

Draft Corporate Plan 2024-2028

Introduction

We know there are many things residents and local businesses love about the Tandridge District including our beautiful countryside, the community feel of our towns and villages and our great location.

We want to look after all of that and to add to it. We want tomorrow's Tandridge to be a place where the wider environment and the distinctive and attractive character of the district is protected and enhanced, where there is more affordable housing and better infrastructure, where there is a successful and sustainable economy with thriving town centres, villages and rural areas that meet the individual needs of their communities.

We aim to:

- Protect the environment, deliver affordable housing and boost the local economy.
- Put residents and local businesses at the heart of what we do and be responsive to their needs.
- Deliver high quality services and value for money.
- Provide financial prudence and sustainability.
- Provide clear and effective communication.

We can no longer rely on government funding, so to enable us to achieve this vision we will need to generate our own income. That income will enable us to deliver the services that are important to residents and businesses in the district.

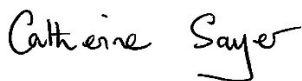
Later on in this plan we explain how we will generate additional income to fund service provision and delivery of the priorities set out here. We will make sure that we do this in a responsible and transparent way that does not undermine our role as a public body.

We are also looking at different ways to deliver services which are more cost effective and efficient, for example by sharing services with other councils, by working more collaboratively or by paying other organisations to provide services on our behalf.

We have produced this plan in consultation with residents, local businesses, councillors, our staff and other partners. We have tried hard to ensure it reflects what is important to you and what you would like to see as the shape of things to come.

This plan sets out our new vision, priorities and actions which will take us through the next four years. It recognises and reflects the district's special characteristics, the needs of residents and businesses and the wider context – both regional and national – in which we operate.

This will continue to be a time of significant change and challenge for local government and local communities and we will keep this plan under regular review.



Councillor Catherine Sayer, Leader of the Council



David Ford, Chief Executive

Our vision

Protecting the environment, delivering affordable housing, encouraging economic growth and supporting a healthy and inclusive community.

We will do this by:

- Delivering high quality services and continued improvement.
- Providing value for money for your council tax.
- Being financially responsible.
- Responding to the needs of the district's residents, businesses and other partners.

Priority 1: Protecting and enhancing our environment

Although close to London, Tandridge is a large, mainly rural district covering 110 square miles, with a population of about 88,500.

94% of the land in the district is classified as Green Belt - the highest amount in the country. Just under a third is open space or woodland, while over half is in agricultural use.

Approximately 70% of the district's population live in the main northern residential areas of Caterham, Oxted, Warlingham and Whyteleafe which, together, cover about 9% of the Council's geographical area. The rest live in smaller settlements and villages.

Tandridge has 19 Conservation Areas and around 600 Listed Buildings, of which 20 are recognised as being of Outstanding National Interest and are Grade I listed buildings.

There are eight sites of Special Scientific Interest, seven Local Nature Reserves and nearly 40% of the area is designated as being either an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or of Great Landscape Value.

These special characteristics mean we need robust planning policies and enforcement to protect the district from over development, while allowing appropriate new development and much needed infrastructure.

Investment in infrastructure is needed to secure upgrades to transport, schools and health services.

Public transport is inadequate and expensive, with infrequent and reducing bus services and no direct connections between some towns and villages. The district is well connected to Surrey, Kent and London by motorways and other main roads. Gatwick Airport is to the south west of the area, while Biggin Hill Airport is situated close to the north east.

Many of the schools are over capacity, with students commuting long distances or outside the district to secure a school place. Health services are also at capacity.

Objective 1: Ensure new development is properly planned and sustainable and benefits the district's communities.

Delivered by:

- Ensuring planning decisions protect the environment while delivering quality place-making and appropriate land use with supporting infrastructure.
- Delivering a proactive enforcement service which focuses on taking action against unauthorised development perceived to cause significant and/or demonstrable harm to the environment.
- Collecting section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy and spending it on the infrastructure needed to support new development.

- Engaging with infrastructure providers to make sure other funding is properly targeted to benefit the district, including in relation to transport, health, education and flood mitigation and climate change.
- Working with Surrey County Council and other transport providers to promote sustainable transport choices, increase accessibility for all and reduce congestion.
- Delivering a Building Control service which complements the planning processes and is residents' service of choice.

Objective 2: Ensure our planning policies and practices reflect, protect and enhance the special characteristics of the district.

Delivered by:

- Developing a Local Plan which delivers sustainable growth, while protecting the whole district from inappropriate development and including social, economic and environmental policies to inform decision making on planning applications.
- Making open and transparent planning decisions in accordance with our adopted development plan and national planning policy to enable growth and development that is consistent with the principles of sustainable development.
- Focusing on improving biodiversity, including within the Council's own developments, encouraging and enabling green tourism and green infrastructure.
- Assisting Parish Councils with the production of Neighbourhood Plans.

Objective 3: Reduce our environmental impact and supporting residents and businesses to reduce their own impact.

Delivered by:

- Continuing to provide an efficient recycling and waste service, encouraging residents and businesses to reduce, reuse and recycle.
- Delivering an effective street cleaning service to reduce the environmental impact of litter, encouraging residents and business to keep the district clean.
- Enforcing against fly-tipping.
- Seeking Biodiversity Net Gain from new development and using the Council's own developments to lead by example.
- Seeking to reduce waste and emissions across our own estate, assets and activities, and use natural resources more efficiently. Through our own activities and planning policies improve the district's resilience to the effects of climate change.
- Working with Surrey County Council and other partners to help local residents and businesses make responsible environmental decisions and to take action to reduce their own carbon footprint and use of resources, as well as increase their climate change resilience.

Objective 4: Invest in and improve parks and open spaces through our open space strategy.

Delivered by:

- Implementing the UK shared prosperity fund action plan to help deliver the open space strategy and improve the quality of parks and open spaces throughout the district.
- Refurbishing children's play areas to provide a high quality, inclusive and safe play environment.
- Working with parish councils and volunteers across the district and helping communities to maintain their own local green spaces.
- Promoting council assets as Biodiversity Net Gain sites

Priority 2: Delivering affordable housing for local people

Over three quarters of Tandridge residents own their own property, while 11% rent from the Council or a housing association.

We have around 2,580 council properties and just over 600 leaseholders. The number of households in temporary accommodation is increasing due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

The lack of affordable housing and the cost of private rented accommodation in the Tandridge district is a significant challenge for families needing affordable housing options. Because of this, the Council only builds homes to rent and not for home ownership.

Since 2016, we have built around 100 affordable rented homes for people on our housing register and we have plans to build 200 more homes in the next few years.

We supplement our council house building programme with a programme of buying back ex-Right to Buy properties.

We have received funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) to buy homes for Afghan and Ukraine families. This fund was established as part of the UK's humanitarian duties for Ukrainians and Afghan families.

We also work with housing associations, developers and landowners, to build affordable homes which include rented and shared ownership homes.

Objective 1: Maximise the use of our assets by building more council homes.

Delivered by:

- Reviewing and freeing up our own land and assets for council house building.
- Identifying other suitable land for development, including land belonging to public sector partners.
- Securing grant money through Homes England and other sources to fund future developments
- Continuation and extension of the Council House Building Programme.

Objective 2: Encourage the development of affordable housing by developers, ensuring new homes are well designed.

There are many different views and definitions of what affordable housing is. We recognise the government definition of affordable housing often results in homes that are not genuinely affordable to local people. However, these are generally the only type of affordable homes we are able to require developers to build.

Delivered by:

- Using our planning policies to require private developers to deliver affordable housing from qualifying schemes in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CSP4 with a mix of housing types, tenures and size and high quality design.
- Giving priority to local people for affordable housing.
- Expanding our Housing Enabling offer to Registered Providers of Social Housing to increase their levels of affordable housing.

Objective 3: Reduce homelessness in the district.

Delivered by:

- Providing local temporary and emergency accommodation.
- Continuing to work with housing associations and other social landlords to provide more homes for those on our housing register.
- Working with partners to commission services to support those who are at risk of becoming or who are homeless.
- Developing a more proactive approach to rent arrears to offer help and minimise evictions.
- Ensuring vacant council properties are re-let as quickly as possible and within set deadlines.

Objective 4: Increase the standard of private housing in the district.

Delivered by:

- Working with the Environmental Health shared service to ensure inspections are carried out and to enforce higher standards.
- Managing the Home Improvement Agency to ensure the quality of any specified adaptations.
- Developing an Empty Homes Strategy to encourage the occupation of empty homes.

Priority 3: Financial prudence and sustainability

Objective 1: Become a financially self-sustaining council.

The government's revenue support grant has been cut dramatically over recent years and may disappear altogether before long and the amount of business rates that we are able to keep is also much reduced.

We receive only 11 pence in every pound of council tax paid because, although we collect the tax, the rest of it goes to other public bodies. Our ability to provide high quality services now depends on the Council finding new, responsible and low-risk sources of income to fund them.

In addition, we need to find the most efficient and cost effective way to deliver services, whether they are delivered directly by us or by paying other organisations to provide services on our behalf.

We anticipate we will need to increase council tax every year to reflect increasing costs, but we will review this position annually.

Delivered by:

- Ensuring that our budget setting process is transparent and well managed to deliver a balanced budget outcome each year.
- Operating in an efficient and rigorous way across all or day-to-day operations.
- Running an effective debt and income collection team to recover money owed to us.
- Generating additional income and building our financial resilience through responsible and sustainable commercial activities and development of a strong income generation culture.

Objective 2: Funding high quality services

Delivered by:

- Investigating all opportunities to sell the Council's expertise in particular areas and pursuing these where supported by a robust business case. The income or profit will be reinvested in the services we provide.
- Investing in new property assets or development opportunities within our district where these will provide a reliable revenue income stream or longer term capital receipt. These will be considered in the context of promoting economic, environmental and social wellbeing in the district.
- Using our existing property assets to generate revenue income or capital receipts for the Council, including bringing some of them forward for development.
- Implementing a robust contract management approach to gain maximum value for money.
- Continuing to keep all services under review to identify further efficiencies.
- Working with other Councils to deliver larger scale efficiencies and better service delivery models.
- Implementing the digital transformation project to provide cost effective and alternative ways of accessing services.
- Improving our IT infrastructure to enable us to operate more smoothly and reliably.

Priority 4: Putting residents at the heart of what we do

The Council has a responsibility to keep its stakeholders informed and to be accountable. We know how we communicate with residents and others is important and good communication and regular consultation are critical to ensure we listen and respond to community concerns.

Customer care is a priority for us and it is important we treat residents and other service users in a fair and inclusive way and respond to enquiries effectively and appropriately.

The way people engage with their local council is changing, with more people wanting to use digital methods. However, we need to make sure that our services are accessible to all. We will invest in technology and more digital tools for residents and businesses, but will also provide for those who are not able, or do not want, to use digital methods.

We will monitor how customers interact with the Council and focus our improvement activities in a cost effective way.

Ensuring we attract, train and retain the right staff with the skills we need now and in the future is essential to providing high quality services. We will invest time and money in achieving this at a time when it is increasingly difficult to recruit the people we need, as we are competing with London councils and the private sector.

Having the right culture and internal processes in place will help to achieve this. Good internal communication keeps staff informed and involved. Staff who understand what the organisation is trying to achieve and are committed to delivering the best possible service contribute to providing high quality services and enhancing the Council's reputation.

Objective 1: Engaging with, listening to and acting upon residents' concerns.

Delivered by:

- Consulting with residents to assess satisfaction and inform service improvements. Positively engaging with, and listening to, residents, parish councils and local voluntary groups.
- Clear and effective communication, focusing on explaining the services we provide, the projects we are engaged on and responding to enquiries about our activities.
- Expanding the Council's digital services to better communicate with residents and encourage easier access to online services.
- Ensuring access to services and support for anyone who is not able to use digital methods.
- Adapting to changing circumstances which impact residents and businesses.
- Lobbying government and other agencies about health, education, transport, roads, youth provision, crime and safety issues in the district.
- Fostering good relationships with those bodies to secure positive outcomes for residents and the district.

Objective 2: Develop our workforce to ensure they have the skills we need now and in the future.

Delivered by:

- Investing in attracting, retaining, developing and rewarding skilled staff. Improving staff development opportunities and career progression.
- Delivering the digital IT strategy to ensure staff have access to the systems and tools they need with a modern working environment.
- Developing and delivering an organisational development plan.
- Developing apprenticeship schemes.
- Drawing on external advice and expertise where it cannot be provided in-house.

Priority 5: A safe, healthy and caring community supporting those most in need

There are approximately 88,500 people living in around 39,000 properties in Tandridge district, with a higher than average proportion of residents aged 65 and over.

While perceived as an affluent area, there are a number of areas of deprivation. The impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has impacted many residents and businesses.

The district relies heavily on volunteer and community groups to deliver information and services to the most vulnerable residents.

In terms of health provision, there are no large hospitals and GP surgeries are oversubscribed. We are part of East Surrey Place, which should enable closer working to provide improved patient care.

While crime rates are low in comparison to the national average, there are areas which are subject to anti-social behaviour.

We work closely with our partners (other councils, NHS, charities etc) to raise awareness of and deliver activities for residents, in particular younger people.

Strong communities support each other in challenging times and are less likely to be socially isolated. We will work with partners and other communities to reduce social isolation and improve health and wellbeing across all ages.

Objective 1: Work with partners to create strong, safe and welcoming communities.

Delivered by:

- Acting with Surrey Police and other organisations to tackle crime and the causes of crime, and to raise awareness of hidden crime such as domestic abuse.
- Working with partners to continue to deliver more effective enforcement activities to respond to and reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Ensuring effective safeguarding and vulnerability policies and procedures are delivered across the district.

Objective 2: Provide support and easy access to services for those most in need.

Delivered by:

- Providing help for young people to support mental health and improve access to learning opportunities and jobs.
- Working with partners to provide community services to reduce social isolation.
- Supporting local and community organisations and promote volunteering.
- Improving access to training about domestic abuse.
- Improving the health and wellbeing outcomes for East Surrey residents through partnership working.
- Ensuring our equality, diversity and accessibility approach reflects best practice.

Objective 3: Develop and implement a wellbeing and leisure strategy for the district.

Delivered by:

- Increasing wider use of our parks and green spaces for leisure and cultural activity.
- Supporting youth provision projects and voluntary organisations which provide them.
- Developing a leisure map to help residents discover activities and services which support their health and wellbeing.

Priority 6: A thriving economy

There are just over 5,000 businesses in the district, of which almost 3,000 pay business rates. Almost all of them (92%) are micro businesses with between zero and nine employees.

We work closely with the two Business Improvement Districts, in Oxted and Caterham, as well as the Lingfield Chamber of Commerce. These organisations aim to promote, support and connect businesses in their areas to work better together, while promoting their towns and what they can offer shoppers and other Tandridge businesses.

The majority of the district's working population commutes to work by car to jobs in neighbouring districts rather than within Tandridge. The major employment destinations are Reigate and Banstead, Crawley, Sutton, Mole Valley and Croydon.

Unemployment is lower than the UK average, with highly skilled working age residents, although most of those skills are used in jobs outside the district. Skills levels in employees in the district reflect the dominance of the hospitality industry and retail industries.

Objective 1: Support local businesses and high streets, encouraging regeneration to make the district attractive to live, work and visit.

Delivered by:

- Working with local businesses throughout the district and with the Business Improvement Districts/ Chamber of Commerce to support existing businesses, attract new businesses and reduce the number of vacant shops.
- Using our own assets to provide new retail and business space. Maximising the occupancy of Quadrant House for business use and promoting opportunities in other areas with office space.
- Working with local interest groups and partners to enhance the environment in our town and village centres to improve services for visitors and local businesses.
- Using our planning policies to ensure our towns and villages can respond to changes in retailing and retain the facilities and services residents need.
- Facilitating improved business infrastructure.
- Promoting the district as a great place to do business and encouraging inward investment.

Objective 2: Ensure the economy can grow and attract new business and investment.

Delivered by:

- Working with other Councils in East Surrey to deliver an East Surrey economic development offer for businesses, to secure investment and improve business infrastructure.
- Working with local employers to support local employment and employ local workers.
- Supporting and encouraging skills development, in particular apprenticeships through building stronger relationships with schools and colleges and employers.
- Providing support to start-up and micro businesses to increase business birth and survival rates.
- Strengthen relationships with partner agencies to ensure sharing of specialist knowledge, skills, ideas and resources.