people stated that they had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities to some extent. That was 15.1% of the resident population⁷
- Projected population changes 2014-2039
 - 70-74 years an increase of 2,000 residents
 - 75-79 years an increase of 3,000 residents
 - 80-84 years an increase of 2,000 residents
 - 85-90 years an increase of 2,000 residents
 - 90+ years an increase of 3,000 residents⁸
 - In real terms each band would increase by 2,000-3,000 people by 2039
- In the 2011 Census, 10.1% of residents in North Hertfordshire District stated that they provide unpaid care. (This was a total of 12,805 people). In comparison, 9.7% of residents across Hertfordshire and 10.2% of residents in England provided unpaid care in 2011.⁹ Furthermore, 1.8% (2,343 people) of the residents in North Hertfordshire District were providing 50 or more hours per week of unpaid care.

⁵ Public Health England; Life expectancy, based on Office for National Statistics mortality statistics

⁶ Public Health England. 2016. Health Profiles (Online).

⁷ Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census, Table KS301EW.

⁸ Office for National Statistics Subnational Population projections for Local Authorities in England (mid 2014 to mid 2039)

⁹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

- National record of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] rank five of our areas as being deprived using a measure of seven factors; level of income, access to adequate housing, employment, health, education, crime and deprivation factors affecting either the youngest or eldest. 32,844 neighbourhoods (also referred to as Local Super Output Areas, LSOAs¹⁰) ranked nationally; the top 20% are seen as most deprived. The first 3 areas listed below fall within the top 20% most deprived and the last two fall just outside the top 20% most deprived.
 - Letchworth South East 5,822 out of 32,844 LSOAs (refers to North Hertfordshire 009c area. This area is around the Woolgrove school, in Letchworth)
 - Oughton Hitchin 6,681 out of 32,844 LSOAs
 - Letchworth South East 7,062 out of 32,844 LSOAs (refers to North Hertfordshire 009b area. This area is around the Ivel Court shops in Letchworth)
 - Letchworth Wilbury 7,262 out of 32,844 LSOAs
 - Letchworth Grange 8,368 out of 32,844 LSOAs.¹¹
- In 2011, the proportion of the total population that were in a minority ethnic group (i.e. not White-British) was 15.12%. (compared to 19.18% in Hertfordshire, 14.72 in the East of England and 20.25 in England).

Our Financial position

The Council has faced considerable budget pressures over a number of years as government funding has reduced throughout the years of austerity. The position with regard to proposed changes to funding support for local Government remains uncertain. The Council's Medium Term Financial strategy (for the period 2019/20 to 2023/24) highlights that we will need to be ready for future reductions that could arise from changes to Business Rates Retention models, the Fair Funding formula and New Homes Bonus allocation. Our reserve levels could be used to provide some time to react to any changes.

Conclusions and trends.

1. The Council needs to ensure that the Corporate Plan reflects changes to our District.
2. The financial constraints placed upon the Council.
3. The Council recognises the challenges in North Hertfordshire and the additional cost that will be incurred by:
 - An ageing population
 - Increasing demands on care services
 - Specific health concerns – obesity, smoking and helping the growing older population maintain their health.
 - Pressure for substantial housing growth
 - Maintaining and enhancing a cohesive community.
 - Addressing the needs of our separate towns and Parishes
 - Addressing areas of deprivation
 - Encouraging employment opportunities
4. The Council recognises that the Corporate Plan is a “live” document which will develop over time.
5. The Council recognises that implicit in addressing these issues is a commitment to partnership working, shared services, economy of scale, commercialisation and seeking efficiencies where possible.

¹⁰ Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are a sub-ward area that has on approximately 1,600 people within it. There are 82 LSOAs in North Hertfordshire and 690 LSOAs in Hertfordshire.

¹¹ Department for Communities and Local Government – OpenData Communities