

Wokingham Borough Council  
Council Plan 2024-25 (Extended)

PROVIDING SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

ENRICHING LIVES

DELIVERING THE RIGHT

HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACES

KEEPING THE BOROUGH MOVING

ENJOYING A CLEAN AND GREEN BOROUGH

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK FOR YOU BEING THE BEST WE CAN BE

Our Community Vision is for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn work and grow and a great place to do business. This Council Plan is a tool for our organisation, supporting our vision, to identify how we will deliver on these commitments to our community.

## INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SUSAN PARSONAGE AND LEADER, STEPHEN CONWAY

We are working with the voluntary sector, businesses, statutory partners, communities, and young people to shape a brand-new long-term vision for the borough of Wokingham, which is expected to be agreed in the summer of 2024. It will be an ambitious vision for all who live and work in the Borough and will set the direction of travel for the council and our partners for years to come.

The council plan is the mechanism by which we deliver our part of the community vision. The current Wokingham Borough Council Plan was approved in 2020 and underwent a mid-point refresh in 2022. It is due to end in 2024.

We will develop a new council plan with engagement from staff, partners, and residents in 2024. To give continuity while the vision is developed, we have refreshed and extended the current council plan from 2024-25.

In May 2022, the council's administration changed, bringing about a change in strategic priorities. Despite the movement away from the Covid 19 pandemic, we face a number of challenges including the cost-of-living crisis brought about by rises in inflation, the War in Ukraine, significant pressures on the council budget, increase in demand and complexity for our statutory services such as social care, an unusually high number of children with SEND in the borough and above-average house prices. Wokingham has also seen a 15% increase in its population in the last 10 years, compared to 6% in England as a whole. It is therefore more important than ever that we can define clear priorities and can work most effectively and efficiently with the community and partners to design and provide services that meet local need and are financially affordable and sustainable.

Over the last 2 years we have worked to secure funding for 2 new special schools and funded free school meals when the government withdrew support. We are passionate about supporting arts & culture, libraries, sport, and leisure, to help the borough's citizens **enrich their lives**. Promoting creativity benefits individuals, society, and the economy through collaboration with local businesses on delivery.

We are committed to **providing safe and strong communities** and have pledged to achieve White Ribbon status.

Our pressure on the government for local control of house building is working. We are expecting rule changes this year to allow us to build the **right homes in the right places** that meet local needs rather than the desires of property developers and reduce the need to build on green space.

We have helped to **keep the borough moving** by tackling congestion without just building ever more roads and providing more choice as to how people travel, including helping people walk or cycle local trips.

The climate emergency is a pressing concern both globally and locally and we are committed to playing a leading role to achieve a carbon neutral Borough so that we can enjoy a **Clean and Green Borough** now and for future generations to come.

To achieve our ambitions, we will continue to improve, **Changing the way we work for you**, and **Being the Best we can be** putting our new Customer Charter in place whilst building financial resilience in our organisation and in our communities.

The Council Plan sets out what we want to achieve for each strategic priority, what we will do to get there and what success will look like. The Plan will be monitored, and corporate performance measures have been developed to track our progress in delivering these strategic objectives.

## OUR NEW APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Wokingham is a borough rich in strengths, made up of thriving communities and vibrant businesses, town and parish councils, schools, community groups, voluntary organisations, and public sector organisations who are buzzing with ideas and willing to lend their support. What is more, the borough has shown what can be achieved when we come together. Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently to the cost-of-living crisis which is acutely felt by many residents and communities, demonstrates the power and potential that exists in our borough.

Wokingham Borough Council is keen to build on this strength, strategically extending its partnerships and tapping into the skills, experiences, and capabilities of Wokingham's diverse communities. We recognise the broader challenges of climate change, financial insecurity, and inequality will only be addressed through collective effort. We want to work with Towns and Parish Councils and with partner organisations to tackle these, and other, issues.

We also know that the borough's communities have extensive knowledge about the issues and opportunities that affect their lives. Our goal is to create community partnerships which give people more power and influence over the places in which they live or work and the services they use. In some cases, this may involve supporting them to work together to tackle challenges and catalyse community solutions. In other cases, it may involve listening and learning in ways which lead to the true codesign and co-production of local services.

Through extending and deepening our community and partnerships work, Wokingham can build on successes and energy in the borough to ensure it remains a great place to live, work and visit for all.

As we take forward this collaborative work with communities and partners, we know that transforming how the Council works will be imperative and we are committed to this journey.

## KNOWING OUR BOROUGH

As at the latest census in 2021, there were 177,502 people living in Wokingham Borough. That is 15% more people than in the previous census 10 years prior in 2011, when the population was 145,380 people.

According to the ONS, as of 2021, Wokingham is the 28th most densely populated of the South East's 64 local authority areas, with around seven people living on each football pitch-sized area of land.

The population of Wokingham has been increasing by approximately 12% every 10 years, based on population changes between 1981 and 2021. Therefore, if the population continues to rise in line with this average, then in 2031 the population in Wokingham could be at nearly 200,000 people, and potentially over 250,000 by 2051.

A series of borough profiles looking at Demographics, Childcare and Education, Social Care, Economy, Finance, Housing, Voluntary & Community Sector and Community Safety have been developed, which will inform future planning including the Community Vision and new Council Plan for 2025.

## **OUR VALUES**

Our values help shape and guide our behaviour. By demonstrating these values, it will help us move forwards together to achieve our future ambitions for Wokingham Borough.

Our values are:

### **Customer Focussed**

Put ourselves in our customers shoes and listen, to deliver services we would like to receive.

### **Taking ownership**

Taking responsibility for issues and address them with actions we see through to resolution. Be accountable for our service delivery in the context of our community wellbeing and Council objectives.

### **One team**

Work jointly with our residents, colleagues, councillors, and partners, across any boundaries, to ensure efficient, effective delivery on behalf of our communities.

### **Being ambitious**

Aiming for excellence in the outcomes we pursue and the way we do things. Being forward-thinking, innovative, entrepreneurial, and accepting risks where possible to do so.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY

Every Borough is unique in its diversity, opportunities and challenges and Wokingham is no exception.

Whilst being an affluent area with great opportunities and low levels of deprivation, there are challenges to ensure these benefits can be accessed and shared by all. We recognise that as a local leader, a provider and commissioner of services, and a large employer in the borough we have the opportunity to work collaboratively with our partners, suppliers, businesses, and residents to address the causes of inequality and promote real equality of opportunity.

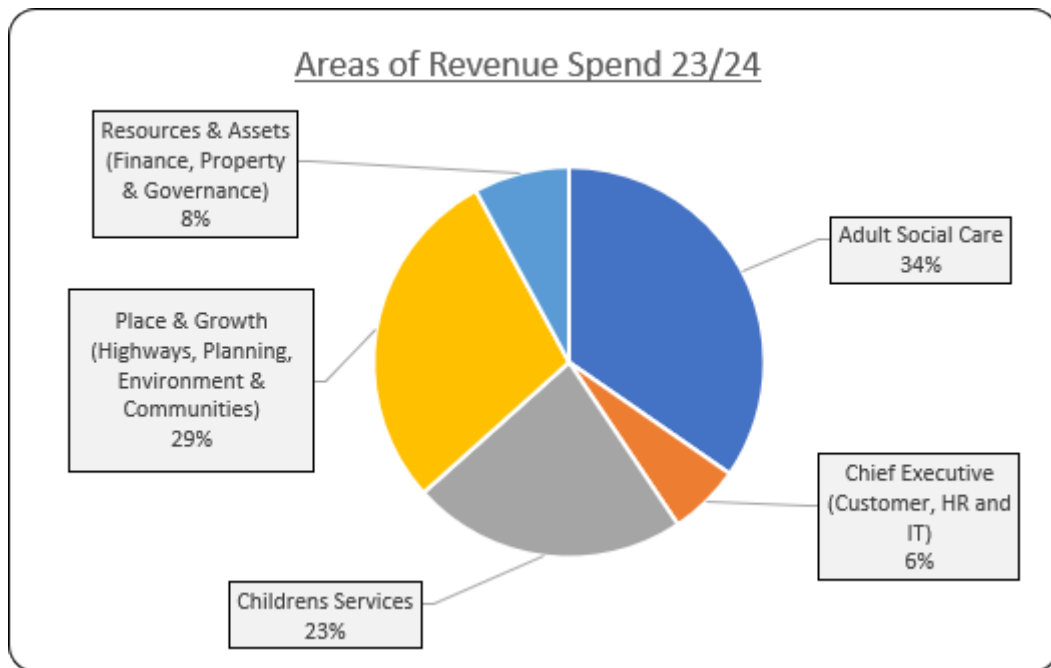
Through this plan we want to achieve a more equal Borough, where everyone is respected and can enjoy the opportunities that the Borough has to offer. As such, the principles of equality and inclusion, underpin this Plan and the Council's supporting strategies.

In practice, this means that we commit to the following in all our work and service provision:

- Work with our partners to promote equality and good relations between communities and diverse groups.
- Maximise opportunities to influence, support and work with partners, business, suppliers, and communities to promote inclusion and tackle the causes of inequality.
- Consistently strive to actively combat discrimination and its impacts for reasons of a person's age, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, or socio-economic circumstances within our communities and within our workplace.
- Equip our workforce with the right tools, knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of our residents.
- Ensure new projects, policies, strategies, service changes and communication take account of all the needs of our users.
- Increase our understanding of the communities we serve to inform the decisions we make.
- Continue to monitor the impact of our employment policies and practices.

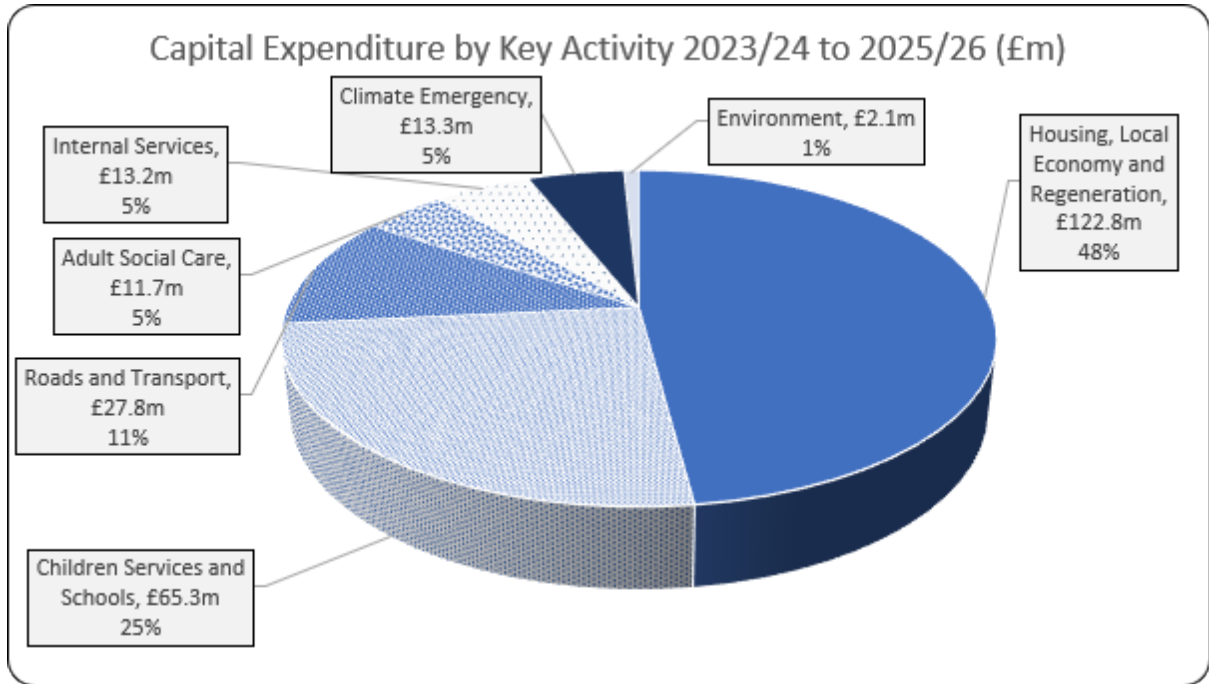
## OUR BUDGET

The budget represents the Council's strategies and priorities from a financial perspective. We have a duty to fulfil statutory services, such as adult social care, children's services, and waste. The majority of our income is used for these statutory services and with increased demand, we continue to be innovative and diligent to safeguard those services you value the most and consider new ways of generating further income to invest back into our community. The graph below shows how the council's revenue expenditure for the year is distributed across its services:



## OUR CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The graph below shows the capital expenditure planned for the next 3 years by key activity area. This excludes any previously approved budget that will be carried forward into future years. In total the Council plan to invest a further £216m (including HRA) over the next 3 years



## **PROVIDING SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES**

### **Our challenges**

Wokingham Borough has a growing population with many thriving communities but with an increasing proportion of residents with long term health conditions, such as dementia, and people with learning disabilities or difficulties, it is important to address and manage demand for long term care and maintain high quality services. Added to this, the proposed Social Care Reforms will have a significant impact on Wokingham's finances due to our high proportion of self-funders. While these reforms have been delayed, we need to plan accordingly should they come into force. Recruitment and retention of staff in key areas such as children's and adults' social care is also a major challenge impacting on our ability to meet demand.

### **We will work with our partners to**

- Meet the rising demand for children's services and adult social care.
- Continue supporting the most vulnerable through the cost-of-living crisis.
- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Prevent escalation of need for children, young people and families.
- Meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families in the Borough.
- Meet the needs of children in care and care leavers in the Borough, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care.
- Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish.
- Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.
- Improve access to primary healthcare and better integrate local health and social care services.
- Tackle antisocial behaviour and increase the resilience of local communities.
- Achieve DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation.

### **What we will do**

- Maintain a relentless focus on safeguarding.
- Implement a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy.
- Increase care home capacity in the Borough.
- Increase special school capacity in the Borough.
- Increase children's home capacity by opening local provision.
- Increase opportunities for respite for families with children who have SEND.
- Increase the number of foster carers who can offer culturally appropriate home environments to our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).
- Shape services around the needs of the individual and deliver them in a way that empowers residents to live independent and healthy lives.
- Plan, commission and monitor high quality services that deliver value for money.
- Work with residents and providers in an inclusive manner to ensure sustainable local provision of care services and a thriving voluntary sector.
- Work with families and young people to ensure planned transitions from children's to adult services.



**What success will look like:**

- Children, young people and vulnerable adults are safeguarded from harm.
- Residents feel safe and secure in their neighbourhoods and in the services they receive.
- Measurable improvements in health, wellbeing and independence in the community.
- Greater access to opportunities through the voluntary sector: increasing inclusivity; reducing social isolation and preventing loneliness.
- Increased opportunities for self-support, reducing the demand for ongoing care and support.
- People with a learning disability have the best opportunities to live well, learn, work and feel supported.

## **ENRICHING LIVES**

### **Our challenges**

We are tackling health inequalities in Wokingham Borough, with a particular focus on emotional health and well-being, early intervention and prevention. Broad measures of wellbeing mask pockets of deprivation, health and economic need and those living in poverty. Over the last couple of years there has been an increase in the number of children, young people and adults seeking support for mental and emotional well-being support. The cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated financial hardship for those who were just about managing and are now relying on charitable and crisis support. Child food poverty continues to be a challenge for many families, which we are addressing through partnership working and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme.

### **We will work with our partners to**

- Hear the voices and uphold the rights of all Children and Young People so that they are fully engaged in the development of the borough's infrastructure and identify the facilities and support they need.
- Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone.
- Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of.
- Make the Borough a place where businesses want to invest and are supported to stay and grow: providing opportunities for our residents.
- Provide excellent adult education and training opportunities that meets the skills needs of our employers.
- Deliver our health and well-being strategy to support residents to lead happy, healthy lives.
- Work with our Town Councils to ensure our town centres retain their local distinctiveness, developing community cohesion and ensure that they remain more than just a place to shop.
- Address poverty, including child food poverty.

### **What we will do**

- Support and challenge all schools to provide the right environment for effective learning and good emotional well-being for pupils.
- Provide sufficient school places and more help for children with special educational needs.
- Maximise opportunities for physical and social activities and make sure everyone can participate if they want to.
- Increase the opportunity for creativity to flourish through a vibrant arts and culture offering which is accessible to everyone.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business by providing high quality business advice and support.
- Fund a pilot to poverty-proof the school day in Wokingham.
- Develop and adopt a new Young Persons Housing Strategy and a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, based on the achievements and lessons learned from the current ones.

- Ensure those looking to move into work are supported with the right skills and advice enabling them to secure employment locally.

**What success will look like:**

- A strong local economy with continued inward investment into the Borough.
- Thriving villages and town centres offering residents and visitors a range of retail and leisure options.
- A culture of lifelong learning that ensures skills stay relevant for the future world of work.
- Increased educational attainment overall and a narrowing of the gap between disadvantaged children, those with protected characteristics and their peers.
- Reduced health inequalities
- An increase in all residents engaging in active, healthy, cultural and social opportunities.
- More local people involved in volunteering and community activities.

## **DELIVERING THE RIGHT HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACES**

### **Our challenges**

We have a challenge within Wokingham Borough to manage and balance need with requirements for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. While we have pushed back on housing in areas such as Rooks Nest Farm, we acknowledge that with development comes more affordable housing which is secured through our planning policies. Creating places fit for the future, that are inclusive and have the right infrastructure in place. Ensuring that our homes are affordable, sustainable and of good quality and supporting those with specialist needs or at risk of homelessness.

### **We will work with our partners to**

- Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.
- Deliver a variety of housing options that meet the needs of vulnerable and disabled residents.
- Maximise affordable housing delivery where possible through developers, social landlords and our own housing companies including the provision of specialist accommodation for our most vulnerable residents.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow.

### **What we will do**

- Development of a new Housing Strategy ready for adoption in 2024
- Develop policies to make sure development is vibrant with the right mix of housing, employment, leisure, community uses and green infrastructure that is well connected and meets community needs.
- Ensure our existing built environment and valued green spaces are protected.
- Work with all landlords and home owners to improve the quality, efficiency and sustainability of the Borough's existing housing stock.
- Ensure a planned approach to house building and place shaping through master-planning and community involvement.

### **What success will look like:**

- Where possible, all new development is delivered through a planned approach minimising the impact on existing communities and protecting our valued green space.
- Residents are supported and protected during any new development in their neighbourhood and that any essential infrastructure is delivered up front.
- New developments have their own sense of place that adds to the quality of life and sense of community for those residents living there.
- Sufficient affordable, specialist housing to meet the requirements of all those residents in priority need.

## **KEEPING THE BOROUGH MOVING**

### **Our challenges**

We have a challenge to effectively manage high volumes of traffic travelling through the Borough, to reduce congestion, deal with road works and address strategic connections. We must also balance this with supporting and enabling behaviour change in residents' travel choices and maximising the use of digital connectivity and smart city technology.

### **We will work with our partners to**

- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.
- Review and implement the Local Transport Plan and the walking and cycling strategy.
- Explore new technologies that contribute to an intelligent transport system that makes the best use of the existing road network.
- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions.

### **What we will do**

- Support bus services and commit to do so until at least 2026.
- Continue to promote and develop the MyJourney programme as a tool to help residents and visitors make sustainable transport choices.
- Increased number of electric vehicle charging points.
- Ensure a strategic approach to highway investment and maintenance.
- Increase opportunities across the Borough to access public transport and use electric vehicles.

### **What success will look like:**

- Increased use of public transport, walking and cycling initiatives.
- More electric vehicles on the road and fewer petrol and diesel vehicles.
- A well-maintained road network and improved safety for all road users.
- Improved air quality.

## **ENJOYING A CLEAN AND GREEN BOROUGH**

### **Our challenges**

To tackle climate change, achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 and adapt to the impact of climate change that we are already experiencing while addressing the needs of a growing population and seeking out value for money. There is a challenge in encouraging behaviour change around waste, recycling and transport (particularly car use) around the Borough whilst addressing air quality and respiratory health and protecting valued spaces.

### **We will work with our partners to**

- Play a leading role to achieve a carbon neutral Borough.
- Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy.
- Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.
- Deliver the Solar Together Scheme.
- Deliver the Social Housing Decarbonisation Scheme.

### **What we will do**

- Deliver the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, whilst supporting the strategic embedding of climate emergency principles across the organisation.
- Ensure our colleagues across the council and our contractors, take measures where possible to reduce carbon emissions including making our own buildings more energy efficient.
- Help and support our residents and businesses to make behavioural changes that actively address the challenges of climate change.
- Continue to tackle fly-tipping, litter, graffiti and waste generation.
- Enhance our existing green areas and valued open spaces.
- Keep a weekly waste service whilst collecting different forms of waste more efficiently, encouraging recycling and ending reliance on single-use plastic bags.
- Begin work on a climate adaptation plan.

### **What success will look like:**

- Residents and businesses change their behaviours to do more to tackle climate change and the Council is seen as setting a positive example.
- The Borough is recognised as a flagship authority in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.
- A greener Borough, with more trees and a richer biodiversity with improved and more accessible, open spaces.
- Increased recycling and a reduction in general waste produced by each household.
- A more joined up walking and cycling network with more people choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport.

## **CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK FOR YOU AND BEING THE BEST WE CAN BE**

### **Our challenges**

The last few years have been the most challenging yet in terms of the council's financial position. We must manage the council's finances responsibly against the pressures of inflation and government funding reductions, taking the long-term decisions necessary to secure the council's finances for the coming years. We need to reduce council costs through being a smarter and more efficient organisation, developing effective and accessible digital solutions: making it easier for our customers, residents and businesses to work and communicate with us.

We will work with our partners to

- Shape a long-term vision for the future of our borough to guide all our future policies, decisions and services.
- Provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed on our customers.
- Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.
- Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough.

What we will do

- Place our shared vision for the Borough at the centre of the Councils plans and underpinning strategies.
- Challenge the government to give a fair deal to Wokingham and end the under-funding of our borough by £30m a year compared to the average local unitary authority.
- Implement our People Strategy to be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice.
- Be relentlessly customer focussed, implementing our Customer Experience Strategy.
- Strengthen our use of data and insight to understand current and future demand so that we can plan, design and deliver the best outcomes for all our residents.
- Manage performance effectively, through continuous improvement of our reporting processes and effective scrutiny.
- Listen to what our communities are telling us and use this feedback to shape service delivery, challenge how we do business and manage expectations in an open and honest way.
- Develop an inclusive service delivery approach, in a way that promotes the independence of residents, and harnesses the digital opportunities available.
- Continue to ensure our governance arrangements are sound and benchmarked against best practice.

What success will look like:

- An improvement in Customer Experience across all council services – we meet the ambitions of our Customer Charter
- A community led approach to meeting the needs of our residents, that is focused on the right outcome, delivered in the right way at the right time.

- Communication and feedback that encourages engagement with residents, businesses and partners in an inclusive and informative way.
- Effective use of digital technology, underpinning the very core of our organisation, that drives innovative new ways of working, helps to understand how things will change in the future and inform decision making.
- A council wide approach to the financial challenges and solutions, increased grant contribution to support service delivery, and shared expertise in contract management across the organisation.
- Colleagues are passionate about what they do and proud to work at our organisation, they understand our goals and their role in helping us to achieve them.
- We will have a proportionate approach to risk that encourages innovation whilst ensuring successful delivery.
- A forward thinking, innovative approach to organisational planning and delivery, with a strong commercial approach to everything that we do.