

Annual Report

2015/16

This report sets out some of the council's key achievements during 2015/16 and some areas it is working on for the future.

For 2016/17 the council reviewed its corporate priorities and outcomes and agreed a smaller more streamlined set.



People

Fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute

Improve the health and wellbeing of our residents



- Launched our three year sports and leisure programme for the over 50s called 'Forever Active in East Herts', a partnership of community organisations led by the council. Sport England awarded £185,921 towards the total project cost of £383,177.

- Received £100,000 from Hertfordshire County Council District Offer phase one enabling a combination of voluntary organisations and other partners to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes to East Herts residents. 14 projects in total have been supported including:
 - The Meet and Eat project has supported around 50 older widowed people to enhance their cooking skills and reduce isolation. Two courses running weekly over seven weeks and three courses running monthly over a year took place at Centra and Network sheltered accommodation. Residents reported back how they have benefitted greatly from the healthy meals and increased social friendship.
 - The Exercise to Wellbeing project helped around 35 individuals take part in dance to exercise, Nordic walking and relaxation classes to consistently improve their physical activity levels and learn useful techniques for coping better with stress. All those who received support used the classes to aid their wellbeing and enjoyed the social and fun content of the activities.
 - The Dementia Homes project has seen 70 clients living with dementia, 43 of these in Ware and Hertford being assessed and supported with simple adaptations to their homes. The aim being to increase their independence, reduce falls and live healthier lives. Phase Two District Offer projects will receive a further £100,000 and are due to be delivered in 2016/17.



Reduce fuel poverty

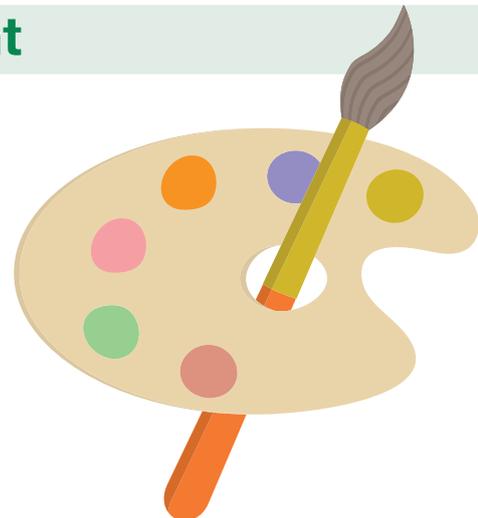
- Launched a detailed Fuel Poverty and Action Plan in February 2016, outlining a comprehensive range of actions to help combat fuel poverty and improve the energy efficiency of homes. Actions were targeted within areas with greatest fuel poverty in the more rural north of the District, as well as those homes not on the gas network. Government data suggests that over 7.3% of households in East Herts are in fuel poverty (DECC 2015), with almost 13% of households in some areas of the District. Fuel poverty has a significant effect on health outcomes and 73 excess winter deaths are attributed to excess cold (Public Health England 2015).



- Visited 58 local residents in need with advice and practical assistance, including signposting to external funding schemes/home energy efficiency schemes where these exist. The council is an active partner of the Herts Healthy Homes project, which provides support and home visits to elderly and vulnerable residents. They offer minor insulation work, emergency heating repairs, and electric blankets.
- Continued to offer 50% grants towards the cost of cavity wall and loft insulation for all local residents.

Increase community engagement

- Held the fifth Community Sports Awards. This annual event aims to celebrate achievements and contributions to sport as well as inspiring our local sporting talent to go on and reach their full potential. Twenty five awards were presented in total across nine categories.



- Granted a 30 year lease to the Ware Arts Centre to transform Ware's Southern Malting into a fantastic community arts hub. The centre aims to create an arts-for-all centre with studios, workshops, exhibition and performance areas together with a cafe and gift shop.

Deliver customer focused services

- Undertook our biennial residents' survey which showed 69% of residents were satisfied with the way the council runs things (70% in 2013). Some key concerns raised by residents were local tips/ household waste recycling centres and bus services, so not directly provided by this council. However the trend regarding bus services also reflects our members concerns, as evidenced by the inclusion of the outcome "working with key partners on sustainable transport solutions for East Herts" within the new corporate strategic plan for 2016/17.
- Customer satisfaction with face to face contact continues to improve, with 83% (2015) of customers rating the contact as 'Good' (82% in 2014 and 80% in 2013.)

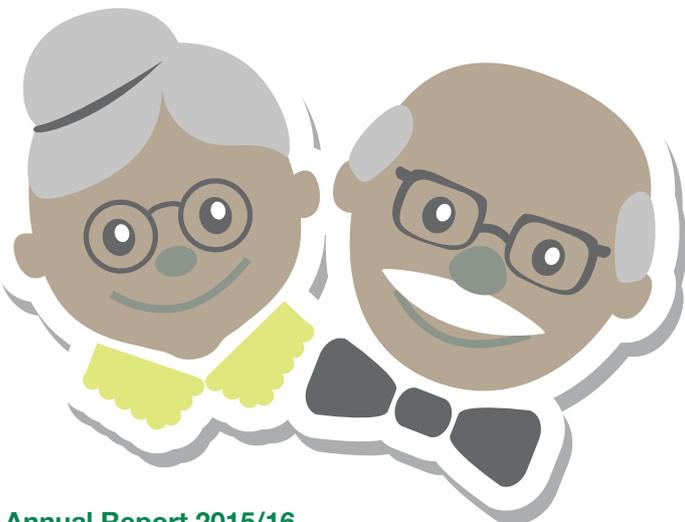


Improve outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals

- By 2015 there will be 850,000 people with dementia in the UK and we are focused on becoming a dementia friendly district to help break down barriers and encourage empathy within local communities.

Opened a dementia café at Bishop's Stortford funded in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, with Dementia support workers to give advice and information in a friendly and comfortable environment.

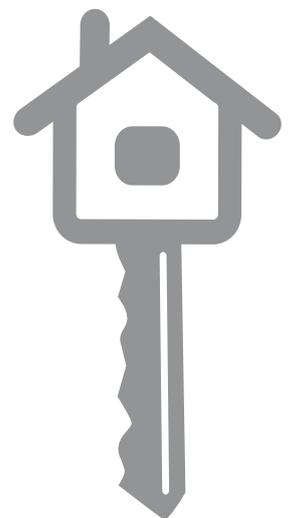
- Offered free dementia awareness sessions for residents, businesses and students across the district to raise their awareness including council staff, Freman College in Buntingford, Hertford Theatre, Rhodes Art Complex in Bishop's Stortford, Waitrose in Hertford and members of the public.



- Activity grants funded eight Silver Sunday events to celebrate the knowledge and contribution older people make to society. The events were an opportunity to socialise with others and took place in Sawbridgeworth, Stanstead Abbots, Hertford, Ware, Bishop's Stortford, Albury and Braughing.

- Exceeded our performance target of 10 calendar days to process housing benefit applications (9.73days).

- In response to a rise in the number of households presenting to the council as homeless (71 households were accepted in 2015/16, a 45% increase on the 49 households in 2014/15 in line with the national trend), we have helped residents to keep their tenancies in the private rented sector and provided support with rental deposits by establishing a dedicated post and making use of £49,000 homeless prevention grant.



 **recycle**
for your community

-  aerosols
-  food & drink cans
-  plastic packaging
-  mixed paper & card
-  newspapers & magazines

RV3
2629

 **recycle**

Place

Safe and clean

Reduce residual waste and increase our recycling rate

- Despite higher waste volumes, 49% of our waste was reused, recycled or composted (same as 2014/15).
- 88% of residents are satisfied with the information provided about the council's waste and recycling collection service (88%), the types of materials collected by the recycling and composting collection service (86%), the service for collection of waste (refuse) overall (79%) and the service for the collection of items for recycling and composting overall (79%).



Reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from our own operations by 25% by 2020 and work with partners to reduce the emissions of households and businesses

- Two School Air Quality projects have been delivered at Richard Hale School and at Leventhorpe School in Sawbridgeworth, both adjacent to two East Herts designated Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). These projects were delivered with the London Sustainability Exchange (LSX), working with year 12 and year 8 students respectively to increase awareness of air quality and promote greener methods of transport to staff, students and family members.
- Updated a toolkit for schools developed in partnership with the London Sustainability Exchange (LSX) to help provide schools with a wider understanding of the issues and the combination of solutions required to address air quality. The new toolkit will be promoted to Hertfordshire Secondary Schools to help support curriculum subjects of science, geography and personal, health and social education.
- Made good progress in reducing our carbon dioxide emissions – since 2009 the council's CO₂ emissions have reduced by 18.02% and we are on track to meet 25% by 2020, through implementing the council's Climate Change Action Plan. This figure represents carbon emissions from all East Herts Council services arising from heat/light/power for our buildings (from Wallfields through to individual meter points in some of the smaller buildings we are also responsible for) as well as transport and contracted out services e.g. waste/leisure etc.



Maintain our clean streets and reduce litter

- Worked with the police and other agencies in the Community Safety Partnership to develop new ways to tackle anti-social behaviour. Residents, visitors and businesses, were consulted on a range of proposals to tackle dog fouling, dog control and anti-social behaviour. The offences would carry an initial fine of £100, but failure to pay could lead to legal proceedings with a potential fine of £1,000 in the magistrates' court.
- Used our compulsory purchase powers to commence the purchase of a run-down and derelict home in the centre of Hertford and bring it back into use. Empty homes can attract fly tipping, rodents, vandalism and other types of anti-social behaviour so a compulsory purchase order (CPO), the first to be made by the council, was submitted to the Secretary of State early in 2016. Consultation with the local community has generated no objections and work is proceeding with the purchase of the property.



Maintain our parks, play areas and open spaces in good order

- Retained our Green Flag awards for our parks at The Ridgeway in Hertford (for the seventh year running) and Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford (for the eighth year running). The Green Flag Award recognises and rewards the best green spaces in the country.

- Achieved our second RSPCA Gold Footprint award for the quality of stray dog services, housing and animal welfare principles. Council initiatives during the year include:

- o A family dog show and information packs about responsible ownership handed out at Southern Country Park's fun afternoon in July



- o Providing training facilities for Dogs Trust to run a microchipping course
- o Ongoing joint visits with Herts Police to promote responsible ownership
- o During stop and search roadside checks with police throughout the year, handing out "What to do if your dog goes missing" leaflets to any drivers with dogs
- o In 2015/16 the council picked up 96 stray dogs compared with 117 in the previous year.



Reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the fear of crime

- 72% reported that they feel safe in their local area after dark, while 17% said they feel unsafe. By comparison, during the day 95% reported feeling safe in their local area.
- The proportion of residents that feel that crime and anti-social behaviour is a big problem in their local area has significantly decreased since 2013. For example, perceptions of vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles, noisy neighbours or loud parties, people being drunk or rowdy in public places and groups hanging around the streets are all issues which can make residents feel unsafe.
- Working with East Herts Community Safety Partnership we have helped to keep crime low and reassure the public that East Herts is a safe place by:
 - Launching Community Youth Champions. The scheme is designed to deliver learning and understanding on community safety issues to the younger community in a way that encourages them to become champions of key community safety messages which can be passed onto their peers. All senior schools across East Hertfordshire participated, sending Year 12 students. The event will be repeated again in 2016/17.



- Supporting the Op Stomp initiative, a scheme designed to work with vulnerable people or locations in the district that are more at risk of crime. The aim behind the initiative is to provide reassurance and public safety advice. Op Stomp visited several rural locations in East Herts this year as well as visiting Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth towns. Also purse bells, purse chains and shed alarms were distributed to those considered vulnerable.

- Encouraging and promoting the membership of East Herts Neighbourhood Watches, designed to keep the local community up to date with what's going on in their area and working closely with the police, helps to prevent and tackle crime. The membership of Neighbourhood Watch in East Herts has increased by 70% (8,638 members in 2015/16 compared to 4,922 members in 2014/15). In addition Business Watch leaflets were distributed to 4,500 businesses encouraging them to sign up to the scheme.



- Holding our annual summer activities programme for young people. This year a total of 621 different individual young people attended the activities of which 79 young people gained an accredited outcome. Engaging young people in positive and enjoyable activities in the presence of a positive peer group is an important first step in helping address ASB.



Ensure future development best meets the need of the district and its residents

- This year we secured 147 new affordable homes, the second highest level of new affordable homes delivered in the last six years. The majority of the new affordable homes due in 2015/16 are from private section 106 developments and are not solely housing association led; the council is very dependent on the private developers build programme and the amount of affordable homes they can deliver on site depending on viability assessments. Going forward the council is committed to undertaking a feasibility assessment into setting up a company to build new homes.
- Granted planning permission for the development of up to 2,200 homes and related infrastructure at Bishop's Stortford North. As well as affordable housing, the developers will provide £53.8m of transportation and social infrastructure. For example:
 - Employment opportunities from shops and offices and two neighbouring shopping centres and light industry.
 - Accessible green space including Hoggates Wood and Ash Grove and several play areas for children and young people
 - Two primary schools and a secondary school
 - Two community buildings
 - A new bus route, footpath and cycle ways



- Increased the percentage of major and minor planning applications that have been processed within the agreed timescales. For example the processing of major applications has increased by 15% and minor applications by 4%, when compared to performance in 2014/15.
- Completed and adopted the Hertford Urban Design Strategy (HUDS). This is a Strategy which seeks to ensure that the public realm of the town is improved as a result of new development that comes forward. The council can also use the Strategy as a basis for separate investment in the area.



Prosperity

Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities

Deliver value for money and reduce our reliance on central government funding

- For the sixth year running the council cut or froze its share of the council tax bill. This means that the average Band D property will pay £155.97/year to the council during 2016/17 and receive in return services ranging from waste and recycling collections to popular parks and open spaces, clean streets and well-managed and maintained neighbourhoods.



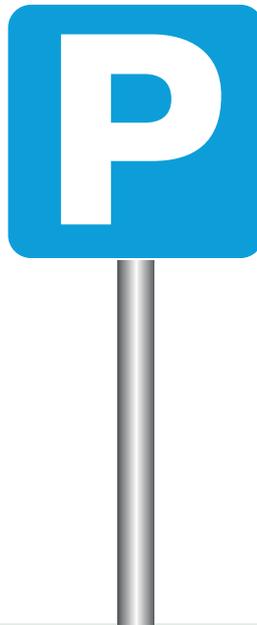
Enhance the economic well being of East Herts

- Supported the county's business awards in June 2015 by contributing resources to support the event, where three East Herts businesses received awards at a gala ceremony, organised by the Hertfordshire Federation of Small Businesses. Awards categories included Business Innovation, Apprentice of the Year, Service Excellence, Best New Business and Entrepreneur of the Year as well as Business Person, Employee and Community Business of the Year.
- Purchased Old River Lane, a key site in the heart of Bishop's Stortford, offering many exciting regeneration possibilities. Council ownership will help ensure that this historic market town meets the needs of residents while retaining its distinctive character. The council has appointed top architecture and urban planning practice, Allies and Morrison, to prepare a town centre planning framework, which will show how the site could be integrated into the rest of the town to achieve the best outcome. The work will take into account all the issues relevant to the future of the town centre – transport, parking, buses, walking and cycling, future retail and leisure uses, potential housing, before coming forward with a framework



which will guide future development and investment. It will also influence the development of the major sites in the town – including the land the council owns at Old River Lane. The council is also carrying out extensive consultation with residents before making any final decisions on how the site could be developed. The first stage of the consultation was completed in July. Through rents and other incomes, the site is already generating a return on the investment of 5-6%, while money in the bank during 2014/15 gave the council an interest rate of 1.47%.

- Made more short stay spaces available in Hertford's Gascoyne Way car park, so shoppers and visitors to Hertford will find it easier to park. Feedback to the council showed there was a high demand for short stay spaces, especially at weekends. In Bishop's Stortford, we made it easier for shoppers and visitors to find a parking space after the council cut the amount of time people can stay in the short-stay spaces in Crown Terrace car park from five to three hours. Changes were made after businesses said that more turnover was needed so that their customers could find a space more easily.



- Played a key role, in partnership with other Hertfordshire councils and regulators, in setting up Better Business for All (BBfA), with the aim of helping businesses to increase productivity and profit margins by complying with, but not being restrained by regulations.

Deliver sustainable rural business growth



- In partnership with the rural community and different interest groups, launched a new Eastern Plateau Rural Development Programme (RDPE). The programme partnership group oversees the programme and ensures strategic fit with the Local Development Strategy. 2015/16 focused on the development of the programme, identifying the programme themes and outcomes it will be looking to deliver. The key priorities are:
 - Support for increasing farm productivity.
 - Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification.
 - Support for rural tourism.
 - Support for rural services.
 - Support for cultural and heritage activity.
 - Support for increasing forestry productivity.

As at April 2016 25 outline applications for funding had been received and during 2016/17 these will be assessed to see if they meet the criteria for funding.



Protect the environment

- Continued to undertake flood alleviation works to reduce flood risk and damage to natural environment across the district by:
 - Undertaking programmed monthly grille clearance at identified sites with extra inspections and clearance in times of heavy rain.
 - Constructing and or replacing grilles and headwalls at Cox Lane Much Hadham and Stanstead Abbots car park.
 - Refurbishment and automation works to the Weir gates in the river near to Hertford Theatre.
 - Undertaking investigations with remedial and maintenance works where required at thirteen flooding locations across the district.



