

Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028

Message from the Leader of the Council

Imagine a future where every Harlow family lives in a decent home, where they are proud of the neighbourhood they live in, proud of our thriving new town centre, with access to a fantastic job or apprenticeship thanks to local businesses investing more into Harlow, where they feel safe at any time of day and know that their children will live a healthier and more prosperous life than they have, underpinned by a council that drives Harlow forwards in.

That is the future this plan will deliver. Bold and ambitious, but deliverable. We have laid the foundations for that future by delivering on our five priorities. The five pledges we made in 2023 to restore trust in the council and what it could achieve. Not everything has gone right – it never does. But we have changed the way Harlow Council works and have put us on the footing to transform our town over the next four years.

Harlow has so much going for it. We led the wave of the New Town revolution, invented fibre optics, the recipe for Baileys, and so much more. We're the only sculpture town in the world, we sit at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor, we're the fastest growing area in the country and over the next four years will see the construction of a new hospital, new neighbourhoods and a new town centre, enormous Government investment and transformative private sector aspiration.

Yet, Harlow is yearning for change. The evidence tells us that, our residents tell us that. We know that there is so much more to do to achieve that vision and to ensure that every resident and business is proud of our town again. That's why, we've set out our six missions for the next four years and I passionately believe that these six missions will transform the future of Harlow.

Six missions to hail a new chapter in our history. Six missions which we, and every member of our team, will deliver, for Harlow. Six missions to change the way we do things and ensure that the children of Harlow today have a safer and more prosperous future and to ensure that every resident from Arkwrights to Aylets Field, from Hilly Field to Hare Street lives in a better home, in a renewed neighbourhood, with a new town centre, with a better job and a growing local economy, safer streets, a healthier future and a council which truly delivers for them.

Our Plan will put the heart back into Harlow and transform our town.

Message from the Chief Executive

Harlow is at an exciting point in its history – just over 75 years after the formation of Harlow New Town. Harlow continues to grow, and this creates new opportunities for the future that we must ensure help the town. In addition to this wider growth, the council has also been able to secure £43m of central government funding to transform the town centre and this will happen during the lifetime of this Corporate Plan.

This Corporate Plan, rooted in evidence, sets out an ambitious programme for the next four years. It is based on what residents tell us and also on what the economic and social data tells us. The plan has also been developed in tandem with our four-year Medium Term Financial Plan so that we can draw clear links between our ambitions and how we will deliver them.

The root of this Corporate Plan lies in our desire to create a vibrant and prosperous place for the people who live here, those who travel to Harlow to work and to visit. It also sets out how we will do that and how continuing to transform council operations will be an important part of that work.

We know we have much to do, but I am confident that this Corporate Plan sets out the right strategic approach to achieve our goals over the next four years. Much of this will be delivered in conjunction with our many external partners and we commit to ensuring the existence of productive working relationships with all of them.

The plan will be supported by an annual delivery plan that will set out more detail about what we will do each year to work towards the objectives set out in this document. This will then in turn drive the service plans of each team in the council so that there is a clear focus on performance in the delivery of the wider objectives. The delivery plans will also allow for flexibility and for priorities to change as circumstances and economic conditions dictate.

I firmly believe that this Corporate Plan will provide real clarity and focus for the council's work and help to deliver real opportunity, working in conjunction with our wide range of partners.

Purpose of our Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan is Harlow Council's main strategic document.

It clearly sets out our mission and priority for Harlow and how we will achieve, measure and fund them from 2024 to 2028. Our new Corporate Plan has been produced alongside our Medium Term Financial Plan to make sure our plan is financially achievable and deliverable.

The plan is based on a wide range of datasets and was created in collaboration with elected political leaders, residents and staff from across the council. This has been done to make sure our plan is clear, evidence-based and focused on what matters most.

Our Six Corporate Plan Missions for the next four years

- Mission 1: Transform Harlow's Housing
- Mission 2: Renew our Neighbourhoods
- Mission 3: Rebuild our Town
- Mission 4: Secure Investment for Harlow's Future
- Mission 5: Protect our Communities
- Mission 6: Deliver High-Performing Council Services

Built success on our five key priorities in 2023

1. **Fixing council housing** with the backlog in repairs cleared, the average repair wait time down from 270 days to 30 days, void turnarounds down from 66 days to 22 days, a new tenancy audit programme and stock condition survey underway and a new Housing Allocations Policy to ensure local homes are for local families.
2. **Restoring pride in Harlow** with significantly improved landscape maintenance and street cleansing programmes, new neighbourhood parking and estate replanting schemes completed, upgrades to our roundabouts and thousands of potholes, street signs and highways furniture items fixed and replaced.
3. **Rebuilding our town** with the regeneration of the town centre underway, the Harlow Regeneration Partnership delivering, estate renewal in long left-behind neighbourhoods and over 100 new council homes under construction.
4. **Securing investment into Harlow** with an agreement for hundreds of millions of pounds to upgrade our infrastructure, new support to back local businesses and tens of millions of private sector investment to create jobs and apprenticeships and grow our local economy.
5. **Improving council services** with better leisure offerings and free events, more transparent and efficient decision-making and ensuring the council is truly focussed and engaging with residents' priorities.

What we do

The plan covers the full range of the council's responsibilities under our five services:

- Communities and Environment.
- Finance.
- Governance and Corporate Services.
- Housing.
- Strategic Growth and Regeneration.

Essex County Council is responsible for providing other services in our town, including education, adult social care, libraries and highways.

Transform Harlow's Housing

We are responsible for a wide range of housing services for residents from homelessness to allocating council houses, but we also work with private housing providers to help make sure as many residents as possible can access the accommodation they need. As part of our Housing service, we are responsible for the repairs and maintenance of our housing stock.

Renew our Neighbourhoods

Our Communities and Environment services work together to restore pride in Harlow by tackling the issues in our streets and parks, homes and workplaces. Our environmental work includes providing waste and recycling service to the town, managing the town park and other green spaces, and overseeing our climate change strategy. Our communities work includes running Harlow Museum, Pets Corner and the Playhouse theatre.

Rebuild our Town

Our Regeneration team are responsible for our commitment to rebuild our town including council house building programme and town centre redevelopment. Our Planning team also manages the development of Harlow through policies like the Local Plan, which allocates land for housing and jobs and provides protection for our natural environment.

Secure Investment for Harlow's Future

Our Economic Development team works to secure investment in Harlow alongside local businesses and education providers to attract jobs and make sure residents have access to employment and learning opportunities

Protect our Communities

We provide community safety around the town, responding to cases of antisocial behaviour, and work alongside partners such as Essex Police as part of the Safer Harlow Partnership. The council is part of the Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board which provides leadership and funding for health and wellbeing in the town.

Deliver High-Performing Council Services

The council is committed to improving council services and we are responsible for an annual residents' survey, which is a key tool for identifying resident's priorities.

We provide customer services and communications and are responsible for dealing with residents' enquiries and making sure they are kept informed. Our Finance and Governance and Corporate Services, support the council in meeting our legal and financial responsibilities, including running elections and awarding contracts as well as setting our annual budget, paying those that do business with the council and collecting Council Tax. Our Business Insight team are responsible for making sure the council remains accountable for its priorities.

Where we are now

The Harlow District was formed on 1 April 1974 from the former Harlow Urban District and is now composed of 11 wards with 33 councillors.

Harlow's population is 93,300 (ONS Census, 2021) - an increase of 13.9% from 2011. This is the fifth highest increase in the East of England and more than double England's average increase (6.6%). Harlow already has the second highest social housing stock in Essex, but our growing population will lead to greater demand for good quality housing.

Harlow has the youngest population in Essex with the median age of Harlow residents being 37 years and is also one of the most diverse parts of Essex with the highest percentage of residents (27.1%) from ethnic minorities. Overall life expectancy in Harlow is 78.6 years, the second worst in Essex and lower than the national average of 79.4 years. Harlow faces a number of health challenges, with childhood obesity levels within the top highest Essex cohort, as well as mental health and suicide rates that are the highest in Essex.

Our residents' most important local issue is tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, with only 37% of Harlow residents reporting feeling safe after dark, which is well below the Essex average of 55% and 71% nationally. Domestic abuse, violence against a person and sexual offences are the most prevalent crimes in Harlow, which we must reduce.

Harlow occupies an area of 3,054 ha and is located at the centre of the UK Innovation Corridor. This strategic location makes Harlow a key location for ICT, aerospace and life science industries, but improved infrastructure is needed to secure future investment in the town. The UK Health Security Agency is moving to Harlow and the much-needed new Princess Alexandra Hospital is planned to construction in 2025.

A vibrant town centre is fundamental to Harlow's future prosperity. We have secured over £40million in funding through the Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund which will transform Playhouse Square and College Square into a vibrant arts and culture quarter, create a new transport hub in Terminus Street and a revived Broad Walk and Market Square. We have also set up the Harlow Regeneration Partnership with one of the UK's leading developers and put in place our first Partnership Business Plan covering the plan period.

Harlow is home to around 3,200 businesses and provides 43,000 jobs. We also have a successful further education college, upskilling thousands of Harlow residents each year by working with local employers to ensure they are providing the skills needed in a rapidly changing economy.

Despite this, Harlow has a high unemployment rate of 5% (October 2023) and a high percentage 21% of residents with no qualifications – the third worst in Essex and above the national average of 18.2%. However, with a higher active population and a better job density ratio, Harlow has a relatively better economic outlook than the East of England average. Securing investment, jobs and new business growth will be key to improving individual aspirations within the town.

Our residents survey showed that close to three-in-five are satisfied with the way that the council runs things (58%), although satisfaction is significantly higher among residents aged 65+. We want to build a culture of continuous improvement to achieve consistent scores across age groups.

We have over 450 members of staff across 5 service areas and 45 teams as well as over 350 staff in our wholly owned company HTS, but we recognise the need for a people resource plan to make sure we have the right skills, behaviours, productivity and capacity to provide the best value services possible for the town.

Our Story - Putting the heart back into Harlow

Harlow was created just after the Second World War to give people a better future – and that’s just as important today for everyone who lives and works in Harlow.

We’re determined to put the heart back into Harlow by delivering a vibrant, safe and welcoming town centre that will restore pride in our town, attracting investment and opportunities for all. We want our town to be a place where people of all ages enjoy spending their time, led by a new arts and cultural quarter with events and activities for everyone. We want to keep the Harlow pound here, so residents choose to spend their time and money in Harlow, supporting and encouraging local businesses to flourish and succeed.

It’s not just a renewed town centre that’s important for our future. Our beautiful parks and green spaces are rightly treasured, but we know people want to feel safe in – and proud of - their homes, neighbourhoods and communities.

We know how proud our staff are of the place we call our town. Our staff are already focusing on the day-to-day services that make a difference across the town – tackling issues in your street, repairing council homes and delivering more housing for local people. We’ll continue to put what’s important to residents first, despite the financial pressures we, like all councils, are facing.

Our town has a strong track record of innovation – fibre optics were invented here – and that spirit of invention and discovery will play a part in our reinvention of Harlow.

We know we haven’t always got it right for some of our residents who have felt let down. But we’ve been listening to people’s concerns and priorities, and we’re determined to rebuild trust with everyone who calls Harlow their home. We’ll be honest about the challenges ahead; we’ll be clear about what we’re going to do and why it’s important for our future.

We know how we’ll make a difference to Harlow in the short term. But that’s just the start of our work to deliver a bright future for everyone here and we will keep focusing on what’s most important for local people - making Harlow a better place to live, work, raise a family and start a business.

Where we want to be

We want Harlow to have healthy and safe communities with access to housing, education and skills to provide a better future for everyone who lives and works in Harlow.

We want Harlow to be a place where people of all ages enjoy spending their time, through providing high quality housing, renewed neighbourhoods, green spaces and a thriving town centre that meets the needs of the community.

We want Harlow Council to build a culture of continuous improvement by putting what's important to residents first, being transparent about the decisions we make and focusing on the services that make a difference.

Our Corporate Plan Missions will deliver this.

To Transform Harlow's Housing we will...

...provide better access to housing for all residents.

How we will get there:

- Embedding our new housing allocations policy and processes to increase transparency and efficiency in our social housing allocations.
- Both directly delivering and encouraging developers to build more high-quality homes for local people.
- Embracing the new legislative changes to landlord provision particularly through the Social Housing Regulation Act and other similar changes.
- Delivering new high-quality council housing which incorporates sustainable construction approaches, energy efficient and photovoltaic technologies.
- Working with developers through the planning process to target sustainable approaches to the delivery of all new homes.

What we'll measure:

- Number of residents on the housing needs register.
- Time it takes to be allocated a priority banding after joining the register.
- Tenant satisfaction levels.

...Invest in new and existing council housing.

How we will get there:

- Deliver hundreds of high quality new council homes.
- Enable the delivery of thousands of new homes of all tenure types.
- Reviewing estate amenity areas and delivering a programme of renewal to improve safety, security and resident enjoyment.

- Developing an investment programme for our housing, estate infrastructure and ancillary infrastructure.
- Continuing with a retro fit programme of existing housing to reduce carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency.
- Continue to improve our repairs, maintenance and major works programmes.

What we'll measure:

- Number of new council homes delivered.
- Number of new homes delivered through the Harlow Regeneration Partnership.
- Number of homes delivered by other providers and developers.
- Tenant satisfaction levels.
- Compliance with decent homes standard.
- Number of disrepair claims.
- Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings for our stock.

To Renew our Neighbourhoods we will...

...create thriving neighbourhoods

How we will get there:

- Restoring pride with improved landscape maintenance, street cleansing and neighbourhood renewal programme for street furniture, highway infrastructure and other such facilities to transform the local street scene.
- Reviewing the use of community assets to explore options for renewed incorporation to neighbourhood life.

What we'll measure:

- Creation of neighbourhood renewal programme.
- Success of new landscape maintenance and street cleansing programmes.

...respect our natural resources through minimising pollution and waste and creating clean and inviting green spaces.

How we will get there:

- Delivering the outcomes of the climate change strategy to see the town through to its net zero target by 2040.
- Expanding the provision of electric vehicle charging points across the neighbourhood areas and town centre.

What we'll measure:

- Council and town-wide carbon emissions.
- Number of electric vehicle charging points installed.

To Rebuild our Town we will...

...create a welcoming renewed town centre.

How we will get there:

- Delivering all regeneration projects already commissioned as well as bringing forward further schemes and investment to entirely transform the town centre in line with the masterplan framework.

What we'll measure:

- Completion of sustainable transport hub, Broad Walk upgrades, Market Square regeneration (subject to funding) and Playhouse Square cultural quarter.
- Completion of other town centre schemes delivered by the council or Harlow Regeneration Partnership, or by the private sector.

...invest in new and existing estate infrastructure.

How we will get there:

- Deliver the Harlow Regeneration Partnership Business Plan.
- Reviewing priority estates to establish a delivery programme of major estate renewals.

What we'll measure:

- Number of actions in the Harlow Regeneration Partnership Business Plan delivered on time.
- Number of priority estates renewed or planned to be renewed.

To Secure Investment for Harlow's Future we will...

...facilitate sustainable growth and investment in the town.

How we will get there:

- Securing inward investment from both the public and private sectors to deliver new jobs and growth to Harlow.
- Both directly delivering and enabling new commercial development.
- Securing the infrastructure required to deliver the vision of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT).

What we'll measure:

- Number of jobs in Harlow.
- Number of new commercial units developed.
- Land secured and construction enabled for HGGT northern access roads and the wider sustainable transport network.

...build the skills and education of future generations.

How we will get there:

- Increasing levels of educational attainment and qualifications among Harlow's young people, including increased enrolments on STEM related subjects and those which local employers demand.
- Developing skills for growth by supporting and promoting the delivery of affordable skills opportunities for all adults.
- Closing the gap of the proportion of the working age population obtaining Level 3 and Level 4 qualifications in comparison with the national average.

What we'll measure:

- Number of enrolments on STEM related subjects in further education.
- Number of people achieving further and higher education qualifications per year.
- Number of people achieving qualifications directly funded by council.
- Number of higher education level learning opportunities in Harlow.

...deliver services which protect and support the town's businesses and homes.

How we will get there:

- Improving our inspection services of private sector businesses and housing provision.
- Better support to local SMEs to grow.

What we'll measure:

- Number of complaints received in relation to business and private housing compliance.
- Number of environmental health breaches.
- Number of HMO enforcement issues.
- Number of disrepair claims.
- Number of new start-ups in Harlow.
- Number of contracts awarded to local SMEs.
- Number of jobs and apprenticeships created.

To Protect our Communities we will...

...create a safer future for Harlow where communities benefit from targeted action on crime and antisocial behaviour.

How we will get there:

- Identifying current antisocial behaviour issues and emerging trends and hotspots within the town and taking real steps to reduce antisocial behaviour over the plan period.
- Joint working with police and health partners to tackle antisocial behaviour in residential areas as well as new town centre provision as the regeneration projects complete.
- Ensuring the Community Safety Hub with Essex Police is a genuine hub for tackling crime and antisocial behaviour which makes a tangible difference for residents.
- Working with the PFCC to deliver the outcomes from Essex Crime Plan.

What we'll measure:

- Reduction in number of antisocial behaviour reports received and reviewed.
- Number of targeted operations carried out in hotspot areas.
- Number of joint patrols carried out.
- Percentage of residents reporting feeling safe.
- Number of campaigns or events carried out that are based on PFCC priorities.

...support a healthier future that addresses inequalities and provides access to the right support to boost health and wellbeing.

How we will get there:

- Supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and families through improved service provision and closer working relationships and influence with other service providers.
- Improving access to affordable and free activities that promote and support healthy lives, including cultural, creative, sport/physical activities and access to green spaces.
- Identifying and addressing barriers to health provision with closer working

relationships and influence with local health organisations.

- Improving the numbers of residents who are digitally engaged to be able to access services and information that support their health outcomes.

What we'll measure:

- Number of school readiness events.
- Number of residents using council-supported digital skills projects.
- Improvement in health outcome and projected health outcome indicators.

To Deliver High-Performing Council Services we will...

...strengthen engagement with the council for people of all ages and backgrounds.

How we will get there:

- Reforming how we consult and engage with our residents to ensure the voice of our residents is at the heart of all we do.
- Focussing on engagement activities to specifically attract younger people to have their say on council services.
- Introducing electronic communications options where this enhances service delivery to residents.
- Increasing voter registration and turnout.

What we'll measure:

- Residents' Survey results on engagement with the council.
- Number of voters registered and election turnout.

...listen to what residents tell us and use this, alongside supporting data, to make decisions.

How we will get there:

- Giving residents an annual opportunity to comment on the service that Harlow Council provides and the things that are important to them.
- Genuinely embed first class communication and engagement with our residents in all we do.
- Making data led decisions and embedding benchmarking in all we do.

What we'll measure:

- Annual residents survey.
- Engagement on social media.
- Number of participants in consultations.
- Number of decision-making reports that contain data comparisons.

...actively tell residents how we use council resources and how others can work with us to deliver services.

How we will get there:

- Ensuring all council decisions, policies and services are transparent.
- Making it easier for local business to work with us under reformed procurement practices.
- Deliver new shared services where there are identified operational and commercial drivers and seek diverse and best-fit partners.
- Providing best value by analysing areas of greatest spend to provide economies of scale.
- Securing social value in contracts with our main contractors that directly benefit residents.

What we'll measure:

- Number of meetings webcast and views of those.
- Number of Harlow businesses that win Harlow Council contracts.
- Number of shared services created.
- Number of best value reviews carried out.
- Value of contracts with social value terms.

...continuously improve service provision and provide excellent customer service in all we do.

How we will get there:

- Driving a culture of continuous improvement and challenge.
- Enhance our customer service experience.
- Further transforming HTS service provision to ensure we are providing first class services.
- Identify opportunities for simplification in Local Council Tax Support scheme.
- Establishing a benchmarking scheme to measure council performance against best practice in decision making.
- Ensuring that residents are informed about the council work and plans for the future using a variety of communication channels.

What we'll measure:

- Number of complaints received.
- Resident satisfaction levels.
- Local Council Tax Support scheme reviewed.
- Percentage of residents reporting feeling informed.

...build resilience around our people, resources and finances to not just deliver

services, but make them better.

How we will get there:

- Providing accessible and easy to use services for our residents.
- Seeking cost reduction through challenging how we deliver services, ensuring value for money, as well as a return on investment.
- Create a culture that supports high performance and enables a flexible, skilled, engaged and diverse workforce that maintains positive relationships with trade unions.

What we'll measure:

- Number of residents using digital services.
- Compliance with accessibility requirements for digital services.
- Council budget.