

Our plans for the future

Our vision

The Council's vision for the District is a simple one . . .

to make Rochford the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit

To help us realise that vision, the Council has adopted six principal aims, some of which can be delivered directly by the Authority, others of which can only be delivered through working with other organisations in the District. These aims are to:

- Provide quality, cost effective services
- Work towards a safer and more caring community
- Provide a green and sustainable environment
- Encourage a thriving local economy
- Improve the quality of life for people in our District
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

Last year, we published a Community Strategy for the District. This strategy has been brought together through a partnership of the District Council, the County Council, the Parishes, the Health Service, the Police, business and voluntary sectors, as well as education and training providers in the area, meeting

and working together and jointly agreeing a shared long term vision for the District. The key themes within the strategy revolve around:

- Feeling safe
- Looking after our environment
- A good education, good skills and good jobs
- Healthy living
- Getting around
- An inclusive community

These themes fit closely with our own aims. The strategy incorporates a five-year action plan that takes into account the views obtained from widespread consultation with local communities. It also recognises the District's location relative to the Thames Gateway, a national priority area for regeneration identified by Central Government.

Although only a part of the District actually lies within the Gateway boundary, the future of the District is very much linked with that of the Strategy for Thames Gateway South Essex. For Rochford, our long-term ambition is to be the green part of the Gateway, developing the District as an area for leisure, recreation and tourism.

We will measure our progress towards our overall vision through

- Achievement against targets set both for ourselves and for the partnerships within which we work
- Comparison against national and local performance indicators
- Consultation and public satisfaction surveys
- The level and nature of complaints we receive and the number of ombudsman investigations we deal with
- Recognition through national and regional awards schemes and initiatives

As a Council with limited resources, receiving the lowest level of grant settlement per head of population from Government of all the Essex authorities, we accept that we will not be able to do everything at once, that choices will have to be made, and phasing will be necessary to prioritise activities over time. We will also need to balance national priorities with local ones.

Our values

As part of our day-to-day working, the Council operates a code of conduct to:

- Act with integrity
- Be open and transparent about what we do

- Respect others and treat people courteously and equally
- Be responsive to customer needs and requests
- Always try and improve on what we do
- Work with others to improve what we do both directly and through partnership working

Our key priorities for 2005/2006

To provide quality, cost effective services we will

- Focus on those activities highlighted in our Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan. These activities include:
 - Producing a new Corporate Strategy by April 2006
 - Continuing our programme of Member training and development throughout the year to improve our decision-making process
 - Reviewing and implementing a new system of managing performance by March 2006 to improve transparency and accountability around the delivery of projects and services
 - Developing our workforce capacity throughout the year. Key measures for us will be the impact of our staff training and development programmes and other elements of our HR policies in terms of:

- Performance improvement in individual services
- Internal promotions
- Staff turnover
- Sickness rates
- Reviewing the workings of our Overview & Scrutiny and Planning Committees, with changes being implemented from May 2006
- Securing specific service improvements in the areas of council tax/housing benefit, homelessness and recycling

Key targets for this year are

- Council Tax/Housing Benefit
 - Reduce the average time for processing new claims to 30 days
 - Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 55%
- Homelessness
 - Reduce the number of vulnerable households in temporary accommodation by 5%

- Increase the proportion of homelessness cases processed within 33 days, to 87%
- Recycling
 - Expand kerbside recycling to 95% of households
 - Increase the proportion of waste recycled or composted to 18%
- Overall, we will work to increase the number of statutory indicators in the two top quartiles nationally, by 5% year on year for the next two years. In 2003/2004, 59% of indicators were in the top two quartiles: for 2004/05 we are aiming to increase this to 62%, and for 2005/06 to 65%. We recognise that this is extremely challenging and we will therefore review our progress at that time
- Roll out an electronic records management and workflow system across the Authority from April 2005 for completion by March 2007. This will allow more flexible working and provide customers with better access to services

To provide a safer more caring environment we will

- Provide affordable homes to meet local needs

Specifically, we will complete the refurbishment of Hardwick House to provide 22 homes for rent by

October 2005 and provide 30 new units for the frail elderly by February 2006

- Commence the development of 27 new-build flats for rent on the former Reads nursery site in Rawreth Lane for completion by October 2007
- Work with partners to finalise a series of detailed action plans within the district-wide Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy by September 2005. Our key target is to secure a 13.5% reduction in crime during the period 2005-2008

To provide a green and sustainable environment we will

- Complete the roll out of our kerbside recycling scheme to the majority of properties in the District by November 2005
- Introduce a “buy-in” green waste initiative available to residents from July 2005
- Implement our environment initiatives programme in relation to weed control, grass verges, rubbish dumping and graffiti from August 2005

To encourage a thriving local economy we will

- Develop and evaluate options to secure additional parking in and around our main centres by November 2005

- Provide information and services to promote increased recycling by local businesses by December 2005
- Implement a street enhancement scheme covering Websters Way in Rayleigh, with completion by August 2005

To improve the quality of life in the District we will

- Complete work on the new Rayleigh Leisure Centre by May 2006
- Extend Rochford Cemetery through completing the purchase of additional land by next summer 2006
- Review an extension of decriminalised parking enforcement and residents’ parking schemes, rolling out changes from February 2006
- Provide a replacement skateboard ramp at Clements Hall by October 2005

To maintain and enhance our local heritage we will

- Complete our renovation of Rayleigh Windmill by September 2005
- Complete the provision of an adjoining sensory garden area by November 2005

Our key priorities to 2010

Projects

Development of Cherry Orchard Country Park

Key Targets

- Obtain confirmation of local plan proposals following the Local Plan inquiry by September 2005
- Acquire land for extension by March 2008

Implement the result of the Council's Housing Option Appraisal process

Key targets

- Commence work on the chosen path by April 2006
- Put new measures in place by April 2008

Work with key partners in Thames Gateway South Essex towards regeneration of the area

- Key actions are currently being developed and will include our contribution to initiatives such as the green-grid, through projects such as the Cherry Orchard Country Park, and tourism/improving the environment, through refurbishment of Rayleigh Windmill

Services

Complete a review of our organisation structure

Key targets

- Commence implementation from July 2005, for completion no later than April 2008

Review the capacity and performance of key services, and opportunities for partnership working

- No targets have been finalised as yet but it is intended to have a programme of specific actions in place by February 2006

Review the Council's working practices to ensure services deliver 'value for money'

Key target

- A robust 'value for money' framework in place by January 2007

Review and re-tender our refuse collection, grounds maintenance and street cleansing contracts in the context of the Essex Waste Consortium project

Key target

- Appoint contractor(s) no later than March 2008

Prepare our new Local Development Framework (LDF) to provide long term planning guidance for the development of the district

Key target

- An approved LDF in place by December 2008