

Woking Borough Council **Corporate Plan** **2021/22**



A council that works for you

Cllr Ayesha Azad

Leader of Woking Borough Council
and elected member for Heathlands



First and foremost, Woking Borough Council's Corporate Plan is a document about values and how these shape the future of the borough.

But no plan, however forward-looking, could ignore the place from which it starts. The impact of Covid-19 during 2020 and 2021 will continue to have a significant impact on the council's business and the degree to which it can bring its values to bear.

Fortunately, good financial management has been the cornerstone of the council's activity during the past decade. This has placed the authority in a better position than it might otherwise have been during the pandemic and allowed it to better support those within the community that needed it during successive lockdowns.

Financial challenges remain. But with the advent of a new corporate leadership, the time is right to define more comprehensively the council's core vision and values that will inform service delivery and the relationship it has with the residents it serves.

I am delighted that Woking Borough Council is producing a Corporate Plan. It is an opportunity to express why the council does what it does. An opportunity for residents to better understand its motivations and to better judge the job that it does for them.

This plan is unique because it will only last for one year. The reason for that is because I want residents to have their say on the council's core vision and values.

Only once residents have had their say will the council put together a five-year strategy for

2022-2027, which takes us to the beginning of the next Local Development Framework Core Strategy period.

However, before then I want to have a conversation with local residents that reflects their needs and concerns. My ambition for the five-year strategy is it will reflect Woking as a whole – and the council's role in shaping the place, empowering the people and being the very best organisation it can be in the service of all.

My vision is of a council in constant communication with residents. Through the creation of an online civic space and our Residents' Panel, everyone in our borough will be able to have their say on any issue they want.

My ambition is to embed this culture of consultation into the decision-making process so that councillors will have residents' feedback on any subject available to them. That will not necessarily mean that everyone gets what they want all the time. Instead it will ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to be heard.

And it means that the council will have a system for democratic engagement that far exceeds a simple vote once a year. I want the council to be making decisions for residents, alongside residents and with residents understanding about what the council is doing and why.

I have committed to improving some of the ways that the council does its business to ensure openness and transparency which were highlighted by the independent report and the last peer review.

So our values I hope will reflect optimism, ambition, trust, openness, communication, compassion and a positive culture for our residents, staff, and partners.

Chief Executive's introduction

Julie Fisher



We will continue to support residents and businesses through this challenging time and will carefully direct our resources to ensure we provide essential services, particularly for our most vulnerable residents, whilst looking to the future to develop an ambitious five year strategy.

We will continue to build upon recent achievements to make Woking an economically vibrant, inclusive, digitally connected borough – one that prioritises sustainable growth that drives long term prosperity and wellbeing for residents.

We will continue to be at the forefront of innovation in addressing the challenges we face as a result of climate change. The commitments we have made to tackle climate change are fundamental to good growth and must underpin our regeneration plans. The targets we set to reduce carbon emissions and improve biodiversity and how they manifest in improving the living environment for residents go hand in hand with improving the wellbeing and health for all.

By working with health colleagues, we can make a huge difference to the wellbeing of residents, making services more accessible, focussing on prevention and joining up services in a way that benefits people.

We face significant challenges as a result of the pandemic but I believe Woking has the building blocks and opportunities to strengthen its position as a key regional economic hub. Our town centre will continue to be a destination for business and leisure, and a fantastic place to live, work and reconnect with friends and family now and in the future.

We want to hear from businesses and from our partners about how we achieve our ambitions through the Big Conversation. And by listening to our residents, we will ensure our plans encapsulate the views and needs of local communities.

The engagement with our residents this year will not be a one off – continuous dialogue with residents will help inform our decision making, providing ongoing feedback that helps shape our plans. The Big Conversation will offer a new way of working that's embedded in our service teams and a conversation that enables residents to engage in the future challenges we face together.

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Our borough

Situated in the heart of Surrey, Woking is a modern and diverse town born out of the railways and communications revolution.

Comprising 6,357 hectares, Woking is the very definition of a 'green and leafy' suburb. 60 per cent of the borough is designated green belt land and large swathes of the borough's open space is protected.

Approximately 100,000 people live in the borough and we provide services to around 40,000 homes. Woking, West Byfleet and Knaphill are the borough's main urban and economic centres followed by Byfleet, Goldsworth Park, Horsell, Kingfield, Old Woking, Sheerwater St. Johns and Westfield, which have their own identities and local interests.

Woking is the third most densely populated borough in Surrey. The average household size is 2.49 persons, slightly above both the regional and national average. Compared to the rest of Surrey, Woking has a fairly young population, with the second highest proportion of under 16s but the second lowest number of over 65s in the county.

The borough's defining characteristic however is its diverse and multi-cultural community. Woking has the highest proportion of non-white British residents in Surrey.

The borough's excellent transport links and proximity to London makes it an important regional hub with enormous potential for growth. Woking has a large economic workforce. 84.7 per cent of the working-age population is economically active, the second highest proportion in Surrey and well above both regional and national averages.

Woking has recently powered its way to the top of Lambert Smith Hampton's UK Vitality Index 2021 for the country's best performing location across a range of indicators including economy, business, health outcomes and the environment. The 'definitive health check on the UK's towns and cities' assesses locations outside London to identify the best places to live, work and do business, in addition to those with the highest growth potential.



60% of the borough is designated green belt land



100,000 people live in Woking



Third most densely populated borough in Surrey



84.7% of our workforce is economically active

People

A healthy, inclusive and engaged community

Our 2021/22 objectives:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of all residents
- Reducing social inequality
- Engaging our communities



How we will achieve these objectives



Improving the health and wellbeing of all residents

- Working with partners to embed health and wellbeing in all that we do.
- Supporting independent living and reducing social isolation.
- Promoting cultural, environmental and sporting opportunities.

Reducing social inequality

- Tackling homelessness and its root causes.
- Building high-quality affordable and key worker homes across the borough.
- Working with partners to improve access to services.

Engaging our communities

- Ensuring residents know who and where to go to discuss issues or make changes in their community.
- Encouraging residents to volunteer and play a greater role in supporting their communities.
- Helping residents to identify and make use of all the resources available to them.
- Engage with our tenants and leaseholders about the future of housing services.

Case study: Transforming Sheerwater

The multi million pound Sheerwater Regeneration Project will transform the centre of Sheerwater into a thriving, sustainable community and create an attractive new neighbourhood comprising 1,200 high-quality, energy efficient homes.

The Sheerwater Regeneration Project will help improve outcomes for local people through the provision of high-quality affordable housing, useable green space, inclusive leisure facilities and access to health services that meet the needs of the community.

The new development will provide:

- Energy-efficient homes built to last. Half will be affordable and these properties will be more spacious – with more one, two and four bedroom properties than before.
- A new Central Park in the heart of the community with a multi-use games area, skate-park and wildwood play area. Attractive pedestrian walkways will connect this central outdoor space to each of the development's neighbourhood areas which also have their own pocket parks and podiums gardens cleverly designed to conceal resident parking areas.

- A spacious Central Square designed for informal socialising. This will also offer opportunities for al fresco dining with its mix of restaurant and retail space and provide a welcoming gateway into the new development.
- Services tailored to the needs of the community. A community campus will incorporate health and family services, pharmacy, dentist and pre-school nursery within easy reach of the new park.
- Shared leisure facilities to support the health and wellbeing of the whole community. The new Eastwood Leisure Centre with its five-court sports hall, 25m swimming pool, teaching pool, fitness suite, two multi-purpose studios and a flood-lit all-weather 3G football pitch, will be shared with Bishop David Brown School to improve pupils' physical education.

This multi-phase regeneration project will take six years to complete. The first phase of residential housing will be available in July 2021. The Eastwood Leisure Centre will open to the general public later this year.



Place

An enterprising, vibrant
and sustainable borough

Our 2021/22 objectives:

- Promoting a strong economy
- Improving the borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure
- Sustainable development

How we will achieve these objectives



Promoting a strong economy

- Creating a vibrant economic hub bringing together high-quality leisure, retail and residential spaces.
- Supporting businesses to grow, nurturing start-ups and encouraging businesses based outside of the borough to relocate to Woking.
- Supporting our residents, communities and businesses to recover well from the pandemic.

Improving the borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure

- Helping residents to reduce their carbon footprint and impact on the environment.
- Conserving existing habitats and creating new ones including in our urban areas.

- Preventing flooding and conserving water.

Sustainable development

- Addressing the borough's infrastructure needs to support development, integrate transport networks and prioritise sustainable travel.
- Promoting and investing in low carbon energy supply across the borough.
- Creating high-quality built environments fit for the future.

Case study: Woking's green credentials

Woking has long been committed to protecting the environment. Our first climate change strategy was adopted in 2002, although our efforts began much earlier in 1990.

Adopted in 2015, 'Woking 2050' is our current climate change strategy. This sets out a vision guiding our collective efforts to create a sustainable borough by reducing our impact on the environment. Woking 2050 is not just about carbon, it looks at our whole way of living and how it influences our environment. As a council we have a role to bring together our combined potential to make a difference for the future.

We monitor delivery of Woking 2050 through our Climate Change Working Group, whose members include representatives from the community, business, environmental organisations, councillors and council officers.

Natural Woking, adopted in 2016, is our equivalent strategy for biodiversity and green spaces. Whilst Planet Woking is our initiative designed to help local people and organisations to do what they can to make a positive difference for the environment. There's also information and activities to inspire younger residents on the Little Planet Woking pages.

On 25 July 2019, we pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030. We will reduce to zero any greenhouse emissions associated with our own estate and operations. Where any remaining emissions cannot be avoided, we will offset these through projects such as tree planting and maintain trade in renewable energy, thereby eliminating its contribution to climate change.





Us

An innovative, proactive
and effective council

Our 2021/22 objectives:

- Digital first
- Strengthening partnerships
- Effective use of resources

How we will achieve our objectives



Digital first

- Developing Woking as a smart borough, exploiting the opportunities provided by 5G and new technology innovations.
- Creating an online civic space, which makes it easier for residents to feed in their views and influence council decisions.
- Modernise working practices and improve residents' digital experience.

Strengthening partnerships

- Looking for opportunities where we can work collaboratively with our public sector partners to provide holistic and seamless services for residents.
- Helping our voluntary community and faith sector to play a greater role in supporting vulnerable residents.

- Making it easier for others to work with us by creating shared plans and clear and transparent processes.

Effective use of resources

- Initiating a business review to ensure the council can deliver best value for taxpayers in all that it does.
- Continuing to invest in staff, our greatest resource, by ensuring they have the skills and equipment necessary to perform their roles to the best of their ability.
- Reducing our carbon footprint across our estate and operations.

Case study: Joined up care for residents

By working closely with our public sector partners like the NHS, we can improve care for residents and help to alleviate some of the pressure on frontline services.

Far too often people remain in hospital for longer than they need to. They no longer require hospital treatment but are unable to leave because of an ongoing care need or vulnerability.

Delayed hospital discharge or 'bed blocking', prevents other patients from being admitted, increases hospital waiting times and is costly to both the patient and the NHS as the longer a patient remains in hospital, the greater their chances of developing a secondary problem i.e. an infection or bed sores.

We have been helping to speed up hospital discharge by putting in place the care packages recovering patients need to be able to return

home safely. We already provide a range of support services to help people maintain their independence at home. By

working closely with hospital discharge teams we can make sure adaptive equipment and services such as community meals are in place prior to discharge. If substantial adaptations are required we can help find suitable accommodation in the interim.

The care we provide also helps to prevent hospital re-admission, keeping people independent locally and at home.

The Covid-19 pandemic stretched NHS and council resources like never seen before and by working together we have more effectively supported residents.



Our finances and challenges

The money we collect from council tax receipts accounts for less than 20 per cent of our annual income. The rest of the money we spend on providing services comes from other revenue streams, such as commercial income, grants and central government funding, some of which have been heavily impacted by the pandemic.

In summary, 2020/21 was a challenging year for the council.

- More people needed our help so the cost of housing and supporting vulnerable residents increased.
- We received less income from fees and charges, in particular, our income from car parking fell by 70 per cent.
- We were unable to collect rent from commercial tenants severely impacted by the pandemic.

The government provided support through general grants for additional costs, and compensation for lost income, however neither will meet the council's full costs.

The outlook for 2021/22

The council has set budgets for 2021/22 which recognise the uncertain financial position. To protect frontline services for the most vulnerable, councilors have agreed an increase in council tax of 2.04 per cent, the equivalent

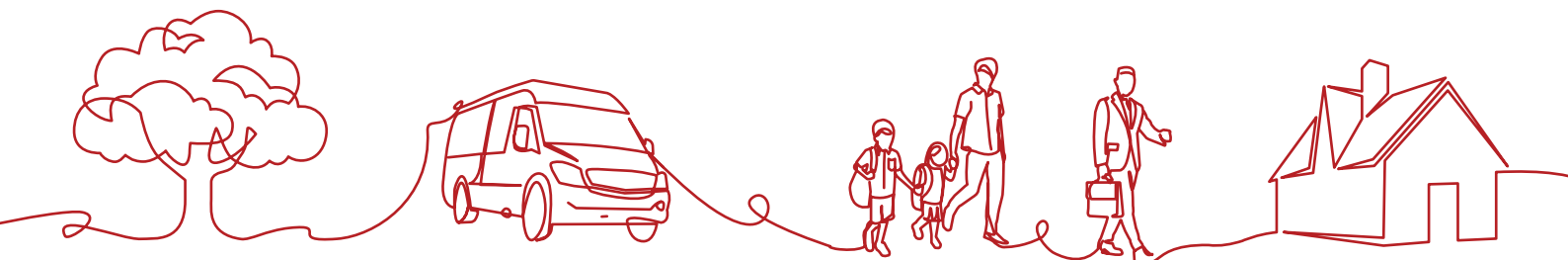
of an additional 10 pence a week for a Band D property. The uncertainty relates to our other income streams and whether or not these will return to pre-pandemic levels.

The outlook for Woking however is potentially more optimistic than most. The work we have been doing to revitalise the town centre and regenerate other parts of the borough, will help to stimulate the local economy and attract residents back into our town.

We will continue to use separate investment funds to help businesses recover but temporarily suspend work on some projects which would need to be funded from borrowing, or the council's reserves, until the financial outlook is clearer.

The future

It will be important for the council to manage the financial effects of the recovering local economy and demand for services beyond the pandemic. Being prepared will put the council in a good position to make service changes if necessary, and to respond to the new environment.



Woking's 2021/22 budget

We're delivering vital services to over 100,000 residents. This year your Council Tax will be used for day-to-day spending...

£4.1m

Health, Wellbeing and Cultural Development

Supporting your mind, body and soul delivering leisure services, health and wellbeing initiatives, sports development, children's and youth services and the arts.

£4.3m

Community Support

Supporting our multi-cultural communities through community engagement, community safety, family support and running our Centres for the Community, in addition to supporting local voluntary and community-led organisations.

£2.6m

Customer Support Services

Assisting our residents through our Housing Benefit and Council Tax services, licensing, revenue collection and customer services.

£5m

Corporate and Democratic Services

Keeping the democratic process running smoothly, whilst enabling the rest of the Council to function efficiently, ensuring residents are kept informed, financial and legal services, human resources and information technology.

£4.4m

Sustaining the Local Economy

Helping our economy thrive through our business support and parking services.

£1.7m

Independent Living

Enabling elderly and vulnerable residents to continue to live independently through our housing support and handy person services, Careline and community meals services and extra care services.

£4.6m

Housing

Ensuring we all have a roof over our heads by delivering homelessness services to those in need and maintaining housing standards within the private sector.

£10.5m

Environmental Quality

Maintaining our physical environment through delivering waste and recycling services, environmental health, environmental services, building services and emergency planning.

£7m

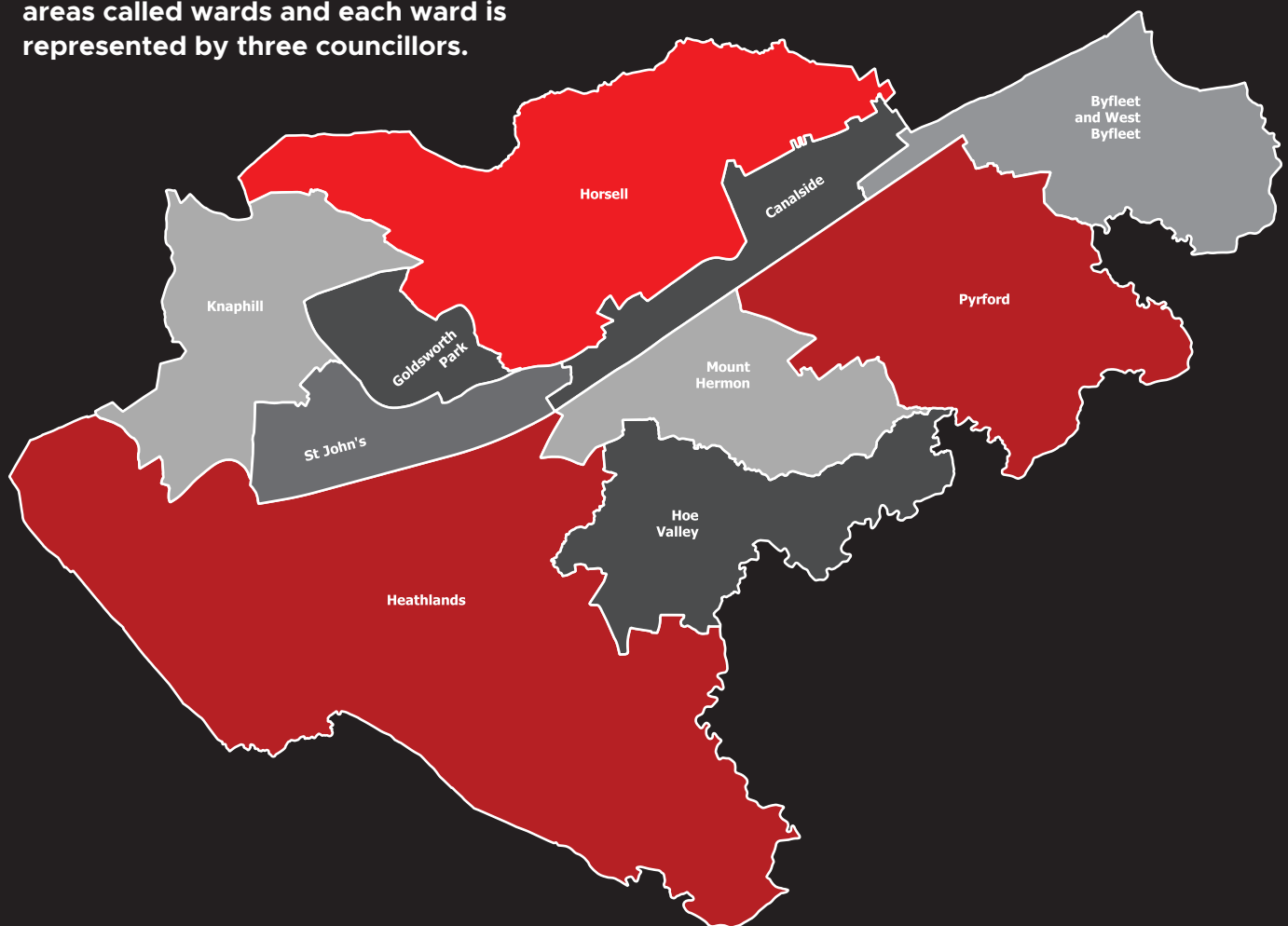
Place Making

Creating and managing the environment in which we live through planning and development services, estates management, green initiatives and infrastructure delivery.

Your money spent well

How the council operates

Woking Borough Council has 30 elected members, referred to as councillors. The borough is divided into ten geographical areas called wards and each ward is represented by three councillors.



How decisions get made

The Executive is accountable for decision-making within the Council's overall policies and budget framework and recommends to the council on new policies and decisions outside its remit, ensuring the consistent application of corporate standards.

How things get done

The council employs officers to give advice, implement decisions and manage the council's day to day operations. The chief executive officer and senior officers which comprise the

council's corporate management group, are responsible for developing service delivery plans and managing the teams that carry out the work.

Who does what

In Woking, and across Surrey, local government functions are split between the borough councils (us) and Surrey County Council. This is referred to as a two-tier structure of local government.

We are responsible for local services such as planning, development control and housing, while the county council is responsible for county-wide functions such as education and social services.

Borough council	County council
Collection of council tax and business rates	Birth, marriage and death registrations
Environmental health	Education
Housing	Fire and rescue
Leisure and culture	Highways and roadworks
Parking	Libraries
Parks and open spaces	Public health
Planning	Social care
Public toilets	Strategic planning
Sport	Trading standards
Street cleaning	Transport
Waste collection and recycling	Waste disposal

The Big Conversation

Establishing an effective, two-way dialogue with residents and our other stakeholders is a priority for the council, giving a voice to all members of our community.

Not only do we want to get better at listening and responding to community concerns, we also want to work with the community to develop the council's longer term plans.

Who will we engage with

- **Residents** – we want to hear what our residents think about the borough. What is good about Woking, what can be improved?
- **Businesses** – what do they need to thrive in the town centre and beyond? What support would they like to see the council provide?
- **Partners** – what are the biggest challenges facing the people we work with? What opportunities exist to work together more effectively to deliver meaningful outcomes?
- **Councillors** – what changes do the people they represent want to see? How can we work closer with each of the communities in the borough?
- **Staff** – how can we develop our staff to ensure the council works effectively and delivers value for money for residents?

How will we engage

The Big Conversation will take place online and face to face when it is safe to do so:

- We have relaunched the Woking Residents' Panel. This will provide people who live in the borough ongoing opportunities to shape the borough's future by acting as a sounding board for new initiatives.
- We are creating an online civic space that will enable us to share plans for the future and provide a safe space for residents to feedback and share their views about our services and future plans for the borough.
- We will continue to engage with residents about what matters to them, including Planet Woking (environmental concerns), Shaping Woking (development in the borough) and Enterprise Woking (working with Woking's business community).
- We want to hear from all ages, particularly our young people.

"Only once residents have had their say will the council put together a five-year strategy for 2022-2027"

Cllr Ayesha Azad, Leader of the Council

