



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Council – 14 October 2013

Progress report on the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2011-15

Purpose of report

This report sets out the Chief Executive's summary of the Council's progress to date towards achieving the ambitions set out in the Corporate Plan 2011-15.

Attachment(s)

Appendix 1 – Corporate Plan 2011-15

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Council adopted the Corporate Plan 2011-15 ('the Plan') at its meeting on 27 April 2011. The Plan is attached at Appendix 1. It seems an appropriate time, at the mid-point of this 4-year Plan, to assess our progress against that plan and to reflect in particular on the achievements of the last 12 months.

2.0 Corporate Plan 2011-15

2.1 The Plan consists of 8 strategic outcomes split into 23 lower-level outcomes, along with a total of 69 actions designed to deliver those outcomes.

2.2 In adopting the Plan, the Council prioritised 4 of the 23 outcomes. These were:

- Regeneration and Economic Development
- Sustainable Development
- Financial Stability
- Customer-focused Services

3.0 Progress towards delivering the Plan

3.1 Our main achievements and work still in progress towards delivering the 4 priority outcomes within the Plan are set out below.

3.2 Regeneration and Economic Development

3.2.1 We have:

- Freed up land at Barrington Road and Newton Road (the site of the former depot and recycling centre) in Rushden for development. Both sites have been sold (one subject to contract) and will be developed for housing and retail use respectively.
- Completed the planned improvements to the southern section of Rushden High Street, providing a much more pleasant environment for retailers and shoppers.
- Introduced the Community Facilities Fund to allocate a significant proportion of New Homes Bonus (NHB) to meet local infrastructure needs. We have so far allocated £285k to 13 projects from across the District.

- Approved the Rushden Lakes application, which would see the biggest investment in the District in many years, create in excess of 1,000 permanent jobs, provide much-needed local retail facilities and benefit the local environment. Following a Planning Inquiry into our decision, we are awaiting the Secretary of State's decision in January 2014 as to whether to allow the development to proceed.

3.2.2 We are also:

- Working with Northamptonshire County Council and other partners to deliver broadband to 90% of the properties in the county by the end of 2015
- Finalising our Community Infrastructure List (the 'R123 List') to set out the major infrastructure needs across the district in preparation for the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Reviewing our planning processes, seeking out ways to cut red tape and working on a Better Business Northamptonshire project with councils across the county to improve our services to businesses across the Council, beyond our initial focus only on Planning Services

3.3 Sustainable Development

3.3.1 We have, in partnership with English Heritage and the National Trust, successfully challenged at Judicial Review the decision by a Planning Inspector to allow an appeal against our refusal of a planning application for a wind farm next to Lyveden New Bield. The developer has been given leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal, but we have won the battle so far.

3.3.2 We are also:

- Continuing to work with our North Northamptonshire partners on the revision of the Joint Core Strategy, although progress has stalled pending the Secretary of State's decision on Rushden Lakes.
- Working with 4 Town Councils and a number of Parish Councils to support their preparation of neighbourhood plans, which will set out their local aspirations within the overall planning policy context. We are also supporting others in the preparation of community plans to assess the needs of their communities.

3.4 Financial Stability

3.4.1 We have achieved our goal of balancing the revenue budget by 2012/13, and leaving a reasonable level of reserves to cater for major unexpected costs. We have:

- Retained a proportion of NHB to support the revenue budget (80% in 2012/13 and 70% in 2013/14, with plans to reduce this to 50% in 2015/16). Members will be aware that NHB is a bonus in name alone; it is, in fact, only a partial refund of the very significant cuts in government funding that we have suffered over the last 3 years, and is conditional on our delivering housing growth. Many councils have felt unable to allocate any NHB to growth-related projects such as those referred to in section 3.2.1 above.
- Reduced staffing costs (our biggest area of cost) by over 15%, from £7.2m in 2009/10 to £6.1m in 2012/13.
- Entered into new shared services, for legal advice (twice – initially with Northampton BC and then with LGSS) and for health & safety, emergency planning and business continuity, with Kettering and Corby BCs.
- Devolved responsibility for public conveniences and CCTV to the town councils.

- Completed the Nene Centre improvements and roof replacement, and recovered the vast majority of the costs of the latter through a successful legal process. We are also close to completing the Pemberton Centre improvement project, which, like the Nene Centre project, is designed to deliver significant budget reductions by generating additional health & fitness income.

3.4.2 We have set a balanced budget again for 2013/14, and are currently forecasting an underspend.

3.4.3 We have also reached agreement with the County Council for them to return to us the additional Council Tax that they now receive by virtue of our scrapping empty homes discounts. We received £220k this year and that is being allocated, with NCC's agreement, to funding Disabled Facilities Grants, where demand is far in excess of the amount provided to us by the government for that purpose.

3.5 Customer-focused services

3.5.1 Progress has been slowest in this area. The focus has been very much on trying to maintain the level of service that we provide to our customers in the face of massive funding cuts rather than to improve our services while cutting staff numbers and costs.

3.5.2 The most significant activity in this area has probably been the introduction of the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme this year. While this could easily be included under the Financial Stability heading, because an imperative of the scheme was to ensure that it was self-financing, the customer service issues were very challenging.

3.5.3 CTS involves fairly large numbers of people who previously received 100% Council Tax Benefit now being required to pay a percentage (generally 8.5%) of their bill. This placed great demands on Revenues and Benefits staff, not just in terms of increased customer contact but also through having to deal with people who were upset, angry or simply worried about how they were going to pay their bill. The team dealt with these issues admirably and collection rates remain positive; we anticipate collecting 98% of the amount billed for 2013/14, in line with the rate for 2012/13.

3.5.4 We are in the process of upgrading our website, removing redundant pages, making navigation around the site easier and introducing more self-service features so that customers can make payment and book services when it suits them and without having to phone or visit us.

4.0 Equality and diversity implications

4.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

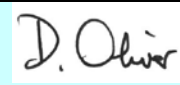
7.0 Risk management

7.1 There are no risk implications arising from this report. However, there are significant risks to the Council being able to achieve the ambitions set out in the Plan by 2015, mainly due to the continued financial pressures which the council will be under during that period. These pressures and risks will be set out for Members' consideration during the budget-setting and Medium-Term Financial Strategy process later in the year.

8.0 Recommendations

8.1 Council is recommended to note the report.

(Purpose: To ensure that Members are aware of the Council's progress in delivering its Corporate Plan)

Legal	Power: Local Government Act 1972 and 2000				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
Person Originating Report: David Oliver, Chief Executive ☎ 01832 742105 ✉ doliver@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
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CFO		DMO 4.10.2013		CX 4.10.2013	

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