



# 'Delivering together' our Council Plan



# Introduction

from **Cllr Julia Thornton**

Leader of the Council



I am delighted to introduce our new Council Plan and to set out our commitments to you.

Our Plan is being introduced at a challenging time. As our communities and our local economy continue to recover from the impact of the pandemic, we have also seen that the cost of many of the things we rely upon have risen sharply. The cost of living is high and the effects of climate change are impacting the environment that we cherish.

But, we have risen to challenges before, and we will do so again.

It is important to me that the Council remains focused on its residents and their wellbeing. That businesses have confidence and our local economy grows. And that we protect our environment and lead locally on tackling the challenges of climate change.



We are a caring Council, one that has wellbeing running through everything that it does. We will continue to be managed efficiently, and be responsible with the money that we have to spend on our services and in our communities.



We will be our most effective by delivering together. Listening to what is needed, empowering communities to act, and working with the many people and organisations across our District that share our values and ambitions to make the place we live, work or visit the very best it can be.

This Council Plan sets out our priorities and will help us to keep our focus on the health and wellbeing of our communities, the strength of our local economy and the future of our environment.



**Cllr Julia Thornton**

Leader of the Council





# Wellbeing

Wellbeing runs through everything we do.

Wellbeing isn't just about access to health services. It's about quality of life: doing all we can to provide suitable homes for people to live in, supporting people to live independently for longer, creating a safe, healthy and protected environment and a strong local economy that provides the jobs and services we need.

It's about our lifestyle choices and opportunities to plan for our future, responding to climate change and cherishing our natural environment.

Driven by a desire to improve wellbeing, a focus on good financial management and exceptional customer service, we have achieved some great outcomes for our District.

Our **Here to Help** scheme has been supporting residents with the impact of the cost of living. Through the Household Support Fund, we distributed £800,000 to help low-income households with essential costs such as food and utilities, as well as supporting food bank provision across the District. There was also practical support provided through our Warm Spaces initiative. Supported by local community venues, people were provided with community support, housing, financial and employment advice, alongside a Family Cooking Programme.

Working with Police and partners through the **Community Safety Unit**, our District has the lowest levels of anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, drug misuse, robbery, shoplifting and sexual offences in the county, making it the second safest place to live in Kent.

Our **Better Together** initiative builds on the legacy and projects that people created in their own neighbourhoods during the pandemic and is helping to provide practical support, skills development and capacity building to individuals and community groups to enable new initiatives and groups.

Through our work with our affordable housing company, Quercus Housing, we have provided 24 **affordable homes** for the District's residents and worked with partners, including West Kent Housing and the charity Hft, to deliver a further 17 homes since 2020. A further 17 new homes were delivered by Quercus Housing during 2023.

In 2022 we opened a brand new **leisure centre** at White Oak in Swanley secured funding of £1.5m to deliver a programme of energy efficiency upgrades to low-income households living off the gas grid and were awarded £1.5m of funding to invest in local businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funding schemes.

However, we are mindful that the years ahead are likely to present us with some difficult challenges.



## A look back



We were the first council in the country to become self-sufficient of central Government funding. We are almost unique in planning our finances over 10 years to give us a stable financial footing and are one of very few public sector organisations to hold Platinum status for Investors in People, the fifth time in a row we have achieved the highest accreditation available.



The years immediately before this Plan have been unique in our lifetimes. A pandemic that radically changed how we lived, worked and looked after our health and our neighbours. The pandemic has left lasting change in people's lives and the way in which people and our economy work.



National and international factors have created further uncertainty and challenge. Political change, conflict in Ukraine, heightened energy costs, increased cost of living and high rates of inflation are all impacting communities and businesses as we write this Plan.



Local communities and businesses have responded. 1,500 volunteers joined the Care for our Community scheme during the pandemic. Homes have been offered to people seeking safety from the war in Ukraine and for refugees. Community groups have sprung into action and sustained their efforts to support people locally. Their efforts have been supported and celebrated through events including Run, Walk or Push Against Dementia, the Big Community

Sing and the Making It Happen Community Awards.

Local businesses have diversified, sustained their presence in our towns and villages and this has encouraged new businesses in to our local economy. To support our local businesses we have secured funding, prepared our Economic Development Strategy, launched the Sevenoaks So Much More campaign and invested in the Visit Sevenoaks tourism website.

We have remained steadfast with a focus on what is needed locally. Services continued throughout the pandemic with Councillors and staff making sure residents had the food and supplies they needed and ensured tens of millions of pounds of grant funding were distributed to businesses.

New companies have been formed to deliver new income to support our services and to make sure more of the affordable homes that the District needs are being built.

When the operator of our leisure centres in Sevenoaks and Edenbridge abruptly ceased trading, we worked quickly to re-open them and the health and leisure facilities that our communities value. We were prepared and ready to act, and they were reopened in just six weeks with a new operator.

And we have made a commitment to tackle the challenge of climate change.

Much progress has been made, but there is more to do.

# Looking ahead

Over the last decade we have worked hard to deliver a strong and sustainable financial position, saving £8.4 million whilst continuing to provide the services that our communities rely upon.

However, the scale of the challenge to our budgets is at its highest level for the last 10 to 15 years. This is caused by high inflation, large increases in utility costs, wages and the price of fuel for our refuse freighters, as well as increased demand for our services and the need to secure contracts for the operation of our leisure centres.

Providing good value for our services, and continuing to collect rubbish and recycling every week, means that there have been managed rises in council tax. From April 2023, the average household payment towards our services is £237 per year, just £4.55 per week.

The pressure to provide the housing that people need in a District that is 93% Green Belt means some difficult decisions may need to be taken. At the same time, there are further reforms to the planning system expected from Government and the potential for standards to be set that could change the way rubbish and recycling is collected.

The climate challenge is also one that is upon us and amongst our highest priorities.

We have a strong financial footing, a track record of delivering high quality services and confidence that, by delivering together, we can continue to overcome the many varied and complex challenges that are faced by local government and public services.

The pages that follow set out our priorities and the promises that we make to you. Each of our six Cabinet Members sets out the services that they are responsible for and what they aim to achieve before the next District Council elections in 2027.





# Our Priorities

## Focus areas:

Community empowerment, engagement, health & wellbeing, leisure & active lifestyles, community safety and a strong voluntary & community sector. Preventing social isolation & loneliness and increasing disability awareness.



## Communities

We are fortunate to live in one of the safest places in the country, but we understand we will need to continue to work with our communities and partners to maintain this.

We will continue to nurture safe, supportive, and inclusive communities, taking a 'delivering together' approach to keep communities safe.

Empowering local people and supporting our outstanding voluntary and community groups in their work with the most isolated and vulnerable residents in the District will continue to be a priority.

We also have the tools and partnerships in place to support happier and healthier communities. By linking our leisure facilities, housing, open spaces, planning and environmental health work together we can improve health and wellbeing across our District.

## Focus areas:

Skills and opportunity, business growth, improving infrastructure, rural economy, green economy, visitor economy & the arts and town centres. Delivering the UK Shared Prosperity & Rural Prosperity Funds.



## Economy

The District's economy is greatly influenced by our proximity to London. As the economy changes, new jobs will be created and new skills will be required. We will support businesses and residents through the transition ahead, with tailored support programmes, a focus on our towns and rural economies and new opportunities for training.

The rural nature of our District and the post-pandemic shift to home based working further creates demand for high quality broadband to be available across the whole District.

With such high visitor numbers to our historic homes and buildings, incredible landscapes and visitor attractions, tourism makes a significant contribution to our local economy and is an area we will continue to highlight, promote and support.

## Focus areas:

Financially responsible, long-term stability, regeneration and capital projects. Customer focus and continuous service improvement.



## Our Council

Ensuring the Council remains on a sound financial footing, is managed effectively, is focused on the customer, provides value for money and continues to improve, will help us to achieve the priorities we have for our communities.

A well run, well managed, open and transparent Council provides reassurance and we are determined to remain a fiscally sound organisation that you can trust and rely on.

# Our Priorities

## Environment

Our District's high quality natural environment plays a pivotal role in the wellbeing of our residents. Our focus remains on protecting this very special asset.

The number of homes we should be building to meet future demand is a huge challenge in an area that is 93% Green Belt. The District is also fortunate to have a significant number of Natural Landscapes (previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and a rich historic environment including listed buildings, conservation areas and registered parks and gardens. Yet we know there are many families, young people and key workers who need a home of their own or more space to grow.

Tackling the challenge of climate change by reducing our carbon emissions and improving biodiversity is critical now and for future generations.

### Focus areas:

Climate Change, Local Plan, natural environment, biodiversity, sustainable travel and waste & recycling.

## Housing

Having a safe and secure place to live is one of the most critical factors to a person's wellbeing. With the link between housing and health well known, the need to provide the right homes for the future of the District has never been greater.

Available land for new homes is limited by the high quality natural environment that blankets our District. This means that land values are high, making it more expensive than most areas outside of London to build new homes. And when homes are built, prices are higher and often less affordable to local residents.

This contributes to making the availability of affordable housing a huge issue facing the future of the District. Through our emerging Local Plan, taking the actions set out in our Housing Strategy and building new homes ourselves, we can continue to address the need for homes across our District.

### Focus areas:

Affordable homes, rural housing, housing standards, housing options - the right homes in the right places, homes for older people, supported housing and preventing homelessness.

# Delivering our Council Plan Improvement & Innovation

Councillor Julia Thornton

## Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

-  Economy
-  Housing
-  Our Council



*“The services I am responsible for include equalities, customer service, service improvement, performance management, communications and the projects we undertake for economic development & regeneration.”*



## Track Record

- Our 2021 resident survey told us that:
  - 81% resident satisfaction with the way the Council runs things (national average 56%)
  - 86% of residents trust Sevenoaks District Council (national average 53%)
  - 82% satisfaction with keeping residents informed
  - 81% resident satisfaction with helpfulness of staff
- Provided 17 flats & the Meeting Point business hub through the redevelopment of 27-37 High Street, Swanley
- Secured planning permission for approximately 100 new residential units at developments across Edenbridge and Swanley, with retail units and a new community hall included in those plans
- Secured over £1.5m funding to invest in local businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural Prosperity Funds.



## Our Challenges

Sustained increase in customer demand for our services

Lack of available funding from a national level to invest in locally important public services and local regeneration projects

Difficult market and economic conditions from high inflation and higher cost of living on the Council and local businesses

High land values, borrowing costs and cost of the materials required to deliver plans for regeneration.



## Promises:

- To provide high quality, customer focused services
- To keep levels of resident satisfaction and sense of wellbeing high
- To deliver the Economic Development Strategy; supporting businesses to come to the District and to grow
- To progress and deliver regeneration plans, including those for Stangrove Estate, Spitals Cross and White Oak
- Improving wellbeing through Council services, supporting the economy and delivering well-designed regeneration schemes.



# Delivering our Council Plan

## Housing & Health

Councillor Perry Cole

### Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

-  Housing
-  Communities
-  Environment



*“The services I am responsible for include housing strategy, housing standards, housing advice & homelessness prevention, rough sleeping, empty homes, health & wellbeing, energy efficiency and fuel poverty.”*



### Track Record

- Provided 24 affordable homes through Quercus Housing, our affordable housing company. Working with our partners we have delivered 17 further supported housing schemes together
- Secured funding of nearly £700,000 over three years to support single homeless and rough sleepers with housing and support
- Secured funding of £1.5m to deliver a programme of energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon heating solutions to low-income households
- Our HERO service has supported residents to manage their household bills and debt, access local support and employment
- Supported the Homes for Ukraine scheme, ensuring more than 200 privately owned homes were ready to be shared with those seeking safety in our District
- Our dedicated One You team continued to work directly with local residents to improve their health
- Reopened Edenbridge and Sevenoaks leisure centres and Lullingstone Park Golf Course following the abrupt closure of the operator. Ready-made plans allowed an interim operator, Everyone Active, to re-open the centres in just six weeks.



## Our Challenges

High land and property values

Delivering more homes, including affordable homes

Reducing homelessness

Addressing climate change and fuel poverty

Supporting residents impacted by increases in the cost of living

Improving wellbeing and reducing health inequalities

Supporting those seeking asylum through UK Government programmes.



## Promises:

- To provide a range of affordable homes to meet the housing needs of our communities including the needs of specific groups
- Working with partners to deliver the housing needed to meet local needs; the right homes in the right places
- To reduce homelessness and improve routes into permanent accommodation by delivering the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies
- To promote high quality homes and optimise the range and suitability of new and existing homes in both the public and private sector
- To provide grant funding to adapt homes and reduce the number of empty homes
- To deliver the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan, including the provision of our One You healthy lifestyles service.





# Delivering our Council Plan

## People & Places

Councillor Lesley Dyball

### Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

 Communities

 Economy



*“The services I am responsible for include the Community Plan, community safety, town centres, tourism, community grants, safeguarding, youth services and leisure activities.”*



### Track Record

- Our Here to Help programme and Household Support Fund allocated over £800,000 to help households with the cost of living
- Community Plan refreshed in 2022 and supported by new funding through the Local Strategic Partnership Community Wellbeing Fund
- ‘Better Together’ community mobilisation programme launched
- In the top two safest places to live, work and visit in Kent, with the lowest levels of anti-social behaviour
- Secured funding of approximately £120,000 over three years to provide domestic abuse support and in excess of £100,000 to support a programme of youth engagement and mentoring
- A varied communities programme delivered each year including Family Fun Days, Silver Sunday, Run, Walk or Push Against Dementia, The Big Community Sing and the Making it Happen Community Awards
- Launched ‘Sevenoaks So Much More’ and the Visit Sevenoaks website, promoting the Sevenoaks District as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

## Our Challenges

Reduction in funding available to provide services in our communities

Impact of the cost of living, including higher demand for our community services

Resilience of the voluntary sector, following the impact and greater customer demand from the pandemic and more recently, the cost of living

Understanding the changing skills and employment needs of our District.



## Promises:

- To work with the District's Local Strategic Partnership to deliver the 'Better Together' Community Plan, empowering communities to come together to improve their local community
- To ensure the District remains a safe place to live and visit by delivering the Community Safety Strategy with our partners
- To provide a support programme for households experiencing financial hardship
- To support a growing tourism offer in the District through the Sevenoaks So Much More and Visit Sevenoaks campaigns, alongside the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership.



# Delivering our Council Plan

## Development & Conservation

Councillor Simon Reay

### Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

-  Environment
-  Economy
-  Housing



*“The services I am responsible for include the Local Plan, development management, conservation, contributions from developers, building control, transport policy and planning enforcement.”*



### Track Record

- District wide engagement in our new Local Plan, including with traditionally hard to reach groups
- More than £14m secured for the District from developer contributions through the Community Infrastructure Levy, of which £4.2m has been distributed directly to Town and Parish Councils for local projects and facilities
- Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan - £1.2m secured to deliver the Sevenoaks East to West cycle route. Further £45k secured to plan and design routes from Sevenoaks to Otford, Sevenoaks to Seal to Otford and to develop a Swanley Urban Area Cycling and Walking Plan.





## Our Challenges

Delivering housing and economic growth through our Local Plan, whilst protecting our high quality natural environment, the Green Belt and our Natural Landscapes

Government reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework

Introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain Requirements for new developments

Securing the funding necessary for strategic infrastructure

Implementation of the Building Safety Act.



## Promises:

- To deliver a new Local Plan for the District, that has a positive impact on the number of new homes, address the challenge of climate change and promotes wellbeing
- To protect our historic environment, high quality natural environment and improve biodiversity
- To adopt planning policies that secure necessary contributions towards affordable housing and infrastructure from developers
- To implement new cycling and walking routes and progress the Council's Movement Strategy
- Ensure the health and safety of people, and to help conserve fuel and power through the application and enforcement of the Building Regulations
- Improving wellbeing by promoting high quality design and environmental performance in new developments.



# Delivering our Council Plan

## Cleaner and Greener

Councillor Margot McArthur

### Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

 Environment

 Communities

 Economy



*“The services I am responsible for include street cleaning, waste & recycling, tackling climate change, CCTV, Environmental Health, parking, licensing, air quality and emergency planning.”*



### Track Record

- Maintained a weekly collection of all rubbish and recycling
- 20% increase in customers using the fortnightly garden waste collection service
- 91% resident satisfaction with refuse and recycling services (national average 79%)
- Reduced our carbon emissions by replacing vehicles, and a waste collection round review, which together, resulted in a reduction of over 30%
- EV charging points installed in car parks and for taxis
- Introduced cashless parking payment options.



## Our Challenges

The Environment Act 2021 could introduce statutory collections of weekly food and glass waste, standardised containers and significant changes to garden waste

Continuing to collect the high levels of waste and recycling in the most efficient way

Meeting new targets for air quality

Tackling the challenge of climate change with our residents and businesses.



## Promises:

- To maintain a weekly rubbish and recycling collection service
- To keep our streets clean and seek to tackle those that break the law by fly-tipping in our District
- To continue to reduce our carbon emissions, including making our vehicle fleet more energy efficient
- Improving wellbeing by maintaining high standards through our environmental health, animal welfare and licensing services.





# Delivering our Council Plan

## Finance & Investment

Councillor Kevin Maskell

### Delivering together

Delivering our Council Plan priorities for

-  Economy
-  Housing
-  Our Council



*“The services I am responsible for include financial strategy, assets, investments, business rates, council tax, benefits and council tax support and fraud prevention.”*



### Track Record

- Continuing to set a balanced 10-year budget to help plan for a strong long-term future
- Secured property investments returning £1.5m a year to Council budgets
- Reviewed our Treasury Management policies and achieved interest returns on Council money held in the bank and other investments
- Supported business through the pandemic and beyond, ensuring more than £40m of grant support has been distributed to businesses in the Sevenoaks District since 2020
- Supported residents by ensuring benefits and council tax support to the value of £20m are paid annually.



## Our Challenges

Increasing demand for Council services

Continued reductions in funding to maintain Council services

Reducing number of grant funding schemes to meet the costs of services and deliver regeneration and investment schemes

High inflation and interest rates

High land and property values and increased building costs impacting investment in capital schemes

Staff recruitment and wage pressures

Reducing the environmental impact of Council activities.



## Promises:

- Continue to deliver a long-term balanced budget and maintain our position as one of the most fiscally strong councils in the country
- Manage the Council's assets and investments effectively to maximise income to support the delivery of Council services
- Ensure that Council services are resilient by exploring innovative and alternative approaches to service delivery that improve cost effectiveness and quality of provision
- Monitor the quality of service delivery to residents and ensure value for money
- Improving wellbeing by supporting residents faced with the increased cost of living and reducing the environmental impact of Council services.



## The next steps

---

Our Council Plan has set out our promises to you.

Each year we will monitor our progress and report how we are doing publicly.

Undoubtedly things will change that we cannot forecast today.

New laws and regulations, changes that effect our economy and changes in the funding we receive to deliver our services are just a few examples. Importantly, our residents and local businesses may tell us that their needs have changed and, as we have in the past, we will be ready to adapt.

Each year, we will take the opportunity to review our progress and ensure our priorities and promises to you remain the right ones.

---

t 01732 227000

---

w [sevenoaks.gov.uk](http://sevenoaks.gov.uk)

---

Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices,  
Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG

---

**This publication is available in large print and can be explained in other languages by calling 01732 227000.**

---

✕ sdc\_newsdesk

 Sevenoaks District Council Official

 [sevenoaksdistrictcouncil](https://www.instagram.com/sevenoaksdistrictcouncil)

 Sevenoaks District Council

---

Delivering  
together...  
2023 to 2027