

Wiltshire Council Corporate Plan 2010-2014

Everybody Matters

Executive Summary

Welcome to the 2010-2014 Corporate Plan for the new Wiltshire Council.

The Plan sets out the contribution that the council and its activities will make towards improving the quality of life for people living and working in Wiltshire. The council, and Wiltshire as a whole, is facing a difficult and challenging time over the next four years and beyond. However, it is also recognised that our new organisation is in a great position, and its employees are fully committed, to ensuring that we meet those challenges and that Wiltshire continues to be a place of choice to live and work in the south of England.

Our vision

While the place we live will always have a major influence on our quality of life, it is our communities that are at the heart of the area and give us a sense of well-being and belonging. Strong communities are better placed to cope with changing and challenging circumstances and they will often possess the tools and the means of finding their own solutions to many of the problems they face. Such communities tend to require less intervention from public services, which in turn reduces pressure on increasingly scarce resources.

Our vision for Wiltshire is therefore to **create stronger and more resilient communities**. The vision is underpinned by 3 key goals, all of which have people and communities as their focus:

- **Deliver high quality, low cost, customer focused services** – putting the customer first and ensuring that we are providing what our customers need and want, in a cost-effective way which demonstrates value for money.
- **Ensure local, open, honest decision-making** – engaging with communities so that people are contributing to the decisions that affect them and their local area.
- **Working together to support Wiltshire's communities** – across the council and its partner organisations, focusing on the needs of people and communities rather than on specific services and departments.

Our priorities

Our chosen priorities must reflect our overall vision and goals, address the most pressing challenges facing Wiltshire, and respond to what you, our customers, have said. At the same time, we have to realise that we cannot do everything when it is clear that we must reduce the cost of our activities over the coming years. Identifying clear priorities helps us make choices when resources are not sufficient to deliver everything we might want to.

We have focused on the things that matter most to everybody, the 'themes' that encompass our lives, and considered the main priority under each:

Family/People: the welfare of family, friends, colleagues etc.

Our priority – Working in partnership to support vulnerable individuals and families

Our priority – Increasing the potential of young people

Community: our sense of belonging, our social well-being

Our priority – Local voice, local choice

Place: what it feels like to live here, the importance of the wider environment

Our priority – Improving our roads and pavements

Our priority – Supporting the local economy

Our priority – Meeting housing needs

Our priority – Reducing our environmental impact

As an organisation, the council itself also needs to prioritise its own activities to ensure that we achieve our stated vision and can support the priorities under these themes. As a new organisation in this economic climate, we need to be determined in ensuring that the council is fit for purpose.

Our priority – Achieving savings, efficiency and value for money

Our priority – Customer focus and improved access to services

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1. Introduction

The world around us is changing in almost every respect. Some aspects of our lives are changing very quickly such as the economy or through advances in technology, while other things are changing more gradually such as the average age of the population or the climate on the planet. The things we need and want as well as the place in which we live continues to change and evolve.

In such an environment, people and organisations have to develop new ways of thinking, new ways of working, and even new ways of living in order to respond to and keep up with the pace of change.

The move to a single local authority, the creation of the new Wiltshire Council, represents the first radical step forward in providing a modern organisation which is equipped to handle the challenges of the changing world and play its part in shaping life in Wiltshire.

Everybody Matters is our plan for setting out how the new council will evolve, what we aim to achieve and why, and how and when we will do it. We need to be clear about our direction so that all of Wiltshire's residents can understand what we are trying to do and how it will affect their lives. In many aspects, the plan also helps to illustrate where citizens and their communities can play their part in ensuring Wiltshire remains a place people choose to live and visit.

2. Life in Wiltshire today

There are many things that determine what life is like in any area – is the economy prosperous, are there enough houses, can people afford to live here, are the villages, towns and the countryside

pleasant places to live and visit etc. Various national and local surveys provide us with an overview of what people consider life is like in Wiltshire and how happy they are living here.

The most recent Place Survey* demonstrated that 85.9% of residents are consistently very satisfied with Wiltshire as a place to live, comparing favourably with the national figure of 79.7%. There are many reasons why people are content with life in our county.

As a rural county, Wiltshire is a naturally beautiful place with a landscape which commands international recognition, with nearly half of that landscape being classed as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The county is steeped in cultural heritage with a wealth of archaeological and architectural treasures and has a large number of historically significant features. Our towns and villages reflect and enhance the beauty of their rural setting. As the survey shows, our physical surroundings play a major part in making the county a place in which people choose and are happy to live.

A look at some of the key statistical indicators demonstrate many more clear reasons why we have much to appreciate :

- People are healthier and live longer. On the vast majority of indicators people are healthier than the national average and life expectancy for both men and women is approximately 2 years (and rising) above the national average.
- Crime rates are amongst the very lowest in the country, and are falling year on year, making Wiltshire one of the safest places to live.
- Unemployment is consistently lower than the average across the country
- Average income per head of population is higher than the national figure
- The level of qualifications amongst the working population is higher than the national average

In a great many ways, we are therefore proud of the contribution the new council, and its predecessors, has made to the quality of life in Wiltshire. However, we recognise that in this rapidly changing world, we are all going to have to work hard to maintain and protect that quality of life in the face of some considerable challenges over the coming years.

2.1 A place to live and work

The well-documented global and national economic problems have an impact on Wiltshire and its residents. On one hand, as has been stated above, we are in a relatively strong position to cope with the recession. Low unemployment and high levels of entrepreneurial activity suggest that we will be less badly affected than most other parts of the country. That said, the downturn will cause many difficulties for people and businesses and the council has to be committed to providing assistance wherever possible.

To this end, working with our partner organisations, a plan has been developed called Action For Wiltshire which details the measures we will undertake and assistance we will provide to ensure that our residents and businesses are supported through these difficult economic times. Some of these actions include the provision of £290k of financial support to the Citizen's Advice Bureau to help them manage the increased demand on their services and setting up a helpline to provide advice for small businesses,

As Wiltshire is such a popular place to live, house prices continue to be higher than average in comparison to levels of income. This places continual pressure on people and their ability to remain living in their local town or village, often forcing them to leave the county for places offering cheaper housing. The council is therefore committed to providing greater levels of affordable housing to ensure that those on lower incomes are not excluded from living in the county. Initiatives to build an additional 400 affordable homes are underway and the council has recently

been given government approval to start building additional 'council' houses to assist with housing the less affluent amongst the population.

One positive sign for the future is that although house prices remain high compared with average earnings, the gap between Wiltshire and the rest of the country is getting smaller meaning that the problem is improving slowly.

A further challenge facing the council is the requirement imposed by central government to build an additional 44,000 homes in the area by 2026. This has huge implications for Wiltshire in terms of spatial planning and the associated infrastructure and environmental considerations. Following extensive public consultation, we will be producing a Core Strategy for Wiltshire which will set out how our place will develop in terms of housing and business growth and as such, the strategy will be a major driver in determining what life is like in the county.

Climate change will remain a major challenge for the world and for the local authority. As well as the need to dramatically reduce the overall environmental impact that our lives have on the planet, we will also need to manage the affects and implications of increasing temperatures and changing weather conditions. Like all councils, Wiltshire now has CO2 reduction targets to achieve both as an organisation and for the county as a whole. We have also signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change which is a statement of intent demonstrating our commitment to tackle climate change - addressing both its causes and its impacts.

In large rural areas like Wiltshire, with widely dispersed towns and villages, developing and maintaining a safe and effective highway infrastructure is essential. Our county is joined together by a network of over 2,700 miles of public roads which, due to the fact that almost all of our residents make use of them, feature highly in people's thinking. The most important feature of a highway network is, of course, safety and this has always been our primary focus. Although the numbers of accidents resulting in fatalities or serious injuries has been falling consistently over the last decade, we need to keep working closely with partners such as the Police and Highways Agency and ensure that trend continues.

The maintenance of our highways is an aspect which our residents regularly consider needs improving. The overall trend for the roads in Wiltshire in recent years has been one of improvement, and our carriageway conditions compare favourably with many other highway authorities, especially our B class roads and minor roads which are in better overall condition than other shire counties in the South West. However, we know we need to get better so we have recently reviewed all of our systems for repairing dangerous potholes and dramatically improved the speed of our response, from taking an average of 3 days in 2007 to a current average of less than a day. This has been a real challenge considering the additional damage to our carriageways sustained during the freezing conditions in the winter of 2009.

2.2 Our communities

While there are many things that influence people's quality of life, it has become clear in recent years that one of the most important aspects is a sense of belonging, being part of a 'community'. People living in places which have a strong sense of community, a healthy community spirit, tend to enjoy a better quality of life both in a physical/material sense and in terms of their general well-being.

It is also clear that in neighbourhoods where there are strong social networks with a range of voluntary groups and clubs taking an active role, the burden on public services is dramatically reduced. This means that communities are better placed to look after themselves in many aspects of life without needing expensive intervention from public service organisations.

Recognising that people can become disengaged with their communities and local democracy, in recent years the local authorities in Wiltshire have increased their activities at a more local level. Local residents have been engaged in dealing with community issues through Area Partnerships and Area Committees, resulting in real benefits such as the creation of Local Area Plans, the provision of funding for local community projects, and an increase in the number of residents becoming engaged in volunteer activities. Wiltshire can be proud of the fact that 29.6% of its residents are regular volunteers against a national average of 23.2%.

Without doubt, the good work done in recent years by the councils and their residents has had a positive influence. The previously-identified high levels of satisfaction with Wiltshire as a place to live, the low levels of crime etc. all help to show that we are all heading in the right direction, However, despite the positives, over two thirds of our residents feel that they are unable to influence local decisions and there remains a general lack of trust and confidence in the government and its institutions.

The challenge for the council is therefore to rebuild people's confidence levels by encouraging them to have a greater involvement in the decisions that affect them, thereby ensuring that local people are influencing the way their local area changes. By being open and honest we can start to rebuild the trust in democracy.

Investing in our communities and ensuring that people have a voice in the decisions which affect their lives was at the heart of move to a unitary council. The cornerstone of our approach to this has been the creation of 18 Community Area Boards across the county. The Boards will concentrate on issues affecting their respective local areas and aim to re-connect people who currently feel detached from their communities and feel that they do not have a voice. Collectively, the council has invested £750k for this year, rising to nearly £3m over the next 2 years, for Area Boards to invest in projects and activities which they consider to be valuable in building resilience in the communities and bringing people together.

Recognising that it will take harmonised effort and engagement from many sources to strengthen our communities, the council has established a new Voluntary and Community Sector (CVS) Support Unit. Encouraging greater levels of volunteer participation and co-ordinating and targeting the activities of those organisations will reduce the burden of public service involvement and be of enormous benefit to our communities.

2.3 People and families

Life expectancy has been increasing for many years due to advancements in science and improving standards of health care. In the modern world, populations are now living longer and the proportion of elderly people in our society is increasing. There will be many impacts of having an older age-profile in Wiltshire however, the key challenge for the council will be the increasing number of adults requiring long term adult care.

In response to this long term challenge, the way that adult care services are provided by the council has been reviewed is now being radically transformed. As well as ensuring that the widening range of needs are catered for, Adult Social Services will also focus on preventative approaches to promote people's independence and well-being, resulting in a reduction in people requiring comprehensive and costly intervention by the council.

Some families in Wiltshire are vulnerable to experiencing inter-related difficulties which require greater levels of assistance and input from the council. Family breakdown, drug and alcohol problems, domestic violence, child protection problems and other such concerns are all often found in a relatively small number of families or households. Such families are caught in a cycle where one problem tends to lead to another.

To break this cycle and to improve their chances of lifting them out of a vulnerable situation, the council is committed to establishing early and sustained relationships with these families, cutting across its own department-based Housing, Children's and Adult Services and working closely with our key partner organisations such as the Police and Health Services. In short, the intervention of the council in this way will help to ensure that many of the difficulties do not turn into larger problems in the future, prevention being better than cure.

There is a particular problem with a rising number of young people, 16 to 19 years olds, who are neither in the education system nor in employment, referred to as NEETs. They can, very quickly, become entrenched in a non-productive way of life and the longer their predicament persists, the harder it is for them to re-engage. Some end up with a life-time dependency on intervention from public services with the added problem of passing that acceptance of dependency on to their children.

The council, and indeed the country as a whole faces the challenge of reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment, or training in order to prevent larger, longer term problems. As well as making sure we are identifying and tracking the progress of NEETS in the county, we are also working to ensure that they have flexible and comprehensive access to learning giving them the best opportunities to succeed in securing suitable employment. Direct assistance is given through targeted Youth Support and offering personal advice and guidance in support of existing employment services. Further assistance is being provided through Education Maintenance Allowances which provide financial incentives and support for young people remaining in education or in training.

The health and well-being of our population is also a challenge for the council. Unhealthy lifestyles, inactivity, obesity, drug and alcohol use, and the associated long-term health conditions are all placing an increasing burden on public services and also have a negative affect on the local economy. Along with our partners, the council has a key role to play in helping to improve and maintain the general levels of health in Wiltshire, whether that be through educational means or by offering incentives, for example providing free swimming for the over 60's and under 16's.

2.4 The council

Taking into consideration the challenges facing Wiltshire as an area, its communities and the people living here, it is clear that the newly formed unitary council must be an organisation that is fit for purpose. To ensure that we continue to operate responsively and effectively our organisation, your council, will need to continue to build on the benefits and successes of the move to one council. We will need to go beyond our stated **LGR** aims if we are to continue to deliver in the rapidly changing environment.

One of our key **LGR** aims was to ensure that the new organisation developed a genuine and sustained focus on our customers. We had a real challenge in ensuring that our customers had reliable access to the council and our services on 1st April 2009 and through the transition period. To make this happen we provided face to face customer services in all of the main council locations and introduced a single main contact number and dedicated numbers for specific service areas.

Through our Customer Access To Services Strategy, we are now committed to enabling all our customers to have simple and easy access to the services they need, ensuring that their experiences are positive and constructive, and ensuring that we get it right first time. This is not simply about improving our reputation and increasing satisfaction levels, it is also about being efficient and eliminating unnecessary time and effort. Quite simply, a customer focus saves money.

Over the last decade, economic prosperity has allowed for considerable investment in the range of public services and in society-shaping projects. The recent global financial crisis and the

subsequent legacy of high levels of national debt will result in pressures on public service budgets over the next decade. In terms of grants from Central Government, Wiltshire is already one of the lowest funded councils in the country and as a result of the recession, the amount of income we generate has dropped. We intend to keep council tax as low as possible and therefore we will need to work much smarter, using our resources in the most efficient way if we are to improve and maintain the quality of life in Wiltshire.

The move to one council has already delivered £8.5m of efficiency savings in its first year. Having become a single organisation, the harmonisation of our services across the county is the next challenge in the short term however in doing so, we are also undertaking an extensive programme of 'Lean' reviews of our systems, processes, and services. The aim of these reviews is to ensure that we are providing our customers with effective services, using our resources in the most efficient way possible, and eliminating any wasted time and money from our activities. It is anticipated, and possibly essential, that we will go far beyond our original LGR savings and efficiency targets.

Many services and activities undertaken by the council have close links and overlaps with those of other public service providers such as the Police, NHS, PCT, and Fire Service. We therefore need to work much more closely with these partner-organisations to identify the most effective way of meeting our customers' needs and to ensure that we do not duplicate our efforts and waste resources. We already have well established partnership groups which have looked at the overall, strategic approach that public service organisations take, such as the Wiltshire Assembly. We now need to take this further and start looking at the actual activities we are all involved in and find ways of improving what we do and reducing the cost of doing it.

3. Vision and goals

What is the main role for Wiltshire Council? What is its purpose? The answer is that its role is extremely wide ranging and it will change over time to reflect the pressures and opportunities that emerge for its people and its communities. Whilst it performs many functions because it is required to by law, it retains flexibility in many areas to adjust its focus according to the needs of its people and its communities. Its activities will influence lives either directly or indirectly but in short, the council is the main body influencing the quality of life in the area and it takes that responsibility very seriously.

It is recognised that the council alone will not be successful in tackling all of the issues facing the people of Wiltshire. The demands being placed on local government and the increasing pressure on resources means that it is vital that the challenges ahead are tackled through working closely and collaboratively with Wiltshire's communities. We must share the responsibility for making Wiltshire a great place to live, work and visit, and this means developing both the capacity of the organisation and of the community to respond to the challenges ahead.

3.1 Our vision

Therefore, the key strategic aim for Wiltshire **is to create stronger and more resilient communities** with the key outcomes being a clear improvement in the quality of life for everybody in Wiltshire and a reduction in the amount of necessary intervention on the part of the local authority, helping to reduce the cost of public services.

The vision is founded on that sense of community spirit. We want to encourage and support local communities to get involved and work with us to strengthen their ability to deal with local challenges. We want to work closely with town and parish councils, voluntary groups, local people in general to establish what the community needs and to help provide that in the most sustainable and effective way.

To help us, as an organisation, remain focused on delivering our key strategic aim, we have identified three key goals which will underpin everything we do and act as challenging guidelines to all of our activities. Our key goals are as follows:

- **Deliver high quality, low cost, customer focused services**

We need to provide services Wiltshire actually needs, at a quality standard our residents actually want, and doing this in a cost effective way which represents value for money. There is always the risk that we try to provide something at the highest possible standard regardless of the cost, when something less grand, less complicated and less expensive is all that is needed. We therefore need to understand what our residents and the area need, and design our services and activities accordingly.

We also need to understand that our residents and visitors, our customers, are the most important people to consider when designing and delivering services. Our focus, for everything we do, must be on the customer to ensure that people are satisfied with what we are doing.

- **Ensure local, open, honest decision making**

If we are to strengthen our communities and ensure that they develop a strong sense of independence, we need to make sure that decisions which affect them are made by the communities themselves. To feel a sense of ownership and belonging, the people must be able to contribute directly to the decisions that change things in their local area.

We also need to ensure that we are very clear about the decisions we make, and the decisions made locally, so that people can understand why something is changing even if they are not in full agreement. An open and honest approach is essential if we are to build trust in our communities.

- **Working together to support Wiltshire's communities**

Across the whole of the new council, we have to make sure that all of the departments are working closely together in support of our communities. Council activities and services have traditionally been very separate with each service being seen as a specific means to an end. We must think about the needs of the community and our citizens rather than worrying about who does what to whom in the council.

There are many partners, both public service providers and voluntary organisations, with whom we need to work more closely and effectively in support of our communities. We need to understand each other's work and activities and make sure that we are not working against each other or duplicating our efforts. Partners working together with a shared community focus will be much more effective in delivering our vision.

3.2 What will success look like?

Achieving our overall Vision will require some major shifts in thinking and behaviour, not just from the council but from all the residents in the county. Strong and resilient communities will improve the quality of life for us all and, at the same time, lead to a reduced intervention from, and therefore the cost of, public services.

There are many factors which will contribute to our success. Our vision is of communities:

- that are places where people **choose** to live and work
- where people take pride in their town or village

- where people from all backgrounds, ages and beliefs feel valued, included, and are treated with respect
- where people volunteer and get together to tackle local concerns
- with many 'social networks' allowing people to be active and involved
- which possess the skills and businesses to generate jobs to meet local employment needs
- which are informed about environmental issues and actively create local solutions
- where children and young people enjoy life and achieve their potential in and out of school
- where people get involved in democratic processes and have a voice in shaping the present and the future of their area
- which promote healthy lifestyles

In summary, our vision is for communities where a strong spirit and sense of belonging enable them to rise to, and cope with, current and future challenges.

4. One council - one culture

The move to one council brought together five separate organisations with their own individual strengths and weaknesses, their own ways of working and of delivering their services, and their own values and behaviours that their respective organisations expected. To successfully achieve our vision and goals, we need to create a single culture to support the change of focus for the council.

We want to be an organisation that works corporately, understands that our citizens look at us as a whole and not as individual services and therefore our behaviour and values should reflect this. Every member of staff needs to embrace a 'can-do' attitude and have a commitment to help the citizen and community, to help solve a problem even if it is not part of their specific job.

We need to approach our work with the enthusiasm and commitment necessary to inspire confidence in our citizens, confidence that we have their best interests at heart in all that we do. We also need to value and recognise the contribution of our staff and elected members and equip them to carry out their roles in an efficient, effective and friendly manner. In short, when we say "everybody matters" we must mean it.

Achieving a cultural shift will take time, focus, energy and the belief and drive of all leaders and managers to make it happen. To start with, it is vital to agree what we consider to be important values and ways of working, and translate them into clear behaviours and actions. Staff, elected members, and our customers, must be aware and understand what is expected of them so we are all clear about how to move forward.

The values and behaviours are:

- **Focusing on the customer** – put customers at the heart of what we do, listen to and involve them, be honest about what we can do, be an ambassador for the council.
- **Being inclusive and supporting others** – build trust, be available, be open and listen, allow others to express their views.
- **Creating clarity** – clear direction, focus on what's important and on actions that make a difference, communicate.
- **Leading through change** – provide a positive vision for the future, support and involve people, trust others to deliver.
- **Being decisive** – take ownership for decisions, take the initiative, create 'can-do' attitude.
- **Treating others with respect** – individuals matter and deserve respect, act consistently, be open fair and honest

- **Challenging the norm** – seek ways of doing things differently, encourage innovation, be receptive to new ideas.

5. A change of perspective

If we are to be successful in delivering our vision and goals, and if we are to continue to provide for our communities and citizens in a rapidly changing environment, we need to develop a new way of thinking and a new way of looking at the role of the council and our partners in influencing the quality of life in Wiltshire.

Local authorities have traditionally organised themselves and looked at their activities in terms of the specific services they deliver which has had the result of creating 'silo' based organisations which do not always reflect the real needs of their customers. We have designed and delivered services to suit specific needs and drivers rather than thinking of our overall relationship with our customers in all aspects of their lives.

We recognise that in order to start thinking about people and their relationship and experiences with the council during their lives, we will need to change our structures, processes and services. We need to join up our services, not just across the council but across all of our partner agencies and all those engaged in delivering public services. It does not matter which part of the council or which particular partner is responsible for something, what matters is what works for the customer.

The relationship between the council and any citizen starts at birth and continues right through a person's life until death. The council's engagement at these two pivotal moments is as simple as registering each event however, in between the two, every citizen has a constant, often unnoticed engagement with the local authority. The basics are easy to identify – we all go through the education system, we all have our refuse collected, we all use the roads and pavements, we all have the opportunity to vote and use leisure centres, and of course, we all have to pay our council tax. Beyond this, people have to call upon the council for an enormous range of services depending on their particular circumstances in life. For example, you may require planning permission, an area may need a subsidised bus service to prevent isolation, some children may require protective services, and elderly people may require long term care.

The council maintains some form of relationship with an individual throughout the time that person lives in Wiltshire and we all have a relationship with Wiltshire as a place, with the community we live in, and of course, with our family, friends and the people around us.

As a new unitary authority, Wiltshire Council has the opportunity to transform the way it provides services to individuals and families, how it engages with the community it serves, and what it does to further enhance the attractiveness of its rural and urban spaces. The agenda is huge and by necessity the council needs to focus its efforts on a small number of priorities. We have concentrated on the things that matter most to everybody, the 'themes' that encompass our lives – place, community, and people - and considered the main priority under each.

6. Our priorities

Family / people:

6.1 Working in partnership to support vulnerable individuals and families

Working more effectively with our partners at the local and strategic level is essential to creating stronger more resilient communities. At the local level, area boards provide councillors with the opportunity to fulfil their community leadership roles engaging with local people and partner agencies, taking forward a common agenda. At the strategic level, the Wiltshire Assembly, the

PSB, the WCG and a number of thematic partnerships now form the new family of partnerships and have responsibility for delivering the LAW and LAA. They allow services across different sectors to be planned and coordinated together, with the future potential to align budgets, join public services together, and achieve results that could not have been possible by agencies working alone.

Vulnerable individuals and families demand the input of many public service providers, often in isolation from each other. Effective partnership working will result in early and appropriate intervention to resolve problems and improve prospects, focusing on the issues of those people rather than concentrating on which service is supposed to be doing what.

Why a priority?

- It is widely accepted that Wiltshire Council is the lead public sector organisation speaking on behalf of Wiltshire's communities. However, it is also recognised that, despite its size, the council cannot act alone and must work effectively and closely with a wide range of partners. The need for this collaboration has grown significantly in recent years, and is now essential if we are to effectively deal with the complex inter-related challenges affecting our communities.
- The Council is a key player in the delivery of the LAW ambitions and LAA targets and success in doing this depends on close joined-up working with partners.
- The future financial pressures on the council will necessitate more innovative and closer working with our partner agencies to improve the efficiency and value for money achieved.
- Partnership working is a fundamental element of CAA. Our success in CAA will be judged, at least in part, by the extent to which we engage with partners to deliver positive outcomes that meet community needs.
- The original LGR bid to become a unitary council recognised the need to go beyond simply creating a unitary council and to move towards an ambitious 'unitary plus' solution. This envisages a future where the resources and capacity of public agencies could be maximised through management integration, joint commissioning, shared services, and joint policies and strategies.
- Vulnerable individuals and families tend to experience a variety of problems which can lead to increasingly expensive and resource intensive intervention from separate public services. Partnership working to ensure early and appropriate intervention will lessen the frequency and severity of these problems, will reduce the requirement for intervention, and result in the individuals and families realising their potential and having a better quality of life.

6.2 Increasing the potential of young people

Young people can make a positive contribution to creating stronger and more resilient communities in many different ways. This includes through work and their contribution to local economic prosperity, in enjoying life and becoming involved in community activities, promoting understanding between different groups, and reducing the feelings of insecurity especially amongst older people. However, they do need support to fulfil their potential and to counter the false negative perceptions that some people have about young people.

Why a priority?

There are a number of inter-related issues that make young people a priority for the council.

- The provision of excellence and choice in education is a political mandate and there is recognition that there is a need to narrow the educational attainment gap. School attainment varies considerably between children of different backgrounds and between different schools.

Children with special educational needs, in care, and in receipt of free school meals often under-perform in examinations compared to other children. There are also wide variations between schools with some performing extremely well whilst others perform poorly.

- Young people not achieving examination success may increase the possibility of them becoming NEETs (not in education, employment or training). If left unchecked, this can lead to a dependency on benefits and continuing intervention from public services. The number of NEETs in Wiltshire is relatively small but it is increasing and needs to be reduced to prevent longer term problems and escalating public costs.
- Reducing child poverty is a national issue and the government intend to place a new duty on local authorities to work with partners to lift children out of poverty. The main cause of poverty is inadequate income, arising from unemployment or low wages. Poverty has costs to both the individual and society and can be seen to limit the potential of local communities. Children living in poverty can experience low educational achievement and poor health which in turn can impact on long term economic growth and demand for public services.
- In the Place Survey, facilities and activities for children and teenagers is identified as important in making somewhere a good place to live and needs to be improved. A lack of activities, especially for teenagers can lead to potential crime related problems including anti-social behaviour.

Community:

6.3 Local voice local choice

Giving people opportunities to get involved in local democracy and the ability to shape and influence decisions affecting their lives is very important in creating stronger more resilient communities. It creates many benefits including fostering a sense of ownership and pride in an area, encourages local action and voluntary work, and promotes more openness and trust in the community itself and with public agencies.

Why a priority?

- Local area governance formed one of the key elements of the 'We're ready..' bid for a unitary council. It was recognised that we needed to strengthen community engagement in local decision making by creating Area Boards. These are now in place and the challenge is now to generate greater citizen interest and engagement, and for services to be organised so that they can respond effectively to community priorities and issues.
- A key feature of a resilient community is that there are opportunities for people to be involved in discussing and shaping the decisions that affect their lives. In 2008 less than a third of residents agreed they could influence decisions affecting their local area. Although this is higher than the national average it needs to be substantially improved.
- Recently, there has been a loss of trust and confidence in government generally. This can result in people being sceptical about the work of the council and disengagement from democratic processes. This reinforces the need to maintain and enhance our relationship with local communities and ensure we are responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Place:

6.4 Improving our roads and pavements

The standard of roads and pavements and the access people have to services, jobs and other facilities has an influence in determining where people want to live and work and by inference on

the strength and resilience of communities. It can have a marked impact especially in rural areas, where poor roads can limit local economic growth, new housing development, and the provision of public transport services.

Why a priority?

- The quality of the street scene has a major impact on how people feel about an area and their commitment to it. The Council has a lead role in ensuring the street scene, especially roads and associated infrastructure is properly maintained.
- An effective road network is vital for Wiltshire, particularly in respect of the local economy, giving access to services, and in linking rural and urban areas to the principal road network. Future challenges may include having to cope with more adverse and extreme weather conditions.
- Improving the condition of roads is a local political mandate. This reflects a long standing public dissatisfaction with the standard of road maintenance, road safety and journey times. In local surveys road repairs is the service identified as most in need of improvement and future investment.
- Area Boards represent a key challenge for the highways service. Analysis of the Area Board issue logs shows that over half of all the issues raised by residents are concerns about roads and other related matters (120 out of 237 issues raised at 23/9/09 across all Area Boards).
- Most of the council's highway and related functions are delivered under contract. Whilst performance has improved in 2008/09, the negative perceptions and views of the public have remained largely unchanged. The contracts are due to expire in 2011, and this may provide an opportunity to review, reconfigure and improve the service provided, so that it better meets the needs and expectations of the community.

6.5 Supporting the local economy

Local business activity and the provision of a wide variety of local jobs makes an important contribution to creating stronger and more resilient communities. It provides local wealth and minimises deprivation, fosters self-sufficiency and reduces dependency, indirectly promotes health and well-being, and helps to maintain a balanced population age profile. The loss of local businesses and jobs can have a profound effect on the vibrancy and confidence of local communities.

Why a priority?

- Giving support to the local economy during the economic downturn is a national and local political mandate. A strong local economy is important to providing local jobs, creating wealth and in helping to protect people's general health and wellbeing. A prolonged recession can have many negative consequences in terms of levels of unemployment, debt, and homelessness and can lead to an increasing dependency on benefits and public services.
- Although Wiltshire has a comparatively strong local economy there are a number of worrying trends in terms of out-commuting, lower business growth and confidence levels, NEETs, and skill gaps in the workforce. There is also an over-dependence on public services for jobs in the county (?). This may increase its economic vulnerability given the envisaged public sector cuts required in the future.
- A number of town centres require regeneration projects to be brought forward to ensure their continued vibrancy in the future.

6.6 Meeting housing needs

There are 185,000 homes in Wiltshire and the provision of suitable housing to meet local needs is a fundamental element of creating stronger and more resilient communities. It has an impact in many different ways. For example, the standard and quality of housing can affect people's health and wellbeing; the high cost of housing can price people out of the housing market making it difficult for them to live in an area where they have family or other community ties; and homes in a poor condition that are not energy efficient are costly to run and have a negative effect on the environment.

Why a priority?

- The cost of housing in Wiltshire is approximately 10% higher than average, and at the same time the earnings of people working in the county is below average. This makes affordability a big issue for many people. The need for more affordable housing is recognised with demand far exceeding supply. The recent recession has further worsened the situation with less new housing being built and more people experiencing unemployment and debt problems, which could lead to an increase in home repossessions and homelessness. There are currently around 7,100 people on the council's waiting list for an affordable home. This has increased by xx over the last year.
- Homelessness can be a real problem for certain groups, including young people and those who are vulnerable. Around 400 people were accepted as homeless last year and this was focused in the urban centres of Chippenham, Salisbury, Devizes and Trowbridge.
- Many homes in Wiltshire are not energy efficient and this can result in higher than average heating bills and 'fuel poverty' for some people. It is also a contributory factor to climate change through increased carbon emissions.
- The council has a major leading role to play in improving the provision of housing in Wiltshire. This includes planning where new housing development will occur through the Local Development Framework, directly managing 5,400 council homes in Salisbury, and securing and allocating affordable rented housing across the county. It is also working with many other partners such as the Ministry of Defence to develop long term plans to provide housing for services staff.

6.7 Reducing our environmental impact

In Wiltshire we are fortunate to live in a beautiful county with a wonderful natural environment. However, that environment is increasingly under threat from a warming planet, pressure on the availability of natural resources, and an unsustainable demand for carbon-based energy use. We are therefore determined to protect and enhance what we have by reducing the overall environmental impact that our lives have on the planet. In addition, we also need to prepare for the unavoidable impacts the environment will have on us as the climate continues to change.

We want to strengthen our communities by encouraging them to adapt to the impacts of climate change, to reduce their own greenhouse emissions, and to make public their commitment to action.

Why a priority?

- The council has CO² reduction targets it needs to achieve as an organisation (NI185). This will impact on all of our activities as a council, both in the frontline services and those functions supporting the business. A further challenge is the requirement to reduce CO² emissions per head of capita across the whole county (NI187). Essentially this will require us to promote and facilitate reducing the carbon footprint of public and private sector businesses, households,

transport activities etc. and will therefore require commitment from all of our partners and residents.

- The climate is unavoidably warming and amongst the impacts of this will be a change in weather conditions. We need to set out how Wiltshire's public services are going to adapt and prepare for events like storms, flooding and heat waves to minimise disruptions. The council has a target to develop a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NI188) as part of the LAA.
- As with other large organisations, the council is now required to participate in carbon trading. Essentially this requires us to meet and exceed CO² reduction targets or risk having to purchase additional 'credits' with the associated, and considerable, financial and reputational implications.
- The People's Voice survey of 2007 demonstrated that the majority of residents are concerned by climate change and that they want the council to take the lead on tackling it.

Council:

6.8 Achieving savings, efficiency and value for money

It is important that the council is able to continue to provide key services which support strong and resilient communities and improve people's quality of life. People should feel public services are provided fairly and economically. It is almost certain the council will need to reduce its spending in future but at the same time it will also have to find ways of protect and enhance its key services to communities.

Why a priority?

- Achieving savings formed one of the key elements of the 'We're ready..' bid for a unitary council. It stated that by joining and integrating services together and applying 'lean' principles performance could be improved and costs significantly reduced. The government will judge our success in achieving the move to one council in terms of realising the savings promised. However, it is now recognised that this is just the start and the council will be required to make substantially more savings than first envisaged. This is due to the national economic position and the current pressure on public finances. A 20% reduction in government funding to the council may occur over the next five years.
- There are a range of significant financial challenges facing the council including carbon trading, landfill taxes, pay harmonisation, pensions, transport costs, council tax equalisation etc.
- There is a political mandate to reduce the rate of increase in council tax every year working towards a zero percentage rise.
- Less than a third of residents believe that the Council provides good value for money services (30%) which is below the national average for all councils (33%). However, there is considerable variation between groups. Families with children are least satisfied with the council and the value for money it provides. They may feel they pay high council tax and get very little in return (with many probably not realising that schools are part of the council). They make up nearly 20% of the population. Conversely people who live in council or social housing, often in receipt of benefits and are high users of public services are satisfied with the council and believe it provides good value for money. But they make up only 3% of the population.

6.9 Customer focus and improved access to services

For council services, a focus on people, to ensure their requirements are met is essential and forms a 'given' cultural value of the organisation. Like 'local voice local choice' above, putting the

customer at the heart of what we do, listening to and involving them to ensure services are shaped around their needs and concerns is an important part of stronger more resilient communities. For example, we must ensure equity of access and that people from different backgrounds and locations are not disadvantaged by a lack of access to services.

Why a priority?

- The demands and expectations of customers continue to rise with requirements for better services that meet customer needs, more choice and options, and easier access. Like most council's we have not kept pace with these trends and less than half of our residents are now satisfied with how our services are run (47.5%). However, whilst a low figure this is greater than the national average.
- Customer focus and access to services formed one of the key elements of the 'We're ready..' bid for a unitary council.