

West Berkshire Council

Council Strategy

**caring for and
protecting the
vulnerable**

**promoting a
vibrant district**

**improving
education**

**protecting the
environment**

2013-17



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

West Berkshire in numbers

Our plan on a page

Foreword

Understanding West Berkshire 1

What you've told us 2

Funding 3

Public health 4

Vision & purpose of the Council 5

Our priorities 6

The principles we work to 11

Making sure we deliver 14



ONE district

One council

154,000 people

105,000 cars

750 miles of road

65,000 homes

12,500 streetlights

730 miles of countryside paths

74% of West Berkshire an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

ONE year

£122m net budget

25,000 children at school

4,300 older people and disabled adults helped to live at home

820,000 visitors to our website

3,000 planning applications

37,000 tonnes recycled

2 million bus passengers

ONE day

2,650 children transported to school

400 people looked after in residential and nursing care

130 looked after children

900 enquiries through the Contact Centre

2,500 books borrowed from libraries

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2013-17

Our overarching vision:

Keeping West Berkshire a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business



The purpose of the Council:

- 1. Helping you to help yourself**
- 2. Helping you when you cannot help yourself**
- 3. Helping you to help one another**
- 4. Promoting and acting in the interests of the communities, people and businesses of the district.**

Our priorities in delivering public services:

- Caring for and protecting the vulnerable**
- Promoting a vibrant district**
 - Improving education**
- Protecting the environment**

The principles we work to:

- Putting people first**
- Living within our means**
- Empowering people and communities**
- Transforming our services to remain affordable and effective**
- Doing what's important well**

FOREWORD

Our vision is to keep West Berkshire a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business.

To achieve this, we want the vulnerable in our communities to be cared for and supported. We want to promote a vibrant district and our economy to prosper. We want our young people to fulfil their potential. We want people to be able to enjoy our towns, villages, green spaces and countryside.

We want these things because the 154,000 people living in West Berkshire want them.

We now operate within tough financial constraints. It is the national Government's priority to reduce the national debt – and it is only right that the Council should play its part. Since 2010 we have had to find savings of over £23m and have removed over 300 posts from across the authority – around 1 in 6 of those working for the Council. However, in achieving these savings we have sought to protect front line services wherever we can. A further £16m worth of savings are likely to have to be found over the next 3 years.

We continue to maintain our record of improving outcomes for people across the district. In the last year, we have:

- opened a new extra care housing scheme in Thatcham;
- completed major refurbishments and rebuilding at the Winchcombe and the Downs Schools;
- received strong feedback from Ofsted on our Children's Services;
- opened a new waste and recycling centre at Padworth;
- adopted the Core Strategy planning future development across the district;
- opened a new footbridge in Hungerford;
- successfully launched Neighbourhood Panels, bringing victims and offenders together to resolve crime;
- secured £1.2m lottery funding to upgrade the West Berkshire Museum.

The next year will see significant changes for the Council, assuming responsibility for public health and legislative changes meaning we can keep a proportion of our income generated through growths in business rates. Looking further into the future, there remain significant challenges as a result of the local government financial settlement.

However challenging our financial situation may be, we are presented with an opportunity to do things differently. We recognise that our objectives can only be achieved in partnership with the people of West Berkshire, other public service providers, businesses, voluntary and community organisations, town and parish councils, centred around the localism agenda and our core purpose of helping you to help yourself; when you cannot help yourself; to help one another and; acting as advocates for West Berkshire.

This strategy defines our ambition and agenda for change over the next 4 years. It focuses on our 4 key priority areas - underpinned by a set of principles which will guide how we are responding to changes in the policy, financial and legislative landscape.

In each area, a set of strategic objectives more specifically sets out what we are seeking to achieve. These from the basis of our Council and service delivery plans. Along with our Medium Term Financial Strategy these will show how we will allocate resources and put in train measures to make sure our services remain affordable and as effective as possible.

We know the next few years will mean a great deal of upheaval and uncertainty for a great many people. Whilst we cannot avoid that, we make a commitment to be fair and open about what we are doing. We believe that a more flexible, responsive council will deliver better outcomes and value for people and provide a fulfilling place for staff to work.

We are a strong and committed organisation. Built upon the dedication and professionalism of our staff and partners, we feel we are well placed to deal with the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Gordon Lundie
Leader

Nick Carter
Chief Executive

March 2013

UNDERSTANDING WEST BERKSHIRE

The best place to start in outlining the work of the Council and where we need to be is to consider our place – the West Berkshire that we live, learn, work and do business in – and to understand some of the socio-economic and demographic pressures we are set to face, alongside issues that matter to local people.

West Berkshire is a great place to be.

The area is made up largely of rolling, chalk Downlands, with the Kennet valley forming our southern border with Hampshire. We are a substantially rural area, with three quarters of the district lying within the [North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#).

Almost two thirds of people live in the Kennet valley: Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford, Theale, and in the suburban areas to the west of Reading borough. It is within this area where some of our key businesses – Walker Snacks, X-trac, ADP business systems, Quantel, Bayer, AWE and Vodafone - are located. However, covering an area of over half of Berkshire, we also have one of the most dispersed populations in the South East.

Not surprisingly, West Berkshire is a desirable place to live. Our population has grown by 6% over the last decade and projections suggest growth of a further 10% over the next.

We are an increasingly ageing population. Since 2001, the number of people aged over 65 has grown by around 23% (compared to 13% across the South East) and is projected to increase by a further 34% over the next decade (compared to 26% regionally). This will mean 8,000 more older people living in the district – a number of whom will need some form of care or support.

West Berkshire has not been immune from the recent recession during which unemployment rose to its highest level in over a decade. The proportion of people out of work has been falling – and remains below the regional average - although at just under 1,700 – remains double that in 2007.

One in four of those claiming unemployment benefit are young people. Although this has fallen from its peak in 2009, it equates to four times as many people aged 18-24 looking for work than a decade ago.

Businesses have been lost - most visibly on the High Street, but also amongst the small and medium sized enterprises which form the backbone of our local economy.

However, West Berkshire has a strong economic base and there is continued investment in the area: the overall growth in new businesses in West Berkshire is higher than across the South East more generally. Most obvious is the new Parkway development, with 50 new shops - including 2 new department stores – which opened right in the heart of Newbury, along with nearly 150 new housing units.

The housing market remains slow and the number of new houses built in the area has been low for the few years. However, demand for housing remains high and in the medium term is expected to grow. Affordability is a significant issue for many people: there are currently around 4,000 people on our housing register and demand for housing options and advice remains high.

The impact of the recession is not purely economic and we are mindful of the potential effects of worklessness - notably amongst our young people. Being out of work places not only economic pressures on individuals and households, but may also lead to a range of social issues such as rising homelessness, family breakdown, health and crime.

Overall, we have low levels of deprivation in West Berkshire. However, there remain pockets of relatively high deprivation within the district, notably within our more urban areas.

West Berkshire also has relatively low levels of reported crime compared to surrounding areas and over the course of the year, we have seen a 20% drop in our overall crime rate.

This is a short summary of some of the key issues relevant to West Berkshire. A more substantial overview of the social and economic fabric of the area, is provided in our District Profile, available at westberks.gov.uk/research.

WHAT YOU'VE TOLD US

Satisfaction with a wide range of our services is high and surveys have shown the vast majority of local people were happy with individual services like refuse collection (88%), doorstep recycling (82%), parks and open spaces (74%) and libraries (66%).

However, less than half of people felt informed about public services in general and only a quarter thought they could influence decisions affecting their local area.

We have worked hard to keep people more informed and engaged in local decisions affecting them. We continue to listen to service users' and customers' feedback and to respond to this as we continually strive to improve what we do.

Given the significant changes afoot in the funding and delivery of public services, we undertook a budget simulation exercise with local residents, asking the question - *how would you allocate diminishing resources across the range of different services the Council provides?*



Help set West Berkshire's budget

Changes are taking place in public services, and West Berkshire Council is asking for your help, through an online 'Budget Simulator'.

Go to www.westberks.gov.uk/budgetsimulator. Look at the services we provide for you, make your choice of where spending should be increased or reduced (it shows you the consequences of any savings you want to make) and send us the results.

Your suggestions will help West Berkshire Council set its budget in future years.

Internet access is free at all West Berkshire Council libraries.
Closing date is **17 December 2010**.

Budget Simulator

West Berkshire Council

More than 800 people took the opportunity to take part giving us a clear message about the services local people most value and where we should be focussing our resources.

Child protection was considered the most important service for local residents, along with care and support for older people and adults with disabilities, children's services, community safety, support for schools and youth services.

Loosely speaking, functions dealing with people were more valued than place-based services such as roads, waste, public protection, traffic management, countryside services, libraries and leisure facilities. This stemmed from a sense amongst many of *"people first and things second"*. As one respondent commented:

"In hard times, I think it is better to protect services for children, disabled and older people. We must try to reduce the human cost; that's why expenditure items like buildings, heritage, parks and road maintenance should take the back seat until the situation improves."

A theme emerged that people could - and necessarily should - be doing more to help themselves. For example, *"if we can support local communities to take care of each other, we can reduce the need for certain facilities."*

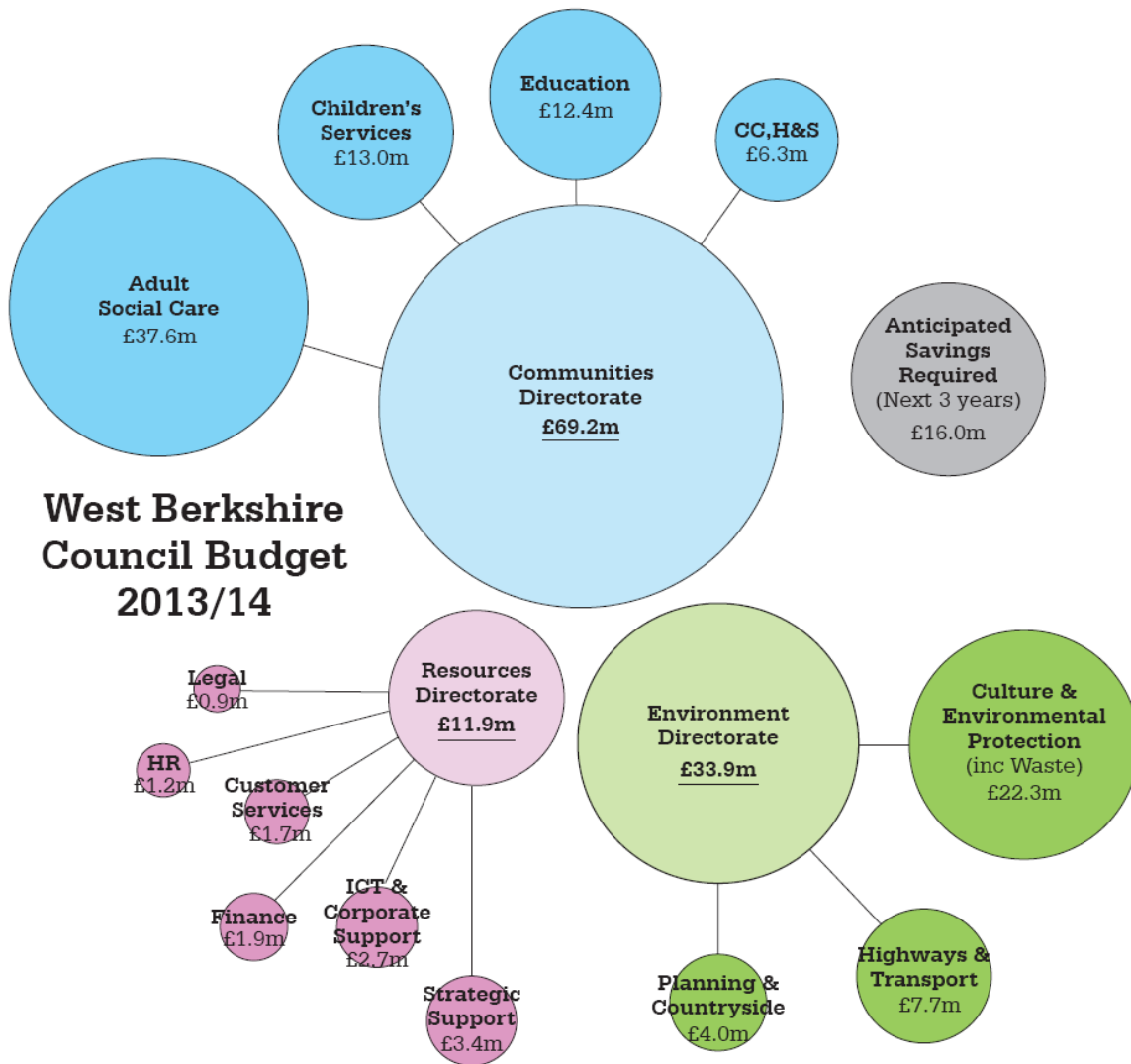
The feedback from this exercise has been used explicitly in the planning and development of this strategy and in our approach to budget setting where - for example - the overall level of funding of both adult and children's social care services are more substantively protected.

This is also reflected in the new management structure of the Council, themed around 'people', 'place' and 'resources' which has further streamlined the organisation, reducing the number of directorates from 4 to 3.

The full results of the budget simulator exercise - and all other exercises we undertake to engage with and listen to the views of residents and service users - are published online through our *Consultation Finder* database at westberks.gov.uk/research.

FUNDING

Lots of people ask what services they get for their council tax and if West Berkshire Council provides value for money. Over the course of 2012/13, we will provide £122m worth of services across the district. You will probably use at least one every day – even if it is just driving to work, walking in the countryside, or simply putting your rubbish in the bin.



This graph is useful in showing the relative amounts of money spent on different services across the Council. By far and away the largest area of spend is in the Communities directorate (60% of service-related expenditure): just less than a third of expenditure is in relation to the Environment directorate (roads, bins, transport, planning) with a tenth of service expenditure in the Resources directorate. Adult Social Care is the largest area of expenditure reflecting the social safety net provided by the Council to support vulnerable individuals in our communities. The second largest area of

spend is in Cultural and Environmental protection: £15.5m of this relates to the collection of waste and refuse from across the district.

The Government's 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) allocated a tough settlement for local government, reducing the amount of grant funding by some 28% over four years.

In the three years since then, we have put in place a programme to remain within our budget, whilst minimising the impact on front line service delivery. This has delivered savings

of around £23m although has meant removing around 1 in 6 posts across the organisation. As a result, we are continuing to live within our means, whilst maintaining delivery of key services.

Finances continue to be difficult to predict with any certainty as key, Government policy changes - around business rates, council tax benefit, planning fees, and support for academies - are proposed, consulted on, amended and implemented. Alongside these external factors, there are significant demand pressures within some services - notably within adult social care, providing the social safety net for the most vulnerable in our communities.

We estimate significant savings still need to be made: over the next three years a further £16m worth of savings is still needed to be found – note the size of grey circle in the graph above.

The Council will clearly need to continue to make difficult decisions and given the size of the reduction in overall budget, front line services will almost certainly be affected.

This strategy provides the framework for these decisions: prioritising those areas seen as most critical or important. It sets out our overarching approach to dealing with this reduction in resource whilst minimising the impact on local communities.

This is reflected in our Medium Term Financial Strategy which prioritises the allocation of our resources to those determined as most critical in supporting the strategic objectives within this strategy and our statutory responsibilities.

This, in turn, will determine the level of service we will realistically be able to provide in different areas, be they good or adequate.

The amount of capital expenditure which the Council is able to fund is also to decrease by around £5 million or 42% over the life of this strategy and we have undertaken a review of remaining spending in this area to ensure it is aligned to our priorities – notably the highways network and education.

You can find out more about our finances at westberks.gov.uk/councilspending.

ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

We believe that everyone has the right to enjoy good health. We want people in West Berkshire to live in a vibrant and sustainable community and live as healthy and independent lives as they can. We want our health and care services to be integrated, high quality and safe. When you need to use those services we want you to have a positive experience of care.

As of 1st April 2013, local authorities across the country will take on direct responsibility for public health from the NHS. This means that the Council will lead the transformation and integration of local health and social care services to improve health and wellbeing for the people of West Berkshire.

This provides new opportunities for West Berkshire, allowing us to focus on improving the health and well-being of our population through all our activities.

West Berkshire Council has been working closely with our Public Health colleagues in the NHS over the course of the last year to identify and put in place how it intends to improve issues around both health and well-being.

A new Health and Well-Being Strategy has been developed and consulted on with an overarching aim of adding years to life and life to years. The strategy identifies a number of key priorities:

- giving every child the best start in life;
- promoting a healthy district;
- addressing childhood obesity;
- supporting those over 40 years old to address lifestyle choices detrimental to their health;
- promoting independence and supporting older people to manage their chronic conditions.

The transition will mean the movement of a small team of public health professionals into the authority who will champion healthy working through the local authority and GP commissioners to integrate health and social care -preventing ill health, protecting against threats to public health and tackling inequalities in health.

The authority will be responsible for updating a comprehensive assessment of health needs, from which joint local health and wellbeing

strategies will be developed to address the national Public Health Outcomes. In doing so, the Council will have a focus on local priorities and action across the life course to ensure a preventive approach is embedded in public services.

VISION AND PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

Our vision is to keep West Berkshire a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business

The Council has three organisational values which help guide our philosophy and culture. These are universal values, valid and appropriate to the challenges that lie ahead:

- *respect* in all relationships;
- *integrity* in everything we do;
- *efficiency* in reaching our goals.

People's changing expectations, changes in government policy, difficult economic circumstances, coupled with demographic and growth pressures mean that we are fundamentally reviewing how we deliver services across the district.

The role of the Council is shifting from a traditional *provider* of public services, to a more *supportive* one. We need to constantly do things smarter and keep all our services affordable, whilst giving local people the support they need.

We need to make difficult choices. We need to ensure a level of service within different areas – be it good or adequate. Vital, however, is that our priorities are done well.

Guiding this shift in emphasis, our *core purpose* therefore defines what we are here for as a council:

1. Helping you to help yourself
2. Helping you when you cannot help yourself
3. Helping you to help one another
4. Promoting and acting in the interests of the people, communities and businesses of the district.

These four simple ideas run throughout our approach to delivering outcomes for the people and communities of West Berkshire.

Helping you to help yourself means enabling people to get access to the information and support they need to help them get on with

living their lives, in the most efficient and effective way possible, without relying on the direct provision of council services. This recognises that individuals would like to be - or could be - in greater control.

This might be as simple as providing customers with information on which they can take personal decisions - for example developing the range of services available online; through to the more complex provision of personalised budgets and the support for people using social care services.

Helping you when you cannot help yourself means supporting and protecting the vulnerable in our communities – be they children or adults. It focuses on those who need the support of public services - such as looking after children in care, or supporting people with learning, physical or sensory disabilities.

Helping you to help one another means working with and supporting people and communities to achieve their own ambitions. Local people value their local area and take pride in it. Most of West Berkshire is already covered by a local community plan and volunteers and community groups across the district positively influence others' lives. We will build on this, helping communities to get their ideas off the ground and be more involved in the services and facilities provided in their area.

Promoting and acting in the interests of the communities, people and businesses of the district highlights the role the Council plays in representing West Berkshire, for example in promoting inward investment to achieve sustainable business growth and create skilled jobs, developing a skilled workforce and planning and maintaining our infrastructure to meet the demands of growth and businesses.

Every service that we provide as a council, either directly, or indirectly through empowering individuals, communities and the involvement of individuals, is designed with this core purpose at its heart.

OUR PRIORITIES

Caring for and protecting the vulnerable

Why is this a priority?

Supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable in our communities is one of the most important things we do. It is central to the whole purpose of the Council, providing the safety net for people when they cannot help themselves.

Children, young people and adults may need support for a whole number of reasons including learning, physical or sensory disabilities, mental ill-health or needing support as they get older. Alongside this socio economic issues are creating vulnerabilities for other groups of people who may not meet the threshold for receiving statutory services from adult social care, such as people who are in difficulty with either accessing or retaining suitable accommodation.

Where possible, we will seek to ensure people are supported to make their own decisions, maintain their independence, overcome barriers to reaching their potential and to help them improve their quality of life.

What will we do ...

Children and young people

- **Implement** the Munro Review to **modernise services** to vulnerable children, **focussing** child protection resources on those children who are at most risk and **working in partnership** with schools, health and other partners to provide high-quality, preventative support for other vulnerable children and young people and their families
- **Pilot** personal budgets for disabled children to ensure that services are tailored to individual needs
- **Recruit** more local carers to ensure that looked after children are placed as locally as possible in family-based settings
- **Focus** on early intervention and support for young people more in danger of becoming disengaged and disenfranchised.

Children and young people (cont)

- **Support** 'Troubled Families' within West Berkshire by getting children into school on a regular basis and supporting parents to get work through the West Berkshire 'Turn Around Project'.
- **Improve** response to children experiencing emotional abuse, neglect and living with domestic abuse.
- **Improve** and **enhance** independence through the provision of independent travel training for young people with special educational needs / disabilities

Older people and vulnerable adults

- **Review** our social care activity to ensure it is affordable and sustainable over the medium term and targeted on areas of critical risk or prevention of dependency on long term services.
- **Provide** an information and signposting service so individuals can make informed decisions about options and the cost of their care and early intervention and support to access timely assessment to prevent dependency on care services.
- **Work with** the NHS, voluntary sector and other organisations to reduce duplication of effort and resources and to maximise the funding available for direct support to individuals and their families: welfare benefits, Continuing Health Care.
- **Support** carers to continue caring through increasing the numbers of carers identified, carers assessments, support services, self help groups, carers breaks.
- **Increase** the number of people who manage their own personal budget and are in charge of their own social care, ensuring comprehensive risk management.

Older people and vulnerable adults (cont)

- **Promote** the development of a range of community based services including day opportunities, extra care housing, equipment, alarm lines to increase choice and support to those eligible for social care services.
- **Target** services on helping adults back to independence and recovery, recognising that many can return to independence after a short period of support through reablement and rehabilitation services.
- **Target** services for housing related support to those most in need across the district.
- Continue to **work to** prevent homelessness offering the widest possible range of options, advice and interventions
- Continue to **provide access** to short term accommodation based services for those who need support to move on to more independent living.

Promoting a vibrant district

Why is this a priority?

Continued economic growth is vital if West Berkshire is to remain competitive. This needs to be sustained through supporting existing businesses and encouraging inward investment.

Whilst prosperity is key to a good quality of life, so is the social wellbeing of the local population. We need to provide and maintain the physical infrastructure on which the district depends. Only in delivering on all these will we succeed in keeping West Berkshire a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business.

What we will do ...

Infrastructure

- **Focus** on carrying out essential highways maintenance.
- **Deliver** effective transport solutions across the district
- **Explore** new opportunities and methods for delivery of a range of housing, including responding to the housing needs of rural communities
- **Lead** and **deliver** the *Superfast Berkshire* project, as part of a national infrastructure programme, to bring superfast broadband to rural areas of West Berkshire.

Supporting Business

- **Focus** local economic development on promoting the district to businesses and becoming more business-friendly;
- **Work with** our regional partners to develop a strategy for encouraging local enterprise and inward investment
- **Work with** local and regional partners to ensure that local skills and enterprise needs are met.
- Continue to **refresh** and **implement** Newbury 2025, our vision for the regeneration of Newbury

Planning

- **Provide** a responsive planning service with a clear policy framework that balances protection of the environment, economic development and the housing needs of local residents

Community Safety

- **Work with** our partners to keep crime levels low, reducing the incidents of crime.
- **Work with** local communities to help protect them from future flooding.

Healthy Lives

- **Improve** the health and well being of the adult population of West Berkshire through tackling inequalities in health.
- **Focus** on a preventative approach to public health, supporting people to make better lifestyle choices and consider their own future health needs.

Improving education

Why is this a priority?

People are any area’s greatest asset. The right knowledge and skills are vital, not only in to help each and every person to fulfil their potential and improve their quality of life, but also to underpin growth and innovation in the district, vital for our future competitiveness and prosperity.

The establishment of academies and other changes in the education system will alter the role of the Council in relation to schools. We will continue to work to make sure that every young person realises their potential.

Amongst other things this means working with schools, children and their families to improve outcomes for all, and improving training opportunities for young people, especially those currently not in education, employment or training.

What we will do ...

Working with schools (cont)

- **Develop** school buildings to meet demand and create the best possible learning environments within available resources.
- **Provide** efficient and effective services that are traded with schools, including academies.

Higher and adult education

- **Support** schools and work with other providers to ensure positive implementation of the raising of the participation age to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015
- **Influence, commission and provide** adult and community learning opportunities that provide for the most vulnerable, and the wider adult population.

Vulnerable pupils

- **Challenge and support** schools where outcomes for pupils need improvement and focus early years support on children and families who are most vulnerable.
- **Ensure** appropriate support is in place for all the most vulnerable children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, or who are looked after, or in need of safeguarding.

Working with schools

- **Support** schools and governors to continuously raise standards at all key stages and achieve an Ofsted inspection rating of good or better.
- **Support** schools in evaluating themselves and giving successful schools greater freedoms.

Protecting the Environment

Why is this a priority?

Three quarters of West Berkshire is designated as an Area of Outstanding Beauty. That natural environment plays a key role in sustaining a high quality of life in West Berkshire and is the reason why many people chose to live here.

Protecting this resource and the environment more generally, both now and for future generations, are seen as key to the district's continued prosperity.

What we will do ...

Environmental and historic protection

- **Focus** development on the existing urban areas to protect our countryside and the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- **Ensure** the protection and promotion of our natural and built environment and heritage

Cleaner and Greener

- **Maximise** the proportion of waste recycled and composted across the district.
- **Minimise** the amount of waste being sent to landfill sites.
- **Reduce** carbon emissions through efficient energy management, thereby reducing our energy consumption and bills.

THE PRINCIPLES WE WORK TO

We face unprecedented financial challenges and as a council and we need to fundamentally review what we do, and how we do it.

The relationship between the Council, our partners and local communities is inevitably changing. This is driven in the main, by constrained resources, but also by a recognition that things can often be better delivered at a local level, and not constrained by central government targets and regulations.

The corporate business and service delivery plans emanating from this strategy are built on five clear principles which will help us as an organisation, to navigate through the years ahead.

The principles can be applied to every function and service we provide and will mean, not only that the Council is smaller, but also more flexible and responsive to local needs.

Putting people first

We are committed to improving quality of life for all. Central to this is putting people at the heart of everything we do. Reflecting local need, *putting people first* means looking at how our services are designed and operated from the perspective of those who use them.

We need to review and improve our decision-making to put local people at its core. We need to ensure that we continue to listen to local people in deciding how our services should be delivered in the future and that they feel able to contribute to the decisions that affect them.

We also need to focus on how we communicate, recognising that people live busy lives and that we live increasingly in a digital age. We need to understand people's priorities and needs and make it simpler and easier to access and use our services.

We will do this by:

- **designing** all our services around those who need them
- **being open** and transparent in the way we do business;

- **strengthening** communications with an emphasis on electronic communications – including social media - to keep residents up to date.
- **ensuring** collecting customer feedback is meaningful and used effectively;
- **work to** minimise discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity for all members of our communities;
- **expanding** access to our services online, adopting the 'digital by default' principle and placing a greater emphasis on self-service;

Empowering people and communities

The Council is at its most effective when it is helping communities to help themselves: helping people to live successful lives as independently as possible. We believe that if you give power to local people, you get better results and achieve better value.

We know that our army of volunteers already makes a huge difference to thousands of people's everyday lives in their local areas. We want to work more closely with our voluntary and community sector to make it easier for people to contribute to their communities.

We recognise that some of the services we will have to scale back or stop are still important to local people, so we want to make it as easy as possible for communities to take over local facilities. This will include handing over buildings to community ownership, helping communities to get their ideas off the ground and encouraging people to volunteer.

We believe that not only is this approach more sustainable in the long-run, but that it will also make them more flexible to local needs.

Our approach will be to:

- **support** the continuing development of parish plans and town visions and make sure we put in place the resources to play our part in realising their aims;
- **facilitate** the development of Neighbourhood Development Plans – where they are wanted - to involve communities more closely in planning matters in their local area;
- **reshape** the way cultural, countryside and other **services** are delivered, with significantly greater involvement from local communities, the voluntary sector and parish councils and seek to transfer assets and services where these can clearly be delivered more effectively.

Living within our means

We never forget that the money we spend is yours. In straitened times it is even more important that we deliver the best possible value for money for local taxpayers.

We must drive ever greater value for money from our services: seeking more efficient provision where services are too expensive; changing providers if they aren't cost-effective and; ceasing provision altogether if they have little or no public need or value.

The themes threaded throughout this strategy will be embedded in individual service delivery plans and our overarching Council Delivery Plan, showing how specific corporate initiatives (such as a greater emphasis on electronic media and IT and closer working with communities, partners and other authorities) and service-specific initiatives are delivering savings.

Continuing to 'live within our means' means that we have to make difficult decisions now, focussing on our priorities and managing our budgets.

We will do this by:

- **ensuring** council tax increases are kept at a minimum throughout the life of this strategy;

- **ensuring** that value for money drives our underlying approach and that lower priority services are delivered at below average costs;
- **delivering** the necessary savings to continue to live within our means (currently estimated at around £16m over the next 3 years)
- **reviewing** and **renegotiating** contracts with external suppliers and service providers to drive down costs.
- **increasing** and **enhancing** our approach to procurement and contract management and where possible, join up with other public sector organisations, to ensure that we are getting value for money;
- **maximising** the income coming into the Council through ensuring all our fees and charges generally align with the rise in inflation;
- **taking** maximum advantage from central government's proposals on returning business rates to local control;
- **develop** joint-funding arrangements with voluntary and community sector, parish councils and other community groups to fund local improvements;
- further **rationalising** our estate, making greater use of existing buildings and sharing more of our buildings with partners wherever possible.

Transforming our services to remain affordable and effective

We must adapt to respond to the significant financial, policy and service challenges we face over the next few years to remain fit for purpose.

We have restructured the organisation, streamlining the authority further and reducing the number of directorates from four to three. This reflects the new emphasis on people-orientated and place-based services as expressed through feedback from the Budget Simulator exercise. This means that we will be more focussed on the new key priorities articulated through this strategy and supports an organisational culture centred on the principles expressed here.

More specifically, we will:

- **reshape** – and in some cases deliver significant savings – where appropriate in a number of services over the course of this strategy. For example in the areas of adult social care, cultural and countryside services, communications and ICT;
- **undertake** a series of Outcome Based Reviews to ensure services remain effective and can be afforded within the funding available;
- **develop** opportunities for working more cost-effectively with other authorities;
- **seek to** develop new, outsourced models of working for a number of functions.

Doing what's important well

It is important that we 'keep our eye on the ball': remaining focussed on our priorities and those core services most valued, or important to local people and on which the most vulnerable in our communities rely. We need to manage our services, ensuring a level of service within different areas – be it good or adequate.

Our focus is on ensuring that the delivery of core services is maintained; that we make decisions that promote the long term economic and social well-being of the district, promote localism and manage outcomes for the most vulnerable.

Our approach will be to:

- **monitor** and **publish** on a quarterly basis a 'scorecard' against which local people can assess our progress against the key priority outcomes set out within this strategy and the supporting Council Delivery Plan;
- **set** ourselves appropriately robust and realistic targets for these key priority outcomes and achieve them;
- **review** our achievement against our key priority measures on an annual basis alongside the refresh of this strategy.

MAKING SURE WE DELIVER

This Council Strategy sets out our priorities and a realistic set of objectives that we will deliver for the people of West Berkshire, whilst living within our means.

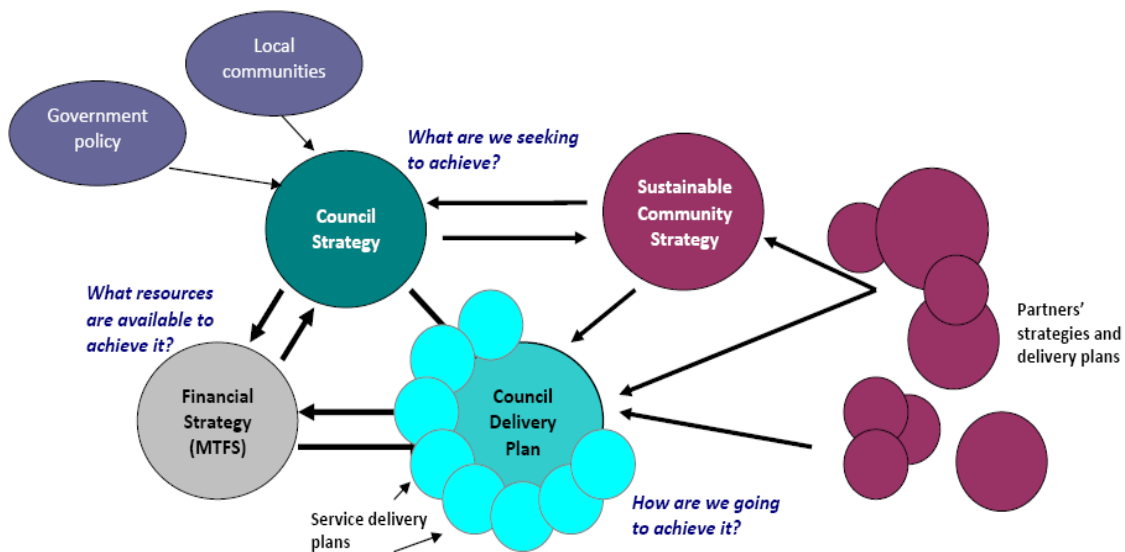
We cannot achieve these objectives alone and we will continue to work with partner agencies and voluntary and community partners, communities, parish councils and the business community in keeping West Berkshire a great place in which to live, work, learn and do business.

Aligned to the wider strategic aims within the Sustainable Community Strategy, the objectives within this strategy form the basis for our more detailed strategic, service delivery and financial planning, which will turn these ambitions into actions.

In order to be able to deliver these objectives, live within our means and meet our statutory

responsibilities, we must take a very proactive approach to managing our resources effectively. Our Medium Term Financial Strategy is the key tool for proactive financial management, providing the basis of the annual budget setting process to ensure that our resources for the forthcoming year are aligned correctly to our priorities.

Together with the overarching Council Strategy, they provide the framework from which our more detailed strategic business plan and individual service plans are developed, through which our strategic objectives and outcomes are delivered.



Tracking progress and identifying opportunities for improvement are key to realising and delivering on this strategy. We will continue to monitor progress against each of the objectives in this strategy and report on a set of key accountable measures on a quarterly basis through our westberks.gov.uk/performance webpages. This will provide us with a consistent and timely picture of how well we are doing, as well as ensuring we remain accountable for the delivery of these outcomes to local people.

The delivery of our strategic objectives is supported by a range of policies and strategies, as well as individual service delivery plans. These set out in detail how our vision and objectives will be delivered and progress will be measured. These plans are principally working documents to enable managers to allocate staff and other resources, and to ensure employees are clear on how their work contributes to the Council's overarching objectives.

The reporting on this strategy will reflect progress on these key plans.