

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



CORPORATE PLAN 2017/21

Introduction and foreword

From the Leader of the Council, Cllr Lynda Needham

Local Government faces a period of significant and at times quite rapid change brought about by new or revised legislation, significant changes to how the Council is funded and, for North Hertfordshire, a number of changes within the district, its people and how we work together to maintain the environment so many of us evidently enjoy. It is important that we regularly review the Council's objectives, and its delivery of services to ensure they are still fit for purpose.

We maintain a clear vision for the District, 'Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place for people to live, work and prosper' but we cannot deliver the vision alone; it is clear that we must work with our partners, our businesses, our urban and rural communities in order to achieve this.

This Corporate Plan document itself is one of the many tools we use to keep people informed and increase their awareness of the work to which the Council will commit its resources.

The District's Local Plan, which we anticipate having its final consultation in the Autumn, will inform both the number of homes and location of housing required in North Herts in the longer term. Whilst it will prove challenging, it is important we have sufficient homes in the right places, with adequate infrastructure to support them, for successive generations and for people to work here.

North Hertfordshire District Council continues to deliver high quality, efficient services to residents against a backdrop of reducing budgets, and sustained reduction in central government grant. NHDC will need to continue to significantly increase the level of savings made and, where possible, generate income to sustain other services – this is not unique to North Hertfordshire. The continued strong leadership from both elected members and officers will be paramount in continuing to challenge, monitor and support the Council to deliver these improvements, especially against changing needs and at times, increasing demands for other services.

In order to inform our objectives and ensure we are reflecting the wishes of our residents in both the short and longer term, we will use information gathered in our recent District Wide Survey 2015; full details can be found online <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/customer-services/publications-and-consultations/district-wide-survey>

Comparison with other authorities through that survey shows that 96% of residents are satisfied with North Herts as a place to live, compared with 82% nationally. 83% of North Herts' residents are satisfied with the way the Council runs things, against 67% nationally. 65% of residents feel NHDC keep them well or fairly well informed about the services and benefits it provides, against a national average of 61% for other authorities. This demonstrates very clearly how much our residents value the place in which they live and the services that the Council provides.

KNOWING OUR COMMUNITIES

In any review of services delivered by the Council, either alone or in partnership, it is important to take account of what we know about how our residents live now, and what changes may need to be taken into account in the short, medium and longer term.

The District of North Hertfordshire has a population of 131,000 (mid term estimate 2014). The area is made up of 23 wards. The population density across North Hertfordshire is 3.40 persons per hectare, well below the 6.94 average for Hertfordshire, but which also demonstrates the contrast of a district with large rural areas surrounding its four main urban settlements.

Official statistics indicate that the population is likely to increase over the next 15 years by just over 24,000 residents (population estimate at 2031 – 153,400) This is due to a combination of factors, including people living longer, changes in social patterns, and the attractiveness of the District as a place to live. This will put considerable pressure not just on our housing numbers but vital social support mechanisms such as schools and GP surgeries as well as our transport infrastructure.

The mean age of the population for North Herts is 40 years, identical to the mean age for the East of England region, and 39 years for All England. The life expectancy at birth for people living in North Hertfordshire is 79.8 years for males, and 82.5 years for females. This compares favourably with the England life expectancy at birth for males at 78.3 years and 82.3 years for females for the same period (2006-10). Within North Hertfordshire, Letchworth Wilbury has the lowest life expectancy at birth for males at 76.4 years. Weston and Sandon has the highest life expectancy at birth for females at 88.0 years.

It is estimated that 19.3% of adults in North Hertfordshire District smoke (2014 data) against the All England estimate of 18%. The number of adults over 40 years seeking help to stop smoking increased between 2009-2013, but the increasing incidence of younger people starting to smoke, and often from an early age, remains a concern.

13.0% of children measured in Year 6 (2014/15) were overweight or obese (161 pupils), comparing very favourably with the All England average of 19%.

62.2% of North Hertfordshire adults are physically active. Between 2011-13, cardiovascular death for under 75s was 74.09 people per 100,000, slightly above the Hertfordshire average. Long term poor health or disability affects 3.9% of population, although this is measured by response to questionnaire so much may lie in the perception of what is a long term health condition or degree to which any disability affects day to day life.

Projected population changes for North Hertfordshire from 2012-2037 shows the impact that higher life expectancy has in regard to the age of the general population, with a higher proportion of our residents living into the following age bands;

70-74 years	81.63% rise
75-95 years	65.91% rise
80-84 years	72.73% rise
85-90 years	123.91% rise
90+ years	246.16 % rise

In real terms, each of these bands represents 2000-3500 residents by 2037, but with such growth also come differing degrees of need for support, not only from the District Council, but also health, social care and colleagues from the voluntary and community sector.

The provision of unpaid care is becoming increasingly common as the population ages, as is the age at which children, spouses or partners, including those approaching or already in retirement themselves, start to or continue to care for their relatives. This makes it an

important social policy issue as it influences and is influenced by the supply of in-home and residential care, but also has implications on employment opportunities, social and leisure activities, and the health status of those providing care.

In North Hertfordshire, 2,343 people said that they provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week (PH survey 2013). Within North Hertfordshire, Letchworth Wilbury has the highest percentage of residents saying they provide 50 hours or more of unpaid care at 2.8% per cent. Arbury has the lowest percentage of residents providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care at 1.1% per cent.

The national record, Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015, measures seven factors which impact a household's lifestyle; these include level of income, access to adequate housing, employment, health, education, crime levels and deprivation factors most affecting either the youngest or most elderly members of the community. Of the 32,844 neighbourhoods ranked nationally, those which are in the top 30% are seen as being most deprived; North Hertfordshire has four such areas.

Letchworth South East	5,822 out of 32,844
Oughton	6,681 out of 32,844
Letchworth Wilbury	7,262 out of 32,844
Letchworth Grange	8,368 out of 32,844

The district has significant diversity, with a black and minority ethnic population of 13,359 people. This is 10.5% of the total population, compared with 14.6% for England, and 9.2% for the East of England region.

Overall 15.2% of residents in North Hertfordshire describe themselves as from a non white UK population. This compares with a non white UK population of 14.8% for the East of England region, and 20.3% for England. In North Hertfordshire the non white UK population includes 19,225 people.

It is important for the Council to review and understand changes and trends in its local population; this enables us to prioritise areas where we can work, including with a range of partner agencies, to help to continue to improve the lives of our residents.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE – THE DISTRICT AND ITS OBJECTIVES**OUR VISION:**

Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper

North Hertfordshire District Council is committed to working with its local communities, to continue delivering good quality services that reflect the local priorities and the resources we, and our delivery partners have available to us. We use a range of information to identify priorities such as consultation with our residents, local businesses and, population data, which not only helps inform the Council's current work, but its planning for the future population too.

There are three objectives for the Council for 2017/21, which are

- **To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and the disadvantaged are supported**
- **To promote sustainable growth within 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 also continue to deliver a wide range of services which we refer to as our 'business as usual' – routine waste collection, recycling, street cleansing, food inspection, collecting Council Tax and Non-domestic (business) rates, finding temporary and permanent homes for residents, etc. When we deliver these services day to day, we are not complacent about their individual cost to residents and we are constantly looking for more economic, efficient and effective ways of delivery; Services may not always be delivered by North Hertfordshire District Council alone, but increasingly in a partnership or alternative delivery model, but always with the impact on service users foremost in our minds. We are also increasingly looking for ways in which we can provide services which could generate an income for re-investment in order to protect the longer term delivery of other Council services.

None of the objectives above can be addressed in isolation, as each of the three necessarily interact and impact another, 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 the disadvantaged are supported**

In the Council's most recent Citizens Panel survey (2014), respondents were asked to rank in order of importance, the three features they most valued about the district; 'low levels of crime' was identified as the most important. We know from working with our community safety partners that North Hertfordshire remains one of the safest places to live in the country.

Our Community Safety Partnership has the fourth lowest crime figures compared to the rest of the county; with 41.9 crimes per 1000 of the population in comparison to 47.3 crimes per 1000 of the population for Hertfordshire. However, we also know that whilst the general trend is for crime in North Herts to continue to fall, the reporting of domestic abuse is on the rise; whilst this could be viewed negatively as a rise in the actual number of incidents, it also demonstrates greater confidence among those who may be victims of abuse that their report will be taken seriously, handled sensitively and appropriate interventions made. We will continue to work closely with our Community Safety Partnership and support providers to ensure this position continues.

The district is generally quite prosperous yet deprivation also exists and there are a number of pockets where deprivation is classified as "most deprived". Whilst efforts to tackle all the related causes of poverty and deprivation must be planned in the longer term, the Council provides access to debt and budget management advice (including through the Citizens Advice service which we continue to fund), and offers apprenticeships and work experience in a range of services to provide a step onto the career ladder.

The demand for housing in the district is high and market cost housing is increasingly out of reach for many households. Those without adequate housing and who cannot afford to buy or rent suitable housing in the open market are said to be in 'housing need'. The Council is committed to meeting this housing need through the provision of affordable housing in the district. We are also committed to working with our health and other partners to identify and address homelessness, recognising the linkages between poor living conditions, rough sleeping and mental and physical health conditions.

North Hertfordshire's already large number of people over the age of seventy as a percentage of overall population is due to rise significantly by 2037. This requires consideration of future services supporting older people to live at home independently; not only the Council's Careline service, but also working with partners to consider how best to support carers and assist in increasing awareness of and support for those living with dementia and other similar conditions; we are already in the early stages of developing a multi agency Dementia Alliance for the district to maintain support longer term.

North Hertfordshire has always had a large number of people who volunteer; this enables a wide range of local projects to progress and being engaged in a worthwhile activity also benefits individuals' long term mental and physical health. In the Citizens Panel survey, 16% of respondents said they would be likely to want to join a community volunteer group which would help maintain and enhance open spaces on the Council's behalf; this would further enhance the work already underway with charitable groups such as Groundwork enhancing and maintaining the appearance of our parks and open spaces.

We are aware of the threat that changing demographics present to our rural communities; we will commit to working with them to ensure appropriate development will allow them to remain attractive and thriving, whilst also continuing to support other rural initiatives throughout the

course of this Plan. We aim to ensure North Hertfordshire is an **attractive and thriving** place to live and we will deliver this objective by;

- Delivering identified improvements to green space, to include
 - road and pathway improvements to the Hitchin (St Johns Road) Cemetery
 - refurbishment of and improvement to vehicular access to the King George V Pavillion, Hitchin and
 - improvements to car parking and bridge access at Walsworth Common, Hitchin
 - commence consultation on options for wheeled sport provision at Newmarket Road, Royston
- Ensuring that our renewed waste and street cleansing contracts, continue to provide as efficient and effective a service as possible, whilst continuing to improve recycling rates,
- Continuing to explore options for joint delivery of waste, street cleansing and recycling services, including the most efficient means of transportation and disposal
- Investigating a range of options to improve use of Council assets
- Grant funding organisations sharing in the delivery of our objectives
- Review use of green space across the district to ensure it is properly aligned to usage

OBJECTIVE 2: Prosper and Protect

To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) undertaken in the preparation of the district's 'Local Plan' considered the amount of land available for housing development, with particular emphasis on demonstrating that there will be sufficient land available to meet future housing targets. Consultation on a range of potential sites for housing development will take place in Autumn 2016, and will inform the final Local Plan submitted in March 2017 for adoption.

The district has a considerable daily outflow of commuters, to highly skilled employment mainly in central London but also to the high tech and development industries which surround Cambridge. For those who remain within the district each day the retail or hospitality sectors represent our largest employers. We will 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.

North Hertfordshire has four town centres, three of which have BID companies in place; these have used the additional business rate levy to contribute to a community cinema and tourist information office in Royston, street wardens and trade recycling schemes in Hitchin and food fairs and similar activities in Letchworth. We will continue to support the work of these companies to maintain the footfall in our town centres and to maintain their viability, which will include a review of parking.

We recognise that tensions exist in creating opportunity for growth to sustain the local population, the impact on rail and road networks and the green and open spaces so important to our residents. The Local Plan will identify areas where development may take place (and the scale of such development) and alongside that, we will review both existing and future green space provision.

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

We aim to ensure North Hertfordshire is a place where people can **prosper** and we **protect** our heritage and will deliver this objective by;

- Submission of a Local Plan for North Herts, to the following timescales;
 - March 2017: Submission of North Hertfordshire's local plan for examination
 - Summer 2017: Examination
 - March 2018: Adoption of the new local plan
- Continue to implement our Economic Development Strategy for the district, including through the provision of an Economic Development Officer, to work closely in partnership, increasing inward investment and business development opportunities
- Complete the redevelopment of the Council's office accommodation and explore opportunities to share that accommodation with other partners, to increase financial and resource efficiency
- Completing the regeneration of John Barker Place in Hitchin to provide new homes and better shops
- Work with BIDs and relevant partners to convene events such as Small Business Saturday, and explore alternative options for vacant premises to enhance the retail offer of our town centres
- Agree projects for delivery of improvements to urban and rural facilities over four years from 2016 through the £1m Capital Enhancement Fund
- Review of the Council's Car Parking Strategy to ensure it supports our corporate objectives

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

The results of the Council's 'districtwide survey' 2015 shows that residents perception of the way the Council runs its services remains high (83%); whilst this has dropped marginally since the last survey in 2013 (86%), this remains well above the latest Local Government Association Benchmark for satisfaction of 67%. In 2015, 79% of residents felt that the services provided by NHDC remain of good quality, 67% felt that the Council remains committed to making the area cleaner and greener and that 63% believe we treat all types of people fairly. The lowest level of agreement is made in regard to the statement 'North Hertfordshire District Council makes an effort to find out what local people want' at 48%; the number of residents who felt informed about how to get involved in local decision making (44%) is also low, so we know we need to increase existing levels of engagement with our communities. Changes arising from the Care Act 2014 and confirmation of devolved funding such as under the current Better Care Fund will affect the long term care of the elderly, and we also have a part to play in supporting our ageing community.

Our successful Careline scheme has continued to expand its vital support services across and outside Hertfordshire, to enable older people to live at home longer independently; we also know from our 2015 residents' survey that satisfaction with the service, at 100% of users, remains exceptional. This is one of a range of more 'commercial' activities we will increasingly explore, using opportunities afforded by the Localism Act and Deregulation Act; the importance of reviewing all sources of income to ensure they are at optimum levels to provide greater financial resilience for the future remains a high priority.

APPENDIX A

The Council acts as custodian of local assets maintaining and managing them, either through rental, operation by external groups, or through long term lease agreements for and on behalf of its residents. The authority will consider how to continue to achieve best consideration from these assets, including through potential transfer to local, viable community organisations; this also reflects the general spirit of the Localism Act 2012, to increase community rights. The recent announcement of 30 hours free childcare for pre-school children of working parents may also offer opportunities for joint working between the Council and care providers to establish sufficient facilities to meet the increased demand for spaces.

The Council's Waste and Street Cleansing contract due for renewal in 2018 will be extended, so we can take a look at the feasibility of partnering with another authority, to bring greater economies of scale, optimise income from recyclates where possible, and reduce unit costs still further.

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 partnership, joint working or more 'commercial' models where they are appropriate
- Working with our partners, Stevenage Leisure Limited, to enable the extended North Herts Leisure Centre to offer an increased range of physical activities
- Continuing to extend the Council's Careline Service 'offer', including use of 'telecare' and similar technology, to ensure elderly or disabled residents have a greater ability to remain living at home safely, but independently;
- Working with health partners to optimise opportunities for older people to remain living independently but well supported at home,
- Working with community and voluntary sector partners to facilitate appropriate, integrated services not only for those being cared for in the community, but all the more importantly, for their carers
- For children/young people to be offered opportunity to increase activity to prevent longer term ill-health, working through our leisure providers, schools and Sport England funded schemes
- Roll out competitive Building Control Services with six other Hertfordshire authorities
- Optimising use, management and profitability of the Council's assets, including consideration of long term lease 'transfer' or similar to sustain community and social opportunities, and for land, consider options to include social or affordable housing
- Reviewing resources to ensure the Council continues to deliver key services cost effectively
- Increase awareness of opportunities for volunteers (formal and informal) and increasing publicity for schemes requiring volunteers, through the Council's Outlook magazine, website, social media and working with partner agencies; this to include latest initiatives such as #teamherts.org.uk
- Review how the Council and its partners can better engage with and build capacity for its communities, and in doing so, increase awareness how to become more engaged with and in the democratic process

PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND REPORTING

All projects will be subject to sound business cases being provided, and specific targets established as they are introduced and the Council's performance against these will be monitored and reported; this will be quarterly through the Council's Senior Management

APPENDIX A

Team, and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee twice a year. Any exceptions in regard to delivery of a top risk project are reported on 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 the Finance Audit and Risk Committee. Details of dates, times and agenda for meetings are available on the Council's website www.north-herts.gov.uk.