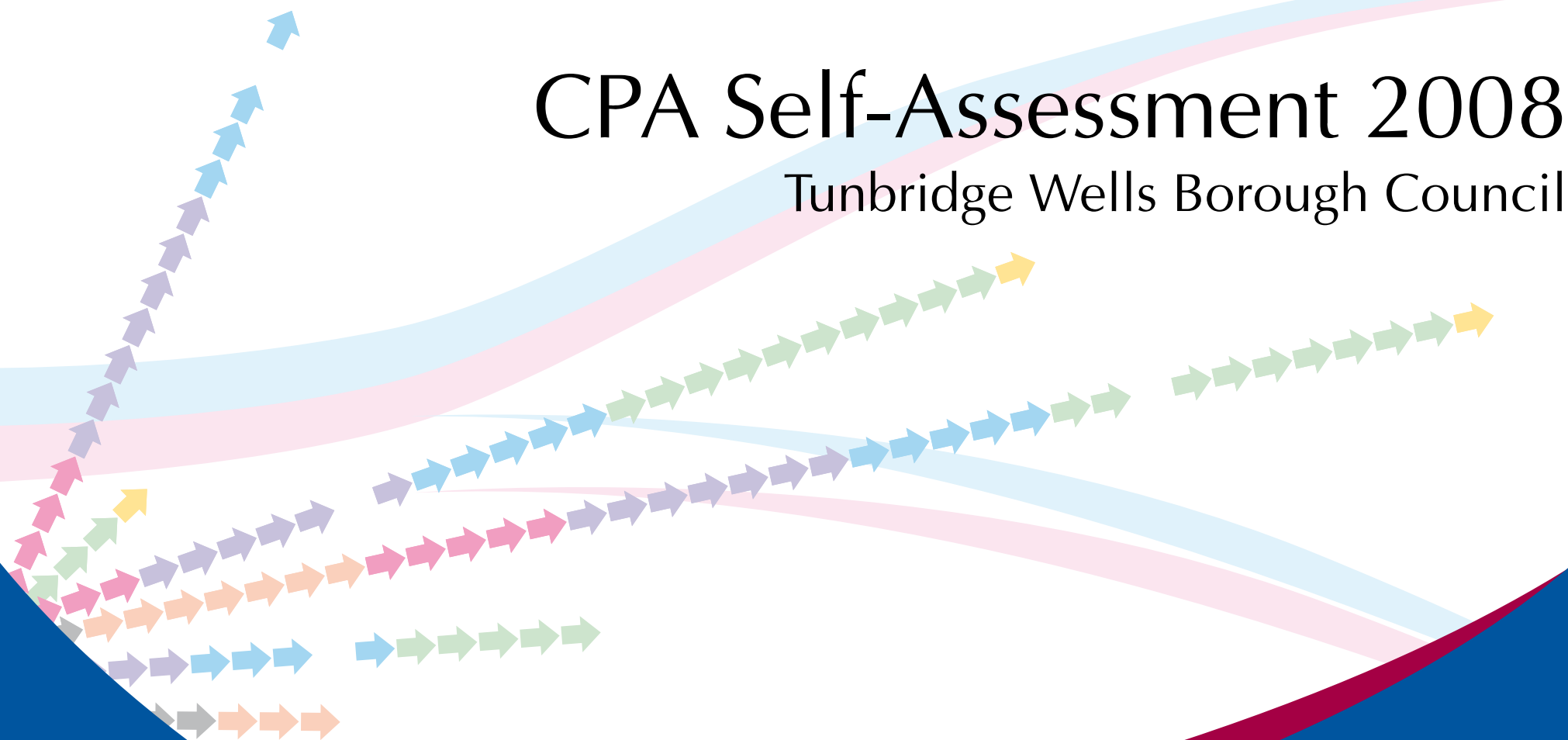


CPA Self-Assessment 2008

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council



At one time we only reacted to criticism, now we lead by example...

This self-assessment illustrates our journey since we were found to be a 'weak' Council in 2004.

That judgement shocked the Council into action and, since then, we have radically improved the way in which we lead our community, work with our partners and manage the organisation.

You probably wouldn't find anyone here who would say it has been an easy journey; it has only been possible as a result of difficult decisions, significant changes in service delivery, and a great deal of hard work.

Our commitment to that change process is a clear response to the historic criticisms that the Council was 'complacent', not well led, had poor relationships with partners and stakeholders, showed a reluctance to take difficult decisions, and lacked clarity as to what we wanted for our residents. It is also a testament to the abilities of the team we have here. Members, staff and partners have collectively focused our efforts and energy on ensuring that we have become an outward focused and dynamic authority that has a positive, 'can do' approach and that is known to deliver for the community.

Four years on, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is a different place. We have kept and improved all of the best parts 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.

No matter how big or small the challenge, we have collectively been prepared to meet it. For example, we have signed up with a major development partner to take forward the economic development of our towns over the next ten years. This is a huge step forward in delivering our long-term vision.

We have been equally keen to make the small things work – the things that make a real difference to people's lives but which are seldom seen.

We have reached out to communities that have previously been difficult to reach. Our Ward Walks programme was recognised by the Local Government Chronicle in its list of top ten examples of best practice for customer engagement. Satisfaction with the Council amongst BME communities has risen and is no longer lower than non BME residents. Inequalities in life expectancy have been reduced, bucking regional and national trends.

We can truly say we are delivering for all of our communities, no matter how hard-to-reach or how difficult the task.

However, we are not complacent. We know we can always do better and we have robust plans in place to deliver on those areas where there is still work to do. The ongoing challenges of changing public expectations, local and national financial constraints and the need to deliver more for less compel us to innovate and be creative in how we deliver our services. We also recognise the dynamic environment in which we operate: demographics change; the challenges of the national and local economies change; national priorities change.

Because of the team here, the processes we have in place to recruit talented individuals, and the shared vision we all hold, we are agile and flexible enough to address future challenges with confidence.

When reading through this document, we hope to inspire you. We hope to show that achievement for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is not just about making organisations fit for purpose and running efficient services. It's much more than that.

For us improvement and achievement means making a positive difference to the places where people live and work. We have been able to do this over the past few years as our self-assessment demonstrates.

This is our journey. This is Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.



Sheila Wheeler
Chief Executive



Cllr Roy Bullock
Leader of the Council



Tunbridge Wells - The People, Place and Council

Our Borough

Tunbridge Wells is one of 12 districts in Kent. It is uniquely positioned within the county, benefiting from a rich historical legacy, 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. 55 per cent of our population live in Royal Tunbridge Wells and 45 per cent in rural towns and villages.

Covering 33,133 hectares, the borough is home to a population of 104,600 residents, living in 45,961 households (2006/07 mid-year population estimates) representing 7.6 per cent of the county population. The borough borders East Sussex (Wealden and Rother districts), and the Kent districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Ashford. It also benefits from good transport links to London and the south coast.

Tunbridge Wells is an attractive place, with over two thirds of our borough designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and includes ten Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Our residents enjoy a high quality of life with average life expectancy of 79.9 years and over 70 per cent of our residents live in owner-occupied households.

The Council

The Council has 48 councillors: 44 Conservatives and 4 Liberal Democrats. In 2006 a smaller, more focused Cabinet was introduced with portfolios aligned to our corporate priorities. The 'Leader and Executive' model is now embedded into decision-making with Member 'champions' and 'lead councillors' to support Cabinet in their work.

This has been complemented by a fundamental review of the Council's Scrutiny function, which has led to a more effective and focused approach to Overview and Scrutiny. This was recently recognised in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Awards, where we were commended for our work and use of resources.

Our officer structure comprises a Chief Executive, three Directors and nine Heads of Service. The Performance Management, Overview and Scrutiny and Communication functions report directly to the Chief Executive. The Council employs 396 people, 50 per cent of whom live in the borough.

The percentage of top five per cent earners that are from ethnic minority communities and the top five per cent of earners that are disabled are in the top quartile nationally.

The Council has 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 Finances

The Council has a net revenue budget of £14.5 million (excluding benefits) and gross expenditure totalling £60 million.

Council Tax levels are amongst the lowest in the country at £134.79 for a Band D property. This means that each one per cent increase in Council Tax nets the Council around £60,000. The Council has considerable reserves of some £30 million and a capital programme amounting to around £8 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, commits the Council to reducing this. This has added further pressure to the annual budgetary savings process, with a recent analysis suggesting that £3.8 million needs to be saved over the next seven years. The Council has already delivered in excess of £2.2 million savings over the past three years through a combination of business process re-engineering, partnership working and some reductions in service delivery.

The Council relies heavily on income from a variety of sources, including car parking, crematorium and land charges which may place further pressure on the Council's revenue budget due to the economic downturn. This is being managed through the service planning and risk management processes.

Opportunities and Challenges

Our borough faces many challenges and many opportunities.

Tunbridge Wells is one of the safest places to live in the county. Car ownership is high, we have the largest commuter population into London in the south east of England, and some of the longest journey-to-work times in the country. There are increasing pressures on the transport infrastructure – particularly the road systems in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Tunbridge Wells currently has a strong retail economy and 19 per cent of the total town centre floorspace accounted for evening economy sector facilities in January 2007. A large proportion of jobs in the borough are within the service sector. In particular: distribution, hotels, restaurants, public administration, education and health. One of our corporate priorities has focused on helping to diversify the local economy through business advice and the recent downturn in the economy may have a significant impact on these services.

We have pockets of deprivation concentrated within small areas of the borough, with Sherwood and Broadwater featuring in the most deprived 20 per cent of wards in Kent and Medway. Despite high levels of skills among most of our population, 39.3 per cent of all residents in Sherwood and 34.6 per cent of all residents in Broadwater have no qualifications. In 2006, 10.5 per cent of the working age population had no qualifications; slightly higher than the average for the South East (9.6 per cent). This is why, together with our partners, we have identified priority neighbourhoods in which to focus our efforts.

Our relative position to London could alter as other areas of Kent and the South East develops – for example the new Ebbsfleet station and associated development may well have an impact on our economy.

The average house price in 2008 in the borough was £314,917 which means that affordability is a considerable issue. Despite national trends, average house prices are still increasing in Tunbridge Wells. The high cost of housing, coupled with gaps in housing supply, means there are challenges in balancing the housing market.

Our population comprises 2.6 per cent BME residents (Census 2001) and our local research also demonstrates a recent increase in new European migrant communities residing in the borough. In planning for our services for the future we will have new challenges to address and we need to work hard to ensure that the needs of these new communities are met as well as working to integrate them into our borough.

The borough is expecting to see a significant decline in those aged 0 – 15 and 25 – 44 years and a substantial increase in the numbers of people aged 65 and over between 2006 and 2021. This potentially has knock-on effects on a number of services and has precipitated consultation with this often hard-to-reach group. For example, the Council Housing Strategy has a particular long-term focus on older people.

The challenges we face as a Council also provide opportunities to develop partnership working and deliver value for money. These were weaknesses for us in 2004. Without developing excellent partnership arrangements we wouldn't be able to meet the challenges of demographic change.

These challenges and opportunities set the context for our journey as a Council. They have informed the services we have developed and how we have set out to improve our Council.



Ambition for the Community

Our Ambition journey – where we were

In 2004, the Audit Commission's CPA Report found that:

'The council does not give effective leadership in the community or to services...it has a poor relationship with many stakeholders and is perceived negatively. The widely held view is that the council lacks a vision for the borough and is not ambitious'.

The Council had poor relationships with its partners and stakeholders and did not understand the needs and aspirations of its communities. There was a lack of coherence and consistency in its planning with no clear corporate aims. As a result the Council was perceived negatively.

Where we are

In 2007, a Peer Review of the Council noted that:

'Relationships with partner organisations have also improved significantly and evidence from focus groups demonstrated that TWBC's approach to the promotion of partnership working is welcomed and valued amongst organisations'.

The Council is confident, dynamic and flexible. We are ambitious for our community, outward-focused and work well with partners seeking to enhance the quality of life for all. We have in place a coherent, well-articulated agenda for the borough.

However, we are not complacent and are keen to ensure that this agenda remains relevant in the context of a changing background of new challenges for us and our partners.

Our Journey

Over the past four years we have worked hard to develop a greater understanding of our communities and their needs and to strengthen our relations with partners and stakeholders to ensure coherence in our ambitions for the borough. Specifically, we have done this through establishing an effective Local Strategic Partnership to deliver a shared Sustainable Community Plan, which promotes social, economic and environmental well-being. Internally, we have broadened and extended our planning horizons and improved the way in which we consult on, communicate and deliver our priorities.

Case Study: The development of a local strategic partnership

Partnerships Delivering Results *Sustainable Community Plan*

In 2004 the CPA report concluded that our Community Plan was not fully supported by our stakeholders. With the leadership of our Members, we have now turned this area of weakness into a significant strength.

Our Sustainable Community Plan 2006-2011 (SCP) was reviewed and re-launched in 2006 following an extensive period of consultation with our communities and stakeholders and built on a robust analysis of the needs of the area and our communities. Members led the redevelopment of a sound evidence base on which the Council could agree a shared vision with our communities. The plan therefore reflects local priorities and our partners' plans – most notably the Vision4Kent (county-wide Sustainable Community Plan) as well as county and national priorities.

This was a vital step for us in getting the basics right and establishing a framework for the whole Council to move forward with. The process of developing the SCP assisted in improving partnership working and building strong relationships with a range of organisations. The SCP sets out our shared vision.

'Enhancing the quality of life for all'



The plan identifies nine themes that form our ambitions:

- Safeguarding the environment
- Maintaining a thriving local economy
- Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure facilities
- Maintaining community safety and reducing fear of crime
- Transport – getting around the borough
- Meeting the need for housing
- Promoting health and improving well-being
- Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence
- Learning for all

We have strong performance management arrangements in place to support the delivery of the SCP and recent reports show over 80 per cent of actions being delivered or on target. This demonstrates an ability to deliver real outcomes through partnership work.

Since the SCP was agreed, the Council has reviewed its LSP arrangements (with external assistance from the I&DeA and Warwick University) and has now established a new Local Strategic Partnership, Tunbridge Wells Together, to ensure that we are better placed to deliver our ambitions. The LSP is underpinned by thematic delivery groups which in many cases are chaired by partners, reflecting the strong partnership culture the Council has facilitated.

Our Local Development Framework is also being developed in parallel, with much of the consultation undertaken jointly to ensure that it reflects the priorities of the SCP.

Delivering our Ambition through Partnerships and Joint Strategies

The Council has also contributed to and led in many other partnership initiatives to deliver our ambitions, for example:

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has been at the heart of developing the newly-agreed Kent Agreement 2 (the second generation LAA for Kent). The Council (on behalf of the LSP) has also developed a model Local Action Plan which has been recognised as best-practice across the county and has been adopted by other Kent councils.

We have signed up to the Kent Commitment, which sets an ambition to give Kent the best local government in the country. It puts residents and service users at the heart of its improvements as well as providing major opportunities to rationalise, and widen access to, seamless public services. The opening of our Gateway in November 2008 which draws on retail concepts to deliver better access to public services, connecting with people in the same way as modern retail organisations, will be a tangible outcome of this commitment.

Sub-regionally, the Council has played an active role in the Kent and Medway Improvement Partnership and has been particularly active in the area of business transformation with a Business Transformation Partnership that it has forged with Maidstone and Ashford. This is being used as a template elsewhere.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has been effective in overseeing a fall in crime and re-offending rates in the borough. The establishment of a Partnership Tasking and Co-ordination Group (PTCG) in January 2007 has delivered a number of tangible outcomes for the community. For example, in one area where there had been issues arising from groups of youths gathering and drinking in a public space, the use of local intelligence led to the deployment of high visibility patrols and the use of support workers to educate the young people about the effects of drinking. This resulted in a potential problem being averted.



The Council has also played a lead role in a range of other partnerships designed to take forward local priorities, including: an A21 lobby group (designed to keep much needed improvements to the A21 on the Government's agenda); work on improving joint working on waste collection and disposal (led by the Chief Executive); the establishment of a Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership (designed to take forward joint working opportunities in a range of service areas); work with the West Kent Partnership on economic development and transportation issues; and work with parish councils to support local priorities.

Confident and visible leadership

These improvements in partnership working are possible because the Council is clear about its own priorities and provides confident and effective leadership.

In 2004 the Council was run according to an 'Annual Operating Plan' that looked only one year into the future. It neither took account of the medium-term ambitions of the organisation, nor did it address wider community priorities. Councillors did two things: set the Council four focused priorities (which dovetail with the SCP) and they consulted widely with other elected Members, partners and stakeholders to develop a three-year Strategic Plan which is now coming into its third year of operation.

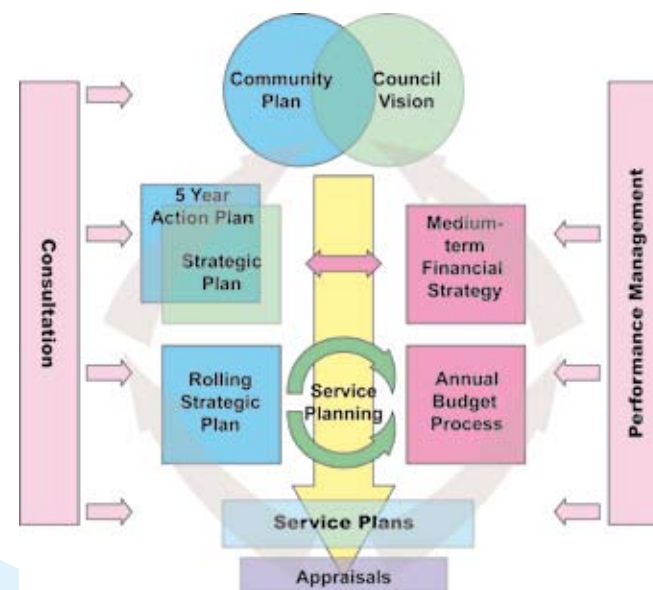
Corporate Priorities

- Promoting and maintaining a thriving and diverse local economy
- Caring for our environment
- Having housing suitable for local people
- Developing safer and stronger communities

Corporate Commitments

- Delivering high quality services to our customers
- Improving customer service and satisfaction
- Ensuring that we are well-managed, proactive and deliver value-for-money services

The Strategic Plan builds on the Council's four Corporate Priorities and three Corporate Commitments, breaking down each into individual objectives. The SCP and Strategic Plan are both supported by robust performance management arrangements that ensure that overall objectives are translated into action through service plans, other plans and strategies and individual appraisals.



With clarity as to what are and what are not priorities, we have not been afraid to set challenging ambitions.

The appointment of a development partner to lead the economic development of the borough's towns is a multimillion-pound investment stretching over a decade. Without a clear understanding of the needs of our communities, clear priorities and shared ambitions with partners, this would not be possible to take forward.

We have also facilitated a replacement hospital with the health sector and included a proposal in the Local Plan 2006. The ambitious scheme includes relocation of two hospitals to the site at Pembury, releasing land in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre for a future mixed development and bringing local health and economic benefits.



Case Study: PFI Hospital at Pembury

Community involvement and consultation

Clearly, for our ambitions to be robust they need to be based on consultation and a rigorous assessment of local need. For them to be delivered effectively, they need to be widely owned and communicated and kept under constant review.

We have developed both formal and informal approaches to engagement to ensure we continuously listen and respond to our communities. These methods have been brought together in our Engagement and Consultation Strategy. A Communications Plan, Customer Service and Access Plan and Engaging Hard to Reach Groups Guide support this.

All our key strategies are subject to stakeholder consultation and involvement and equality impact assessments, including the Strategic Plan, the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as well as specific priority strategies such as the Borough Housing Strategy during the development and review stages. For example, every comment or suggestion made as part of the Strategic Plan consultation received a written response from officers, informing them of whether the suggestion had been taken on board.

Ward Walks

Our innovative Ward Walks programme systematically engages all our residents in their neighbourhoods over a six-year period. The programme has been recognised by the Local Government Chronicle in its 'top ten best practice for customer engagement'. It brings together county, Ward and Parish Councillors and key partners (including Kent County Council, West Kent PCT, Town & Country Housing Group, Police and Kent Fire and Rescue) along with a diverse range of staff to engage residents in their homes over a period of time.

Priorities for improvement that are identified on the Ward Walks are shared amongst partner organisations. This ensures we are collectively delivering value-for-money by reducing duplication of effort, but more importantly gives us a shared assessment of need. For example, the recent programme identified homes where older people did not feel safe from risk of fire. As a result we have worked with Kent Fire and Rescue who undertook free inspections and install smoke alarms in those properties that have needed them.

Balancing Expectations

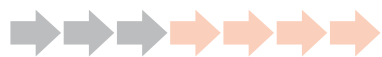
We are conscious that we will not have the resources to meet all the aspirations of our communities (even with the involvement of partners). Tough decisions may have to be made. We have therefore sought to prioritise the wants and needs of our residents both through borough-wide surveys and through trade-off modelling.

In 2006 we contracted Research for Today to carry out a survey amongst three hundred households across the borough to challenge residents on levels of service provision when confronted with cost choices. This exercise, called SIMALTO, (Simultaneous Multiple Attribute Level Trade-Off) has recently been carried out with the Council's elected Members and informed the budget process for 2008/09.

For example, the SIMALTO exercise showed that residents were willing to incorporate an increase in parking charges of 10p, only in association with maintaining existing levels of service elsewhere. This trade-off analysis has helped to provide a robust framework within which decisions for prioritisation of services can take place and enabled the Council to increase some car parking charges whilst maintaining other services.

Engaging Hard-to-Reach Groups

The demographics of the borough dictate that we must ensure both consultation and the collection of intelligence are reflective of the views of all our residents, with a particular emphasis on those who may be 'hard to reach'. This is an area that is constantly subject to change. For example, statistics show that there has been a rise in migrants in Tunbridge Wells in the past five years with nearly 900 national insurance registrations recorded from foreign nationals in 2006/07. In one local Catholic Primary School of 315 pupils, around 50 pupils in early years education did not speak English as a first language.



We have done a lot to try to understand these changes and to inform the way in which we should be engaging new and other hard-to-reach communities to inform service delivery. For example, we commissioned the Institute for Community Cohesion (iCoCo) to undertake a needs assessment. Similarly, a Select Committee has undertaken a significant review of the effects of migration on the local economy. This involved speaking with local churches, schools, Social Services, the Citizens Advice Bureau, local farming communities, housing providers, JobCentre Plus, as well as local GPs. This review has developed a set of recommendations that build on our existing work with migrant communities and is informing our service planning processes.

In policy terms, we have agreed a guide to inform engagement with community groups to agree and implement the gender, race and disability strands of the equality schemes. Action plans have been approved by Cabinet and outcomes are being achieved. An important indication of our progress in this area has been our movement from Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government to Level 3; only the third district council in England to make the leap in a single year.

Cabinet has also approved the age, religion/belief and sexual orientation sections of the equality scheme – one of only a small number of councils in England to do so by April 2008. Developing these shows we are committed to ensuring that our services are appropriate to the needs of all our diverse communities.

To further enhance our engagement with all sections of the community, we have the following structures in place:

- Regular meetings with the Access Group who promote mobility and access for all in the Tunbridge Wells borough area.
- West Kent Sexual Diversity Advisory Group facilitated by West Kent Police.
- West Kent Minority Ethnic Advisory Group facilitated by West Kent Police.
- Urban and Rural Youth Forums – established by the Council.
- Faith Forum meeting between faith leaders and the Council.

Resident Survey 2007/08

75.9 per cent of older people were satisfied with how the Council runs things

We also supplement our borough-wide survey with 'Boost Surveys' for hard-to-reach groups. Our recent survey with new migrants has informed us of the need for a welcome leaflet, which is now being developed by the LSP.

**Case Study:
Equalities – reaching out to all
of our communities to deliver
high-quality services**

Politically, we have a Portfolio Holder who is responsible for equalities with two Equalities and Diversity Champions who lead the way forward with Members. The Chief Executive chairs the Corporate Equalities Monitoring Group which is a cross-Directorate staff group charged with taking forward the equalities agenda. This has fostered a real sense of leadership in an area of weakness just a few years ago.

This work is now making a difference. For example:

- 27 extra people received assistance with their refuse collection bins in 2007/08 as a result of better publicity of the 'Pull and Return' system we have in place for those who are unable to move the bins themselves.
- As a result of engagement with local faith communities, an area of a cemetery has been set aside for use as a burial area by the Muslim community.
- The Council has led the successful adaptation of people's homes for those who have disabilities. In 2007/08 this led to 103 people being able to live in their own home instead of seeking alternative accommodation. This not only surpasses the Council's target by a large margin, but also has significantly contributed to the long-term quality of life for those residents.

Communicating our Ambitions

We have developed innovative ways of communicating our vision, values and ambition. These are tailored to our audience and this ensures that all of our stakeholders 'buy-in' to the shared ambitions for Tunbridge Wells.

Communicating our ambitions and achievements

- Borough magazine 'Local', to all residents
- Member newsletters
- Parish and Partners 'e' newsletters
- On the Write Lines staff newsletter
- Corporate Briefings, awareness campaigns, and our website
- Staff and Councillor Conventions
- Faith Forum and partner meetings
- Parish and Town Council meetings

A key element in communicating to all households in the borough is our 'Local' magazine. Our recent Borough-wide surveys showed that:

- *A quarter of all residents preferred to use this as the primary means of accessing information on the Council and its activities.*
- *64% of respondents had seen a copy of the Council's newsletter, in the past 12 months.*
- *89% read at least some of the contents of the newsletter (14% reading all of it).*
- *72% agree that they enjoy reading the newsletter and look forward to receiving it.*
- *64% agree that it gives them useful information about the Council's activities.*

The 2008 survey showed that 60 per cent of residents felt that the Council keeps them well informed about the services it provides. This has increased from 51 per cent in 2005 and illustrates the effectiveness of our external communications. Although this compares well with other authorities, we are trying to improve this further by extending our coverage of the Local magazine beyond just households. For example, we are now distributing it in places that aim to reach a much wider audience. It is now given out to commuters at our railway stations, placed in pubs and copies are also given out through our Ward Walks programme.

We also hold regular briefings for parish and town councils and also the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum where officers and Members attend. These are good opportunities to communicate our shared long-term vision and ambitions.

We reach out to different communities by ensuring we distribute our press releases to national publications such as Asian Voice. Our research tells us that some communities are more likely to read national publications than those provided locally, so we have responded to that by engaging people in a different way.

Internally, our community's ambitions are communicated to all staff and elected Members through the service planning process (see Prioritisation), six-monthly appraisals, the six-monthly staff convention (attended by all staff) and by regular briefings to Members and staff by the Chief Executive and Directors.

There is a wide understanding of what those ambitions are and what they mean for each individual in the organisation. For example, the recent staff survey found that 92 per cent of managers agreed that the organisation's priorities were understood and had been communicated to their own staff. 89 per cent of staff also said they understood what their manager(s) expected of them.

Corporate Priority posters are on display in all rooms in Council buildings and reception areas, and have been communicated widely, internally and externally.



Next Steps

The Council is far from complacent. Three years on from agreeing the SCP and the Council's priorities, we are taking stock of what has been achieved and thinking in greater detail about long-term future challenges, particularly given a recent 'State of the Borough' report that we have commissioned from Local Futures. Vision 2026 sets out the following statement for the borough:

'we will continue to celebrate the past and shape the future so that, by 2026, we will have healthy confident communities within a prosperous, accessible and attractive borough'

This is in the process of being embedded into our service planning arrangements for 2009 onwards and demonstrates that this organisation never stands still but constantly challenges itself to do better.

We regularly review our partnership arrangements as there could be potential for improvements in the way we enter partnerships. We currently have robust arrangements in place for our identified strategic partnerships and these have been praised by external reviews. However, our Corporate Services Select Committee is undertaking a review to see if we need a more strategic approach to entering new partnerships.

The 'ambition' to enhance the quality of life for all

We have clear and challenging ambitions. They are embedded in all that we do and have given us the basis on which to build our service provision. The ambitions have been built through effective working relationships with partners who, in turn, have been crucial to our success. With these ambitions and partnerships in place, we have been able to establish a clear prioritisation framework for ourselves. We believe this evidence shows that we have the necessary tools with which to provide excellent levels of service.



Prioritisation

Our 'prioritisation' journey – where we were

In 2004, the Audit Commission's CPA Report, with regards to prioritisation, said:

'This is a weak area with no significant strengths... the council has not set clear corporate priorities... a clear basis for the corporate priorities does not exist...very few examples exist of where the council has redirected resources towards corporate priorities.'

In 2004 the Council lacked focus and was often buffeted by prevailing circumstances. Momentum was lost, delivery was inconsistent and confidence in our ability to deliver was low. In 2004 it was clear we needed to do more to prioritise our resources effectively and to provide a strong framework within which to work for the future.

Where we are

In 2007, an external Peer Review concluded:

'Stemming from the ambitions for the community there are clear corporate priorities that are well articulated and understood by Members and officers, for example the town centre regeneration ... There is strong evidence of the 'Golden Thread' running throughout the organisation from the Community Plan through to individual appraisals'.

We have now developed robust mechanisms to ensure that we can achieve our community's ambitions. These arrangements have seen a significant improvements for the Council, in outcomes linked directly to priorities.



Our Journey

As already mentioned, the Council has set itself clear corporate priorities and corporate commitments. We have also considerably improved our corporate planning processes:

- *We have moved from an Annual Operating Plan to a rolling Strategic Plan which is clear about what is – and what is not – a priority.*
- *We have introduced strong processes for planning the delivery of services.*
- *We have brought forward the budget process by nearly six months and take a long-term approach to planning our finances and ensuring that resources follow priorities.*
- *There is now strong political and managerial leadership, prepared to make and see through tough decisions and to maintain our focus.*
- *We have developed a strong evidence base upon which decisions can be made and justified.*

Setting and communicating our priorities

As set out above, we have developed a three-year Strategic Plan (our Corporate Plan) on the basis of widespread public consultation. This is now in its second version and provides the detailed direction for our services.

The Strategic Plan sets out clearly what are and what are not priorities and breaks each corporate priority and corporate commitment into measurable performance indicators for the short, medium and long-term. Targets are outcome-focused and are embedded into the service planning process and monitored through the Council's performance management system.

The Strategic Plan clearly identifies national, regional and county priorities and makes clear how its objectives contribute towards their delivery. The Strategic Plan is supported and complemented by Portfolio Statements which set out the responsibilities of each Cabinet member and express the political priorities of Cabinet. These, in turn, inform the service-planning process.

The Corporate Priorities set the direction for our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Our MTFS is developed in parallel with the Strategic Plan, looks ahead three years and places financial plans in the context of our priorities and national constraints. 'Away days' are held throughout the year with Cabinet and senior managers to challenge resource allocations to ensure we are delivering value for money across all our services. This has enabled an effective mechanism to shift resources between priority and non-priority areas. For example, ICT resources have been realigned to support the Gateway programme.

In addition to using stated priorities and non-priorities to inform budgetary decisions, Members have also used a variety of tools to assess Value for Money. These include our Value for Money Strategy and Toolkit and the Kent Price Book. For example, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council provides the best value for money in half of all the services that are compared (six out of 12).

Changes in priorities and service delivery are subject to consultation, both internally and externally, through a range of mechanisms as set out under 'Ambition'.

Delivering our priorities Plans and Strategies

To translate the community's ambitions and the priorities in our Strategic Plan, a number of key plans and strategies have been put in place to deliver improvements in our priority areas. Wherever possible, action plans are incorporated into the Council's performance management system.

To ensure that our plans and strategies are regularly reviewed, we have a Plans and Strategies Matrix Group of officers that analyses the Council's plans and strategies against the Council's Plan and Strategy Guide.

Improvement Planning

We also have a Corporate Improvement Plan. This was developed to bring together and codify a wide range of improvements and important actions arising from the Council's original CPA Inspection, other service-specific inspections and other external inspections including Use of Resources, VFM, Data Quality and our Peer Review. To reflect its importance, the Corporate Improvement Plan is monitored both by Cabinet and the Select Committees, and also by the Audit Committee.

Vision for Kent Priorities

Learning for All	Economic Success	Keeping Kent Moving	Environment Excellence	High Quality Homes	Enjoying Life	Safer & Stronger Communities	Improved Health, Care & Wellbeing
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Sustainable Community Plan Priorities

Learning for Everyone	Maintaining a Thriving Local Economy	Transport - Getting Around the Borough	Safeguarding our Environment	Meeting the Need for Housing	Enabling People to Take Part and Enjoy Leisure Activities	Maintaining Community Safety and Reducing the Fear of Crime	Encouraging Social Inclusion by Supporting Independence	Promoting health and improving wellbeing
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Our Corporate Priorities

Promote and Maintain a Thriving and Diverse Local Economy	Care for Our Environment	Have Housing Suitable for Local People	Develop Safer and Stronger Communities
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Local Delivery

Economic Strategy	Environment Strategy	Contaminated Land	Housing Strategy	Leisure Strategy	Community Safety Audit and Strategy 2005-2008
Transport Strategy	Conserving Built Environment	Carbon Management Plan	Homelessness Strategy	Kent Partners Compact	Licensing Policy
West Kent Area Investment Framework	Conserving the Natural Environment	Local Plan 2006	Private Sector Renewal Strategy 2004-2009	Draft Youth Strategy	Child Protection Policy
LDF	Countryside Management	Supplementary Planning Guidance	Empty Property Strategy 2006-2011	Comprehensive Equalities Policy and Scheme	LDF
	Flood Policy Statement	Kent Municipal Waste Management Strategy	Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy 2005-2008	Play Strategy	
	LDF		LDF		

Cross-Cutting Commitment

Delivering high quality services to our customers				
Ensuring that we are well managed, proactive and deliver value-for-money services				
Improving customer service and satisfaction				
Draft People Strategy	Corporate Improvement Plan 2008-2011	Medium Term Financial Strategy	Customer Service & Access Plan	Draft Communication Plan
Value for Money Strategy	Risk Management Strategy	Procurement Strategy	Asset Management Plan	Draft Consultation & Engagement Strategy



Resourcing Priorities

Actions have been developed to shift resources away from non-priority areas and explore new ways of working to deliver the Corporate Priorities. For example, pages 40-42 of the Strategic Plan outline where reprioritisation of resources has been delivered in 2007/08 and where proposals have been established for 2008/09. These were developed over a period of time with away-days with Members and officers informing decisions. These priority issues are derived directly from our corporate priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan and, given changed economic circumstances, are currently being reviewed.

2008/09 Priorities for extra investment

- Economic Regeneration
- Transport Improvements
- Recycling
- Housing Services
- Community Engagement
- Partnership Working
- Enhancing our governance structure such as Overview & Scrutiny function

Non-Priorities for reducing investment

- Back office functions in isolation
- Providing leisure services directly where more cost-effective alternatives exist
- Subsidies to Assembly Hall Theatre
- Events
- Grants in non-priority areas
- Making the general Council Tax payer pay for services that are used only by some residents or non-residents

Our clear focus on directing resources to priority areas has recently led to the following improvements in service transformation and increased resources for our communities. These were prompted by the priorities expressed in the 2007–10 Strategic Plan:

- We invest £656,000 annually on Disabled Facilities Grants and an additional £200,000 per annum on discretionary housing renewal grants. As a result, we are making a significant contribution to ensuring that there is housing suitable for all residents of the borough.

- The Council established a Joint Transportation Board in 2005 with Kent County Council to address transport and traffic management in the borough. The Council has invested £50,000 in a Public Transport Study which will provide modelling for a regional hub as identified by both SEEDA and SEERA, and we have levered in £250,000 from Kent County Council. In addition, the Council has commissioned a Borough Car Parking Study. This will assist in addressing community priorities relating to congestion and traffic in our town centres.
- Additional sums have been invested in the waste and recycling contract to maintain existing (top quartile) performance levels pending a final decision on re-tendering.
- Simplifying public access to local services and joining up our front of house in Gateway, an overall capital investment in excess of £3 million.
- The Council has an agreed framework for a transformational approach to joint business process reengineering with Maidstone and Ashford Borough Councils.
- In 2007, the Council entered into a partnership arrangement with Maidstone Borough Council to deliver its Overview and Scrutiny function. The partnership coincided with the introduction of three new Select Committees focusing on the Council's priorities and Cabinet portfolios.



- *Effective performance management has ensured that we have improved performance in priority areas. For example, in 2003/04 the Planning Service had a number of its key indicators in the bottom two quartiles. With additional resourcing, performance has improved dramatically in all areas of performance and we are now performing in the top two quartiles.*
- *Resources have been invested in the establishment of a Regeneration Company which will play a lead role in regenerating the four town centres of Tunbridge Wells over the next ten years. This contributes significantly to achieving the aims of the ‘maintaining a thriving economy’ theme.*
- *We have invested time and resources into establishing effective partnership working through shared services. This is providing long-term value for money. For example, we share services with other Councils in the following areas:*
 - *Licensing*
 - *Revenues*
 - *Learning and Development provision*
 - *Overview and Scrutiny*
 - *Equalities*
 - *CCTV*
 - *Benefit Fraud*
 - *Planning Services*

Delivering Priorities for all our Communities

Whilst the majority of our communities benefit from an excellent quality of life, we have also been clear about addressing inequalities within the borough.

Alongside our partners, we have identified two priority neighbourhoods – Sherwood and Showfields – where local communities face a range of economic and social barriers to accessing services and opportunities. Characteristics include a significant number of lone parents, people who are in receipt of income support and/or are long-term unemployed, and health inequalities. The area is also characterised by social housing and some issues of anti-social behaviour are prevalent.

To this end, we led on the development of the new TN2 Community Centre in Sherwood with significant community involvement at all stages from design to management. This new community asset has been delivered in partnership with Kent County Council, Town & Country Housing Group (TCHG) and the West Kent YMCA. The new centre is managed by a local residents trust, which has been in operation for over a year and is providing a strong focus for engaging and delivering local services, which are accessible and respond to local needs.

We are committed to sustaining the focus in Sherwood and have allocated revenue support for three years to develop the capacity of the Trust and ensure that the centre is sustainable. To achieve value for money and build on the partnership working, staff have been employed in partnership with Town & Country Housing Group and include a Community Development Officer. In addition, 13 new affordable homes are being developed by TCHG on the site of the former Community Centre, to which the Council will have nomination rights.

**Case Study:
Making a difference in our
priority neighbourhoods**

Communicating our Plans

We have remained focused on our priorities during a time of considerable organisational change. To help maintain this momentum, the service planning process has been vital in translating the Corporate Priorities and the Corporate Improvement Plan into service improvements.

All services across the organisation produce a service plan in line with a corporate template and these are signed-off by Management Board to encourage wider ownership. Heads of service work with middle managers to develop these to ensure plans are realistic and reflect front line service delivery.



Heads of service present their service plan proposals by Directorate at an annual service planning meeting of Management Team. This assists in the communication and sharing of experiences amongst services. All Heads of Service have preparatory meetings with their respective Portfolio Holders to ensure their input is taken into account in the planning process via their Portfolio Statements. This also assists elected Members in gaining a more detailed grasp of the services for which they are responsible.

All service plans include actions from Equality Impact Assessments. This ensures that our service planning is influenced and informed by the needs of all our communities.

All Council decisions, including Cabinet and Council committee papers, are required to demonstrate their impact on the Strategic Plan and Budget. This enables a robust approach to delivering priorities in the decision-making process. For example, in 2007 Cabinet instructed officers to review the Council's Capital Programme to ensure that it can be further aligned to the Council's priorities.

All staff attend a six-monthly staff convention, where key messages and progress are communicated across the Council. Feedback from conventions is also used to inform management decision-making and facilitates a culture of learning and sharing across the authority.

Keeping Stakeholders Informed

Wherever possible, stakeholders are involved in changes to priorities. For example, we have provided support to the Trinity Theatre when it was clear that their grant funding was going to be reduced. This was done through a process of working with the Board and supporting the development of a business plan which allowed a reduction in grant of £38,000 whilst maintaining financial sustainability.

Similarly, the Council has worked with the voluntary and community sector to assist them in managing changes brought about as a result of changes to our community grants scheme.

Next Steps

Health inequalities was an area of development for the Council. Although a recent NHS report found that there were no longer any statistically significant health inequalities in Tunbridge Wells compared to the rest of Kent, it has been recognised that this is something we could develop further work on. As part of developing the Council's Vision2026 and the refresh of the Council's priorities, we will be looking to ensure that health is expressed explicitly as a priority from 2009.

We have already refocused our housing and leisure services to take on a wider remit of health and well-being. This reflects the challenges of an ageing population as identified in Vision2026 and our commitment to achieving Kent-wide targets for the Kent Agreement 2. A new Health and Well-being strategy is currently being developed with the PCT as a result of this change and we have a Healthier Communities Coordinator in post who is taking the agenda forward.

The Peer Review raised a concern that the Council was in danger of taking on too much and not being able to deliver on its priorities. We have responded by establishing a delivery unit that will ensure that resources are matched to priorities and that the necessary support is provided to ensure that key projects are delivered to time, cost and quality.

The 'prioritisation' to enhance the quality of life for all

We believe that we have prioritisation mechanisms in place that are help in delivering excellent services. We have a strong framework that enables us to shift resources to priorities from non-priorities. This gives us the capacity to provide sustainable, high performing services to all of our communities.



Capacity

Our 'capacity' journey – where we were

In 2004, the Audit Commission's CPA Report said:

'The council has strong financial capacity...The council employs good quality staff...Decision making meetings are not effective....Councillor capacity is not enhanced due to the limited range of training, and poor take-up.'

Although elements of our capacity were a strength in 2004 we have not been complacent. Our staff and Members have been a huge resource in our improvement journey. We have invested in Member development and have restructured the Cabinet system to align with our Corporate Priorities. Members and staff have been innovative and forward thinking. This has given us the basis on which to deliver improved services and has been instrumental in helping address our weaknesses.

Where we are

In 2007, our Peer Review concluded:

'Political and senior management arrangements have been revised and refocused on priority areas and there is a clear focus on roles and responsibilities of all councillors ... The peer review team received evidence from Members and officers that there is a continued focus on providing value for money services. Engagement and relationships with partner organisations have significantly improved with evidence that some partnerships are delivering improved outcomes ... staff are seen as customer-focused, approachable, supportive, and enthusiastic to 'do their bit' and this spirit needs to be supported across the whole council.'

We are now an outward-looking authority using evidence, creative thinking and best practice examples from across the world (such as our Ward Walks initiative) to help us create new and innovative value for money services. We take risks where we need to, we celebrate innovation and success and we learn from failure. Our internal relationships are strong and we have excellent Cabinet and Management Board working relationships.

We continue to meet rising customer and community expectations, whilst at the same time delivering high performing services. We have achieved this through a combination of working in partnership, increasing efficiency and looking for new ways to deliver services.

Our Journey

It was important for us to build on our existing strengths from 2004 to ensure that all of the building blocks for effective and transparent decision-making were in place. Most notably, this included staff with a passion for excellence and customer service.

Key planks of our journey have included streamlining and strengthening managerial and political leadership, introducing effective scrutiny arrangements and an Audit Committee to improve challenge and enhance transparency, reducing our reliance on interest from our reserves and making the Council more financially sustainable.

We have tapped into the strength of our staff by giving them the tools they need to do their job and the freedom to challenge existing working practices and to explore new ways of working. These ambitions are clearly set out in the Council's People Strategy. This has been supported by a programme of business process re-engineering and the use of information and communication technology.

We have strengthened our governance arrangements and our approach to risk management whilst, at the same time, encouraging measured risks. Perhaps most importantly, we have built capacity through partnership working: partnership between services, with other councils and with the voluntary and community sector. This has also contributed to improved value for money.



Strong political and managerial leadership

The Council has put in place strong governance arrangements. The Constitution and Scheme of Delegation clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of staff and elected Members but this has also been supplemented by a range of additional protocols including a Member/Officer Relations Protocol and a General Member protocol. Further details are set out in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

The Council has a strong and effective Standards Committee that has seen through a range of changes including a revised Code of Conduct and arrangements for the Local Filter of complaints against councillors. Standards Committee members champion good governance arrangements and regular training and briefing sessions are held for both borough and parish councillors. A recent Audit Commission survey of senior officers and Members showed that they had a strong understanding of governance issues and the role of the Standards Committee, and that Members did not interfere in minor operational issues.

In 2007 the Council established an Audit Committee to strengthen governance. The highly qualified independent members of the Audit Committee have increased the committee's skills base and the Audit Commission has commended this.

Cabinet portfolios are aligned to priorities and this is reflected in the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements. The Council has a detailed Forward Plan. Report templates require that a range of cross-cutting issues are considered, as well as legal, financial and equalities implications.

We have invested heavily in Member development and training. Role descriptions have been produced and training needs are identified through surveys, focus groups and 1:1 personal development plan interviews with each councillor. There is a comprehensive elected Member training programme provided in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council meaning that councillors learn on two levels: through the provision of formal training and through networking and the exchange of best practice. An induction pack has been developed, supported by an induction programme for all new Members.

A series of rolling Member briefings are held that cover a variety of topics to improve the knowledge base of the Council, which are open to all Members including parish and town councillors.

Member Briefings

We regularly provide all-Member briefings. Here are some from the past year:

- Customer Access
- Economic Development
- Corporate Governance
- Customer First and the Gateway
- Strategic and Financial Planning
- Housing
- Community Facilities in Cranbrook
- Waste and Recycling
- Planning



To support Members in their frontline duties, we have developed a 'Councillor Kit Bag', which allows all Members to access information in the community on key issues that may be raised by residents.

Case Study: Councillor Kitbag

Internally, as part of our commitment to the development of a strong and productive working relationship, Members and officers have worked with the Leadership Centre for Local Government for over two years. This work has looked at political and managerial leadership issues using the National 'Umbrella' framework and provided a sound evaluation of the leadership and change management issues facing Tunbridge Wells. As a result of this work we now have in place a strong statement of our commitment to work together to continue to deliver outcomes for the public of Tunbridge Wells and to embrace the Place Shaping agenda.

Open to challenge

We are a learning organisation and, since our CPA in 2004, have sought challenge, guidance and best practice from other professionals to help and support us in our improvement journey.

Examples of where we have learned from external challenge include: Audit Commission inspections of our planning, housing and cultural services, I&DeA reviews of procurement, overview and scrutiny, reviews of our grants processes and our approach to equalities and an external review of our LSP arrangements.

Scrutiny routinely challenges performance. Any detailed action plans to rectify underperformance are reported to the relevant specific select committee. For example, the Corporate Services Select Committee requested further details on progress on some HR indicators to scrutinise some of our policies and procedures. As a result of changes, the Council's sickness levels have reduced by over 9 percent in 2007/08. See case study for further examples of scrutiny making a difference.

Case Study: Scrutiny – examples of reviews that have led to changes at Cabinet

Empowering Staff

The Council has worked to ensure that relationships between senior management, staff and councillors are strong, open and challenging. We recognise that improvements can only be achieved and sustained by a commitment to achieving excellence together for our communities. This is reflected in our People Strategy.

For example, a recent staff convention saw the Leader and Deputy Leader being invited to present their vision for the borough to all staff. Our Ward Walks programme also sees councillors and many front line staff working together to engage residents.

In a recent survey by the Audit Commission on the Code of Conduct, all Members agreed that Members and Officers show respect for one another.

Where our journey of improvement has had an impact on our capacity, we have worked to ensure that this has been addressed. For example, the Human Resources function was given a temporary 12-month increase in staff capacity to implement a review of policies and procedures and deliver the People Strategy during a time of staff pressure.

This review has subsequently taken place to provide consistency and confidence in the system. Although this has naturally caused some difficulty for those who have been adversely affected, it has been a necessary decision to ensure fairness to all.

We keep staff involved and informed in a number of ways including a monthly Directorate team meetings, Corporate Briefings communicated to all staff by Heads of Service, a more informal bi-monthly e-newsletter 'On the Write Lines' and six-monthly staff conventions, which provide an opportunity to share information on all services and celebrate success through the staff awards scheme.

The Chief Executive also meets all staff in a more informal setting through her 'birthday club', ensuring a climate of openness. A Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) meets every two months with representatives from each service. This is the means by which the Council consults its staff on matters of corporate change. Examples include changes to the HR policies and severance policy that were raised as part of the JCC process.

Our 'staff suggestion scheme' came out of JCC and aims to generate ideas about improving as a Council and an employer. Recent ideas being implemented include energy-saving intelli-plugs for computers and a jargon buster database on the intranet.



Innovation is encouraged across the organisation; for example, as part of our annual budget-setting process, all staff were encouraged to come forward with opportunities, however small, to deliver value for money through the 'Budget Bonanza'. Examples that have been implemented include the replacement of paper towels in all WCs with energy saving hand dryers and the virtualisation of our IT servers (from 60 to 15 servers) which will reduce power consumption and maintenance costs.

Building capacity through partnership working

Since 2004, we can demonstrate an excellent track record of working in partnership to deliver services.

We are leading on the development of further possible partnerships including Legal Services and Revenues and Benefits. We have engaged in joint procurement exercises including the purchase of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software, commissioning an Accommodation Needs Survey of Gypsies & Travellers, a House Condition Survey, the BVPI survey and cash collection.

In order to achieve value for money and resilience in our services, we have funded posts with a number of partners including Town & Country Housing Group, Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

New methods of service delivery are actively pursued, as evidenced by work on the Council's household waste and recycling contract and the transfer of the management of the Council's three sports centres services to Fusion Lifestyle.

The Council has also developed its approach to the letting of new waste and street cleansing contracts in close liaison with Improvement and Efficiency South East, the industry and partners in the Kent Waste Partnership -particularly Kent County Council as Waste Disposal Authority. The aim is to ensure best outcomes for the taxpayer across the spectrum of collection and disposal, minimising the implications for landfill, and maximising value for money recycling.

The Leader of the Council chairs a quarterly meeting with parish councils where corporate issues are communicated and other topics of interest discussed. Actions are cascaded to relevant Directors and reported back at the following meeting and the agenda is developed collectively.

The Chief Executive co-chairs the Community Safety Partnership with the Chief Inspector of Police for the Tunbridge Wells area. This has worked successfully, with real partnership momentum delivering a reduction in overall crime figures of over 20 per cent in the last year.

Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Council has a strong history of working closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). It is recognised that in many instances the Council is not best placed to effectively deliver all services, including to some of the borough's hard-to-reach groups.

The Council's grants programme provides a clear mechanism for commissioning the third sector to deliver services that meet our corporate priorities. The programme seeks to develop the capacity of the sector to develop sustainable projects, which is reflected in our grants criteria. Over the last three years we have awarded 45 grants totalling around £930,000 to support community and voluntary organisations providing services to residents of the borough.

Voluntary Action West Kent (VAWK) is the local infrastructure organisation for the VCS in West Kent. The Council provides core funding to VAWK to develop the capacity of the third sector. For example, VAWK has recently been commissioned by the Council to develop a model for involving the VCS in the new Gateway. This close partnership has resulted in a number of organisations coming on board to utilise the town centre location on a surgery basis, as well as securing a permanent presence of the Volunteer Bureau which is having a significant impact in the community.



The sector is also engaged in the delivery of the Sustainable Community Plan and the new Kent Agreement 2. The 'stronger' sub group of the LSP is chaired by VAWK and involves a number of organisations delivering services in the community focusing on enhancing civic engagement, volunteering and developing a strong third sector.

**Case Study:
Working with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

Taking measured risks

Our approach to risk management is robust. There are a number of high-level strategic risks, which are continuously reviewed, managed and monitored.

These have been integrated within the corporate performance management system (Covalent) to ensure they are seen as an integral part of performance management at a service level.

For example, the recent economic downturn and the 'credit-crunch' prompted Cabinet to raise a number of possible strategic risks to the Council. These have been scrutinised by the Audit Committee and embedded within our management system. This is enabling action to be taken to minimise exposure to these risks as well as strategically seeking to optimise opportunities.

Operational risks are identified and managed as part of the service planning process. Those elected Members with strategic responsibilities have received risk awareness training via Zurich Municipal and have fully participated through workshops in identifying the Council's key strategic risks.

The Council is also taking proactive steps in examining risk in partnership context. The Public Services Board, which supports the LSP, has recently requested that a risk audit be undertaken against delivering the Kent Agreement 2 targets given the changing economic climate.

VFM and service transformation

Whilst the Council has strong financial reserves, it continues to face considerable challenges in terms of revenue expenditure. This is caused in part by the low levels of Council Tax and the wide range of services the Council provides. Further pressure will be placed on the Council as it continues to reduce its reliance on the interest on its reserves and the likely reduction on income that will result from the current economic circumstances.

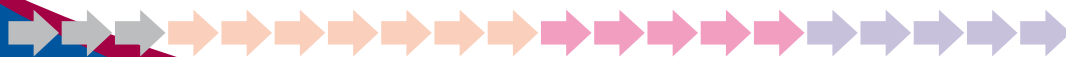
The Council is working hard to look at ways of delivering services more efficiently or in different ways to reduce expenditure and the need to make cuts to priority services.

Enabling Transformational Change

The Council has historically invested in technology and the ICT Strategy has provided a technological vision for joined-up customer focused service delivery, which seeks to enhance the customer experience whilst achieving value for money. Particular strengths include geographical information systems (GIS), document management (EDRM), remote/home working, customer relationship management (CRM) and business process re-engineering (BPR) which are now delivering real improvements to service delivery and transforming the way we work as a council.

The Gateway, scheduled to open in November 2008, will reduce the number of customer service points within the Council from five to one, as well as incorporating a range of partner agencies. Using integrated technology, we have re-engineered our service processes (over 150 processes have been introduced to the Gateway via an integrated CRM solution) thereby reducing the number of customer contacts required to process a service request and time required to complete a request.

The Council is an active member of the award-winning Kent Connects Partnership, participating in numerous collaborative IT projects across Kent. The success of this has seen an increasing percentage of transactions that are now being taken online and the Council is engaging in innovative methods of providing services electronically. Over 30 per cent of bookings at the Assembly Hall Theatre were made electronically in 2007/8 and 25,000 customers have signed up to the e-marketing list. This is expected to reach 40 per cent in 2008/09.



We can also now accept changes relating to Housing or Council Tax by e-mail or telephone. Previously, this could only be done in a letter. This is helping to improve access and deliver good customer service.

We have established mobile and home working with our staff and Members. This is enabling value-for-money to be achieved through flexible working arrangements.

We are also testing the benefit of using DigiTV to enable us to further diversify our communication with partners and stakeholders, in particular, access to choice based lettings via mobile phone technology.

Case Study: Achieving VFM through transformation

Value for Money and External Funding

The Council's current projection for Gershon Efficiency Savings is £2.2m compared to the target of £1.4m. LABGI monies have been set aside to fund Invest to Save initiatives and one-off pieces of work related to the Council's priorities.

The Council has, wherever possible, sought to secure external funding, which has enabled a large increase in the capacity to deliver services. External funding has been used in Environmental and Street Scene Services (Recycling Credits). The Council is also tapping into capacity building funding through active participation in the Kent Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to support initiatives such as partnership working and business process re-engineering.

A number of specific VFM performance indicators have been developed to provide a basis to make sound VFM resourcing decisions at a corporate level. The Council also takes part in the Kent-wide 'Price Book' initiative where comparative service costs for all Kent local authorities have been brought together into one place. This assists the Council in understanding its relative position in terms of performance, cost and satisfaction, and therefore enables effective benchmarking and a determination to learn from the best deliverers.

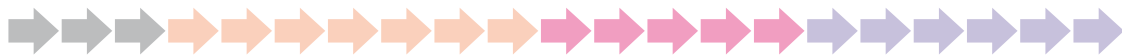
The Council follows best procurement practice and has implemented its Procurement Strategy that includes significant elements on cross-cutting issues such as sustainability and equality. The Council has also developed a Contract Renewal Programme to assist in delivering value-for-money. Numerous other procurement opportunities have been facilitated. For example, the Council has produced a 'How to do business with the Council' guide on its website.

Over the past two years the Council has actively pursued collaborative procurement opportunities (see joint working above). Clear value-for-money outcomes have been achieved for the community by the saving of £7m over a ten-year term from the sports centre contract. This has been delivered in partnership with Fusion and has already increased participation by 23 per cent.

What next?

We are currently implementing our People Strategy and the values are now embedded into the organisation. The aim of the strategy is to provide a framework for our responsibilities as an employer and to provide an effective mechanism for workforce planning.

We are also keen to improve our Use of Resources scoring. These were enacted into our Corporate Improvement Plan and will result in an improved score for 2008.

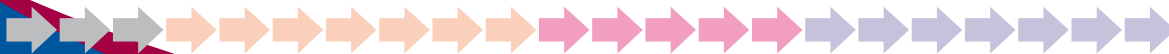


The 'capacity' to enhance the quality of life for all

We have been careful to build on our strengths and capacity was one of those. Our staff, Members and partners already had the potential to fulfil our community's ambitions.

Over the past four years we have built on these strengths and given our team the best tools to do the job. Our staff and Members have contributed to our leadership, developing our shared vision and priorities. Our capacity, although always tested, is providing us with the opportunity to get the best out of our resources.

We have been challenged, we challenge ourselves, we learn from experience, we learn from others – ultimately we find our own course to ensure we provide quality services to our community.



Performance Management

Our 'performance management' journey – where we were

In 2004 the Council's performance management framework was assessed as being weak:

'A performance management culture has yet to be embedded and therefore it is not used to best effect. The council has not devised a corporate performance management framework... performance is not effectively managed to tackle weaker services and drive improvements.'

Performance management was seen as a process and a chore in some areas, rather than being seen as directly linked to improving outcomes for people and affecting the overall quality of life in the borough.

Members and officers have worked hard to develop and embed a culture of performance management and improvement across the organisation and there is no better testament to that success than the fact that we are now in the top 11 per cent of district councils for three-year improvement in performance.

Where we are

In 2007, the Council's Peer Review found that:

'The council has a transformation agenda that has delivered a restructure of services, and an improvement and cultural change programme that is now achieving performance improvement across the whole council.... The drive and determination throughout the council is evidenced by the significant improvement in terms of performance across all services... The council has a strong focus on performance management and systems (Covalent) and processes are in place throughout the council.'

The Council has a rigorous and transparent performance management framework firmly embedded in the thinking of officers and Members that is focused on delivery of real outcomes in the community. The Council has shown leadership in developing clear performance management systems with partners to ensure that partnership working can clearly demonstrate real outcomes.

Our Journey

Since 2004 the Council has invested heavily in ensuring that performance management lies at the heart of all we do to ensure that real and meaningful improvements enhance the quality of life in the borough.

Examples of improvement include:

- *The introduction of the Covalent performance management system in 2006 to both staff and elected Members (totalling nearly 100 users) backed by a rigorous training programme and regular user workshops. The Audit Committee also uses the system to monitor the implementation of the Corporate Improvement Plan.*
- *Integrating risk management within performance reporting to ensure that our strategic and operational risks are used to help make effective decisions.*
- *Introducing a streamlined performance management reporting procedure and managing issues on a quarterly basis linked in to other reports including finance, risk and complaints. This process enables accountability, scrutiny and assures data quality as part of the normal everyday practice of delivering quality services.*
- *Improving data quality. In 2008 the Council achieved Level 4 for Data Quality – a significant improvement from Level 2 in 2006. This has marked a huge improvement to the control environment in which the Council operates.*
- *Ensuring staff roles in performance management are clearly defined through assignment of responsibilities in Covalent, responsibilities being included in job descriptions and then tested through the appraisal process. These link everyday performance management to our Corporate Priorities.*



- Improved our set of Local Performance Indicators (LPis) to allow us to track performance and progress against our Corporate Priorities.
- Developed a robust and independent scrutiny function to challenge the Executive.

Our Performance Management Framework

We utilise a number of forums on a monthly and quarterly basis to manage performance to deliver improvements. These enable effective communication, shared learning and challenges performance.

First Group

This meets on a monthly basis and includes the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service. It manages latest performance developments and addresses underperformance across the Council. For example, when performance was slowing down in late 2006, we held a performance summit to instil fresh momentum into improving our core performance indicators. This resulted in some impressive improvement in the 2006/07 results. Provisional results for 2007/8 suggest that this improvement continues to be sustained.

Service Team Meetings

Each service team meets on a monthly basis and tracks service-specific actions from First Group. They also use Covalent to monitor more regular performance reporting. For example, Housing and Leisure Services use Covalent reports to monitor performance at their monthly management team meetings.

Cabinet

Cabinet Members monitor and challenge performance on a quarterly basis through the normal reporting procedure. We aim to ensure clarity of presentation, adopting the red/amber/green model or the use of exception reporting to ensure the performance information is clearly communicated and understood in order to inform actions. Reports focus on underperforming performance indicators and performance against corporate priorities and by portfolio. Cabinet Members meet with their relevant Heads of Service and discuss latest performance figures and challenge performance.

For example, in Revenues and Benefits, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services met with the Head of Revenues and suggested reducing the priority of BVPI 76c (number of fraud investigations) to ensure that priority was given to the outcome measure BVPI 76d (number of sanctions). As we were exceeding our target for BVPI 76d it was decided not to reinvest resources to meet BVPI 76c.

Each quarter, Cabinet considers performance reports in conjunction with financial performance and reports on complaints. On a six-monthly basis, these are combined with Strategic Risks and performance reports from the Sustainable Community Plan. Issues relating to strategic risk, finance and corporate governance are reviewed at bi-monthly Corporate Governance Working Group meetings.

Cabinet is thus able to have all of the governance information together at each Cabinet, which enables it to make sound decisions based on good quality data.

Corporate Services Select Committee

The Committee scrutinises performance based on exception reporting on a quarterly basis. Reports have been tailored to the needs of the Committee (at their request) allowing it to focus on underperforming key indicators and to help develop action plans with the relevant services to improve performance (see case study for more examples).

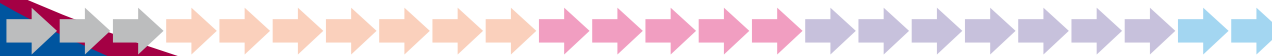
Other

The Chief Executive meets with Directors on a weekly basis as well as separately with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. This ensures the strategic direction of the Council is in touch with daily opportunities to improve performance at a senior level. These tasking and planning meetings are also in place for Portfolio Holders and Heads of Service.

Performance management is cascaded down throughout the Council. Performance against objectives is discussed at individual appraisals and this also informs individual personal development plans.

Project Management

The Council is undoubtedly ambitious and the Peer Review raised a concern about it taking on too much. The Council has been careful to ensure that all major projects are managed properly according to sound project management principles (PRINCE2) and has a strong record in delivering projects to time, cost and quality. Particular recent examples include Dunorlan Park, the Gateway and the Business Transformation Programme. Post implementation reviews are undertaken to learn lessons (eg Dunorlan Park).



The Council is looking further to strengthen its project management arrangements by establishing a 'Delivery Unit' which will oversee key projects identified in the Strategic Plan.

Performance Management Driving Improvement

Over the past four years we have welcomed external challenge and internal review to help drive consistent improvement.

We have embraced the recommendations of these reviews and they have been embedded within our Corporate Improvement Plan. This is owned by Cabinet and monitored quarterly with further scrutiny from the Select Committee and Audit Committee. The Audit Committee ensures we have a robust control environment in place to sustain those improvements.

There are many examples of where challenging performance management has driven improved outcomes, including:

- *In the period 2004/05 to the last 12 months, planning applications processed within the prescribed timescales have improved from overall 74 per cent to 91 per cent. This is now top quartile performance. Much more emphasis is placed on performance management and reporting, from data on Covalent to data prominently displayed in working areas.*

- *Relatively high sickness absence prompted a review of policies that impacted on sickness absence. As a result, sickness absence fell by over nine per cent last year. The Healthier Communities Team is now working with the Leisure team on a programme of staff lunchtime activities, including health walks, yoga and Pilates to encourage staff to increase their physical activity and to assist in a further reduction in sickness absence.*

Complaints

We also utilise complaints to drive improvements to service delivery. We maintain a central database of complaints to enable effective analysis. Cabinet considers a six-monthly complaints report that outlines service trends, common issues and examples of services that have been changed as a result. This is also discussed and learned from at Management Team. For example, we have re-organised our approach to dealing with Freedom of Information Requests as a result of a customer complaint. All FOI requests are now monitored by the Customer Care Manager, and guidance has been produced for staff.

The Standards Committee monitors complaints on a quarterly basis. The Corporate Governance Working Group also receives updates on complaints trends to ensure the governance arrangements in the Council are robust enough to deal with them. There is also a web-based suggestions system to enable customers to use alternative methods to feed back to the Council. By dealing with complaints promptly and effectively, we reduce time and resources spent reviewing them at a more senior level. It has also meant that there have been no findings of maladministration made by the Local Government Ombudsman for the past five years.

Case Study: Learning from complaints – improving services

Due to the improvements we have made in dealing with complaints promptly and learning from the resulting issues, residents' views of how we deal with complaints has improved significantly. Our recent borough-wide survey showed that the helpfulness of staff dealing with complaints received a net satisfaction rating of 26 per cent compared with 6 per cent in 2004. Furthermore, overall satisfaction with how complaints have been handled has increased from 33 per cent in 2006/07 to 43 per cent in 2007/08. This is comfortably in the top quartile for all local authorities.

Benchmarking

As part of the service planning process, performance indicators are subject to detailed benchmarking and a rigorous target-setting process. For example, despite numerous BVPIs being deleted, we have rolled a number forward as LPIs with other Kent councils to maintain a good comparative framework to challenge improvement. The Council's Housing Service has led the development of a set of common strategic housing PIs across Kent to replace BVPIs.



Further approaches include the Council's involvement with the Kent and Medway Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (KIEP) and the Kent Performance Improvement Network (KPIN). These are officer-based partnerships, which help to learn from others in order to improve performance management and ensure that the Council is continuously focused on delivering improvements.

The Covalent system assists the process of prioritisation by clearly identifying performance trends and comparative information from other local authorities; this is available to staff and elected Members. It enables services to identify and understand the inter-dependencies of performance management and has also promoted joint working.

Our benchmarking for 2007/8 shows that we have more performance indicators in the top quartile than any other authority in Kent. From our perspective this demonstrates that we deliver core services well to our public.

A further example of benchmarking was when we reviewed the pest control service, looking at what we offer and the pricing of work. We became aware that private operations and some authorities were taking payment in advance as was Client Services for bulky waste collections. The introduction of 'book and pay' means that the Pest Control Officers have more time to spend on delivering the service as there is a reduction in paperwork and banking each week. Its also helps to secure income through a reduction in bad debts.

Managing performance through partnerships

As mentioned, the Council makes extensive use of partnerships to maximise its capacity and to ensure that it can help meet the needs of its residents as comprehensively as possible. The Council takes a proactive approach to managing the performance of partnerships in which it is involved, which is demonstrated by the achievement of 80 per cent of the LSP's target in 2007/08.

Our Sustainable Community Plan has been in place for two years and its delivery is overseen by the local strategic partnership. We have integrated this partnership plan into the Council's Covalent system, with regular reports presented to both Cabinet and the LSP. Where underperformance is identified, this is addressed through discussions with partners. For example, when some actions were underperforming due to changes in partnership organisations, they were referred to the Joint Transportation Board to obtain clarification to assess whether it was still considered a partnership priority.

With the new Kent Agreement, the Council has led the way in developing local action plans and ensuring that each action is allocated to both the appropriate partner but also to the appropriate level within each organisation. Delivery is also overseen by members of the Public Service Board as well as Heads of Service within the Council so that there is responsibility at both strategic and delivery levels.

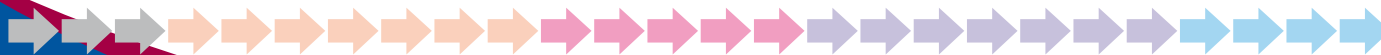
Using Community Feedback to Drive Improvement

The Council has developed innovative methods to gather community feedback to drive improvements in performance. Although traditional mechanisms reach large sections of the community, the Council has made a concerted effort to understand the needs of hard-to-reach or 'seldom heard' groups.

For example, the Ward Walks initiative has been a pioneering development to help achieve this. Information gathered by officers, elected Members and partner organisations is immediately fed back to service managers and improvements made as a result. Details of the service changes that were made are all fed directly back to the individual or household to ensure we are letting them know the outcome of their request or concerns.

Satisfaction with the Ward Walks project has been very high, demonstrating that we can reach out to previously hard-to-reach communities and make a real difference.

**Case Study:
Actions taken as a result of
Ward Walks feedback**



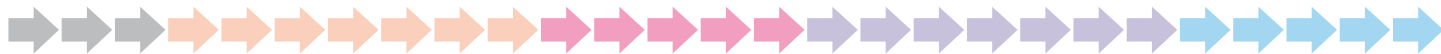
What next?

In 2007 we implemented a number of outcome-focused local performance indicators. Our Direction of Travel statement noted this progress and it has enabled us to explicitly illustrate the difference we have made to people's lives in Tunbridge Wells.

This is being supplemented by our work on the Kent Agreement 2 (KA2) where outcome-based targets are being set with our Local Strategic Partnership. We are working to embed these arrangements into our existing performance management framework as it develops over the next few months. We are also conscious of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) that is being introduced in 2009. Instead of working to respond to this, we have been careful to ensure our existing partnership arrangements are robust to enable excellent performance management. This is enabling us to deliver real outcomes through strategic partnerships. This will, in itself, ensure we are well placed to meet any new challenges that CAA may bring.

The 'performance management' to enhance the quality of life for all

The improvement that staff, Members and partners have made to the way we collectively manage performance has given us the framework to deliver high quality services for our residents. In terms of performance indicators alone, we are outperforming most excellent authorities. The progress we have made has been recognised nationally. We learn from all sections of our communities as our examples illustrate. We now have a performance management framework in place that is delivering achievement and improvements in all service areas...



Achievement and Improvement

Our 'achievement and improvement' journey – where we were

In 2004, the Council was performing strongly in only a few areas; evidence of achievements and outcomes was inconsistent. The CPA report found that:

'Weaknesses outweigh strengths and sufficient significant improvements have not been achieved ... unaudited BVPI information for 2003/04 shows that performance for many of the comparable indicators has not continued to improve. Of those services which have not improved significantly, several were below average or in the worst quartile compared to other councils.'

Where we are

By contrast, the Peer Review in 2007 found:

'The council can demonstrate a record of many achievements, not least a proven track record of delivering good services and facilities to very satisfied customers. Some of the examples reported to the review team include new recycling services and some excellent work with vulnerable and disadvantaged adults through its leisure services. The investment in the planning service is particularly recognised as delivering improvements.'

'Another very positive area of achievement is the impressive performance in terms of BVPIs and in particular satisfaction amongst residents. This impressive performance is accompanied by a commitment to provide cost-effective and value for money services. People also speak highly of the work that this council is delivering with its partners. There are excellent partnerships in place with examples such as the TN2 community centre in Sherwood which is recognised as addressing community cohesion issues within a deprived area. These are excellent examples of partnership work really making a difference'.

We have clear and challenging ambitions to meet our shared vision. We have clear corporate priorities that guide the organisation and our work with partners. We have matched those with the capacity necessary to fulfil expectations and embedded a strong performance management culture across the organisation. These foundations have led to significant improvements in our services and outcomes have made a real difference to the lives of people in Tunbridge Wells.

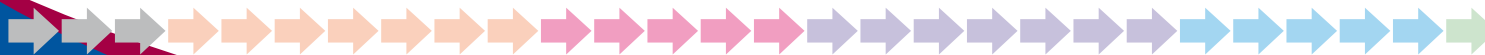
We can clearly show evidence of sustained and improving outcomes with 68 per cent of PIs improved in the last three years. We provide excellent value for money for our residents with our VFM score improving from a level 2 to a level 3 and Council Tax levels amongst the lowest in the country. Surveys show that residents are happy to live in the borough and with the way we deliver services.

Our Journey

Since 2004, we restructured our Council, introduced a culture of continuous improvement and placed community priorities at the heart of what we do. We now have clear and challenging ambitions to meet our shared vision.

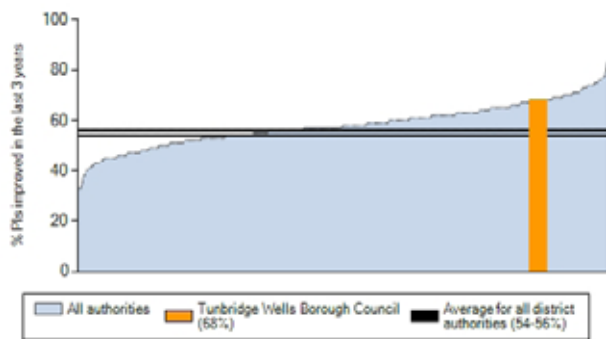
Providing Value for Money – low cost, high performance, high satisfaction

We have been able to provide low cost/high performing services whilst maintaining high satisfaction levels.



High quality services

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is ranked 43 out of 388 for the percentage of PIs improved in the last three years. 68 per cent of PIs have improved compared to 56 per cent for the average district authority.



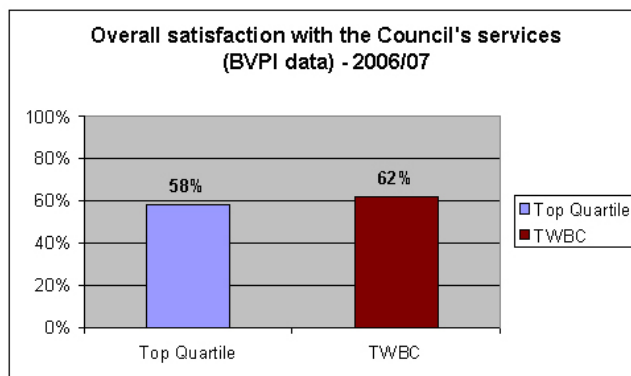
Graph 1

- 57 per cent of performance indicators are in the top quartile, significantly above the 33 per cent average for district authorities.
- The Audit Commission ranked our housing and sustainable communities outcomes first out of 354 local authorities in England for three-year improvement.
- Significant improvements in service perception. For example, the proportion of residents who were happy with cleanliness rose from 66 per cent in 2006 to 87 per cent in 2008 – a 21 per cent improvement in just two years.

- Audit Commission figures show we have improved at a faster rate than the average district authority despite the 'weak' rating and large-scale organisational changes in 2005/06.
- Benefits performance has improved to top quartile performance in almost all relevant BVPIs. It was recently self-assessed at an 'excellent' level and is performing at Level 4 (out of 4) in every single performance indicator that the Department of Work and Pensions monitors.

High satisfaction

- 92 per cent of the public are happy with Tunbridge Wells as a place to live, significantly higher than most authorities.
- Tunbridge Wells recorded higher or the same rate of overall satisfaction (65 per cent) for its services as 25 'excellent'-rated district councils and is comfortably in the top quartile nationally.

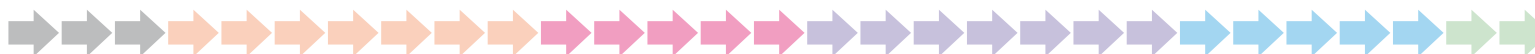


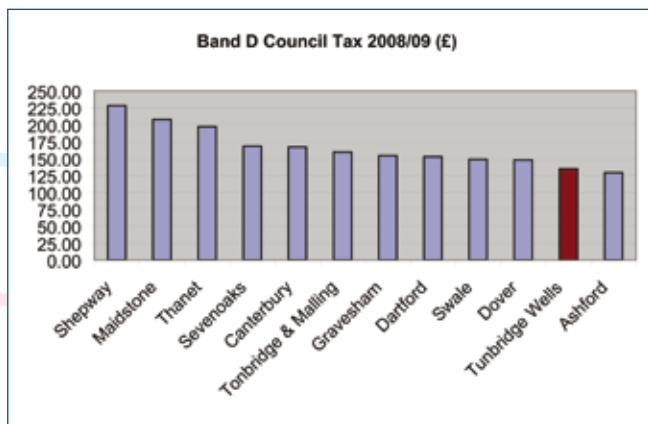
Graph 2

- Satisfaction with Council services from 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 (where there was a 13 per cent difference between overall satisfaction and satisfaction from BME communities). The gap is now just three per cent.
- We have achieved top quartile satisfaction rates for street cleanliness, sports and leisure facilities, museums, theatres and concert halls and parks and open spaces.

Low cost

- We provide excellent value for money to our residents and have the second lowest Council Tax levels in Kent and 58th lowest level out of 238 District Councils in England – top quartile performance at £134.79.





Graph 3

Promoting and Maintaining a Thriving and Diverse Local Economy

- The ranking of the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells has improved in a national survey of retail town centres from 63 to 55. This demonstrates the improvement in the quality of the town centre for residents and good business advice provided by the Council.
- The unemployment rate has been maintained at just one per cent over the past seven years – significantly below the national average of over 5.5 per cent. This is making a huge contribution to the quality of life of families in Tunbridge Wells.
- Through partnership with the private sector we are projecting savings of over £7 million over ten years following the re-letting of our Sports Centre Management October 2006. Attendance at the three sports centres increased by 23 per cent last year. All these sports centres have ‘Quest’ accreditation.

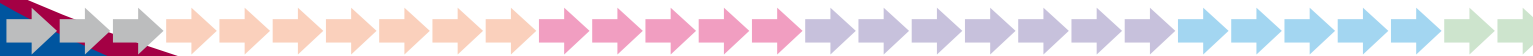
**Case Study:
Fusion Lifestyle**

- We have an excellent track record in generating and utilising recreational developer contributions. Over £142,500 of contributions part-funded the popular new play and teenage facilities at St John’s Recreation Ground, completed in 2007, and a further £20,000 funded the cycle route through the Oak Road Doorstep Green. The new play and teenage area coming to Rusthall will be funded in part by developer contributions of nearly £185,000, alongside £50,000 in BLF grant funding from the Play Programme. The BLF Play Programme grant funding of £207,000 has added value to three capital projects, including the new play facilities developed in partnership with Speldhurst Parish Council and Pembury Parish Council, bringing the total value of the portfolio of Play Programme projects in the borough to £521,700 over three years.
- We have worked in partnership with Kent Police to prevent incidents of joyriding. We have offered our services to crush the cars that are used by those caught joyriding which has eliminated a range of anti-social behaviour in one of our local car parks. This has made a positive impact on local residents’ quality of life.
- We have achieved top quartile satisfaction rates for the Assembly Hall Theatre, museum and sports and leisure facilities. According to the Council’s Borough-wide Survey 2008, 92 per cent of users are satisfied with the Assembly Hall Theatre and 85 per cent are satisfied with the Museum.
- There were 125 new business start-ups per 10,000 population in 2007/08 – greatly exceeding our target of 40. Many stemmed from business advice provided by the Council.

Making a difference – place shaping

Achieving our Corporate Priorities and long-term vision has not just been about delivering BVPIs – they are about making a real difference to our communities.

Below are examples of the main achievements and improvements in those Corporate Priorities that are making a real difference to the quality of life for people in the borough of Tunbridge Wells. These are helping to fulfil our long-term vision of enhancing the quality of life for all:



**Case Study:
Business advice**

- 52,271 m² of industrial/commercial floor space has been completed in the last three years, equating to approximately 1,700 jobs.
- Tourism is now worth £199.7 million per year to the Tunbridge Wells Borough economy, an increase of 3 per cent since it was last measured three years ago. This has made a positive impact on the local economy and enabled business growth.
- A total of 223 extra jobs were created and supported via the tourism industry between 2004 and 2008 – an increase of six per cent.
- Creation of a unique public/private sector delivery vehicle, which will take a lead role in regenerating our four town centres over the next 10 years.
- Eight years since the closure of the cinema, we are bringing a key town centre anchor site into development, by working in partnership with the private sector. The planning application proposes a mixed-use development consisting of retail, office and a 140 bedroom hotel development. Pending planning approval, demolition will commence in late 2008/early 2009 with scheduled completion in late 2010/early 2011. The redevelopment represents an investment of over £50 million and is expected to create up to 750 jobs upon completion. This has been a high priority for residents in the area and will enhance the links between the two axes of the town

- We have secured £180 million across West Kent to support the rural economy between 2008-2013.

Caring for our Environment

- We are well into the top quartile performance for customer satisfaction with parks and open spaces at 85 per cent. Well-managed open space contributes to the overall quality of life for individuals. For example, since 2004 we have increased the number of allotments available and in 2007 we have enabled more young people to play football by increasing the number of available mini pitches.

**Case Study:
Parks and open spaces**

- Recycling and composting rates have almost doubled from 25 per cent in 2003/04 to 46 per cent in 2007/08. This makes a substantial contribution to the corporate priority of caring for our environment.
- Our refuse collection service ranks seventh out of 238 District Councils in England for value for money (using cost, performance and satisfaction comparisons).
- The rate at which material is diverted from landfill by composting is performing in the top quartile. Currently at a rate of nearly 23 per cent of household waste – this compares to just five per cent in 2003/04.

- Tunbridge Wells has top quartile satisfaction with cleanliness of streets. This figure is currently 77 per cent – up from 72 per cent in 2003/04, bucking downward national trends.

- Improved cleanliness has been a result of initiatives such as graffiti removal teams, street cleaning activities, Enforcement Officers issuing fixed penalty notices against those who drop litter and the speedy removal of fly tipping.

- The Council has extended and improved the cleansing regime in the multi-storey and surface car parks that it operates across the borough, including deep cleaning to respond to incidents of anti-social behaviour in stairwells.

**Case Study:
Grot Spots**

- More recently our parking attendants were the first in Kent to complete the Kent Police Accreditation scheme and have been redesignated Street Scene Enforcement Officers. For example, two offenders pleaded guilty by post and nine were found guilty in court because they refused to pay their fine. These people dropped items such as cigarette butts, takeaway meals and crisp packets, all of which are classified as litter. They all received fixed penalty notices of £75 at the time and if they paid within 14 days the payment would have been reduced to £50. Now each has a criminal conviction.



- Over 97 per cent of new homes are built on brownfield land within the existing settlements. This means that the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations are protected, which is a key priority in our Sustainable Community Plan.
- We have achieved Green Heritage and Green Flag awards for Dunorlan Park and Green Flags for the Grove and Woodbury Park Cemetery. We have also gained the Sandford Award for Heritage Education at the museum. This means that not only is the borough a place where the natural environment, sustainability and links with the area's heritage are at the heart of the community, but future generations of residents will also benefit.
- The Council works with the Clean Kent Initiative to deliver additional cleansing capacity through collective work. In partnership with KCC and other districts, a team of cleansing operatives is provided to the borough of Tunbridge Wells for a week every month. Working in conjunction with the Council's contractors and our own staff, the Clean Kent crew enables the Street Scene team to 'go the extra mile' to deliver quality environmental results. The initiative also provides resources for education work, especially in schools, to bring about a changed attitude to care for the environment.
- In our leadership role, officers and Members take part in our Love Where We Live campaign. This involves going out into the community to pick up litter, clean areas of rubbish and obstructions and engage with our residents on the principle of Love Where We Live.

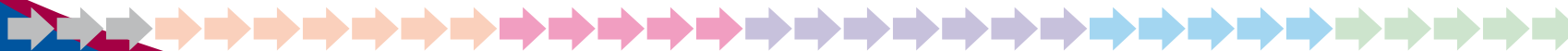
- To support residents, we have been working with the Kent Energy Centre to offer selected households a free home visit from an energy doctor. The energy doctors are trained to advise people on how to reduce their energy bills and make their homes more environmentally friendly. The types of advice on offer range from simple no-cost activities, such as checking to ensure that heating controls are being used correctly, to more in-depth assistance such as loft and cavity-wall insulation and central heating improvements. This is helping to improve home energy efficiency in the borough and tackle fuel poverty, whilst at the same time reducing carbon emissions.
- In 2005 the Council was producing 400 kilos of waste per week at its Town Hall and Calverley Terrace locations. We are now recycling 200 kilos of waste per week. We have more than trebled our recycling at the Town hall.

**Case Study:
TWBC contributing to decreasing waste**

Having Suitable Housing for Local People

Improvements in achieving this Corporate Priority have centred on the development of the Council's new Housing Strategy 2006-11, which was informed by the Housing Inspection in 2005. Some of the key achievements and improvements are:

- 352 dwellings completed per annum from 2001-2006, achieving the Structure Plan target of at least 290 dwellings per annum. This is also above the 1991-2001 rate of 280 dwellings per annum.
- The number of affordable housing units provided per annum has increased from 41 in 2005/06 to 122 to 2006/07 and a further 54 in 2007/08. This is meeting a key demand from local people and transforming the lives of local families.
- The willingness of the Council to forego a significant proportion of a capital receipt to attract 40 per cent affordable housing on a development site as opposed to 30 per cent demonstrates the commitment to this corporate priority.
- A total of 103 applications for Disabled Facilities Grants were processed in 2007/08, making a significant contribution to the quality of life of individuals and families.



- Continued prevention of homelessness through pro-active housing options advice and initiatives to help people access private rented accommodation has helped to achieve a 33 per cent reduction in homeless applications in 2007/08 (from 243 in 2006/07 to 164 in 2007/08).
- We now have an accredited lettings scheme in place to improve standards of accommodation and housing management in the private rented sector.
- We now have a mandatory Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) scheme in place and we have also adopted and are implementing a policy to identify and improve housing conditions in non-licensable HMOs.
- A strategy for dealing with empty properties is now in place and we now provide grants to help improve empty properties so that they can be brought back into use as affordable housing. This has resulted in 82 properties being brought back into use or demolished since 2004/05 against a target of 62.

**Case Study:
Bringing properties back into use**

- We are ensuring that our housing needs are met through the development of Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy as a sub-Strategy of the main Housing Strategy.

- When we sold the Medway depot, we produced £3 million income and ensured provision of up to 250 units of housing, which included 43 affordable homes. Additionally, we also assisted in reducing traffic congestion in the town centre by diverting away 38 HGVs from the urban environment to an industrial estate outside the main thoroughfares of the town.
- In 2007 the Council submitted a joint bid with seven other West and North Kent local authorities for Regional Housing Board funding for private sector renewal for 2008-2011, and the partnership has been allocated a total of £9.768 million of capital grant funding for the period 2008-2011, of which the Council's allocation is £1.552 million. This will support our work in bringing all homes to a decent homes standard.

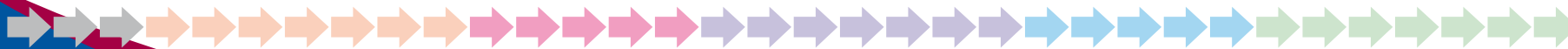
Developing Safer and Stronger Communities

- Following introduction of the national concessionary fares scheme, the Borough Council has continued to provide free 'companion passes' for carers, despite there being no provisions for this in the national scheme. This is improving access for numerous people in the Borough – improving the quality of life for individuals and families.
- In 2007/08 criminal damage was reduced by 14.6 per cent, theft of motor vehicles was down 10.5 per cent, vehicle interference was down 19.6 per cent and burglary dwelling was down 2.3 per cent. This is despite already low levels of crime compared to other authorities nationally.

- By March 2008 there have been a total of 90 young people who have received support from the Power Project and only three have gone on to re-offend (96.2 per cent have not). Referrals have come from a range of different agencies including schools, police and voluntary groups.
- First time entrants to the Youth Justice System have reduced from 96 in 2005/06 to 79 in 2007/08.
- The first 'crack house closure' in West Kent took place in the borough.
- In May 2007 Operation Safer Streets, a multi-agency operation involving police, the council, the Safe Town Partnership, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and Trading Standards, contributed to the ongoing reduction in crime in the night-time economy. In 2007/08 crimes were down 10.3 per cent from 2006/07. It is acknowledged that the Alcohol Control Zone in the town centre and Southborough (put in place in June 2006) has contributed to this reduction.
- Over the past two years membership of the borough's Safer Town Partnership has increased by 20 per cent. A number of retail members have reported a reduction in their losses and detection rates are very high in members' stores. The most recent breakdown from the analyst's report shows a detection rate of 77 per cent in members' retail stores as opposed to 37 per cent detection in non-members.



- During 2006/2007, the Kenward Trust's partnership-funded outreach worker and engaged with over 100 people in need of drug and alcohol support and advice – this level of engagement was maintained in 2007/08.
- Through our annual community grants programme we have supported 45 community organisations over the past three years; outcomes include a programme of youth activities for 9-16 year olds, to promote the concept of 'ownership through commitment' for young people in Rusthall village and providing counselling and support to clients who otherwise could not afford the service – such as those on low income and/or benefits, the elderly, homeless and young people.
- 633 young people took part in the 2007 summer programme of sports and arts activities in priority neighbourhoods and rural areas. 1,500 attended the Summer Slam partnership event with Charlton Athletic Football Club.
- Summer 2008 has seen the start of a three year programme of August 'Fun in the Sun' play days in rural areas of the borough with either a mobile skate park or climbing wall, multi-sports and arts and dance workshops. In the first week over 350 children took part over three days.
- Over the last three years the Assembly Hall Theatre has worked in partnership with Fidelity Investment and KCC to bring 2,550 school children from deprived schools to see productions by the Birmingham Stage Company. Without this opportunity, it's unlikely these children would visit a theatre. A programme of associated workshops reaches up to 100 children at each session.
- Through our tea-time clubs at Sherwood, we provide positive after-school activities for children aged five to 14, which seek to encourage positive behaviour through interaction with positive role models. As a result, the children's attention spans have increased and one regular attendee previously adamant he wanted to be a bank robber now wants to join the army.
- In partnership with Town & Country Housing Group, the Council has appointed a Community Development co-ordinator to work in Showfields/Ramslye and Sherwood. This has enabled a number of initiatives to move forward, including the recommendations coming out of Health Needs Assessments.
- The Council has worked in partnership with Kent County Council and Town & Country Housing Group to develop a modern new community facility for Sherwood (TN2), one of the most deprived areas in the borough. The number of users has almost quadrupled since it re-opened and has made a significant positive impact on the lives those living in the area.
- In the priority neighbourhoods of Showfields and Ramslye, recorded crime fell by over 51 per cent between 2006 and 2007.
- An evaluation of the Cold Calling Control Zone (CCCZ) in Cranbrook has indicated high levels of satisfaction, reduced crime and increased feelings of safety, particularly among older people with 82 per cent of respondents (37 per cent of whom were over 70) saying they felt safer after the introduction of the zone.
- Racial Incident and Homophobic Incident reporting lines are now available to residents, with trained personnel manning these lines 24/7.
- The Community Safety Partnership and our key partners TCHG and KCC, have appointed a Domestic Abuse Services Co-ordinator whose task is to map existing service provision for those affected by domestic abuse and developed a strategy to strengthen provision across the borough. Currently, funding is provided for a Freedom programme (for victims of DA), a drop-in service provided by Women's Support Services and a Community Perpetrators programme (in partnership with probation and other West Kent districts).
- The CSP also works with HMP Blantyre and the Probation service on community payback initiatives such as presentations on the impact of their behaviour to young people engaged in anti-social behaviour and environmental enhancement work.



- Through our grants programme we have enabled Bangladeshi children to access additional English and Maths provision in recognition of the fact that some parents have limited English language skills and were unable to fully support children with homework.
- A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment was completed as part of the Local Development Framework process and to inform the Housing Strategy. This has given a clear picture of their needs for pitches in the future so that they can be included in our plans.
- 100 per cent of all Council buildings are DDA compliant, which represents top quartile performance. This has improved access to our buildings and demonstrates that we are providing services to all sections of the community.
- Each year we work with the North West Kent Racial Equality Council and local organisations to provide a Mela to celebrate the diversity of the borough through music, food and dance. In 2008 over 8,000 visitors attended.
- The Museum & Art Gallery has developed and extended its service to local special schools. Four local schools now regularly use the education service and the service provided has widened to include those with severe learning difficulties.

- Art Strolls are held during the day for the blind and visually impaired via the museum. These are targeted at people who prefer to have someone to take them round exhibitions, explaining and reading labels if necessary. This demonstrates that we are aware of reaching out to communities and individuals to ensure they are able to access our services.
- Work for Museums & Galleries Month 2007 involved 21 disadvantaged teenagers from the West Kent YMCA in a long-term art project resulting in an exhibition of their work. The young people learned new skills and developed a sense of pride from having their work on display. As a direct result, one participant went on to apply to Art College.

**Case Study:
The Museum – reaching out to our community**

- We provide Exercise Referral Programmes for patients with certain conditions who would see real health benefits from exercise. Patients are referred to our sports centres and offered 1-2-1 and group support in becoming more physically active. This involves significant partnership work and mutual communication.
- ‘Safer Food, Better Business’ packs have been produced to help local businesses implement better hygiene standards. This has resulted in 301 awards being given out – improving hygiene standards in Tunbridge Wells.

- In a bid to reduce car crime in some of our car parks we have introduced talking parking machines. When a parking ticket is purchased, the machine offers car safety advice. This is contributing to creating safer communities.
- Tunbridge Wells is performing similar to, or significantly better, than the England average in 30 out of 31 health indicators. However, inequalities within wards are still apparent and need to be addressed.
- The gap between the electoral wards with the highest and lowest life expectancy is the lowest of all local authorities in Kent. The Kent Public Health Information Team concludes that there isn't a relative inequality in life expectancy in Tunbridge Wells. Any gap, however small, needs to be closed and the Council is working with partners in priority neighbourhoods to address this.

Delivering High Quality Services to our Customers

- Our partnership work on planning and economic development has ensured that accessibility to core services is very good. A recent survey showed that more than a half of residents are having no difficulty getting to any of them using their usual form of transport. In particular, the local supermarket (86 per cent rating easy), bus stop (85 per cent), doctor (85 per cent) and local bank/cashpoint (82 per cent) are easily accessible by more than eight in ten residents.



- The speed of processing all Planning applications is now in the top quartile nationally, greatly improved from four years ago when Planning was not performing strongly.
- The speed of processing Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims has reduced from 24 days in 2004 to less than 19 days in 2008 – well into the top quartile. This is ensuring we are providing a value-for-money service.
- The accuracy of processing benefit claims within 14 days has improved from 87 per cent in 2005 to 96.5 per cent in 2008.
- 172 vulnerable households have been assisted through our approach to reducing fuel poverty via grants.

**Case Study:
Reducing fuel poverty**

- We have signed up to an innovative British Gas-funded scheme that offers a Council Tax credit of £75 to local homeowners who install energy efficient measures in their homes. We have assisted 161 households since November 2006.
- From 1 April 2008, residents in the Tunbridge Wells Borough have been able to e-mail or telephone us with any changes relating to their Housing or Council Tax claim. Previously, this could only be done in a letter. This is greatly increasing access and improving customer service by adapting our services according to changing behaviours of our residents.

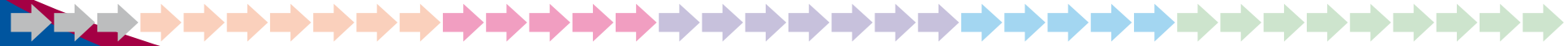
- 96.4 per cent of residents in Frittenden (rural area) and 91.9 per cent of residents in Paddock Wood (urban area) are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. (Ward Walks data).

**Case Study:
TN2 Community Centre**

Improving Customer Service and Satisfaction

- The following Council services attracted more than two thirds of residents showing that they are satisfied with the levels of service:
 - Assembly Hall Theatre
 - Electoral Registration services
 - Tourist Information Centre
 - Parks
 - Museum
 - Building control services
 - Housing Benefits services
 - Environmental Health
 - Collection of green waste etc for composting
 - Collection of paper & cardboard for recycling
 - Parking info to obtain a parking zone permit
 - Planning services
 - Licensing of pubs & clubs
 - Council Tax services
 - The provision of local recycling sites

- 100 per cent of enquiries received out of hours are answered within target times, providing excellent customer service.
- After some customers with little English language skills were trying to access our services, we developed Language Line to assist in interpretation. Although requests have been few in number, it has helped a small number of individuals when required.
- We have 27 members of staff who can speak 13 different languages who have volunteered themselves for interpreting services for customers if it is required. By taking this approach we have provided value for money and empowered our staff in providing excellent customer service.
- In order to cut waiting lists, the programme at Tunbridge Wells Sports Centre was revised to enable 400 more children to take part in an additional 50 junior swimming lessons per week.
- As a result of feedback from an electronic survey conducted by the Assembly Hall Theatre in 2006, a new booking system was purchased which enables theatregoers to choose their seats when purchasing tickets online.
- We have worked proactively to meet the needs of our customers. For example, we received periodic requests from individuals for large print planning information. We now send out these to individuals requiring the service, as a matter of course.



- As a direct result of customer demand, the football season is starting six weeks early in 2008, with bookings being taken in August at selected sites.

Ensuring that we are Well-Managed, Proactive and Deliver Value-for-Money Services

- All staff have an appraisal which is linked to our Corporate Priorities.
- Members are equipped with the information they need to undertake their role. For example, our Councillor Kitbag, induction session, Member training programme and individual plans are enabling Members to obtain further skills.

Case Study: Member support

- Sickness absence has reduced by nearly 9 per cent in the past year.
- The Council has a healthy level of staff turnover, at around 8 per cent for the past three years. This shows that we are enabling career development and are able to retain staff at a good level to ensure reasonable continuity.
- We encourage staff to undertake voluntary work. During Volunteers Week staff spent a day transforming the garden at the Headway Trust's new day centre.

- We use complaints as a key method of gathering customer intelligence and use it to improve services. For example, we received a complaint from a resident regarding disabled access to the Union House car park. As a result of that complaint, we are working towards provision of disabled marked bays in Union House car park. In a bid to support and improve staff welfare, we provided staff with a free MOT health check at the Town Hall in March 2008, following which seven additional staff became members of the Tunbridge Wells Sports Centre.
- In 2006/07, we achieved a Level 3 for Value for Money as part of the Use of Resources assessment. This was an improvement from Level 2 in the previous year.



What next?

Our focus is on outcomes and achievements. We always knew we were having an impact but sometimes had trouble articulating what those achievements 'look like'. With the help of improved local performance indicators and an emphasis on recording outcomes at our First Group and team meetings, we believe this is something that we can now demonstrate.

Our next big challenges are completing the delivery of the major projects that meet our long-term ambitions. The town centre regeneration is something we are careful about getting right. Masterplanning and delivery will be a huge opportunity for transforming the borough.

Seeing through the Gateway and building on its initial success by, for example, taking on additional services and rationalising property with partners will also be crucial. We have no doubt that co-locating with partners will provide a further powerful driver to improve partnership working.

and finally...

With four years of consistently strong performance, improved governance arrangements and countless examples of improvements on the ground, we are quite clear both that we are making real and tangible improvements to the residents of the borough and that our improvement journey is sustainable.

We are in no way complacent and know that challenges – both internal and external – remain. We are committed to addressing these challenges and believe we have the structures, talent, resources and capacity to do this.

We believe that we can provide evidence that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is now performing strongly and is delivering quality services to all parts of the community.

Our journey is not over. We hope that, up to this point, our journey has inspired you.

If you require this information in large print, on audiotape or in any other format, please contact us on 01892 526121

