

Annual Report 2014/15

Last year was challenging as Huntingdonshire District Council, like other councils, continued to face the task of providing services on a decreasing budget. We met this challenge head on by reviewing the way we deliver services to identify efficiency savings and minimise costs while still meeting the needs of our residents and customers.

Huntingdonshire District Council froze Council Tax for local residents again last year and we continue to have one of the lowest levels of Council Tax in England. In the last year we have set out our medium-term financial ambitions to reduce our reliance on Central Government funding in order to provide a sustainable financial platform without transferring costs to our local communities.

We have worked hard to manage our budgets and over the last four years we have saved in the region of £7m. Last year's expenditure savings, including the £1.8m generated through Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) processes, totalled almost £2.7m compared to the original 2014/15 budget of £20.9m. These savings have enabled us to increase reserves and allocate money to be invested in a Commercial Investment Strategy fund which will generate a sustainable source of income for years to come.

ZBB identifies savings through fundamentally reviewing services by effectively rebuilding services from a blank piece of paper. The process requires us to look critically at how services are delivered now and then develop a new approach within a new cost level. Proposals go through a challenge process with key Cabinet members who either agree with them or propose further change in light of their political commitments. ZBB is continuing this year and will see every service looked at in detail to identify further opportunities for making savings.

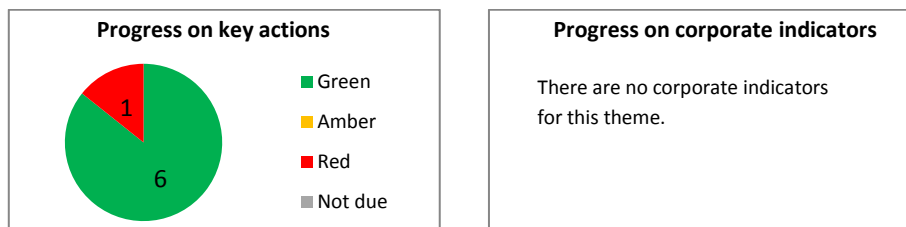
As well as reducing spending, the Council was also successful in working with partners to secure a £500,000 Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) grant scheme to provide "seed funding" for the Tranche 1 shared service projects being undertaken with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council. We have recently agreed to share Building Control, Legal and ICT services, which will result in significant savings in the future as well as increased resilience and opportunities for staff development. Looking ahead, these shared services will provide a solid foundation on which we can develop options for sharing more services in future.

The last year has seen a particular focus on how we manage projects, with new corporate project management guidance introduced and a range of templates developed for project managers to use to plan and record details of every stage of the project lifecycle. Over 40 officers from across the authority have received project management training and the new Programme Office is overseeing the performance of all current projects to ensure that agreed processes are being followed.

Corporate Plan 2014/15 Key Actions and Corporate Indicators

The pie charts below summarise last year's progress on delivering key actions listed in the Corporate Plan and performance against targets set for our corporate indicators.

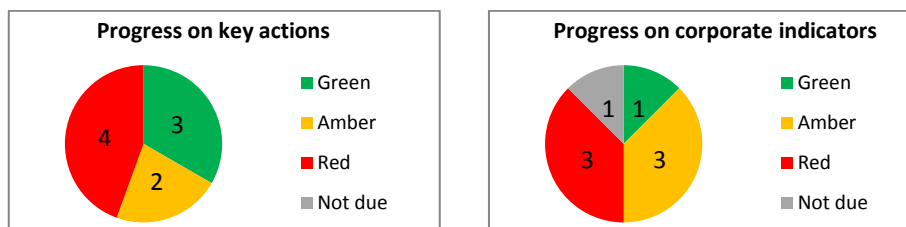
A strong local economy



What went well? We have introduced a fast track pre-application planning advice service to support potential growing businesses in the district. We have continued to implement the Huntingdonshire Economic Growth Plan, with over £5m of external funding secured for the delivery of the Plan's objectives since it was adopted in 2013. The district has been ranked among the top 10 rural areas in Great Britain for quality of life based on a range of indicators including employment rate and gross weekly earnings.

Areas for improvement: Work on Community Infrastructure Levy governance is ongoing.

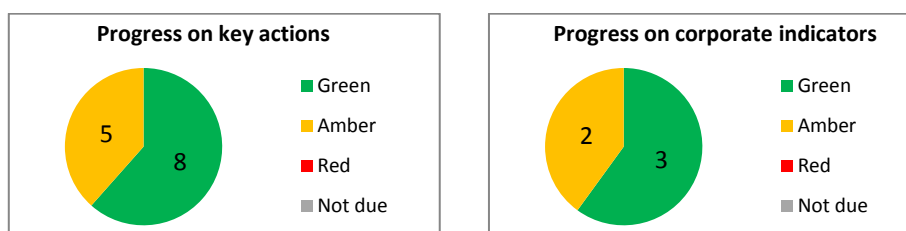
Enabling sustainable growth



What went well? The Council has continued to maintain a five year housing land supply.

Areas for improvement: An updated Buildings at Risk Register is now due to be published by December and an updated Design Guide is now due to be published by the end of 2015/16.

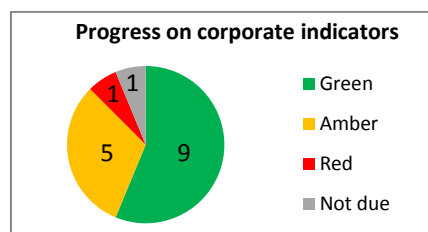
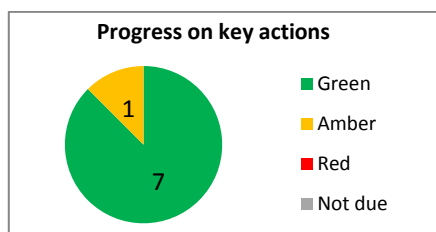
Working with our communities



What went well? The new shared service for CCTV started in June and lessons learnt have been taken into account when developing other shared services. Our Sports and Active Lifestyles Team saw their best ever overall participation level with 46,110 attendances or visits.

Areas for improvement: Our Commercial Investment Strategy is still being developed and negotiations regarding an extra care housing scheme in Ramsey are ongoing.

Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council



What went well? We introduced ZBB and this budget rebasing exercise resulted in significant savings (£1.8m). New processes introduced by our Benefits team have helped improve performance in processing new claims and changes of circumstance.

Areas for improvement: A recent workshop refreshed managers on the Council's policy and procedures for dealing with sickness absence and a new Employee Wellbeing Service launched in March 2015 should also help us to improve attendance rates. Our ambitious target for improving the net operating costs of our leisure centres was narrowly missed but the trend is expected to continue to a position of a net operating surplus in 2015/16.

Huntingdonshire District Council by numbers:

The Council provides a vast range of services to the **173,600** residents and **8,100** businesses that were based within the District in 2014.

In 2014/15, the Council:

Froze Council Tax for the **3rd year** in a row

Successfully helped over **220** households avoid homelessness

Carried out over **1,000** inspections and visits of food premises, resulting in **17** notices served – over **96%** of food establishments were broadly compliant with food hygiene law at 31st March 2015

Dealt with around **1,400** planning applications

Received approximately **1,800** customer visits to our main website a day, with a further **580** visits to our online applications and **1,220** a day to our leisure offering

Paid out around **£3m** each month in Housing Benefit payments

Collected **£91m** in Council Tax for parish, district and county councils and the fire and police services (**98.4%** of Council Tax due was collected by the Council compared to a national average of **97%**)

Reduced the amount of energy used in Council buildings by **1.8%** compared to 2013/14 and reduced the amount of diesel fuel used by our fleet of vehicles by over **4%** compared to 2013/14

Had more than **46,000** attendances or visits at Sports and Active Lifestyles events and activities, as well as over **2 million** visits to our 5 One Leisure sites, including **400,000** made by schoolchildren

Made significant improvements to the net operating costs of our One Leisure sites, reducing the subsidy to just **3 pence** per visit from **21 pence** per visit in 2013/14

In delivering these services we had **16** complaints referred to the Ombudsman and **none** were upheld