



# **CORPORATE PLAN 2013 to 2017**

**November 2013**



## Introduction

This Plan sets out an ambitious but deliverable agenda for the next four years which will steer the Council through the challenges of the current recession and the certainty of fewer resources for local government in the foreseeable future.

It aims to make Northumberland a better place in which to live, work, study and enjoy within the constraints of a prudent economic regime. In so doing, it recognises that Northumberland is a special place – somewhere that retains a strong identity, stemming from the unique combination of its landscape, location and heritage.

To this end, the Plan supports the Sustainable Community Strategy and provides members, staff, customers and partners with a clear understanding of our vision, strategic aims and policy priorities. Essentially, it helps us to consider competing pressures, understand the links between them, and establish a common understanding across the local authority of the challenges and opportunities we face in achieving our shared strategic outcomes.

We have a strong track record in reducing our spending whilst maintaining quality services to our communities. And over the lifetime of this Plan, we are determined to ensure that local services are well managed and improved.

To help us to do this we will focus on the customer and make better use of our resources – an active Council using people, money, land and buildings to the benefit of communities. We will also optimise the use of technology and generate economic growth by being creative, flexible and open to new ideas that are founded on a “can do” culture. We will work in partnership, across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to both maximise our influence and deliver more efficient ways of working.

Our themed approach will align the delivery of our ‘family of services’ to the needs and aspirations of local people with a concerted focus on early intervention and prevention. We will engage and involve our service users and communities in shaping what we provide, when and how, within the constraints of the resources available. We want to create the right conditions for all our communities and businesses to be resilient and flourish, and to underpin all this we will invest in a modern communications and transport network which is fit for the future.

Within this we also recognise that Northumberland is not an island and has to relate to the wider context within which it operates. In this regard working with the rest of the North East of England, Cumbria and Scotland will be particularly important.

We have some tough decisions to take. However, we are confident that despite the significant challenges and level of change facing the council, we have the people and processes in place to manage these effectively and take advantage of any opportunities that may arise in order to deliver our vision for the County.

Grant Davey  
Leader

Steven Mason  
Lead Executive Director

# Economic Growth

*Northumberland has a broad-based economy although there is still a reliance on the public sector for growth and employment. Whilst the private service sector has partly offset job losses in traditional industries, it is striking that four fifths of businesses employ less than five staff and there are very few large employers in the commercial sector. However, the fewer bigger companies and enterprises with high growth potential are part of a vibrant manufacturing base operating in global markets.*

**Our aim is to promote a more prosperous county through sustainable economic growth that provides residents with ready access to high wage and skilled jobs and opportunities to create thriving businesses.**

**To achieve this, we will seize every opportunity to improve the county's economic conditions and to equip all our residents with the right qualifications, training and skills to access meaningful work.**

## Business Support

Given the scale and nature of the county's business base, supporting both the creation and attraction of new businesses and the growth of our existing firms is fundamental.

Through our development company – ARCH, we will develop strong operational links with the network of the county's most competitive companies. We will also provide commercial packages and incentives to attract new inward investment to the county, particularly on those sites with Enterprise Zone status.

Tailored advice support will also be provided to businesses. In our more urban areas, this assistance will focus on growing local talent and local supply chains. In our more rural areas, the attention will be more on providing better broadband provision and access to flexible workspaces. Countywide, we will also continue to nurture and multiply our strong network of social enterprises.

## Sector Development

Certain business sectors are important to the local economy, and each have the potential to further expand and diversify. These include advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, forestry and timber, energy, and tourism.

As a Council, we will help strengthen the value and depth of these niche industries by, for example:

- supporting our agriculture and fishing industries
- promoting Blyth Estuary as a Renewable Energy Zone
- sponsoring the development of a North of England Forestry and Timber Growth Plan
- continuing to improve the visitor offer, attract more visitors, and lengthen the tourism season, as well expanding the scale and depth of creative industries

## Education and skills

Working with early year's providers, schools, colleges, universities, and adult training providers, the Council has a key role to play in ensuring that local people secure meaningful work without having to leave the area. Fundamental to this is properly matching the skill sets of the county's residents to the prevailing labour market.

We need to create a ladder of progression that starts by making sure all children go to a good or better school, and reducing the numbers with additional needs placed out of county for their schooling.

Within this, we will promote a curriculum that responds to the needs of the economy, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, so that achievement gaps can be closed and young people prepared for future employment. In addition, we will increase the range and quality of vocational curriculum opportunities available through schools, colleges and training providers.

In partnership with schools, academies, Northumberland College and the regional Universities, we will encourage skills training beyond level 3, and make Higher Education more accessible to residents.

For those not going to University, we will create clear, coherent and progressive pathways of learning, with employers playing a central role in preparing young people for work. This will particularly focus on incentivising apprenticeships.

Across all of this activity, we will particularly focus on generating an enthusiasm for programmes of study in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

## Transport and Connectivity

The county's capacity for economic growth (and the core of this plan) is inherently linked to the quality and range of its transport and strategic communication networks.

We will construct the South East Northumberland Link Road within budget and to timescale to provide a northern link from the A1 to the A189 Spine Road. We will also continue to lobby Government for the dualling of the A1 to the Scottish Border.

In addition, we will present a robust business case for the development of a strategic growth corridor along the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line that will facilitate the reintroduction of passenger train services and improve freight capacity.

We will continue to form part of the management company for Newcastle International Airport, and seek, in particular, to provide direct flights to North America, and maintain links with central Europe and the Middle East.

We will aspire to have every home and business connected to broadband. This will be achieved by working in partnership with British Telecom to supply the majority of the county through fibre, and sponsoring innovative wireless and satellite solutions to reach the most remote areas to ensure 100% coverage.

In addition, we will campaign for complete mobile phone coverage thereby allowing calls and texts to be made and received anywhere in the county.

## Places and Environment

*The countryside and coastline of Northumberland is truly breath-taking. Characterised by rolling hills, prominent crags, sparkling rivers, and spectacular beaches, the county oozes quality. This is matched by a considerable range of heritage assets, many of which reflect our location as a border frontier and our history of traditional rural and coalfield industries. Our towns retain a distinctive, market feel with no single place having a population of more than 40,000 residents.*

**Our aim is to maintain and further improve the quality of our towns, villages and countryside, and make it easier for residents to access services and high quality, affordable homes and to travel using different modes of transport.**

**To achieve this, we will keep Northumberland clean, green, and safe from the detrimental impacts of climate change, build more houses to benefit those most in need, and provide a convenient, integrated public transport network.**

### Sustainable Development

Through the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF), we will get the right balance between allowing appropriate new development and protecting the county's extensive and distinctive natural and heritage assets.

The LDF will, together with associated neighbourhood planning processes, identify a range of viable and acceptable housing development sites that will help secure the long-term future of our towns and villages.

It will also allocate quality economic development sites and premises in the right locations, and define a flexible policy framework to encourage rural businesses and home run enterprises.

In addition, however, it will manage the prudent use of Northumberland's natural resources, including minerals, energy, land, existing built fabric and water while producing less waste and minimising adverse impacts on communities and the environment.

Finally, the LDF will steer the effective delivery of any new and upgraded infrastructure required to service our communities. The most significant of these will be to make sure that the Environment Agency puts in place the necessary flood prevention measures to the River Wansbeck.

### Town centres

We will support our town and parish councils to maintain and further improve the distinctive vitality of our network of market town and district centres.

As part of this, we will sponsor town performance studies to define the range of shops and services, and the levels of pedestrian footfall and car parking. We will also assist in running events and promoting attractions.

We will consider proposals from town and parish councils to introduce free car parking – with the proviso that effective management regimes are maintained.

## **Managing our Streets and Spaces**

We want to restore local pride in our neighbourhoods and villages.

We will do this by:

- continuing to find cost-effective ways to maintain our highways and keep our roads open in bad weather
- improving the quality of scheduled grass cutting and reinstating verge maintenance
- increasing the frequency of street sweeping in our retail centres and around schools
- establishing a generic pool of “Street Wardens” to police our towns, villages and countryside for litter, dog fouling, fly-tipping, graffiti, etc
- joining the “Keep Britain Tidy” campaign and benchmarking our performance against other local authorities
- improving the gateways to the county and our towns with colourful planting schemes
- converting all our street lights to energy efficient lamps
- continuing to promote recycling and waste reduction with an aim of “zero waste to landfill”

## **Affordable Housing**

Over the lifetime of this Council, we will facilitate, in conjunction with our social housing partners, the construction of at least a further 1,000 homes to rent or buy that allow more residents to access the housing market. We will also ensure that housing developments led by the private sector complement the strategic objectives of the Council.

In addition, we will campaign for the borrowing restrictions on the Housing Revenue Account to be lifted and for the Local Housing Allowance to be based on the market conditions of Northumberland not Tyneside.

We will continue to address the challenges of affordable warmth.

## **Sustainable Travel**

We will continue to promote sustainable travel by providing electric vehicle charging points and improving walking and cycling facilities.

Through the Combined Authority for the North East, we will have a greater influence over local bus services. Like Durham, we will join our Tyne and Wear counterparts in forming a new Integrated Transport Authority (ITA).

Our priorities will be to put in place effective smart ticketing that allows easy travel across buses, trains and the Tyne and Wear Metro; as well as continuing to invest in real time technology so passengers are fully aware of the arrival/departure of services.

In addition, we will continue to support our community transport operators to find innovative and sustainable ways to provide transport in those extensive areas where commercial bus services are not viable or appropriate.

## Stronger Communities and Families

*Northumberland has an indisputable sense of place with three quarters of residents agreeing that they have some kind of affinity with the county. They are generally satisfied with it as a place to live and most have friendships with neighbours. However, fewer agree that people of different backgrounds get on well in the local area with less than half feeling that local people pull together to improve things locally. Only one in four believe they can influence decisions which affect their area.*

**Our aim is to ensure that all residents genuinely feel safe, belong, and have a say in how the county is run, and to provide a range of quality community and cultural services and facilities which inspire creativity and participation.**

**To achieve this, we will closely align the delivery of Council services to the needs of local people and work alongside the diverse network of voluntary and community sector organisations to ensure everyone gets involved.**

### Community Safety

We want diversity to be valued, respected and celebrated, with people of different backgrounds and beliefs tolerated and welcomed into our communities.

Through the network of seven Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAP) units and collaborating closely with the Police Commissioner, we will make sure resources are targeted at those crime and disorder issues of most concern to residents. This will include taking direct and swift action to tackle anti-social behaviour in our housing estates and town centres.

We will provide a comprehensive support service for the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

In addition, we will continue to provide reassurance and resilience by protecting the population from infectious diseases, environmental hazards and severe weather incidents.

### Community Development

We want to support our network of voluntary and community organisations, whilst recognising that grant-giving resources by both the Council and other traditional sources will continue to be squeezed.

This will mean working closely with the emerging VCS Assembly and other thematic networks to co-produce the design and delivery of local services. A low-interest loans scheme will be introduced to pump-prime more new and expanded social enterprise activity and the operation of the current Community Chest scheme will be audited to assess if the maximum value is being realised.

In addition, we will introduce new ways to acknowledge and celebrate actions taken by communities and residents that demonstrate a good “community spirit” and sense of belonging to where they live.



## **Impacts of Welfare Reform**

We want to continue to tackle poverty, particularly among our children. Tracking the cumulative effects of the Government's extensive reforms to the welfare system will be a key component of this.

We will support and make the case for those residents adversely affected by the impacts of welfare reform both through direct interventions and working with our partners, including our Citizen Advice Bureaux and credit unions. This will include making sure that support is effectively delivered to those residents facing short-term financial crisis because of unforeseen circumstances or support to remain or move back into lasting accommodation.

We will also keep under review the eligibility criteria for Council Tax Support.

## **Troubled Families**

We will ensure that children in need and those in need of protection receive timely and appropriate interventions to prevent further significant harm.

In particular, we will target families displaying anti-social behaviour. This will involve providing early help to families at risk of falling into crisis and thereby ensuring fewer children require support from statutory social work services. This will be achieved by assigning a key worker, from across a range of professionals, to provide intensive family support that addresses all the issues affecting that household.

We will promote the Connected Northumberland approach to maximise the support given to families in the first three years of a child's life.

## **Culture and Leisure**

We fully recognise the importance of all residents having access to a range of cultural and leisure facilities in both creating a sense of community and maintaining their wellbeing.

We are building a new leisure and community facility in Ashington town centre that includes: sports facilities, including a sports hall, pool, gym and studio spaces; library services; registrar's office; café, social and meeting spaces; and access to information, advice and council services.

We also find creative solutions to providing a range of community-based sports facilities within our smaller towns and larger villages.

We will encourage, with our partners, increased participation in the arts within South East Northumberland through the delivery of a wide-ranging programme, sponsored by the Arts Council, of new and engaging events that matches resident's view of "what great art is".

We will ensure that residents can access creative and broad programmes of entertainment to revitalise music, theatre and arts across the county.

In addition, we will encourage the parish and town councils to refurbish the counties play areas in partnership with park friendly societies and charitable associations.

# Health and Well Being

*Northumberland's population continues to grow but the balance of the younger to older is changing more quickly than in other parts of the country. Life expectancy, particularly in south east Northumberland, is lower than the national average. In addition, adults with long-term health conditions are now the predominant users of NHS services, and people with disabilities resulting from long term conditions constitute almost all of the users of adult social care.*

**Our aim is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to lead healthy, independent lives for as long as possible and to safeguard our most vulnerable residents in a way that maintains their dignity and confidence.**

**To achieve this, we will use all the levers available to us, including our new public health powers, to deliver integrated, well-managed, and targeted services to allow all residents to access the support they are entitled to.**

## Independent Living

We will make sure that all Council services are designed to maximise people's capacity to stay or become more independent.

We will do this by harnessing the collective skills and resources of the statutory, voluntary and community sector to ensure that we deliver an enhanced offer of preventative support in our communities.

In addition, we will encourage all community-based services and activities to be designed and delivered in a way that maximises the participation of people with long-term conditions or with a disability.

## Supporting those with long-term illness or disability

We will develop a more integrated and consistent approach to supporting individuals with disabling long-term

health conditions, based on putting in place personalised care plans.

This will involve working closely with the Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the NHS Foundation Trusts serving the county whereby we make sure that each individual has a seamless experience when the funding for their support changes between children's services, adult social care, and NHS continuing health care. As part of this, we will agree mechanisms for shifting resources from crisis and institutional services to support controlled by people themselves and provided in the community.

We will implement from 2016 the new national cap on lifetime care costs for people with assets or savings, while also aiming to focus our limited resources on the people who most need our help.

## **Corporate Parenting**

We will develop child friendly policies and services that take account of children's development and their protection.

We will continue to maintain and prioritise robust processes to minimise the numbers of children in care and to effectively safeguard those that are.

In so doing, we will ensure that the average duration for the completion of care proceedings is reduced to a maximum of 26 weeks.

We will also combine the Council's fostering and adoption service into a unified permanence service.

We will remove the open residential children's home from Netherton Park and seek to commission further children's homes across the county.

## **Preventing isolation**

In addition, we will address the isolation of older and vulnerable people.

This will mean improving the advice made available to vulnerable people in all parts of the county about services and facilities they may wish to access and use.

We will also provide seed funding for projects which are aimed at keeping our older and vulnerable people part of day to day community life.

We will deliver supported housing specifically designed for use by vulnerable people, including young people coming out of care, and ensure that those previously employed in the Armed Forces are given appropriate priority in housing allocation.

## **Public Health**

We will promote public health and wellbeing in the community by:

- investing in early intervention and prevention activities
- making every contact with the public count in spotting health and wellbeing issues
- commissioning services against an assessment of local health needs
- putting in place a range of health improving services, including those that aim to support schools and businesses to promote the health of their respective pupils and workforce
- advocating the take-up of screening and immunisation programmes
- supporting non-health based organisations to understand their contribution to creating health and wellbeing gain

This will mean engaging in on-going and constructive dialogue with communities to gain a better understanding as to what health and wellbeing means to them and how they would like to be supported to attain it.

In particular, we will promote a culture of safe and responsible alcohol use with low levels of alcohol related harm supported by accessible services for those who need treatment and support.

We will also encourage lifestyles that result in low levels of obesity – with individuals actively participating in sport, leisure and cultural activities and following healthy diets. This will include offering additional support and treatment to those who need it.

## Developing the Organisation

*The Council is only four years old having been created in 2009 following local government reorganisation. The initial focus was on establishing single, efficient processes and systems that built upon the best practice of the seven previous local authorities. The challenge going forward is to further strengthen the Council's identity – make it clear to all residents and businesses what it stands for and how it wants to work whilst recognising the foreseeable budget constraints.*

**Our aim is to grow a unified Council where all staff and elected members understand their role and are collectively motivated to deliver excellent services as effectively and efficiently as possible within our limited resources.**

**To achieve this, we will build confidence by listening and valuing the views, concerns and ideas of all staff and continue to develop more integrated and multi-disciplinary approaches to meet the challenges faced by the Council.**

### Customer Focus

Above all, the Council must be in tune with its residents; readily accessible and providing quality customer services that resident's value and need.

To this end, we will:

- apply a consistent Council brand that also seeks to promote the assets of the county
- move our main telephone number to a line with local charge rates
- improve the look and feel of our website, whilst maximising the level of online transactions
- maximise the number of customer contacts through the use of mobile phone and social media technologies
- listen and promptly respond to the feedback received from our residents
- provide a network of town-based one-stop shops with Cramlington acting as the exemplar

### Investing in our capacity

The Council is the single biggest organisation in the county. It employs the most staff, has a considerable spending power, and a significant property base. We will exploit this influence to the full.

We will provide apprenticeships that allow residents, particularly young people, to develop their skills and secure meaningful jobs. We will create a pool of social workers thereby ensuring that the young and elderly are safeguarded by people who have Northumberland at heart.

We will make sure that we will purchase, procure and commission as much as we can through locally sourced supply chains, labour and products.

We will use the Council's portfolio of assets to, wherever possible, pump prime or unlock economic growth, particularly within our town centres.

## **Innovation**

We will embrace innovation and pioneer new ways of working that gives us more value for less resource. This will be funded on a culture of continuous improvement, always exploring and introducing smarter and more streamlined ways of working.

We will introduce forums for staff to present new ideas and suggestions for service delivery improvements and efficiencies. We will also create a similar open access slot that allows residents, organisations and communities to propose new approaches to how we do things.

The larger or more complex suggestions will be fed into the “Ideas Incubator”, which will have staff and resources to run and test effective pilots for subsequent wider roll-out.

We will embrace digital delivery of services and work with our partners to expand the reach of e-business and remove the barriers to information technology.

We will continue to establish new delivery vehicles, such as ARCH and Homes for Northumberland, as the means by which to provide more flexible and rapid responses to the needs of residents and businesses.

Where it is in the interests of the county, we will offer to act as a pilot or pathfinder for new approaches emerging from Government, national associations, or policy think-tanks.

## **Partnership**

The Council has a sound track record in partnership working and collaborating with others to achieve economies of scale and better integration.

We will continue to explore ways to share and pool services with other public services, building on the existing alliances with Northumbria Healthcare (adult social and acute health care) and North Tyneside Council (audit). In addition, we will maximise the scope to co-locate staff with those from other partner agencies.

We will invest in creating a robust Health and Well Being Board that is equipped to address the wider determinants of poor health and the challenges of independent living.

We will also continue to work with parish and town councils (via our Local Charter) and VCS organisations to put in place the most effective delivery of community-based and personalised services and to ensure the retention of local assets.

We will, together with our counterparts in Tyne & Wear and Durham and subject to Government approval, form a Combined Authority for the North East with the aim of maximising economic growth from the city region. Its initial focus will be on transport, skills, and inward investment.

We will work with other “Northern” local authorities, including those in Scotland, to take joint action on issues of common concern or potential, and to lobby Government for additional freedoms and flexibilities to properly reflect our more rural characteristics and the cost of service delivery in such areas.

