



State of the District Review

Do - Enable - Influence



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Outcome 1: Improving the happiness and wellbeing of residents

We want the highest possible quality of life for the people of Huntingdonshire. It will be a place which attracts employers and visitors and somewhere residents are proud to call home. We will be evidence based, responsive and support the foundations of a good life. This includes personal independence, prosperity, social connection, community and good health.



In 2022, our administration launched Huntingdonshire Futures, a long-term place strategy that consists of five key journeys aimed at driving change in Huntingdonshire. Since its inception, we have engaged with local businesses, residents, and various stakeholder groups to refine the strategy and ensure it is effectively integrated within the council's framework. Steering groups for the first two journeys—Health Embedded and Inclusive Economy—were established in the fourth quarter of 2023/24, leading to the publication of the Community Health and Wealth strategy in early 2024/25.

Through the Huntingdonshire Futures grant scheme, we awarded a total of £40,000 in grants to 28 businesses that support the place strategy Journeys in 2024. This scheme was renewed in 2025, allowing us to distribute an additional £40,000 in grants to 19 organisations and activities that highlight our communities, heritage, and cultural identity, thereby fostering pride in our place.

Our WorkWell program was created to assist individuals with health issues in maintaining or finding employment, and is one of 15 national trailblazers. It is now fully integrated into the Residents Advice and Information team at Pathfinder House. This team employs a holistic, person-centred approach to help residents return to the workplace, successfully supporting over 40 new residents each month in their job searches. Following its success, this scheme has been extended by the government for a further three years.

In recent years, there have been substantial investments of over £2 million in One Leisure and our Active Lifestyles programs aimed at increasing physical activity throughout the district. These investments have allowed us to introduce a variety of new and specialised classes, including the ESCAPE-pain management program and Active for Health initiatives. As a result, attendance in these classes has surged by over 121% since 2022.

Capital investments in our One Leisure Centres in St Ives and St Neots have also seen the number of attendances grow by 14% since 2022, with refurbishments planned to start for our centres in Ramsey and Huntingdon this summer. Following collaboration with our partners, we were also able to invest in the recommissioning of Sawtry swimming pool, helping to restore a beloved community hub for the district.

Outcome 2: Keeping people out of crisis



We will identify the root causes that lead people into crises and find ways to prevent them. We will do this through our own actions. We will also work in partnership with residents, businesses, community groups, charities and our public sector partners.

In 2024, all front-line staff participated in a series of training sessions designed to help them identify and respond to signs that someone may need assistance. This training ensures that opportunities for early intervention are not overlooked and that our residents can access the support they require.

2024 also saw the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) move to Pathfinder House, providing residents with better access to their resources. This relocation has improved outreach options, allowing the CAB and the Residents Advice and Information team to collaborate from multiple locations across the district. Furthermore, maintaining Pathfinder House ensures that every resident can easily access these important services.

In addition to updating the Community Safety Partnership action plan, 2023/24 also saw us successfully secure £44,000 in partnership funding to strengthen our collaboration with the police. This funding enabled us to utilise data more effectively to analyse serious violent crimes. Building on this success, both parties are now developing proposals for further initiatives aimed at addressing crime, particularly violent offences, in the district.

In April 2024, we implemented a new Council Tax Support scheme, designed to provide increased levels of support to low-income households whilst making the scheme easier to access and understand. These changes have meant that more low-income households have less or even no Council Tax to pay, supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

Changes to the scheme have also allowed us to improve our response times for both new claims and changes in circumstances, ensuring residents are notified of outcomes quicker than in previous years. In the same period, the Council has also seen a reduction in initial debt recovery action whilst also achieving the highest in-year Council Tax collection rate in 5 years.

Our Housing Needs team has achieved significant successes, assisting over 1,459 individuals in avoiding homelessness through their intervention, as well as helping 2,471 households find housing through the Housing Register and Home-Link scheme since 2022.

Outcome 3: Helping people in crisis

Where a crisis has already happened, we will work holistically to understand the issues, the cause of these issues and what opportunities exist to address them. We will seek to prevent multiple personal crises becoming entrenched and unmanageable by addressing root causes



Since 2022, we have continued to welcome a further 571 Ukrainian guests into Huntingdonshire, as well as a small number of other asylum seekers, helping them to flee war and persecution and enabling them to live safely. Our model focuses on building strong community relations and supports our guests in becoming fully independent, receiving praise from both the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence.

In response to delays in the works funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), an inquiry was launched in 2024 to investigate the state of the system, identify the causes of the delays, and explore potential solutions. This led to the formation of a Members Working Group aimed at addressing the issues and ensuring that residents receive the assistance and funding they need more quickly. To date, significant progress has been made in improving the system. For the first time since May 2023, the number of residents who have been able to remain in their homes due to a DFG has exceeded targets, and the average time taken to complete DFG-funded projects has been reduced by two weeks.

To better assist residents in crisis, we launched the WeAreHuntingdonshire website. This platform centralises information on financial, physical, and mental health support, as well as food assistance, volunteering opportunities, and skills and employability resources. It is an essential resource that we continue to promote and support, helping residents receive tailored assistance based on our broader detriments approach.

Since 2022, we have also helped over 4000 households into temporary accommodation, enabling us to shield them from instances of homelessness and domestic abuse, as well as to escape the severe weather. The monthly number of households in temporary accommodation has continued to trend down since 2022, ending 2024/25 with our best performance in the last 3 years. This metric has only missed its target twice in the last three years and remains lower than the national average. This is a testament to our hard work in prevention.

Our work with Domestic Abuse survivors has also helped us to achieve DAHA accreditation, which is nationally recognised as the benchmark for how social housing providers and Councils should respond to domestic abuse. Although there is a heavy focus as to how we react in our role as the Local Housing Authority, assisting customers and residents experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse, the accreditation also considers how we respond as an employer, supporting our workforce who may be experiencing domestic abuse, helping to make the district safer for all.

Outcome 4: Improving housing



We want everyone to live in a safe, high quality home regardless of health, stage of life, family structure, income and tenure type. Homes should be energy efficient and allow people to live healthy and prosperous lives. New homes should be zero carbon ready and encourage sustainable travel.

Following the 2023 mid-term review of the Housing Strategy, we successfully aligned our housing activities with the Corporate Plan and gained a clearer understanding of the most recent data. As a result, we have begun developing a new Housing Strategy for the years 2025-2030. This new strategy will be guided by the latest Housing Needs Assessment and will outline our approach to delivering new homes in the district to address housing needs, including specialised provisions. We are on track to complete this new strategy by the end of 2025.

Since 2022, we have undertaken a series of actions to increase the availability of affordable homes in the district. In collaboration with our partners, we have successfully delivered 1,423 affordable homes, helping our residents to achieve homeownership. Additionally, the affordable housing note, published in December 2024, will further support the development of new affordable housing by providing clear guidelines for our development partners.

We have also been able to use surplus Council sites to support the delivery of affordable housing. For example, the Amplus/Longhurst Project has signed a revised contract, allowing us to submit a planning application for the largest site and move forward with the development of the remaining eight sites for affordable housing.

There has been significant progress in improving the existing housing stock within the district. The Tenancy Strategy, adopted in July 2023, provides clear guidelines for managing tenancies in the area. Additionally, our efforts to develop a Private Sector Housing Enforcement policy will allow us to impose civil penalties when these standards are not met.

A series of regeneration opportunities are also being pursued, through meetings with our Registered Providers and our work with the Cambridgeshire Private Sector Housing Group, to help regenerate our existing housing and to combat dampness and mould, improving the quality of life of our residents.

In the last three years, over 3,300 houses have received new council tax bandings. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in the availability of gigabit broadband, rising from 53% in 2022 to 88% by the end of the fourth quarter of last year. Similarly, the availability of 5G phone signal has improved dramatically, increasing from 23% in 2022 to 92% today, which helps our residents stay connected.

Outcome 4: Improving housing - Continued



Our planning service has also undergone a significant transformation, following a Peer Review in collaboration with the Planning Advisory Service. The review was completed in November 2024, and the final report was received in March 2025. While some of the recommendations are still being processed, it has helped to drive transformation in the planning process and has led to improvements in performance, with planning ending 2024/25 with its best performance in the last three years.

The Planning Service has also made significant progress in reducing the number of outstanding applications. As a result of their sustained efforts, the backlog has decreased from 1474 in 2023 to 541 today.

Huntingdonshire is also in the midst of the Local Plan refresh, which will outline our long-term vision and framework for the future development of the district. This process was started early, putting our progress significantly ahead of our neighbours and comparator districts and helping us to be the best in class.

Since 2022, we have also seen an increase in spending funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Over £18 million has already been spent on CIL projects, with a further £14.9 million in receipts ready for allocation. This has enabled us to fund projects up and down the district, such as:

- *An extra £750,000 towards the MAGPAS air ambulance base in Alconbury Weald*
- *£6,013,000 to a new health facility in the Stukleys*
- *£271,000 was allocated to Phase 2 of the Hinchingsbrooke hospital redevelopment*
- *£1,495,000 went to the Hinchingsbrooke park improvement programme*
- *£4,800,000 was allocated to the St Neots Future High Street Fund*

Most recently, CIL money has gone to local causes such as:

- *£700,000 to expand St Neots Fire Station*
- *£1,500,000 to the Bury Community Facility*
- *£360,000 to Sawtry Swimming Pool*

Outcome 5: Forward-thinking economic growth

We want our local economy to attract businesses that prioritise reducing their carbon footprint. A place where businesses choose to start up, grow and invest in high value jobs so they and our residents and high streets, can flourish and thrive. Local people should be able to develop their skills to take advantage of these opportunities, with businesses and education providers working more closely together to deliver an inclusive economy.



Since the start of this administration, we have actively promoted Huntingdonshire as a prime destination for high-value inward investment, supporting businesses of all sizes and sectors throughout the district. With the establishment of the new Economic Development team in late 2024, we have successfully showcased the Invest In Huntingdonshire brand at exhibitions and events across the country, attracting investment to the region. Additionally, we have observed an increase in the number of businesses receiving free support and guidance from the Economic Development team, particularly in securing external grant funding.

At the beginning of the 2022/23 financial year, we secured over £800,000 in funding to distribute to local businesses, aiding in the revitalisation of their shop fronts, regenerating our high streets, and helping to increase foot traffic in our town centres.

As a council, we have played a vital role in assisting local businesses in obtaining and managing funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). As a result, 218 businesses received support, leading to the creation of 30 new jobs and the safeguarding of 26 existing ones. These efforts have helped businesses throughout the district and contributed to our overall increase in employment.

In 2023, we laid the essential groundwork for our economic growth strategy, which allowed us to start implementing it in 2024. This strategy has already strengthened our district's key assets, including our small business community, strategic location, and the high quality of life for our residents. Moving forward, this strategy will guide our vision for future economic growth. Recently, the first draft of the economic growth strategy was presented to Overview and Scrutiny, where members provided valuable feedback.

The market towns' regeneration program has made significant progress since its launch in 2023. The improvements to the Ramsey Great Whyte Civic and Business Hub have been completed, and there have been major advancements in St Neots at the Old Falcon and the Priory Centre. Most recently, digital screens have been installed in our town centres, and the work on St Neots Market Square has also wrapped up. These regeneration efforts are enriching our historic market towns and preserving the rich heritage of our district for future generations.

Outcome 6: Lowering carbon emissions



We will take positive action to reduce carbon emissions and become a net zero carbon Council by 2040. We will enable and encourage local people and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity across Huntingdonshire.

A key goal for this administration is to develop an energy strategy for the council aimed at reducing our carbon footprint by minimising energy consumption and transitioning to alternative energy sources. This transformative strategy is in the final stages of delivery and is expected to be completed by this September.

A key aspect of our strategy is transitioning to new, renewable energy sources. For example, we have installed solar panels at our One Leisure sites and other council-owned buildings. So far, these solar panels have enabled us to generate up to one-third of our own energy at One Leisure St Ives, with an expected payback of 7 years, significantly reducing our energy bills and enhancing our energy security, while also supporting the sustainability of our pool provision for the next 25 years. We expect the solar adoption project to be completed by the end of summer.

In early 2022, we received a grant of £1.3 million to promote biodiversity and nature restoration in the district. Since then, we have implemented biodiversity plans for all HDC-owned sites, with investment fully delivered in three priority sites already. This project has also involved rewilding, planting, and creating habitats at various sites throughout the area. Most recently, we completed habitat management projects at Hill Rise (St Ives), Priory Park (St Neots), and Spring Common (Huntingdon). Additionally, through work with our partners, we have positively influenced the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Peterborough and Cambridgeshire and have successfully secured funding from the CPCA Climate Opportunities Fund to support natural flood defence initiatives in the district.

The largest source of carbon emissions in the district comes from vehicles and commuting. To help mitigate this issue, our operations fleet has been exploring decarbonisation initiatives, such as using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) instead of fossil fuels. Following the successful HVO trial earlier this year, the cabinet has approved the implementation of HVO across the entire operations fleet, which is expected to reduce our fleet carbon output by 83% and is currently being procured, ready for implementation later this year. Additionally, the broader Fleet Decarbonisation plan is anticipated to be delivered by the end of summer.

Outcome 7: Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services

Around 80% of our resources are aligned to business as usual (BAU) service delivery and this priority focuses on delivering good quality, high value for money services with good control and compliance with statutory functions. We will continue to provide a wide range of existing statutory and important services and seek to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.



Following the delivery of an independent Corporate Peer Challenge in May of 2024/25, we have adopted 37 clear actions to reflect the suggestions in the report and have already begun working to meet them. Currently, 22 of the actions are completed, with the remaining 15 in progress, scheduled for completion in September of this year. This process is overseen by Overview and Scrutiny to ensure transparency and growth, helping us to be best in class through our process of continual transformation. The feedback from this Peer Challenge and the subsequent actions will enable us to build on our strengths and address areas of improvement, helping us to deliver quality services for our residents and better enabling us to be a model for our peers.

Customer services are also going through an improvement process, via the Customer Change Programme. This program aims to enhance the customer experience by improving efficiencies, reducing energy consumption, and simplifying processes. Recently, we have optimised our website, and a governing program board has been established, ensuring that the project remains on schedule.

The upgrades to the visitor facilities at Hinchingsbrooke Park are currently in progress, following the recent completion of the consultation period. These enhancements will include improvements to the car park and visitor centre, the addition of a new café, and the installation of electric vehicle charging stations. The project is scheduled for completion in April 2026.

Our country parks, nature reserves, and open spaces have greatly benefited from the involvement of our volunteers. They have engaged in green skills volunteering focused on biodiversity and have continued with seasonal maintenance efforts. It is wonderful to see such community participation, as it promotes physical health and well-being while helping to preserve our valued outdoor spaces.

Since 2022, our environmental health team has conducted over 2,200 food safety inspections, exceeding their target and helping to maintain a high standard of food hygiene within the district, making it a better place to live.

Our street cleansing team has also shown consistent improvement since 2022, passing 99% of spot checks last year and achieving their best performance in the past three years. Their excellent work helps keep the district free of litter, debris, graffiti, flyposting, and weed accumulations throughout the year.