

The fundamentals of local government

Central Government context

Over the last few years, the Government has introduced a range of legislation and new initiatives aimed at the modernisation of local government. The Government is anxious to ensure that:

- councils are empowered to lead their communities;
- councils' political decision-making processes are efficient, transparent and accountable;
- there is continuous improvement in the efficiency and quality of the services for which councils are responsible;
- councils actively involve and engage the community in local decisions;
- councils have the powers they need to ensure that they can promote and improve the well-being of their areas and contribute to sustainable development.

The Government's programme for the reform of public services is therefore designed to ensure that services are delivered in ways that:

- are responsive to the concerns and needs of local communities;

- improve continuously, especially in areas where there has been a pattern of under-performance;
- are co-ordinated in ways which minimise duplication, maximise effectiveness, and present a concerted response to the causes of complex problems such as social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal; and
- suit the needs of the consumer or citizen (rather than the convenience of the provider).

The three tiers

When it comes to knowing exactly who is responsible for providing you with local government services, it needs to be remembered that there are three tiers of local government operating within Rochford – the County Council, the District Council and a number of Parish/Town Councils across the District.

In terms of who does what:

County Council

- Emergency planning
- Waste disposal

- Education
- Libraries
- Social services
- Highways and transportation, including public transport and rights of way
- Trading standards
- Strategic land use planning in the form of the structure plan
- Minerals planning issues
- Tourism
- Employment promotion and economic development including European liaison

District Council

- Meeting future needs for housing in the district including the provision of grants for adaptations to disabled persons' homes and improvement grants
- Planning – incorporating the preparation of statutory plans for land use and development, most development control, building regulations, and planning enforcement

- Environmental health – concerning the areas of food safety and hygiene, clean air, certain health and safety matters, environmental protection and nuisance
- Support for those who are homeless or the victims of domestic violence
- Refuse collection and waste recycling
- Street cleaning and the removal of fly-tips and abandoned cars
- Managing council-owned housing
- Collection of all council tax, including that relating to the County Council, the Parish/Town Councils, the Police Authority and the Fire Service
- Payment of housing and council tax benefit
- Town centre car parks in the Council's ownership
- Parks, open spaces and playing fields
- Leisure facilities
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Employment promotion and economic development
- Introduction and enforcement of bye-laws

- On-street parking enforcement has been managed by the Council since October 2004
- Licensing of premises used for entertainment and late-night refreshments, commercial animal establishments, butchers and caravan sites. Liquor licensing will become a District responsibility during 2005

Town/Parish Councils

- Allotments
- Cemeteries, war memorials and the maintenance of some closed churchyards
- Aspects of the environment including litter control and bye-laws
- Social and recreational facilities such as parish and community halls, some parks, open spaces and playing fields
- Public amenities such as footway lighting, public seats and shelters, public clocks and off-street car parking areas

The Community Strategy

The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on all District Councils to prepare a Community Strategy.

The diagram on page 3.4 shows the importance of a community strategy to future service provision. It provides the link between the national, regional, and county-wide agendas, local strategies and plans, and services provided by the Council and partners.

A partnership has been set up with representatives from statutory agencies, local businesses, the community and voluntary groups to develop and implement the District's Community Strategy.

Following substantial consultation, the strategy was approved and launched last summer. It provides:

- A long term vision for the area, with achievable outcomes
- An action plan identifying shorter term priorities and actions which will contribute to the achievement of the longer term outcomes
- A shared commitment from a variety of agencies, not just the District Council, to implement the plan

The strategy details our ambitions for the district for the next 20 years covering safety, the environment, education and jobs, healthy living, getting around, and inclusivity. It also provides an action plan for delivering our proposals. The Local Strategic Partnership, which oversaw its production, is now monitoring, reviewing and updating the action plan on a regular basis.

