Corporate Plan 2016-19

Working with our communities to sustain a thriving District
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Introduction

We continue to live in challenging times financially. The Council’s funding from central government has reduced dramatically and we can no longer afford some of the plans and projects that we envisaged a few years ago.

The country’s financial problems have had a major impact on many of our residents and communities too, creating a greater demand than ever for some of our services and those of our partners. The challenge for all of us is to do more with less.

We have a record of improving services, investing in technology and staff to embrace new ways of working and to tackle specific issues. We have reduced our management costs by nearly a half in recent years, and have entered into a range of shared and contracted-out services to ensure that Council Tax payers get the best possible value for money.

Despite the financial constraints under which we have been operating, we have remained ambitious and have worked with the private sector to deliver significant growth in the District. It has been very challenging to achieve that growth while preserving the character of our towns and villages and ensuring that new development brings with it the associated infrastructure and services needed to support that development – road improvements and medical facilities, for example.

We will continue to play a full part in ensuring that the District thrives and prospers. This Corporate Plan includes a small number of key priorities which we will be focusing on over the next four years:

- Sustainable development – there is continuing demand for housing in this area. We recognise the need for growth and the benefits it can bring, particularly in helping to revitalise our town centres, but it must be sustainable. We will aim to accommodate sensible levels of growth while preserving the character of our historic towns and villages.
- Regeneration and economic development – allied to growth must be improvements to the quality of our town centres. We will work with the private sector to bring investment into the area and to reverse the decline of some of our towns. We will continue to consult local communities about the changes that they want to see and work with them to achieve their aspirations for their local area.
- Financial stability – we will continue to control our costs, to find ways of generating income and to provide value-for-money services by maintaining our drive for efficiency and building effective partnerships.
- Customer-focused services – despite the economic downturn, the District is still relatively affluent. Many of our residents and businesses routinely use the internet and we will continue to upgrade our website to provide better quality information and to enable far more transactions to be carried out online. We will also work even more closely with our partners, particularly the County Council, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.

East Northamptonshire is a great place to live, work and visit. This Council will continue to play its part in making it even better.

Cllr Steven North
Leader

David Oliver
Chief Executive
1.0 Corporate outcomes – where we want to be

This Corporate Plan sets out East Northamptonshire Council’s key priorities and the outcomes that we intend to achieve over the next four years. These reflect a realistic balance between what we would like to do and what we can afford to do, and provide a basis for us to plan our work and to allocate our resources.

Our ambitions are challenging and we have limited resources but we believe we are right to be aiming high – our communities and our customers deserve that, and we all want a district that we can continue to be proud of.

We know we can’t achieve all this alone. We will be working with other public sector partners, the private sector and the voluntary sector to achieve our goals.

The Council’s vision is

**Working with our communities to sustain a thriving district**
The corporate outcomes that we will focus on for the next 4 years to achieve this vision can be summarised as:

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These outcomes form the basis for the content of this Corporate Plan.
2.0 Where are we now?

We keep track of national statistics on a range of things that contribute to quality of life. These statistics consistently show that East Northamptonshire is generally safer, cleaner, healthier and more prosperous than most parts of the country.

We also regularly encourage views and feedback on services, and consult and engage with local people and partners on our future plans and development. Much of this happens through:

- Surveys of our residents
- Consulting with local communities about how they want to see their area or neighbourhood develop, and involving them in the planning process
- Community Focus groups on specific service developments
- Surveys and “You say, We do” articles in Nene Valley News
- Day-to-day customer feedback through comments, compliments and complaints
- The feedback buttons on our website and in our customer service areas
- Standard questions in our service area questionnaires to give us customer feedback across the whole Council
- Opportunities to speak at Council meetings
- Councillors’ surgeries and meetings with their communities

Analysis of feedback over the past few years provides an important part of the background to the preparation of this Plan. In addition, we have considered the impact of the current economic climate, together with the policy direction of the government, on local residents, communities and businesses.

Many of the issues about which residents regularly express concern are primarily the responsibility of other public sector bodies, such as:

- health (the NHS)
- crime (the police)
- the condition of roads and pavements (the County Council or, for major ‘A’ roads, Highways England)

Other concerns, like job prospects or shopping facilities, are largely dependent on national factors such as the economy.

This plan focuses on what we can do to deliver what our communities and customers want and it also recognises that we will need to work with a range of partners to achieve our vision of:

**Working with our communities to sustain a thriving District**

Our approach to achieving the outcomes set out on page 5 is outlined in the following sections.
3.0 What will we do to achieve our goals?

We need to make the most of limited resources, so we will focus on the quality of life issues that are most important to our communities and that we can do something about.

3.1 A good quality of life – Prosperous

East Northamptonshire is a relatively prosperous District, and unemployment is low. In recent years we have invested in improvements to the town centres of Raunds, Irthlingborough and Rushden to make them more attractive and to encourage people to visit and to shop, and we will build on this.

Regeneration and Economic Development

The economic prosperity of the District is driven primarily by national factors, but there are some key actions that we will carry out to help to provide the best possible climate for business growth.

We will:
- Support the delivery of the Rushden Lakes development to provide a greatly-improved retail offer and much-needed employment in the District.
- Maintain free parking in our town centre car parks.
- Provide business-friendly services, taking a supportive approach to dealing with regulation, helping businesses to obtain grant funding and making it as easy as possible for them to set up, grow and increase local employment opportunities.
- Continue to invest in the environment and tourism, particularly Destination Nene Valley, the Greenway, the Blueway and Stanwick Lakes.
- Invest £300k to help ensure delivery of at least 90% coverage of superfast broadband across the District.
- Identify land for development to attract high quality jobs.
- Work with partners and employers to increase the skills required for those high-quality jobs.
- Develop a Local Infrastructure Plan that sets out the facilities and transport links that local communities need, and continue to use our Community Facilities Fund and to work with others to bring in additional investment to help meet those needs.
3.2 A good quality of life – Sustainable

There is significant demand for housing in East Northamptonshire. Our challenge is to ensure that this growth is resilient to future changes in climate, and that it benefits the local economy and local communities by improving the quality of the environment.

**Sustainable development**

*We will:*

- Continue to work jointly with our partners in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough to deliver the revised Core Spatial Strategy so that it balances effectively the overall need for housing and business growth and the wishes of local communities in East Northamptonshire.
- Continue to support Neighbourhood Plans, ensuring that local development meets local aspirations and is consistent with the Core Spatial Strategy.
- Develop plans, supported by local people, for a new Sustainable Urban Extension at Rushden East to provide a mix of high quality employment, housing, leisure and open space, and to reduce the pressure to build in our rural areas.
- Support the government’s commitment to upgrade the Chowns Mill roundabout at the junction of the A6 and A45, and its proposals for the dualling of the A45 between Stanwick and Thrapston.
- Progress the 4 Towns Plan and consider reviewing the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan.

**High quality built environment**

*We will:*

- Ensure that new developments provide adequate infrastructure, including high quality green and open space, and that new buildings meet high lifetime homes and environmental standards.
3.3 A good quality of life – Clean

We know that the services that the public value most are refuse collection, street cleansing and recycling, so we will continue to invest in them. Waste management is becoming increasingly expensive because of new legislation and Government fines for putting household waste into landfill, so we will maintain a service that is high quality while aiming to keep costs down.

Effective management of waste
We will:
- Secure a continued high quality, cost-effective waste collection and street cleansing service when the current contract ends in 2017.
- Encourage residents to reduce the amount of domestic waste that they produce and to increase recycling through continued education and enforcement.

Clean streets
We will:
- Working with Town & Parish Councils, continue to take a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to dealing with litter, dog fouling, graffiti, fly tipping and other eyesores.
3.4 A good quality of life – Healthy

People are living longer than ever before, and we will continue to provide services to help everyone stay healthy, fit and active.

**High levels of participation in active recreation**
We will:
- Develop a new Leisure Strategy that encourages healthy, active lifestyles, including tackling obesity and rural isolation, and ensure it is delivered by entering into a new contract with a suitable provider when the current contract ends in 2016/17.

**Improved housing**
We will:
- Seek, through our planning policies, to ensure that appropriate types and levels of affordable housing are provided as a result of new developments.
- Address poor housing standards through grant aid and enforcement.
- Work with our communities to put problematic empty properties back into use.

**Good public health**
We will, through continued advice, education and enforcement:
- Protect public health and safety through monitoring and enforcement of legal standards in workplaces, food premises and the environment.
3.5 A good quality of life – Safe

Low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour

Levels of crime in East Northamptonshire are already low, and we will continue to work with the police and other partners to keep it that way.

While crime prevention and detection are primarily the responsibility of the police, we will:

- Engage with vulnerable and priority individuals and families to support them with early help to improve their safety and wellbeing.
- Ensure that new developments and licensed premises are well-designed to minimise the opportunities for crime.
- Work with the police and other partners to target and reduce domestic violence and anti-social behaviour.
4.0 Good value for money

We have suffered significant cuts in government funding at the same time as our investment income has remained low. Because of these reductions in income, we have had to cut costs significantly, but we have maintained high quality services while keeping Council Tax amongst the lowest in the country.

Most of our Council Tax payers think that our current low level of tax – just over £2.00 a week, and less than 10% of the total bill – represents good value. We will continue to provide good value for money.

Financial stability
We must ensure that our finances remain healthy so that we can continue to maintain high quality services. We will:
- Continue to look for opportunities to increase income and reduce costs and to manage our finances carefully so that we maintain a balanced budget and can afford our future plans.

Good value for money
We will:
- Focus our resources on the priority areas set out in this Corporate Plan, spending money only on those things which are important to our local communities, deliver the council’s legal duties or are essential for the effective running of the Council.
- Continue to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible.
Achieving these outcomes for our communities depends on our carrying out certain key processes well

5.0 High quality service delivery

Our main aim is to provide high quality, customer-focused services to the public. This is sometimes challenging, because many of the services we provide are governed by various laws, some of which require us to ensure that businesses and members of the public comply with them. We are inspected by a number of regulators and government departments to ensure that we are complying with those laws and enforcing them effectively.

Customer-focused services

We will:

- Use customer insight to enhance our service delivery and improve the ways customers can access our services using self service principles, particularly online.
- Continue to identify and reduce ‘avoidable contact’, where our customers really shouldn’t have had to call, e-mail or write to us.
- Enforce relevant legislation fairly and equitably, ensuring that our customers understand the reasons for our actions and feel that they have had a fair hearing.
6.0 Effective partnership working

We can only achieve many of our priority outcomes by working in partnership with other councils, the police, the health service, the voluntary sector and others.

Strong strategic partnerships
We will:
- Focus our efforts on those partnerships that make a significant contribution to our priority outcomes, particularly in delivering economic growth and in reducing costs through shared services.
- Strengthen our relationships with the health, education and voluntary sectors and our Town & Parish Councils.
7.0 Effective management

Our management of people, finances, assets, information and risks is crucial to our providing high quality services and value for money.

Committed staff

We maintain a fundamental belief in the value of our staff and the contribution they make towards the success of the council. It is important to us for them to feel positive and motivated.

We will:
- Maintain a positive, fair, supportive working environment by involving staff and unions in the changes that will affect them.
- Maximise flexible working arrangements while meeting the needs of the council and our customers.
- Plan our future workforce requirements and implement appropriate pay and benefits and training and development arrangements to ensure that we will always have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs.

Good use of resources

We will:
- Ensure we have the right ICT infrastructure to enable new ways of working to improve efficiency and customer service.
- Manage every aspect of our operations – finances, risks, assets, performance and information – effectively and efficiently to ensure that we can continue to deliver quality services while providing good value for money.

Legal compliance

We will:
- Comply with all the statutory requirements that govern our activities, including equalities legislation.
Two things underpin everything we do – understanding the needs of our different customers and communities, and having staff and councillors with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours

8.0 Knowledge of our customers and communities

We recognise that all our customers and communities are different, and will reflect those differences in the way we deliver services.

Customer and community insight

We will:
- Develop our understanding of our customers’ needs and of how, when and where they want to use our services.
- Engage with local communities to understand their needs, including their requirements for local infrastructure.
- Continue to consult residents and businesses to gauge opinion, understand the issues that they are concerned about and inform decision-making.

9.0 Staff and councillors with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours

It is vital that all our staff and Councillors have the knowledge and skills they need to carry out their duties.

Continuous development

We will:
- Continue to invest in training and development for staff and councillors, to ensure that they have the right skills and knowledge to carry out their roles into the future.

Appropriate behaviours

We will:
- Lead by example, providing open and transparent government and clear decision-making arrangements.
- Use our knowledge, skills and behaviours framework as a basis for recruitment, induction, appraisal, training and development.
Other important documents that support this Corporate Plan

**Medium Term Financial Strategy**
This strategy sets out how we will use our resources to achieve our priorities.

**Local Development Framework (LDF)**
The LDF comprises the Joint Core Strategy, which covers the area of East Northamptonshire, Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough councils, together with Development Plan Documents specific to East Northamptonshire.

**East Northamptonshire Council Constitution**
East Northamptonshire Council has agreed a constitution which sets out how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that it is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

To view the above documents, go to:

**www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/corporateplan**

All of the Council's strategies, policies, press releases and details of any ongoing consultation can be found at **www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk**