



Rochford District Council

Corporate Plan

MARCH 2000

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INTRODUCTION

1. "Our Heritage – Our Future" is Rochford's District Council's motto and effectively describes the Council's mission. Set apart from its more urban neighbours to the south, Rochford is an area that has retained its identity, with green fields and salt marshes, ancient woodlands and open riverbanks. With its main towns of Rayleigh and Rochford and many smaller town and village communities including Hockley and Great Wakering, the modern Rochford District Council takes its heritage seriously yet continually reviews its plans for the future. Its interests are its residents, their well being and the environment they live in.
2. The District Council plays a major part in the local economy and every day provides services to the residents of Rochford or encourages others to do so, either through adopting an enabling role, or simply lobbying on behalf of the community.

A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

3. Local Government needs both to promote and respond to the changing environment in which it finds itself. It is important that whatever problems and opportunities present themselves, the District Council continues to aspire to improving its service provision against a likely background of tight financial controls on public expenditure and growing public expectations.
4. This document is seen as an essential part of the toolkit the Authority will need for the 21st Century. It endeavours to build on what has been produced in the past and sets out a course for the future, taking into account the likely budgetary framework within which the Authority will need to operate.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

5. The Corporate Plan is the Council's business plan for the next three years. It seeks to match the allocation of resources within the Council with agreed priorities and provides the framework within which budgetary and service decisions are made. The Corporate Plan also provides the context for the development of more detailed objectives and targets for the services provided by the Council and the service and personal development plans associated with this process.
6. The Corporate Plan is a living document and will be reviewed on an annual basis in line with service provision, budget parameters and public aspirations. Progress towards meeting key objectives will be monitored throughout the year and progress widely publicised.

OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

7. The key objectives below are intended to form the framework for the Council's activities over the next three years.

The Council will:

1. Provide quality, cost effective services
2. Work towards a safer and more caring community
3. Promote a green and sustainable environment
4. Encourage a thriving local economy
5. Improve the quality of life for people in our District
6. Maintain and enhance our local heritage and culture

The following pages describe how the Council intends to put these words into action.

1. PROVIDE QUALITY, COST EFFECTIVE SERVICES:

The Council recognises that the services it provides are an integral part of everyday life in the District. These services should meet the standards of quality expected by users. They should be no more expensive than the services provided by other Councils or the private sector.

The Council is already well known for delivering services economically. The challenge is to ensure that the services delivered balance the often competing demands of high standards, low costs, and the limited resources available.

We will: -

i. Continue to seek improvement to our services, both in terms of quality and cost by:

- Creating a continuous improvement culture and implementing a comprehensive programme of service reviews over a period in line with "Best Value" legislation and practice

Our standard

- Ensure that the District Council is ranked amongst the top 25% of District Councils in all the services it provides.

ii. Seek to provide one point of contact for the majority of customer requests (including services provided by our partners, the Parish Councils and the County Council) by:

- Continuing the development of a "one stop" shop service at our reception areas and community information points
- Completing a review of reception facilities by mid 2000

Our standard

- Perception by residents of a seamless service, demonstrated through customer surveys and increasingly lower levels of complaint.

III. Improve the way we communicate with people through using plain English and recognising the communication and access needs of all users

- An ongoing review of all written and computer generated information, letters, forms, etc. and how these are accessed and developing new mechanisms for reaching those with special needs
- Continuing to train front line staff in communication skills and responding to those with special needs.
- An ongoing review of Council owned buildings and the development of a programme of access improvements, within the resources available, to ensure the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act are met.

Our standard

- Meeting of quality benchmarks for our literature, (particularly claim forms and licences where they exist) and also the perception of our customers gained through customer surveys, low levels of complaint, etc.
- An increase in the number of Council owned buildings which meet the Audit Commission's definition in terms of access.

iv. Continue to look to new technology to aid communications with our customers by:

- The establishment of the Council's own "web site" by the end of 2000

Our standard

- The creation of the "web site" within the timeframe set and the development of communication through that site.

v. Encourage the growth of a trained, motivated and responsive workforce by:

- All staff having a personal development plan in place by the summer 2000, together with an agreed programme of training and development tailored to the resources available.

Our standard

- Retaining a skilled workforce.

vi. Develop the Council's response to Central Government's intentions to change the committee structure as outlined in the Local Government Bill and ensure that any new or revised structure is transparent, clearly attributable and accountable to the public by:

- Reviewing the implications of the Local Government Bill as it would affect this Council and preparing options for the Council to consider by summer 2000.

Our standard

- Operation of a decision making framework which is easily understood and "user friendly" to the general public, with general recognition as to when, where and how decisions are taken.

vii. Developing a system for allowing Councillors to spend more time working in their community by:

- Implementing the actions outlined under (vi) above

Our standard

- Councillors confirming that they are able to spend more of their time dealing with community issues.

viii. Continue to develop mechanisms to maintain high standards of probity in all the Council's activities by:

- A review and updating of the Officer and Member codes of conduct by late 2000
- Implementing the actions outlined under (vi) above

Our standard

- Establishment of model standards of probity and integrity across the decision making process

ix. Continue to work on our Corporate Image to give a clear and positive Identity for the Council by:

- Carrying out a review of corporate identity and signage by mid-2000
- Encouraging contractors working for the Council to identify themselves in the same way

Our standard

- All signs on and to Council buildings, services and vehicles to be clearly identified

2. A SAFER AND CARING COMMUNITY

The Council recognises that it can play a leading role in helping to create an environment in which residents of the District feel safer in the conduct of their everyday lives. The District is already one of the safest places to live in Essex, and together with partners such as Essex Police, Probation, the County Council's Social Services and Highways Departments, the Council will continue to work towards ensuring Rochford's image as a safe place to live and work is maintained and reinforced. With a Crime and Disorder Strategy now in place, the Council is busy actioning the proposals contained within it, along with partner organisations. The Council is also involved in the promotion of drug awareness amongst its various communities, and in combating the issue of domestic violence across the District, and has developed a number of good working relationships with other agencies in these areas.

Caring for its residents is another important aspect of the Council's work and again, with partners that include the County Council's Social Services Department, the Area Health Authorities and local Social Housing landlords, the District Council will continue to develop its caring initiatives.

We will:-

I. With our partners, continue to develop and monitor the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and implement the proposals contained within it by:

- Both direct action and working with partner organisations

Our Standard

- Recognition of crime and disorder implications in all of the Council's activities and further improvements in the District's crime and disorder statistics.

ii. Continue to develop working partnership arrangements with other organisations to encourage community development and involvement in local projects by:

- Support for the role of partner and voluntary organisations where their activities coincide with the Council's aims and aspirations
- Development of service level agreements and programmes to underpin working relationships

Our standard

- Active and thriving voluntary sector working with the Council

iii. Promote initiatives aimed at raising individual and community awareness of their respective roles and responsibilities in achieving safer and caring communities by:

- Increased involvement with organisations and groups to secure a measurable improvement in individual and community participation/response to community issues
- Developing ways to encourage participation and voting in Local Government elections

Our standard

- Increased participation rates in local surveys, etc.
- Increased participation in local elections and the democratic process by the community.

iv. Maintain the Council's ability to respond to emergency situations by:

- Participating in emergency planning training exercises
- Developing awareness within the Authority and with partner agencies in terms of respective roles and responsibilities

Our standard

- Tried and tested response to any reasonably foreseeable emergency situation.

v. Work on ensuring that the public and private housing provided in the District meets the needs of the community by:

- Further development of the stakeholder conference as an integral part of the Council's housing strategy development process
- Evaluating the findings of the recently prepared housing needs study and the incorporation of these into revisions of the Housing Strategy and the District-wide Local Plan over the next 2 years
- Developing closer working relationships with other organisations and agencies to implement the policies developed through the Housing Strategy and the Local Plan
- Producing policies to help reduce levels of unfitness and disrepair in the District's private housing stock.
- A comprehensive review of the management of the Local Authority's housing stock by late 2000
- Ongoing programmes to improve energy efficiency in the District's housing stock
- Reviewing the Council's housing advice and homelessness services by the end of 2000

Our standard

- Policies in place aimed at developing sustainable communities
- A close match between housing needs and housing provision and the securing of increased funding in respect of initiatives
- Higher standards of housing management and maintenance
- Advice services in place to prevent homelessness and the speedy processing of homelessness applications

vi. Provide services to protect public health and safety by:

- Programmed inspection regimes to safeguard public health and safety in place
- Focussed publicity campaigns on health and safety issues as part of an ongoing programme to raise overall public awareness

Our standard

- Appropriate licensing and registration mechanisms in place
- High levels of compliance with statutory requirements
- Greater public awareness of general health and safety issues

3. PROMOTE A GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

The Council can make a contribution to a green and sustainable environment in a number of ways – as a purchaser of goods and services, through the planning process and other regulatory functions, through the delivery of its own services, and through influencing the operating practices of its partners and contractors. It can also play a part in informing and educating those who live and work in the District about the environmental impact of the choices that they have, particularly when made in a local context. For example, locally there is a debate around the issue of recycling and what could happen if refuse collection volumes continue to rise; if more waste cannot be removed via recycling, then further alternatives, including that of incineration, need to be looked at to replace landfill.

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been involved in a County-wide District Council consortium which has objected to proposals in the County Council's Waste Plan which might possibly result in the provision of an incinerator within the District to the west of Rayleigh. The Council has also been actively trialing a pilot scheme aimed at separating domestic waste at source so that any rubbish which can be recycled is recycled rather than landfilled. The Council will also explore ways to reduce road traffic in the district by actively encouraging alternatives to cars, through support for safer journey initiatives and green commuter plans

We will:-

I. Reduce the amount of waste for collection and disposal and increase the level of recycling within the District by:

- The production of a District-wide Waste Strategy by mid 2000
- The development of pilot waste recycling initiatives
- Encouraging residents to reduce, re-use and recycle to reduce the need for disposal

- Forming appropriate partnership arrangements to facilitate the development and implementation of new recycling schemes

Our standard

- Re-tendering the contract on waste collection (due for renewal in spring 2001) with greater emphasis on recycling
- A reduction in the volumes of waste collected and an increase in the volume recycled (including composting)
- Ensuring that the content of the County Waste Local Plan and contract strategy reflects this District's aims and aspirations incorporated in its own waste strategy

ii. Act to reduce the amount of environmental pollution by:

- Re-tendering the contracts on refuse and street cleansing with appropriate specifications to tackle the problems of waste and litter pollution
- Developing our inspection and monitoring programmes and ensuring an effective response to all enquiries and applications
- Maintaining appropriate licensing and registration systems
- Progressing the review of Air Quality in the District with completion of Stage 2 by Spring 2000
- Developing public awareness programmes on issues of air quality, waste, litter, etc.
- Implementing a "pilot project" aimed at promoting "Green" business

Our standard

- Higher levels of compliance with statutory standards and local indicators

- Increased public awareness on these matters measured through media coverage, customer surveys and customer complaints
- Increased awareness amongst businesses through the successful implementation of the "Green Business" pilot project

iii. Develop more sustainable land use policies across the District by:

- Updating the District Local Plan to incorporate sustainability principles
- Preparing a District Transport Strategy in partnership with the County Council as Highway Authority which recognises sustainability principles
- Review the provision of community transport within the District by Spring 2001

Our standard

- Completion of the Local Plan and District Transport Strategy Documents incorporating sustainability principles by end 2001/early 2002 and Spring 2000 respectively
- Completion of the review of community transport within the District by Spring 2001

iv. Operate the Council's business in accordance with environmental stewardship principles by:

- Completing an internal waste audit and formulate a waste reduction plan by mid 2000
- Producing an appropriate purchasing policy for supplies and services by mid 2000
- Developing the Council's Home Energy Efficiency Strategy

Our standard

- Completion of these plans with demonstrable progress towards target measures e.g. A reduction in the amount of energy consumed by the Council, a reduction in waste produced by the Council and greater purchasing of products made from recycled materials

4. ENCOURAGE A THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY

Employment and the local economy are dependent upon World and U.K. economic conditions which are mainly beyond the Council's influence.

Nevertheless, the Council makes the best contribution it can to the local economy by providing the means for a continuing supply of local jobs, the release of sites for employment development and improvements to transport links. It also engages with partner organisations in developing specific training initiatives for those who live and work in the District and through its own employment and training programmes, assists in developing the local economy.

We will:-

1. Seek to influence transport strategies for South East Essex by:

- Forming partnership groups able to influence transport strategy
- Annually review car parking and the Council's approach to charging

Our standard

- Effective partnership working with the County Council, as highway authority, and local public transport operators
- A balanced approach between the competing aims of car parking charging as an income generator, its impact on the local economy, the management of parking space and the environmental objectives of the Authority

ii. Identify land suitable for commercial and industrial development and ensure the planning process supports wherever possible local economic aspirations by:

- Regularly reviewing non-residential land allocations and matching these with future requirements
- Working closely with developers and where appropriate "fast tracking" planning applications

Our standard

- Ensuring that the County Structure Plan review reflects the District Council's aims and aspirations
- Local Plan policies and proposals in place to support local economic initiatives but at the same time including suitable environmental safeguards
- Development briefs in place for all major employment sites in the District
- Processing planning applications for major commercial developments speedily

iii. Wherever possible, buy goods locally and employ local people by:

- Ensuring that wherever possible at least 50% of contractors on the Council's select list are local to the area
- Making sure that all Council jobs are advertised locally

Our standard

- An increase in the amount of work and employment placed locally and the number of persons recruited locally

iv. Use a balanced approach between control and encouragement in local licensing and registration by:

- Publicising our policy on enforcement and making sure it complies with Government guidelines

Our standard

- A fair, open and consistent approach to licensing and enforcement

v. Continue to promote a programme of town and shopping centre enhancements in the District by:

- Allocating funds from within the Council's capital programme to maintain a rolling programme of town and shopping centre improvements across the District
- Working with partner organisations such as the County Council on securing funding to invest in the wellbeing of the District's town and shopping centres
- Encouraging and facilitating the development and refurbishment of key sites such as the Mill Hall complex in Rayleigh and land adjacent to the Market Square, Rochford

Our standard

- Public recognition of our town and shopping centres as continuing to play a key role as centres of retail, social and commercial activity

vi. Contribute to the establishment of effective employment training and advice programmes in the District by:

- Working in partnership with established training organisations to promote new training programmes in the District
- Identifying the key gaps in employers' needs for their workforce and promoting the development of training programmes to meet their needs both through established training organisations and facilitating the involvement of secondary schools in the wider education and training arena.

Our standard

- Establishment of effective training and advice programmes in the District
- Closure of the gap between employers' needs and the skills of the resident workforce

5. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS

The District Council, through the provision of its services and the operation of its regulatory functions, can do much to impact upon the quality of life of local residents. Where the Council is not the key provider, then it can still contribute through working with and/or lobbying the responsible organisations in an attempt to ensure that the quality of life of the District's residents is maintained and enhanced.

We will:-

i. Endeavour to ensure that leisure provision in the District is appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the local community by:

- Considering the leisure services contract and how it should be re-tendered prior to its re-tendering by spring 2002
- Continuing to monitor and review the play facilities provided in the District
- Implementing the proposals now agreed associated with enhancing the Mill Hall site
- Developing a strategy for use of the woodlands for formal and informal use by late 2000
- Re-tendering the grounds maintenance contract with appropriate safeguards, for letting from spring 2001
- Reviewing the use of the Park School dual use facility given the closure of the school by the County Council in association with the re-tendering of the leisure services contract

Our standard

- To implement the actions and meet the deadlines outlined above

II. Increase the level of awareness of residents to the benefits of an active lifestyle by:

- Continuing to develop programmes around health related fitness issues
- Working with partner organisations such as the County Council as both Education Authority and Highway Authority and the Health Agencies on the implementation of these programmes

Our standard

- Increased awareness by local residents on health related fitness issues through media coverage, customer surveys, etc.

III. Working with partner organisations in ensuring adequate health service provision is available to all residents by:

- Seeking to Influence the funding decisions of the Rochford Primary Care Group and South Essex Health Authority to address the current shortage of G.P.'s and NHS dentists in the District
- Participating in the development and implementation of the Health Improvement Programme and Locality Action Programme
- Continuing to participate in the work of the Drug Reference Group
- Participation in the development and implementation of the Community Care Plan

Our standard

- Increased access to GP's and other professionals across the District in general and particularly where local priorities have been identified

- Production of a Health Improvement Programme and Local Action Programme which reflects the District Council's priorities
- Increased awareness of the issues surrounding the misuse and abuse of drugs and alcohol
- Production of a Community Care Plan which reflects the District Council's priorities

iv. Ensure environmental quality safeguards are maintained throughout the District by

- Continuing to respond effectively to public health and environmental complaints, enquiries and applications
- Incorporating quality of life policies in the renewal of the Local Plan, scheduled for completion by late 2001/early 2002
- The safeguarding of sensitive strategic sites such as Blatches Farm

Our standard

- Responsive services reflecting the District Council's priorities
- Completion of the Local Plan with appropriate policies
- Securing of sensitive sites from development threat

6. MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING LOCAL HERITAGE AND CULTURE

The District is one with a history. Rochford has retained its Identity and the policies contained in the Corporate Plan endeavour to build upon the past whilst meeting the likely requirements of the future. The District Council takes its heritage seriously and can play an important role in ensuring that both the District's past history and future aspirations are addressed in a sensitive way.

We will:-

I. Protect and enhance the built heritage of the District by:

- Reviewing the conservation area boundaries and policies providing protection and enhancement by spring 2001
- Reviewing the strategy and policies for the protection of listed buildings by spring 2001
- Regularly reviewing the "local" list of buildings of merit and seeking full listing in appropriate cases
- Securing the purchase and refurbishment of 35-39 West Street, Rochford as part of the enhancement of the Rochford Conservation area

Our standard

- Buildings within conservation areas maintained to a high standard
- Listed buildings protected from detrimental change
- Maintenance of the "local" list of important buildings
- Achievement of refurbishment of 35-39 West Street

II. Develop the potential of the District for tourism by:

- Production of a tourism strategy by summer 2001
- Implementation of the proposals contained in that strategy thereafter

Our standard

- Approval of a tourism strategy for the District by the summer 2001

III. Develop the provision of "Arts" throughout the District by:

- Production of an arts strategy for the District
- Implementation of the proposals contained in that strategy thereafter

Our standard

- Approval of an arts strategy for the District by the spring 2000

IV. Promote a high standard of design within the District by:

- Development and operation of an awards scheme aimed at promoting good design
- Ensuring the development of all major sites is accompanied by the production of a development brief which recognises and emphasises the importance of good design

Our standard

- Awards scheme in place and operational by the summer 2000
- Design briefs in place for all major sites

HOW CAN YOU CHECK ON OUR PROGRESS?

- We will review this Plan on an annual basis to check on how we are doing.

We will also publish information on the plan and its progress in our own newspaper, Rochford District Matters, which is delivered to all households in the District free of charge. If you have any queries on the plan, or want information as to progress, please do not hesitate to contact Shaun Scrutton, Head of Corporate Policy and Initiatives on 01702 318100 or Email shaun.scrutton@rochford.gov.uk