

2021

Message from the leader

Councillor Rob Bird

Following a year of unprecedented challenge for our borough and, indeed, for the nation, I am pleased to report that Tewkesbury Borough Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic has now shifted from emergency support to recovery, providing help that will enable residents, communities and businesses prosper again. Our Covid-19 Recovery Plan, approved by council members, gives us a focus on improvement for the future, and the flexibility to adapt as things change.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our council has successfully continued to implement the priorities we agreed in the Council Plan 2020-2024. Our ambition to ensure that we deliver for the future, with housing for young people and generations to come, sustainable and thriving communities, a prosperous local economy, and cost-effective services designed around the customer, has been pursued with enthusiasm and drive.

Back in March 2020 a peer review of Tewkesbury Borough Council provided a very encouraging report on the council's performance, indicating clear areas of strength, and setting out some valuable advice about how we can improve to deliver on our ambition. We will ensure that we pursue the subsequent action plan carefully, to help achieve the objectives we have set.

“ This year's State of the Borough provides a wealth of information on what the council has been doing over the past 12 months – and it's really clear to see that while responding to the pandemic has been a priority, there has been so many other **significant achievements of which we are extremely proud.** ”



Councillor Rob Bird, Leader

Finance and resources

- Our investment portfolio continues to perform very well with our return income being significantly higher than the local council average.
- The purchase of a Volvo garage in Crawley brought our total investment in commercial property to £60m. The portfolio generates around £3.43m (5.73%) gross rental resulting in just under £2m benefit to the council.
- Avoiding the potential closure of Cleeve Hill Golf Club due to financial unviability, we agreed and signed a new long-term lease with a tenant who will transform the facilities, offering locals, visitors and golfers a really exciting place to visit.
- Our trade waste service is set to be transformed. Following the development of a business case, we are now looking to recruit a trade waste officer to carry out a full review of the service. Improvements set to be around our offering (including considering a recycling service), our commercial approach, and the marketing of the service.
- In January, we took the decision to extend the contract with Ubico for another five years from 1 April 2022. We have been a partner in Ubico since 2015 and we are looking forward to continuing to work in partnership with them.
- We hosted a fully-funded Local Government Association Peer Challenge, which saw a team of six senior officers and members from other councils engage with more than 120 people over four days. Effective leadership, embracing digital change, engaged staff with a 'can do' attitude and a good understanding of its place was just some of the positive feedback we received.
- Despite there being no financially viable option but to increase council tax, our services continue to be provided at excellent value-for-money - with our council tax remaining the sixth lowest in the country.



Economic growth

- **We've appointed a Heritage Action Zone co-ordinator** to help us deliver this exciting three-year programme. Activities include a grant scheme for improving shop fronts, and the setting up of a culture consortium made up of 12 local community groups. The consortium, called Tewkesbury Culture, is aimed at promoting Tewkesbury's fantastic culture. It has already delivered Light Up for Tewkesbury, after the town's Christmas lights switch-on was cancelled due to the pandemic.
- **Tewkesbury Culture has been successful in its bid to historic England** for up to £80,000 to cover projects for the next three years entitled 'Rise up Tewkesbury Culture'. Projects include setting up a 'youth space', Tewkesbury in Medieval Bloom' (a school project), Tewkesbury festival of light and Tewkesbury Arts Festival.
- **The Growth Hub delivered over 100 events** throughout the year which included online business workshops and 1-2-1 events to help support businesses with social media, video promotion, branding, developing eco-businesses and social enterprise.
- **The examination into our Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan took place** – with adoption expected early next year.
- **We are a member of the steering group helping to shape Tewkesbury 2021** celebrations, and provided £25,000 of funding to support the events that are able to take place. While many have been scaled back due to the pandemic, events taking place include a son et lumiere, Tewkesbury Tapestry community artwork and school engagement through a virtual festival.
- **We continue to work with Cheltenham Borough Council in supporting Gloucestershire County Council** to meet the funding contract conditions and preparations for delivery of an all-ways Junction 10 on the M5. Gloucestershire County Council was awarded £249m to deliver the project.



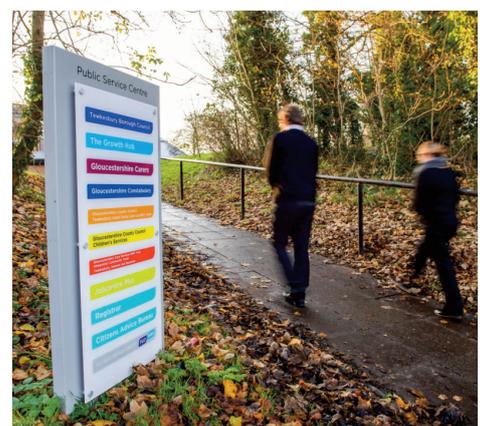
Housing and communities

- **We agreed a Local Development Scheme** which sets out the timetable for a review of our Joint Core Strategy (which sets out the overall housing and employment land requirements for our area).
- **The first stages of the Housing Needs Assessment** were carried out by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC). These surveys focus on Community Led Housing (CLH) within rural areas where people and communities play a leading role in addressing their own housing needs.
- **We recognised the complexity around the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** and delivered a well-received seminar for parish councils to help them prepare for the funding. This has seen multiple parish councils receive CIL payments collectively totaling to over £192k.
- **We now manage five temporary accommodation properties in-house** - resulting in £18,000 of savings. Our Property Services team oversees the maintenance of these properties while our Housing Services team manages the tenants.
- **We supported 276 community groups with funding advice**, including creating funding plans, reviewing funding applications and linking with other groups and projects in the area.
- **We donated 21 surplus laptops** to Gloucestershire Voluntary Community Sector Alliance and IT Schools for Africa to help those most in need of the IT equipment.
- **We supported the Office for National Statistics (ONS)** with promoting the Census 2021 with its first digital survey. Our borough's response rate exceeded expectations and 97 per cent of households completed the survey across England and Wales.
- The borough's population was rated one of the **top five fastest growing districts** outside of London (2020 ONS).



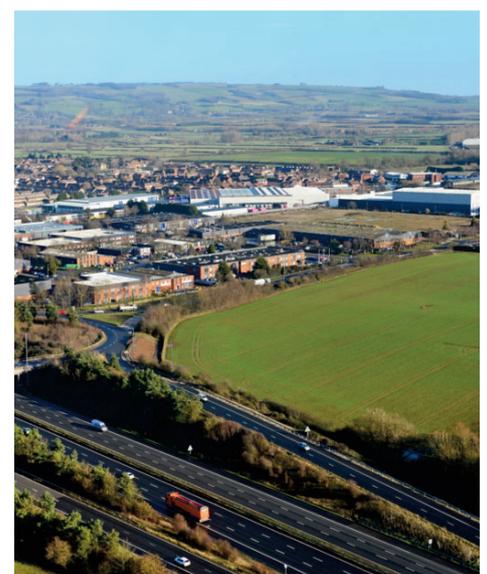
Customer first

- **More than 85 per cent of garden waste club customers are renewing online**, freeing up our customer services to support the customers who really need over the phone support.
- **Our new communications strategy was approved**, which will help us to ensure we're continuing to engage effectively with our customers and promoting the work we do.
- **We launched a new Business Transformation Team**, which brings together specialist skills and talent to help us push forward our improvement projects. Work includes launching a new digital platform, carrying out a review of our bulky waste service and reviewing our corporate website.
- **We launched a new bulky waste service**, with customers being able to make a booking online for the first time. The changes include a new contractor running the service and now at least 75 per cent of items are recycled or reused. The new service also introduced a more commercial pricing structure, a reduction in wait times from six weeks to one week, automated customer communications and improved back-office processes. We are on target to make £90,000 savings in the first year.
- **A new Customer Care Strategy was approved**, which includes a refreshed set of customer care standards – clearly setting out what our customers can expect from us in our approach to customer care.
- **We responded to 575 Freedom of Information requests.**
- **We remain one of the top performing councils** in relation to the low number of formal complaints we receive, with 144 received last year.
- **We continue to provide a grant of £52,000 to the Citizens' Advice Bureau**, helping them to provide support to over 1500 members of the community. Throughout 2020/21, residents using the service have benefitted from nearly £1.8m of financial gains.
- **We launched a new digital platform, Liberty Create**, to provide our customers with a significantly improved online experience. More online options, automated updates on bookings via email / text, and live information on issues such as missed bins are just some of the benefits. The new platform also provides efficiencies for the council through streamlining processes and removing the need to purchase additional software to deliver online services.



Garden communities

- A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for West Cheltenham development - known as the Golden Valley development - was adopted by Council on 28 July 2020.
- We established a governance structure for our Tewkesbury Garden Town to ensure this major programme is delivered in the best possible way.
- An evolution of the Tewkesbury Garden Town concept masterplan updated with recent changes is in its final stages and will be submitted as supporting evidence for the Joint Core Strategy review later in the year.
- A crucial part of the infrastructure needed for Tewkesbury's emerging Garden Town, a bridge over the railway at Ashchurch and Northway, was permitted by the our planning committee.
- The Tewkesbury Garden Town has been awarded £2.4m funding by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- Work is now starting on the next stage of the Ashchurch north bridge programme, finalising detailed design and assembling the land required, ahead of commencing the procurement of a contractor in Spring 2022.
- We continue to be actively engaged in both the A46 Partnership and Midlands Connect to promote the development opportunities and led by Gloucestershire County Council, work continues on the development of a business case to bid to the Department of Transport for an off-line J9/A46 solution.



Sustainable environment

- Following the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency, we approved a 'climate change and carbon reduction action plan' with the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
- Supporting our carbon reduction action plan, and using £284,000 of funding from Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, we made a decision to replace our council offices heating system with an air-to-air system. This project is set to achieve a 78% reduction in the carbon usage for the heating of the building.
- Our waste and recycling contractor Ubico has increased awareness on the impact of contaminated recycling bins. Work has included carrying out additional checks and providing an information sticker explaining why a bin hasn't been emptied, and this work has been supported by a social media campaign.
- We worked with Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership to map our natural capital assets. The goal is to help guide land-use and planning decisions, to identify opportunities for investment in the enhancement of natural capital in the county, and provide a tool for delivering positive benefits for people, wildlife and the economy.
- We have worked with partners across the county to promote a 'Be Clear on Plastics' campaign to encourage residents to reduce, reuse and recycle plastics.
- Our draft heritage strategy, which focuses on the conservation and enjoyment of our historic environment, is now being used to support the examination in public for our local plan.
- Our garden waste club continues to provide a fantastic and sustainable way for our customers to dispose of their garden waste – with more than 18,570 customers now signed up to the club.

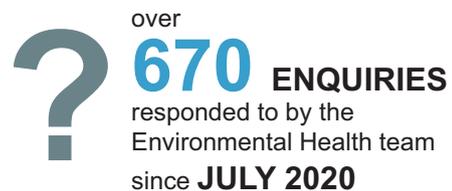


Covid-19 response

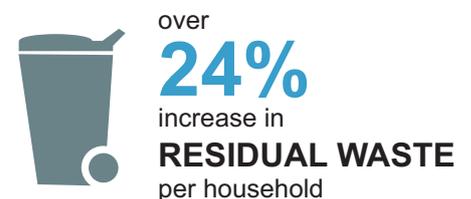
- **Our business grants team continues to work extremely hard** to support local businesses gain access to government covid-19 support grants – with more than £30m awarded to over 1500 local businesses since March 2020.
- Recognising the volume and complexity of the information being issued by the government relating to the pandemic, **we built and maintained a Covid-19 microsite** so it was easier to access and digest.
- **Working with Places Leisure, we've supported the reopening of Tewkesbury Leisure Centre** in line with covid-19 safety requirements.
- Supporting our commitment to ensuring our services are provided to our residents, business and communities, **we have put in measures to ensure staff feel safe** returning to the public services centre while also supporting the benefits that come with remote working.
- **We have worked with Cotswold Tourism through social media**, campaign work and our website to promote the borough as a place to visit when it is safe to do so.
- **Our Growth Hub has supported businesses throughout the pandemic** – including around 100 webinars to more than 360 attendees. Topics included online marketing, video development, social media and goal setting.
- **A bid has been developed to provide a Youth Hub service hosted within Tewkesbury Growth Hub**, which will provide advice and information for young people.
- **Supporting the reopening of the high streets and retail centres across the borough**, we have delivered a range of promotion activity funded by the Reopening High Street Safely Fund. Initiatives included posters and floor stickers in town centres, footfall counts and social media campaign work.
- **Supporting the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents** in our borough, we worked with community groups to provide a winter grant scheme. This helped 556 vulnerable families struggling to pay for food, essential supplies and fuel costs.
- **We provided active support to the countywide response and recovery to homelessness.**



Covid-19: How we supported our community



Covid-19: How we supported our residents



Covid-19: How we supported our businesses



105 virtual help and support **WEBINARS** for **BUSINESSES** through the **GROWTH HUB**



5384 **SUPPORT** and **ADVICE** visits to businesses by **ENVIRONMENTAL** health team



over **30m** paid in **BUSINESS GRANTS**



£21m awarded through **BUSINESS RATE RELIEF** and expanded retail/nursery discount



1230 **BUSINESSES CONTACTED** via email or letter by the **ENVIRONMENTAL** health team



780 **VISITS** to **BUSINESSES** by our Environmental Health team

Covid-19: How we maintained good governance



over **40,200** **VISITS** to the Covid-19 **MICROSITE**



81 **VIRTUAL COMMITTEES** and member working groups delivered



527 Management **TEAM ACTIONS**



82 information **BULLETINS** for councillors and parish councils



over **70** **FREEDOM** of **INFORMATION** requests relating to **covid-19** received



6082 **SUPPORT TICKETS** dealt with by **ICT TEAM**

Looking ahead

Next year will be unpredictable for councils across the country following the Covid-19 pandemic. Our response to this has been unprecedented, and it is clear that we have had to adapt and respond to this fast-moving emergency in a way that we have never had to before. As we begin to emerge, we now need to focus our resources on delivering our robust recovery plan while also ensuring our core service delivery is maintained.

We know that becoming smarter in how we provide our services will be key over the next few years. Customer demands and expectations continue to change, and all our services are working hard to adapt to new ways of working and become more creative in how we provide services to our customers. Our new Business Transformation team will help us to ensure that we shape our services to meet the future needs of our customers, as well as ensuring our in-house processes are as efficient as they can be.

Our growth agenda remains as a pivotal strand within our Council Plan and we are committed to punching well above our weight to create a 'place' to meet the needs of our growing population and aspiring businesses. As one of the fastest growing district outside of London, we know that our borough will continue to grow quickly over the next few years. Securing sustainable growth has its roots set in the Joint Core Strategy that we have adopted, and our Tewkesbury Garden Town will support our development approach by delivering a transformational quality settlement at the foothills of the Cotswolds.

Our growth will also help us to generate additional council tax and new homes bonus - or a replacement housing growth incentive scheme, should it be agreed by government - which will support the provision of services. Whilst our capital reserves are limited, our revenue reserves are in good shape. Delivering successive, significant surpluses have boosted those reserves and allowed us to set aside more funds into uncommitted reserves which will help to meet our future financial challenges.

Overall, these are challenging times given the financial climate but we have found this drives a desire to improve further and do more with less. With austerity, comes innovation and we have proven over the years this is something we are good at.

