

Corporate Peer Challenge

Position Statement



Hertsmere Borough Council



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1 Welcome

Following the election in May 2023, Hertsmere Borough Council has transitioned from a long period of Conservative administration and is now led by a partnership between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

This political change has brought with it a greater emphasis from the new leadership to listen and engage with our communities, working with local partners to make a difference. Our Hertsmere Vision, Delivering Better Futures has been updated to reflect this and the accompanying Performance Management Framework will hold us to account.

We have already made significant progress and have implemented a number of the new administration's key priorities including offering a rebate on our increase of the Council Tax, directing the remaining funds to critical community and voluntary organisations, setting out major changes to our waste and recycling collections to improve recycling, re-instating a critical bus route, securing the future of a local cinema and making significant strides towards a new Local Plan.

Alongside this period of political change, we have undergone a significant shift in the way that we work. We have embraced the challenges of a new way of working and have made a considerable investment in a hybrid working environment in our offices. This followed our decision to reduce office capacity and generate income by releasing space to our partners at Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Within our communities, the current financial climate means that our residents are increasingly in need of extra support and we are responding to those needs – supporting our local Citizens Advice, working with our foodbanks, engaging with local groups on the ground and working closely with partners from the voluntary, health and statutory sectors. House prices and the rental market makes it challenging for local people to live in the borough and we are working to build our own affordable housing to supplement

local supply. Our Housing team works closely with local partners to support those furthest from the housing market. In recent years we have also welcomed those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, as well as hosting an Afghan resettlement scheme bridging hotels and supporting asylum hotels, taking an active role on the Hertfordshire Strategic Migration Partnership.

For many years, we have prided ourselves on our strong financial management and our entrepreneurial approach, working in partnership with the public and private sector to achieve value for money. We have established a range of wholly-owned and joint venture companies as well as a range of partnerships. We continue our work to maximise the value of our assets, including capitalising on our rich film and television heritage through our ownership of Elstree Film Studios and our relationships with Sky and BBC Elstree. We are home to world-class businesses including Sky Studios, Arsenal and a growing pharmaceutical sector and have worked hard to build these mutually beneficial relationships. We are open to new ways of working, as long as they provide best value and are in the interests of our local community.

We are ambitious and clear about what we want to achieve, however we know that we are working within a challenging time for local government, financial pressures are biting and recruitment and retention is difficult across a number of key professions. Our close proximity to London, sharing boundaries with three major London boroughs brings challenges but also provides opportunities. We are determined that our ambitions aren't constrained by the resource challenges we face.

As we celebrate our 50th anniversary with our community and colleagues, and over a year on from the 2023 elections, we welcome the opportunity for reflection and external input provided by the Corporate Peer Challenge and look forward to welcoming the team to Hertsmere.



Sajida Bijle
Chief Executive



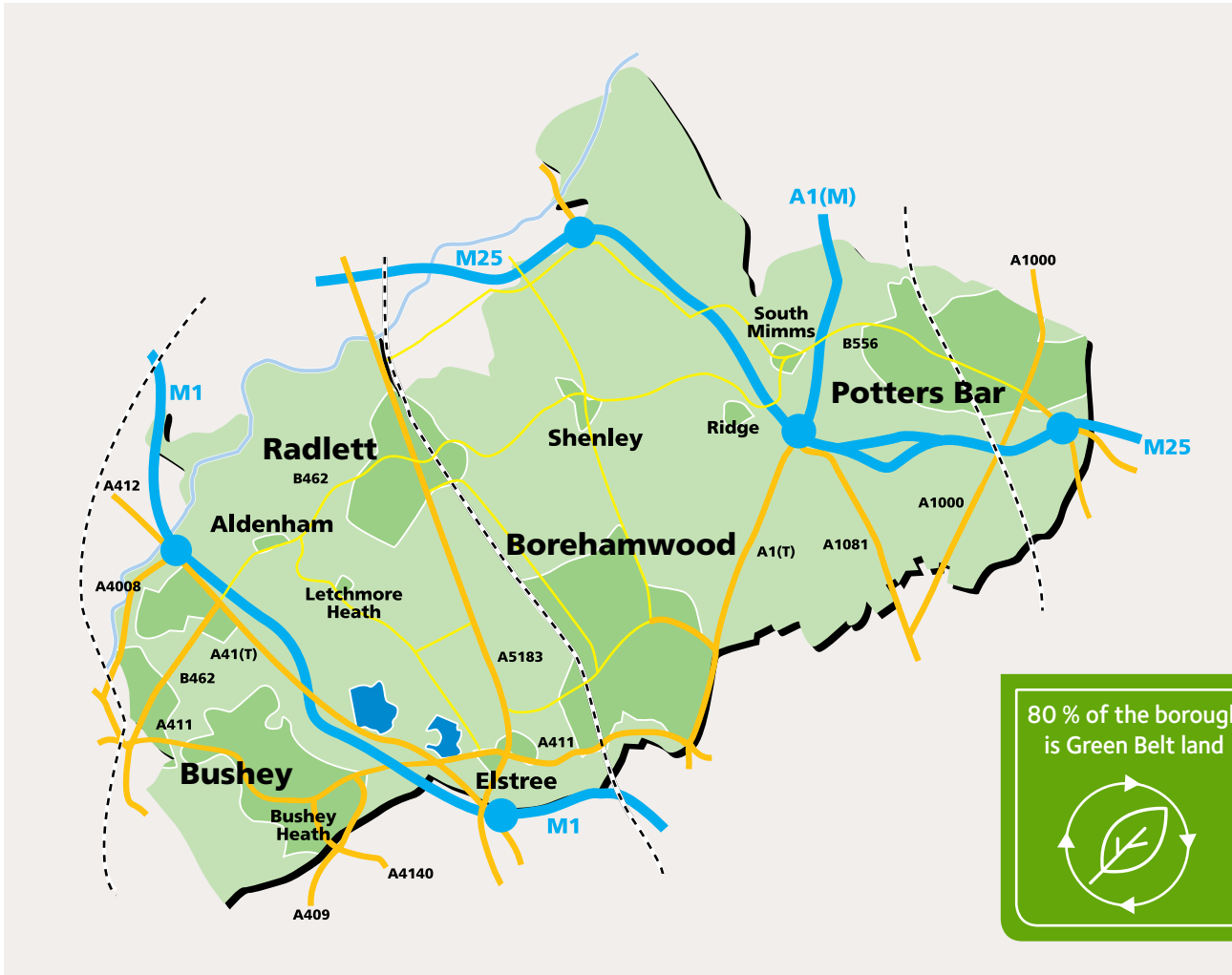
Cllr Jeremy Newmark
Leader of Council



Cllr Paul Richards
Deputy Leader of the Council

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Hertsmere - the place



Hertsmere is a largely rural borough in Hertfordshire, situated approximately 12 miles to the north of central London. With 80% of our borough in Green Belt land, the majority of our 108,993 (mid 2023) residents live in our four main towns - Bushey, Borehamwood, Radlett and Potters Bar - each with their own identity, along with a scattering of villages and hamlets: Elstree, Shenley, South Mimms, Ridge, Aldenham and Letchmore Heath.

Excellent north-south rail connections, with journey times to London of 20-26 minutes from all major towns and road connections (the A1m, M1 and M25 all run through the borough) mean that Hertsmere is very well connected to London and the rest of the country. However east-west

travel remains more challenging along with public transport connections between the borough's main settlements.

It's this mix of green areas, distinct towns, and strong connections that means life in Hertsmere offers a great balance of city and countryside, this has been confirmed by our recent residents' survey where proximity to London and accessibility to green space came high as the favourite things about living in Hertsmere. However, the significant proportion of Green Belt in the borough does lead to constraints for future development.

It is also this location and strong connections which make Hertsmere a great place to establish a business, and the borough has attracted a number of major employers as a



result. The professional, scientific or technical; construction, and ICT industries are particularly strong. An active film and television industry exists around Borehamwood, which has a heritage of film and television production dating back to the early 20th century. A budding avionics specialism is currently developing at London Elstree Aerodrome. Small businesses also make up an important part of the local economy.

However, proximity to the capital also brings challenges including recruitment and retention of workers and talent, high house prices which particularly impact first time buyers, along with high and rising private rental costs. In 2022, Hertsmere was named the third least affordable location in the country in which to buy a house behind Westminster and Camden (Plumbnation 2022) and although average prices have fallen slightly, Hertsmere's housing market remains challenging with the fourth highest average house prices in the East of England.

Hertsmere's population today is growing, aging and diversifying, with a notable Jewish population (at 17%, the largest proportion in any local authority (Census 2021)) and growing South Asian and wider European community.

Whilst relatively prosperous, pockets of real deprivation exist within the borough with part of Cowley Hill ward in Borehamwood being the most deprived in Hertfordshire and in the top 10% of deprived areas nationally (IMD 2019).

Overall population health is good, although health inequalities do exist and provision of local health services remains below that required to meet upcoming challenges (SW Herts Healthcare Partnership 2024). With no Urgent Care or hospital provision within borough boundaries, residents must travel out of borough for access.

The Council and workforce

With an FTE of 344 Hertsmere Borough Council is a small authority with a total pay bill of £17,162k (23/24 figures)

Based from the Civic Offices in Borehamwood, which is our main site, the Waste and Recycling Team work from the Cranbourne Depot in Potters Bar and our Engineering Team from the depot on Shenley Road, Borehamwood.

We are not a stockholding authority and have contracted delivery of our leisure services. Our waste collection is delivered in house.

Sajida Bijle, our Chief Executive has been in post since 2020 and along with Executive Director Peter Geraghty heads up the organisation. The Senior Management Team comprises of eight Heads of Service.

Around 10 years ago, in response to ongoing challenging budgets, we underwent a wholesale reorganisation which resulted in a reduction to the workforce of around one third. We remain a lean organisation with limited scope for reorganisation. This has led us to work creatively and initiate a range of shared services and partnerships for specialist services, leading to savings of over £1 million on a recurring basis.





Recruitment and retention continues to be a challenge, particularly in relation to professional areas and we are working hard to address this within a pressurised budgetary environment. We do employ a number of agency staff across the borough and Service Heads are working hard to reduce reliance on agency workers.

Our most recent staff survey in 2024 tells us that 67% of our employees are proud to work for the council and 72% of staff feel committed to the organisation's goals.

The public sector context

Hertsmere Borough Council was established in 1974 following a period of local government reorganisation under the Local Government Act 1972. It emerged from the former area of Bushey Urban District and Potters Bar Urban District with Elstree Rural District and part of Watford Rural District (the parish of Aldenham).

We operate within a two tier administrative system with responsibilities divided between Hertfordshire County Council and the 10 district and borough councils. We also have five parished areas within the borough boundaries.

We have built strong relationships with the other Hertfordshire Districts and often work together in partnership, specifically with our nearest neighbours in the south west of the county. We also work closely with Hertfordshire County Council with this relationship building particularly over the last few years through the coordination of the response to the pandemic, cost of living crisis and the challenges faced with increased migration.

In our parished areas of Aldenham, Elstree and Borehamwood, Ridge, Shenley and South Mimms the parish

councils are generally responsible for local events and some activities for young/older people, Christmas lights, allotments, cemeteries, parks and war memorials.

A number of our district councillors serve at more than one level either as parish or county councillors in addition to their role at Hertsmere.

We are covered by Hertfordshire Constabulary and are served by Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board.

Hertsmere Borough
Council celebrates
its 50th anniversary
this year



Key statistics



Population

108,993 (mid 2023)
Increase of 7.8% from 100,031 in 2011 (England average 6.6%)

Diversity

36.9% from an ethnic minority (not white British) in 2021, up from 24.3% in 2011 (census)
77.1% white (down 7.16% from 2011) including 11.6% Other White from other European Countries (up 5.8%), 10.5% Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh; (up 2.72% from 2011), 4.9% Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Carribean or African (up 9%)



Households

42,682 (2021 census)



20% of adults state they are **physically inactive** (21/22 – Active Lives, Sport England) 18.6% Herts



House sales and prices

Average house price: £496,000 (February 2024 ONS), East of England £339,000

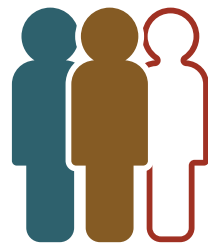
Average monthly rent: £1,609 (March 2024 ONS), East of England £1,131

Housing affordability ratio: 14.5 (2023, ONS), England ratio: 8.3

Deprivation

Overall ranks 224 out of 317 lower tier authorities (IMD 2019)

However part of Borehamwood Cowley Hill ranks 1 in Hertfordshire and in the first decile nationally. 12 LSOAs in the 10th decile nationally and 1 in the 1st decile. Within Hertfordshire 13 in most deprived 20% but 8 in the least deprived 20%



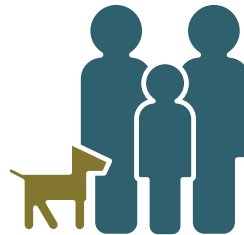
Economy

Median pay - £27,837

Businesses in Hertsmere - 7,695 (March 2022, ONS)

Local units - 8,260 (March 2022, ONS)

Active businesses 8,560 (2021, ONS)



Mosaic profile

The most prominent groups in our area are:

Domestic Success – thriving families, bringing up children following careers (23% Hertsmere, 11% East of England)

Prestige Positions – established families in large detached homes living upmarket lifestyles (21% Hertsmere, 9% East of England)

Family Basics – Families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet. (13%, 8% East of England)

What do residents say?



Overall 61% of residents are satisfied with life in Hertsmere, 36% are neutral and 3% have a negative view

Parks and Green Spaces (46% satisfied, 29% neutral) and Waste Collection (44% satisfied and 29% neutral) are the services with highest satisfaction ratings and street cleaning has the highest level of dissatisfaction (41% dissatisfied)

38% of residents are satisfied with the way Hertsmere Borough Council runs things (28% neutral and 33% dissatisfied)

39% of residents trust Hertsmere Borough Council

38% of residents agree that Hertsmere Borough Council acts on the concerns of local residents

26% of residents agree Hertsmere Borough Council provides Value for Money (30% neutral and 43% dissatisfied)

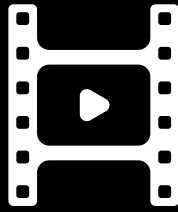
60% of residents strongly feel that they belong to their local area

Overall residents of Bushey and Potters Bar tend to be more satisfied along with residents aged 18-34 years.

Source: Hertsmere BC. Community Survey December 23 – February 24

BRITISH HOLLYWOOD

Film and Television have been part of Hertsmere's heritage for over 100 years. Six historic studios have been based in the area and many stars of the big and small screen have worked in the borough with film credits including world famous franchises like Indiana Jones and Star Wars and cult TV classics including The Avengers and The Prisoner.



Today Borehamwood is home to BBC Elstree with the newly refurbished EastEnders set, the Council owned Elstree Studios home to the original Big Brother and Strictly Come Dancing and Sky Studios Elstree a state of the art studio which already has Wicked and the latest in the Paddington franchise to its name.

We are also proud to be home to the Elstree Screen Arts Academy, a University technical college specifically focused on the culture industry.



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Local priorities and outcomes

The Council’s vision and priorities and the outcomes sought by them

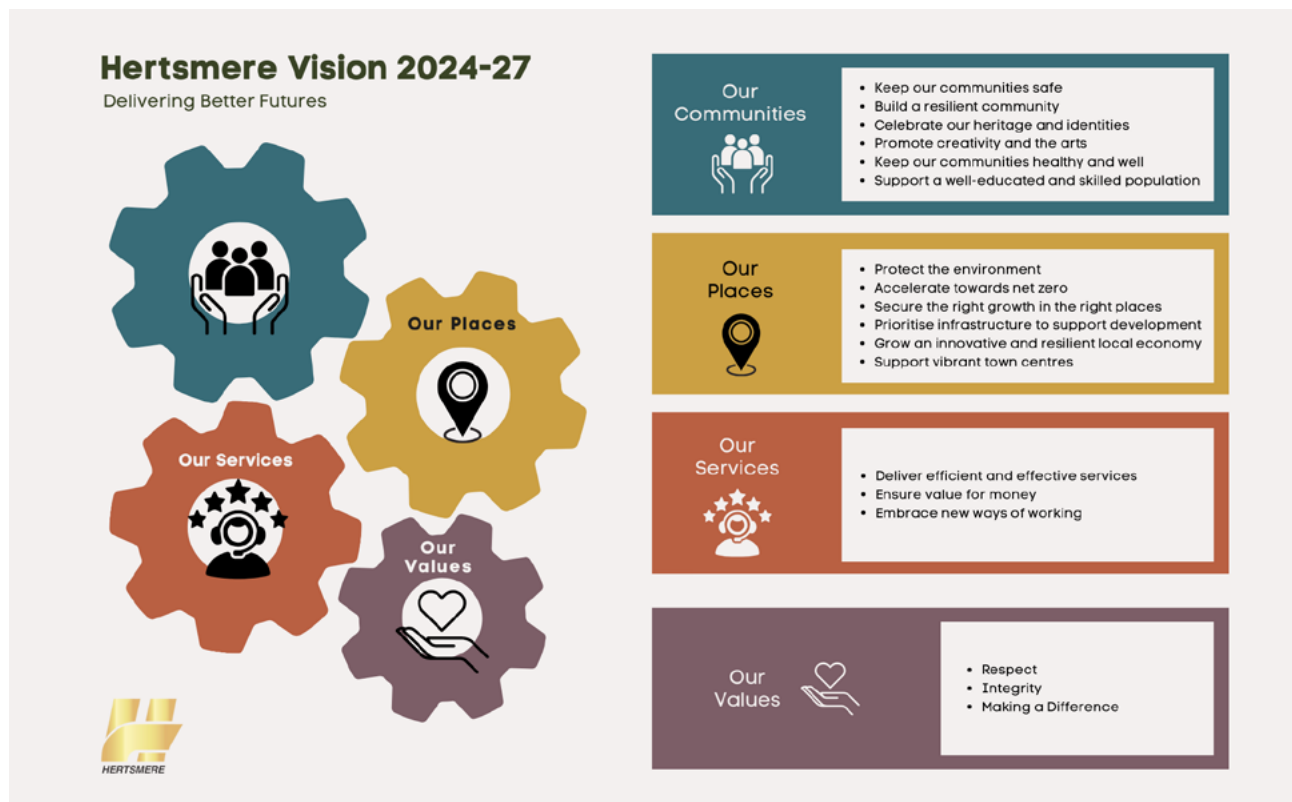
The Hertsmere Vision was updated and streamlined for 2024-27 to better reflect the aspirations of the Partnership Administration. The Vision identifies three areas of focus: Our Communities, Our Places and Our Services under the headline ‘Delivering Better Futures’ and six priority areas have been identified under each. These are influenced by what’s happening on the ground locally but also by those priorities being developed in partnership such as through the Hertfordshire Growth Board.

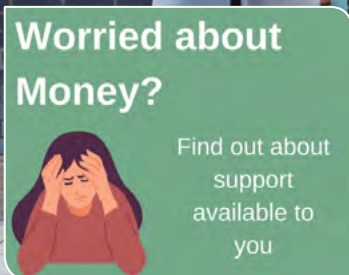
The Corporate Plan is published each year and sets out our more detailed plans for implementation of the Vision along with a review of activities from the previous year. Service Units work to service plans, which are influenced by the Vision and Corporate Plan in turn. Performance management of staff carried out through our Clear Review

system show how as individuals we can support the achievement of our ambitions.

How communities and stakeholders shape priorities and delivery

We are committed to listening to our residents. In late 2023 we purchased a social listening and engagement platform which has made community engagement easier and more accessible to staff. Since its launch in late 2023 we have carried out eight consultation and engagement exercises (excluding Local Plan engagement) on a range of topics including budget consultation, community priorities and burials and cremations. A key part of the software is the community engagement platform which acts as a centralised hub for all consultation exercises, allowing residents to track live and closed engagements and for us to ‘close the feedback loop’ by letting residents know how their input has changed policy.





Hertsmeare's Worrying about Money leaflet

Hertsmeare's Food Poverty Alliance was set up in 2021 in response to the unprecedented demand for food aid during the Covid-19 pandemic and the growing food insecurity being experienced by our residents. The Council brought together foodbanks, food aid providers in the borough, alongside our community and voluntary sector organisations. The alliance aims to reduce food poverty and food insecurity in Hertsmeare and to coordinate with partners to enhance the services available to the community.

The group is a subgroup of the Hertsmeare Health and Wellbeing Partnership, which is a subgroup itself of the Hertsmeare Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and will report to, and be guided by, the LSP and Hertsmeare Together's Community Strategy.

Based on the information and learning from our Food Poverty Alliance, Hertsmeare Borough Council worked with the Independent Food Aid Network to co-produce a 'Worrying about Money?' leaflet for the residents of Hertsmeare aimed at reducing the need for charitable food aid. These resources have been co-designed, with partners on the Alliance, to help residents experiencing financial insecurity and anyone supporting them, to easily identify and access local advice providers and ways to access existing entitlements and maximise income. The leaflet was sent to all households alongside the council tax bills in 2022, to encourage residents to seek financial support prior to reaching a crisis. The leaflet has been a success with community and voluntary organisations using it to support conversations about resident's finances. The leaflet has recently been refreshed and will continue to be used in response to resident's ongoing concerns about the impact of the cost of living crisis. The leaflet can be found [here](#).

Contact: Hilary Shade, Head of Partnerships,
Community Engagement and Housing



The unexpected pause caused by the pandemic has provided an opportunity for us to review our approach to carrying out **residents' surveys**. In line with many of our peers, we have now moved towards a more cost effective, online survey solution via our Zencity platform and carry out an online Community Survey twice per year. The survey uses targeted online pop-ups to gather a demographically representative sample of our residents. We have included a number of the LGA 'are you being served' residents' survey benchmarking questions and will use the first results to provide a baseline for future comparison. The first survey was carried out from December 23 – February 24 and tells us that 61% of our residents are satisfied with life in Hertsmere and 60% of residents strongly feel they belong to the local area.

We continually engage with residents to inform our service delivery with individual consultations taking place across the authority, particularly in Planning and Street Scene. Over 18,000 people responded to our Local Plan consultation in 2021, the highest ever to a public engagement exercise undertaken by the council. As a result, the plan was redesigned to provide a better fit with resident's expectations whilst also ensuring that we meet

the borough's growth needs. The new draft version of the Local Plan was agreed at a special Council meeting on the 20 March 2024 and an extensive public consultation was undertaken in April and May with over 2000 responses received.

Through our work with our wider district partners we engage our residents in the development of strategic growth plans for the south west of the county. Together with five partner authorities we are preparing a South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan and have approved a Strategic Vision for the area: 'Realising our Potential' which will help frame the future development of South West Hertfordshire.

Our Economic Development Strategy, Hertsmere Works, directs our relationships with local businesses. We provide a range of support including networking opportunities, training events and forums, listening to the needs of business owners and encouraging inward investment. We have hosted a local Developers' Forum to better understand the needs of the sector.

Our Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) provides regular opportunity for stakeholders to engage with us and participate in service development across the public and voluntary and community sectors. The quarterly meetings are well attended and partners are provided with the opportunity share relevant information. Historically, the LSP has been the vehicle for a range of joint funding and the Community Strategy articulates joint commitments for the area. A number of small working groups have now been established to deliver the high level action plans associated with the strategy. We also work closely with key Voluntary and Community Sector partners including the Citizens Advice and Communities 1st our local voluntary sector infrastructure support organisation.

There are two main subgroups for the LSP, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Partnership where we use our convening powers to support and direct partnership working. Both groups have developed strategy documents and monitor progress through action plans.





How equality and diversity considerations inform prioritisation and delivery arrangements

The 2021 census has identified that we are an increasingly diverse borough with 36.9% of residents coming from an ethnic minority in 2021 an increase of 12.6% from 2011.

The Partnership Administration has made the celebration of our diverse communities a focus. Our community grants have and continue to encourage applications for projects which support diversity and inclusion and we have held a

number of celebration events to mark occasions such as Black History Month and Pride.

Our committee reports include the requirement to consider the equalities implications of any recommendations and all new policies are required to have Equality Impact Assessments.

We have recently updated our [Equalities Objectives](#) and published [our response](#) to the General Equalities Duty on our website. Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Workforce Policy was agreed in September 2023 and there is a commitment to develop and implement an outward-facing EDI strategy aimed at building community partnerships.






Performance Management Framework



Hertsmere Vision 2024-27
Delivering Better Futures

Our Communities




- Number of households living in temporary accommodation
- Percentage of homelessness cases closed in the period due to successful prevention
- Number of community safety related partnership initiatives
- Participation rates at Inspire All facilities
- Percentage of residents responding 'quite' or 'very' well to the question: Overall, how well informed do you think Hertsmere Borough Council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides

Our Places



- Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting
- Number of missed waste collections per 100,000 collections
- Percentage of Major planning applications determined within 13 weeks
- Carbon Savings from all Council operations

Our Services



- Ombudsman Complaints upheld per 10,000 population
- Working days lost to short term sickness absence in the rolling year
- Total employee turnover
- Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected
- Percentage of Council Tax collected
- Percentage of invoices paid on time
- Percentage of telephone calls answered within 20 seconds
- Proportion of council property fit for let that is leased out
- Compliance with regulatory standards (e.g. gas/water/fire/electric - EIRC and PAT/asbestos) for council owned properties

How the council manages performance and local performance information

An integral part of the update to the Hertsmere Vision has been the development of a new [Performance Management Framework](#).

The updated framework provides a streamlined approach for corporate performance management whilst recognising the breadth of focused service specific scrutiny that takes place through committees and member and officer groups. A full review of the performance indicator set has been carried out with all Service Heads, the most comprehensive in a number of years, with the aim of ensuring that the information collected better reflects the services and projects that match our priorities. This has been published as part of our Corporate Plan for 24/25.



The Cabinet Performance Management Panel reviews the 16 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on a quarterly basis. These are designed to reflect the core services delivered to residents. The first set of the new reporting arrangements covered Q1 24/25 and provides a narrative of progress against the Corporate Plan, reflecting the limitations of using quantitative data on its own to manage performance. This information is also shared publicly via Cabinet.

The KPI set along with a more detailed collection of Management Information indicators are reviewed each quarter by Chief Officer Board allowing the directors to maintain an overview of service delivery across the council.

In addition to the quarterly updates, an Annual Report is published each year. As of 23/24 this provides updated statistical information on the borough and includes the indicators collected by the Office for Local Government (OfLoG) and in future years will capture those from our community partnerships.

We have also recently procured a social value engine which we are trialling to measure some of our community projects. If it proves a valuable tool we will roll out its use as an extension of our performance framework.

Each unit produces Service Plans in line with their service requirements and these are filtered through to the employee performance management system for localised performance objectives and target setting for individual staff. Staff currently receive regular performance reviews, which are recorded through the new Clear Review performance management system.

Reducing waste and improving recycling

Hertsmere's recycling rate had plateaued at the national average while neighbouring boroughs (albeit with differing demographics) were achieving some of the best rates in the Country. The new administration post election was committed to improving this position.

A detailed analysis of the changing national policy, actions of best in class, and costs of delivery was carried out. A programme of improvements centered around early introduction of a weekly food waste collection but also including controlling residual waste and moving to a subscription based rather than universal waste service was agreed.

Proposals were designed to be self-financing while also being able to respond to and maximise the benefit to the borough from national changes. It is still early to assess impact on recycling and the most significant measures (separate weekly food waste collection) will not be introduced until April 2025 (albeit one year in advance of Government requirements). However recycling rates appear to have stabilised and possibly improved as a result of the changes made and a programme of increased communications. The move to a subscription based garden waste collection has been very smooth, supported by strong communications and a slick customer interface online and through our Customer Services team. Our subscription target has been met and no formal complaints lodged.

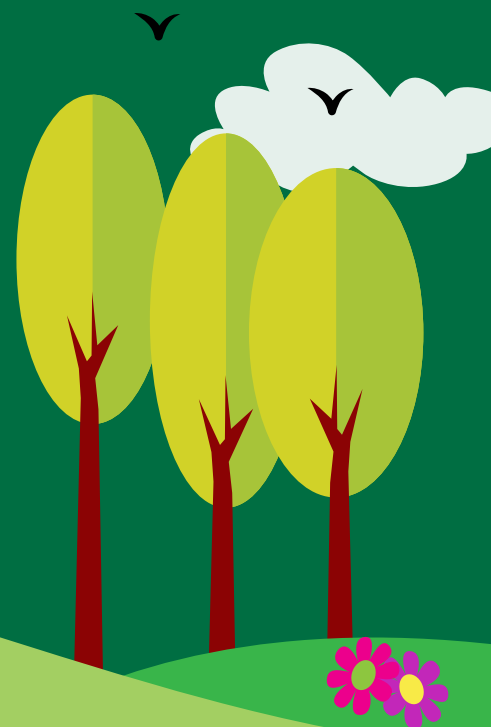
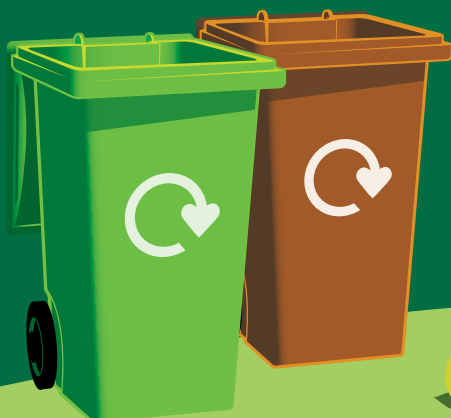
The recycling improvement programme is supported by a cross Council project team, led by Street Scene but supported by Customer Services, Corporate Communications, IT and Finance.

Key to success has been to adopt a collaborative approach and seek feedback. Many of our staff are also our residents and the input of our frontline customer services staff to our communications has been key to their effectiveness. The value of learning from others has also been key and the collaborative approach of waste collection and disposal authorities across the County, supported by our Hertfordshire Waste Partnership has also been key.

Contact: *Ian Kershaw, Head of Street Scene*



 **recycle**
for Hertsmere



4 Organisational and place leadership









The arrangements and support for organisational leadership

The May 2023 election marked a period of significant change for the borough and a shift in political control. The Council is now run by a Partnership Administration with a Labour Leader and a Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader.

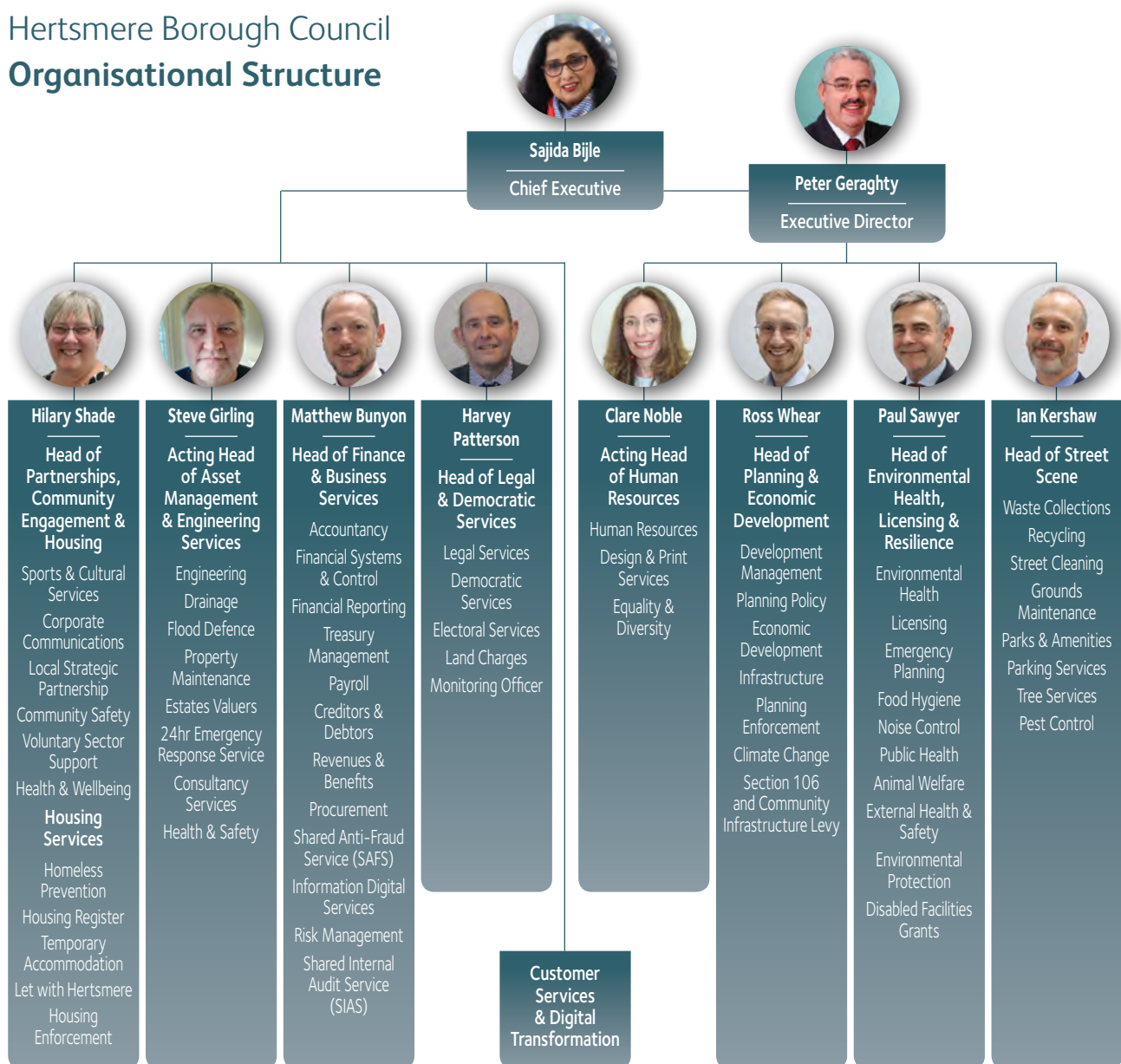
We follow a cabinet model with two Scrutiny Committees:

Policy Review and Operations along with Personnel, Licensing, Audit, Standards and Planning Committees.

Across the borough there are 39 Councillors representing 16 wards. Each serves for four years with all out elections. Following the May 2023 election the political makeup of the council is 16 Conservative, 14 Labour, 9 Liberal Democrat.

Portfolio	Cabinet member
Leader, Consultation, Communications and Asset Management	Cllr J Newmark 
Deputy Leader, Environmental Sustainability and Net Zero and Public Health	Cllr P Richards 
Communities, Neighbourhoods, Enforcement, Economic Development and Transformation	Cllr C Gray 
Housing and Housing Development	Cllr A Matthews 
Planning Infrastructure and Transport	Cllr N Oakley 
Finance and Budget	Cllr C Shenton 
Resources, IT and Digital Transformation	Cllr R Challice 
Street Scene, Parks, Leisure and Culture	Cllr C Myers 

Hertsmere Borough Council Organisational Structure



Our Senior Management Team is led at Chief Officer level by Sajida Bijle, Chief Executive, supported by Peter Geraghty, Executive Director. There are eight Service Heads, with operational responsibility for our service delivery units.

In addition to regular 1-1s between the Directors and direct Heads of Service line reports, the following officer meeting structures are in place to ensure we are able to deliver our objectives.

Chief Officer Board (COB) – Chief Executive and Executive Director with Senior Management Team members and officers invited as required. COB meets formally each fortnight to discuss live and strategic issues.

Senior Management Team (SMT) – All Service Heads in attendance along with the Corporate Communications Manager. The Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) and the Risk Manager also attend as required. The meeting takes place face to face each month and provides an opportunity

to share information, address corporate projects and agree collective responses as required.

Middle Managers meetings are held as required for wider dissemination and discussion of corporate issues and all units hold regular team meetings.

How the Council leads the local area and works with local and regional partners

The inclusion of 'We Work Together' in our newly established Corporate Values recognises our commitment to partnership working. As a small authority we see how this generates additional capacity and also recognise that we aren't always best placed to deliver certain community based services. A review of partnerships is carried out on an annual basis by Operations Review Scrutiny Committee.

Shared place ambitions, collective leadership capacity and the future focus of joint working

We work closely with our nearest district neighbours to help direct the long term future of South West Hertfordshire through the [South West Herts Joint Strategic Partnership](#). We have articulated and endorsed a vision addressing Climate change, net-zero, strategic growth opportunities, strategic infrastructure delivery, economic opportunities and housing needs, underpinned by a Sustainability Appraisal to ensure that the potential environmental, social and economic effects have been considered.

At a county level, the [Herts Growth Board](#) brings together district and county councils with the Integrated Care Board, Homes England, Hertfordshire Futures, Hertfordshire's Local Enterprise Partnership and the Police and Crime Commissioner to respond to the needs which arise from local growth. The Leader is the current Chair of the Growth Board and an active participant on the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Board.

The Chief Executive Coordinating Group meets each week to discuss countywide issues and facilitate collective decision making, sharing intelligence, learning and discussing live issues impacting the county. These meetings are supported by a number of professional or subject specific countywide groupings such as the Assistant Directors Network, the Chief Finance Officers Group, the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, Safety Advisory Group and Hertfordshire Association of Cultural Officers. We actively participate in these groups, with our Chief Executive as current Chair of the Herts Property Group.



In the past we have taken the lead on a number of countywide projects such as the [Hertfordshire Year of Culture](#) and the [ParksHerts](#) website, both involving all 11 Hertfordshire Authorities.

Staff are encouraged to attend countywide officer partnerships such as the Herts Waste Partnership as ways to investigate shared service delivery and our Executive Director is about to take up the prestigious post of President of the Planning Officers' Society which represents public sector planning professionals.

We are aware that our location to the north of London and the South of Hertfordshire presents a challenge when considering where to lean for partnerships and are open to opportunities to work more closely with our neighbours in the London Boroughs of Barnet, Harrow and Enfield.

Shared services and income generation

We have established relationships with our Hertfordshire District Partners and County Council to share services where a strong business case can be made. We also generate income through delivering services on behalf of other authorities.

Shared services

- *Shared Anti-Fraud Service* - A partnership between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire councils. This includes fraud advice and awareness incl. training, support on strategy documents, fraud reporting and investigation services, prosecution, data sharing with Government bodies;
- *Shared Internal Audit Service* - A partnership between Hertfordshire councils. SIAS undertake internal audits and report their findings to the relevant authorities;
- *Hertfordshire CCTV Partnership* - Provides 24/7 CCTV coverage for four Hertfordshire councils and private clients through the company arm of the partnership;



Homelessness prevention Shenwood Court



In partnership with the charity One YMCA, Clarion Housing Group and Hertfordshire County Council, Shenwood Court, Borehamwood is a 24 room accommodation and complex needs support service to help rough sleepers.

Build at a former under-used hostel, the scheme builds on our proactive approach to rough sleeping, which we launched with our No Second and No First Night Out Schemes, aimed at ensuring no one spends a night on the streets.

In addition to providing accommodation, residents are allocated a dedicated support worker and provided with a support plan centred around their needs. Funding for the project was secured from the County Council and a bid to DLUHC's 'Rough Sleeping Initiative'. The scheme has had a positive effect on rough sleeper and homelessness figures since it opened in 2021.

Contact: Hilary Shade, Head of Partnerships, Community Engagement and Housing



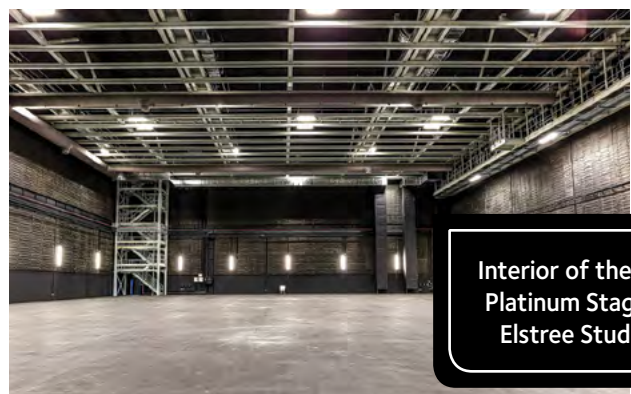
- *Broste Rivers Ltd* (parent company to *Herts Building Control Ltd*) - owned by eight Herts Authorities and established to deliver Building Control Services across founder LA areas;
- *Procurement Manager* - Shared service arrangement with Stevenage Borough Council;
- *Risk Management and Health and Safety* - Shared service arrangement with Hertfordshire County Council;
- *E-Learning portal* - shared contract with Broxbourne Borough Council;
- *Litigation Services* - shared service arrangement with Hertfordshire County Council.

Income generation

- *Elstree and Borehamwood Town Council* - Payroll function (£1,300 pa);
- *Hertsmere Developments Ltd* - provision of support services including Payroll, Accommodation, IDS (c£19.5k pa);
- *Hertfordshire Building Control* - Directors remuneration (£19,000 pa);
- *Three Rivers Parking Services* - provision of parking services to Three Rivers DC (£513,901 23/24).

Wholly owned and partnership companies

We also have two wholly owned subsidiaries and one joint venture company which have been established to support the delivery of the council's services. We have extended our governance model to make sure we have the right oversight of the companies where we are shareholders through our Shareholders and Investment Committee (SIC). This oversees the running of the companies from a council perspective ensuring that our objectives as a shareholder are met. The SIC is not decision making but makes recommendations and holds the companies to account to ensure our interests are met and that there are appropriate controls in place for good governance and risk management.



Interior of the new
Platinum Stage at
Elstree Studios

ELSTREE STUDIOS

Elstree Studios: Elstree Film Studios Limited (EFS), a wholly owned subsidiary of the council, manage the Elstree Studios site, also owned by the council, under a 30 year lease agreement and the our general fund benefits from a significant annual rental income. The Platinum Stages were built in 2022, a £15.6 million project part-funded by Hertsmere Borough Council and the government's Getting Building Fund via the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The Platinum Stages are let directly by the Council albeit they are managed by EFS under a management contract separate from the EFS lease for the rest of the site. As part of the deal, £100,000 per year from the rental income received by the council will be invested locally into creative activities, including local media and creative enterprise and initiatives. The Platinum Stage development at the Studios won Building Project of the Year at the Constructing Excellence Awards in 2023. However, current circumstances at the Studios have led to challenging times and may impact on the financial returns available to the council. Further information is provided on page 26.



Hertsmere Developments Limited: Hertsmere established a wholly owned development company, Hertsmere Developments Limited (HDL), in February 2016. It has taken some time to establish and resource the company with the first developments only coming through the pipeline in the last year. Financially, the Council have provided support to HDL by way of a flexible working capital loan facility along with specific development loans for which the company pays a commercial rate and the Council receives an investment return. HDL completed its first development at Clarendon Gardens in March 2024 with its second development at Eldon Avenue due to complete by quarter 2 of 2024/25. Over the two schemes 26 new affordable housing units will be delivered and HDL have already exchanged contracts for their sale to Hertsmere Living Limited, our innovative joint venture with Watford Community Housing Trust (see below), who will hold the properties for affordable and social rent in perpetuity.

Hertsmere Together Community reassurance



Following the Hamas Terror attacks on October 7th 2023, we worked quickly to convene a meeting of community and faith leaders, led in partnership with Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Community Security Trust. The meeting was used to listen to the concerns of the wider community, provide information from trusted sources and to provide an overview of the advice and practical support available to the local Jewish and other multi-faith groups. Following the meeting, a joint statement was issued and regular bulletins issued, ensuring that the flow of trusted information remained open. The work of Amir Choudhury from the Borehamwood Islamic Society and Joshua Moont from Borehamwood and Elstree Synagogue to maintain positive community relations during this period was recognised by the Council with a joint Civic Award at the Mayor's Civic Dinner in April.

Chief Inspector Mark Bilsdon said: "In the last six months Hertsmere has witnessed partnership working at its best. Following the October 7th attack in Israel

the local Jewish community has been fearful of an increase in Antisemitic attacks. We read headlines in the national press on an almost daily basis that there had been a significant increase in Hate Crime and the CST reported a massive increase in Hate Incidents. However in Hertsmere over the last 12 months Race or Religious crime has actually decreased. This could only have been achieved through the strong bonds between the statutory authorities, religious groups and charities in Hertsmere. These relationships have been formed over the preceding years that were then called upon following the appalling events of Oct 7th. We have worked hard as a partnership to reassure all our communities across the CSP where we have been able to now return to "business as usual." The strength of the partnership has been further evidenced more recently following the attack by Iran on Israel and we had no increase in calls from the community."

Contact: Hilary Shade, Head of Partnerships, Community Engagement and Housing

Sustainability and Net Zero



Our updated Hertsmere Vision confirms our commitment to protect the environment and accelerate to net zero following our declaration of a climate emergency in September 2019.

We have adopted a Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy along with an associated action plan in 2020 and have worked to bring forward a number of schemes to support our residents to achieve these aims:

- Solar Together Hertsmere – an innovative new scheme offering solar panels and battery storage to households in the borough through a group buying scheme;
- Home Upgrade Grant Scheme – aiming to help low income homes to be warmer, lower their carbon emissions and save money on Fuel Bills;
- Introduced Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- Participated in tree planting initiatives and worked with the County Council to give away over 6,000 trees to local residents;
- Climate Action Community Grants;
- Introduced changes to our waste collections to increase recycling;
- Implemented the 'Beryl' bike and e-bike share scheme in Borehamwood and Elstree which will extend into Bushey for 2024 enabling cycle travel between Bushey, Watford and Elstree and Borehamwood.

We are an active partner of Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, and we work together with our local authority partners and the LEP to collaborate and identify joint work programmes on environmental, climate change and sustainability issues.



Hertsmere Living Limited (HLL): In February 2022 the Council approved the formation of a stockholding joint venture company with Clarendon Living Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Watford Community Housing Trust. The main purpose of creating HLL was to retain ownership of housing developed by the Council and selected schemes from its development company, HDL, in perpetuity to provide social and affordable housing and a revenue income stream. In January 2023 the Council agreed to provide loan funding to HLL. The Council will receive an investment return on any lending which will need to be at a commercial rate in accordance with Subsidy Control rules. HLL was initially funded through an equity property transfer by Council which was matched by the equivalent cash equity provided by Clarendon Living Limited. Watford housing Community Trust provide administrative support to HLL.

Support for local residents

The last few years have challenged both us and our residents with the pandemic followed by a cost of living crisis requiring us to provide direct support, at speed, like never before. We were able to develop and use key relationships across the borough to support our residents, working particularly closely with statutory and voluntary sector partners. These relationships have strengthened and are now a key channel for resident support.

We work closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary through the Community Safety Partnership, developing and carrying out a range of initiatives together based on local intelligence including community based training and information sharing, focused interventions and diversionary activities. Recent work has included a number of Women's Safety Events, holiday activity camps and school visits.

Support for the voluntary sector

We recognise that we are not always best placed to deliver services directly to our residents so offer a range of financial support to the voluntary sector to enable them to deliver much needed services. These include five year Partnership Agreements which aim to provide some ongoing stability for key local organisations such as Citizens Advice Hertsmere and Communities 1st, our annual





community grants scheme and our Ward Improvement Initiative Scheme which allows each councillor flexibility to support projects and programmes in their local area. Further detail on the range of support provided can be found in our [Annual Review of Support to the Voluntary Sector](#).

We also work closely with local residents who want to make a difference. We support a number of Friends of groups for local parks and support volunteer litter picking events and environmental projects. We also run a number of networking groups including the Heritage Forum and Active Hertsmere. These groups support local community groups, charities and sports clubs, many of whom are volunteer run. They provide support and networking opportunities, making links and providing useful information and access to funding where possible. Our financial support to Communities 1st, our VCS infrastructure organisation, also covers the valuable work they carry out to support the wider local volunteer network.

How is the council communicating its challenges, future ambitions and organisational changes

The Council is committed to keeping local stakeholders informed and involved, and has developed a variety of methods to do so.



Our resident's magazine [Hertsmere News](#) is published three times each year and delivered to every household.

We have a range of e-bulletins which ensure that people have ready access to regular updates about services and information that interest them.

In addition our Corporate Communications team issue regular news releases and support our social media channels. We are adapting our communications, moving towards more popular short form, engaging content including videos, a move which has led to increased engagement.

Our recent resident engagement regarding council communications suggested that Hertsmere News, e-bulletins and our website are the preferred methods for communications. Moving forward, we have begun to recruit residents to a 'Citizens Panel' and have over 20 residents interested in taking part.

Our online discourse and sentiment analysis tool 'Organic' scans social media to help us better understand the issues that are important to our residents in real time, allowing us to track, react and respond as issues develop.

We also use bespoke communications solutions where needed. The development of the Local Plan has required significant specialist communications support, which we have supplemented with additional in house resources support. This involved face to face meetings in all the main residential locations in the borough and displays in libraries and community buildings, ensuring that our messages are accurate, clear and disseminated widely.

We have also taken stalls at a number of events such as the Generation X jobs fair and the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure forum (UKREiIF) describing job opportunities in the Council and Borough and more generally explaining what we do.

Our Council website is kept updated though a network of trained staff in each department. Centrally, support sits with the customer service team which works closely with Corporate Communications to ensure that content is relevant and up to date.

Our residents' magazine Hertsmere News

5

Governance and culture

The May 2023 election and the subsequent changes means that a significant proportion (17) of our 39 elected members are new to the council and the majority of these new to the role of elected member, including members of the Cabinet. New members have been supported through an intensive induction process which included mentoring from senior members, introductory sessions with the Senior Management Team and ongoing regular one to ones between Portfolio Holders and Service Heads.

The Chief Executive has a close working relationship with the Leader of the Council and has regular one to ones with him, the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition. There are also monthly scheduled meetings with the Chief Officers and Group Leaders. The Executive Director also has regular briefings with the Leader and Cabinet members. This serves to keep communications open and transparent and ensures a shared strategic direction for the council.

Council decisions are developed through a process of discussion and iteration between Officers and Members, including input from statutory officers. Reports are taken first to Chief Officer Board for discussion with the directors,

before being taken to Management Board (made up of the Cabinet and Chief Officers) before going to Cabinet Briefing, Cabinet and on to Council as required. Officers and Service Heads support this process throughout. This facilitates openness and shared understanding.

Scrutiny Committees

We recognise the value of effective Scrutiny to ensure transparency of decision making. We have two Scrutiny Committees: Policy Review which focuses on key policy development and Operations Review which has a focus on front facing service delivery. To support the committees, we have appointed a member of the Senior Management Team to attend each meeting and provide high level support to Committee Chairs, both of whom are opposition members, and with work programme development.

As part of the introduction to the ambitions of the Partnership Administration, each new portfolio holder made a presentation to Policy Review Committee, setting out existing work and ambitions for each. These have proved valuable for both Portfolio Holders and the Committee, encouraging dialogue and an opportunity to develop future work programmes.





Scrutiny's role in service Development – Enforcement Task and Finish Group



Cabinet and Member Panels

A key facet of our approach to governance is the use of Cabinet and Member Panels. These are captured as part of the Performance Management Framework and serve to provide detailed oversight of a range of functions, service areas and contracts including Financial Monitoring Panel, Asset Management Panel, Hertsmere Stakeholder Investment Committee and the Member Leisure Panel. This allows specialist knowledge to be developed, leading to better scrutiny and management. A full list of Member Panels can be found in the Council's Governance Structure diagram on page 22.

Strategic risk management arrangements and audit

Our governance framework is set out in detail in our Annual Governance Statement presented to Audit Committee in June 2024. This also provides assurance that these controls are operating effectively across the council. Our Audit Committee is a key component of the council's Corporate Governance arrangements. It provides independent assurance to the council on the adequacy of the council's governance, risk management and control frameworks. It also maintains oversight of internal audit and external audit functions.

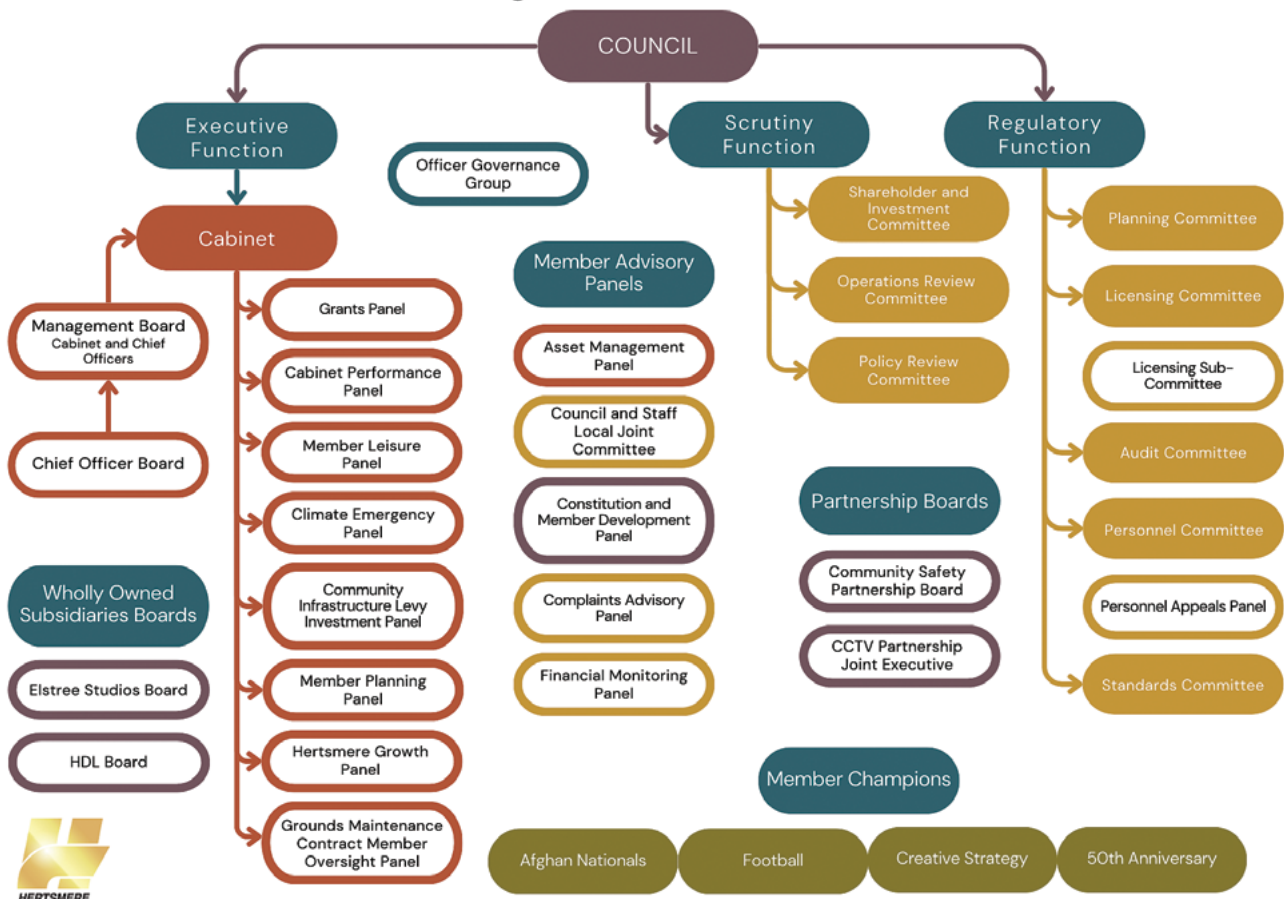
Like many local authorities we have experienced significant audit delays in our end of year accounts due to capacity issues with the external auditors. At the time of writing, our 2022/23 accounts have not been audited by our external auditors. They have now advised that it is likely that the 2022/23 statements will be signed off under certificate by the dead stop date 2024 in accordance with the new legislation following the review of public sector audits by the Financial Standards Agency. Our new external auditors from 2023/24 are KPMG and were appointed to us in December 2022 under the PSAA's national collective scheme. KPMG presented their 23/24 Audit Plan for the Audit Committee in March 2024 and officers have been working to support their preliminary audit work.

Established in July 2023, Operations Review Committee's Enforcement Task and Finish Group carried out a pre-scrutiny exercise to inform the development of a new Council Enforcement Service, a priority for the new administration. The group established a terms of reference to consider current enforcement arrangements within the council and to consider alternative delivery models. The group met three times between September and December and considered the purpose of the service alongside reviewing existing schemes in a number of other local authority areas. The Group presented its final report to Operations Review Committee in January 2024 and recommendations were incorporated ahead of a reports to Personnel Committee and Cabinet which asked the Cabinet accept the recommendations of the group in full. Recruitment to the Enforcement Team is now complete. The use of Scrutiny in this way allows backbench engagement in key decisions, garnering a range of experience and views and allowing time for in detail and proactive consideration of policy decisions.

Contact: Harvey Patterson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Paul Sawyer, Head of Environmental Health



Hertsmere Borough Council - Governance Structure



Staff engagement mechanisms and internal communications

Our staff survey from February 2024 found that 63.6% of staff feel well informed about what is happening at the Council. Each week staff receive a 'What's Going On' email which keeps everyone up to date on corporate news and projects as well as new joiners/leavers, information on staff events and opportunities that might be of interest. This is supplemented by the use of regular 'all staff' emails as required.

We have committed to carrying out more regular staff surveys through our Engage Platform. The results from the initial survey have been considered in detail at Senior Management Team and Management Board and a number of recommendations for improvement considered at the Personal Committee at the end of April including consideration of an exploration of the pay and grading structure by EELGA and an increase in relevant staff training.

More recently we have introduced 'Hertsmere in Focus' a quarterly in house magazine specifically for staff with the aim of sharing good news and updates from across the council.

During the refurbishment of the council building we held regular briefings with representatives from each Service Unit to obtain feedback and share information relating to the work, as well as publishing regular Future Work Design Bulletins to all staff.

Following the move to hybrid working we have recognised the need to ensure that channels of communication remain clear and open between us. To support this we have recently introduced Clear Review, a new employee performance management system which makes recording informal and formal interactions easier. This has been rolled out over the last six months alongside training in people performance management being delivered to all staff. As a small Council, relationships within and between teams are particularly important. The recent staff survey illustrated this with 82% feeling agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel supported by their line manager in relation to their health and wellbeing.

As part of the review of the Hertsmere Vision, we have taken the opportunity to develop and formally articulate a set of Corporate Values. These will articulate to our customers, partners and staff what's important to us and how we operate. These have been developed by a group of Officers and elected Members and are based around the

responses to a question in our recent staff survey. We are working to ensure these are embraced by staff at all levels by hosting staff briefings over the coming months and ensuring that they are reflected across our staff awards and other HR policies.

Staff receive a number of in kind benefits in addition to their salaries:

- Interest free season ticket loan;
- Free access to Inspire All Leisure facilities;
- Free use of 'Beryl' bike share scheme;
- Free car parking;
- Flexible working hours with two days flexi per month;
- Hybrid working with two days working from home each week;
- Professional Membership Fees paid
- Cycle to Work Scheme;
- Regular free/subsidised well-being initiatives such as yoga, meditation, massage, reflexology, Flu Jabs, eye tests and health MOTs;
- Employee assistance scheme including counselling and advice service

- Support for post entry learning and continued professional development;
- Financial incentive for no sickness absence.

The Local Joint Committee (LJC) is a staff and councillor forum that acts as a pre-cursor to the Personnel Committee which enables staff views to be heard on policies and working practices. Staff members of the Committee act as a voice for the staff as a whole and are the conduits for staff consultations. Recent examples include consultation on staff pay increase and the Hybrid Working Policy.

We have an active social club who organise a range of activities throughout the year including the much anticipated Christmas pizza party and staff raffle! The gardening club look after the roof garden and the plants in the offices. We also host a variety of Health and Wellbeing Events for staff and staff regularly organise cake sales to raise funding for various charities and regular collections for the local foodbank.

We have refreshed our Stars Award to reflect the newly adopted Corporate Values, aiming to recognise and reward staff that embody our values in practice. These have relaunched with the first awards made in Summer 2024.

Our Values



RESPECT

- We treat people fairly
- We are approachable and act with compassion
- We advocate for our communities

INTEGRITY

- We act with honesty and from a position of trust
- We are accountable for our actions
- We listen and communicate openly

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- We are customer focused
- We work together
- We are ambitious and open to new ideas

Our regular staff and community surveys along with our other community engagement work will enable us to measure how well we are working to our values.

Staff survey - headlines



I am proud to work for Hertsmere Borough Council

68% agree, 29% neutral, 3% disagree

I feel committed to the organisation's goals

72% agree, 25% neutral, 3% disagree

I would recommend this organisation as a great place to work

63% agree, 31% neutral, 6% disagree

I understand how my job makes a difference to our communities in Hertsmere

91% agree, 7% neutral, 2% disagree

I feel supported by my line manager in relation to my health and wellbeing

82% agree, 13% neutral, 5% disagree



Contact:
Clare Noble,
Head of Human Resources



6

Financial planning and management

Whilst we have a proven record of good financial stewardship, delivering a balanced budget and securing benefits for local people and the borough is becoming increasingly difficult. We are facing the most challenging environment for council finances for over a decade and our priority is to secure the council's long-term financial sustainability.

We currently collect approximately £84 million in Council tax from over 43,000 properties in the borough. Funding is then distributed between the County Council (78%), the Police and Crime Commissioner (10%), the Borough Council (10%) and the Town and Parish Councils (2%).

Budget 24/25

Our revised Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) agreed at Council on 28 February 2024 shows a total future budgetary gap over the four-year financial period from 2024/25 to 2027/28 of £670k, unless an appropriate course of action is taken. The revenue budget for 2024/25 is £13.984 with a Capital Investment Programme of £62.764m over the four year period 2023/24 to 2026/27. It is worth noting that the 2024/25 budget has utilised £1,100k of investment income, which is a significant increase on recent years and is due to the current high interest rates as well as loans to our subsidiary companies. There is also £1,072k from specific grants and £291k from the planned use of reserves. These funding sources are however uncertain and unsustainable in the medium to long term, hence the Council must continue to

secure more sustainable and robust sources of future financial resourcing and build further on its innovative and commercial approach to achieve the aspiration of financial self-sustainability.

A full strategic review of the Financial Strategy is being undertaken and a revised strategy will be presented to the Cabinet in 2024. Whilst this review has unfortunately been delayed due to other priorities it should be noted that elements of the Financial Strategy including the Revenue and Capital Budgets, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), risks, pressures and influences and the Capital Strategy have all been reviewed and updated annually as part of the budget process.

We take full advantage of Government Grants available to us including:

- UK Shared Prosperity Funding;
- Local Authority Housing Fund;
- Food Waste Collection Fund;
- Getting Building Fund, via the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership; maximising the opportunities these present to deliver additional services and projects.

Hertsmere's commercial approach to income generation has helped us to protect our frontline services over a period of reducing funding. Since 2011, our income has been rising year on year and in total by around 114% or £10.4m over the past fourteen years.

However, there is uncertainty in relation to these income streams as these are dependent on various external drivers in particular the local economy and its impact on levels of employment, business growth and demand for services such as homelessness and affordable housing. Alongside this, our wider ability to raise income through fees and charges continues to remain challenging.

To reflect this, we have adopted a more entrepreneurial approach and focused on expanding our ability to generate income and reduce costs by entering into partnerships with other councils and partners, leading to savings of over £1 million on a recurring basis. We have looked at how best to maximise our assets and now share a physical location with Hertfordshire Constabulary and the NHS and have pursued commercial opportunities where appropriate, such as establishing our own subsidiaries, Elstree Film Studios and Hertsmere Developments Limited.

Council tax pays for many different services across the borough



ELSTREE STUDIOS

Historically Elstree Film Studios has delivered us £4m annual income. However more recently the Studios have been impacted by the discovery of asbestos and RAAC which has had an adverse effect on the rental income with three stages out of action and the associated claims from tenants. This is obviously of great concern to the Council and therefore we have taken a number of steps to monitor and manage the ongoing situation including:



- A series of update reports to Full Council;
- The engagement of Lambert Smith Hampton to support the Council in determining the future strategy for the studios;
- Weekly internal meetings with key Officers from the Council and the Studios along with the Leader in his capacity as Chairman of the Studios Board to manage the risk.

We are actively exploring options to address the future sustainability of the Studios.

Contact: Sajida Bijle, Chief Executive



We take ongoing financial management seriously and our robust approach to budget monitoring and management is embedded within the organisation. Unit budgets are managed by Services Heads with support of the finance team. Our Member led, cross party Financial Monitoring Panel and Scrutiny Committee receive regular and detailed budget monitoring information on a monthly basis throughout the financial year, holding officers and budget holders to account and ensuring that key variances and

trends are reported and known.

Looking forward we remain open to innovative and commercial opportunities whilst investigating how we can leverage the maximum return from our assets and carrying out careful management of our budgets. We would appreciate and look forward to hearing the views and ideas of the Peer Team on how additional financial efficiencies can be achieved.

Financial decision making, internal governance arrangements and public engagement

The budget process and strategy links closely to the Hertsmere Vision and enables the delivery of the Council's priorities. The process begins each spring with senior managers initially scrutinising the current budget and medium term financial plan and identifying potential savings and efficiency proposals as well as recognising potential budgetary pressures. Budgets are then further scrutinised and challenged following the timetable set out below:

Date	Action
July	Management Team 2024/25 Budget Workshop
August – September	Services line by line budget review and development of budget proposals: pressures, efficiencies, savings, additional income
October	Management Team Budget Star Chamber: Peer challenge
November	Member Budget Panel – review of latest budget position
November	Autumn Statement (Spending Round 2022 (SR22))
November – December	Further budget reviews including all fees and charges
December	Provisional Financial Settlement announced
January	2nd Member Budget Panel – review draft balanced budget
January	Cabinet – review draft budget and recommend for consultation
January	Policy Committee review of draft budget
January – February	Public Consultation
February	Cabinet – review draft budget including consultation responses and propose final budget to Council for approval
February	Approval by Full Council

Consultation on the budget

Our constitution and best working practice requires that the Policy Review Committee, all Members of the Council and all stakeholders be consulted on the Revenue Budget prior to the Cabinet recommending that Council adopt the budget.

Public consultation takes place in January/February and for the first time residents were able to participate via our Engage platform. The consultation process included a press release in local newspapers, invitations to participate in the budget consultation via social media and on the Council's website as well as a direct mailing to local businesses. Consultees are provided with a budget overview along with

a draft budget summary and then a brief online survey. 53 survey responses were received in relation to the 24/25 budget with 46% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal to increase Council Tax by 2.99% whilst 25% were neutral.

In addition to the stakeholder consultation, staff were consulted on the proposed pay award along with Personnel Committee who consider the Pay Policy Statement and reviewed the staff consultation responses and heard from staff representatives.

Chief Officers and Heads of Service are involved and consulted throughout the budget process and their comments are included in the draft revenue budget and medium term financial plan.

7

Capacity for improvement

We are working hard to ensure we have the right capacity in the right place to deliver the aspirations set out in the Hertsmere Vision.

We, like other local authorities in the current financial climate are facing significant financial challenges. As detailed above our Medium Term Financial Plan seeks to address these. An area of focus is maximising the income from our assets and a new draft Asset Management Strategy has been prepared for adoption. The overarching objective of the Strategy is to provide a fit for purpose, value for money estate to support service delivery and corporate objectives. Excluding Elstree Studios the estate currently delivers £5m of income and we have also generated capital receipts from the estate either by sales of underperforming, non operational properties or through redevelopment.

Our position on the edge of London means that we also face considerable challenges in recruitment, particularly in specialist posts across Planning, Environmental Health, Asset Management and Waste Services. Staff turnover remains high at 17.6% (31/06/24).

We maintain a focus on recruitment and retention and we have worked hard to recruit professions to make Hertsmere an attractive place to work. Initiatives have included pay benchmarking, 'refer a friend schemes' 'retention payment scheme', amending the Flexible Working Time policy to allow up to two days of flexi leave each month alongside using Career Grade posts to develop career paths for existing employees. We've also implemented a successful 'grow your own' initiative in Waste and Street Scene focusing on HGV drivers and subscribed to the InfiniStats system of pay benchmarking.

As a small authority we recognise that internal career development can be challenging. However, we support staff to undertake professional development and training wherever possible and this is included and monitored through the Clear Review System. We regularly support a cohort of officers onto the District Councils Network Staff Development Programme and a number of service heads have undertaken training through the Institute of Directors.

Corporately sickness rates are monitored each quarter as part of the Corporate Performance Management Framework and turnover rates have been added for centralised reporting from 1 April 24. Personnel Committee carry out detailed monitoring ensuring that up to date information is used to make relevant policy decisions.

Our pay awards are decided locally, Hertsmere has opted out of the National Joint Council Scheme of conditions on pay. Our most recent pay award was 4% with an additional non-consolidated lump sum of £500 for employees earning under £35,500. In the previous year in order to provide additional support to lower paid employees, an award of £2000 or 5% (whichever is the greater) was made. In addition a non-consolidated sum of £1,500 was given to all employee earning below £50,000. We do recognise however the importance of ensuring that pay differentials, particularly how they relate to staff and managerial roles, should reflect the responsibilities and the qualifications required to carry out these roles.

We have committed to a wholesale update of the Workforce Strategy during 2024 and will use the recent staff survey to support this.



Recruitment and retention challenges

Street Scene services

Post Brexit and post Covid-19 it was evident that a significant number of permanent staff had exited the workforce and the numbers and quality of staff being recruited was reducing. These pressures were national (particularly around HGV drivers) but extended to loaders as well. This was impacting our ability to provide a reliable waste collection service

We undertook detailed analysis of where we stood in the market place in terms of pay, other points of attraction and where we recruit from. This showed that rates of pay were the key factor and therefore retention payments were put in place followed by a pay award on a sliding scale that gave higher percentage to lower paid staff. Agency agreements were reviewed and entry payments for temporary staff increased. A sustained emphasis on converting temporary to permanent staff was made. Additional training was put in place for all staff including the possibility to achieve HGV qualifications.



All collections have taken place on the scheduled week for the last 12 months



These actions have secured service resilience with all collections taking place on the scheduled week for the last 12 months, compared to 2021/22 performance where for six months a number of garden waste rounds and occasionally dry recycling rounds collection suffered delays for most collection cycles.

Ongoing, the recruitment and retention plan remains active whilst the quality of agency staff has increased and the numbers moving from temporary to permanent positions has trebled. We were able to share our experiences with other Hertfordshire authorities and benchmarking introduced by Hertsmer is now in place across the County.

Our response has been effective and was introduced with speed. Despite the fact that the root causes of the issues were out of our control, our moves to understand the market position, identifying what incentivised staff to join us and then stay was key, allowing us to recruit and then retain good quality staff.

Contact: Ian Kershaw, Head of Street Scene and Clare Noble, Head of Human Resources





Future Work Design

The Future Work Design project was and continues to be about developing a suitable hybrid working approach for our council. It built on the flexible working systems that were put in place during the pandemic and developed an approach that ensures we are well positioned to continue to deliver excellent services to our communities in Hertsmere and sustain productivity levels, whilst also offering more flexibility for our workforce where we can.

The overall project covered three main areas of:

- Workforce Planning and Hybrid Working Policy;
- Decluttering and Paper Light Project;
- Reconfiguration of Office Space.

In terms of workforce planning, we engaged EELGA to undertake an appreciative inquiry alongside staff and elected member feedback, and a review of best practice in workplaces elsewhere, to help develop the fundamental principles that should be adopted for our local hybrid working model. The aim was to strike a balance between affording employees the opportunity to spend some time working remotely if they wish, whilst also maintaining cohesion within the respective teams and keeping the civic offices as a thriving hub for collaborative work that is 'open for business'. This is supported by our Hybrid Working Policy which enables employees to work from home up to two days a week.

The offices had not seen any significant investment over a period of 30 years and a significant amount of paper records and files were stored onsite. A major declutter and scanning 'Paper Light' project has digitised our records.

Alongside this we engaged space planning consultants, Moveworks, to help us to redesign our workspaces. Intrinsic to that was the agreement with Hertfordshire Constabulary to occupy space on the first floor as an expansion to their existing facilities on the ground

floor. This has provided the opportunity for redesign as well as bringing much-needed revenue to the council.

The Senior Management Team agreed with Moveworks a series of principles for the project which aimed to provide a modern, clean and comfortable workspace with a mix of formal and informal meeting spaces. A clear desk policy and lockers for each member of staff facilitates a hot-desking approach.

Works commenced in 2022 and after some detailed procurement, finance and planning processes we awarded the contract for the main works required to refurbish, re-plan and furnish the civic and depot offices to Alcema who have a strong track record for delivery. The logistics of completing this project in the shortest time with the least disruption to services with little spare space was complex, but Alcema worked with Moveworks on dovetailing all the necessary moves and activities. The contractors started work on 3 April 2023 and building works on the offices carried on throughout 2023 with workspaces being stripped out and rebuilt to the new designs and new IT provision installed to facilitate hybrid working. The main works to the offices allowed for occupation of new spaces between July and October 2023, however works are still ongoing to the Council Chamber and the Member's areas. Throughout the works staff and Members were kept informed through regular Future Work Design bulletins, and each team had a Move Champion to represent their respective service areas.

The aim of the project was to modernise our work space to match the authority's recently adopted hybrid working model and has delivered a working environment that is updated, fit for purpose and a pleasant place to work in.

Contact: Hilary Shade, Head of Partnerships, Community Engagement and Housing



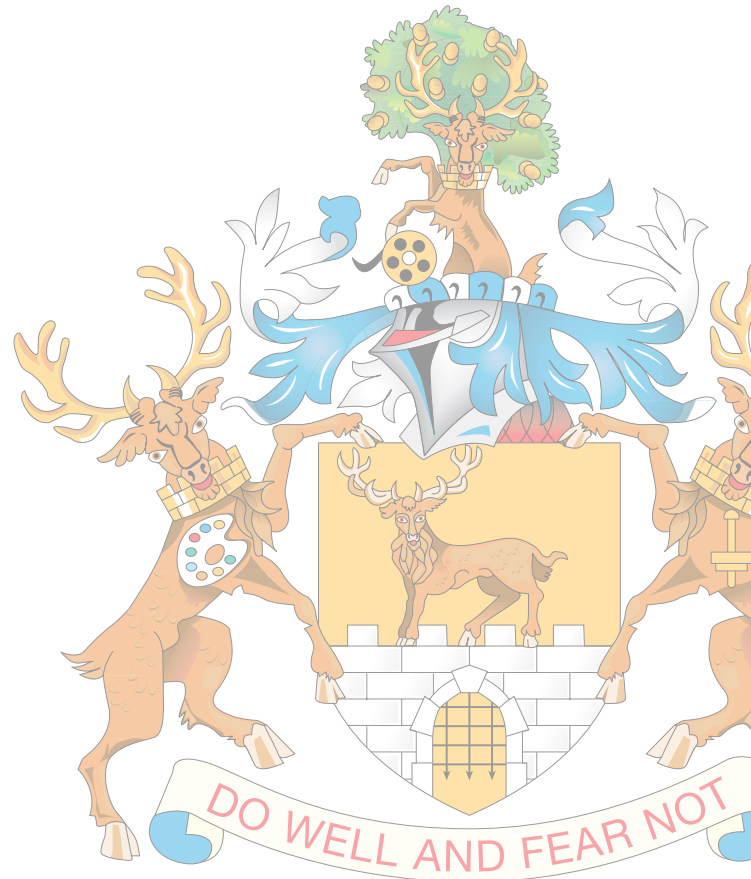
8 What's next?

The first year under the Partnership Administration has been one of learning and development, establishing new working relationships whilst maintaining high quality services and delivering a number of 'must do' programmes.

As we look to the future, our ambitions remain high. We recognise the challenging environment in which we're operating but are keen to maintain momentum developed over the last months, delivering our new Local Plan and determining a future Strategy for Elstree Studios are just two of the major pieces of work set out in our Corporate Plan 24/25.

Recognising the size of the authority in relation to its ambitions, we want to ensure that we have the workforce and expertise to deliver. It's important that we retain, encourage and promote our people and create the right conditions for them to flourish and give their best. We hope the Peer Review can help us focus on those aspects that we need to strengthen or enhance in order to achieve and provide us with opportunities to learn from best practice.

Reflecting on our 50th Anniversary as an opportunity to celebrate where we've come from but also look to the future, we are hopeful that the Corporate Peer Challenge will help to ensure that we are best placed to move forward with our Vision.



Case study:

Economic development - Hertsmere Works

The Council has reinvigorated its approach to Economic Development since 2020 and the subsequent adoption of the Economic Development Strategy in 2022.

Initial work began to network with local businesses with the aim of understanding local needs. Following this initial period of relationship building, a programme of support has been developed with initiatives including:

- **Business Engagement** - To date over 330 businesses have been engaged with on a 1-1 basis over two separate programmes focusing on strategically and economically significant businesses and small micro-sized businesses and retailers;
- **Networking** - Our quarterly networking events are regularly attended by around 100 local businesses. Separate more focused events have evolved including a number of training and development opportunities including Google Digital Training, Managing Business Risk, a Sustainability Conference and Disability Confident event;
- **Newsletter** - delivered to over 4000 inboxes our six weekly newsletter provides information on funding, events and local support available to them.
- **Town Centre Development** - 2024 has seen us take our first steps towards the establishment of a Town Centre Partnership for Borehamwood. We have brought together a range of stakeholders and businesses together to develop a shared vision and establish more collaborative management between the local authority and retailers;
- **Film and TV** - recognising the impact of Film and Television production to the local economy, we have established a post within the team with specific responsibilities for the sector, acting as a local link into the Hertfordshire Film office and building on our heritage offer. We have held our first Creative Forum, specifically focused on Creative Businesses and supporting other local firms to capitalise on the opportunities that the creative sector brings to the local economy. Our first event was attended by over 30 interested parties;
- **Skills Development** - Meeting quarterly, the Hertsmere Skills Board brings together local businesses with the University, Herts Local Enterprise Partnership and the Council to look at difficulties relating to skills in the borough;



- **Business Directory** - Hertsmere Works was launched as our online business directory and has over 170 businesses registered providing a single source for local people to find local businesses;
- **Careers Fairs** - Generation Hertsmere, now building to its third successive year is our local schools jobs fair, supported by the Local Enterprise Partnership's Careers Hub. It enabled a large number of young people from all secondary schools in the borough to engage with local employers ranging from Canada Life to Sky and Warner Brothers through to the Police, Royal Air Force, life sciences and IT;
- **Employment Support** - Our Community Renewal Funded 'Community Wealth Building' programme delivered in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions and Clarion Futures supports local unemployed people into work. The scheme has led to over 679 total job offers and 328 further training places with a 70% conversion into work from a total cohort of 970 local people over two years;

Much of this work is delivered in partnership organisations such as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and we have built strong delivery relationships with these and other key stakeholders, supporting their activities in the area where we can, including allocating UKSPF funding to the LEP to support local job search and business support activities in the local area.

We have found that delivering this multi-faceted programme of events and support has allowed us to build an understanding of our role as an enabler to grow the local economy for the benefit of those who live and work in Hertsmere.

Contact: Ross Whear, Head of Planning and Economic Development

Case study:

Hertsmere Cancer Screening Uptake Project

Our award nominated Cancer Screening Uptake Project, has brought together local Primary Care Networks and wider system partners to collectively target the health inequalities in cancer screening uptake and diagnosis.

The project team have adopted the principles behind the NHS's the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, bringing together the wider system to build a culture of collaboration, pride and the time and space needed within the partnership to problem solve, build relationships and trust between primary care, other system partners and our local communities.

The project team identified a need to target low cancer screening uptake in the borough. At the start of the project, Hertsmere had the lowest uptake of breast, bowel and cervical screening invites in Hertfordshire and a lower uptake rate than England. The funding from Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council has been used to identify patients who have not responded to screening invites and those with increased cancer risk. Proactively contacting these patients has allowed the team to fully address any concerns that the individual might have, whilst also offering the option of booking in for an appointment while on the call. This approach builds on the vaccination tracing work during the pandemic and has been extremely well received by both partners and patients. At the time of writing, the cervical cancer screening rate for the participating eight

practices was 63.45%, from 1 December 2022 - 28 February 2024. The project has booked 2213 cervical screening appointments from 4751 answered calls and the current screening rate has improved to 76.61%. This success also meant that the 9th GP practice in Hertsmere has also joined the cervical cancer calls from 23 November 2023. During which time their screening rate has moved from 66.87% to 68.31%.

The breast cancer screening calls started in January 2023, the screening rate was 63.62%, since the first call was made 290 appointments have been booked from 713 answered calls (calls were limited to coordinate with the North London Breast Cancer Screening team's processes), and the screening rate is now 73.16%.

In addition, the project has also been contacting black men over the age of 45, who are at a greater risk of developing prostate cancer. These men received a text with a link to the Prostate Cancer UK risk checker and were invited to respond to the text to contact their practice and talk to a GP. Men who have not responded to the text were called by the GP Federation, so far 139 calls have been made and 101 PSA appointments have been booked moving the screening rate for this cohort from 18.5% to 55.8%.

Contact: Hilary Shade, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement





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