



MAKING  
**WATFORD**  
BOLD & PROGRESSIVE

# Watford Borough Council's Corporate Plan to 2020

2017/18



## Introduction to our Corporate Plan

Last year we introduced our new vision, priorities and values for Watford and made a clear statement about our ambitions for the town to 2020.

Over the past year, we have lived up to our values of being 'bold' and 'progressive' and have made great progress in delivering the commitments set out in our Corporate Plan. At the same time we have taken time to look at our emerging opportunities and challenges and reviewed this plan to make sure we are still on the right course for Watford and the council.

Our service improvement proposals, which we highlighted in last year's Plan, are making great strides but we realised that we could achieve even more by bringing together our digital plans for the council and the town into an overall transformation programme, which we have called 'Watford 2020'. Our customers are at the heart of Watford 2020 as is our determination to retain the high quality services that residents value

We have included our drive to secure our financial future in Watford 2020 as the programme is critical to making sure we are in a good position financially by the time the money we get from government ends in three years' time. This involves what we are doing to be a more business-like council and ensuring all our services are as cost effective and efficient as possible. It also sets us the task of making sure we maximise our income and are getting the best use out of our property assets.

The town's major projects are making great strides but remain a critical area for focus as delivery is vital to the on-going success and prosperity of the town. Over the lifetime of this Plan we will see some of the transformational projects we have been driving and supporting come to fruition including the exciting development at Intu and Watford Health Campus. Last year, we marked a fantastic milestone for the Campus with the opening of the new road to Watford General Hospital and the start of the first business zone which will deliver new jobs to the town later this year.

Watford continues to be a place where people want to be. This doesn't happen by accident, keeping somewhere vibrant, attractive and welcoming takes effort and really bold forward-thinking. Sometimes, the decisions are difficult and certainly not universally popular. What is important is that, as a council, we have recognised that change will happen to the town, whether we get involved or not. Our role is to ensure this change or growth is shaped in the best way possible and that it brings real benefits to the town. A good example, is Intu and the fantastic new centre that will be opening next year – by working with Intu, the council has facilitated a town centre cinema, which local people said was a priority for Watford. Other benefits include generating money to invest in our parks and open spaces and sports and leisure facilities.

A key theme throughout this Plan is the importance we place on communicating with our residents and community and ensuring you have every opportunity to feedback to us and share your views. I, along with your local councillors, welcome hearing from you and would encourage you to get involved in shaping our plans and decisions.

As ever, if you have any comments on the Corporate Plan, our plans, major projects or the Council, then email me on [themayor@watford.gov.uk](mailto:themayor@watford.gov.uk) or call 01923 226400 and ask for the Mayor's office.

**Baroness Dorothy Thornhill MBE**

**Elected Mayor of Watford**

# Shaping our Corporate Plan

Our Corporate Plan sets out our ambitions for Watford and how we will deliver these commitments by 2020. It is underpinned by our corporate vision, values and objectives as well as the Mayor's priorities for the town during her fourth term in office.

As our organisation's key strategic programme, the Corporate Plan sets our direction and programme of work for the medium term. For 2017, whilst we have undertaken a review of our corporate projects and areas of work, we are building on last year's plan making sure that we capture our achievements as well as carrying forward areas of work still to be completed. At the same time our review enables us to identify new and emerging projects that support our vision and deliver our priorities.

Through our review we remain committed to some key principles in shaping what we do:

- we cannot meet the financial challenge and the opportunities to be more commercial and entrepreneurial without making fundamental changes to the way we do business
- we cannot afford to scale back our ambition for the borough and the Council.
- we need to be more creative, innovative and resilient if we want to continue to be successful as we go forward.

## **Watford is changing**

We know Watford is changing. Its success as a town means it is an extremely popular place to live, work and visit. This means the pace of economic and population growth is high. This has impacted on house and rental prices over the last few years and housing is now certainly top of the challenges we need to address as a council. We also know we have a shifting demographic, with a growing young, diverse population, and rising pressure on local infrastructure and services. We will be a town of 100,000 people this year.

Additionally, the expectations of our communities continue to rise; they expect high quality and responsive services and a Council that is prepared to listen to them and deliver services not just in office hours but in many cases 24/7. The pace of life is fast, supported by new technologies, and citizens expect their councils to modernise in line with the opportunities new technologies bring.

We are committed not just to keeping up with change but to look to the leading edge of what new technology can deliver where it supports our goals.

## **Fulfilling our ambitions**

Our Corporate Plan needs to reflect how we can seize every opportunity that comes our way to deliver new homes, create jobs and opportunities for our residents and to make economic growth work for Watford so that our residents can benefit and share in our borough's success. We need to understand how we can secure our own finances and protect services we know are important to residents whilst also ensuring we listen and respond to our community in a way that meets their needs. We need to ensure that housing growth takes place in sustainable locations with appropriate infrastructure in place and that the Town's character and residential areas are protected.

A critical driver for this Corporate Plan is our need to respond to the government's on-going reduction in funding to local government with the removal of revenue support grant by 2020. The revenue support grant has been an integral part of funding for local government for many years and so this presents a real step change for all councils. For Watford Borough Council, it means a loss of around of £3million of revenue (on top of the £5million worth of savings we have already had to make since 2010), which was a significant proportion of our budget (see pages 21-23) for details of our budget and financial planning). However, it also means that, if we get it right, we have the opportunity to plan and manage our finances in a way that is no longer dependent on central government funding decisions which means our financial future is very much in our own hands.

Everything we outline in this Plan is informed and influenced by our requirement to secure our financial future without diminishing our ambitions. This is why it is so important that this Plan sits alongside our Medium Term Financial Strategy. Together they set out how we will establish the basis to deliver on our key priorities, which will maintain Watford as an exceptional borough providing opportunities for all that live, work and visit here.

This Corporate Plan, therefore, responds to our new vision by challenging us to continue to be bold and progressive, despite the constraints, so that we create the environment the Council needs to thrive and fulfil its ambitions for the town.

## **We will need to be an excellent organisation**

To do these things and to do them well, we will need to maintain and achieve high performance across all of our functions. We need to have the people, skills and key infrastructure, such as IT systems, in place so that we can be dynamic and responsive, fast and flexible, innovative and creative. We also want to be outward looking as an organisation, engaging with our communities and building partnerships across the private, public and voluntary sectors that support us in delivering for the town. For our staff, this Corporate Plan provides the direction on how they can contribute to the town and the Council's success and challenges them to look at how they work to see if there are new and better ways to deliver services.

In the last year, our transformational Watford 2020 programme has set us on a clear path to delivering this excellence. We have engaged with our staff and members on what this means for them as to be successful we know everyone needs to be involved and play their part.

## **How we will deliver**

This plan outlines how we will deliver our priorities whilst ensuring we maintain the high quality we have achieved in delivering our core areas of business such as waste and recycling, street cleaning, revenues and benefits and planning performance. Indeed, ensuring we manage performance across the Council so that our key business areas provide the service levels our residents expect is a key theme underpinning everything set out in this plan. The Watford 2020 programme is the overarching transformation plan:

## OUR WATFORD 2020 PROGRAMME

Through our Watford 2020 programme we are embarking on a major change and improvement journey. This programme isn't just about transforming how the council operates, but also providing a digital infrastructure for our town that provides local businesses with a competitive advantage and enhances the quality of life of residents.

A programme plan for Watford 2020 has been developed and includes four streams of work:

**Digital Watford** – we are delivering a series of projects that are focused on creating an effective digital infrastructure within and outside the Council; transforming how Council services are provided and ensuring Watford businesses and residents have access to the technology and skills to maximise opportunities.

**Service Innovations** – we are embarking on a programme of service reviews to streamline council services ensuring they are joined up, digital and customer focused.

**Commercialism** – we are positioning the Council to generate income by functioning as a commercially astute business with an entrepreneurial approach to developing new opportunities whilst remaining faithful to our core values.

**Accommodation review** - we are looking at the Town Hall complex to make sure we are making the most of it as an asset, seeing if there is scope to share our buildings and if we could design it better to support more efficient working.

**Supporting Strategies** – we are developing and initiating a range of strategies to ensure the culture, skills, communication and technology is in place to deliver the ambitions of the programme.

# Part One

## The Council's Vision, Priorities and Values

### OUR VISION: To create a bold and progressive future for Watford

Our vision reflects our approach to the current challenges and opportunities facing the Council as an organisation and the town as a place to live, work, visit and study. We want to champion our town so that it is a place where all our communities thrive and prosper, benefitting from strong economic growth and good quality local services and facilities. This will require the Council to be innovative and explore new ways of working and champion initiatives that will transform the town and the organisation. More of the same isn't going to secure the future we want for Watford, which is why **bold** and **progressive** lie at the heart of our ambitions.

### OUR FIVE PRIORITIES:

Supporting this vision, the Council has 5 priority areas of work. Our priorities are critical to the Council achieving successful outcomes for its ambitions for the town.

1. Identify ways to manage the borough's housing needs
2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity
3. Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities
4. Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community
5. Secure our own financial future

In addition, our core, day to day business underpins everything we do and all of our work and effort contribute to our success. In particular, we recognise the importance of 3 key areas in making us an effective organisation, in touch with our residents and delivering in the areas and in a way that they expect. These are:

- Effective two-way engagement and communication
- Sound management and high performance
- Improving the town's environment.

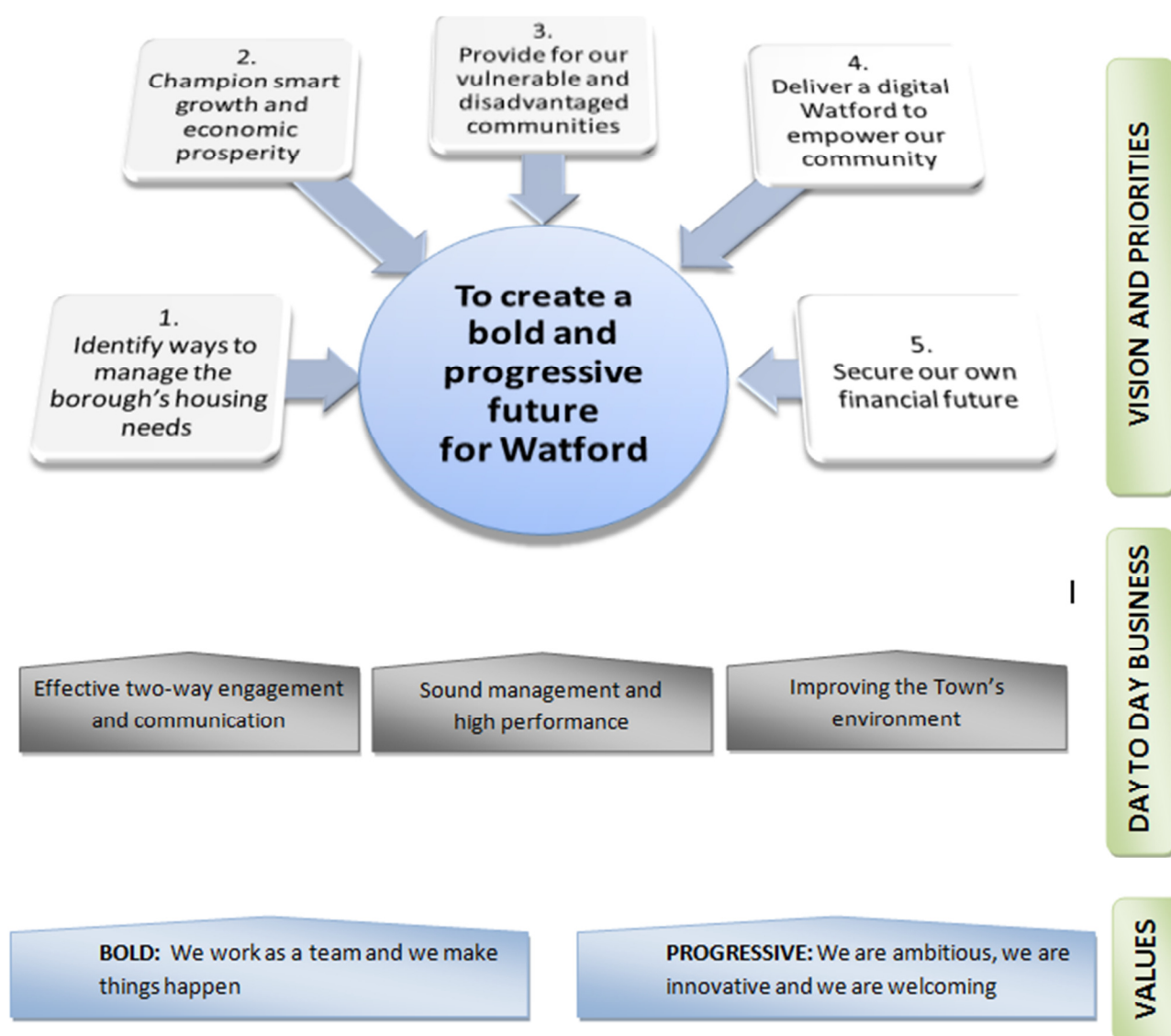
### OUR VALUES:

Our revised corporate values reflect the behaviour we expect our staff to demonstrate in their work and clearly establish how they contribute to delivering our new vision.

1. **BOLD:** We work as a team and we make things happen
2. **PROGRESSIVE:** We are ambitious, we are innovative and we are welcoming

Our values focus on taking forward our new corporate agenda. We are more confident that the behaviours of being fair, showing integrity, and being inclusive are now embedded across the organisation.

## OUR CORPORATE FRAMEWORK





# Part Two

## Watford today

Watford is a place to be proud of, and as a council, we plan to keep it that way. We value our clean streets, well-kept parks, and places for children to play, the vibrant high street and diverse range of activities and facilities across our borough. We have a diverse and cohesive community who add to the vibrancy of our town and our residents are generally satisfied with the Council and their local services. Understanding our town and our community helps us to identify what shapes Watford and the challenges and opportunities we face as a council to champion our town.



**Population: 96,400** over an area of **8.5** sq. miles

Young population: average age **36.46** years

Diverse population: **38%** BME

**39,052** households

Average household size: **2.46** people

High proportion of single person households: **31%**

High number of households in rental accommodation: **37%**



**High growth in house prices and demand:**

Most in demand place to live on the tube map (2015)



**Voted 9<sup>th</sup> happiest place to live in the country**

**8 Green Flag award winning parks**



**Career Builders:** Singles and couples in their 20s and 30s progressing in their field of work from commutable properties – most common MOSAIC group: **12%**



**5<sup>th</sup> best connected borough in UK - M1, M25, West Coast Mainline, Overground, Underground**

Direct services to London Euston in **16** mins



**3,500** businesses    **57,000** jobs

Low unemployment / high level of qualifications

**48%** of Watford employment is in Knowledge Sectors

**12.7%** self-employment rate



**72%** of residents are satisfied with how Watford BC runs things (2<sup>nd</sup> highest in Hertfordshire: 2015)



# Part Three

## How we will deliver our priorities

### 1. Identify ways to manage the borough's housing needs

Watford is a popular place to live. Its location close to London, great road and rail links, good schools and employment opportunities have seen demand for homes in the town increase over recent years. However, it has also meant rising house prices and rental costs, which has put affordability under pressure.

As demand and housing costs rise, we have seen unparalleled numbers of people presenting at the Council with housing issues and the solutions available to us have been severely under pressure. We have already started some innovative work to tackle the supply of housing available, particularly affordable housing and additional temporary accommodation for those in urgent need, including setting up a joint venture with the Watford Community Housing Trust to deliver new homes.

#### Our challenges

- Over-heated housing market – high demand and high prices
- High use of temporary accommodation
- Affordability under pressure
- High rental costs
- Overcrowding and deteriorating standards in rental homes
- Growing population
- Limited space in the borough for new homes
- Household and demographic changes

#### Our opportunities

- New models of delivery including the joint venture
- Strategic sites identified for the delivery of new homes

#### Highlights of what we have achieved so far:

- 245 homes delivered (2015-16)
- Supply of sites for 13.4 years identified
- 'Skyline – Watford's Approach to Taller Buildings' approved to set out our approach to taller buildings, including design criteria; tall buildings modelled to understand impact on townscape
- Joint Venture Companies with Watford Community Housing Trust established and first project to deliver temporary accommodation and new homes progressed (Tolpits Lane)
- Modular temporary accommodation solution to deliver cost effective temporary accommodation identified
- Proposals for the first homes on Watford Health Campus submitted (Willow Lane) following engagement with local community on the plans

**We will continue to deliver this priority by:**

- Supporting the continuing delivery of the Council's target of 260 new homes per annum
- Delivering the next phase of our Local Plan so that it reflects the borough's housing needs
- Completing the first new homes and temporary accommodation (including 40 homes at Tolpits Lane) delivered through the Hart Homes Joint Venture and explore further opportunities
- Securing planning approval and completing the delivery of the modular temporary accommodation
- Updating planning policy statements on affordable housing
- Working with our Watford Health Campus partners on the delivery of new homes at the Willow Lane and Riverside zones, including securing affordable homes
- Securing new homes, including affordable homes as part of the town's major projects including the Western Gateway, Watford Junction and further homes on Watford Health Campus and on other potential sites such as appropriate garage sites
- Delivering the Housing Improvement Plan to
  - Deliver a step change in service delivery through new ways of working, better business processes, a review of service structure and roles, improved communications and stakeholder involvement and new pathways for service users
  - Deliver a review of housing-related policies (Nominations Policy, Homelessness Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy)
  - Respond to the Homeless Reduction Bill requirements
  - Undertake move of Disabled Facilities Grant to Hertfordshire County Council
  - Maximise access to available funding
  - Improve temporary accommodation income collection
  - Ensure fit for purpose and cost effective temporary accommodation provision
  - Access new private sector provision

## 2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity

Watford has been extremely successful in building a strong local economy. By being forward thinking and having the right plans in place, we have secured local employment, retained businesses and remain an attractive place for investment. We have also ensured that the growth has delivered real benefits for the town (such as a new regional shopping centre being built which will house the town's first IMAX cinema) and generated money to support local services.

The Council has played its part through its own investment in the town, such as the improvements to Cassiobury Park (in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund), all our other parks and open spaces (with a record number of Green Flags), and by securing the right partnerships to take forward some of our major projects such as Charter Place (Intu), Watford Business Park and Watford Health Campus.

Even with so much achieved, we know the town cannot stand still if it wants to remain successful and prosperous. As a council we want to shape our town, which is why we are proud of our Local Plan that clearly sets out our commitment to well-planned and managed growth – without this we would be at risk of poor quality, unplanned developments and unchecked back filling. This is what happens in some other areas. But we know smart growth also means addressing issues such as congestion and parking, which are important to local people so securing the right infrastructure to support growth is vitally important.

### **Our challenges**

- Competing demands for land within the borough
- Limited land for any new housing / new business / industrial space
- Making sure the necessary infrastructure (roads, schools, public transport) are in place to tackle issues such as congestion
- Shortage of fit for purpose office and light industrial accommodation
- Ensuring the quality of the design of new developments so that they enhance the town's overall environment and promote the wellbeing of residents
- Ensuring sufficiently skilled local labour force to meet needs of local employers and businesses

### **Our opportunities**

- Location remains a strong driver for prosperity – regional centre for retail, culture and leisure
- Sound Local Plan provides robust framework for managing growth
- Strategic development sites located close to good transport links
- Inward investment in Watford – Intu, Watford Health Campus, Watford Business Park, Metropolitan Line Extension

### Highlights of what we have achieved so far:

- Consultation held with our community on the next phase of our Local Plan to shape the future of the town
- Thomas Sawyer Way, the new road to improve access to Watford General Hospital and open up the Watford Health Campus site for regeneration, completed and opened on time
- First business zone on Watford Health Campus (Industrial Zone South), which will deliver local jobs, started
- Asset managers appointed for Watford Business Park with first phase of redevelopment underway
- Planning application submitted for Ascot Road redevelopment
- Multi-million pound upgrade of Charter Place started and premier department store secured as anchor store
- Cassiobury Park 'Parks for People' completed; bandstand relocated to the park, new visitor hub building completed and refurbished paddling pools ready in time for 2017 summer season
- New Gaelic Football facility opened
- Third year of our successful Big Events programme delivered generating vibrancy and footfall in the top of the town
- Developed a narrative on the benefits of our approach to smart growth to inform our community and build understanding

### We will continue to deliver this priority by:

- Delivering the next phase of our Local Plan including submission to the planning inspectorate
- Progressing investment in major projects, infrastructure and public realm:
  - Town Hall Square completion
  - Watford Health Campus: completion of first business zone / industrial zone south (known as Trade City Watford), approval of revised masterplan and rebranding, car park strategy for Watford General Hospital
  - Western Gateway
  - Watford Junction first phase planning applications including infrastructure improvement plan agreed
  - Clarendon Road new office construction progressing
  - Watford Business Park, including Zone A venture partner, achieved
  - Charter Place / Intu completion including aligning leases across both sites and delivering High Street resurfacing
  - Metropolitan Line Extension construction
  - Ascot road start on site

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replacing the lifts at our satellite car parks and renewing the public realm</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the One Bell conversion and ensuring public rights of way are secured</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering Clarendon Road / Beechen Grove enhancements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council on tackling congestion and promoting more sustainable methods of transport including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ improving cycling lanes</li> <li>○ promoting cycle hire</li> <li>○ promoting car clubs</li> <li>○ improving walking routes</li> <li>○ extending electric charging points network</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership to deliver our Economic Growth Delivery Plan and providing the strategic lead for:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Inward investment and business retention</li> <li>○ Skills brokerage and sector skills development</li> <li>○ Growing Watford's knowledge economy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering the first phase of Sports Facilities Strategy             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cassiobury Park: official opening of new hub and paddling pools and events programme</li> <li>○ Woodside: masterplan approved</li> <li>○ Oxhey Park North including River Colne improvements</li> <li>○ Gaelic Football Club: completed, Club relocated with an agreed engagement strategy</li> <li>○ Cassiobury Site (Fullerians) investment</li> <li>○ Cassiobury Croquet Club improvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a community arts strategy to support and maximise our cultural offer across the borough</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining investment options for New Watford Market and renew outdoor market livery</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking forward Watford Museum Heritage Lottery Fund improvement project</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Watford BID to ensure the vibrancy and success of the town centre, including preparing for renewal</li> </ul>

**Smart growth** is a better way to build and maintain our towns and cities.

Smart growth means building urban, suburban and rural communities with housing and transportation choices near jobs, shops and schools. This approach supports local economies and protects the environment. Our Local Plan has, at its heart, the positive outcomes that can be achieved through smart growth.

### 3. Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities

We are fortunate in Watford that the majority of our population enjoy a high standard of wellbeing, healthy lives and are able to access help when they may need it. We recognise that this is not the case for everyone and people's circumstances can change. We need to understand where these pressure points are for our town, and for individuals, and ensure that we are working with our partners to minimise the issues vulnerability can bring. Through our commitment to equalities and diversity, we will ensure that changes to service delivery as well as our strategies and policies take into account the impact on our community as part of our decision-making process.

#### **Our challenges**

- Harnessing prosperity to benefit all our citizens
- Changing demographics and emerging communities
- Impact of cuts and changes to benefits and other support
- Pockets of deprivation and health inequalities within the borough
- Changing and reducing services provided by other agencies such as health and social care

#### **Our opportunities**

- Targeting our support to those most in need
- Building on successful projects to date, such as the Street Improvement Project and Herts Healthy Homes project, and accessing funding through use of data and intelligence for targeted projects
- Working with partners, such as the police, to understand vulnerabilities and our emerging communities

#### **Highlights of what we have achieved so far:**

- Supported by the Community Sport Activation Fund, delivered an exciting range of sports activities to get people in central Watford more active and seen 3,500 local people get involved
- Children's weight and eating habits tackled through our 'Fit 4 Fun' programme run through our local schools
- Free swim and gym scheme for 8-15 year olds during the Easter and summer holidays offered through our two leisure centres
- Through our Street Improvement Programme made a real difference to Cassio Road by working with our partners to address some of the issues that can impact on the quality of life in an area and for local people
- Free adventurous play all year round championed through our review of play facilities and two exciting playgrounds for young people with state of the art play equipment will be ready for opening this spring

- A £1.54 million insulation project to insulate 127 homes on the Harebreaks estate completed. The work, which was majority funded by government grants, is expected to save residents £33,000 collectively each year on residents' energy bills
- Hertfordshire Healthy Homes (HHH) project supported for the fifth year with the addition of a Greenaider gardening project to help vulnerable residents with their gardens and to engage with other help agencies. Watford had the most HHH scheme visits this year across all Hertfordshire councils enabling onward referrals to 18 different schemes and support organisations

#### **We will continue to deliver this priority by:**

- Opening our new adventurous playground at Harwoods and launching our Easter and summer play programme for 5-15 year olds
- Continuing to deliver our Street Improvement Programme
- Delivering a refreshed Sports Development Framework to support improved health and wellbeing
- Undertaking a review of our community assets to ensure they are being best used to help our third sector support our communities, including our more vulnerable residents
- Establishing a community use agreement for our Exchange Road property
- Reviewing our three year Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework to ensure it continues to promote the wellbeing of our town and our residents
- Providing the strategic lead for promoting economic equality through our Economic Development Growth Plan
- Working with our partners to deliver projects to improve housing and health conditions in the borough through the delivery of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and the Health through Heat project
- Reviewing our council tax reduction scheme
- Working with partners to understand our community and the issues that are affecting our vulnerable and disadvantaged residents so we can target our services effectively and ensure our partners, including Hertfordshire County Council, are also addressing issues where there is most need (social care, children's services, youth)
- Developing a corporate approach to mental health issues in the borough



## 4. Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community

Our Watford 2020 programme highlights the transformation that can be achieved through harnessing the opportunities offered through new technology and the digital world.

Through Watford 2020, our aim is to empower local people and communities, to improve their lives, make things easier and quicker, and to give them access to things they might not have been able to take advantage of before.

We also aim to support businesses to better exploit the digital age, to promote their services, create new avenues of business and become better connected.

### Our challenges

- Speed and complexity of some of our processes and transactions
- Citizen expectations on how they access our services
- Current workforce skills in the digital arena
- Speed of technological change
- Not all residents and businesses have online or digital skills or experience

### Opportunities

- Harnessing the potential of our new website to improve customer experience, engagement with our community and to reduce costs where appropriate
- New model of IT delivery and IT transformation will support change
- High level of take up of new technologies and social media in Watford

### Highlights of what we have achieved so far:

- Leadership and direction for the digital agenda in Watford is now being driven by our Digital Watford Board
- Through our Watford 2020 programme set out how we plan to transform the town, the council and our customers' experience through better use of technology and being more innovative in our digital thinking by delivering the following 5 strands of work:
  - Digital Watford (incorporating Digital council, Digital town and Digital customer)
  - Service innovation
  - Commercialisation
  - Accommodation Review
  - Strengthening our underpinning strategies to support delivery (e.g. HR, ICT)
- The face to face customer experience of visiting the Town Hall has been improved through a refurbishment of our Customer Service Centre so that it provides greater digital self-serve opportunities through:
  - Queue management system which is improving people's waiting experience
  - Redesigned reception area
  - 'Meet and Greet' role to provide greater support for those visiting

- Delivered free WiFi to our town centre , which has attracted over 40,000 registered users
- Provided more services online so people have more options on how, and when, they interact with us, such as:
  - waste and street care issues can now be easily reported using a new online reporting tool
  - council tax and business rates are easy to pay with a new online payment tool and residents can sign up for paperless billing
  - parking services such as applying for visitor permits and appealing parking fines can now be done directly through our website with licensing, building control and planning services to follow shortly
- Opened up communications and engagement channels with the introduction of the Govdelivery electronic newsletter to our residents

#### **We will continue to deliver this priority by:**

- Underpinning everything we do with a robust, forward looking and innovative ICT Strategy
- As part of our Watford 2020 programme:
  - delivering an ‘internet of things’ pilot
  - procuring a WiFi app for Watford town centre
  - opening up opportunities for wireless broadband operators to deliver their services to businesses across the town by utilising rooftop space
  - completing our customer service redesign for face to face visitors
  - delivering the next stage of the website project as part of our digital journey to fully maximise its potential to improve: customer experience, access to services and engagement and communication with our residents including a ‘citizen accounts’ solution
  - reviewing our accommodation, ways of working and technology so that we can be more effective and responsive to customer and service needs
  - reviewing our services to ensure that how we work is customer focused and as efficient as possible
- Building a new approach to two way engagement with our residents through the use of social media and other channels so they can make a contribution to local issues, policy development and service improvement

## **5. Secure our own financial future**

All of the work in this Corporate Plan is dependent on the Council getting its finances right and securing a sound financial base. This has never been more challenging with the Council facing the loss of around £2.5million revenue support grant by 2020. However, this also brings the drive to innovate and look for ways to do things differently that will deliver savings or generate additional income. It also provides the council with the opportunity to establish a sound financial basis into the future, which is not dependent on changes in government priorities or policy. We also recognise that supporting our local businesses to thrive is critical to ensuring both a healthy economy and to securing business rate growth, which will form a key part of our future finances.

### **Our challenges**

- Loss of revenue support grant by 2020
- Savings or additional income of £3 million needed to 'balance the books' by 2020
- Need to finance our ambitions as well as business as usual
- Growing population means an increasing demand for services

### **Our opportunities**

- Access funding streams and external funding to support our ambitions
- Use our property assets to increase our income
- Identify opportunities to be more business-like and commercial
- Work with other organisations (both private and public sector) to deliver services and, potentially, raise income
- Provide stimulus to the economy in terms of business growth and more jobs through our approach to smart growth, which helps support the council's finances too
- Greater financial security as we are now less dependent on government decisions and policies affecting our budget, which helps our long-term planning for the council and the town

### **Highlights of what we have achieved so far:**

- Watford Commercial Services Limited established as our own trading company
- Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed that aligns both our revenue and capital budgets to our ambitions in this Plan and ensures we are in a strong financial position by 2020
- Engaged a private sector partner to manage our commercial property portfolio to ensure we are maximising the income we receive
- Supported the creation of new organisations, such as the BID which has successfully generated more investment into the town centre
- Maintained excellent provision and value for money in the areas local people tell us are important - our parks, street cleansing, refuse collection, leisure centres, art and culture and events and will continue to do so
- HLF funding of nearly £5million leveraged in the last three years through our own investment and commitment to improve important facilities such as Cassiobury Park and Watford Museum

**We will continue to deliver this priority by:**

- Developing a 'commercial strategy' including how we enhance our commercial skills and experience and how we can trade our services
- Undertaking an analysis of the Council's cost base to build a more thorough understanding of the costs of our services
- Managing our property portfolio to stimulate growth, generate returns and meet changing service needs
- Ensuring our contracts are delivering value for money and high quality services through robust tendering and procurement processes and on-going review including: Leisure Management, Waste collection, street care, parks and open spaces, Watford Colosseum
- Capturing returns on investment from our major projects and joint ventures
- Submitting a planning application for the Town Hall complex
- Securing £1million savings through our Watford 2020 programme

## Part Four

# Underpinning themes

Whilst this Corporate Plan focuses on our priorities and the areas of work that will drive delivery, there are some key, important foundations that ensure our success and also build our effectiveness as an organisation. These are the themes that underpin the organisation and reflect our continuing commitment to being a quality organisation, achieving high performance across all we do.

### Effective two-way engagement and communications

Our local community and residents are the heart of the town. We want them to feel confident that they are kept well-informed about all that is going on in the town and that their voice can be heard on issues that matter to them. Whatever we do must be underpinned by effective and relevant communication and be responsive to how people want to engage with us, whether this be through meetings, consultation, our website or social media. At the same time we need to keep up to date with the way new technology is rapidly changing how people choose to communicate – our local population is relatively young and many are early adopters of new technologies. Our challenge is to keep up with them whilst still responding to those with more traditional ways of staying in touch.

**Actions:** we will take forward specific initiatives to consult our community pre and post the Mayoral elections to review the town's progress and help shape future priorities and decision making.

### Sound management and high performance

Successful delivery of our ambitions relies on making sure we have the best people, systems, processes and management arrangements in place to deliver efficient, high quality services that represent real value for money to the community.

Our vision challenges us to continually improve and ensure we are amongst the top performing councils across all the services we deliver – whether we do these ourselves or through effective partnerships. This means we need to set ourselves targets that really stretch what we do and how we work and look to the best authorities for our benchmark. We need to embed a culture of 'delivery' through sound programme and project management and rapidly identify and address any areas where there is a risk to meeting milestones.

Our support services like IT, HR and Finance continue to be the essential building blocks for our success. IT remains critical for all that we do and whilst real step change has begun, we need to ensure IT continues to improve and that we have the right strategy in place to make the most of the opportunities it offers. We want our staff and members to be equipped with the best IT solutions available, including making sure our critical business applications are up to date and that we modernise where better solutions present themselves.

Talented, well skilled staff are vital if we are to achieve what we have set out in this Corporate Plan. We want to retain and grow our own talent where possible but when we do recruit we want to make sure we attract the best from elsewhere. We will work with our HR team on embedding a culture where strong performance and delivery are recognised, people are encouraged to be innovative and strive to make a real contribution to the Council and the town.

**Actions:** We will bring forward a peer review of the Council's services to assess how and where we can improve and compare us with the best.

## Improving the town's environment

An attractive, well maintained environment is fundamental to our town and, we know, is really important to local people. We will ensure that the refuse, recycling and street cleaning service remains high quality and we will identify pockets where a focused, partnership approach to bring the neighbourhood up to standard would be beneficial. This is part of our continuing commitment to enhancing the public realm including building on the successful improvements to the top of the town, which have seen this area revitalised, with work planned for the civic area outside of the library and Town Hall.

**Actions:** we will continue to invest with the BID and Hertfordshire County Council on improvements to our public realm and also maintain excellent relationships with delivery partners such as Veolia to continuously enhance the quality of our environment

## Our finances

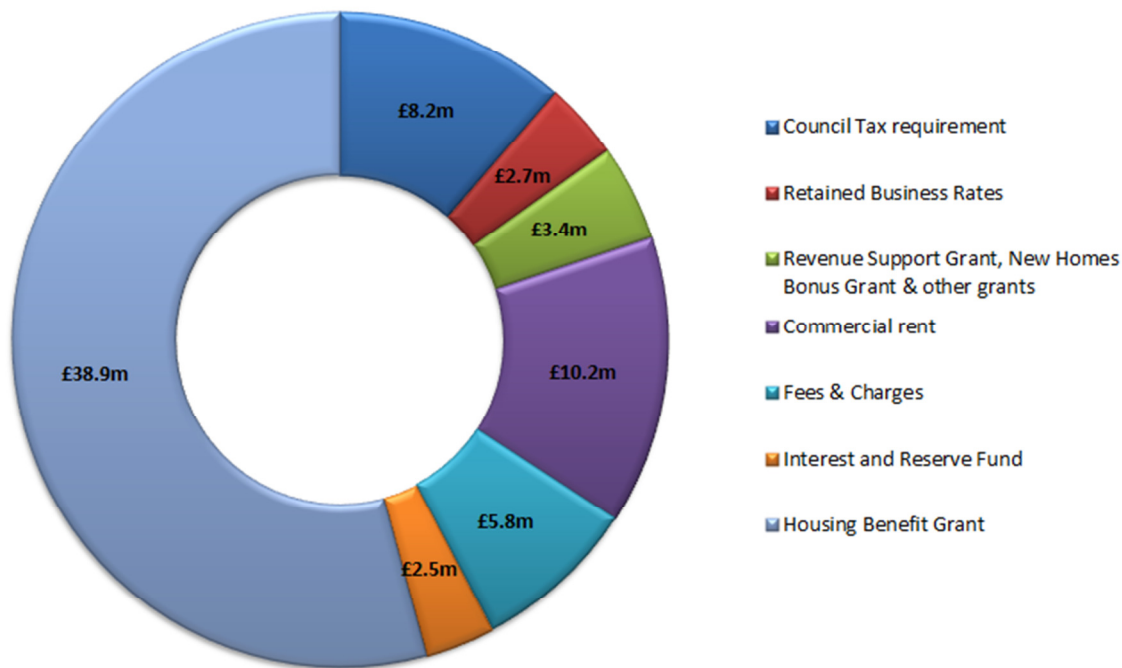
Our finances are perhaps the most critical building block for our plans. We need our finances to not only support our day to day activities and provide our services (through our revenue budget) but also to deliver the major, transformational projects that make such a difference to our town and local neighbourhoods (through our capital budget).

Our Medium Term Financial Strategy is a four year forecast that sets out our budget and looks at factors likely to impact on our expenditure.

For 2017/18, the strategy shows that our gross budget is **£71.1 million** with a net budget requirement of **£14.262million**.

There are a number of ways this is funded:

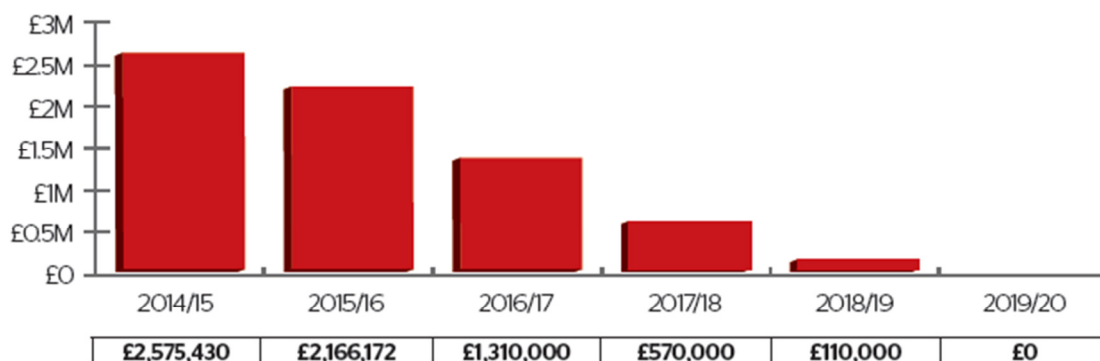
- Council Tax requirement
- Retained Business Rates
- Revenue Support Grant (but reducing to zero by 2019/20), New Homes Bonus Grant & other grants
- Commercial rent
- Fees & Charges
- Interest and Reserve Fund
- Housing Benefit Grant – this is money that comes directly from government to be administered by the council to support those in need of housing benefit. It is not council money that we can spend in any other way



*Watford BC's funding 2017/18: by different funding sources- the largest amount of money we receive is for Housing Benefit which we are responsible for allocating to our residents in need of this financial support*

### Changes to government funding

In terms of the Revenue Support Grant, this is the grant councils receive from government to help support the cost of the services they deliver. In December 2015, the government announced that this funding is ending – for Watford this will be in 2019/20. What this means is shown in the chart below – indicating a loss of £2,575,430 by 2020. It also means the percentage of our budget dependent on council tax increases from 60% in 2017/18 to 68% in 2019/20.



As set out in this Plan, this presents a significant challenge for Watford – in percentage terms it is around 16% less budget to spend by 2020 compared with 2014/15. Implementing our Medium Term Financial Strategy, which sets out how we will bridge this gap, will be a major area of focus for the Council to 2020. Our goal is to ensure we maintain the quality of the services that are important to our residents whilst still being able to innovate where this delivers improvements or in response to new opportunities.



## **Use of reserves**

With the savings we need to make over the next year (and following two years), it is not always easy to be exact as to the timing and the final sums that will be achieved. In view of this, the Council is allowed to, and will, make prudent use of some of its reserves to 'smooth' the delivery of the savings. Obviously using reserves to support the revenue deficit is not sustainable in the longer term and, therefore, this means that savings and efficiencies will still need to be made. It does, however, ensure that the Council is able to set a balanced budget whilst the organisation undertakes the work necessary to achieve a permanently secure financial footing. Our Medium Term Financial Strategy has allowed for the use of £886,000 of reserves in the next financial year.

## **Council tax**

With the on-going reduction in government funding, council tax is now, by far, the major source of funding for the Council.

The government has built into our finances an assumption that we will raise council tax, and most councils are doing so. However, the proportion of council tax that comes to Watford Borough Council is extremely small – around £250 a year for someone living in a Band D property. Most goes to Hertfordshire County Council (including an additional charge to support the County's adult social care budget) and a small amount to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Watford had managed to freeze its element of council tax for 7 years but we are now faced with a funding gap which means a continued freeze is not sustainable. Putting up council tax by 1.99% this year would cost each council tax payer around £5 a year and would provide the council with £155,000 additional income. For 2017/18 Watford's element of council tax will, therefore, increase by £5.00 (2.00%) for a Band D property, which is line with the current rate of inflation (RPI of 2.0% in September 2016). It is less than a 10p a week for a Band D property. This means the average charge is now £254.84.

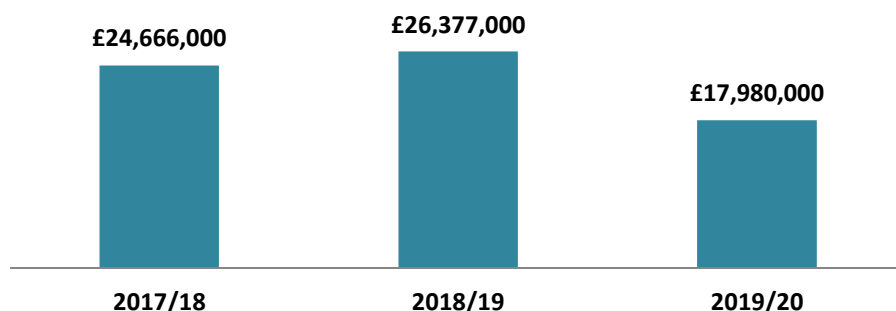
## **Business rates**

Whilst the Council collects business rates it cannot keep all the money it collects. This has to be shared with the county council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and government to fund services. There is an element of risk involved in the Business Rates scheme, which is designed to incentivise Councils to promote business growth within their areas. The Council expects its share of business rates to be £2.452 million in 2017/18.

## **Capital spending**

The Council's plans are supported by its Capital Investment Programme, which is used to acquire or create new assets, or enhance existing ones. Capital Investment may be paid for by capital resources (which are restricted to this kind of use) or borrowing, or any spare money available from revenue budgets (unfortunately WBC does not have any such spare money!). Even if there is pressure on the revenue budget, councils are not allowed to use capital resources to support revenue spending on day to day activities and service delivery, they have to be used to either acquire or create a new assets or to enhance an existing ones.

The capital budget for the next three years is:



There is a huge amount of capital investment in Watford over the next few years and the Council is committed to use its own capital budgets, seeking investment from central government and other third parties, and borrowing to the benefit of its residents. Below are some of the major projects and areas of work we have identified for capital expenditure.

**Parks and open spaces**

including Oxhey Park North and tennis court refurbishment  
*NEW for 2017/18*

£4,000,000

**Watford Health Campus**

this will help support the first six phases of residential development to deliver new homes, as well as the Industrial Zone South employment zone and a new multi-storey car park for the hospital. This investment will generate a return back to the council to support front line services.

£34,124,000

**Loan to Hart Homes**

a loan to the Council and Watford Community Housing Trust's joint venture company which will deliver affordable homes and temporary accommodation for use in 2018  
*NEW for 2017/18*

£6,075,000

**Modular Housing**

providing additional temporary accommodation in the borough  
*NEW for 2017/18*

£6,000,000

**Property Investment Board**

budgets for the reinvestment of receipts from sales of existing commercial property, and the proposed increase in size of the portfolio to generate increased, secure and long term revenue returns for the Council.

£19,429,000

**Planning, Transport & Infrastructure**

schemes to improve the highway between Clarendon Road and St Mary's Church and review the Community Infrastructure Levy charging regime for the borough  
*NEW for 2017/18*

£580,000

# Part Five

## Monitoring the Plan

Ensuring we deliver our Corporate Plan is critical to our success as an organisation and builds our residents confidence that we keep our promises.

We ensure delivery is on track through:

- Making sure all our Corporate Plan areas of work are reflected in service plans, work programmes and individual performance development review objectives, building the 'golden thread' through the organisation
- Identifying the key milestones for our work and holding ourselves to account for delivery – this will include regular updates to our Cabinet, Programme Management Board and Leadership Team
- Establishing a robust set of performance measures that are regularly monitored by Leadership Team, Portfolio Holders and our Scrutiny Committees. These measures extend to our outsourced services
- Providing challenge and assurance through robust governance including: Programme Management Board for our major projects, Property Investment Board for our property related work, Finance Review Board for our finances and Digital Watford Board for our 2020 transformation agenda



## How do I find out more?

[www.watford.gov.uk/councilplan](http://www.watford.gov.uk/councilplan)