

STATE OF THE BOROUGH REPORT



TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL



Message from the leader, Councillor Dave Waters



“2017/2018 marked the end of the second year of our current Council Plan, and my time as leader. We have had another successful year and have many achievements to report on.

“The Council Plan 2016 - 2020 introduced new priorities with a real focus on ensuring we continue to provide our residents with the value-for-money services they want and need. This year we have renamed two of the priorities to highlight our continued support for our growing communities and businesses within the borough.

“While we have many achievements to report, we continue to face unprecedented financial challenge, which see us continually transforming the way we deliver our services to ensure we meet our customers’ expectations.

“We have continued to work with a commercial approach to generate income and this report highlights just how seriously we are taking this new way of working.

“With a new leader at the helm - my colleague, Councillor Rob Bird - the upcoming year will be an exciting and challenging one. Our Council Plan this year really backs our ethos Better for Customers, Better for Business and together with partners, staff and councillors we will continue to improve as a council as we move through the lifespan of our Council Plan.”

**Councillor Dave Waters, Council Leader
until May 2018**



Priority: Finance and resources

We remain in the lowest quartile nationally for council tax, (5th lowest in the country), where our average band D tax payer will pay us £2.20 a week for a huge range of services.

We have continued to make commercial property investments throughout the year. Over £14m has been invested this year bringing our total investment to over £31m, these investments generate an income of £1.15m per year. A further £12m has been approved for commercial property investments during 2018/19.

The top floor of the Public Service Centre has now been refurbished. In December 2017 a third of the space was successfully let to a new tenant. This along with the other partners in the Public Service Centre gives the council a rental income of £184k.

We funded the £83,000 improvements to the facilities at the Vineyard’s play area in Tewkesbury.

Priority: Economic development

The adoption of the Joint Core Strategy in December 2017 includes a requirement to deliver a minimum of 192 hectares of employment land and 39,500 jobs over the strategy period to 2031.

We launched a new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2017-2021) in June 2017 to support our ambition to be the primary growth engine of Gloucestershire.

£465k of funding was secured from the Local Enterprise Partnership to bring a business Growth Hub into the Public Services Centre. The hub will officially open in September 2018.

19 projects have been approved under the Leader project totalling to a value of £515k across Tewkesbury borough and the Forest of Dean district.

Over 100 community groups were supported and signposted during the year to apply for external grant funding. Since July 2015 and the implementation of a new Community Grant's Officer post, over £1million of funds have successfully been applied for.

We will continue to work with our neighbouring authorities for improvements to Junction 9 and surrounding junctions of the M5. Grant funding has been approved to make improvements to the infrastructure around Junction 9 and to create a business case for an always junction 10.

Priority: Housing

The three Joint Core Strategy councils (Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City) approved the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy in December 2017. This provides the overall growth requirements, strategic level policies and strategic site allocations for these areas.

The council continues to provide support to town and parish councils with the development of their neighbourhood plans. So far 14 plans are being prepared of which three have been adopted. Plans are also advancing in at least four other neighbourhoods.

Government growth deal funding has been received to fund two programmes; infrastructure for a new cyber business park in west Cheltenham and improvements to traffic flow and release of land for housing at Longford. The total amount of funding received is £26.53m.

We have exceeded our target figure of 150 of affordable homes with 233 homes delivered in total.

There were 227 successful homeless prevention cases during the year.

As part of our new Housing and Homeless Strategy we are the lead authority for the Places of Safety contract. Our housing team have been awarded Bronze standard after submitting an application for Challenge one of the Gold Standard in December 2017. They will now progress to achieving the silver standard.

Priority: Customer-focused services

The refurbishment works to the ground floor have commenced and are due to be completed by the end of August 2018. These works will incorporate the growth hub whilst also making it easier for customers to access all the services provided from the Public Services Centre.

We have adopted a more proactive approach to environmental crimes and have issued more than 20 fixed penalty notices. Along with six successful prosecutions relating to fly tipping and transportation of waste offences. New policies have been approved such as the Public Space Protection Order to crack down on dog fouling.

We have reviewed and redesigned the administration of our garden waste service. Introducing a sticker licence, transitioning all customers to the same annual renewal date supported with a brand new payment system. This makes the online offering to customers as easy to use as possible. The project has had phenomenal success with over 16,000 customers subscribing, generating income in excess of £730,000 to date. 70% renewed online, this is a positive contribution to our digital agenda.

Our processing of planning applications has improved from the previous year, for example 90% of all major applications were determined within the prescribed timescale.

Our processing of housing benefit related claims also performs well with new claims processed in an average of 15.47 days (21 days) and change of circumstances in just over four days (nine days) - national average in brackets.

A range of our self-service forms online have been improved to give a better customer experience these include; business grant application, community support request, job application, food business application and missed bin forms.

We have implemented a system to provide the option for a Paypoint/post office payment. This allows people to pay bills such as council tax and garden waste subscription at a local shop or post office at a time convenient to them.

A review has also been undertaken of our income system which has successfully ensured that our online payment systems are mobile friendly and are more reliable to maintain business continuity.

We continue to provide a £53,000 grant to the Citizens Advice Bureau helping them to provide support to over 1000 members of the community.

Our recycling and composted rate continues to improve and is now 55% which is above average for all English local authorities and where half of all councils have seen a decrease in their recycling rates over the last few years.

We are committed to maintaining and improving a culture of continuous service improvement. A Development Services improvement plan has been approved and set to be completed next year. The Revenue and Benefits restructure is complete and a new management structure is in place.



Looking ahead

I take over from Dave Waters as Leader of a very successful Borough Council, thanks to the hard work, professionalism, and difficult, but effective, decisions taken during the last 10 years; by my predecessors Dave Waters and Robert Vines, all our councillors, and most importantly, all our council staff.

Tewkesbury Borough Council has built a reputation for being innovative and setting new standards, and recent achievements in particular, have delivered on our overall objective, to 'drive greater prosperity and quality of life for all', as set out in our Council Plan. We must continue building on these successes, in our 4 key Priorities of sound finance, economic growth, housing delivery and customer service.

Councillor Rob Bird

The adoption of the Joint Core Strategy is the single most important outcome of our work which will benefit residents, businesses and visitors, for which my thanks go to everyone involved; projects are now being prepared to ensure that the essential infrastructure is in place and that the much needed housing and employment land are delivered. The all important Borough Plan is now being drafted to create supportive local planning policies, to meet the local needs of our rural Borough, with the aim of council approval for consultation in the autumn.

Our Customer Service ethos has been truly transformative, delivering major improvements in the service experienced by those we serve – from the innovative Public Services Centre concept, to our commitment to easier transactions, delivered through IT. Our planning service is focusing on service delivery, while new ideas on paperless billing, web based communication and customer relationship management systems will be pursued, and the completion shortly of our major premises refurbishment will underpin our continual service improvement philosophy.

Finance will always be a challenge, which is being met successfully with a more innovative, self-reliant and commercial approach. Part of this story is the economic success of the Borough, which delivers prosperity for all. The fantastic new Business Growth Hub, opening shortly, the first in the UK hosted by a local authority, is a huge example of our commitment to local business support, and in delivering on our commitment "businesses have told us what they want, we aim to deliver".

In summary, we continue to pursue our 'Better for Customers, Better for Business' ethos, which has served us so well.