

A RECORD OF ACTION A PROMISE OF MORE

The Conservative Manifesto for the
West Berkshire Council Elections
7th May 2015



Conservatives

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A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER



Cllr Gordon Lundie

Dear Resident,

In 2011, a Conservative Administration was elected to run West Berkshire Council on your behalf. At that time, the country had a new Conservative-led Coalition Government and the economic situation of the Country was dire. In the last four years, your Conservative Council delivered (£27m) in savings as Central Government pulled the Country out of severe economic times and reduced council funding.

In response, we held your Council Tax low and, unlike many other Councils, did not close a single Children's Centre, library, leisure centre or other civic amenity. Local authority educational attainment improved even as many secondary schools became academies. We spent more money on road maintenance and improvement. We have refurbished the Museum. We have given personal budgets to over 900 clients in receipt of the Council's long term community support service; this is a significant change, allowing for the first time, the elderly and the vulnerable to have greater control in how their needs are met. We have delivered one of the best recycling rates in the South East and opened Parkway – a commercial and residential regeneration that has transformed the centre of Newbury.

The next four years of a Conservative Council at West Berks Council will focus on four major themes:

1. An Even Better Future – Spending Your Money Wisely in West Berkshire.
2. An Even Better Future – Learning in West Berkshire.
3. An Even Better Future – Working in West Berkshire.
4. An Even Better Future – Living in West Berkshire.

This Manifesto shows what we have done in the last four years and what we will do for the residents of West Berkshire in the next four years if you re-elect a Conservative Administration to West Berkshire Council.

We ask for your continuing support in ***Securing an Even Better Future*** for the residents of West Berkshire.

Gordon Lundie

Leader of West Berkshire Council

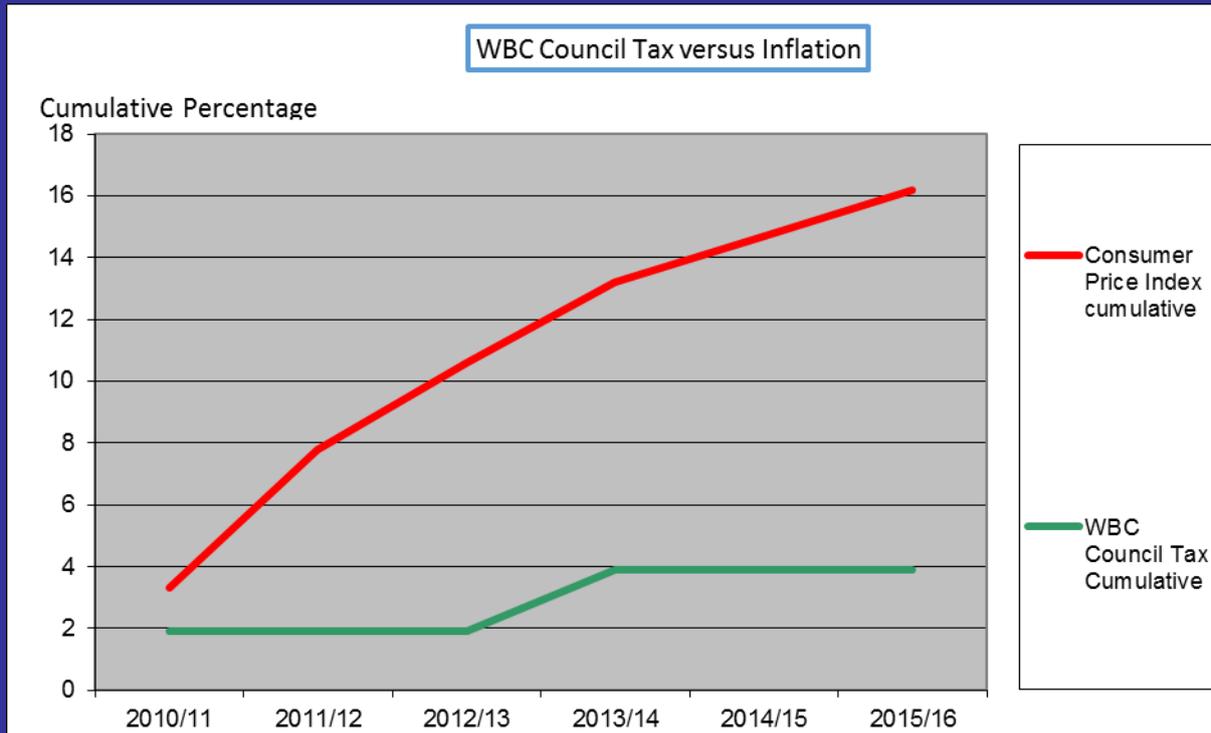
Leader of West Berkshire Conservative Group

An Even Better Future – Spending Your Money Wisely in West Berkshire

West Berkshire is a great place to live. Residents have a Council that uses your money wisely. Conservative Councillors will never forget whose money it is. It belongs to you - the Taxpayer. In the last four years, we had a minimal Council Tax rise – in fact, inflation adjusted, it is 11% lower now than it was in 2011. Council tax is linked to property size rather than income levels, so keeping it as low as possible really does make a difference for those on lower wages, for those with low earning capacity such as the vulnerable or those on fixed incomes such as pensioners. We will keep it low – whilst delivering excellent services; that is our simple plan! We will minimise any Council Tax rises in the future. We will keep cracking down on Council Tax Fraud so that everyone pays their fair share. West Berkshire's Conservative Council has delivered.

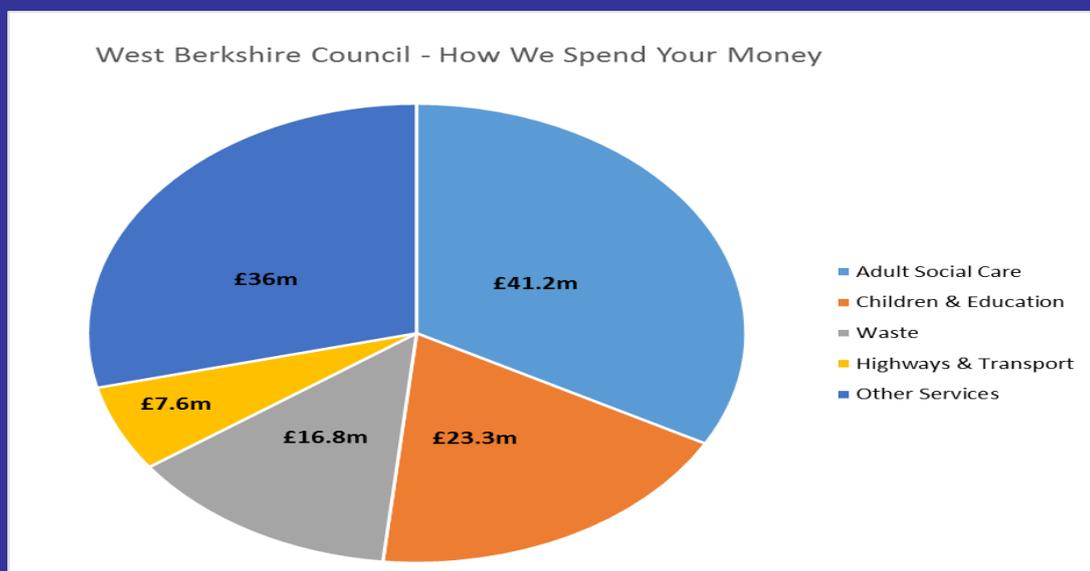
During the last six years of this Conservative Council, Council Tax increased by 4%; during the last six years of the last Liberal Democrat Council, Council Tax increased by 48%. We have made substantial efficiency savings due to the reductions in Government funding and the pressures of an ageing population. We were able to keep Council Tax Low (no rises in Council Tax for four of the last five years), invest in our future and still deliver a balanced budget over the last four years.

You know that Conservatives can be trusted with your money.



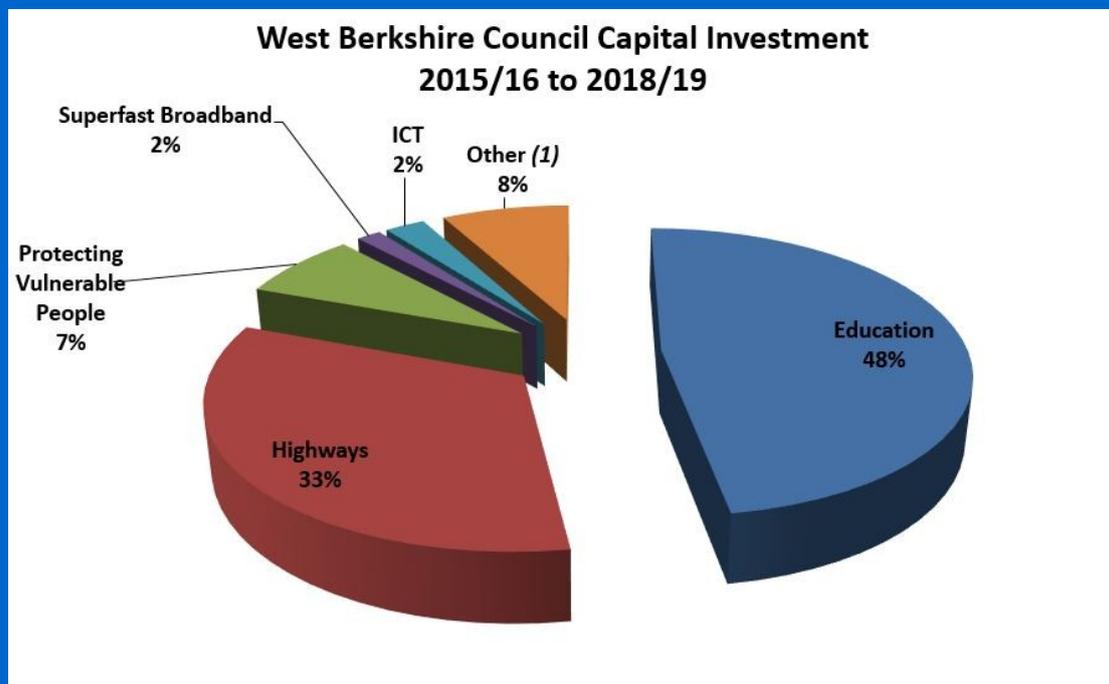
We pledge to balance the budget over the next four years and continue to live within our means.

We know it's your money and we will spend it wisely. The pie chart below shows the major areas where we spend your money. Other Services, as well as administration and interest on capital investments, includes the other services the Council performs for you such as planning, libraries, public health, leisure centres, countryside, environmental health and trading standards etc.



Investing for Your Future

In the next four years, at least £110million will be invested in West Berkshire by your Council and our partners. The major areas where the Council invests for your future is in Education, Highways, Protecting the Vulnerable and Superfast Broadband. Other in the chart below refers to improvements to countryside and open spaces, leisure centres, libraries and other amenities.



In the last four years, we have invested £50m in school buildings and facilities such as the new Technology Block at Denefield School and the new Hearing Impaired and Physically Disabled Resource at Kennet School. We will invest in more capital projects to further improve schools.

Work is well advanced on bringing rural broadband to the areas left out by commercial providers. We have already brought Superfast Broadband capability to 6,600 homes in Burghfield, West Ilsley, Mortimer, Newbury, Chieveley, Streatley, Great Shefford, Hermitage, Kintbury, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Theale and Tilehurst through our Superfast Berkshire programme. Approximately 60 homes per day are being upgraded. This programme will continue through 2015 bringing upgraded Broadband to 16,000 homes before moving on to the next phase – the Superfast Extension Programme. We pledge to invest £3.734m in Rural Broadband and bring Superfast Broadband to at least 95% of West Berkshire premises and improved broadband to all by the end of 2017. We understand the vital importance that broadband plays in improving the economy and the quality of life in rural areas.

Investment for Renewal

Autumn 2011 saw the opening of Parkway in Newbury. Parkway has stimulated economic growth and been instrumental in placing Newbury within the top 100 retail destinations in the country. We pledge to invest for renewal and regenerate the London Road Industrial Estate - a major gateway into Newbury that includes a new access road from the A339. We will attract new and existing employers as well as residential housing to this regenerated area of Newbury. We will commission plans to renew the Market Street area of Newbury for homes, car parking and a new setting for the Railway and Bus Stations. We have begun work to create a new link road into the Sterling Cables area which will allow the area to be redeveloped and renewed. We will work with Thatcham Town Council to renew Thatcham Town Centre. With the help of Greenham Common Trust, we will develop plans to renew the Wharf and Waterside Building in Newbury. With our partners, we will continue to seek out other renewal projects across the District. We shall work with the Newbury Business Improvement District as they continue to develop Newbury's business offering.

Investment in Transport

Roads and Transport are vital to the economy and way of life in our District - in both the rural and urban areas. Our road network is almost 800 miles long. During the last four years we have surface treated 210 miles - a quarter of our total road network. Severe weather – rain, frost and snow attack the road surfaces and edging. We understand the impact on our residents and businesses, so in 2013 we adopted the policy of permanently repairing potholes and this has made a significant contribution to improved road surfaces, along with our asset management approach, reducing the need for repeat repairs. Over the next four years, we will resurface at least 145 miles of roads and give higher priority to estate and unclassified roads. West Berkshire Council has attracted additional Department for Transport Belwin funding for road resurfacing due to their recognition of the excellence of our Highways asset management performance.

As part of the Wharf development, we will also review the working of the Parkway Bridge.

As part of our focus on reducing congestion, we widened the A4 at Calcot – to reduce congestion on the A4 between Royal Avenue and Langley Hill. We installed an innovative traffic light system at eight key junctions in the district so that the lights react to traffic which means that the traffic flows better at all times of the day. We have recently introduced a permit scheme so that utilities have to request permission to carry out non-emergency works on the highway network. This enables us to schedule the works and therefore minimise disruption for road users. We will continue to focus on reducing congestion.

We have delivered traffic management schemes throughout the District – following requests from Parish Councils, the results of speed surveys and accident investigations. Love Lane is a good example where the traffic calming measures were built in line with the suggestions made by the Parish Council.

We will continue to work with the cycling groups to improve the cycle network. All developers are required to provide appropriate numbers of cycle parks in any substantial development.

We have achieved “Park Mark” safer parking award for the standards and safety of the Council car parks in Newbury and Thatcham. We have helped local businesses with some free parking in Newbury at Christmas time. We will keep car parking charges competitive with neighbouring Councils.

2,500 pupils are transported daily in the rural areas from home to school, ensuring safe access to education. More than 60% of bus routes in the District are subsidised by the Council – and we support community organisations who provide transport for the less able. We will continue to ensure that residents in rural areas are able to access service centres and facilities. Many bus stops have been upgraded to provide easier access to the bus with raised platforms and Real Time Information screens are being installed across the District.

Investment in Flood Risk Prevention

Floods have caused huge concern and damage to our residents in the last eight years. We worked closely with local communities and our partners – Thames Valley Police, the Environment Agency and members of the Armed Forces - to support residents and businesses impacted by the severe weather of 2013/14. We learnt a lot and we will use what we learnt to mitigate the effects of severe weather into the future.

Communities, with our support, established Flood Forums for areas prone to flooding in the Pang Valley, Lambourn Valley, Streatley, Newbury and Thatcham. We will continue to work with the Community Flood Forums to implement further flood alleviation schemes in East and West Ilsley, Thatcham, Pangbourne and Eastbury. Flood Alleviation schemes have been delivered to protect communities in Cold Ash and Thatcham, Newbury, Winterbourne, Lambourn and Purley. The next four years will see further Flood Alleviation Schemes in Tull Way and Dunstan Park in Thatcham and in Great Shefford. We will work with Thatcham Flood Forum and the Environment Agency to create the Thatcham South East Flood Alleviation Scheme.

In Purley, we will carry out surveys for Property Level Protection with the Environment Agency. This means that property owners can get grants to protect their properties from any future flooding.

Scottish and Southern Electricity have implemented measures to protect the Pingewood sub station, and West Berkshire Council has carried out clearance of ditches and drains in the areas in the east of the District which were affected by flooding in 2014. Repair work is also being carried out on the Kennet & Avon Canal.

An Even Better Future – Learning in West Berkshire

West Berkshire is a great place to live and a great place to learn.

We have 25,000 schoolchildren learning in West Berkshire. Our Children’s Centres provide Early Years settings and adult learning is provided through our excellent links with Newbury College.

The Academy Programme has meant that a number of schools have left local authority control and we have provided support and services to those schools which have become Academies. Kennet, Park House, St. Bartholomew’s, Trinity, Denefield and Theale Green are now Secondary School Academies. Fir Tree and Whitelands Park are now Primary Academies. We will continue to care about the education of pupils in those schools who wish to move to Academy status by providing appropriate support and services. The decision to move to an Academy is for the Governors of the School advised by the Head Teacher. If Schools choose to become Academies, we will continue to provide them with services and support consistent with their Academy status.

Our School Improvement Team will continue to support our School Senior Leadership teams in order to improve the leadership given by education professionals and governing bodies. We shall continue to support our School Improvement Team to continue to provide the necessary courses and mentoring to help schools to maintain the improvement in school attainment for all pupils.

There are 75 schools under local authority control – 4 secondary, 51 primary, 7 Junior, 7 infant, 2 nursery, 2 special and 2 pupil referral units. Overall our schools are doing well with results better than the national average in both GCSE A* - C and the KS4 SATS – Level 4 and above. We pledge that all primary schools KS2 SATS results will show at least 75% of pupils achieving level 4 and above in all subjects. It’s vital that our primary schools get children ready for secondary school.

Our expectation is that, by 2020, all schools in the district including academies will be rated good or outstanding by Ofsted – most importantly that all achieve well in Leadership and Management and in Teaching and Learning. Good teachers, well led, means good schools.

Our expectation is that, by 2020, all schools will be in the top quartile of achievement for GCSE A* - C in 5 subjects including English and Maths and that overall local authority schools will be in the Top 10% in the country for this achievement.

We will develop a Hungerford Education Plan in conjunction with the local partners. We will ensure that education at all levels gives the best start in life for all children in Hungerford and the surrounding area. In the first instance, we will provide additional places for primary age children and continue to support John O’Gaunt School to become the school of choice for all pupils when they reach secondary stage.

During the last 4 years, we have made major improvements to our schools including a new Science block at The Downs School, Compton, a new Technology block and other improvements at Denefield School and a new 6th form block at Brookfields School and Little Heath School. Fourteen other schools have been enlarged to cope with increase in reception levels and remodelled for general improvements.

All our schools are equipped to provide universal free school meals to all children in Key Stage 1. For those schools which are working with temporary kitchen accommodation we shall be providing additional, or new, kitchen space.

We are currently working with partners in order to provide a new primary school in South Newbury and will continue with the programme of extensions to other schools, such as John Rankin Junior School and The Willows School, to provide additional places in the Newbury area for the increasing number of pupils. We also have a number of capital projects to provide improved accommodation in some of our schools, these projects include Lambourn Primary School and Kennet Valley Primary School.

We pledged that we will ensure that vulnerable young people and those with special needs receive the best possible support and we built a new unit for pupils with physical disabilities and pupils with hearing impairment at Kennet School, Thatcham. We shall be providing two new units for pupils with autism – one for secondary school pupils and one for primary phase.

We shall continue to invest in our School Improvement Team in order to ensure that we continue to narrow the educational gap for our vulnerable children.

We shall continue to provide Children’s Centres across the district. We continue to work with partners in order to provide parents with one facility for their needs for the under fives – including various clinics and services provided by Health.

We have a strong record of success with NEETS (young adults Not in Employment, Education or Training). We have the second lowest NEETS rate in the South East. Using the Local Enterprise Partnership’s (LEP) City Deal programme, we will continue to ensure that all our young people have as many opportunities as possible. With Newbury College and with support from the LEP’s City Deal, we will create a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Block at Newbury College.

Education is a lifelong pursuit. We shall continue to provide a comprehensive Adult Education Programme working in conjunction with other partners including Newbury College.

An Even Better Future – Working in West Berkshire

West Berkshire is a great place to live and work – it has the prosperity of the South East with much of the lifestyle of the South West. Continuing that prosperity depends upon having a strong economy with thriving businesses and jobs.

West Berkshire has been at the forefront of the British economic recovery. We have the lowest unemployment numbers in Berkshire – at 0.8% claiming Job Seekers Allowance. Over 14,000 companies are based in West Berkshire – small and big. We have great world-class employers in the area – companies such as Vodafone, one of the world's leading mobile communications providers; Xtrac, the worldwide leader in the design and manufacture of transmission systems and Bayer, a world leader in pharmaceuticals, crop protection and polymer materials as well as the district's largest employer AWE in Aldermaston and Burghfield. All of these companies have one thing in common – great skills and expertise from their staff.



We are determined to improve Skills Development amongst our young people in low skilled employment to better their long term career opportunities. This is one of the many benefits we gain by working closely with our Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) which is focused on the keeping the broader Thames Valley Berkshire area as one of the main engines of growth for the whole UK economy. Our involvement with the LEP includes high level engagement at Shareholder level and with Executive Board members. We pledge to keep this level of involvement with the business community as this will keep West Berkshire as the place to start, grow and nurture a business.

We shall give our full support to the key LEP Project to create direct access to Heathrow Airport. We shall also support the additional runway at Heathrow and the new Cross rail link (Reading to Canary Wharf.)

Unlike many parts of the country we have a very low level of youth unemployment. We actively encourage local employers to hire apprentices and to assist their young employees to improve their skills. To support these efforts we pledge to continue hiring our own apprentices within the Council. We have set a target of 18 apprenticeships each year, with at least one in the “people care area” and at least one other with a disability.

By keeping West Berkshire as a prosperous and business friendly district, we will attract further employers and services to West Berkshire. A new IKEA store in the East of the district will be opening soon. This will create many new jobs as well as bringing a worldwide successful retailer to the area. We welcome IKEA.

We also have great start-up and small and medium size companies in West Berkshire and we pledge to work with the Newbury Business Improvement District (BID) and the LEP as we believe they are fundamentally important to our economic future

We know that the rural areas also need good businesses and jobs to support their prosperity. We pledge to support and encourage the growth of small businesses in rural areas by working with partners to promote farm diversification, community enterprises and new start-ups.

We pledge to strive to make West Berkshire a great place to start a new business. We pledge to make West Berkshire a great place to nurture and grow a business.

An Even Better Future – Living in West Berkshire

West Berkshire is a great place to live and we need to protect both the people who live here who are vulnerable or in need and the environment in which we live.

Our People

We have a responsibility to our vulnerable adults. April 2015, sees the introduction of the Care Act. This is the biggest change to English adult social care law in over 60 years. We will keep West Berkshire residents and carers informed about, and engaged in, the Care Act changes and how they affect us all as it is implemented.

Very successful Extra Care housing schemes were opened at Alice Bye Court in Thatcham and at Redwood House, Hungerford. With the recently opened sheltered accommodation at Linley Lodge, 123 households are supported by these schemes. We facilitated an excellent new dementia nursing home in Thatcham. We will create an Extra Care Scheme in the East of the District and we will create a supported living unit in Newbury. Between them they will cater for at least 63 more families.

Personal budgets allow those adults with social care needs to manage their own care needs with the support they need. We have introduced personal budgets to over 900 adults with care needs. We will continue to encourage and support personal budgets for adults with social care needs because they allow the adult to make the choices that are right for them, decide how and when they want their care and choose how the money will be best spent for them.

The Council's Adult Social Care service is regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and we shall work to ensure that our services are classified as outstanding or good at each CQC inspection. We will continue to do our best to care for our most vulnerable adults in the West Berkshire Community.

Our Children

Together with major stakeholders we will create a new building for the use of all young people at Waterside whilst replacing the youth support activities in another building in central Newbury.

We shall continue to improve all aspects of care for our vulnerable children and young people through constant reappraisal of our Social Work team and how we can support them in the vital work they do with parents and children. We have been extremely successful with our Troubled Families Programme and will continue to build on the improvements already seen.

It is our intention that we will be deemed to be "Good" or "Outstanding" at Safeguarding (OFSTED definition) by 2020. Front line Children Services have been protected and we shall continue to do so. Hard to reach vulnerable children and young people will be prioritised and protected.

We shall strengthen our team of Foster Carers – this will ensure that as many Children Looked After as possible, including those with complex needs, will be able to stay in West Berkshire – currently a number of our most vulnerable with complex needs are in placements outside West Berkshire as we are not able to meet their needs locally. We want our young people to still feel close to their families and remain a part of the local area. We have recently changed our Housing Allocation Policy so that registered foster carers in social housing will be entitled to retain an extra bedroom, thereby ensuring that fostering a child does not reduce foster carers Housing Benefit.

We shall continue to work to make West Berkshire Council the place where Social Workers choose to work and continue to work by giving them the most supportive conditions possible. The creation of a Head of Prevention and Developing Community Resilience is a statement of intent in this area. Our Brilliant West Berkshire project will refocus our involvement on prevention across the whole spectrum of Children and Adult Services.



The recruitment and retention package we have put in place in Children's Services will lower dependency on agency staff. Better early intervention practices will result in a lowering in the number of Looked After Children for whom we care.

We are working to ensure that families who have children with Special Education Needs have access to Personal Budgets. This means that they will have more flexibility in how their needs are met.

We shall continue to support our Looked After Children to obtain the best possible outcomes from their education including encouraging and supporting those who wish to participate in Further Education. This has been an increasing trend over the past few years and we shall continue to give encouragement to the young people who want to follow in the footsteps of their peers.

We shall continue to support our very successful fostering and adoption services to remain in the top quartile nationally. We shall introduce a fully shared adoption service with colleagues in other Berkshire authorities.

Together with parents, teachers, our colleagues in Thames Valley Police, the Health Service and other stakeholders we will do our best to keep our young people safe from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Our Wellbeing

The transfer of responsibility for local health preventative services from the NHS to local authorities has been the biggest shift in public health delivery in decades.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 conferred new duties on local authorities to improve outcomes across a range of public health issues. Local authorities now hold responsibility for commissioning and delivering services in areas such as sexual health, alcohol and drug misuse services, NHS Health Check assessments, public mental health and dental public health amongst others.

We formed the Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB) with representation from a wide range of Healthcare and Social Care professionals as well as Councillors and Council staff - this is breaking down the barriers between the NHS and Social care and working to improve the health of all in West Berkshire through early detection of diseases like diabetes.

The proportion of people over the age of 65 in West Berkshire continues to increase as it does in the UK population as a whole so the importance of prevention and integrating health and social care services will be paramount.

The HWB has commissioned a number of Public Services – West Berkshire's Alcohol Awareness Scheme has won national recognition. We will commission services to help those with substance addictions and help them play an active role in society and ensure that the new substance misuse treatment and advice contract delivers for our residents. We will develop and fund a network of Dementia Friends across the district. The HWB has commissioned a new sexual health treatment and advice contract – we shall monitor its performance carefully.

We will ensure more people are aware of and take up the offer of personal Health Screening helping early detection of long-term conditions. We will introduce Health Champions – Healthy Living Pharmacies. Community pharmacies are an important part of many local communities and are well placed to deliver many public health services such as weight management, alcohol awareness, smoking cessation and flu vaccinations.

School Nurses and Outreach Services all have a role in reducing teenage pregnancy – ensuring that young people across West Berks have access to sexual health advice.

We shall continue to target services for carers as a priority e.g. health checks, flu vaccinations, gym and swim sessions for young carers.

Working with Dental Public Health we will target resources on the difficult to reach parts of the district. For children, we shall ensure the brushing for life scheme for under 5's is offered in all our children centres

We will develop a Mental Health Strategy for the district as we know that one in four adults in the UK will experience a diagnosable mental health problem. We will work to reduce health damaging behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and substance abuse. We will improve the health and educational outcomes of looked after children through prevention and integrated health and social care support and services.

For Social Care, we have introduced personal budgets for many adults as they allow the adult to make the choices that are right for them, say how and when they want their care and choose how the money will be best spent for them.

We will continue to promote the Walking for Health scheme in our Country Parks and on our Public Rights of Way. This free scheme has many health and wellbeing benefits. Cycling is an important form of travel and a great way to stay fit and healthy. We will continue to improve our cycleway infrastructure and also bicycle security by introducing new cycle racks across the district. We will ensure health visitors deliver for West Berkshire communities when they are transferred to the Council in October 2015.

Our Countryside

Although we live in the South East close to London, we also live in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). From the Lambourn Downs in the west, to the Thames Path in the east this nationally important landscape is valued by us all. 75% of West Berkshire lies in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We are and will remain an active partner in the management of this unique chalk down land. We approved a new management plan (2014-18) to support initiatives including Tourism, Biodiversity and Conservation. We have actively supported the AONB Leader Programme, which has grant funded many West Berkshire local enterprises and community projects. This has helped to improve the rural economy and quality of life for people living and working in our AONB. We will continue to support the AONB Leader Programme which promotes the protection and use of the AONB for all our enjoyment.

Living in West Berkshire is enormously enhanced by our countryside, country parks and green spaces. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure these are all protected for future generations.

West Berkshire has over 700 miles of public rights of way. We know how important these routes are to our residents and visitors. We will protect them. An ongoing and regular maintenance programme continues. Work has begun on the final link of the Thames Path through Purley.

Our country parks: Snelsmore, Greenham Common, Hosehill Lake and the Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham are much loved recreational areas. Management of these sites along with other commons was delegated by the Council to the BBOWT (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) in 2012. Since then, these sites have enjoyed a greater level of investment thanks to access to grant funding which was not available to West Berkshire Council.

Goldwell Park in Newbury, and Linear Park in Holybrook have retained their Green Flag Status making them ideal recreation areas for families. We have improved the play spaces throughout the district in Shaw, Northcroft, Padworth, Holybrook and Denison Barracks.

Protecting the environment where we live

The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (BLNP) represents the best interests of the natural environment throughout Berkshire. We played an active part in setting up and managing this new initiative which focuses on creating a sustainable Berkshire by promoting the conservation and enhancement of nature, and the benefits we receive from a healthy environment.

The Rivers Thames, Kennet and Lambourn are arguably West Berkshire's greatest landscape, recreation and wildlife assets. Not only are they important locally, but each river has stretches of national scientific importance. These rivers and their characteristic wildlife are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The opening of West Berkshire Council's Padworth Waste Recycling Depot and the introduction of food waste composting means that West Berkshire has one of the best recycling rates in the South East. This means less need for landfill and less landfill tax for the Council Tax payer. We will maintain our rubbish collection programme and, by 2020, we will recycle, recover, reuse or compost 90% of our waste.

We have already converted over 2,000 of our street lights in West Berkshire to LEDs. We will convert all the lights to LED in the next four years. LED street lights provide better lighting, reduced energy consumption and lower energy bills.

Our first electric car charging points at Kennet Centre in Newbury were introduced last year. The number of electric car charging points at Car Parks will be increased during the next four years in line with demand.

We will introduce a collective energy supplier switching service for consumers to help consumers find the best deals available.

Planning for the future of where we live

We have to build homes for an expanding population and we have to protect our environment – a difficult balance. Strong planning policies protect communities from inappropriate development. Over the last few years we have produced an approved Local Plan that shows how we will provide at least 10,500 homes between 2006 and 2026 whilst protecting the countryside. As part of that Plan, we have met the demand for homes by providing 3,900 new homes including some wonderful new developments at Newbury Race Course and St. Bart's School. The ugly Kersey Crescent flats have gone, replaced by houses. The building of 1,000 homes at Sandleford will soon start. Taceham House in Thatcham has been plagued by delays but it is our intention that it will be replaced by an affordable homes development.

We expect between 30% and 40% of new housing to be affordable on brown and green field sites respectively for local households defined as in need and on the Common Housing Register.

Our strong planning policies will protect the AONB. There is, though, a need for housing in the countryside, and we pledge to ensure this is carried out in an appropriate way. In particular, we will encourage the provision of affordable housing in rural locations for local people. We will continue to support farm diversification in our planning policies and we will encourage the use of derelict farm buildings for residential housing use. The AONB is too beautiful to be spoilt so we will discourage planning applications for large wind turbines in the AONB.

We have successfully consulted on the preferred sites for future housing developments. We shall proceed to final consultation in late 2015. Thereafter we shall submit the plan to the Planning Inspectorate and this should prevent development on inappropriate sites. We will encourage the change of use for offices over shops to residential use where appropriate.

The recently introduced (April 2015) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will replace our very successful Section 106 programme which provided developer contributions to infrastructure needs. CIL will be at a much reduced rate compared to Section 106 so we will tackle the challenge of reduced developer contributions to infrastructure needs.

The quality and effectiveness of planning decisions are greatly enhanced by structured consultations with affected neighbours, parishes, and other interested parties. We will seek to ensure that the planning process provides for such consultation.

Housing – how we live

There are approx. 62,000 households living in West Berks with the majority, 43,000, living in owner occupied premises with 700 living in shared ownership homes. We changed the rules on Council Tax to encourage empty homes to be occupied and so that second homeowners pay the full amount of Council Tax. We will review the balance between shared ownership and affordable rent homes to improve the percentage of shared ownership. It's important that households who want to buy should be given the help to do so. We will develop our Local Help to Buy Scheme known as First Step, Next Step and increase its funding by at least £500,000. We will provide more opportunities for that first step on the housing ladder for those who want it.

Not everyone wants to or can buy their home. Across West Berkshire, 9,000 households live in housing association rented accommodation. We reviewed the Common Housing Register to give priority to local people, Armed Forces personnel and those moving to a new job from outside the area. We will target building 1,000 affordable homes in the 2015-2020 period so that people can have the homes to rent socially. 7,000 households live in private rented accommodation. We will implement a Landlords Accreditation Scheme and continue to foster best practice in the private rental sector. We understand that a good home and a good job are the bedrocks of good living. Having a balanced housing mix is important – we have many different people in West Berkshire with different housing requirements. We pledge to keep a balanced housing mix so that a range of housing options is available to our residents.

For those who have become vulnerable, we provide emergency accommodation through Two Saints and their hostel in Newbury. No one who is willing to engage with the relevant agencies needs to sleep in the open. Two Saints, with our help, have recently opened their independent living block to allow residents to transition to an independent life.

As Central Governments welfare reforms are implemented we have used Discretionary Housing Payments to provide transitional help for those in need. We know that this transition can often be difficult and we will continue to provide both financial and practical support.



Enjoying where we live - Culture and Leisure

West Berkshire has a rich heritage – from the Mesolithic settlements along the Kennet valley, the Civil War Battlefields to the former American base at Greenham Common.

Today, West Berkshire has a nationally renowned theatre – The Watermill, a thriving local arts community centred on the Corn Exchange and New Greenham Arts plus a thriving library service which is spread throughout the district. The newly refurbished West Berkshire Museum reopened in August to great acclaim. Shaw House, the grand Elizabethan building, is West Berkshire's 'jewel in the crown', offering a wide-range of activities, both cultural and fun!

The district-wide leisure centres are well used by both residents and our schools. These excellent facilities play a vital part in the health and wellbeing of residents. We improved the Changing Village at Northcroft Leisure Centre and improved the facilities at Kennet Leisure Centre. The specialist outdoor activity centre, Adventure Dolphin in Pangbourne, has recently extended its programme to cater for disabled young people. The Olympic legacy – 'Get Berkshire Active' – runs successful programmes for all age groups.

The Library service is valued by residents. We are looking at ways of further enhancing how we use our libraries, so they become the 'front door' of the council, and a real focus and 'hub' of community life. We will encourage local communities to put forward initiatives for using our libraries. We will also open a library kiosk in our Calcot Office with a 'click and collect' service.

Our Communities

Crime in West Berkshire is at the lowest level in 15 years. Under the watchful eye of a Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner, it is intended that this should remain at a 'generational low.' Our Safer Communities Partnership will work with Thames Valley Police and other agencies to keep crime levels falling. There has been a significant reduction in the number of burglary from dwellings to the lowest level recorded since 1999. Many crimes involve domestic abuse: victims of domestic abuse are coming forward and reporting crime and the Safer Communities Partnership is determined to reduce the number of people who are the victims of domestic abuse. Anti-Social Behaviour is also falling and will be a priority of the Safer Communities Partnership. We will work with the Police and other partners to keep West Berkshire safe.

The voluntary sector is very important in West Berkshire. We have a strong team of volunteers who help others and this helps to build a strong sense of community. We shall continue to support, work with and value our volunteers.

Local Communities are vital to us all. The Neighbourhood Wardens Service does an excellent job keeping communities clean and safe. We will continue to fund it. Our Local Community Bid Scheme that provides funds for small local projects through your Councillors will continue. We will foster and work with Parishes to produce up-to-date Parish plans.

Our Armed Forces Personnel

Our Armed Forces personnel play a vital role in "Securing an even better future" for all of us. Your Council has signed the Military Covenant, we have an Armed Forces Champion, and will encourage local communities to support the armed forces community in their area. We particularly welcome the pending formation of the new 77th Brigade – which will be based at Denison Barracks in Hermitage and comprise a force of around 1,500 soldiers and civilians specialising in high-technology operations.

Improving your Council's effectiveness

Our role as elected Councillors is to ensure that your Council does what you need it to do. The strategic direction and policies of the Council are set by the elected Councillors whose job is to represent you. Our role is to listen to you and always put our residents first.

Making a difference is what matters. The role of the Council Officers (staff) is to make that difference. We hold the officers accountable for the improvements they bring to residents lives. It's important that we invest in leadership development and work to upskill all council staff. Over time, that upskilling will be demonstrated by raising low pay thresholds and tying that to increased staff accountability and rewards for performance.

Our Digital by Choice programme has proved effective: during the Floods, as an example, allowing our residents to tweet their concerns and give and gather information. Our new web site has proved popular and we will continue to develop it.

The devolutionary agenda will be embraced by working closer with neighbouring authorities; thereby increasing efficiencies and increasing the pool of skills. We will become even more of a commissioning Council: commissioning outside parties and partners where appropriate brings increased expertise and accountability to the Council.

Finally, your council is changing; we will ask the Boundary Commission for a ward level review to redraw the ward boundaries. and review the number of Councillors.