

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL PLAN -

OUR JOURNEY TO 2030

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY VISION FOR WOKINGHAM BOROUGH





Foreword

It is with great pride and optimism that we present Wokingham Borough Council's new Council Plan. This document is more than just a strategic outline; it is a testament to our commitment to fostering thriving communities that are vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable for all residents.

Over the past year, we have engaged with hundreds of residents, businesses, and stakeholders to understand their aspirations and concerns. This plan reflects those conversations and sets out a clear vision for the future of our borough. Our priorities are centred around enhancing the quality of life, being inclusive, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

We are dedicated to delivering high-quality services that meet the needs of our diverse population. From improving our infrastructure and public services to supporting local businesses and protecting our natural environment, every initiative in this plan is designed to build a better Wokingham for current and future generations.

As we embark on this journey, we invite you to join us in making Wokingham a place where everyone can thrive. Together, we can achieve our shared goals and create a community that we are all proud to call home.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement.

Stephen Conway, Leader of Wokingham Borough Council

Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive



Introduction



Creating a borough where everyone can thrive is at the heart of all we do.

Our Council Plan has been shaped by the Wokingham Communities Vision, created with the invaluable input from our communities, workforce, partners and elected members.

In line with the Communities Vision, we continue to develop community power, collaborating with our partners to amplify the voice of our residents.

Our plan outlines the Council's focus for the next five years and sets out our priorities, including how we measure progress and ensure we can successfully achieve our ambitions.

We have considered the changing needs of our communities, our current priorities and projects and the challenging economic and environmental conditions we face.





About Wokingham Borough

Our borough has changed significantly over recent years. At the latest census in 2021, there were 177,502 people living in Wokingham Borough.

That is 15% more people than in the previous census 10 years prior in 2011, resulting in an additional 23,100 residents who now call Wokingham home.

Wokingham has an aging population. The highest increase was in the number of people aged 65+ which has increased by 28.2% since 2011.

The makeup of our communities has changed, we are more diverse than ever before and welcome the richness these new communities bring and celebrate our diversity.



Wokingham is an attractive place to live and benefits from good rail and road links to London and the M4. It is home to Reading University and large international businesses as well as thriving small and medium enterprises.

Whilst many people in Wokingham borough are thriving, it is recognised that this is not the experience of everyone who calls Wokingham home.

Thriving communities need all the right building blocks, including good homes, education and jobs, and access to safe green spaces and transport. For some people in the borough, these building blocks are not securely in place, limiting their opportunity to thrive and leading to unfair and avoidable differences in their wellbeing.

With rising cost of living, including housing, coupled with a growing borough and the aftereffects of the COVID 19 Pandemic, this has resulted in more people requiring support.



About the Council

The majority of the money the council has to spend goes on our Adults and Children's Social Care services, these are statutory responsibilities, which include making sure everyone in our communities has the support, resources and opportunities to live "gloriously ordinary lives".

We also know the importance of understanding our diverse communities, working together, helping early and sharing challenges and opportunities to improve outcomes locally.

We have many different roles to play within and for our communities, sometimes needing to be the enabler of the conversation, understanding that better outcomes are often delivered when working together in partnership with others.





Mission



We will work with and for our communities, to ensure everyone has the opportunity to thrive; being able to start well, live well and age well in Wokingham Borough.

Our Ambition for 2030

To support the Wokingham Communities Vision 2035, our ambition over the next five years is to work towards a **Thriving Wokingham Borough**. The main themes of the plan are captured below, these are our areas of focus which will inform our annual delivery plan.

Fair - everyone in Wokingham Borough has equitable access to opportunities, support and leisure, regardless of their circumstances.

Green - the surroundings in Wokingham Borough are clean, sustainable and have plenty of green spaces for all to enjoy, contributing to a reduction in our carbon footprint.

Safe - everyone who lives, works and visits Wokingham Borough feels safe and is supported to live independently.

Connected - strong communities, enabled by affordable, accessible travel, a resilient economy, opportunities for people to connect with one another and digital services which bring people together.



How will we work?

1. We will safeguard our financial stability to ensure we use our resources to deliver the best value for money services.
2. We will continue to be there for those who need us the most, by helping early to provide better support and outcomes.
3. We will put people at the heart of all we do, following the principles in our Customer Experience Charter.
4. We will make decisions based on data, together with insight from engagement with others and by using our skills and experience to co-produce services.
5. We will deliver efficient, sustainable, innovative, digital enabled services.
6. We will work with partners to get the best outcomes for our residents using our Partnership Framework.
7. We will embody the council's values and demonstrate the council's behaviours every day.



Our Council Plan will have an annual delivery plan which we will share with our workforce, communities and partners that provides clarity on action, is measurable on outcomes and updates on progress.



Themes



Fair

What we have achieved

Since the last council plan was produced in 2020, Wokingham Borough Council has taken great strides towards making life fair for its residents. We are one of the only Boroughs to produce a dedicated Tackling Poverty Strategy. We have made significant improvements to inclusion through our Equality Plan and, by becoming involved in the Social Care Future movement and by adopting the Social Care Future vision, we have begun to rewrite our relationship with residents by sharing power with them as equals.

Having a Director of Public Health for Wokingham for the first time has also enabled us to focus on improving health outcomes locally for all and we have committed to better understanding and tackling the unfair and avoidable differences that exist in the borough through all our services and activities.

We have coproduced a new SEND and Inclusion Strategy to ensure we are continuing to support children and young people with additional needs and disabilities are well prepared for adulthood and independence and are visible and valued in our community.

Where we are now

Many new homes have been built in the borough over the last 5 years, however the cost of home ownership and private rent remains very high because Wokingham Borough is such a great place and people want to live here. We need to focus more on creating homes for those who are less able to afford them.

We also recognise that not everyone has the same opportunities to lead healthy lives, and we are working with partners to address this and make the borough more equal.

In line with national trends, the identification of special educational needs in Wokingham has continued to increase, with rapid growth in this area since 2019, resulting in higher numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

Where we are going

Priority 1

People have the chance to contribute to their community through improved inclusion and our commitment to equality and diversity.

Priority 2

People in hardship are supported to improve their circumstances, including support with debt, fair employment and good jobs.

Priority 3

Residents across the borough have access to a range of education, skills and services, and opportunities to live a healthy life, and wellbeing is promoted for all at all ages.

Priority 4

Everyone can live in a place they call home.





Themes



Green

What we have achieved

Through our Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), 3184 solar panels have been installed across 301 dwellings as part of the Berkshire wide Solar Together scheme, 45,906 trees or hedgerows have been planted over 17 hectares since 2021 and 10% biodiversity net gain is now mandatory in all planning applications.

There was a 1,476 tCO2 e* reduction of council specific emissions in 2023-24 and the new Local Plan includes key Climate Emergency policies around minimum energy standards in future developments.



Where we are now

The CEAP identifies actions to reduce carbon dioxide emissions across 9 priority areas. Our residents have told us that protecting green spaces, planting more trees and better cycling and walking routes are important to them.

We are committed to action that are not only good for the health of the planet but also that of people and will help to address inequalities.



Where we are going

Priority 1

Everyone shares the benefits of improved biodiversity and safe, accessible green spaces.

Priority 2

People can enjoy clean and well-maintained streets and other public areas which foster a sense of civic pride for all.

Priority 3

Lowered emissions from transport, homes and businesses and improved recycling will help to tackle climate change, improving people's health and wellbeing.

Priority 4

Residents benefit from improved energy efficiency in their homes, making them warmer and healthier to live in and reducing bills.



Themes



Safe

What we have achieved

The council played a significant role in keeping residents as safe as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, using local knowledge to disseminate information, identify surges and manage vaccination programmes, as well as helping communities to unite and provide support to one another. We have achieved White Ribbon accreditation due to our work on Violence Against Women and Girls. We have invested in tackling Anti-social behaviour by bringing the team back in-house and ASB remains relatively low.

Where we are now

Crime data show that Wokingham is statistically a very safe borough, however not everyone reports feeling safe in their communities. People have told us that feeling safe is important to them and we need to understand better what this means to our residents and what we can do to help them feel safe. Some of the areas mentioned have been anti-social behaviour, graffiti, wanting well maintained shopping centres and pavements, and more lighting.

Where we are going

Priority 1

Residents can expect to be protected from abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Priority 2

People feels safe in their communities, including those who are at greater risk of discrimination, anti-social behaviour or hate crime.

Priority 3

We have supportive communities and partnerships, where helping early is everyone's business.

Priority 4

Housing, streets and public areas are designed, built and maintained with people's safety at the forefront.





Themes



Connected

What we have achieved

Our previous plan has brought benefits like new walking and cycling routes and improvements to Wokingham town centre, including the interchange with improved bus access at the station.

To help support human connections, we have helped introduce a charity and community hub, piloted resident reception, our work to co-produce the Social Care Future vision with residents and the development of our communities vision has connected communities and grass roots organisations like never before.



Where we are now

We have developed a new Local Transport Plan, with a focus on healthier, green and safer travel. Our residents have told us that active and sustainable travel is important, with more frequent bus routes being a priority for them. What they also say is that the condition of the roads, affordable parking and levels of traffic matter too.

Our work on creating communities is truly cross-council and will bring further social and physical connections to all the communities in Wokingham.

Where we are going

Priority 1

We all live in communities where we feel we belong and have strong social connections.

Priority 2

Outcomes for residents are better because we work in partnership and shape services together, including through new technology.

Priority 3

We help our town centres and neighbourhoods to be thriving, accessible and welcoming, helping businesses to succeed.

Priority 4

People can get to where they need and want to through good transport links.



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