

Corporate Plan

2023 - 2027

Swale - Learning from the past, focusing on the future

Foreword by Leader

Welcome to Swale Borough Council's Corporate Plan, which sets out our ambitions and priorities up to 2027. It builds on what we have learnt over the last four years and sets out what we plan to focus on in the future. A great deal has been achieved over the last four years which is something our coalition administration is very proud of. Throughout the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, the council has delivered projects at the same time as providing support to the community.

This document's primary purpose is to ensure that the organisation's resources are coherently allocated in support of agreed priorities. The objectives established here will therefore be a significant factor in determining the focus of the council's activities over the next few years

Our plan has been developed following conversations with residents, town and parish councils and representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

We believe the priorities in this plan, on homes, on jobs, on health, on social inclusion, on the environment and on our partnerships with the voluntary sector, are exactly the ones the council most needs to focus on if its efforts to improve the lives of residents in our borough are to be effective.



Cllr Tim Gibson
Leader of the Council

Introduction

The borough council is made up of 47 elected members representing 24 wards and employing 283 full-time equivalent staff. Of those 28 are working in a shared service. The all-out election held in May 2023 resulted in a change to the coalition administration which includes the Labour, Swale Independents Alliance and Green groups.

One of the objectives of the coalition administration, which was formed at SBC following the 2019 local elections, was to diffuse power among members and improve public engagement in decision-making. The council voted in October 2021 to move to a committee system of governance from the 2022/23 municipal year. A cross-party working group was set up to consider this governance change and to oversee the detail in the new governance model. At the February 2022 Council meeting members agreed a five-service committee model which was successfully implemented in May 2022.

As part of the objective to improve public engagement in decision-making, four area committees were established with their inaugural meetings taking place in September 2020. The purpose of the area committees is to enhance the quality of life and council services in the relevant area and to bring local insight to into council decision-making. The area committees have evolved over the last three years and have recently adapted due to them no longer having funding to allocate. They play an important role in developing new policies and projects as can provide local input at an early development stage.

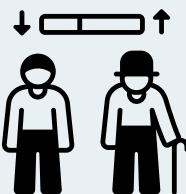
Mid Kent Services (MKS) is a partnership between Swale, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough councils. The partnership (originally Mid Kent Improvement Partnership) was formed in 2008, and means the councils work together to reduce costs and improve service delivery and resilience. The partnership delivers a number of different fully shared services, and the partner authorities work together on shared procurement exercises and contract monitoring arrangements (like waste and recycling services) and have some shared management arrangements eg in parking services. The partnership is flexible to meet the needs of each authority and not all the partners are part of every Mid Kent service, for example HR is shared between Maidstone and Swale only. Some services are provided to other authorities such as Ashford is a partner in the internal audit partnership and the HR service delivers payroll for Dartford Council. MKS is not a separate entity: all shared services staff are employed by one of the councils and deliver services to the councils who are partners in that service.

Swale is part of the following Mid Kent shared services:

- Internal Audit
- HR (including Payroll)
- Legal
- ICT
- Planning Support and land charges
- Fraud and compliance
- Debt Recovery
- Environmental Health

Understanding Swale

Swale population



151,700

Area of Swale



139 sq miles

Covid-19 Pandemic



7,000
vulnerable people contacted

Covid-19 Pandemic

60

rough sleepers assisted into
emergency accommodation

Cost of Living crisis

14,800 households
provided food support through
Household Support Fund

Levelling-Up Fund



£20mil
secured for the
Sheerness Revival programme

Understanding Swale

Population

Swale is home to 151,700 people and the population grew by 11.7% between the 2011 and 2021 census - a higher rate than the South-East which grew 7.5% during the same period. It is anticipated that the population will grow to more than 180,000 by the year 2040. The largest age group is 55 to 59 years and there are slightly more females than males in the whole population.

In the 2021 census, around 137,400 Swale residents said they were born in England. This represented 90.6% of the local population. The figure has risen from around 125,600 in 2011, which at the time represented 92.5% of Swale's population. In 2021, 2.3% of Swale residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category, up from 1.0% in 2011.

In 2021, 8.5% of Swale residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot. This figure decreased from 9.4% in 2011. In 2021, just over one in nine people (11.3%) were identified as being disabled and limited a little, compared with 10.7% in 2011. The proportion of Swale residents who were not disabled increased from 79.9% to 80.1%.

Economy and demographic make-up

Swale's demographic make-up includes a mix of affluent and less affluent communities. In general, the area is less well-off than is typical for the region, and there are some concentrated pockets of severe socioeconomic disadvantage to be found in locations across the borough.

While the causes of this are deep-rooted and complex,

the outcome is that a proportion of our residents suffer from entrenched inequality and a lack of opportunities which the council needs to do what it can to address.

The indices of multiple deprivation in 2019 showed Swale's overall position had deteriorated relative to other places, with the borough now the 69th most disadvantaged of 317 shire districts in England, and the second most disadvantaged in Kent.

Over recent decades, Swale has seen a successful diversification of its economy, which now has key strengths in manufacturing and distribution, as well as high-skilled activities including cutting-edge technology and life sciences.

However, it remains the case that much of the borough's employment is at the lower end of the skills spectrum and the average weekly earnings are significantly below regional and national averages.

Geography

Swale is one of 12 districts which make up the county of Kent. Located on the county's northern coast, the borough sits between Medway, Maidstone and Canterbury, around 37 miles (60km) from central London in one direction and 25 miles (40km) from the Channel Tunnel in the other.

The borough covers an area of 139 square miles (360km²), roughly one-tenth of Kent and is a remarkably diverse place, including the historic market town of Faversham, the traditional seaside resort of Sheerness, the more industrial market town of Sittingbourne and rural villages. The urban centres are connected both physically and culturally by the borough's extensive and important rural areas, accounting for around a quarter of the population, which take in a number of protected wildlife habitats and part of the Kent Downs area of outstanding natural beauty.

Challenges and achievements

The Covid-19 Pandemic in Swale

SBC's members and officers showed high levels of adaptability and innovation responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and worked in collaboration with a wide range of partners to facilitate and enable recovery. The council managed in the order of £50m to businesses and other organisations, involving over 10,000 grants made under the range of direct support schemes that were set up over the period of March 2020 to March 2022. The government's 'Everyone in' scheme which was delivered by the Housing Team assisted over 60 potential rough sleepers into emergency accommodation. The small Rough Sleeper Initiative team provided regular outreach work throughout lockdown to provide support and ensure no-one was overlooked. The Community Support team made contact with approximately 7000 individuals identified by the Government as Shielding or Vulnerable to ensure that they had adequate access to food and other essential supplies. With the support of partner agencies and the voluntary community sector the team ensured that food parcels were made available to those that needed them and that signposting was undertaken for all other essential needs.

Cost-of-Living crisis

The Swale Community & Partnership Team are currently working with Kent County Council (KCC) to deliver the Household Support Fund, this is government funding, to support vulnerable residents in need of help due to significantly rising living costs.

The scheme has been in place from 1 April 2022 and the current round ends 31 March 2024. So far, the scheme has provided food support awards to more than 14,800 households in the form of vouchers, food parcels, food shopping and hot meals. Over 7,100 households have received energy and water support

in the form of fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy and/or water in the form of warm packs and hydro meters.

The Cost-of-Living Partnership Group was created in August 2022 to address issues impacting Swale residents and local organisations. The group now has a membership of over 40 organisations from across Swale including the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) and statutory partners. The meetings have been attended by local members of parliament as well as regularly attended by SBC Councillors and has enabled a collaborative voice on behalf of the VCS, which has also stimulated project delivery and improved relationships

Water emergency

In July 2022, water supplies to homes and businesses in the Isle of Sheppey were lost due to a major fault in the primary water main that carries water to storage reservoirs on the Island. Due to the hot weather at the time, demand for water was exceptionally high and the council put in place its Emergency Plan to work with Southern Water to keep the community informed and distribute bottled water to the community. Coinciding with this, there was a water emergency in the eastern end of the borough. This is a good example of the resilience of the council in times of crisis and demonstrates the dedication of staff who were redeployed from their day jobs so they could work shifts helping the efforts on the ground handing out water and delivering to vulnerable residents. There was also a team working behind the scenes co-ordinating logistics for both emergencies.



Levelling-up funding

In 2022 the council secured £20 million of Government Levelling-Up Funding for the Sheerness Revival programme which will improve health, education, leisure and employment opportunities in Sheerness. The project will regenerate the Beachfields area which will include a new café, extend the healthy living centre to include an outdoor gym, soft-play and adventure golf areas. Funding will also expand Sheppey College to improve its further education offer and create workshop spaces at Masters House.

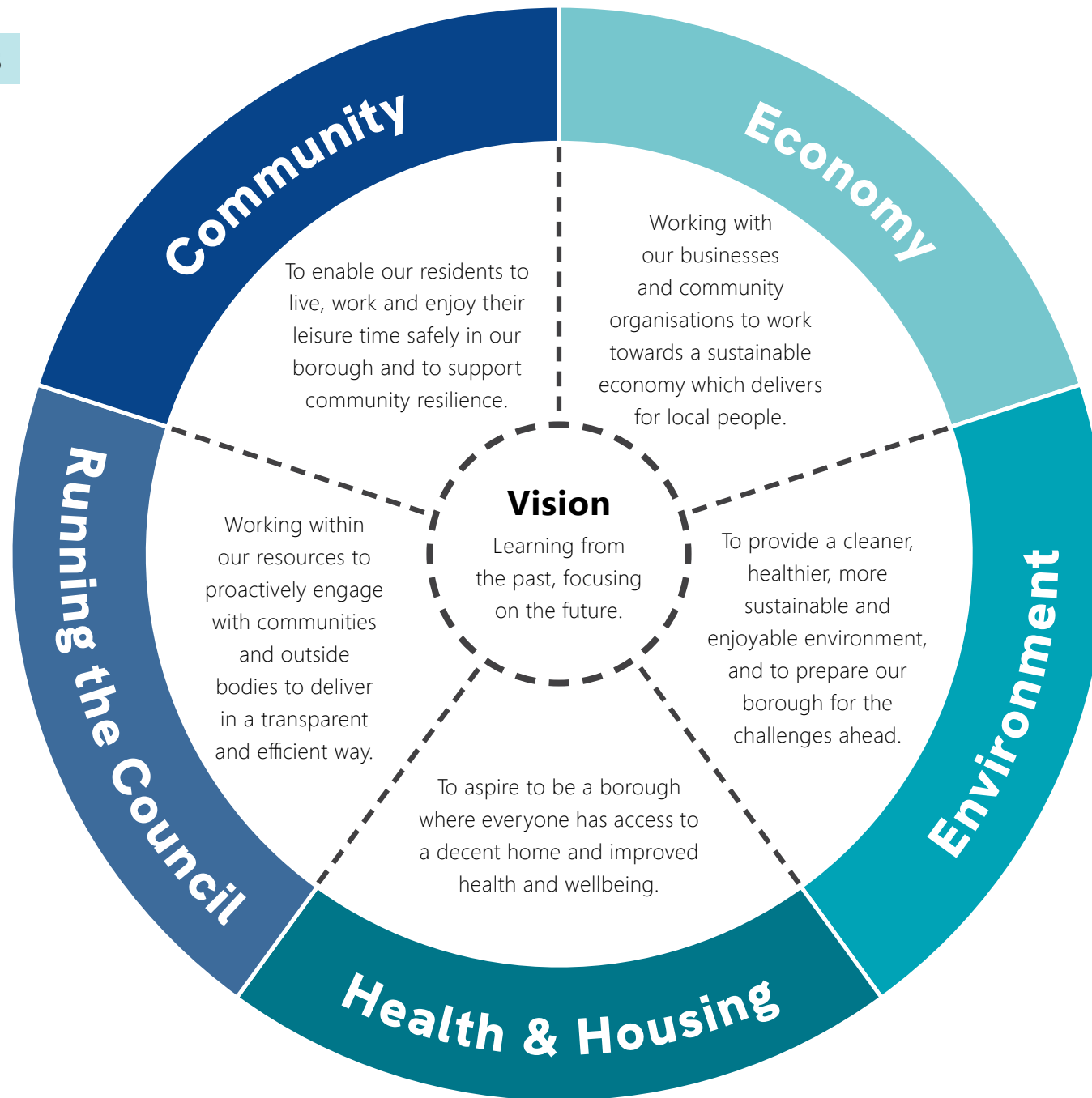
Public realm improvements

The last Corporate Plan cycle facilitated a number of improvements to public realm, including Faversham recreation ground, various churchyards and war memorials, several play areas including Beachfields Sheerness, Manor Grove Sittingbourne and Millfield in Faversham, and new public toilet facilities at Minster Leas, Milton Creek Country Park and Beachfields.

Murston HeArt Project

SBC awarded £100,000 to Murston All Saints Trust for the restoration and development of Murston Old Church. The project included restoring the 14th century chancel as an art gallery and meeting space, studios for visual arts and crafts, plus a community and education space and café which were completed in December 2022. A pocket park was created in the surrounding churchyard including seating, pathways and parking facilities.

Our priorities



Community – the current picture

This priority is focused on creating a sense of community across the borough. We will do this by working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, town and parish councils and in maximising our partnership within the public and private sector. We want our residents to be proud of the borough they live in and have opportunities to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough. Our aim is for our communities to be resilient focusing our support towards the most vulnerable.

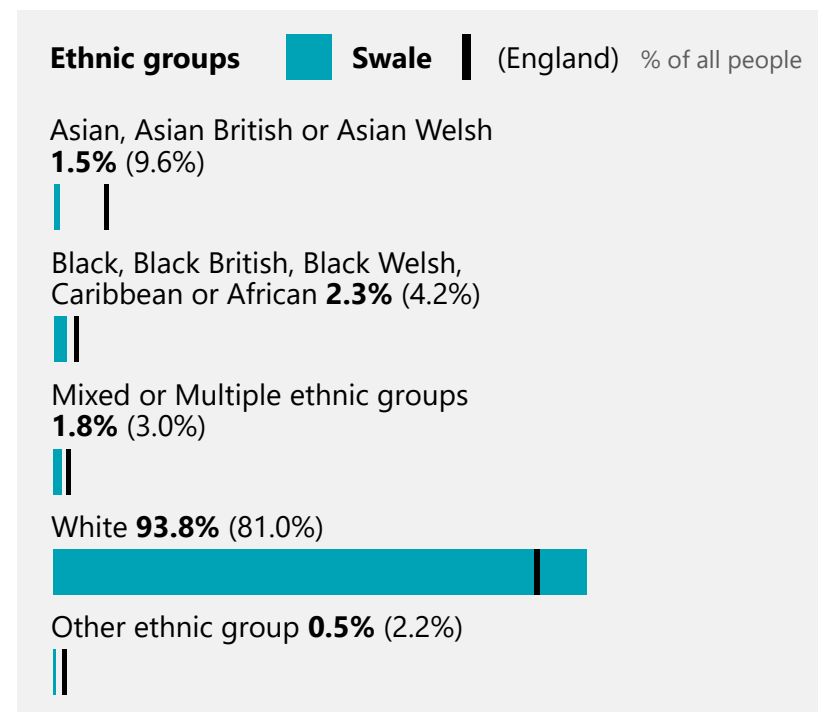
The ongoing recovery from the pandemic means that communities are more focused on what they can do in their leisure time and the benefits to health of either for formal or informal activity. We will deliver services that provide access to a range of leisure facilities and play opportunities both in the built and natural environment. These community assets are pivotal, and the plan identifies how we will look to work with a range of partners and volunteers across the community to achieve this.

Through the pandemic and other emergencies that Swale has faced we have seen our community come together to support each other, we want to build upon this working with Town and Parish Councils to develop more localised emergency plans.

Swale has a vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector who deliver a broad range of services to every part and demographic of the borough, we will play our part in working with the sector to develop and become stronger. Building on the work through the Cost of Living Partnership which has enabled us to support the most vulnerable in our community.

We have a strong Community Safety Partnership in the borough, together we tackle the most significant issues that are affecting our communities. Tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and violence is a key consideration for the partnership. The Council will continue to play its part through using its powers under anti-social behaviour legislation, managing the town centre CCTV and using our licencing powers.

Parking, whether on or off-street, is an important consideration and links to a range of other functions such as safer streets, supporting the economy and regeneration and the encouraging environmental changes. This plan ensures we develop clear and transparent ways that we will manage this service moving forwards.



Community – what we will do:

- Provide the evidence base for the Local Plan to ensure our built and outdoor sport and health facilities meet the demands of the current and future populations.
 - Review the Leisure centre service in order to deliver a range of options for residents to improve their health and wellbeing.
 - Inspect and maintain the playgrounds across the borough and seek external contributions to enhance them wherever possible.
 - Complete the Parking Policy review and implement the principles to ensure traffic flow across the borough.
 - Work in partnership with the local towns and parishes and voluntary sector on our community assets – e.g., playgrounds, sports pitches and pavilions, community halls.
 - To support local groups and organisations in Swale through the delivery of the member grants programme and review the funding mechanism of a community lottery scheme.
 - Enable and empower the existing voluntary and community sector in Swale to develop, strengthen, grow, and improve sustainability for the future.
- To consult with our residents on ways of devolving power and giving communities a greater say in what happens in their locale potentially through the establishment of new Parish, Town and Community Councils if there is community support to do it.
 - To ensure active and effective engagement mechanisms are in place so that all residents and communities have the opportunity to engage with the Council.
 - To support the voluntary and community sector to co-ordinate an effective response to the cost-of-living crisis, including effective distribution of the Household Support Fund.
 - To work as part of the Community Safety Partnership to delivery priorities to address domestic abuse, crime, and disorder, ASB and support vulnerable people.
 - To deliver the Safer Streets Programme in Sittingbourne and Sheerness town centres.
 - To deliver an effective public space CCTV service and town centre radio scheme, and to grow wider service delivery by the control centre.
 - To engage with schools to inform young people about democracy and the work of the council.

Economy – the current picture

Many partners have a role to play in securing economic prosperity – from external funders recognising Swale’s significant potential, to local businesses and skills providers, to business advocacy and support groups.

The award of £20m Levelling-Up funding for the Sheerness Revival programme is major endorsement of this potential. Sheerness Revival will deliver not just short-term benefits but will pave the way, and set the scene, for a collaborative approach to Island regeneration.

The priorities in our Corporate Plan are set against a backdrop of difficult financial times for local authorities, and our objectives seek to maximise the impact of partnership working. Through this approach, our objectives support a wider array of corporate priorities, such as the climate change and ecological emergency agenda.

Limited resources highlight the importance of a clear and robust approach to delivery and our Property Asset Strategy and Economic Development Strategy will support the Corporate Plan in driving efficiencies and identifying opportunities to deliver for our residents and businesses.

The Local Plan is a key tool to deliver corporate priorities and we will seek to ensure Swale’s Local Plan supports the future of our borough as a sustainable, forward-looking place to live, work and enjoy.

Employment history Swale | (England)

Not in employment: Worked in the last 12 months
10.9% (13.2%)



Not in employment: Not worked in the last 12 months
64.9% (61.1%)



Not in employment: Never worked
24.1% (25.6%)



% of people aged 16 years and over not in employment

Economic activity status Swale | (England)

Economically active: in employment
56.7% (57.4%)



Economically active: Unemployment
3.2% (3.5%)



Economically inactive
40.1% (39.1%)



% of people aged 16 years and over



Economy – What we will do:

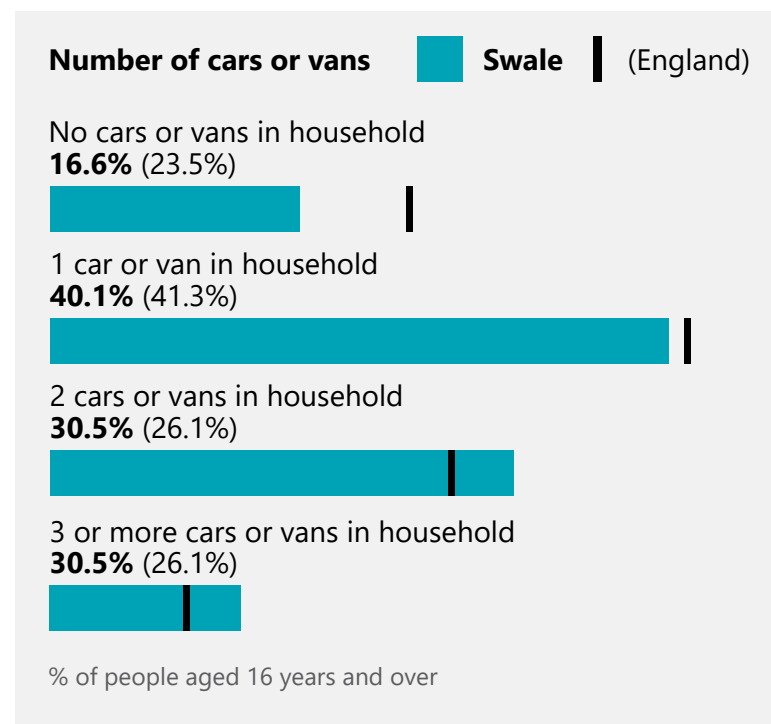
- Use the Levelling-Up Fund as a catalyst for further regeneration on the Isle of Sheppey.
- Use the Sittingbourne Supplementary Planning Document as a model framework to support town centre regeneration.
- Implement the Property Asset Strategy to support best use of our assets and look to increase our income.
- Deliver economic development through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) (currently programmed to March 2025).
- Develop an Economic Development Strategy, building on the successes of the Economic Improvement Plan.
- Progress a Local Plan with local needs and capacity at its heart.
- Support skills development through advocacy and partnership working.
- Develop the borough's second Heritage Action Plan that reflects in-house and partnership capacity, to support and promote our outstanding assets.
- Seek partnerships and support funding bids to facilitate the re-opening of rail freight-heads at Ridham Dock, to get freight off the roads and onto rail.
- Support Network Rail to address the increased traffic congestion at Sittingbourne railway bridge.

Environment – the current picture

The scale of the challenge that the climate and ecological emergency presents us with is unprecedented. The crisis is not something that any of us are immune from, and we will be seeing the impacts on every aspect of our lives. While of course it needs global entities to do much of the work, we can make a small difference across our borough. Our last plan set a pathway for us to be an exemplar environmental steward and this plan looks to continue that approach. This cannot be done just by the Council's actions, we need everyone across the borough to take a positive step forward, whether that be residents at home, businesses or other public sector organisations. This plan looks to review our own targets for reaching net zero following recent national changes. This will include looking at the benefits that renewable energy can bring to our assets, reviewing policies and services to see what more can be done within the budget footprint, as well as maximising external investment in active travel.

The council is about to embark on a new waste, recycling and street cleansing contract. This is vitally important on a number of fronts. Keeping with the environmental challenges, it is imperative that we work with residents to ensure that firstly, we reduce the waste of materials. Doing so will not only support the environment, it will also help residents reduce the ongoing costs of replacing items. Secondly, if an item does need to be thrown away, we need to collectively ensure it goes to the right place, ideally being recycled for future use. The new contract is an opportunity to reset what we have been doing and to try to improve recycling participation, particularly in food and garden waste. We also need to reduce the amount of contamination in our recycling as the hard work of many residents is spoilt by others putting the wrong items in the recycling bins.

Finally, we want to focus on our public realm and how it looks. We want to improve the cleanliness of our borough through a more effective street cleansing contract. We will also work harder to tackle the problem of littering and fly-tipping. We also control large parts of public open space such as our parks, country parks, seafront and residential greens. Whilst our ability to fund major improvements is greatly reduced, we will do what we can to lever in external funding to improve our public spaces. Making sure that there is a balanced approach to keeping well-maintained areas of grass for people to enjoy sports and leisure time, but also providing areas that could be allowed to grow differently to promote ecological improvements.



Environment – What we will do:

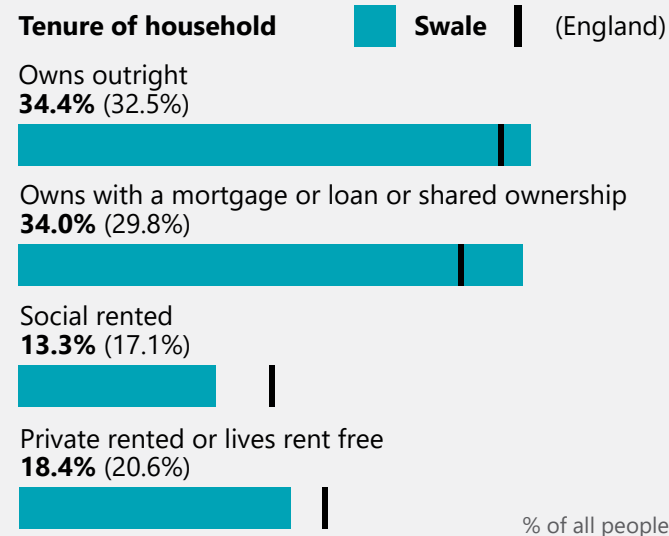
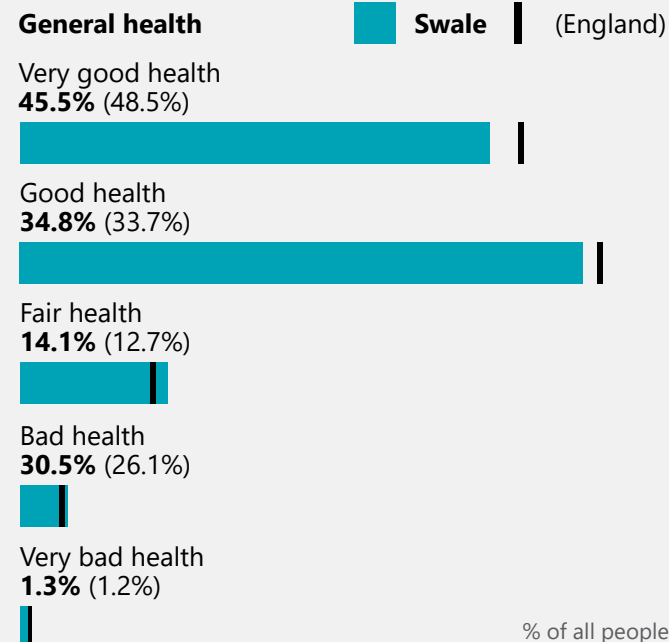
- Refresh the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan and continue to be a leader in our work towards net zero.
 - Look at the feasibility of solar and renewable energy solutions for our estate, including council car parks.
 - Create an air quality policy that formalises what we can do to improve air quality for the benefit of our residents.
 - Form partnerships with key stakeholders to ensure we champion active travel opportunities.
 - Review the grounds maintenance service to ensure we maximise biodiversity gains, particularly with grass cutting, whilst continuing to provide places for residents to enjoy their leisure time.
 - Ensure key policy documents such as the Local Plan and Open Spaces Strategy lever in improvements in the quantity and quality of open space to meet the needs of a growing population.
 - Work with our partners and contractor to successfully deliver the new waste collection contract and undertake initiatives to deliver improved recycling participation.
 - Promote the circular economy by raising awareness of how the materials residents put in their bins can be used for the benefit of the environment.
 - Build on the benefits of an improved street cleansing service and work with residents to ensure they can take pride in their local community.
- Make best use of our resources alongside other enforcement agencies to investigate the most disruptive environmental crimes across the borough, in order to deliver the best environmental outcomes for residents.
 - Lobby for the best possible standards in marine and coastal environments, protecting our habitats and reducing the impacts of pollution.

Health & Housing – the current picture

We are currently in the midst of national housing crisis, and this is placing significant pressure on borough councils to keep up with increasing demand on those that find themselves homeless. We have made strong progress during the life of the last corporate plan to tackle the issue of homelessness and increase affordable housing. Yet still more needs to be done to tackle the ever-increasing demand on our services. The priorities within the corporate plan reflect how we intend to manage the service to make sure the service is as effective as possible and takes a long-term strategic approach to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, we will also work with our partners to ensure that we reduce homelessness and enable affordable housing to be delivered and maintained in the borough.

Ensuring everyone has access to a decent home is a clear ambition of the council, during the life of this plan we will make steps towards this ambition through the use of our enforcement powers and looking at the introduction of new powers that will be introduced through the Renters Reform Bill.

Swale has significant health inequalities across the borough, these are more pronounced in our more deprived areas. As the borough council we have a significant place leadership role to ensure that health inequalities are addressed in everything we do. We will embed in the organisation through all our policies, consideration on the impacts of health and wellbeing of our residents and actively work with our partners through the Integrated Care System and Health and Care Partnership to make a step change in the health of our residents.





Health & Housing – What we will do:

- Work with Breaking Barriers Innovation playbook programme, to develop a long-term programme to tackle health inequalities on the Isle of Sheppey.
- Actively play our role in the Health and Care Partnership to address health inequalities in the borough.
- Ensure we address health inequalities in all our policies ensuring a blueprint for a healthy borough.
- Deliver the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 -2027, to meet and build on our statutory obligations to tackle homelessness and improve the standards of homes.
- Purchase accommodation to use as temporary accommodation to enable us to control costs and provide improved quality and more local provision.
- Prepare for the introduction of the Renters Reform Bill 2023 and ensure we implement the requirements when it receives royal ascent.
- Work in partnership to maximise the number and range of affordable homes in the borough.
- Ensure we meet our safeguarding obligations to keep children and vulnerable adults safe.
- Achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation, demonstrating our commitment to identifying abuse, preventing it and provide help to those affected.



Running the Council – the current picture

Like all councils, we are facing significant financial challenges at a time when the need for our services has never been greater. The council has worked hard to ensure that our main services have been protected and have worked to prioritise our spend to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable in our borough.

Our work in partnership with business and the voluntary sector has enable our money to go further and we need to continue this for the coming four years.

The way we provide services may need to look different but we will ensure that all our customers, residents and businesses will be able to access the help and support they need.

As one of the largest employers in Swale, we also are proud of our record for paying the real living wage to all staff including apprentices and providing high quality training and support to our staff. We need to continue to be the employer of choice for our staff to ensure we retain highly qualified and experienced people who share our values and share our passion for Swale and for providing high quality services.

Running the Council – What we will do:

We seek to provide a caring, responsible and accountable Council

- Maintain fiscally sound and stable position.
- Seek to make best use of assets and staff resources.
- Effective partnership working.
- Maximising opportunities for external funding and income streams.

We will focus on

- Reviewing our customer service options to enable better outcomes for customers.
- Ensuring inclusivity and equality for all residents.
- Improving communication with residents via all channels.
- Reviewing contract and partnership arrangements to ensure the most appropriate and efficient means of delivering services to our diverse communities and customers.
- Investing in projects which deliver financial returns and/or contribute to our wider objectives around Net Zero.
- Work towards maximising the rates of income on all commercial council properties.
- Maximising opportunities for external grant funding to deliver the Council's corporate objectives.
- Managing finances and having a sound culture of performance management robustly to ensure Value for Money.
- Provide services that meet the needs of residents.
- Create a culture that empowers and fosters an ambitious and motivated workforce.

We will embed a positive culture by

- Welcoming fair and appropriate challenge.
- Instilling the values of integrity, dignity, respect and pride.

We will have clear performance expectations by

- A sound culture of performance management.
- Ensuring core governance around corporate and financial planning, workforce planning, managing assets and sound and ethical procurement.
- Ensuring value for money is embedded in culture, service quality and social values.

We will promote strong staff/member relations by

- Maintaining effective governance that allows sound decision making.
- Working together to ensure that staff and elected members codes of conduct are met and adhered to.
- Embedding well-being policy.
- Supporting and training for effective workforce development.
- Appropriate training and support to be provided to our councillors.
- Actively promoting fairness, equality and diversity.
- Work collaboratively to alleviate difficulties with recruitment and retention.

In short, we will:

- Achieve a balanced budget.
- Demonstrate good governance.
- Develop and implement our Customer Access Strategy, ensuring customers can access our services in the most efficient and effective way.
- Provide value for money services.
- Support and develop staff.
- Ensure well managed assets.



Values and behaviours

We are doing a piece of work to review our values and behaviours which will be complete by April 2024. We are also developing a member/officer protocol to improve levels of collaboration, mutual understanding and tone of communication between some elected members and staff.

Our current values, which represent the beliefs and expected behaviour of everyone working for Swale which aim to support quality services, are;

Fairness - being objective to balance the needs of all those in our community

Integrity - being open, honest and taking responsibility

Respect - embracing and valuing the diversity of others

Service - delivering high quality, cost effective public service

Trust - delivering on our promises to each other, customers and our partners

Monitoring

The priorities and objectives in this Corporate Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually at the Policy & Resources Committee.