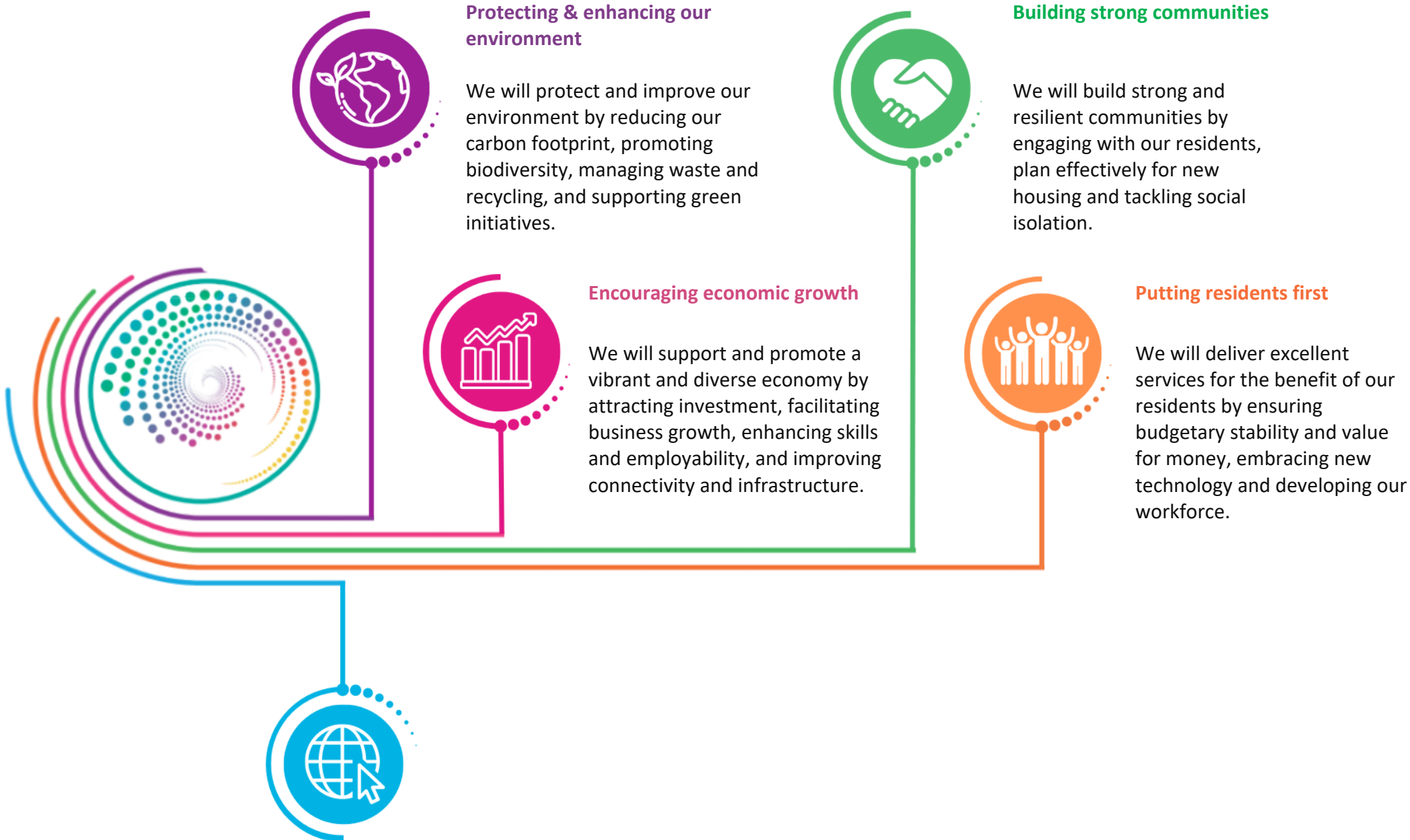




Corporate Plan 2023-27

Making Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit



Protecting & enhancing our environment

We will protect and improve our environment by reducing our carbon footprint, promoting biodiversity, managing waste and recycling, and supporting green initiatives.

Encouraging economic growth

We will support and promote a vibrant and diverse economy by attracting investment, facilitating business growth, enhancing skills and employability, and improving connectivity and infrastructure.

Building strong communities

We will build strong and resilient communities by engaging with our residents, plan effectively for new housing and tackling social isolation.

Putting residents first

We will deliver excellent services for the benefit of our residents by ensuring budgetary stability and value for money, embracing new technology and developing our workforce.

Introduction

This plan sets out the vision and priorities of Uttlesford District Council for the next four years. It also outlines how the council will deliver its services, measure its performance, and manage its resources in a challenging and changing environment.

Our vision is to make Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit. We want to preserve and enhance the natural beauty, rural character and heritage of our district, while supporting sustainable growth and development that meets the needs and aspirations of our communities. We want to provide high quality and accessible services that are responsive to local needs and deliver value for money. We want to work with our partners and residents to tackle the key challenges and opportunities facing our district.

This version of the plan contains actions specific to the 2024/25 year, which is the second year of the plan's life.



Priorities

To achieve our vision, we have four strategic priorities that will guide our work over the next four years:



Protecting and enhancing our environment



Encouraging economic growth



Building strong communities



Putting residents first

Delivery

To deliver this corporate plan, we will:

- Develop annual service plans that detail how each service area will contribute to the corporate priorities
- Monitor and report on our performance against key indicators and targets on a quarterly basis
- Review our financial position regularly and ensure effective budget management and control
- Engage with our stakeholders, including residents, businesses, partners, staff and councillors on a regular basis
- Review this corporate plan annually and update it as necessary to reflect changing circumstances

Our four-year plan will be delivered during challenging financial times in which we need to reduce our budget by around 25 percent.



Protecting and enhancing our environment

We will protect and improve our environment by reducing our carbon footprint, promoting biodiversity, managing waste and recycling, and supporting green initiatives.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Take action on climate change	Clearly set out and publicise our priorities for the coming years to meet our net zero by 2030 pledge, including reducing emissions from our vehicle fleet and corporate buildings.	We will implement the new 24/25 Climate Change Action Plan that details the projects we will focus on during the year. These will support work to reduce carbon emissions.	We will monitor successful completion of activities with the Action Plan and provide quarterly updates on progress.
	Reduce direct emissions from council housing stock. This includes new-build homes being planned/developed.	We will install clean-air heating solutions and develop measures to retro-fit homes to improve sustainability and contribute towards meeting the 2030 net zero pledge.	We will publish a Carbon Management framework and plan by December 2024 to track carbon emission reduction in Council operations, including energy, fuel and water consumption.
	Provide community leadership and enable local action on climate change.	We will review the Zero Carbon Communities Grant fund to agree a revised scheme to support delivery of community projects that are focused on carbon emission reduction and biodiversity restoration or enhancement.	We will submit a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund with the aim of improving the environmental performance of c.200 of our housing stock. Subject to a successful bid we will commence the decarbonisation project in quarter 1 of 2024/25. A proposal for a revised grants scheme for community groups will be agreed by June 2024 subject to approval of the scheme, applications will be submitted by December 2024 and a decision made in the early part of 2025.

	<p>Deliver sustainable ways of working across the council to reduce the carbon impact of business activities.</p>	<p>We will develop and deliver Carbon Literacy training for all staff to support embedding sustainability and climate change into ways of working across the council.</p> <p>We will set up a Sustainability and Climate Action Board to lead delivery of the Council climate action plan across all parts of the organisation and commence work to develop a corporate Carbon Management Plan.</p>	<p>Training will be developed and piloted to the first staff cohort by May 2024.</p> <p>We will set up the new Board in April 2024 and review its effectiveness after 12 months.</p>
	<p>The 24/25 Climate Change Action Plan has been implemented and is being monitored quarterly by the Sustainability and Climate Action Officer Board. This board has now met three times, and is in an effective rhythm of cross-cutting oversight and supporting momentum. Regular meetings take place with the Portfolio Holder. Specific actions within the plan require member approval and these go through Cabinet as appropriate.</p> <p>Work continues on the Carbon Management framework and plan and a bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (PSDF) to help obtain external funding to make improvements to the London Road offices has been submitted following Cabinet approval in November. If successful, the funding will replace end of life gas boilers, replacing them with heat pumps; increased insulation will be installed as well as solar panels on some parts of the roof. The outcome of the bid will not be known until May 2025. Further consideration will need to be given to how we can reduce energy use and decarbonise across our estate, Little Canfield does not meet the criteria for the PSDF in this round (due to lower age of its boiler).</p> <p>A third round of the Zero Carbon Communities fund has been launched offering a further £125,000 to community groups and parish and town councils, with grants of up to £20,000 available. Grants available for a range of projects for energy conservation or efficiency measures in community buildings, nature and biodiversity projects that might include community allotment projects, or the restoration, creation or enhancement of a community nature area. Waste reduction projects or community initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyle choices would also be considered.</p>		

	Discussions continue as to how best to roll out Carbon Literacy training to staff. It is acknowledged it is important but time needs to be taken to ensure it is fit for purpose.		
<p>Conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of the district's natural habitats and wildlife</p>	<p>Fulfil our bio-diversity duty by using the planning system to conserve, enhance and create new ecological habitat.</p>	<p>We will support and promote the public consultation on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Uttlesford, to ensure widespread reach and engagement.</p> <p>We will manage Council land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity.</p> <p>We will develop robust planning polices as part of the Local Plan relevant to habitat protection, enhancement and creation.</p>	<p>We will promote the consultation, which is due to be published in early 2024 through our communication channels to drive engagement among district residents.</p> <p>We will identify and deliver projects on our own estate and publish our progress and achievements by March 2025</p> <p>We will fully consider Regulation 18 consultation responses and use them to draft a Regulation 19 version of the plan for consultation in July 2024.</p>
	<p>The Planning Department has been requiring bio-diversity net-gain details at the point of validating new planning applications and assessing relevant applications against bio-diversity net-gain requirements throughout 2024/5. The emerging Local Plan includes a policy for 20% BNG (double national requirement) to achieve this priority.</p> <p>Several sites have been selected to trial alternative grounds management regimes with the aim of improving biodiversity. Work to produce a more formal 'rewilding and biodiversity' is in train. It will involve some consultation with town/parish councils and residents to maximise the chances of success and ecological improvements. Work supporting the establishment of 'farm clusters' continues, and interesting exploratory discussions have been had with both a local land management consultancy firm as well as with the 'Big Green Internet' initiative, which aspires to build a network of</p>		

	connected forestry areas across Essex. Work is also ongoing to develop a river and chalk stream initiative, spreading the excellent existing work of groups like the Newport River Group more widely across the district (and beyond).		
Manage waste in a sustainable way	<p>Work with partners across Essex on a new waste strategy for the county.</p> <p>Review our domestic recycling and waste services to make sure they are as efficient as possible and review and improve our waste service for businesses.</p>	<p>Following national policy, we will treat the waste and recycling we collect as a resource. We will contribute to the development of the new Waste Strategy for Essex which will help determine how we will manage waste for the next generation.</p> <p>We will conduct a detailed review of all our waste and recycling services through the change programme Blueprint Uttlesford to ensure they are operating efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>We will play an active role in the development of the county-wide strategy through attendance at appropriate meetings and forums, ensuring the views of this district are taken into account. We anticipate the strategy being approved in the summer of 2024.</p> <p>The review of Environmental Services is scheduled for 2024/25. In the meantime, support from national charity the Waste Resources Action Programme has been sought to explore potential improvements.</p>
	<p>The Waste Strategy for Essex has now been approved widely across Essex partners and the partnership is now developing detailed implementation plans including a renewed focus on behaviour change.</p> <p>The Blueprint Uttlesford review of Environmental Services is progressing well. A Member workshop was held with the aim of gaining a steer in relation to potential short term and long-term service changes including reviewing fees and charges for traded / chargeable services. An interim report is in the process of being prepared to feed into the budget setting process for 25/26.</p>		

Work with partners to deliver sustainable transport	<p>Steer development to the most sustainable locations using the Local Plan and via planning decisions.</p>	<p>Deliver the active travel and shared transport pilot schemes in Saffron Walden as part of the DEFRA funded Clean Air project, to build evidence to support roll out of schemes elsewhere in the district.</p> <p>Develop a spatial development strategy and robust planning policies as part of the Local Plan in order to support sustainable travel.</p>	<p>EV Car Club scheme was launched in November 2023 and uptake will be monitored and evaluated through 2024 as part of the two-year trial period.</p> <p>We will fully consider Regulation 18 consultation responses and use them to draft a Regulation 19 version of the plan for consultation in July 2024.</p>
	<p>Work with Essex County Council and other stakeholders to promote and facilitate sustainable, reliable, and adaptable transport infrastructure.</p>	<p>Complete the Uttlesford Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan.</p>	<p>We will complete the Plan by March 2024 and following consultation will develop from it a priority list of schemes for investment during 2024/25.</p>
	<p>We continue to monitor the EV Car Club scheme and local bike hire schemes. Recently we upgraded all hire bikes to electrically assisted bikes as these were proving more popular to hirers than conventional bikes.</p> <p>The council has a corporate account with the EV car club enabling it to be used by staff for work related journeys. A total of 3201 business miles have been undertaken, saving 633.35 KG of carbon dioxide.</p> <p>The local plan is almost ready for submission to government. We continue to meet with ECC Highways on sustainable transport measures within the plan so that there is a clear steer for the Planning Inspector. UDC continues to work with ECC colleagues on the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The consultation on the LCWIP opened on 18 November. Constructive discussions are also ongoing with the NHS to explore minor modifications to address issues raised to mutual satisfaction.</p>		



Encouraging economic growth

We will support and promote a vibrant and diverse economy by attracting investment, facilitating business growth, enhancing skills and employability, and improving connectivity and infrastructure.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Improve connectivity infrastructure	Support work to ensure residents and businesses benefit from superfast broadband.	We will continue to work with Essex County Council on the Superfast Essex project, particularly targeting areas where major broadband suppliers cannot deliver service.	We will have an officer representative in attendance at all Gigaclear Project Board Meetings to ensure our position is presented against the delivery plan outcome for the district.
	Identify opportunities to improve connectivity, including 5G technology.	Work as part of the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) to ensure residents and businesses get maximum benefit from superfast/gigabit broadband and 5G delivery.	We will continue to have a member and an officer in attendance at the DIZ meetings and regular engagement with Digital Essex, ensuring we have early access to information and initiatives available to enhance connectivity across the district.
	<p>Essex County Council issued communication to members and affected parties at the end of July notifying them of the legal action against Gigaclear regarding three of the four contracts being unfulfilled. This is ongoing and no further updates are available at this point in time.</p> <p>The Council is an active partner in the Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) to ensure the benefits of digital investment are harnessed, maximised and shared across residents, commuters and businesses. The DIZ comprises seven local authority partners from the functional economic area between London and Cambridge: Epping Forest District Council, Harlow Council, Uttlesford District Council, East Hertfordshire District Council, Broxbourne Borough Council, Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council. The DIZ host monthly online meetings aimed at public and private</p>		

sector organisations focusing on new and innovative ways to use technology. In 2023/24, meetings were attended by over 130 attendees from 36 organisations.

A project looking at the digital carbon footprint of local authority websites has now ended. The DIZ website was analysed in full in order to identify if particular pages were having a disproportionate impact on the amount of carbon generated and to explore whether a targeted revision and refresh of the web content could deliver a positive impact. This discovery work highlighted that, whilst there was lots of good about the DIZ website, there were many pages that needed attention and scored very badly. Efforts were targeted at actions delivering the greatest likely carbon savings and emission reductions, including the removal of widgets, embedded videos and unnecessary graphics as well as the resizing and reformatting of all images used. There are plans to produce a case study and develop best practice guidance on sustainable website content.

The proposed project in collaboration with Enterprise Nation has been taken off the work plan for now due to a change in funding priorities by the new government.

A DIZ strategy session took place in September 2024 which identified some potential projects which would take place across the geography of all partner district:

- Mobile connectivity mapping. This would identify not just where mobile operators claim there is service but the speed and signal strength. It would allow residents and businesses to make informed choices about their mobile connectivity options and would form part of evidence base for funding opportunities.
- Supporting the transport modal shift by exploring how digital can support moves to more sustainable modes of transport

The DIZ partners also work alongside Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council on funding bids to support the implementation of digital connectivity infrastructure such as 5G masts or small cell technology installed on street furniture, such as lampposts. There has been a recent unsuccessful bid, but future funding opportunities are expected to arise.

The Council is currently funding the [WECAN Digital Inclusion project](#) through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This is a project to help people get online, dispel fears about using the internet and also make best use of being online. Donated IT equipment, such as smartphones and laptops are repurposed and provided free of charge to those who need them, alongside data cards. Over the last 12 months the programme has focused on Uttlesford residents who are both digitally excluded and rurally isolated, including residents in Council run sheltered housing schemes. As of the end of September 2024, 279 sessions have been held in the district with 76 people benefiting from one-to-one support. This valuable service will end in March if no more funding is forthcoming.

Support the resilience and growth of the local economy	Provide business support, information and advice to help the business community recover and grow.	We will complete the actions set out in the Economic Development Recovery Delivery Plan which contains detailed information about the way the council supports the business community.	<p>We will deliver the schemes as set out in the Economic Development Recovery Plan, progress on which will be reported to the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The delivery programme of the plan was over three years with 2023/24 being the final year. Delivery outcomes for the whole plan will be presented to Cabinet in the summer of 2024/25.</p>
	Enhance the skills and employability of local residents. Attract tourism and investment to the district.	<p>UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) are government funded schemes related to the levelling up agenda to support the local economy and administered at a local level. This provides a local business support package, skills training and grants for the rural business community.</p> <p>We will work with partners including other Essex councils to deliver economic priorities across a wider area, benefitting from economies of scale in procurement and scope of delivery.</p>	<p>The UKSPF and REPF allocations/awards are reviewed by the local partnership panel made up of members, officers and community/voluntary representatives on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The outcomes of the awards are included in the progress reports for the Economic Development Recovery Plan to Scrutiny.</p> <p>We will play an active role in relevant county and regional forums including the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium, the Innovation Core Group and the North Essex Economic Board, ensuring at least one council attendee at all relevant meetings to ensure the district's views and priorities are represented.</p>
	A mid-year update on the work Economic Development has delivered on the carry forward projects from the £1 million fund workstream is being presented to Scrutiny Committee in December, including the grants for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) A new funding window has been		

opened for businesses and organisations to bid for funding from the REPF (capital projects only). This has been expanded to include rural business food production and rural tourism.

Partnership working continues with North Essex Economic Board and a joint action plan is in place to support North Essex economic growth. The plan has four key areas of focus, convening local business support organisations, developing a North Essex pride in place, inward investment and promoting North Essex green potential. Officers attend regular meetings and are active in influencing the delivery of the project and are currently an active member in a focused steering group supporting a young traders project.

A new Economic Development Plan is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in December setting out the priorities for the next four years. This will align with the Corporate Plan, encouraging economic growth and supporting the rural economy.



Building Strong Communities

We will build strong and resilient communities by engaging with our residents, delivering new housing and tackling social isolation.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
<p>Provide and maintain quality homes and invest in thriving communities</p>	<p>Commit to improving the condition of our homes by investing in our housing stock.</p> <p>Provide quality homes through managed growth.</p> <p>Deliver high-quality housing management services to empower our tenants and ensure communities prosper.</p>	<p>Develop an Asset Management Strategy aligned to the HRA Business Plan that delivers Decent Homes compliance through planned work programmes.</p> <p>Seek development opportunities and work with other social housing providers to maximise the delivery of affordable housing.</p> <p>Use customer feedback and engagement to shape the services we provide and continue our multi-agency community events.</p>	<p>We will publish and maintain a five-year Capital Works Programme and our progress against it by March 2025.</p> <p>We will refresh asset data through stock condition surveys, asset grading and maintaining a validated compliance register. This is an ongoing process.</p> <p>We will draft and publish an Asset Management Strategy by March 2025.</p> <p>We will publish the HRA 30-year business plan to identify capacity for investment in new and affordable housing by April 2024.</p> <p>We will produce an action plan to deliver the priorities of the Tenant Engagement Strategy by March 2025.</p>

The development of the Asset Management Strategy is currently in progress, albeit experiencing a slight delay owing to the procurement process for specialist consultants to undertake a detailed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset review. This essential review will form the cornerstone of our strategic planning, informing the development of our investment programmes through:

- Short-term tactical interventions
- Medium-term strategic improvements
- Long-term portfolio sustainability measures

The commissioned HRA asset review is anticipated to span approximately three months. We are adopting a parallel development approach, whereby the new Asset Management Strategy will be formulated concurrently with the review findings, ensuring optimal integration of recommendations.

The evaluation of statutory and regulatory compliance requirements continues, with the final framework scheduled for completion by March 2025. This assessment encompasses all relevant legislative obligations, industry standards, and best practice guidelines pertinent to our housing stock.

The procurement of our new maintenance service provider aligned with the timeline and milestones. The award report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration on 5th December. Subject to approval, this will facilitate a structured mobilisation period from January through March 2025, with the successful contractor commencing operational delivery from 1st April 2025.

This implementation timeline allows for thorough mobilisation activities, including:

- TUPE consultation and transfer arrangements
- Establishment of operational protocols
- Implementation of monitoring frameworks
- Systems integration and testing
- Staff training and development

The Council's Housing Team with the support of Planning is launching a new Strategic Housing Forum in January 2025 as part of the review of the Housing Strategy for the next five years. Organisations operating within the district with a stake in housing will be asked to work with UDC to help shape and then deliver the strategy. Stakeholders include ECC, NHS, RCCE (Rural Community Council of Essex), relevant third sector partners, Homes England, housing associations operating within the district and the Developers Forum. The aim will be to agree collectively what the

	<p>district needs in terms of housing provision and how this will be delivered. The emerging local plan will be a key issue for discussion.</p> <p>To help ensure our approach to tenant engagement meets the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, an independent tenant engagement specialist will support our Tenants and Leaseholders Panel members to enable them to fulfil their role effectively and will support UDC in creating a new Tenant Scrutiny Panel. This project launched on 6 November 2024. Our priorities will be to extend our reach using digital channels and put in place effective scrutiny arrangements for engaged residents. In advance of this we are in the process of cleaning our tenant data around contact information/vulnerability/special requirements for access to services. We have met our Statutory Obligation to measure Tenant Satisfaction through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and this will be an annual process. We are reviewing our approach to the Community Road Shows, to widen the reach across the District, and involve more Council teams and external stakeholders in 2025.</p>		
<p>Plan for future housing needs in a sustainable way</p>	<p>Introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the Local Plan and fund new infrastructure in the district.</p>	<p>Work with a range of stakeholders, including Essex County Council, the NHS, water companies, and neighbouring councils to ensure adequate provision of infrastructure is made to support new development.</p>	<p>We have an agreed Local Plan timetable (the LDS) which sets out that a Regulation 19 Version will be published in July, consulted on, then submitted to government in December 2024.</p>
	<p>Deliver a robust Local Plan that sets out a vision, and objectives, for addressing climate change, meeting future development needs in a planned and managed way, and setting out policies and standards to ensure that our historic and natural environment is conserved and enhanced.</p>	<p>Prepare a draft Local Plan, for public consultation, utilising a range of approaches to resident engagement to ensure that all who want to contribute are able to do so. Use the outcome of consultations and best possible evidence to produce final plan for submission to government.</p>	<p>We have an agreed Local Plan timetable (the LDS) which sets out that a Regulation 19 Version will be published in July, consulted on, then submitted to government in December 2024.</p>

	<p>A robust local plan is to be submitted to government by 20 December. It is on track as per the timetable first laid out in March 2023. Consultation generated far fewer responses than at Reg18 and fewer points of objection. UDC has agreed a grant agreement with Essex County Council who will now fund our CIL scheme development work over the next 10 to 12 months. A public CIL consultation will be programmed for 2025 subject to Member agreement.</p>		
<p>Tackle rural priorities</p>	<p>Draw together our understanding of issues and challenges particularly facing our villages and rural communities – including rural isolation, rural poverty and homelessness, rural economy, rural crime and safety issues etc.</p> <p>Develop this into a coherent plan across of the range of interventions we and other partners both currently make and can potentially introduce to serve our rural communities to the fullest.</p>	<p>Work with our partner agencies, councils and communities to map out the issues and the interventions, and to stimulate a debate around priorities, leading to a new and coordinated plan.</p>	<p>The project’s priorities will be mapped out in a three-stage discovery, challenge and action process involving stakeholder representatives, through to April 2024.</p> <p>Progress with the mapping of issues and services will then be tracked against the project plan developed.</p> <p>The ultimate product of this work is improved opportunities and outcomes for local communities, and those measures will be identified along the way as part of the process.</p>

This new, additional major Corporate Plan priority set by elected members for the current four-year electoral cycle to 2027 is an exciting initiative to really punch our weight in serving a hugely rural district. Of course, all our services have operated in this rural context for the 50 years of our history, but we have not previously looked holistically through the lens of rurality at how everything fits together – including our partnership work – to serve this rural context.

We are in Autumn 2024 approaching the end of the first chapter of this initiative – the mapping of what we already do. This covers all aspects of our work from housing to climate and biodiversity, from community safety to rural infrastructure, from rural planning to health and wellbeing and more. The very act of even initially recording all this work in one place has generated instant improvements – such as adding to our existing economic development work supporting our market town high streets a new initiative honing in on village pubs and shops.

The next chapter after this mapping will be a broader stakeholder engagement exercise, culminating in an Uttlesford Rural Summit early next year, drawing together partners and stakeholders from all sectors, to extend this discussion, and complete a broader system mapping. The third chapter will be some detailed gaps analysis, before reconvening the broader stakeholders (through focused workstreams) to develop a strategy and an action plan.



Putting Residents First

We will deliver excellent services for the benefit of our residents by ensuring budgetary stability and value for money, embracing new technology and developing our workforce.

Priority	What we will do	How we will do it	How we will measure it
Ensure financial stability	<p>Deliver a balanced budget every year.</p> <p>Review services through a structured programme to ensure efficiency and value for money.</p> <p>Prioritise money towards the areas of greatest need and impact.</p>	<p>The required budget savings over the next four years will be delivered through the Blueprint Uttlesford programme, through which every council service is being reviewed. Savings will come from a combination of increased income and budget reductions.</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025 to 2030 demonstrates a need to reduce the net the General Fund budget by £5.5 million, once year 1 Blueprint Uttlesford savings are taken into account.</p>	<p>A separate workstream of benefit realisation and cost control has been established and is being led by the Director of Finance and Revenues and Benefits. This ensures financial changes are logged and maintained.</p> <p>The financial position of the council is reported on a regular basis to Cabinet and annually the budget and MTFS are approved by Full Council.</p>
	<p>The council is undertaking reviews of Environmental Services, Licencing, Museum, Revenues and Benefits and Asset Management Services to identify opportunities for savings. The Revenues and Benefits review is likely to be delayed in part due to the need to consult on any 2026/27 LCTS scheme changes (it is worth noting that there are no plans to reduce its generosity but instead make it less administratively heavy to administer).</p>		

	<p>The council also managed to repay a £35.4m private loan at a £10.2m discount. This loan was taken out in light of the Chesterford Park Investment and will average £0.7m in annual savings over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This savings was not expected and therefore this partially offsets other savings that are taking more time to deliver.</p> <p>It is amber rated as a significant portion of the savings relates to the sale of the council's 50 per cent share of Chesterford Research Park and that is not a certainty, with bids not finalised as this report is written. Equally, reviews need to lead to concrete plans with clearly identified and approved savings. Until the majority of the reviews have reached that stage, it would be difficult to declare this position as green.</p>		
<p>Use commercial assets to fund services</p>	<p>Manage the commercial asset portfolio to maximise income for the council to be used on services for residents.</p> <p>Review the portfolio to ensure it represents best value for the council.</p>	<p>The commercial asset portfolio generates income to support the council's services. Regular reviews will continue to be undertaken to ensure it still provides the best value.</p>	<p>The CIPFA Prudential Code requires an annual report on commercial investments and option appraisals. This report will be presented to the Investment Board and as necessary to Cabinet and Council.</p>
	<p>The annual review takes place in Q3 of the financial year and reported in Q4. In the meantime, markets are monitored and portfolio performance reported quarterly to the Investment Board.</p>		

<p>Enhance digital access and innovation across council services</p>	<p>Consider emerging technology, such as AI, when redesigning services.</p> <p>Review our online services to ensure they are helping residents do what they need to do, within the council's financial constraints.</p>	<p>Through the Blueprint Uttlesford programme and the ICT Business Plan, service reviews will include consideration of the best way to deploy value for money technology to ensure we can continue to deliver the services on which our residents rely.</p> <p>We will implement enhanced technology including the use of AI to improve customer service.</p>	<p>Through the ICT Business Plan, we are beginning to make use of robotics and artificial intelligence to streamline routine tasks and processes.</p> <p>Each Blueprint Uttlesford review has a set review methodology and template. Through this it will be possible to demonstrate how technology has been used to maintain or enhance service delivery.</p> <p>Procure and implement AI systems through the Blueprint Uttlesford transformation programme, considering service requirements during each review.</p>
	<p>A bot is currently live and working within the council's ICT management system, dealing with all initial enquiries. This is a trial period with evaluation due to take place at the end of 2024.</p> <p>A capital bid for a bot in Customer Services is to be submitted. Initial design has been done. This will automatically identify and filter common enquiries in order to speed up the response given to residents.</p>		
<p>Further develop a skilled, motivated and diverse workforce</p>	<p>Review our recruitment, onboarding, induction and retention processes to ensure we attract and retain a workforce that is representative of our community. Promote an inclusive workplace to help us recruit the best people in</p>	<p>We will monitor progress against the activities set out in the Workforce Action Plan and will use self and external assessments to measure success such as Disability Confident and Armed Forces accreditation, an increased number of candidates for jobs, a reduction in staff turnover rates, targeted training for our</p>	<p>This priority will be delivered through the Workforce Plan and Action Plan 2023-2027, which will be regularly reviewed and updated according to corporate priorities and engagement with staff.</p>

	<p>line with our values and behaviours.</p> <p>Ensure our learning and development offer is accessible to all, affordable, efficiently delivered and aligned to emerging developmental priorities.</p>	<p>priority areas and improved compliance with mandatory training.</p>	
	<p>The agency worker framework which we are partnering with Essex County Council went live in September 2024 and is being piloted with Environmental Services. It is still early stages and feedback on the benefits of this new system, with a comparison to our previous way of engaging agency, will be shared in the next update.</p> <p>The HR Manager is working with the LGA and other council's nationally on developing skills pathways for hard to recruit roles such as Legal, Environmental Health, Finance and Planning. We started with Planning first and have been successful in recruiting a Planning Officer through this route. We are also growing our own Planners by utilising the apprenticeship levy and career grade structure, securing a further two trainees. The council now has eight apprentices (including the three mentioned in Planning) in total, of which five are new starters and three are current employees upskilling. An early illustration of the success of this strategy is that the number of agency colleagues working in planning is at the lowest level for several years.</p> <p>A Careers Fair took place on the 20th of November in Saffron Walden and officers from a cross section of the organisation attended throughout the day to talk to students about working for the council. The LGA also be launched a national recruitment campaign 'Make a Difference – Work for your Local Council' in November. The purpose is to raise awareness and attract more talent to local authorities. It was piloted in the north of England earlier in the year and showed promising results with more candidates applying for their roles before. We will be aiming to advertise any vacancies we may have at the same time to utilise the exposure from the national campaign.</p>		