

# Council Plan

## 2016 → 2020

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2018



**CUSTOMERS PLACE VALUE FOR MONEY**

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*The data reported in this Plan comes from a variety of sources including the Council's 2015 Residents' Survey, our own performance data and the website 'East Sussex in Figures'. Any questions about the content of this Plan should be directed to the Business Planning and Performance Team*



**CUSTOMERS PLACE VALUE FOR MONEY**

Welcome to our Council Plan which sets out our priorities and key projects over the next few years. This four year plan sets out the key outcomes the Council will deliver with its partners for our district.

The Plan has been informed and developed in consultation with our residents, partners and other stakeholders. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to contribute.

We monitor the Plan regularly and report progress to Cabinet each quarter. As a 'living plan' it responds to changing times, and the financial context within which we operate. We refresh the Plan annually. This refreshed document was published in November 2018.

# Introduction from the Leader



**Councillor  
Andy Smith**

Lewes District Council is an innovative, efficient and forward thinking council with a proven track record of delivering good quality services and responding dynamically to the changing needs of its customers and communities. We are committed to providing value for money for our residents and keeping Council Tax levels as low as possible, despite the challenging financial climate.

Since we adopted this plan in February 2016 and refreshed it in July 2017 we have already gone a long way towards delivering our objectives and commitments.

- Assisted the Citizens Advice Bureau with premises in Newhaven and dedicated office space within the council's main offices in Lewes.
- Successfully introduced co-mingling recycling which is resulting in improved recycling rates.
- Launched a new shared website with Eastbourne Borough Council.
- Set up a Joint Venture for Energy and Sustainability named Clear Futures.
- Set up a Housing Investment Company to help meet the district's housing needs.
- Delivered another series of large events including a successful Artwave Festival and the Lewes Business Awards.

- Launched our 'Neighbourhood First' service: a team of advisors who work with communities in Lewes district to improve their neighbourhoods and maintain the quality of the environment.
- Launched a new smartphone app 'Report It' for flagging up environmental issues.
- Agreed new 3 year service level agreements with our partner voluntary organisations.

We are also making excellent progress, working with partners, on a number of large scale projects to improve our district, including:

- Our North Street Quarter development which will deliver over 400 new homes and a new health hub in Lewes.
- Continued delivery of regeneration through the Newhaven Enterprise Zone – offering new employment opportunities (up to 2,000 jobs) for local residents.

“ *As Leader of the Council I have made a strong commitment to listen to and work with all political groups on the Council, key partners in the public, private, community and voluntary sectors and Council staff. Through these partnerships we will continue to deliver high quality services whilst also taking forward a broad range of ambitious and innovative projects to meet the needs of the district.* ”

”

# The Lewes district

## *Our people and places*



**Our residents, businesses and visitors benefit from beautiful landscapes and a historic environment. Our diverse and attractive countryside includes chalk cliffs and downland, shingle beaches, heathland, wetland and areas of ancient woodland. Our County Town, Lewes, is at the heart of the district and is a popular historic tourist destination. The district has a vibrant and diverse contemporary arts scene and boasts a rich cultural heritage which is important to its economic prosperity.**

This diversity of landscapes and communities is a great strength. Community life is a strong and distinctive feature of the district. Residents identify closely with their own towns, villages and neighbourhoods. There are specific issues and challenges affecting some local communities in terms of employment, skills, and health and housing factors. Connectivity, rural isolation and access to services can also be an issue for some people.

Our population of 101,381 is projected to grow by 8% by 2030. Life expectancy is higher than the East Sussex average. However, around 21% of people are living with a limiting long-term illness or disability.

There is a higher than average occurrence of ill-health and mental health issues (including dementia) in some coastal communities. It is therefore important that we work with our partners to ensure the needs of our changing communities are met. We want to help support people in maintaining healthy and active lifestyles, and to remain living in their own homes.

We benefit from an entrepreneurial economy with self-employment being a significant feature of our district, representing 15% of the economically active population. Over 33% of residents are employed in managerial or professional roles. Unemployment is below the East Sussex average.

Our new business start up rate is above the East Sussex average. Small companies of between 1 and 10 employees account for 90% of all local businesses. It is critical that we support these businesses to grow and prosper, through advice and guidance as well as suitable, high quality employment premises, so they can provide future employment within the district.

Alongside this, we want to put particular emphasis on supporting our young people to ensure they have the training and skills they need to thrive in the future.

# Our commitments

We are making the following commitments to our residents, businesses and communities. These commitments can only be met by working with a range of partners in the private, public, community and voluntary sectors. We are proud of what we have achieved through strong partnership working over recent years, especially our work with town and parish councils. We will continue to seek new and cost-effective ways to work with others to shape and improve services and outcomes for local people.



## CUSTOMERS

Our population has a higher percentage of residents over 65 years of age compared to the national average and this is expected to increase from 25% of the current population to 31.5% by 2030. These changes will need to be taken into account as we develop our services over the coming years.

Although not an area experiencing high levels of deprivation, there are some parts of our district which require more support than others, due to factors such as low incomes or social isolation. We will work to ensure that these needs are understood and reflected in the way our services are planned in the future.

*We will deliver improvements for customers and communities.*

## PLACE

The Lewes district is a vibrant and diverse place. Whilst balancing the need for growth we have a commitment to protect our environment, open spaces and countryside.

A recent survey showed that local people living in our towns and villages wish to see affordable housing that fits the local demands and needs of their community. The survey showed that economic regeneration, supporting business and campaigning for improved road/rail infrastructure to be important roles for the Council. These views have been reflected in this Plan.

*We will achieve investment in our towns and villages.*

## VALUE FOR MONEY

The financial future is challenging throughout local government. The funding we receive from central government is likely to reduce significantly over the next few years, ending completely from 2020. We need to find £2.7 million each year if we are to maintain a balanced budget.

At the same time, our 2015 survey indicated that residents would like the Council to keep Council Tax at or below the target rate of inflation. This Plan sets out how we will balance residents' priorities within our diminishing resources.

*We will keep close control of our budgets and make the best use of our resources.*

# Customers

## *Improved customer service*



**We will work to improve our customer service by making better use of technology. Our aim is to deliver a better service to customers by joining up our systems and training our staff to handle a wide variety of calls.**

In addition we will offer more services on-line, so they can be accessed by customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We will promote and communicate these services which will provide more choice and convenience for our residents.

We will work with our customers to ensure we design our services to meet their needs. We will also continually review our website and online services to respond to customer feedback.

### **We will achieve this by**

- Improving our customer service to ensure more enquiries can be dealt with by speaking to just one person.
- Delivering high quality services for our customers including options to self-serve on our website and increasing use of social media and email alerts.
- Investing in new technology to speed up and improve the service people receive when they contact us.
- Promoting use of the 'Report It' app.
- Introducing a 'My Account' option on the website to enable customers to keep track of their enquiries and applications.

### **Measuring our success**

- Increasing the majority of phone calls answered within 60 seconds.
- Monitoring, acting on and learning from the customer complaints and compliments we receive.
- Satisfaction with the quality of services provided by the Council.
- Increase use of the 'Report It' app.
- Increase proportion of transactions carried out online.

# Thriving Communities

*Resilient, healthy and engaged communities*



The Council will continue to work with its partners to help local communities become stronger and better able to support themselves. Key to this is the provision of good, accessible information and on-going two way engagement with these communities.

Through our Community Safety Partnership we will work to address environmental crime and antisocial behaviour and aim to reduce the fear of crime. 69% of residents feel we are working to make the area safer, a 6% improvement compared to 2008.

With our leisure, tourism and cultural partners, such as Wave Leisure, we will work to promote healthy lifestyles and support people to maintain their health and wellbeing.

We will also continue to work with key voluntary organisations in the area; they provide a range of advice and support services to a wide cross-section of people, also helping vulnerable people to retain their independence.

## We will achieve this by

- Continuing to support local people with low incomes by delivering an efficient Housing Benefit service and through our Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- Working with Wave Leisure and other health partners to provide information and activities to encourage healthy lifestyles, with a particular focus on the needs of specific parts of the district and an ageing population.
- Working closely with our voluntary sector partners (3VA, Lewes Homelink, Sompriti, Citizens' Advice Bureau and AiRS) to deliver key advice services and make effective use of grant funding.
- Improved engagement with local communities, particularly focusing on how we connect with young people, through the delivery of our social media strategy.
- Further develop our relationships with Town and Parish Councils to ensure we work collaboratively on local issues, such as housing, infrastructure and rural isolation through our Neighbourhood First teams.

- Introduce a local lottery for our District to support voluntary and community groups.
- Celebrating a century of women's suffrage through our 'Vote 100' initiative.

## Measuring our success

- Keeping the time taken to process claims for housing/council tax reduction below the average time taken nationally.
- Increased participation in leisure activities amongst older people and in rural areas.
- More visitors to our leisure facilities.
- Mystery visit satisfaction score of 80% or more at our leisure centres.
- Increased sign up to the Council's social media channels, particularly by young people.

# Housing and Development

*Delivering sustainable new housing and infrastructure*



In the district the average house price rose by more than 5% in 2017, making it a challenging place for first time buyers as well as those on lower incomes. Lewes is the second most expensive market town in England in which to buy a home. As the housing authority, we have over 1,300 people on our housing register.

As a Council, we have a clear commitment to deliver more new affordable housing. We have established a range of public/private arrangements and a significant Joint Venture (Clear Futures) which will see the Council using its assets to stimulate growth in the housing market at a local level. We have an ambitious house building programme, which will see over 5,800 new market and affordable homes built by 2030.

We recognise the need for infrastructure improvements to support new and existing homes and businesses. Our planning policies and the operation of the Community Infrastructure Levy are aimed at securing such improvements.

## **We will achieve this by**

- Using our planning powers (including our policy to ensure 40% of new housing is affordable) to encourage and enable developers to deliver further, suitable and sustainable housing in the district.
- Working with local communities on Neighbourhood Plans, to guide future land use and identify where housing can be built.
- Campaigning for improvements to the A27 and A259, rail infrastructure and rail services.
- Enabling the delivery of key infrastructure projects in Newhaven.
- Investigating the feasibility of providing modular housing in the district.
- Investigating the feasibility of developing a scheme to help address rural housing.
- Working in partnership with towns and parishes to unlock development and growth projects.

## **Measuring our success**

- Delivery of over 1,400 new homes across the district, 40% of these being affordable.
- 10 adopted Neighbourhood Plans in place by 2020.
- Flood Alleviation Scheme delivered to unlock development sites in Newhaven.

# Growth and Prosperity

## *Prosperous Economy*



**The district is an outstanding location for business and enterprise with a diverse community of over 4,800 businesses. They employ over 35,000 people from a wide catchment area.**

Key sectors include public administration, cultural and visitor services and destinations, creative industries, education and health, retail and manufacturing.

Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven have rail links to London, Gatwick and the Sussex coast and beyond. The district benefits from access to the trunk road network, with the A27/A26 linking Lewes and Newhaven to neighbouring Brighton and Eastbourne. The nearby A23/M23 provides access to London, Gatwick and the M25.

The port of Newhaven offers cross channel passenger and freight services to Dieppe and beyond to northern European. There is great potential to open up a European market with in excess of 450 million customers.

We recognise the importance of inward investment and have an important role to play in enabling new and developing businesses. We will work closely with strategic and economic partners to bring about investment in jobs, skills and training opportunities. This will contribute to the regeneration needed, especially in coastal and rural areas.

With our cultural partners we will present a distinct visitor brand for the district that promotes the vibrant arts and culture on offer.

### **We will achieve this by**

- Progress the Newhaven town centre masterplan and Enterprise Zone to enable extensive refurbishment and revitalisation.
- In Seaford we will provide 30,000 sq. ft of healthcare space through a groundbreaking project to deliver improved health and wellbeing services to Seaford.
- Working with our commercial partners to deliver over 400 new homes (40% of which will be affordable) as part of the North Street Quarter Regeneration Scheme in Lewes.
- Providing advice and support to help businesses to grow and invest through measures such as our innovative LEAP programme.

- In partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council, developing a new tourism, arts, cultural and heritage brand building on the 'Stay Lewes coast and country' approach. [www.staylewes.org](http://www.staylewes.org)

### **Measuring our success**

- 140,000 sq. ft of commercial space, 330 public car parking spaces and a new 3,695m<sup>2</sup> health centre in Lewes.
- Clear promotion of the district as a distinct visitor destination to increase the value of tourism to the local economy.
- Support a business award scheme with good uptake from local businesses.
- Level of investment into local businesses secured through partners.
- Enterprise Zone established, resulting in increased occupied commercial floor space in Newhaven.
- Facilitation of Artwave festival in the district.

# Quality Environment

## *Clean and green district*



Rightly, our residents value their high quality environment. They believe rubbish and litter is more of a problem now than in 2008. We expect the district to remain a clean and beautiful place to live, work and visit, as a result of continued effort to protect the quality of the local environment.

We have undertaken major investment in our recycling service. This has included introducing garden waste collections, co-mingled kerb-side recycling collections and further promoting our food waste recycling. As a result of this our recycling rate is improving significantly.

Our parks, open spaces and nature reserves are highly valued by local residents and visitors alike. We have a strong track record of environmental enhancement and biodiversity schemes which aim to preserve natural habitats for future generations.

### **We will achieve this by**

- Continuing to promote and encourage recycling including garden and food waste.
- Introducing a policy on single-use plastics.
- Exploring opportunities to further develop our commercial waste service.
- Working with our grounds maintenance contractor, Town and Parish Councils and local volunteers, our Neighbourhood First teams to maintain high quality public parks and community spaces.
- Working with the police and other agencies to tackle environmental crime such as litter and fly-tipping through use of our 'Report It' app.
- Working with partners to deliver a high profile campaign to promote cliff safety.
- Enabling flood protection in the upper Ouse.
- Further progressing our air quality plans.

### **Measuring our success**

- Increased levels of recycling including garden and food waste.
- Working with partners to reduce incidents of fly-tipping.
- Progress against our air quality action plans.
- The number of parks and open spaces devolved to local communities.
- Flood defences in Lewes completed in partnership with the Environment Agency.

# Value for money

## *Delivering sustainable services*



Having already absorbed cuts of 40% we anticipate that our Revenue Support Grant will be completely withdrawn by 2020. This is challenging but we are already on the way to managing this reduction. We will continue to remain agile and flexible in how we manage our services and deploy our resources within this tightening financial environment.

We have an ambitious capital investment programme which will yield new income streams for the Council. But at the same time, we must continue to explore new ways of delivering services.

A significant element of our future savings is being achieved through our Joint Transformation Programme. This ambitious programme has involved a complete remodelling of our services in collaboration with Eastbourne Borough Council. Through flexible working and best use of modern technology we will provide better customer service whilst delivering savings of £2.7 million per year.

### **We will achieve this by**

The formation of a shared workforce with Eastbourne Borough Council and the full integration of management, services and ICT to:

- Protect services delivered at the same level or better to local residents while at the same time reducing costs for both councils.
- Create two stronger organisations which can operate more strategically within the region while still retaining the sovereignty of each council.
- Meet communities and customers' expectations to receive high quality, modern services focused on local needs and making best use of modern technology.
- Build resilience by combining skills and infrastructure across both councils.
- Develop a shared model of governance that enables the sovereignty and democratic legitimacy of each council to be maintained.

We will ensure that our retained asset portfolio delivers best value in terms of efficiency and running costs. Where an asset is held for investment purposes, we will ensure that the return on investment reflects market conditions.

### **Measuring our success**

- Council tax precept remains below the target rate of inflation.
- Deliver a balanced budget and savings of £2.7 million each year.
- Encourage our residents to self-serve using our website and app enabling 24/7 access.
- Percentage of invoices paid on time.
- Maximising the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates to ensure the council has sufficient finances to provide services to residents.