



Stevenage Borough Council - your Co-operative Council

# Our Co-operative commitment

The heart of a town lies in its people

co-operative councils  
changing local communities together



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## Our strong tradition in Stevenage



**This framework explains in detail what it means to be a co-operative council and how this approach so perfectly sums up what Stevenage is all about.**

**W**hen Stevenage New Town was developed over 60 years ago it was the country's first new town. There was an acute housing shortage after the War and New Towns focussed on quickly building houses and providing jobs. Consequently when the new residents moved to Stevenage they found few community services. These early residents soon began to work together to secure the services they needed and this spirit of working co-operatively was woven into the fabric of Stevenage.

Stevenage has now grown to a town with a population of more than 84,000 but has still maintained the concept of communities being at the heart of the town. We see in Stevenage a vibrant voluntary and community sector with at least 300 groups serving a diverse range of needs. We also have many residents who are actively involved with schools, local groups and helping their neighbours right across the town. The spirit of co-operation and participation is something the town was built upon and is still alive and well.

Reaffirming these ideals has helped us to reach a new settlement with the members of our community based on respect: giving people more say, more power and more choice. Our aim is to deliver value for money services tailored to local needs, informed by listening and responding to what the community tells us are their priorities.

Councils must not be paternalistic. In the past the government's top down imposition of views may have stifled our communities' voices. By continuing to reach into the collective consciousness of our community we in Stevenage are able to reinvigorate their passion, commitment and ideals. This does not diminish the role of local government as working co-operatively fosters mutuality. Councils can take a strategic view on issues across the town and residents can work with us to drive service improvements. In this way the council can continue to act as a whole system social enterprise; delivering social returns or 'dividends' in everything we do through creative and flexible co-production of services.

We know we may never have the resources we could previously command, but rather than sitting on our hands and bemoaning this loss we have strengthened our approach, which will harness the passion, commitment and ideals of our communities. This is the true dividend for a co-operative community.

**Councillor Sharon Taylor**  
**Leader Stevenage Borough Council**





# The co-operative council movement

Co-operative working has the potential to transform the way local public services are delivered. Communities will play a key role in determining what services are needed in an area, how they should be delivered, and will work with or on behalf of councils to deliver them in an area.

Co-operative councils are local authorities that are looking to deliver services in a radical way, giving more say and choice to local people. Co-operative councils work with local organisations, residents and communities to change local services. They seek to move away from top-down imposed services that do not offer choice, involvement or control to residents; and instead embrace the traditional values of the co-operative movement.

Co-operative councils want to reclaim the traditions of community action, community empowerment and civic engagement, in order to help transform local communities.

Stevenage is a member of the Co-operative Councils Network. This is a group of leading authorities who are developing creative ideas to involve residents in co-producing services alongside local authorities. This approach is not new in Stevenage. The council has

always put its residents at the heart of service design and delivery and worked together with our many business organisations, community leaders and voluntary and community groups to effect change. We have demonstrated time and again a whole system social enterprise approach.

This means that, like social enterprises, we seek radical and innovative ways to maximise wider social benefits in service delivery through working closely with residents and local groups. We have put the ethos and principles of co-operative working at the centre of everything we do, working with and for the community to deliver a social return that benefits the communities we serve.



**co-operative councils**  
changing local communities together

Co-operative approaches can be applied to almost every aspect of local government services. Councils should not limit how they creatively involve residents and community organisations in shaping, designing and delivering services. Co-operative councils, including Stevenage, are looking at all aspects of the services they provide to see how they can increase community involvement.

This can be achieved in a variety of ways:

- Increasing awareness of, and opportunities for effective consultation and engagement
- Commissioning services from mutuals, co-operatives, social enterprises or local voluntary and community groups
- Devolving total control for services to communities.

There is no one right approach, Co-operative councils must listen to their communities' views, assess their needs and understand how they would like to be involved.

The co-operative approach is built on the values and principles of fairness, respect, and social responsibility and we must ensure that



these values are at the heart of everything co-operative councils do. We must be clear with our communities what co-operative working is and isn't, what we and they can and cannot do, where communities can work with us and where they can take responsibility for themselves. We must also communicate clearly how, when and why they should get involved. We must show our communities that there are dividends and rewards to be shared by working together for everyone's benefit.



# Why work co-operatively?

We are living in unprecedented times, where public services are being scaled back on a level not seen for many decades. Local authorities, like many households and individuals across England, are feeling the squeeze. Indeed over recent years local councils have had significant reductions in grants received from national government. Stevenage is no different and we have been subjected to significant reductions in our budget.

In 2007 we agreed a two year plan to remove £3.7 million from our budget, this equates to a 40% reduction in our total budget. This was not easy and required us to make difficult decisions, but we achieved it while still protecting front line services. However, we could not rest on our laurels. The economic downturn hit from 2008 and central government began a deficit reduction programme. Local government was hardest hit and, like all councils, our income reduced drastically. Since 2010/11 our income from government has reduced by 21% and we anticipate that it will have dropped by 45% by 2016/17. This has put serious pressure on our budgets at a time when many of our residents are at their most vulnerable due to the ongoing recession and need to rely on public services to stay afloat.



In this era people have higher expectations and standards of customer service and quality than ever before. This is no different for local public services. Our residents expect to see high quality, value for money services that are customer focussed and tailored to local need. Demand for public services is increasing year on year and although we borrow many principles from the business world and social enterprises, councils are not commercial businesses - if we were this increase in service demand would lead to increased profits and a healthy bottom line. The challenge for local authorities is how to meet this increase in demand with significantly reduced resources.

In the years of plenty councils found extra resources for discretionary services through efficiency savings. They looked at how each service could be made leaner, sharper and more effective. Many councils, including Stevenage, have already maximized available efficiencies and those that remain are not sufficient to maintain the current high standard of services, or to meet increasing demand.

Simply cutting services again and again would generate a race to the bottom, where councils sink to the lowest common denominator, providing only those services required by law and at a minimum standard. This is not an answer for a forward thinking council, this is not an answer for a council that values its communities - this is not an answer for Stevenage.

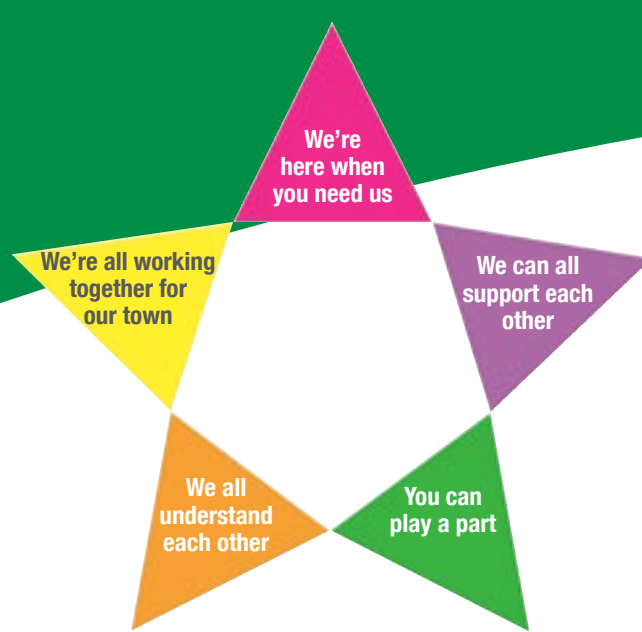
What is the answer then?

We must look at where and how we deliver services, and come up with radical ideas to ensure that the strong foundation of local government is not eroded. It is imperative that councils examine all potential solutions to find innovative models to continue providing services that people want and value. These models must involve residents to ensure that we can deliver their desired outcomes and make every pound spent go further. This is why the social ethos and approach of co-operative councils that work together with residents is so important. It can provide the answers. It enables councils to be resilient and continue to provide the quality services that residents want in difficult times.

Stevenage Borough Council continues to seek radical solutions alongside our communities, to enable us to develop the town and deliver effective services despite the constrained economy. It is now more important than ever to listen carefully to the views of Stevenage residents, giving them a real say in the decisions that affect their lives and their town. We must ensure those who live and work in this town help us to make the tough choices of where to spend our limited resources and how to make them stretch further. We must involve our communities in working with us to find and implement the answers.







# Stevenage's co-operative principles

**In January 2011 Stevenage Borough Council formally declared itself a co-operative council and adopted five co-operative principles. These are:**

- ▶ **The council as a strong community leader**
- ▶ **Working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on needs**
- ▶ **Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community**
- ▶ **A clear understanding between the council and our communities – this is what we do, this is what we will help you to do**
- ▶ **Joined-up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer.**

But what do these really mean?

- ▶ **We're here when you need us**
- ▶ **We can all support each other**
- ▶ **You can play a part**
- ▶ **We all understand each other**
- ▶ **We're all working together for our town**

Our co-operative principles promote and support the close working relationships the council has with the town's residents and organisations. They say that we will continue to listen and involve community groups and residents in shaping the town.

## Characteristics of a co-operative council

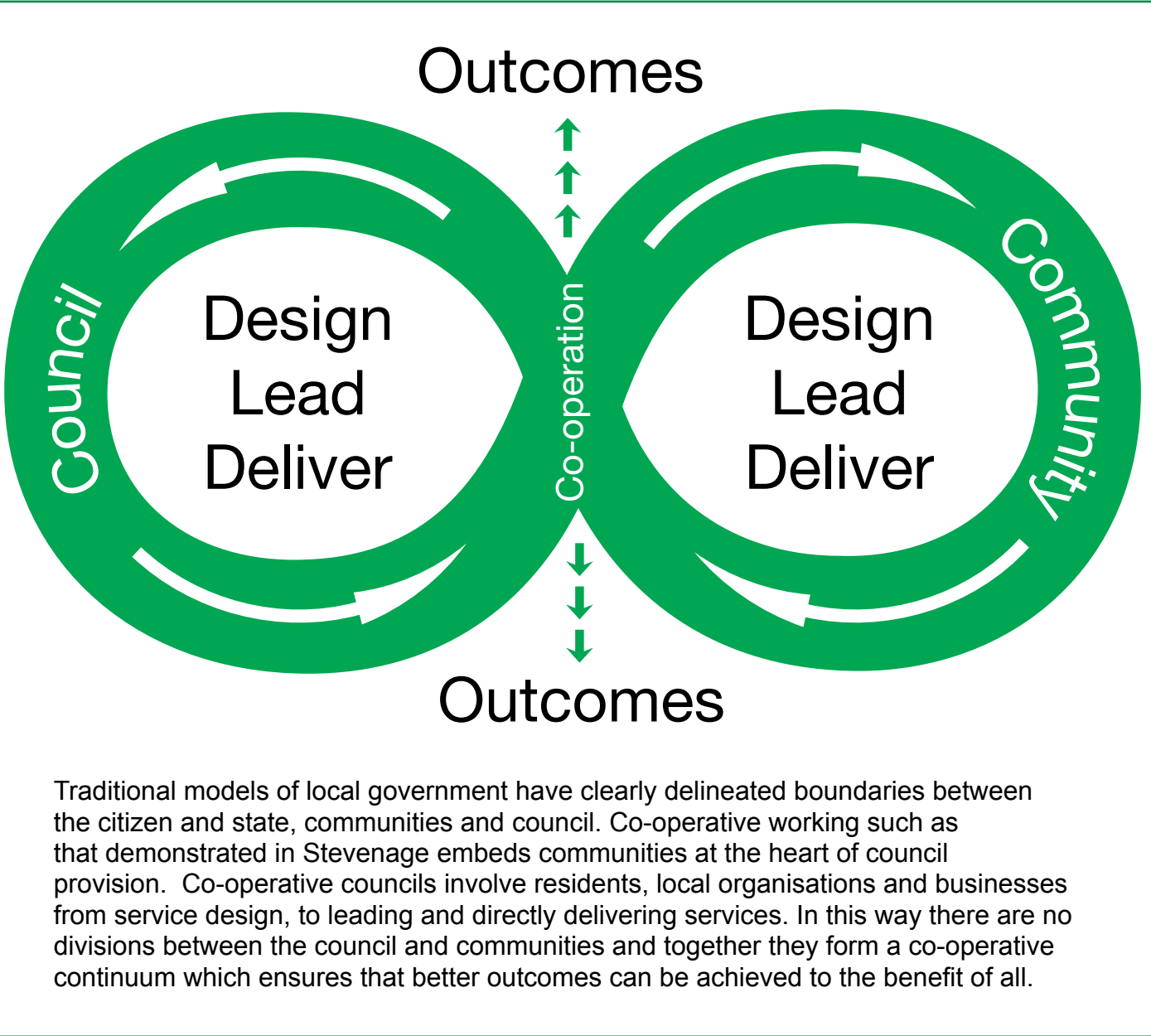
**In order to make our co-operative principles a reality there are many characteristics that we as a council need to strengthen or adopt. A co-operative council should:**

- **Develop a shared vision with the community**
- **Demonstrate transparency of decisions**
- **Exhibit a clear knowledge of the specific needs of the community**
- **Offer choice - services that meet community need**
- **Provide services that are personalised and community based**
- **Embed an open, creative and reflective culture**
- **Be a fair council that treats people equally and with respect**
- **Focus on our customers**
- **Maintain strong relationships with community leaders and local groups**
- **Develop staff with the right skills and capacity to deliver**
- **Support councillors to know their community and lead their community**

We are currently developing values for our staff that will translate and embed these characteristics across the council, demonstrating them in everything we do. This way we will ensure that our staff are clear why we are working with communities, and how we are working with communities.



# Continuum of co-operative working



## Our co-operative approach

In Stevenage the co-operative principles evolved among our pioneer New Town generation.

As the pioneer generations make way for the younger generations it is the right time to stress the ethos of the co-operative council movement to help us maintain our strong community.

Stevenage Borough Council has been working for many years to ensure that our residents are at the heart of everything we do. Our aim is for Stevenage to be a town where everyone can work together and services are co-produced by the council and our communities. We want to be a council that provides support and empowers our local communities, to ensure that all residents and stakeholders have the opportunity to get involved. We aim to be a town where residents and local organisations know how to play their part and are confident in working together and with us. We want to inspire and encourage residents to become community leaders and champions of the future.

In Stevenage, co-operative working is all about partnership. It's about the council and community working together to co-produce services and giving residents more involvement and control of the services they use and the places where they live.

To continue to embed and champion our strong co-operative council ethos we have identified a programme of activities that can become co-operative flagships. For us co-operative working is about community designed, community led and community delivered services.

**Community designed services:** we will include genuine input from our communities in the services we deliver.

**Community led:** services that are led by communities and delivered in partnership with the council.

**Community delivered:** services that are delivered directly by our communities and citizens, rather than by the council.





# Community designed services

**Involving customers and the general public has always been an intrinsic part of how we work in Stevenage. We carry out consultation exercises to inform policies and plans. These exercises provide an opportunity for us to understand what our residents think and inform the development of our co-operative council approach.**

## What we have achieved so far

**W**e commissioned a Residents Survey in 2012 and used this as an opportunity to ask the community how they would like to get involved and work with us.

This gave us information about the services our residents thought could be run by members of the community, and importantly the barriers that our residents feel they face when it comes to getting involved. This has helped inform our thinking on how we consult and engage with residents and on how to take forward our co-operative programme.



The council has a long history of engaging residents in smaller, less formal and often innovative consultation exercises. Our housing Customer Scrutiny Panel of tenants and resident leaseholders plays a key role in inspecting the council's housing service and making recommendations for improvement.

It comprises seven tenants and one leaseholder who have been fully trained to audit housing services and report their findings to the council. Recently the panel completed its first review. An action plan has now been developed from its findings.

Our housing customer pool is used to enable tenants and customers to share their views on a variety of housing issues and services. We intend to expand this customer pool and embed it across all council services.

Our annual neighbourhood, housing and community conferences help us to set our priorities across the town and at a local level. At the neighbourhood conferences residents are asked about local issues, identify problems at the street level, and tell us what really makes a difference to their daily lives.

A recent example of local engagement is work we carried out with the community in Archer Road to find out how local people currently use their neighbourhood centre, what they like and dislike about it and how they would like to see it changed in the future. The response to this consultation showed that residents local to the Archer Road neighbourhood centre are keen to work with us to determine the future of the area.







Each autumn we invite residents to our 'Your Choice, Your Voice' community conference where residents learn about and prioritise town wide services. Participants tell us that such activities help them to understand the difficult decisions that councils have to make each year to deliver services and balance the books.

We have found that consultation events are useful tools in guiding budget decisions and helping us to improve services. We always listen to what our residents tell us in these exercises and where possible act on suggestions. For example, you told us that the recession was impacting on trade in the town. We piloted a free-parking scheme in the St Georges multi-storey and Primett Road South car parks on Saturdays. We have moved the Old Town Farmer's market onto the High Street and have worked hard to improve and re-launch the Indoor market, all aimed at helping hard-pressed shoppers and traders.

Our Stevenage Senior Forum gives older people in the town an opportunity to come together and let their voice be heard. We are supporting this forum to expand and develop and are keen to see those involved become champions for older people issues and opinions in the town.

We supported the 'Can you hear me?' project which was run by young people in the town in partnership with the council and other agencies and provided a great opportunity for the council to engage with the younger view. This is a great example of a community-led and owned project as it was the commitment and enthusiasm of the young people involved that have made it such a success.



One recent highlight has been the production of a DVD to promote young people's opinions of the town.

The council has strong links with many other forums and groups across the town. We support the Taxi Forum: a longstanding, self-organising group of local taxi drivers. This forum is a useful opportunity for taxi drivers to feed back to us on issues such as licensing, community safety and town priorities. Similarly we engage with Pub Watch, a group of local licensed premises across the town who collaborate over issues related to safety and common offenders, and who have established partnership initiatives such as 'banned from one, banned from all'. We have also established an anti-social behaviour (ASB) forum, a group of council tenants and leaseholders who have been complainants, victims or perpetrators of ASB. This group works with us to set service standards in the management of ASB cases, review individual cases and assess policy and procedures.



Recently we have been using Café Choice for budget and service consultations. We use this pop-up café to welcome residents in for a coffee and a chat. This is an informal and interactive method of engaging public opinion, that allows us to meet residents where they are in the town centre or neighbourhoods. We value the opportunity to speak face to face to understand their priorities and issues. Our residents have told us that they also value this opportunity with councillors and officers. This forum ensures we hear first hand what those who live and work in the town truly think.

Our Have Your Say section on the council website allows residents to share their views and respond to formal consultations. It highlights upcoming opportunities for residents to get involved with scrutiny committees to examine services more closely. We also use social media such as Twitter and Facebook to interact with our residents and respond to their views and issues. By using such a variety of consultation methods we ensure that we can reach a range of audiences and views.

We are already looking at how we engage and consult residents in shaping and designing services. We are carrying out research into the best ways to respond and feedback to residents. We are also looking to expand the role that residents play in our formal scrutiny processes, where councillors look closely at particular services to make recommendations for change.







# Community led services

## We have already looked at how listening to residents can help us decide on priorities and inform decisions.

Another way we can do this is by actively involving community groups and residents in shaping or co-producing services. As a co-operative council, we embrace the support and partnership of organisations and residents to explore different ways of providing and managing our services to the mutual benefit of everyone involved. We have many examples where we work in partnership with the community.

## What we have achieved so far

The council plays a lead role in co-ordinating SoStevenage, our local partnership of agencies and individuals that come together to effect change. The SoStevenage Board is made up of business, public and community members. It meets every three months to look at issues across the town. Each year the SoStevenage Annual Forum sees more than 75 representatives from the community, voluntary sector, business community and statutory partners come together to discuss the priorities for the town over the coming year. SoStevenage gives community groups an opportunity to influence issues and decisions that impact on the town.

The council, through SoStevenage, has awarded more than half a million pounds of government money to local projects led and delivered by the community. These include:

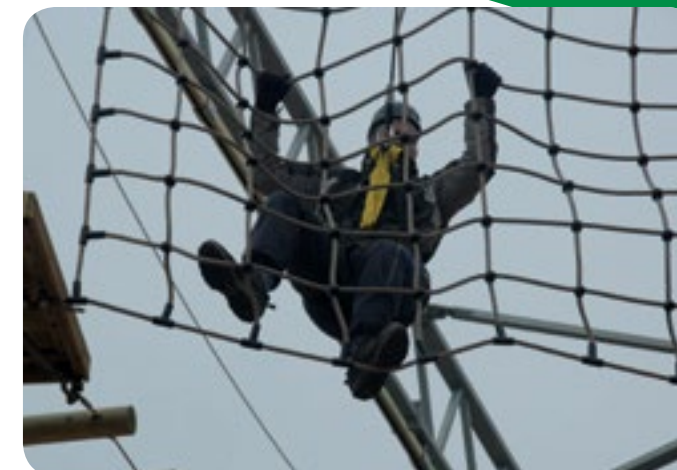
- SoChallenging High ropes course in Fairlands Valley Park
- YMCA Space in the town centre
- SoResilient wellbeing drop in centre
- Wild Stevenage green project to improve the local area
- Money, Money, Money project to offer financial advice and support to those in debt
- Ventures project to develop young entrepreneurs across the town.



The partnership is co-operative in its approach and governance, having itself adopted the co-operative principles this year to become the first local co-operative partnership.

We work closely with the Police and other community safety agencies to improve fear of crime and reduce crime across the town through SoSafe, our community safety partnership. Through SoSafe the council involves residents and local groups in community safety initiatives such as

- The 'Fun bus': This project is delivered by the council in partnership with Nacro, a local crime reduction voluntary group, and Hertfordshire County Council. A fun bus to engage young people that are seen to be 'hanging around'. The bus visits known anti-social behaviour hotspots and Nacro youth workers run sports and other activities, as well as sign-posting young people to other services.
- The Street Pastors scheme: This project uses volunteers from local churches to provide care and support to people late at night in the leisure park and the High Street.



- Dogwatch: This scheme gives residents who are out walking their dogs an opportunity to work with us to keep their area safe. It aims to make dog walkers the eyes and ears of the community in reporting community safety and environmental issues to the police and council. This in turn will improve quality of life, increase feelings of safety and build community relations.
- Environmental Action days (EADs): allow residents, the council and other organisations to work together to improve the local environment. These events also give us the opportunity to speak to members of the community about community safety concerns and ideas. Specific EADs this year have involved planting gardens, removing waste and addressing fly tipping.





- Operation Night Owl: This scheme brings partner agencies, the council and residents together in the evenings to look at ASB 'hotspot' areas in the town. Our housing residents inspectors, tenants and leaseholders who are trained to carry out ASB satisfaction surveys and flat block inspections- also attend with partners to speak to residents and youths in an area about any issues or problems and how they can be resolved.

The SoStevenage Partnership hosted a conference in November 2011 bringing partner agencies and residents together to tackle the important issue of domestic abuse in Stevenage. A working group has been convened to develop and implement a partnership action plan based on the outcomes of this event.

The new inward investment branding for Stevenage was co-produced by the council and the Business Forum. The Forum is a partnership consisting of representatives from across the business community in Stevenage. The Forum worked with us by acting as a focus group for creative ideas. The new brand and website ([www.investinstevenage.co.uk](http://www.investinstevenage.co.uk)) are part of Stevenage Borough Council's business growth campaign, publicising



Stevenage globally in order to attract new business, investment and jobs to the area. As a result we have seen an increase in investment enquiries and more businesses attracted to the town.

The Indoor Market Traders Committee works in partnership with us to improve the vibrancy of the town's Indoor Market. The committee organises community events and initiatives to help promote the trade on offer in the market.

The voluntary and community sector in Stevenage is diverse and has continually evolved to meet the needs of our residents. We are all facing financial constraints and we need to work differently in order to protect the services that are so vital to people, especially during the current economic downturn. This is why we worked with the voluntary and community sector to produce a strategy and action plan for 2012 to 2015, which will build on the strong relationship we have with the sector and provide new opportunities to work together in the future.

The council works with local groups to ensure many valuable services can continue despite the difficult economic environment. For many years we have been one of the most generous Hertfordshire districts in our provision of funding to the community. We provide grant funding to local groups and community. This alongside the rent-in-kind, garages and offer in-kind support that we offer totals more than £1 million per year in support from the council.

We are currently working with leaders from across the voluntary and community sector to establish a new forum, Stevenage Community



Network, which will enable local groups to share ideas and offer each other practical support. The network will give the sector a stronger voice in the town, enabling them to work more closely with us to develop service delivery models. We are also working closely with the community associations that manage the community centres across the town. We are helping them to establish their own umbrella group, Stevenage Community Association Network, which will also allow them to share ideas and support.

Our councillors are the democratic representatives of our residents. They strive to maintain a sense of community in the town by empowering residents and supporting local activities, particularly those with an emphasis on community development. Councillors play a key role in working with local communities to identify issues, to plan, assist and develop solutions through local surgeries and residents meetings.

Our local community budget scheme enables councillors to actively work with communities that come forward with projects and ideas, by giving grants to worthwhile projects and groups in their ward. Each councillor has a personal budget of £3,300 per annum, a total of £128,700 available across the town to help improve and deliver local priorities and create a better place to live.

We believe that all residents should have the chance to actively shape local services. Our Youth Council gives young people across the town the opportunity to debate real issues and

concerns. The Youth Council has two seats on the Borough Council and can take advantage of the opportunity to directly inform services and decisions, giving the youth perspective. The Youth Council is also actively involved in projects for young people, such as running live music events at Bowes Lyon Centre and liaising with other youth councils and school councils.

This year we also established our first Youth Mayor to be a champion for young people and provide a platform for young people's views. Our Youth Mayor has been given a local community budget to spend to address local youth issues.

The council is committed to and passionate about ensuring equal opportunities and accessibility to council services irrespective of background. We have developed a comprehensive work programme to improve how we address equality issues and ensure we can achieve excellence in equality and diversity. As part of this we are working co-operatively with equality groups such as the Stevenage Disability Network and Stevenage World Forum to ensure our services reflect the needs of different communities. We are also working to support the development of a new inter-faith group in the town. This will see various faith groups from all the major religions come together to share aspects of their faith, explore commonalities and look at practical projects that can be undertaken in the town.



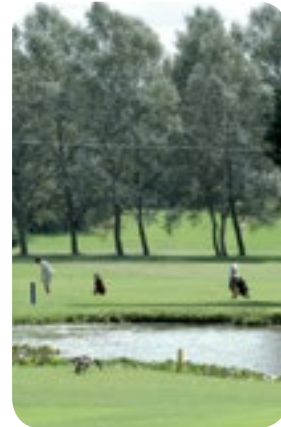




# Community delivered services

**Being truly co-operative should be about putting residents in the driving seat. Communities can tell us what they think and work with us to lead services.**

However communities and residents can also play a more active role by taking full responsibility and directly deliver services instead of the council. Community groups, charities, not-for-profit organisations and residents groups may seek to manage and co-ordinate services on our behalf. Examples may include where we have handed over responsibility for a service or asset, have a formal contract, or provided a grant to ensure service delivery.



## What we have achieved so far

**S**tevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) is a community based social enterprise with charitable status which was established in 1998 to manage the leisure facilities in Stevenage. It has grown into one of the UK's largest non profit leisure management organisations managing contracts in other areas as well as Stevenage. This success has reduced the amount of direct support the council provides to leisure services and has enabled SLL to reinvest any profits back into the Stevenage facilities for the benefit of our communities.



Its board includes unpaid/voluntary members, including people from the Stevenage community.

The council works with Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to deliver services which address financial exclusion issues in the town. The Mortgage Rescue scheme has been successful in so far preventing 25 families from becoming homeless this year. The CAB works co-operatively with us to provide debt advice and advocacy support to any residents with financial issues and our joint court desk worker scheme has been a great

success – with more than 173 successful interventions at court in the last year to prevent families becoming homeless.



As part of our co-operative commitment we are reviewing all our council owned properties and assets to ensure that they can be used effectively and in support of our co-operative ethos. We have recently developed Swingate House, one of our premises in the town centre, into a local community services hub. Stevenage Shopmobility, Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau, and Stevenage Credit Union have located into the building to create a one-stop shop for local services.







Most of our neighbourhoods have a community centre, which really is the centre of the community and many share the space with local churches and the voluntary sector. Community centres were instrumental in the formation of the town. Stevenage boasts 14 such hubs for local groups to get together. These community centres are managed on our behalf by local community associations, ensuring that the communities they serve have a direct influence on the services offered.

Our Toddler Group Initiative (TGI) supports local toddler groups, which are run by parents for parents and their children. The TGI gives groups support and guidance, promotes activities and events and shares ideas for parents and carers.

We work co-operatively with our tenants to design and produce our Housing annual report. This yearly review of our housing service is co-ordinated and developed by our tenants and leaseholders. They decide on content, carry out



interviews, write articles and take photographs for inclusion in the publication. Working with professionals, they also have an input into the look and finish of the final publication.

Stevenage boasts many excellent green spaces, parks and woods across the town. Community members play a key role in maintaining the standard of these open spaces through local Friends of schemes. One such example is Friends of Mobbsbury Wood, a group of neighbours who have worked together for many years to improve and maintain the small wooded area close to their homes. They give up their own free time to improve their local environment.

We have an excellent and long-standing relationship with Stevenage Garden and Allotments Association (SGAA), who work closely with the council to oversee allotments. We hope that SGAA will take on the administration and management of the allotments from 2013.

As part of our commitment to business we have developed the Business Technology Centre, a business incubation centre. The centre is managed co-operatively for us by Wenta, a local not-for-profit organisation. It is an excellent facility that offers much needed support and guidance to entrepreneurs and start ups as well as serviced accommodation suitable for new and growing businesses.



Stevenage Borough Council spends a significant amount of money with external suppliers who help provide our goods and services. We ensure that we use our procurement practices to not only get the lowest possible price, but also to deliver our wider co-operative aims. Where we can, we choose local suppliers who employ local people, as well as those companies who consider their social impact. Where possible we include community contract clauses to encourage suppliers to make firm commitments

to ensure resident involvement, employ local people and support community initiatives.

One example of this is that our Decent Homes contract requires the contractor to advertise potential suitable employment opportunities within the local area and commit to providing at least six apprenticeships opportunities over the life of the contract. The Decent Homes contract also commits the contractors to provide staff resource and financial support to local community initiatives. We also encourage smaller, local companies to apply for contracts with the council, by holding "meet the buyer" events and breaking down contracts into smaller, more manageable chunks.







## Sharing the Dividends

**W**e have highlighted only a few of the many excellent examples of co-operative working in Stevenage. They demonstrate how the council is working as a whole system social enterprise. This approach enables the council to ensure that the money we spend goes further, that it achieves its primary purpose of providing local services for those in our town, but adds even more social rewards and can give back to the local community. We call this sharing the dividends. An example of such co-operative sharing of the dividends has already been highlighted in the way that Stevenage Leisure Limited provide leisure services. Their contracts in other areas provides a healthy profit that is reinvested into improving the service in Stevenage.

Another example can be seen through our new local community services hub in Swingate House. This hub not only allows Shopmobility, Stevenage CAB and Stevenage Credit Union to work together in a more joined-up and efficient way through sharing resources and support, but also increases the accessibility of these

services to local people due to its excellent central location. This means that the council benefits by having groups in a previously empty property, our residents benefit through an improved service and the local groups benefit.

A further example of this is through our contract with Stevenage CAB for debt advice services. Rather than give the CAB a grant to provide local financial services to our residents, we have entered into a formal three-year contract. This not only gives the council some certainty that the service will continue to be delivered locally and co-operatively, but also ensures that Stevenage CAB has some longer term security that allows it to apply for other contracts and grants that they would not otherwise be eligible for. This extra income can then be used to develop further local services and projects and offer much needed employment - another win win example of co-operative working.

We believe that by continuing to work in this co-operative way we can maximise the rewards or dividends that can be shared locally.

## Our co-operative future

We have shown that Stevenage Borough Council already demonstrates its co-operative council commitment through a host of services, activities, and relationships. We want to build on this strong tradition by involving more local groups and residents in designing, leading and delivering services.



## What we will do

### Consultation and engagement

- develop a consultation and engagement strategy
- develop a toolkit, guidance and training to help all council staff understand when, how and who to consult with and ensure they follow best practice
- develop and promote a comprehensive council-wide consultation programme to ensure residents are aware of upcoming opportunities to talk with us
- take Café Choice to our neighbourhoods to gather information at the very local level
- research and consider the best ways to provide feedback to our communities
- expand and develop opportunities for residents to share their views via the council's website
- carry out an independent review of resident involvement in our housing service to ensure it reflects how, when and why you want to get involved
- expand our housing customer pool to develop a full council Choice Champion citizens panel to be used for consultation and engagement
- continue to support and promote the Youth Council and Youth Mayor
- continue to promote opportunities for residents to get actively involved with scrutiny committees
- develop an online directory of community services to promote local services and organisations.







## Community leadership

- work with local partners to increase volunteering levels across the town
- continue to support and promote the Youth Mayor and Youth Council
- train and support our councillors to feel confident and empowered in representing their ward
- ensure that councillors and the Youth Mayor continue to use their local community budgets
- co-operatively to address community issues
- engage with local banks to introduce the First Step Local Authority Mortgage Scheme – working with first time home buyers who are struggling to save for a mortgage deposit to buy a home of their own in Stevenage
- continue to work with the voluntary and community sector to improve their sustainability
- support and develop Stevenage Community Network as a voice for the local voluntary and community sector
- work with community associations across the town to develop and promote the Stevenage Community Associations Network enabling these groups to share ideas and support
- promote the SoStevenage co-operative partnership membership to increase community involvement
- continue to work co-operatively with equality groups and support and promote the Stevenage Inter-Faith Group
- publicise a programme of activity for our environmental action days and promote opportunities for residents to get involved and work with us to improve their local area
- continue to work with partners to develop and implement a town wide domestic abuse awareness and prevention programme
- continue to support and promote local 'Friends of' schemes and encourage participation
- develop a new council Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy and action plan that outlines what we as a council will do to demonstrate leadership and become more socially and ethically aware and active in the community
- create a staff volunteering scheme to release staff to use their expertise and skills to help the wider community
- establish a volunteering protocol and guidance to ensure volunteers used by the council are treated fairly and are effectively managed.
- Establish 'Estates Excellence' to bring together a range of partners and resources to create a pool of expertise to help businesses of all sizes to work with commercial landlords to improve health and safety performance.

## Creative models

- review our community buildings to ensure that they meet our communities' needs
- establish a housing commission to examine our housing services and develop a community led model of delivery
- implement our voluntary and community sector strategy to examine new models of infrastructure support and business and volunteering brokerage
- continue to support and expand our Swingate House community services hub
- work co-operatively with Stevenage Garden and Allotments Association to hand over allotment management to the community
- Continue to work co-operatively with Wenta to promote the development of business and enterprise in the town
- Continue to explore use of community contract clauses in procurement exercises
- Continue to provide 'Meet the buyer' events.

# How we will communicate

At the heart of co-operative working is the need for communication with the wider public. Without it we risk the public and partners not understanding what we are trying to achieve and not working with us for a better Stevenage. We must make it clear how the public can get involved with us. Therefore a robust internal and external communications programme has been developed. The co-operative programme will be communicated through the new Corporate plan that will be published in April 2013.

## Internal:

We will ensure that staff understand the co-operative approach and principles, how they contribute to the council's ethos and how they can continue to work with residents to deliver excellent services.

## External:

We will ensure that the co-operative message is communicated effectively, regularly and consistently to our partners and the wider public in a variety of formats. We aim to raise awareness of opportunities for people to get involved. We will make it easy for residents to contact us with ideas for co-operative working.

# How we will monitor success

The vision and objectives within this framework will be addressed through the development and implementation of a detailed action plan. This action plan will present a clear work programme for the co-operative council.

To ensure we deliver against our objectives it is important that we monitor the implementation of activities that fall within this framework. We will ensure that the overarching principles of this framework are turned into measurable actions and activities with SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) targets and milestones that are regularly performance managed.



The heart of a town lies in its people



## Work with us

The co-operative council is about everyone playing their part; working together for mutual benefit and sharing the rewards. We want to hear what you think about this approach. We welcome your feedback, suggestions and ideas on how the council can work with communities and residents and how residents and groups can work together to become even more co-operative. We would love to hear how you would like to get involved and work with us to make Stevenage an even better place to live and work.

You can provide your thoughts and views in a variety of ways:

**Email:** [policy@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:policy@stevenage.gov.uk)

**Follow us on Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/stevenagebc>

**Like us on Facebook:** <http://facebook.com/sbc>

**Phone:** 01438 242257

**co-operative councils**  
changing local communities together