

West Berkshire Council

Council Strategy

- **caring for and protecting the vulnerable**
- **promoting a vibrant district**
- **improving education**
- **protecting the environment**

2014-18



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

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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 an Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

ONE year

£121m net budget

25,000 children at school

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

3,500 families accessing
Children's Centres

3,000 planning applications

39,000 tonnes waste 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: 2014-18

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
- 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 people living in West Berkshire want them.

West Berkshire has a long track record of self-reliance and enterprise mixed with a strong sense of community. Through helping you to help yourself and helping you to help one another, we want to enable local people and communities to take more control and to feel that they can make a real difference to their own quality of life in the place where they live.

By helping you when you cannot help yourself we need to help and support the most vulnerable people and families and work with our partners to make sure our children, the elderly and disadvantaged get the help, care and protection they need.

By promoting and acting in the interests of West Berkshire we want to support local enterprise in the creation of more high quality jobs and help local people to benefit from opportunities and share in the wealth created. This also means keeping West Berkshire special, and to help people get the most out of our natural environment and the advantages and opportunities this creates.

It is no surprise that we should return to these core purposes when seeking to make the very best use of our limited public resources during these difficult financial times. In this period of austerity we need to get the most out of every penny we spend. We need to focus on things that are most important, to stop doing things that are less effective or that we simply can't afford, and to drive down the costs of bureaucracy as far as we can.

We recognise that our ambitions can only be achieved by working together in partnership with local communities, other public service providers, businesses, voluntary and community organisations, town and parish councils.

This strategy defines our ambition and agenda for change into the future. 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.

There is no doubt that the past few years have been difficult financially. Major challenges remain however over the next few years and we are continuing to face some tough financial choices. But by working together and backing each other, we can make sure West Berkshire remains a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business in.

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 2014

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](#).

Around 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, Harrods distribution, 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.

In line with the rest of the country, we are an increasingly ageing population. The number of over 65s has grown by around 23% since 2001 (a faster rate than that seen across the South East more generally) 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 by 2021.

Although this could bring many benefits including higher levels of volunteering and a wealth of experience to the jobs market, it will inevitably increase pressure on health and social care services. For example, over the next decade it is estimated that the number of older people suffering from dementia will have risen by 30%.

As a result of this, the proportion of people who are working will fall. This could result in less money for services and gaps in the jobs market, with businesses and public services lacking the required workforce and skills. We must ensure that we champion the opportunities and aspirations for young people and support our

partners to provide further education, work experience, training and apprenticeship opportunities.

Over the course of 2013 we have seen an encouraging fall in the number of people claiming unemployment benefit (JSA) across the district with the rate standing at 1% (Dec 2013) - a level not seen since 2008. Similarly, the rate of young people claiming unemployment benefit has been falling over the last 12 months. It now stands at just under 2% (compared to 3% across the South East) – again, a level not seen since 2008. This equates to around one in five of all those claiming unemployment benefit overall and, as participants in the [Thames Valley Berkshire City Deal](#), we will be working to ensure access to employment and skills opportunities for young people within the area.

Over the last few years, businesses have been lost - most visibly on the High Street, but also small and medium sized enterprises. However, the area has a strong economic base and there is continued investment in the area: most obvious is the opening of the Parkway development, but the overall growth in new businesses in West Berkshire is higher than across the South East more generally.

The housing market appears to have turned the corner with completions rising after a period of decline. Demand for housing remains high in the area and in the medium term is expected to grow. Affordability is a significant issue for many people: there are around 7,500 households in receipt of housing benefit and around 1,500 people in the reasonable preference group on our housing register. Demand for housing options and advice remains high.

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.

VISION AND PURPOSE

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

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

The relationship between the Council, our partners and local communities is inevitably changing and the Council's role is shifting from a traditional provider of public services, to a more supportive one. This is, in part, driven by constrained resources, but also by a recognition that things can often be better delivered at a local level.

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 defines what we are here for as a council:

- Helping you to help yourself
- Helping you when you cannot help yourself
- Helping you to help one another
- 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.

MANAGING THE CHANGING FACE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Along with the rest of local government and other public service providers, we are facing unprecedented financial challenges. As an organisation therefore we are continuing to review and amend what we do, and how we do it to ensure we continue to provide quality and cost-effective services for local people.

Finance

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 2014/15, we will provide over £121m 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.

The graph below 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

(some 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: around £15m of this relates to the collection of waste and refuse from across the district.



Update graph once 14/15 budget set

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 response to this, 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 £28m 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.

The planned amount of planned capital expenditure from the Council's own resources (i.e. in addition to government grants and developers contributions) will be approximately £8.5 million per year over the next three years, as compared to £14 million per year on average over the last three years. We are continually reviewing the level of planned capital spending to ensure that it is

affordable and while continuing to support our priorities – notably the highways network and education.

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.

However, there are opportunities. Local authorities are now able to retain at least part of any extra receipts as a result of increased business growth in the area. This places greater emphasis on growing the local economy and supporting local businesses and feeds naturally into our priority of

creating and safeguarding local jobs in ensuring a vibrant district.

In ensuring that we live within our means however, significant savings still need to be made. Between 2014-15 and 2016-17 around £15.5m worth of savings need to be found – note the size of grey circle in the graph above.

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

Prioritising services

Of the £11m savings identified for the next 2 years, we can achieve just over 70% by continuing to change things we do behind the scenes that would be less noticed by service users. New technology sometimes means we can do the same for less money. We're renegotiating contracts. We're transferring management of countryside sites to the voluntary sector.

All that said, and with staffing and management already significantly reduced, cuts to front-line services are unavoidable if we are to continue to live within our means. We recognise this is difficult for some people who rely and value these services. We have been open and honest and published our proposals, asking for people's feedback so that we fully understand the impact of any proposals on those affected and can put in place steps to mitigate the impact as best we can.

The purpose of this strategy therefore is to provide the framework for these decisions: prioritising those areas seen as most critical or important. The development of the strategy was informed by the Budget Simulator exercise we undertook with local residents and as a result, 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.

Working better together

In recent years, our community leadership role has become increasingly pronounced. This involves working closely with all public services in the area

and working in this way we will ensure there is fair and open access to a choice of good-quality services in the local area; that individuals and neighbourhoods get more control over their future; and that the needs of people facing multiple disadvantages are met. These create new opportunities for further joint working across the different sectors.

Our partners in the public sector are also undergoing significant change, for example through reforms in the education sector through the advent of academies, but equally in the transfer of public health responsibilities to local authorities and the greater integration of health and social care between local government and the NHS.

Our strategic role in removing barriers to economic growth, managing natural resources and protecting the local environment is more critical than ever. We are key partners in the new Local Enterprise Partnership and are working hard to deliver infrastructure projects such as superfast broadband across the district.

Voluntary organisations have the potential to play a greater role in delivering services. However they are also adapting to a climate of reduced funding by finding new ways of working. Some need help to boost their infrastructure and resources and to enable them to compete for public sector contracts. We will need to support our community and voluntary partners in order to meet the challenges ahead.

West Berkshire has a strong sense of community. Levels of volunteering and people's sense of belonging are amongst the highest in the country. The vast majority of local communities have developed a parish plan outlining their priorities and vision for how their local areas should develop. As a result of these many of our local communities are well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that more devolved power, influence and resources will open up. Projects across West Berkshire have already shown how such initiatives can help communities to become stronger and more self reliant.

We will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector, and with parish and town councils, to help communities shape and take their responsibility for the provision of services important to them, without feeling overburdened.

This is a long term challenge, involving a fundamental change in the relationship between local people and service providers. Deprived communities will continue to need support to

ensure they can exploit the opportunities as fully as more affluent communities.

Prevention and early intervention in social care and health

Prevention and early intervention means finding ways of predicting and reducing demand for services before it happens, rather than simply responding to demand. This will be important for all our services, but particularly for public health, social care and services to support the most vulnerable in our communities.

The Council now leads the transformation and integration of local health and social care services to improve health and wellbeing for the people of West Berkshire.

This will be achieved through investing in prevention and early intervention, ensuring that everything we do is informed by evidence of effectiveness, delivering effective health and care services as close to people's homes as is possible.

Identifying and meeting people's needs early enough requires carefully coordinated action from all organisations and individuals who have responsibilities for health and wellbeing. We are rethinking the way we work together to support our most vulnerable families and communities. Many emerging health and care needs relate to West Berkshire's ageing population. As people live longer, so the numbers with long term chronic illness and complex health and care needs increase. The Council helps many older people to remain independent in their home. Increasing choice and control over care is an essential part of this process.

The Council will lead on tackling inequalities in health across West Berkshire, reducing social exclusion and working in partnership to promote more independence, address underlying environmental and economic determinants of health whilst endeavouring to get the best value from our resources.

A new Health and Well-Being Strategy has identified a number of key priorities that are being addressed by a small team of public health professionals who now champion health and wellbeing, working within the local authority and in partnership with local GP commissioners and the third sector, integrating health and social care, preventing ill health, protecting against threats to public health and tackling inequalities in health.

Welfare reform and housing

Welfare reform is a major priority for central Government.

The spare room subsidy, Council Tax reform and the cap on benefits have already been introduced and Universal Credit and the replacement of Disability Living Allowance by Personal Independence Payments are scheduled for introduction early in 2014. Further reforms are expected in the future. We recognise however that residents will be impacted to varying degrees and we will seek to support people in times of difficulty.

The biggest impact is likely to be seen in housing. We are committed to working with residents to help them find and sustain secure, appropriate and affordable housing and Discretionary Housing Payments will be used, where possible, to help residents manage the transition arising from changes to their circumstances.

The impact on housing demonstrates the need for a balanced housing stock within West Berkshire.

Moving forward, West Berkshire has a strong Core Strategy that dictates a substantial (30%-40%) requirement to build affordable housing as part of any new residential development. The Local Development Framework (2012) shows that 10,500 homes are needed across West Berkshire over the period 2006 to 2026. The Council's approved planning applications still show a 5 year supply of land and work at Newbury Racecourse has commenced and Sandleford, in South Newbury, has been identified as a strategic site.

The Council does not operate its own housing stock other than a restricted supply of temporary accommodation. It provides services through housing associations such as Sovereign Housing and through service providers. Strategically, it works to prevent homelessness and to increase the availability of housing of all kinds, especially affordable housing. It also is a shareholder in Green Deal Together - an accredited Green Deal Provider backed by a consortium of local authorities located in the South and East of England. This will enable home owners, landlords and businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings, without any upfront cost.

WHAT YOU'VE TOLD US

We have worked hard to keep people 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 in the funding and delivery of public services, at the outset of this strategy in 2010, 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?*

The purpose of this was to provide the guidance and insight into what local people saw as the priorities for local government for the lifetime of this strategy.



**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 revised 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.

OUR PRINCIPLES WHICH GUIDE HOW WE WORK

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

This is all about how we do business: our way of thinking, leadership style, values and behaviours and approach to designing and running services so we can provide high quality, low cost, customer focused services, ensure local, open and honest decision-making and work with our partners to support West Berkshire's communities

These 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 are open and transparent in the way we do business and we will 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 will work to minimise discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity for all members of our communities;

We are also focussing on how we communicate, recognising that people live busy lives and that we live increasingly in a digital age. We are expanding access to our services online, placing a greater emphasis on self-service and adopting the 'digital by choice' principle.

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 the army of volunteers across the district already make 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 will continue to support the development of parish plans and town visions and make sure we put in place the resources to play our part in realising their aims. We will also continue to facilitate the development of Neighbourhood Development Plans – where they are wanted - to involve communities more closely in planning matters in their local area;

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 continue 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.

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 have already saved £28m over the last 4 years, with £15m needed between 2014-16. Continuing to 'live within our means' means that we have to make difficult decisions now, managing our budgets whilst ensuring we focus on our priorities.

We are committed to ensuring that Council Tax increases are kept to a minimum. Prudent financial management means that we must deliver on the necessary savings to continue to live within our means. We must therefore continue to 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.

We have a programme underway to review and renegotiate our contracts with external suppliers and service providers to drive down costs and are 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.

We have been rationalising our estate, making greater use of existing buildings and sharing more of our buildings with partners wherever possible.

We have developed joint-funding arrangements with voluntary and community sector, parish councils and other community groups to fund local improvements and joined forces with other authorities (for example with Wokingham with our Trading Standards service) to provide services together at a reduced cost.

We will take maximum advantage from central government's proposals on returning business rates to local control and continue to maximise the income coming into the Council through ensuring all our fees and charges generally align with the rise in inflation.

We then regularly monitor and publish 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.

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.

In ensuring we do what's important well we review our achievement against our key priority measures on an annual basis alongside the refresh of this strategy.

Based on an assessment of our strengths and where we recognise we need to do better we set ourselves appropriately robust and realistic targets for these key priority outcomes and achieve them.

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

- Continue to **implement** the Munro Programme to modernise and improve services to children, young people and their families.
- Continue **implementation** of personalised budgets for young people with disabilities.
- Continue to **focus on** recruitment of additional local carers with a particular emphasis on adopters and foster care for children with complex needs.
- **Ensuring** early help is prompt and accessible through the introduction of our new Early Help Hub.
- Turn Around Families project will continue to **offer help and support** to vulnerable families with multiple problems
- Continue to **improve** our support to children and families experiencing all chronic forms of abuse.
- **Improve** health and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable children and young people

Older people and vulnerable adults

- **Review** our social care activity to ensure it is affordable, sustainable and targeted at 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.
- **Ensure** that people have a positive experience of care and support
- **Safeguard** adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protect them from avoidable harm.
- **Target** services on helping adults back to independence and recovery recognising that many can return to independence after a short period of reablement and rehabilitation services.
- **Support** carers to continue caring through increased numbers of carers identified assessed and supported.
- **Improve** health and wellbeing outcomes for groups at greater risk of health inequalities
- **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.

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 highway maintenance.
- **Deliver** effective transport solutions across the district
- **Make best use of** existing stock and seek to improve access to private rented accommodation addressing issues of affordability and quality
- **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

- **Become** more business friendly and **encourage** new investment and business retention across all sectors
- **Promote** West Berkshire as the desirable location for combining business, leisure, learning and life.
- **Work with** partners to ensure that local skills meet the needs of today's business and work environments.
- **Actively support** sustainable rejuvenation and regeneration projects in key locations.

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 incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour
- **Work with** local communities to help protect them from future flooding

Healthy Lives

- **Give** every child and young person the best start in life
- **Improve** the wider determinants of health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities
- **Support** people to make informed choices and live healthier lifestyles
- **Reduce** preventable ill health and premature death whilst promoting independence and supporting older people to manage their long term conditions

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.

We recognise that significant improvements need to be made in relation to the attainment of pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium. We have put in place a strategy to address the gap in achievement between our more disadvantaged pupils and more generally and intend to see this closing over the next few years.

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 ...

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 or are in receipt of Pupil Premium.

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.
- **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 delivery of the raising of the participation age to 17 from September 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.

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.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

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 effective joint working with partners, especially parish councils, the police, health and the voluntary and community sector will ensure that we make better use of scarce resources and can also respond to very local or specialised needs.

We want to ensure that together we help communities to achieve what they aspire to. West Berkshire Council is focusing its efforts in this way through a variety of initiatives that respond to local need, and we recognise that by working in partnership the benefits to communities can be even greater.

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 plan