

<b>Consultation</b>	Strategic Plan Consultation
<b>Start</b>	18 December 2009 08:00:00 GMT
<b>End</b>	05 February 2010 23:59:00 GMT
<b>Published on</b>	17 December 2009 15:15:16 GMT



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# Draft Strategic Plan 2010-15



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## 1 Foreword

**1.1** The borough of Tunbridge Wells is an attractive, vibrant part of Kent. Our residents, businesses and visitors benefit from a range of excellent services and facilities, award-winning parks and open spaces, low levels of crime and one of the highest levels of life expectancy in the county. However, we are not complacent and understand that we face many challenges - with nothing more pressing than ensuring we continue to thrive in spite of the economic slowdown.

**1.2** As an organisation, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is a high performance, low cost council. In the past year the Audit Commission rated our value for money among the top 12 out of over 300 councils in the country. We have achieved this through a rigorous focus on priorities, efficiency and quality which has been core to our Strategic Plan.

**1.3** During the past twelve months the world has endured a dramatic slow-down in the economy. Although originating on the world stage, it has also affected us here in Tunbridge Wells. Our income has fallen markedly, the number of empty shops in our town centres has increased and of course employment has fallen. However, to put this into context, we still have fewer unemployed people in Tunbridge Wells than any other district in Kent.

**1.4** The fact that we have weathered the economic storm better than some areas is because we took some difficult decisions in the 'good times'. For example, we chose not to spend our savings (our reserves) in the boom time and actually reduced our reliance on interest which has protected us now that interest rates have fallen. We are now reaping the benefits of this as the council is in a much better position to use those savings more wisely to buy assets at cheaper prices. Coupled with the development of the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company, this decision a few years back looks like it will pay dividends for the people of Tunbridge Wells in the years to come.

**1.5** We have therefore achieved much over the past few years. We have touched the lives of many and improved the quality of lives of countless numbers of individuals and families. Maintaining this level of support and services to our public is increasingly becoming harder. The financial future for all public services is looking bleaker by the month as levels of national debt spiral upwards. Against this backdrop, we will need to make some tough choices in the future.

**1.6** We have recently undergone a senior manager restructure to help meet the predicted deficit and have reduced some non-priority services. This year alone we have saved over £400,000 from the budget and have met our £800,000 savings target for next year too.

**1.7** The financial environment clearly tells us that we need to re-think how we serve our public. Gone are the days where the public can expect us to meet every demand. There needs to be some personal responsibility to be built in our communities to match our own commitment to use tax money wisely. One of our roles in the future will be to build civic pride in our communities. We know that our residents love where they live but we want them to think about how they can help us help them. Over the coming months, we will be looking to develop a 'contract' with our public to ensure that we can work more effectively together to provide better value for money and tackle social issues before they become bigger problems.

**1.8** This is a hugely challenging agenda which may mean changing how society thinks. However, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is now known for meeting challenges head-on and improving our Borough as a result. This is something we can all sign-up to and we hope the public will also buy into our contract.

**1.9** The following Strategy outlines how we will do this over the next five years.

Sheila Wheeler  
Chief Executive

Cllr Roy Bullock  
Leader of the Council

## 2 Broader Context

**2.1** The current economic climate has posed some significant challenges for the Council, wider partners and our communities. This Strategic Plan seeks to ensure that we create new opportunities to enable communities to thrive in a post-recession world. Our Strategic Plan therefore has a five year horizon and is based on the challenges and opportunities that will impact our borough and our organisation:

**2.2** Specific local impacts for us include:

- the economic downturn has resulted in a significant reduction in income
- it is likely there will be a considerable and sustained reduction in government funding
- the high cost of housing, coupled with a significant gap between housing supply and need means that there is a significant challenge in balancing the housing market
- the high cost of living makes it difficult to attract new people to the borough and adversely affects some of our vulnerable residents. It can also makes it difficult for the Council to recruit and retain employees
- there has been a significant increase in the vacancy rates for retail premises in our town centre
- we have an ageing population: by 2016, over twenty per cent of our total population will be over the age of 65
- ensuring we both reduce our local contribution to climate change and promote adaptation to the consequences of climate change
- reducing traffic congestion and the associated air quality impacts
- the geography of the borough increases the need to promote equal access to services in the urban and rural areas
- Continuing engagement with black and minority (BME) and new communities is challenging due to the small numbers within the borough

## 3 Our vision, priorities - the future of Tunbridge Wells

**3.1** To address the challenges the borough faces, the Council has developed a long-term vision in collaboration with the stakeholders of the borough of Tunbridge Wells:

**3.2** *“It will be characterised by stronger communities, who feel safer, well served, well housed and with access to excellent health services. Our residents will benefit from better education and skills development, leading to a thriving and diverse local economy. Tunbridge Wells will be a regional hub, attracting visitors and new business to the borough – both from elsewhere and from within the borough. Everyone will benefit from a range of cultural and leisure offers, in an attractive environment. Underpinning our ambitions is a key desire to ensure the borough remains sustainable, in terms of our current and future prosperity and ensuring the benefits enhance the quality of life for all.”*

**3.3** By 2026, Tunbridge Wells will therefore be **prosperous, green, healthy and confident**.

### How does this Plan fit in with other documents?

**3.4** We clearly cannot deliver our priorities in isolation. This Strategic Plan is part of a wider partnership approach to ensure Tunbridge Well is prosperous, green, healthy and confident. The Plan supports the broader Sustainable Community Strategy that is currently being put together by our partners on the Local Strategic Partnership. It also supports broader county-wide objectives as part of the Kent Agreement.

3.5 This plan also supports the Council’s approach to procurement and commissioning, our commitments towards vibrant and tangible partnership working and our ambitions as a council.

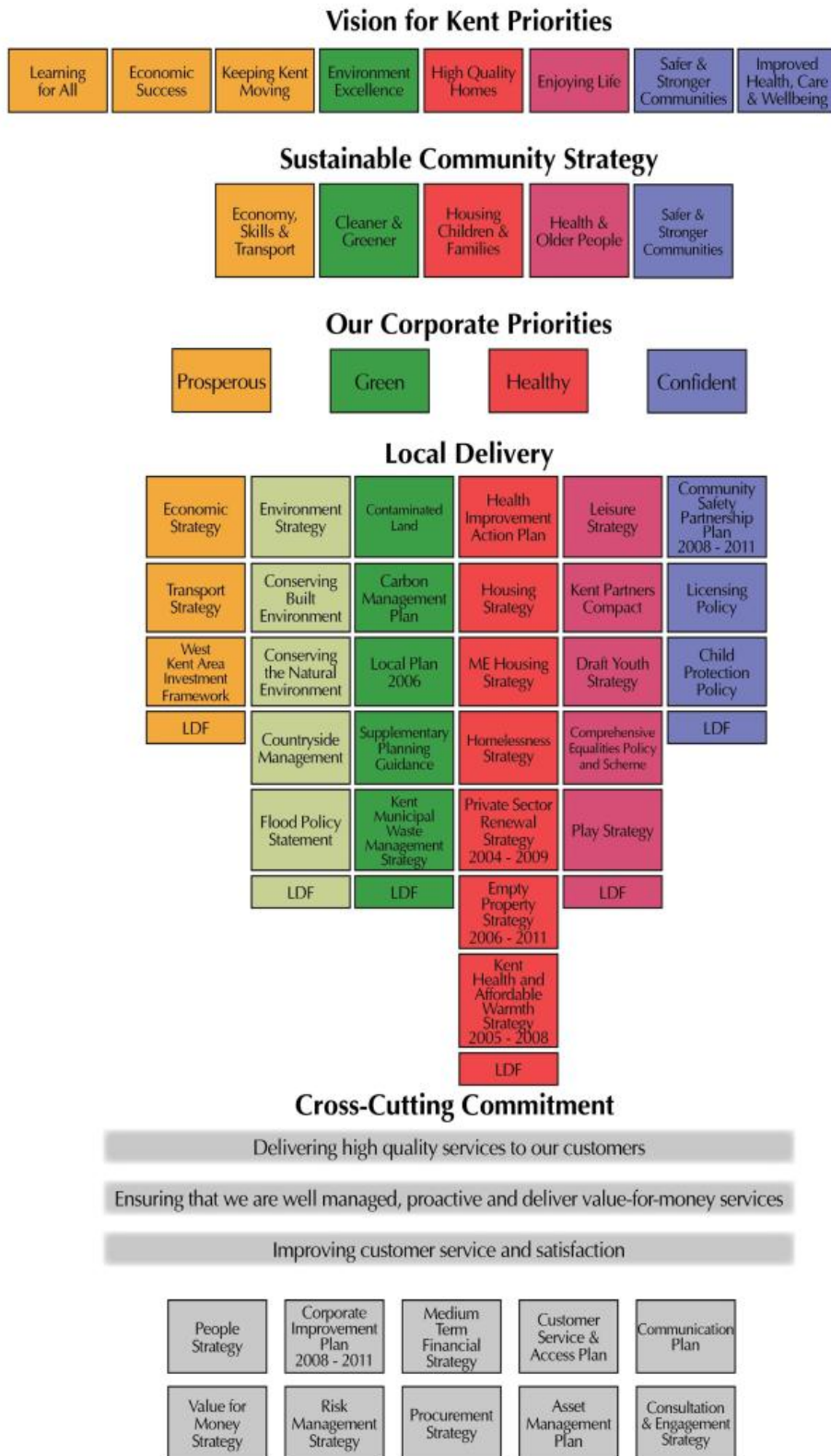


Figure 1 Priorities

## 4 Our borough - the people, the place, the organisation

**4.1** Tunbridge Wells is uniquely positioned within the Heart of Kent, and benefits from a rich historical legacy and is home to an array of well-established villages and rural communities, as well as the thriving town centres of Royal Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Southborough. Fifty five per cent of our population live in Royal Tunbridge Wells and forty five per cent in rural towns and villages.

**4.2** Covering 33,133 hectares, the borough is home to a population of 104,030 residents, living in 42,695 households (2001 Census) representing 7.7 per cent of the Kent county population. The borough neighbours the East Sussex districts of Rother and Wealden, and the Kent districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Ashford and benefits from good transport links to London and the south coast.

**4.3** Tunbridge Wells is an attractive place in terms of both its built and natural environment. Over two thirds of our borough is designated as an Area of Outstanding National Beauty and it includes ten Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The Borough's built heritage is protected by 25 Conservation Areas and includes approximately 3000 listed buildings. Our residents enjoy a high quality of life with average life expectancy of 79.4 years and over seventy per cent of our residents live in owner-occupied households.

### The Council

**4.4** In 2009 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was rated as 'excellent' in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This was achieved by having a great team of people, right from senior management, through to all of our front-line staff.

**4.5** Moving from 'weak' to 'excellent' has required a great deal of change. We kept and improved all of the best parts of the Council and systematically tackled our big challenges. We can now say that we are a confident authority, sure of our place in the community and proud to lead that community from the front. We have a very clear focus on improvement, and work well with our partners to ensure that we make a real difference to the lives of the people living here.

**4.6** It is because we make a difference that we are regarded as 'excellent':

- We now have 57 per cent of our performance indicators residing in the top quartile, significantly above the 33 per cent average for district authorities and the best performance in Kent.
- In 2008, the Audit Commission ranked our housing and sustainable communities outcomes first out of 354 local authorities in England for three-year improvement.
- 92 per cent of the public are happy with Tunbridge Wells as a place to live, an increase of 10 per cent from the year before.
- Satisfaction with Council services from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities has improved from 55 per cent in 2005/06 to 65 per cent in 2007/08. This has closed the inequalities gap in satisfaction rates that existed previously - a testament to our reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
- We have the second lowest council tax levels in Kent and 58th lowest level out of 238 District Councils in England
- Our Use of Resources score improved in every single category in 2008. No other Council in England achieved this level of improvement.
- We achieved a maximum Level 4 out of 4 for our value for money assessment – one of only twelve authorities

4.7 The Council has also transferred all its social housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord and has externalised other services, including sports centre management and refuse collection in order to achieve improved customer service and value for money.

**Our Staff**

4.8 Our officer structure comprises a Chief Executive, two Directors and seven Heads of Service. The Council employs over 400 people, 50 per cent of whom live in the borough. Sickness absence has fallen dramatically over the past three years, moving from the worst quartile nationally, to the best

4.9 We also have the following accolades:

- We are Investors in People accredited
- Our legal function is LEXCEL accredited
- We were highly commended in the Municipal Journal’s Council of the Year awards
- We have a number of Green Flag awards for our parks and open spaces
- ‘Quality Partner’ status was awarded to the Tourist Information Centre by VisitBritain in 2007.
- Our scrutiny team won ‘Team of the Year 2008’ at the Good Scrutiny Awards 2009’

**Our Councillors**

4.10 The Council has 48 councillors: 44 Conservatives and 4 Liberal Democrats. The ‘Leader and Executive’ model is now embedded into decision-making with Member ‘champions’ and ‘lead councillors’ to support Cabinet in their work.

4.11 Our Overview and Scrutiny function is well established and all Councillors are actively engaged in working to support the Council through the range of committees that have been established (See Figure 2 for details)

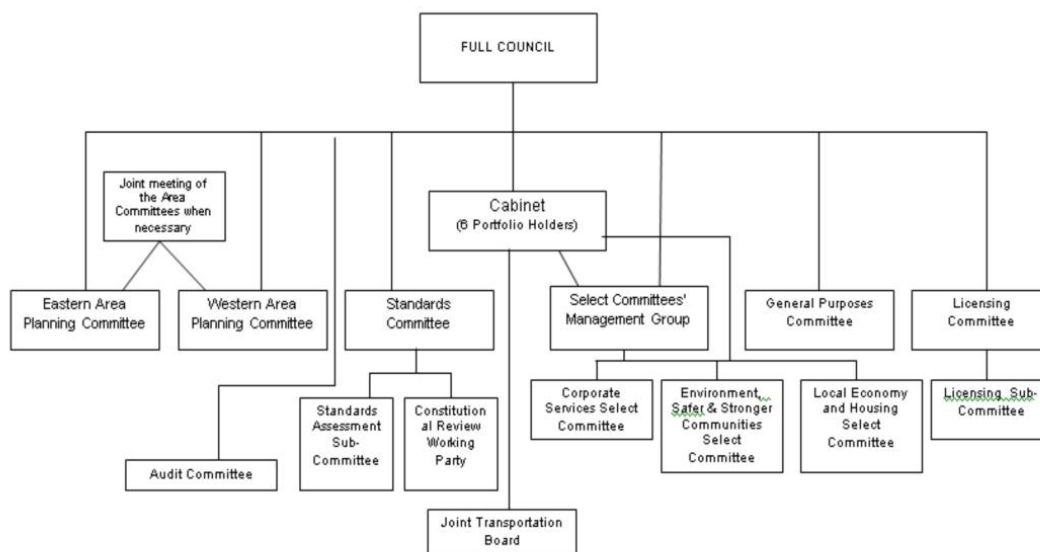


Figure 2 Committee Structure

## Our Finances

**4.12** The Council has a net revenue budget of £14.7 million and gross expenditure totalling £60 million. Council Tax levels are amongst the lowest in the country at £141.51 for a Band D property. This means that each one per cent increase in Council Tax nets the Council around £45,000. The Council has reasonable reserves of some £23 million and a capital programme amounting to around £3.3 million a year. Historically, the Council has relied heavily on investment interest to support revenue expenditure. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, which was agreed in 2006, reduced the Council's reliance on interest to fund the revenue budget; this has proved to be extremely well timed due to interest rates now being at an all time low. The economic downturn resulted in a loss of income from fees and charges of £1.2 million. A recent budget projection calculation shows that £5.4 million needs to be saved over the ten years. The Council has already delivered in excess of £3 million savings over the past four years through a combination of business process re-engineering, partnership working and some reductions in service delivery.

**4.13** The Council relies heavily on income from a variety of sources, including crematorium and land charges which may place further pressure on the Council's revenue budget due to the economic downturn, should further falls occur.

## 5 Delivering our priorities - focusing on what really matters

**5.1** Our vision for 2026 is captured in four words 'Prosperous', 'Green', 'Healthy' and 'Confident'. These are the priorities that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will focus on.

**5.2** Under each of the four priorities, we have set out what we hope to achieve by 2026, what we have achieved in 2009/10 and our current actions for the forthcoming year. We recognise we will need to be flexible to wider changes and will ensure the Strategic Plan continues to be a 'live' document, that can be adapted over time.



### PROSPEROUS

#### 5.3 By 2026:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells will be the best town centre in the South East to live, work and visit, supported by thriving centres of Paddock Wood, Southborough and Cranbrook
- The borough more generally will have enhanced its natural and built assets while planning for and accommodating future growth
- The borough will have capitalised on the new PFI hospital at Pembury by using it as a hub to boost the health-based economy of the wider area.
- The borough will have used its designation as a Regional Hub to increase investment in infrastructure, such as roads and public transport
- We will have increased local employment opportunities for our residents
- We will ensure that people have access to training and educational opportunities to improve their skills whilst seeking employment or to aid their employment. In particular we will work with partners to develop the learning environment and prepare a flexible workforce for future opportunities.

#### 5.4 In 2009/10 we have:

- Supported borough businesses to achieve funding from the Leader programme.
- Supported Hawkhurst to achieve funding through the Kent Rural Towns programme

- Supported Paddock Wood to secure funding through the Kent Rural Towns programme
- As a result of our business advice and support, there were 125 new business start-ups in 2007/08. (to be updated)
- 52,271 m2 of industrial/commercial floor space has been completed in the last three years, equating to approximately 1,700 jobs. (to be updated)
- A 3% rise in the value of tourism to the local economy to £199.7 million per year since 2003.
- An extra 223 jobs were created and supported via the Tourism Industry between 2003 and 2006.
- Supported the VISUM transportation model for the Regional Hub.
- 5 Apprentices taken on by the Council.
- 10 Future jobs created in the Council.
- Site plan drawn up for future development in Cranbrook.

## Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company

**5.5** The Council is working closely with the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company to enable positive developments on several sites to be moved forward in 2010. A project team had been established that meets on a regular basis. Inevitably in the first months of the Company's existence this has largely been of a preparatory nature to establish a foundation for future successes to achieve the aims and objectives of the Company and the following has been undertaken.

- Analysis and development of the opportunities across the Council portfolio.
- Identified and progressed development opportunities.
- Taken a holistic approach to the town centres with a continued focus on the wider opportunity.
- Active and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, local groups and landowners to promote the ethos of the Company and create strong working relationships for future activities.
- Work to understand and develop proposals for submission into the Council's emerging Local Development Framework process to ensure the framework for future regenerative development activity across the Borough is in place.
- Positively contributed to the Core Strategy consultation and made initial views on the TCAAP informal consultation.
- Assisting the Council in the option analysis for potential future relocation.
- In depth analysis for a number of sites considered key for the future regeneration of Tunbridge Wells.
- Developing the brief for Town Hall development opportunity to ultimately inform first stage viability model.
- Liaison with other occupiers to establish scale of the opportunity and formally commence consultation programme.
- Consultation with Theatre operator.
- Pro-active approach to exploring opportunities with the Council portfolio, including formative ideas for Cranbrook development in line with TWBC decision making process.

### **5.6 In 2010/11 we aim to:**

- Have advised 125 new businesses.
- Ensure 1900 local businesses will have used the Business Link service for the first time.
- Ensure 10% of land available for development, developed for employment use.
- Worked with partners (using a transportation model called VISUM) to consider different transport options for Royal Tunbridge Wells.

- Have an adopted Core Strategy.
- Have undertaken Consultation on the Town Centres Action Plans Development Plan Document and Allocations Development Plan Document.



## GREEN

### 5.7 By 2026:

- Tunbridge Wells will remain a beautiful place to live, work and relax
- Individuals, communities and businesses will have taken action to reduce their use of natural resources to minimise carbon dioxide emissions, including the use of renewable energy and the installation of home insulation measures
- We will have a local environment that is resilient and adaptable to a changing climate supporting a wide range of biodiversity
- We will have transformed the vacant, derelict and run-down sites that currently spoil some of the town centres
- The historic built environment that provides a powerful sense of identity will be maintained in good order and enhanced through high quality redevelopment of existing poorly built assets, set within an immaculate and distinctive public domain
- The superb countryside of the borough is managed to protect and enhance its contribution to quality of life for those that live here whilst accommodating a vibrant rural economy
- All residential properties in the borough should conform to the highest standards of sustainable resource conservation to minimise energy use, carbon footprint, fuel poverty and water consumption
- The borough will have locally derived renewable energy sources to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions including biomass, ground and air source energy, together with wind and solar sources where compatible with other environmental considerations
- The citizens of the borough will continue to enjoy easy access to open space for recreation, including parks and play areas and the countryside
- The need to travel to work within and outside the borough will be reduced by increased opportunities to work from home, and encouragement of green travel plans amongst business and public sector employers
- The quantity of waste generated by citizens of the borough will decline supported by less packaging, and more recycling and composting activity

### 5.8 In 2009/10 we have:

- Completed successful introduction of a new kerbside recycling service for the collection of plastic bottles and household cans
- Achieved a reduction in the level of residual household waste being sent for final disposal
- Achieved improvements in the appearance of the street scene
- Achieved an increase in the number of homes with energy efficiency measures installed
- Secured Green Flag awards for Dunorlan Park, the Grove and Woodbury Park Cemetery as well as a Green Heritage award for Dunorlan Park. Increased awareness of local environmental issues and local community activities through the Love Where We Live campaigns and Kent High Weald Project
- Collated and analysed baseline data to evaluate the level of emissions from the council's buildings and services.

### 5.9 In 2010/11 we aim to:

- Work with the Energy Savings Trust to put in place a range of actions to reduce the level of carbon dioxide emissions from the operation of the Council's buildings and services (details to be confirmed and agreed, contributes to NI 185)
- Work with the Kent Waste Partnership to encourage changes in behaviour that will lead to an increase in the number of households that use the recycling service and reduce the amount of residual household waste collected by x (to be inserted)
- Use high profile enforcement and positive promotion to encourage changes in behaviour that will lead to a reduction in the amount of litter, fly tipping and graffiti that has to be cleaned up and improve the level of street and environmental cleanliness (NI 195)
- Carry out site assessments to identify if any action is needed to prevent pollution of the local water and soil environment
- Develop proposals to assist in delivering the introduction of low carbon energy sources in the borough to contribute to the reduction in the per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in line with the national targets in Climate Change Act 2008
- Continue to work to improve local air quality standards
- Review our services to ensure that they are in a position to adapt to the changing climate



## HEALTHY

### 5.10 By 2026:

- Residents of areas of the borough that currently experience poor health will have improved to the level of the best today. Health for the population as a whole will substantially exceed national, regional and county averages
- The community will be active with very high levels of participation in physical and cultural activities
- The housing market in the borough will provide a range of high quality homes meeting the housing needs of all residents with a range of tenures including affordable homes which provide real housing options for local people
- The housing conditions of the borough's most vulnerable residents will have significantly improved through targeted support
- Residents will enjoy improved home energy efficiency, which will positively benefit both them (through reduced fuel costs and improved living conditions) and the environment through reduced carbon emissions
- Our older population will be active and there will be increased opportunities to take part in recreational and physical activities

### 5.11 In 2009/10 we have:

- Supported housing associations to build new affordable homes for local people. Schemes completed included 13 new homes in High Brooms provided by Home Group and 5 new homes in Southborough provided by Town & Country Housing Group. In addition, Orbit South Housing Association started building 23 new homes for local people in Hawkhurst.
- Continued our work to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless through pro-active housing options advice and initiatives to help people access private rented accommodation. This has helped us to achieve axx per cent reduction in the number of individuals and families accepted as homeless between 2003/04 and 2009/10 (from 257 in 2003/04 to xx in 2009/10).
- We have funded additional advice services for those in debt and those seeking employment/training. A total of xxx (to be inserted) customers in the borough received

advice in the year to April 2010. This additional support was funded through £200,000 of Government funding which was secured with Rother District Council in East Sussex to further develop our housing options advice over the two years to April 2011.

- Given a total of xxx(to be inserted) Disabled Facilities Grants were completed in 2009/10 to help disabled households carry out adaptations to their homes, making a significant contribution to the quality of life of individuals and families.
- Provided a range of Grants and Loans to help older, disabled and other vulnerable people to carry out repairs and improvements to their homes, including energy efficiency improvements to help reduce fuel poverty. This work has been supported by Regional Housing Board funding for private sector renewal made available to the Council following a successful joint bid with seven other West and North Kent local authorities which saw the partnership receive funding of £9.768 million for the period 2008-2011, of which the Council's allocation is £1.552 million. This helped us to make xx (to be inserted) private sector homes meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2009/10.
- Provided a wide range of activities to encourage people to adopt a healthy lifestyle and improve their health and well-being, using funding provided by NHS West Kent (the PCT). These activities were taken up by over 8,000 people across the borough and included: health walks; tea dances; basketball and boxing courses for young people; healthy cooking courses; and a GP referral scheme to enable GPs to refer patients to leisure centres for fitness programmes.
- Our Leisure Services were scored in the top 25 per cent in the country for customer satisfaction resulting in more people taking part in activities which improved their mental and physical wellbeing.
- 250 Children took part in the Mela education workshops giving them a wider understanding of the cultural make up of our community.
- Our museum summer activities saw 178 per cent increase in attendance from 2008.

#### **5.12 In 2010/11 we aim to:**

- Support housing associations to build a further 84 new affordable homes for local people. Schemes to be completed will include: the 23 new homes for local people in the village of Hawkhurst; 30 new homes on the former Medway Depot site in Royal Tunbridge Wells; and 17 new homes in Rusthall.
- Continue our work to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless. We aim to further reduce the number of individuals and families accepted as homeless to no more than 71 in 2010/11. Our joint project with Rother District Council in East Sussex will help us achieve this aim by funding additional advice services for those in debt and those seeking employment/training.
- Enable disabled households to carry out adaptations to their homes through a Disabled Facilities Grant.
- Continue to provide a range of Grants and Loans to help older, disabled and other vulnerable people to carry out repairs and improvements to their homes, including energy efficiency improvements to help reduce fuel poverty. This will help us to make at least a further 180 private sector homes meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2010/11.
- Continue to encourage people to adopt a healthy lifestyle and improve their health and well-being. Subject to continued funding from NHS West Kent (the PCT), we will continue to provide a range of activities to promote healthy lifestyles and help people across the borough take up these activities.



**CONFIDENT**

**5.13 By 2026:**

- The borough will continue to have some of the lowest levels of crime in the South East and, as a result, communities will feel safe
- Young people will have the opportunity to participate in a range of activities and be able to influence decision-making
- A thriving community pride culture will have developed with high levels of volunteering and public involvement
- Tunbridge Wells will be a cohesive borough – a borough where people with different backgrounds, faiths and beliefs and where different generations will get on well together
- The borough will be a place of opportunity – with high levels of educational attainment and skills, ease of access to a range of good quality employment and opportunities for independent living
- Families and in particular young people will be supported to achieve their full potential

**5.14 In 2009/10 we have:**

- Seen Tunbridge Wells have the second lowest volume of crime in Kent. Compared with the previous year, the borough had the highest reduction in crime (13.3%) in Kent, meaning there were 905 fewer victims of crime. Tunbridge Wells had the lowest volume of vehicle crime and criminal damage in Kent and again saw the highest percentage reductions across Kent for these crimes.
- Continued to support the resident led trusts running TN2 and Number One Community Centres, seeing an increase in services provided and usage of both centres.
- Worked with partner agencies together we celebrated National Volunteers' Week with a range of activities to encourage people to volunteer and thank those who contribute their time as volunteers.
- Given £207,000 in grant to Tunbridge Wells and District Citizens Advice Bureau to support their work in providing free, confidential, impartial and independent advice within the Borough of Tunbridge Wells to enable local residents to deal with a range of issues including benefits, housing advice, debt advice, legal advice, employment and relationships.
- Granted £133,600 to support 24 projects ranging from Age Concern to the Pickering Cancer Drop-in.
- Organised Ward Walks in four wards in the borough – St Johns, Brenchley, Benenden and Hawkhurst, listening to residents' views about their local area and responding to their comments.
- Helped to facilitate the work of Voluntary Action West Kent in developing after school clubs in Sherwood. With the support from the Borough Council, County Council and Primary Care Trust, a development worker was appointed. A successful bid was made to Sure Start for the project. Recently, a further £24,000 has been awarded to the after school clubs by the Criminal Justice Board Community Cashback Fund. Through the work of the Development Worker and the Borough Council. After school activities are run five days a week until 6pm, giving parents the opportunity to seek employment or training.

**5.15 In 2010/11 we aim to:**

- Have reduced violent crime, particularly alcohol-fuelled offences and repeat incidents of domestic abuse involving high risk victims.
- Have increased the percentage of people who feel that Anti -Social Behaviour is dealt with satisfactorily.
- Continue to see a reduction in all reported crime and remain one of the three lowest crime areas in Kent.
- Get more people involved in local decision-making groups.
- Encourage more people to volunteer in their local area.

## 6 Preparing for future challenges - transforming the way we serve our communities

**6.1** We have always placed a strong emphasis on the way in which we deliver our services and have developed three underpinning customer care commitments that support everything we do.

**6.2** They are:

- Providing high quality services
- Improving customer service and satisfaction
- Ensuring we are well-managed, proactive and provide value for money

**6.3** To date, we have worked hard to deliver on these objectives (see below). However, with unprecedented challenges ahead of us we recognise that we may have to make difficult choices and balance the quality of services against financial constraints. However, wherever possible, we will look to deliver savings in ways which do not impact on front-line services further build on our strong partnership ethos where it adds value and benefits our communities.

### Partnership working

**6.4** One way in which the Council has tried to reduce costs has been through working in partnership with others. The Council has long held a view that partnership working can bring considerably benefits and savings. It will have saved £7.5 million over 10.5 years by contracting out the management of its sports centres to Fusion and a further £8 million in 2008 with a new waste collection, recycling and street cleansing contract with Cory. The Council is now looking at how it can work with Kent County Council and other nearby councils to reduce the cost of its services. The Council already has a range of partnership arrangements in areas such as planning, licensing and benefits fraud and is working to deliver a further range of services in partnership including audit, legal services and revenues and benefits.

### Mid Kent Improvement Partnership

**6.5** To continue to ensure value for money and reduce costs, the Council has joined with Ashford, Maidstone and Swale borough councils to set up the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MidKIP). The partnership aims to explore ways in which they can share services to improve customer service and resilience and reduce cost and has set up a programme of activity in terms of service areas to be prioritised.

### Tunbridge Wells Together – The Local Strategic Partnership

**6.6** The LSP is now well established and is supported by a range of multi agency delivery groups and a Public Service Board. Currently the partnership is reviewing the Sustainable Community Strategy and is also responsible for ensuring our targets under the Kent Agreement Two are achieved. The LSP has a strong role in 'place shaping' and this Strategic Plan will contribute to the overall ambitions of the new Sustainable Community Strategy. Work is on-going to ensure all partners work collectively to minimise the impact of the current economic climate and identify areas of further collaboration.

### Achievements to date:

**6.7** The Council continually strives to make effective use of its resources and has embarked on a number of initiatives this year to deliver high quality, customer focused, efficient services.

## **Gateway**

**6.8** The Council and other public sector partners provide an extremely diverse range of services – everything from removing graffiti or chewing gum to dealing with health, education or crime and disorder. Services are divided between a wide range of organisations and departments within them. Eighteen months ago, a resident wanting to deal with a redundancy, a death or a change in their circumstances would have had to have spoken to many different people in many different buildings – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council alone had five receptions! In November 2008, the Council opened its ‘Gateway’ to public services. A joint initiative with Kent County Council, the Gateway has brought together a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations under one roof in a convenient town centre location. The Gateway has been particularly useful in dealing with those affected by the recession: visitors can receive advice on benefits, managing debt, employment, training and volunteering under one roof. Gateway is now receiving nearly 10,000 visits a month and has received extremely positive feedback from those who have used it.

## **Customer care and service personalisation**

**6.9** Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is embarking on a significant programme of transformation in the way in which it delivers services to residents. The goals are around putting the customer at the heart of all we do, simplifying the way we work, building on a ‘can do’ culture, embracing change and increasing Value For Money.

**6.10** The overriding objective of the transformation programme is to reduce costs and maximise investment in frontline services by making the organisation more efficient. The first phase of work has focused primarily on developing front office services in the Council’s Gateway and by telephone. Phase 2 of the programme will continue this work, building on the good progress of recent months but in addition, working in partnership with departments the aim will be to transform back office processes, reduce waste and improve transaction times. We will also be looking to personalise services to customers by making use of customer profiling data. This plan will include addressing the wide-ranging feedback and suggestions brought forward by staff and customers.

## **Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company**

**6.11** The Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company was established on the 4 December 2008. The Company brings together Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and John Laing plc in one of the first Local Authority Asset Backed Vehicles to be established in the UK. The Company is a joint venture share company that has been created to deliver regeneration and development projects in the Tunbridge Wells area with a view to securing the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. It will last for ten years. The partners have equal representation on the board, with four directors from the Council and four from John Laing. The Company has been established to regenerate four Kent towns - Royal Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Southborough.

The 50/50 partnership will see the Council and John Laing working together to bring forward civic, retail, commercial, community or residential property opportunities by redeveloping or regenerating assets currently within the Council’s portfolio, ensuring satisfaction of the Council’s

obligations to achieve best value consideration. Under the partnership John Laing will also provide masterplan services for the four towns to ensure an holistic approach to development and regeneration.

Upon completion each development will either be sold, or retained within the partnership to provide an income stream, dependent on prevailing market conditions. All profits will be shared 50/50 between the Council and John Laing.

## **Looking to the future**

**6.12** Our budget projections show that we need to find over £5.4m savings over the next 10 years. One thing is certain: we cannot continue to deliver the same services in the same way. We will continue to challenge the way in which we deliver services. In some cases we may have to stop providing services altogether; in other areas, we may need to target services to those most in need or to reduce our service standards; above all else, we will continue to look for ways in which we can reduce the cost of delivering our services.

## **7 Making the best use of our resources**

### **Our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

**7.1** The MTFS is the Council's highest level key financial planning document and sets out the Council's strategic approach to the management of its finances and Council Tax levels.

**7.2** The strategy underpins the Council's priorities for the community in the Sustainable Community Plan and complements our internal priorities set out in the Strategic Plan and the Vision 2026.

**7.3** It is important to realise that that the key aim of the MTFS is to facilitate the Council in achieving the targets laid out in those documents, by setting parameters to work within, setting financial targets, identifying additional resources for priorities and developing financial projections to manage any achievability or sustainability issues.

**7.4** This is especially important when considering the economic downturn that the country is experiencing and the impact both on the community and the Council.

### **Staff – Our People Strategy**

**7.5** Our People Strategy is a key strand supporting the delivery of the Strategic Plan. Whilst the budget ensures that financial resources are aligned to delivering the Council's key priorities, the People Strategy ensures that our human resources (by far the most significant area of spend) have the necessary skills, focus and training to deliver on the Council's ambitions. With a quarter of our workforce having a TN2 postcode and over half our staff currently living within the borough boundaries, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is also a significant provider of employment for our community, with all the consequent benefits in terms of prosperity, confidence and health that employment provides.

**7.6** The challenge for the future will be to maintain service levels and momentum within the context of severely diminishing financial resources. In order to succeed, effective leadership and management at all levels will be vital, as is a highly strategic approach to learning and development to ensure that a reduced workforce is sufficiently able and flexible to deliver the right results both now and into the future.

**7.7** In order to achieve our aims in the difficult financial climate of the next few years, we will need:

- Robust policies that give us the framework to encourage excellence in the delivery of our vision and to resolve staffing problems efficiently, effectively and fairly when things go wrong. These will be delivered in partnership with the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership.
- Well trained and effective managers who treat staff with dignity and respect and are able to coach and develop them to deliver the best outcomes for the Borough and to provide opportunities for career progression within Tunbridge Wells Borough Council or with partner organisations.
- A learning culture where learning and development opportunities are of high quality, clearly linked to desired outcomes and highly valued by all.
- An effective reward strategy that enables the Council to recruit and retain the high quality staff it needs to deliver the vision.
- To ensure that our duty of care to our staff is extended to contractors, especially as partnership working will increase the amount of work done on our behalf by workers who are not directly employed by this Council.
- To create an environment where staff are proud to work for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

## Accommodation and Our Assets

**7.8** The Property Asset Management Plan defines how the Council manages, maintains, acquires and disposes of its property assets. Good asset management is crucial to providing high quality and cost effective services and is a key component to reducing the level of carbon dioxide emissions from the operation of our estate and to ensure best value is achieved at all times.

**7.9** The current economic climate is reflected in all sectors of the property market and therefore impacts upon the Council's assets and the strategies for dealing with them. The Council will continue to ensure that the assets are properly managed and accounted for, maximising the benefit of maintenance expenditure, revenue income and capital receipts.

**7.10** Land values, rental income and investment yields have all experienced a decline in the current property market downturn, and the Council will reassess its policies for disposal of surplus assets and acquisition of new assets in order to strengthen the performance and returns of the asset portfolio. The Council will consider the likely return if property is disposed of but this will also be balanced against the need to realise capital receipts to finance the capital programme. The Council will continue to look to maximise revenue and will consider acquiring and investing in property at this time to maximise returns for the Council taxpayer and to stimulate the economy.

**7.11** One dimension to be considered is the 'Total Place' initiative which looks to map out total levels of public expenditure in a given area and to explore whether it could be more effectively delivered. One of the themes being considered as part of this initiative is the asset portfolio of the various public sector agencies and how it could be rationalised and used to better effect.

**7.12** One particular issue we are considering is the future of the Town Hall. There are both push and pull factors driving this. A Cabinet report in October 2007 outlined that the operational need for the Town Hall on the Civic Site had diminished. It also outlined that the site could provide opportunities to assist in the economic development of the Town. It was therefore agreed that the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company would bring forward ideas and plans for the site and to consider future accommodation requirements for the Council.

## Commissioning and procurement

**7.13** The Procurement Strategy defines the role of procurement in the delivery of the Borough Council's strategic objectives, and the action plan outlines our implementation. The strategy lays the foundations for the development of an effective and sustainable procurement process and aspires to achieving; improved performance of procurement activity, improved specifications, improved contract management and better service outcomes.

**7.14** The strategy embraces the whole procurement process including consideration of environmental issues, economic development and support for local businesses and supply chains. The Council recognised that for small businesses the level of documentation required to comply with the tendering process was over burdensome; therefore the Contract Procedure Rules were updated. Major contracts such as for maintenance have also been broken down to levels that enable small and local contractor's greater scope to undertake work for the Council. The Council also recognises the need to ensure that local and small supplier's cash flow remains fluid during these economic conditions and has signed up to the Prompt Payment Code.

**7.15** Details of forthcoming Council contracts are published along with those of other local authorities on the South East Business Portal. Recent major contracts include the award of a 10 year joint Household Waste and Recycling collection and Street Sweeping contract and next year will see the tender for the Parks and Grounds Maintenance Contract.

## Risk Management

**7.16** The Council is committed to the effective management of risk and sets out its approach to managing its risks in the Risk management strategy

**7.17** Tunbridge Wells Borough Council currently has 19 active strategic risks (as of October 09). A number of the strategic risk scores have deteriorated in the last year as a direct result of the economic downturn. When it became clear the impact this would have on a number of the authority's priorities detailed action plans were drawn up by officers and considered by members, setting out a plan of action to mitigate/manage these risks where feasible. In some cases it has been limited by what action the authority has been able to take to mitigate/manage the risk.

**7.18** Risk reports are considered throughout the year and amended to reflect the changing risk environment; in addition cabinet members continue to receive regular reports on a suite of economic indicators. Further details are available on the Council's website.

## 8 Making sure we achieve our priorities

### Prioritisation

**8.1** We recognise that we need to prioritise our activities to ensure that we focus on the most important things and where possible redirect or reduce expenditure against non-priority areas. This has been vital in ensuring we continue to deliver value for money and high customer satisfaction. Given the wider changes as outlined above, we have listed issues by category for the forthcoming five years:

### 8.2 Priority Issues

- Collaboration with public and private sectors to manage the short term impact of the recession. In the longer term work with the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company to regenerate key areas of the borough.
- Working with partners to secure transport improvements
- Reduce household waste and increase recycling
- Working with the public and private sectors to ensure housing is suitable for local people
- Partnership working where it adds value and reduces cost
- Targeted support to promote healthy lifestyles

### **8.3 Important Issues**

- Consolidating our approach to community engagement (including hard to reach groups) with our partners
- Consolidating approaches to value for money through our business process re-engineering
- Ensuring people can access services as quickly and effectively as possible (getting it right the first time)
- Refocusing ICT to support the Gateway and the way in which we plan and deliver services.

### **8.4 Non-Priority Issues**

- Providing 'back office' functions in isolation
- Providing services directly where more cost-effective alternatives exist
- Making the general Council Tax payer pay for services that are used by only some residents or non-residents. This includes parking and a range of fees and charges.
- Events and grants to outside bodies in non-priority areas

## **Planning effectively**

**8.5** In recent years Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's performance has been exemplary. Using the old Best Value Performance Indicators as a benchmark, we have seen consistent year-on-year improvements in every single service. Our rate of improvement, faster than most district councils in England, has been remarkable.

**8.6** The next challenge for this Council is to continue meeting our priorities in an ever more challenging financial climate. The days of measuring everything have gone. What matters to Tunbridge Wells is delivering what is important to local people.

**8.7** Because of this, we are moving performance management into a more pragmatic phase that will ensure we have a complete focus on what really matters.

**8.8** We will do this by ensuring that each year we plan our services effectively. We will maintain our focus on our long-term vision whilst ensuring we take the incremental steps, within our resource constraints, to meet the needs of the short-term.

**8.9** This will ensure that our long-term vision, Strategic Plan, budget, service plans and individual appraisals all influence each other.

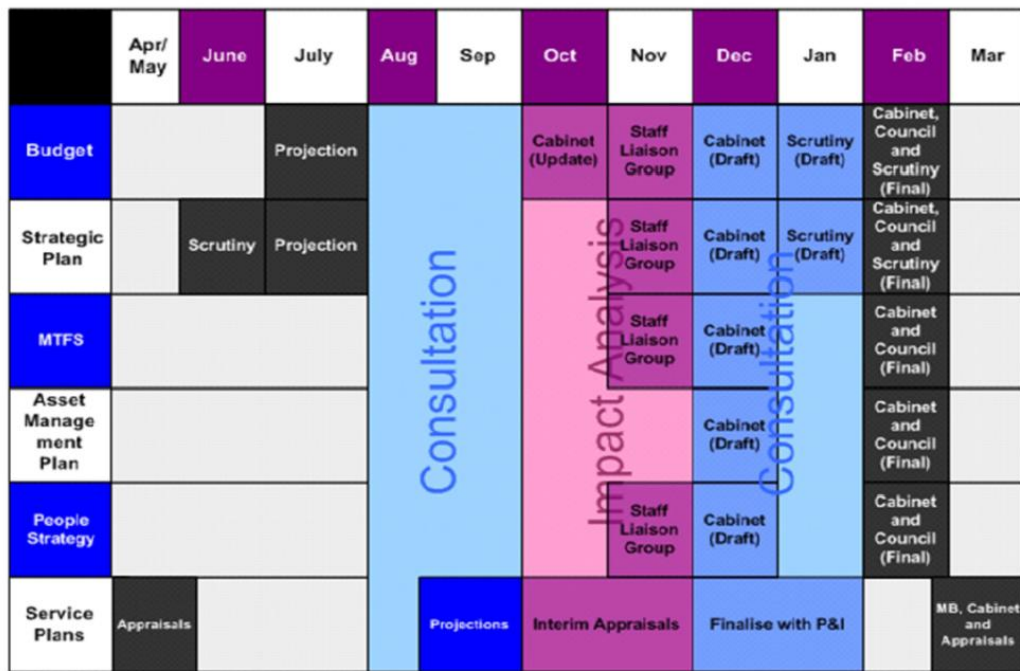
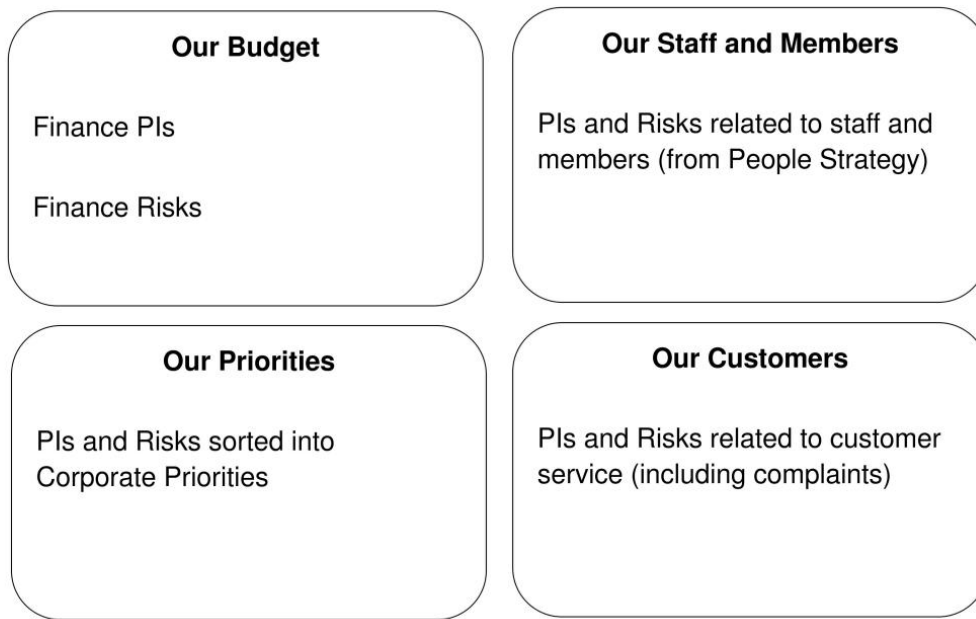


Figure 3 Strategic Planning Process

## Managing our performance

**8.10** By ensuring we focus on the things that matter, we will be able to manage our resources more effectively. By managing performance, our finances, our staff and member resources, as well as our risks simultaneously, we will be able to move more swiftly in taking effective decisions.



**Figure 4 Performance Management Framework**

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