

Policy Context to the Budget 2013/2014

Context to our plans

Bath & North East Somerset Council (B&NES) strives to deliver excellent services to local people and make our area *the* place to live, invest, and visit in the UK. We are committed through our strategies to making this happen.

The environment in which we are working has changed and we are now facing new challenges from cuts to public sector funding, new legislation and shifts in our local population numbers and profiles.

Using a comprehensive evidence base, called the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, we are ensuring that we have a good understanding of the challenges facing us and the needs of local people. This understanding is shaping our strategies and the way we deliver front line services.

Our strategies and plans describe how we will be investing in the future with projects to promote new jobs and homes, keeping Council Tax bills as low as possible and protecting high priority frontline services, whilst ensuring that our most vulnerable residents are given the support that they need.

What our plans say

Our Corporate Plan sets out the Councils vision for the area. This vision puts people first and communities at the heart of everything we do, and is framed around 3 objectives: *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone (quality of life); Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live (people); Building a strong economy.* The Plan goes on to describe how we will make this vision a reality, whilst making the most of our resources. Our Corporate Plan 2012 – 2015 can be found at www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/policies-and-plans/corporate-plan

Our Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) builds on our vision for the area and sets out the commitment from the wider B&NES partnership. It seeks to ensure that public services in B&NES are coordinated, and that our themed multi-agency partnerships such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Economic Partnership are joining up on key issues such as unemployment, skills and education.

We are in the process of reviewing the Sustainable Community Strategy to make sure that it is up to date and relevant; a new version of the SCS is expected in spring 2013. The B&NES Public Services Board is leading the development of the SCS. This Board is chaired by Paul Crossley, leader of the Council, and includes chief officers from B&NES public sector agencies including the police, fire and rescue, housing and health.

Engagement with local people and communities is an important part of our strategy and service design process and our new Local Engagement Framework is helping us to develop a coordinated, transparent and efficient way of engaging. This new approach will help us to reduce duplication, whilst making the most of new ways of working.

The following paragraphs summarise some of the key challenges identified in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and priorities of our Corporate Plan and Sustainable Community Strategy.

Population change: Aging population

The number of older people is growing. Statistical projections suggest that this will continue and that by 2026, people over 75 will have increased by 40%, representing 11% of the total population. This will create challenges in services such as social care, health and housing.

Responding to this population change is a priority of our Health and Wellbeing Board and through the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy the Board has been planning how to meet the needs of our older population. Our commitment is to provide good quality services for older people that include choice, dignity and the respect to make their own decisions, as well as assistance to live independently.

Population change: School age population

The number of school age children is growing and, combined with new housing and families moving into the area, we will need to provide more primary school places. We have embarked upon an investment programme and new school places are proposed in north Bath, Paulton, Peasedown and Keynsham to meet this demand.

New housing developments are being considered in Bath Western Riverside, Bath and Somerdale Keynsham which will create additional demand on schools. We are planning for this now, including the need for new schools. We will continue to invest in children and schools ensuring that we continue to create a learning environment that is nurturing, safe and sets high expectations.

Promoting new jobs

We want to do more to support local people into work. Investing in economic growth to create new jobs, new homes and new opportunities for our residents is a crucial part of our local plans and our developing Economic Strategy will further outline this commitment.

Climate change

Climate change poses significant challenges for the area and we need to move towards a more sustainable future. Our Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy outlines our approach to achieving this including how we are working with the community to reduce our carbon consumption by 45 per cent by 2026, through a range of programmes that promote resource efficiency.

Connecting families

The government estimates that there are more than 200 families living within B&NES which have complex needs. These families experience five or more of the following problems; unemployment, poor quality or overcrowded housing, no parent has any qualifications, mental ill-health, longstanding limiting illness, disability or infirmity, low income, or unable to afford food and clothing items. This is not acceptable, and we are

working to ensure that these families enjoy the same quality of life experienced by others, through our Connecting Families programme.

Reducing health inequalities

Despite relatively low levels of social inequality, there are small geographical areas that experience issues. Social inequality has a significant relationship with a wide range of health and social care needs including life expectancy and long term conditions. In partnership with the B&NES Clinical Commissioning Group we will seek to reduce these inequalities through our Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Legislative changes

There have been many changes in legislation in recent years and these represent significant shifts to the way we work and how we deliver services.

The **Academies Act** has affected the way we manage and fund our schools. We have responded well to this change and are working collaboratively with our new academies to ensure that every child receives a high standard of education.

In response to the **Localism Act**, the Council is considering a range of mechanisms which will facilitate greater community involvement in the planning of local services, such as neighbourhood plans, a new local engagement framework and the new community rights to buy and challenge.

We have established a new Health and Wellbeing Board, which was a requirement of the **Health and Social Care Act**. This Board gives us a greater say in the way health services are delivered, and increases the opportunity for greater integration between health and social care. The overall aim of the Board is to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

Forthcoming changes to **state welfare provision** will impact on people and families within our communities. We are putting mechanisms in place now to support people impacted by this change. We are also working with the new **Police and Crime Commissioner** to ensure community safety initiatives in B&NES continue to receive investment and that crime remains low.