

Annual Report

2015/16

Who are we?

Huntingdonshire is the largest district by population in Cambridgeshire with a population of 175,000 in over 75,000 dwellings. Approximately half of the population lives in the four market towns of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey and the remainder in almost 100 villages. A number of large villages act as local service centres for surrounding areas.

We are represented by 52 Councillors in 29 Wards.

What do we do?

We provide a range of services to residents, businesses and visitors. These include refuse and recycling, business growth support, car parks, elections, environmental health, housing advice, housing and Council Tax support, leisure centres, markets, parks and open spaces, planning and conservation.

Huntingdonshire District Council by numbers

The Council provided a vast range of services to the **175,000** residents and nearly **8,600** businesses that were based within the district in 2015.

In 2015/16, the Council:

- Froze Council Tax for the **4th year** running
- Paid out around **£2.9m** each month in housing benefit payments
- Received benefit claims of which over **96%** were made on-line
- Collected over **29,961 tonnes** of residential waste from **75,000 homes** with **56%** of this being recycled or composted. This was collected by our fleet vehicles using **533,772 litres of fuel** to do so
- Dealt with over **1,500 planning applications** and carried out over 7,500 site inspections on building regulation applications
- Received approximately **1,560 customer visits per day** to our main website
- Collected **£94.5m in Council Tax** amounting to **98.5%**, compared to national average of 98% for 'shire districts'
- Provided **250 housing grants** and rehoused over **470 households**
- Provided **5,000 licences** for taxis and licensed premises
- Monitored **101 CCTV** cameras (c. 260 including cameras located in Cambridge)
- Had more than **2.3 million visits** to our **5 One Leisure** sites, including **400,000 visits** made by school children
- The Local Government Ombudsman received **23 complaints** of which **one was upheld**

Welcome to our Annual Report for 2015/16

Here we look back at the past year and look forward to some of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The previous year has been challenging as Huntingdonshire District Council, like other councils, has been faced with the task of providing services on a decreasing budget. The grants that Central Government gives to councils are being significantly reduced, and these may disappear in the future.

Huntingdonshire District Council has one of the lowest levels of Council Tax in England, and strives to strike a balance between maintaining low tax levels and avoiding service cuts, despite the reduction in government grants.

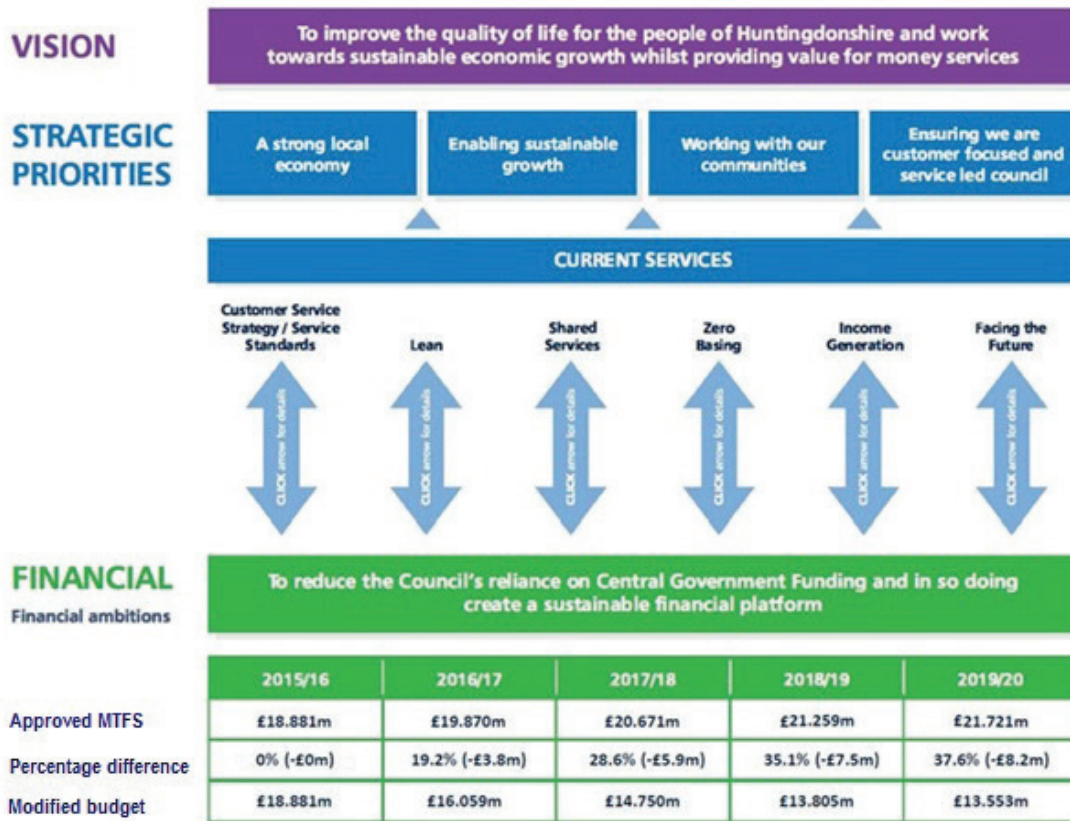
Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Plan 2015/16 set out our vision, strategic priorities and objectives for the fiscal year. These were:

- **A strong local economy**
- **Enabling sustainable growth**
- **Working with our communities**
- **Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council**



"We want to improve the quality of life, deliver economic growth and provide value for money services for the people of Huntingdonshire"

Huntingdonshire District Council's vision



We developed a 'Plan on a Page' – a simple summary that presented our strategic priorities in the context of the financial challenge and showed the initiatives that delivered the savings and new income streams required, while still meeting customer needs.

Essentially we aimed to reduce the council's reliance on Central Government funding and create a sustainable financial platform.

Corporate Plan 2015/16

Strategic Priorities and Objectives

A strong local economy

We wanted to make Huntingdonshire a better place to live, work and invest. Our objectives were to:

- Accelerate business growth and investment
- Remove infrastructure barriers to growth
- Develop a flexible and skilled local workforce



"We are aiming to be self-financing by 2020/21... This is ambitious, but we believe that this is good news for the residents of Huntingdonshire"

Councillor Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources

Some of our achievements for 2015/16 included:

Accelerate business growth and investment:

- Delivering a programme of themed business information clinics and events
- Launching of Huntingdonshire District Council Marketing Strategy to promote Huntingdonshire as a location of choice to live, work and invest

Remove infrastructure barriers to growth:

- Influencing the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to secure resources to help deliver future economic growth and infrastructure
- Making four loan payments totaling £5m made to Luminus to support the development of Langley Court, an extra care scheme in St Ives

Develop a flexible and skilled local workforce:

- Through the council's start up support programme (Outset Huntingdonshire) 31 new business and 45 new jobs have been created
- Establishing a multi-agency one stop shop for improving the match between skills and business needs (EDGE)
- The release of £10.5m of funding to deliver the Innovation, Manufacturing, Engineering Technology (iMET) training centre at Alconbury Weald
- Creating 186 new jobs at Alconbury with companies located on site

Enabling sustainable growth

We wanted to deliver new and appropriate housing with minimum impact on our environment. Our objectives were to:

- Improve the supply of new and affordable housing to meet future needs
- Develop sustainable growth opportunities in and around our market towns
- Enhance our built and green environment



Some of our achievements for 2015/16 included:

Improve the supply of new and affordable housing to meet future needs

- Assisting in the delivery of new housing at: Alconbury, St Neots, Wyton and Bearscoft (Godmanchester)
 - Bearscoft** – construction of first houses commenced April 2016
 - Wyton** - we will be using the County Council's Traffic Model to assess the traffic impact of this development and planned growth across Huntingdonshire for the Local Plan to 2036. This will also recommend a range of transport schemes that might be needed to accommodate this growth
 - Alconbury** - Construction started on the first phase of housing, comprising 128 houses with discussions underway with two housebuilders for a further 500 dwellings. Over 8,000 jobs are expected to be generated through the 20-year development. Opportunities for working and living in one location, with a short cycle, walk or bus ride to work
- Selling council owned land in St Mary's Street Huntingdon for the development of new housing
- Selling council owned land at Earith to Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association for the development of affordable homes for local people
- Ensuring affordable homes were underway on rural exception sites (small sites used for affordable housing where sites would not normally be used for housing) in Warboys and Brinton
- Working hard to secure the best possible result with regards to the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon scheme and committed £5m towards the cost of the project. The scheme has now been approved and works will commence by the end of 2016

Develop sustainable growth opportunities in and around our market towns

- Playing an active role in developing the proposed Devolution Agreement for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
- Progressing in the rejuvenation of Huntingdon town centre including the completion of the multi-storey car park and commencement of building works in Chequers Court

Working with our communities

We wanted our communities to thrive and get involved with local decision making. Our objectives were to:

- Improve health and well-being
- Create safer, stronger and more resilient communities
- Empower local communities



Some of our achievements for 2015/16 included:

Improve health and well-being

- One Leisure Active Lifestyles achieving their best ever overall attendances at 48,292, up 5% on the previous years. Group exercise classes, exercise referral, adult sports activities, disabled sports and PEDALS (instructor-led sessions on adapted bikes) all achieved best ever results independently
- Visits to our 5 One Leisure sites increasing to 2.3 million, up 300,000 from the previous year, and a corresponding improvement in income contributed to One Leisure becoming self-financing in 2015
- An Apple Day at Huntingdonshire Community Plant and Tree Nursery in Godmanchester attracting approximately 250 members of the public who took part in apple tasting and purchasing (10 different varieties grown on site) along with plums, blackberries, beans, potatoes, onions, sweetcorn, courgettes and more



- 1281 pupils from 21 different schools, both local and non-local visiting Hinchingsbrooke Country Park for teambuilding exercises. These exercises included pond dipping, minibeast hunting, exploring, finding out about pollination and looking inside beehives at the onsite apiary

Create safer, stronger and more resilient communities

- 330 households successfully avoided homelessness through support to remain in their current home or find alternative housing, with the assistance of the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme
- 77 single homeless people referred to the Cambridgeshire Single Homelessness Service, 27 of whom were able to secure accommodation through the service
- Supporting 179 vulnerable people to live independently through Disabled Facilities Grants
- Jointly commissioning (with health and social care partners) a New Safer Homes Handyperson service covering the whole of Cambridgeshire

Empower local communities

- Allocating £60,000 from the 2015/16 Community Chest Award Scheme to 29 voluntary and community sector groups across the district
- Supporting local people to take on and manage the Loves Farm Community Building in St Neots; it has now been handed over to the Pre School Alliance and the Loves Farm House Trustees who are now running the facilities
- Setting up and supporting the independent working of the Ramsey Neighbourhoods Trust (RNT) in Ramsey. RNT are now employing staff, attracting large scale funding and influencing real and lasting improvements in the area
- Launching a new 'Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide' which will support communities across Huntingdonshire to develop a shared vision for how they want to see their area developed

Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council

We wanted to deliver value for money services across Huntingdonshire for our residents.

Our objectives were to:

- To ensure customer engagement drives service priorities and improvement
- Become more business-like and efficient in the way we deliver services

Some of our achievements for 2015/16 included:

To ensure customer engagement drives service priorities and improvement

- Minimising the number of days to process new benefits claims - 23.5 days (target was 25 days)
- Minimising the number of days to process changes of circumstance - 3.5 days (target was 7 days)
- Minimising the number of days to process new council tax support claims – 22.5 days (target 26 days)
- Reducing rent arrears on estates portfolio
- Relaunching our Customer Service Strategy to ensure it continued to meet the needs of our customers and provided value for money services

Become more business-like and efficient in the way we deliver services

- Introducing a new website which went live in October 2015. There were a number of improvements such as allowing customers to find the information they need faster, and being more mobile friendly allowing customers to use it on the go and when they need it most
- Customer feedback has been positive and our 'report a missed bin' pages and form were ranked at the highest standard by third party assessors in February 2016

Love the new website, so fast and slick. Also, full of easy to find information.

Customer

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Reduction of reading age in years

85%

Increase in speed of page load

310,000

Page views in first 3 months



Most commonly used words in customer feedback regarding the new and improved website

- Joining up with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council In October 2015 to provide shared services for:
 - Information Technology
 - Building Control
 - Legal Services
- Savings across all three councils equating to 15% of the total cost of running these services



Call Centre customer feedback

- Increasing our presence on social media pages; Twitter followers rose from 1799 to 2654 and Facebook likes rose from 571 to 894
- Receiving 124,000 calls
- Receiving 45,096 visits to our customer service centre sites located across Huntingdon, St Neots and Ramsey/Yaxley

