



MAKING  
**WATFORD**  
BOLD & PROGRESSIVE

# Watford Borough Council's Corporate Plan to 2020



# Introduction to our Corporate Plan

This Corporate Plan introduces our new vision, priorities and values for Watford and makes a clear statement about our ambitions for the town over the next four years.

Whilst we achieved a lot over the period of our last Corporate Plan, we want to use our success, and the considerable range of achievements we have delivered for the town, to spur us on to do even more.

We are clear we need to modernise as an organisation, taking full advantage of the new digital world that is open to us, and making sure our staff perform at the highest level to deliver the high quality services our residents expect.

At the same time our ambitions for the town remain at the heart of what we do and we have identified a challenging but exciting number of projects that will deliver our vision of creating 'a bold and progressive future for Watford'.

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 the Metropolitan Line Extension. It is through these projects that we can secure the town's prosperity, which is important to us all, and ensure that it continues to be a great place to live, work and visit.

Over the last year, I have been delighted that time and again Watford is appearing at, or near, the top of the list as somewhere people want to be. This doesn't happen by accident, keeping somewhere vibrant, attractive and welcoming takes effort and really bold forward thinking. I am pleased that, even through difficult financial and economic times, we have achieved this for the town and we are determined to continue to shape and influence Watford's future success.

Like all councils achieving our goals is set against a very challenging financial picture. The way councils are financed is going to change fundamentally with the government ending the grant it pays to local authorities by 2020. However, whilst difficult it does present opportunities for us to do things differently and explore ways of working that will help us secure our financial future.

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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dorothy Thornhill". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Baroness Dorothy Thornhill MBE**

**Elected Mayor of Watford**

# Shaping our Corporate Plan

Our Corporate Plan sets out our ambitions for both Watford and how we will deliver these commitments by 2020.

Over the last year, we have undertaken a fundamental review of our plan and the vision, priorities and values which provide the framework for our planning. We did this based on:

1. the significant successes we have delivered against the priorities we set in previous corporate plans; and
2. the need to respond to the challenges and opportunities we know are facing councils over the next few years
3. our elected Mayor's manifesto commitments and the priorities she has set the organisation for the town during her fourth period in office

The review clearly shows us two things: firstly, we cannot meet the financial challenge ahead without making fundamental changes to the way we do business, and secondly, we cannot afford to scale back our ambition for the borough and the Council. That means we will need to be more creative and more resilient than ever as an organisation, 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.

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 keeping ahead of it 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 and create jobs and opportunities for our residents and to make economic growth work for Watford so that our residents can 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.

A critical driver for this Corporate Plan is our need to respond to the government's ongoing reduction in funding to local government. In December 2015, we learned that this includes 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 is a significant proportion of our current £16.035 million budget. Everything we outline in this Plan is informed and influenced by our requirement to meet this financial challenge 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 for successful future growth and deliver on our key priorities which are intended to maintain Watford as an exceptional borough providing opportunities for all that live and work here.

This Corporate Plan, therefore, responds to our new vision by challenging us to be bold and progressive 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 be a high performing organisation. 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 deliver 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.

### **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.

# Part One

## The Council's Vision, Priorities and Values

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

Our new 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 learn. 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 new priority areas of work. These have been developed from what we know about the challenges and opportunities we will face over the next few years and our Mayor's manifesto commitments. 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.

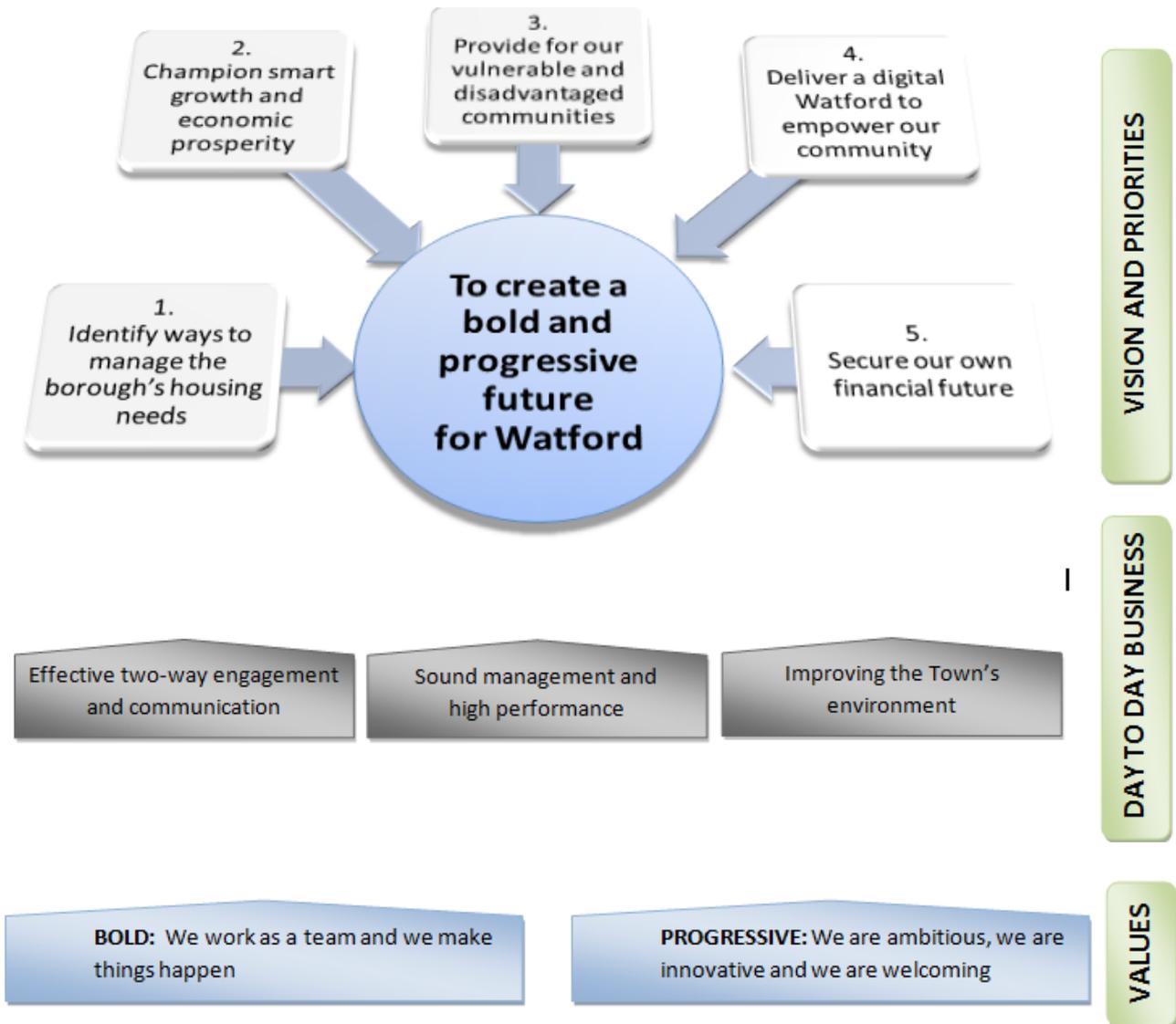
**OUR VALUES:**

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 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: 95,500** over an area of **8.5 sq miles**

Young population: average age **36.46** years

Diverse population: **38% BME**

**38,485 households**

Average household size: **2.44** 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)

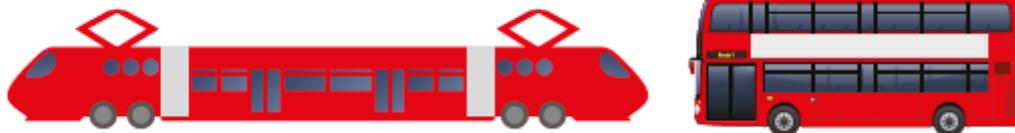


**Voted 9<sup>th</sup> happiest place to live in the country**

**6 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)

# 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, 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
- 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
- Innovative solutions to achieving our new homes target

#### We will do this by:

- Supporting the delivery of the Council's target of 260 new homes per annum
- Identifying and manage ways to tackle the demand and supply for housing in the borough including taking forward our Joint Venture company in partnership with Watford Community Housing Trust, developing new cost effective temporary accommodation, reviewing how we manage homeless applications and re-assessing the future role and resources required for the housing management function
- Implementing measures to maintain and improve conditions within homes to ensure they are suitable for use and promote the health, safety and welfare of residents through the revised Private Sector Renewal Policy.
- Ensuring our planning policies are sufficiently flexible to support the delivery of more affordable homes

## 2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity

One of Watford's achievements over the lifetime of our previous Corporate Plan was its success in maintaining its economic prosperity through the recent recession and having the right plans in place to be ready to take full advantage when the upturn came. By being forward thinking, we have secured local employment, retained businesses and remain an attractive place for investment. The Council has played its part through investment in the town, such as the improvements to the top of the town and our parks and open spaces, and by securing the right partnerships to take forward some of our major projects such as Charter Place and Watford Business Park.

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 back filling. We want to continue to attract investment and address the issues we know are important to our residents such as congestion and parking.

### Our challenges

- Competing demands for land within the borough
- Limited land for new business / industrial space
- Traffic congestion and parking
- Shortage of fit for purpose office and light industrial accommodation
- 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
- Strong local partnerships such as Watford BID, Skillmakers, creative leaders to promote prosperity

### We will do this by:

- Progressing investment in infrastructure and public realm: Town Hall Square, Charter Place, Watford Health Campus, Metropolitan Line Extension, Watford Junction, Clarendon Road, Watford Business Park
- Supporting Watford BID to ensure the vibrancy and success of the town centre
- Working in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council on tackling congestion and promoting more sustainable methods of transport including improving cycling and walking routes
- Delivering the Cassiobury Park 'Parks for People' HLF project

- Delivering the first phase of Sports Facilities Strategy
  - Woodside
  - Oxhey Park North
  - Gaelic Football Club
  - Cassiobury Site (Fullerians)
  - Cassiobury Croquet Club
- Delivering Local Plan Part 2 – Site Allocations, Development Management Policies, Town Centre Policies
- Developing a narrative on the benefits of our approach to smart growth to inform our community and build understanding

**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.

Work to support people affected by Welfare Reform changes has included close working with a range of partners to ensure that advice is correct and consistent. With the introduction of Universal Credit, there is more focus on providing practical support through partners to advise and enable local people to adapt to the new arrangements.

#### **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

#### **Our opportunities**

- Targeting our support to those most in need
- Working with partners, such as the police, to understand vulnerabilities and our emerging communities
- Public health funding to address our identified health need

**We will do this by:**

- Evaluating the impact and outcomes of the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2013-2016 and the contribution to 'community wellbeing' of the borough
- Understanding our borough profile including Census 2011 analysis and using this knowledge to support our engagement and shaping our decisions
- Delivering a refreshed Sports Development Framework to support improved health and wellbeing
- Delivering improved play facilities

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

Developing a digital strategy for Watford is a key area of work for this priority. Through our digital strategy 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.

Successful digital transformation requires effective leadership in order to bring together all the elements required and this will be provided through establishing a Digital Transformation Board.

We also see this priority delivering the next step up to our approach to customer services across all our service areas, led by our successful Customer Services team.

**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
- New model of IT delivery and IT transformation will support change
- Town wide Wi-Fi established to promote digital inclusion
- High level of take up of new technologies and social media in Watford

### **We will do this by:**

- Establishing a Digital Transformation Board to provide leadership and direction for the digital agenda in Watford
- Developing a digital transformation strategy for Watford which identifies how we will deliver a digital workforce, digital customer services and a digital town
- 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. Priority areas identified include online payments, reporting street care, fly tipping, missed bins, statutory nuisance and abandoned vehicles
- Exploring introducing 'citizens accounts'
- 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
- Progressing a step up in our customer services including embedding our new customer service standards and improving the face to face experience
- Reengineer back office services to produce more efficient processes

## **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.

### **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 to support our ambitions
- Identify opportunities to trade our services
- Work with other organisations (both private and public sector) to deliver services

**We will do this by:**

- Undertaking an analysis of the Council's cost base to build a more thorough understanding of the costs of our services
- Developing a 'commercial strategy' including how we enhance our commercial skills and experience and how we can trade our services
- Managing our property portfolio to stimulate growth, generate returns and meet changing service needs including review of:
  - Council accommodation
  - our community assets
- Establishing a new approach to the Council's fees and charges policy
- Developing a corporate debt policy
- Ensuring our contracts are delivering value for money and high quality services through robust tendering and procurement processes and ongoing review including: Leisure Management, Veolia, ICT
- Progressing an energy company for Watford
- Driving business rate income growth
- Capturing returns on investment from our major projects and joint ventures

# 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 ongoing 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.

### 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.

## 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 ongoing 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.

## 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.

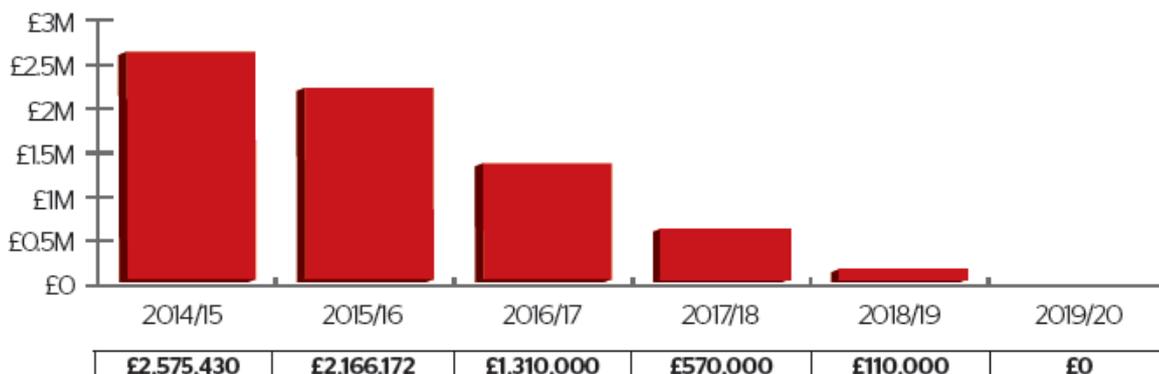
For 2016/17, the strategy shows that our budget requirement is **£16,035,060**.

There are a number of ways this is funded:

- Settlement Funding Assessment
- Specific Government Grants
- New Homes Bonus
- Council Tax
- Collection Fund Surplus
- Revenue Reserves

### Changes to government funding

In terms of the Settlement Funding Assessment, 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 will come to an end – 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.



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. Addressing how to bridge this gap will be a major area of focus for the Council over the next four years. 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 three 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 £761,500 of reserves in the next financial year.

### Council tax

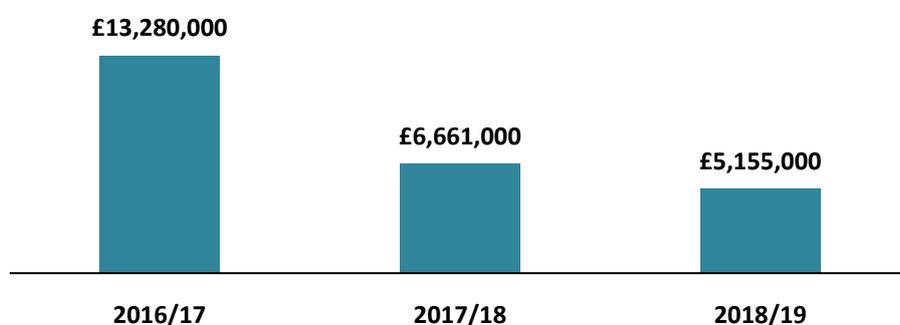
With the ongoing reduction in government funding, council tax is now the major source of funding for the Council. Unlike many other councils, including Hertfordshire County Council, which have increased council tax for 2016/17 in response to funding cuts, Watford has managed to freeze its element of council tax for 7 years in a row.

The money brought in by council tax for 2016/17 is £7,823,667. With the freeze in place, the average charge of £249.84 remains unchanged this year.

### Capital spending

The Council’s plans are supported by its capital budget. Even if there is pressure on the revenue budget, councils are not allowed to use money in their capital budgets to support revenue spending on day to day activities and service delivery. It has to be used to either acquire or create a new asset or to enhance an existing asset.

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 to leverage this funding. Below are some of the major projects and areas of work we have identified for capital expenditure.

Cassiobury Park Heritage Lottery Fund	£6,149,000
Watford Health Campus	£4,500,000
Watford Business Park	£11,300,000
Green spaces	£574,000
Cemetery improvements <i>NEW for 2016/17</i>	£250,000
Cassiobury Strategic Sports Site Development with Fullerians <i>NEW for 2016/17</i>	£200,000
Review of play <i>NEW for 2016/17</i>	£1,250,000

# 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 Cabinet 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 and Digital Board for our digital agenda



## How do I find out more?

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