



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**



**Delivering for Watford:
Council Plan 2022-26 in review**



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Executive summary

Bold and ambitious, Watford Borough Council is consistently recognised for our strong track record of delivery and innovation.

A key part of this is our commitment to the continuous improvement journey, successfully pivoting between active reflection and strategic action.

In that spirit, this review of our performance against the 2022-26 Council Plan is essential, as we prepare to navigate the authority's final two years and continue the transition to a new era for local government in Hertfordshire.

We recognise the moments when we adapted, learned, or identified ways to strengthen how we work. Rather than simply celebrating our successes, we have been honest about where we can improve, using challenges as opportunities to refine our approach and better serve our communities.

Anchored in the Council Plan, our delivery plans (2022-24 and 2024-26) set out the clear commitments that have driven four years of purposeful, communities-focused progress.

This has been achieved through our systems leadership approach, harnessing our collective energy, not just internally but with a focus on Watford as a place and our role within the wider structure and local government family.

This is set to be a vital part of Watford Borough Council's legacy, helping the town to retain its unique character whilst also paving the way towards a positive and collaborative transformation of local government services in 2028 and beyond.

Maintaining a stable and disciplined financial position has underpinned the success of the last four years, enabling us to continue investing in high-quality services, regeneration and long-term value for residents and businesses.

Coupled with our agility, this means we are always poised to manage the deep-rooted pressures local government faces, from budget challenges to responding to COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

This puts us in an excellent position, as we draw on our experiences and galvanise our partners across the public and private sectors to help shape a thriving and prosperous future for Watford and Hertfordshire.

A huge standout in this review is the consistency with which we have delivered a remarkable array of services and projects.

By the end of May 2026, we will have delivered almost 100% of the commitments we set out in June 2022 - a testament to the dedication, creativity and resilience across the council and our delivery partners.

More importantly though, it has meant a real difference to the people of Watford, which this review illustrates. Delivering for the communities and businesses that we serve is at the heart of everything we do.

Looking ahead to local government reorganisation - through which Watford Borough Council will be dissolved and merged with neighbouring councils and Hertfordshire County Council services - we cannot underestimate the challenges ahead and the imperative to provide a springboard for Watford's communities to thrive in the future landscape.

The insights and achievements in this review not only capture the last four years but provide the momentum to drive through the collaborative transformation needed.

This is all while maintaining an unwavering focus on delivering excellence for the vibrant communities which make Watford exceptional.



“Uncurbed ambition and tangible results have led to national recognition as a multi-award-winning council, including iESE Council of the Year 2025 and a top 3 ranking in the Lambert Smith Hampton Vitality Index for four consecutive years.”

“Watford plays a vital role in the county’s economic prosperity as a successful business and commercial hub and is a very desirable place in which to live, work, study and to visit.”



Our place

Watford is a vibrant and diverse borough, known as a major regional centre.

With a population of 102,200 (Census 2021), we are the most densely populated district authority in England, experiencing much faster growth than the national average.

The town is rich in diversity, with the non-White British population rising to 54% in 2021.

Our reputation as a welcoming place, that manages to be both a lively hub and a warm community, is underlined by Watford’s recognition as a town where people live together harmoniously.

One of Watford’s key strengths is that it retains its own strong identity, with a long and varied history as an evolving market town and as a home to a wealth of anchor organisations.

This includes a much-loved football team, acute hospital, regional shopping centre and a high-class entertainment venue. This unique character has underpinned Watford’s ongoing appeal to residents, visitors and businesses.

This year, Watford achieved the second highest place in Lambert Smith Hampton’s Vitality Index, meaning we have now placed in the top three for four consecutive years.

The index assesses the 100 largest towns and cities outside London to identify the best places to live and do business and which areas also have the strongest growth prospects.

This ranking is a huge endorsement for the borough, reinforcing its strengths across three major quality of life factors: economy and business, living and health and environment.

Delivering for Watford

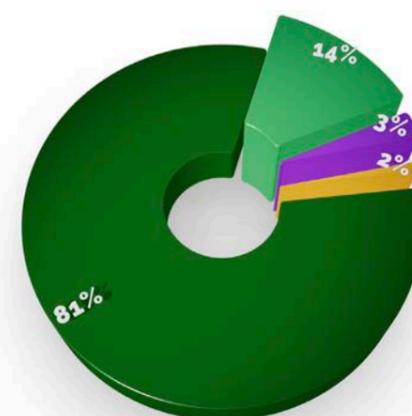
We are ambitious for the town, our residents and our businesses, and we want to see them flourish. Our Council Plan (2022-26) set out our aspirations for both the council and the borough we serve.

With an emphasis on ambition and outcome-focused commitments, the plan:

- Informs our budget setting
- Underpins the planning and delivery of services
- Demonstrates our role as leader of place
- Shows our determination to build on strategic and operational excellence
- Helps our staff understand how the work they do makes a real difference to the people of Watford.

Under each theme and commitment in the Council Plan, we set out our key priority areas of actions in our Delivery Plans.

Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) commitments cut across to support the delivery of our themes, linking together to shape a bright future for Watford.



Status
 Completed - 100
 Ongoing and On-track - 17
 Progressing but later than expected - 2
 On hold - 4



Rigorous performance reporting processes have been central to our overwhelming success in delivering on our commitments and keeping the organisation laser-focused on the Council Plan priorities.

This chart illustrates the tremendous effort and activity of the last four years, resulting in a remarkable 100 commitments completed and 17 progressing as they should be.

These are predominantly long-term, strategic activities that will extend beyond the 2022-26 Council Plan, such as the refurbishment of the Town Hall, the redevelopment of Riverwell and the strategic engagement on the Watford to Croxley Link.

They reflect the significant progress that has driven these place-shaping initiatives forward during the course of the two Delivery Plans.

Importantly, core council activity that has been completed over the last four years and will continue in a new cycle beyond 2026 is also represented within the figures.

This includes activities which impact the everyday lives of the people we serve, such as ongoing support for businesses, investment in our Town Centre and running our ever-popular events programme.

The four ‘on hold’ projects are affected by local government reorganisation and must be fully assessed through this lens.

Our thorough and consistent delivery review process, along with our keen risk management, keeps us alive to the need to take decisive action quickly when circumstances evolve, ensuring we are continuing to deliver long-term value for Watford.

A culture that drives delivery

At Watford, our approach to delivering big for our communities starts with culture.

Rather than defining values first, we focused on creating a working environment where people could operate confidently, contribute openly, and challenge constructively.

From that foundation, our shared values - Bold, Together, Agile, Trust, Respect, and Integrity - emerged organically.

They were developed with colleagues to reflect the high standards we expect of ourselves and how we work at our boldest and best.

These values are practical tools rooted in the art of the possible, rather than statements for occasional reference. They influence everyday decision-making, how we collaborate, how we recruit and how we manage performance.

They guide us through the difficult conversations as much as they encourage innovation. When we do not meet these expectations, we address it openly because accountability is part of our environment.

This culture is directly linked to our performance. Watford's progress is driven by the capability, creativity, and commitment of our people and our leadership approach is designed to enable that.

Officers and members work in genuine partnership, sharing insight, distributing decision-making, and taking collective responsibility for outcomes.

We actively invite challenge to how we work, refusing to settle for the "accepted

way of doing things" and recognising that improvement requires continual examination. For residents, partners, and stakeholders this means working with a council that is collaborative, open to new ideas, and focused on delivering high-quality outcomes.

Our culture shapes our performance, and our performance reflects the strength of that culture. Underpinning our culture is effective and transparent internal communication.

Regular briefings for all councillors, both in-person and written, keeps members informed about key strategic developments, upholding our commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

For our workforce, the Chief Executive holds regular all-staff briefings to share important council updates, complemented by written updates, providing personal insights alongside a focus on strategic priorities.

Fortnightly briefings with Strategic Leads ensure that updates from Corporate Management Team meetings cascade throughout the organisation

Staff sharing sessions, led by different services, also give our people a platform to showcase the value of their work, fostering a culture of sharing and innovation.

These combined communication approaches create an inclusive, open and innovative culture, in which both councillors and staff feel genuinely respected, motivated, and able to engage meaningfully in shaping the council and our work.

Dynamic partnerships and systems leadership

Time and again, Watford's dynamic partnership approach is commended and credited as one of our best and most important assets.

We embrace the fact that we work within a complex landscape of public and private sector organisations, using collaborative systems leadership to achieve improved outcomes for the town and community.

We have nurtured our external relationships to build even stronger and outward looking alliances. Partnership working is critical to developing a collective understanding of place, co-creating solutions and jointly delivering where it makes sense and works for Watford and contributes to the wider system.

The impact and importance of this has been repeatedly demonstrated and is now most prominent in local government reorganisation, through which Hertfordshire is modelling the power of meaningful collaboration.

The continuous improvement journey

We have developed a practical approach to improvement that focuses on what residents experience. Our teams use real insight to guide decisions and act early when performance shifts, supported by clear indicators and real-time data that highlight issues quickly and allow faster, more targeted responses.

Improvement is not a standalone project, it is everyday practice shaped by operational knowledge, feedback and conversations. A defining strength is our ability to intervene quickly when standards dip.

Customer Service Centre (CSC): rapid stabilisation during demand spikes

When seasonal pressures and staffing changes caused waiting times to rise in early 2024, teams used real-time dashboards to identify where demand was building and adjusted shift patterns, routing rules and digital support tools. Within weeks, answer rates recovered and digital self-service volumes increased again, helping restore performance to target.

Our strategic direction is proactively shaped by partnerships, including the One Watford Place Board, People Panel, Youth Panel, and Cultural Leaders Group.

These forums unite leaders across sectors, amplify representative local voices and foster creative collaboration, ensuring our approach reflects the community's real needs and aspirations.

Through regular dialogue and coordinated action, we tackle shared challenges and align priorities, which has been pivotal in co-creating the Watford 2030 Vision - a clear, ambitious roadmap for a thriving, healthy, and sustainable town.

By drawing on the expertise and insight from our partners, residents, and stakeholders, we ensure our plans are both aspirational and achievable, rooted in what matters most to our community.

Street cleansing: fast action

When street cleanliness indicators dipped in 2023, operational teams reviewed route planning, strengthened enforcement in hotspot areas and used resident reports to target activity. The indicators rebounded and have remained more stable over the last two years.

This same pattern is evident right across the organisation. Performance dips tend to be short lived and followed by visible long-term improvement. Services are supported by better technology, clearer data, stronger internal capability and a culture of accountability that encourages teams to course-correct early.



Financial position

Watford's sound financial position is the result of our careful management, along with our deliberate and disciplined approach.

Over the past four years, we have balanced our budget while continuing to prioritise high quality frontline services, regeneration and long-term value for residents.

Throughout this period, we have had to make substantial savings, driven by high inflation, rising contract costs and increased demand pressures.

These savings have been delivered alongside strict spending controls and proactive work to close the budget gap through efficiencies in our services and reduction in numbers of officers, income generation and invest-to-save measures.



External funding has also played an important role, bolstering confidence in Watford both as an organisation and as a place, and enabling us to deliver ambitious major projects and investment into service improvements that would not have been possible through core budgets alone.

With no parish or town councils in the borough, Watford provides residents with a level of local representation, engagement and services that is often delivered through an additional tier of local government.

Although this shapes overall spending levels, our purposeful approach aligns with residents' priorities and ensures we maximise value for money.

Investment decisions have been driven by aspirations for the town and our communities, seeing to it that residents benefit from:

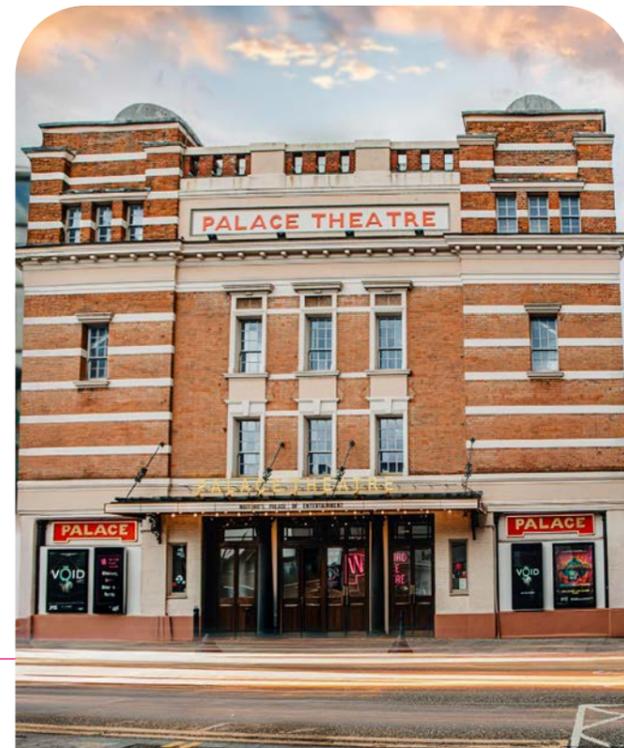
- excellent, award-winning parks and greenspaces
- a thriving cultural scene
- quality leisure facilities
- modern and efficient services
- major regeneration schemes

These choices have contributed to consistently high resident satisfaction, national recognition and a record of delivery that sets Watford apart.

Looking ahead, the outcome of the Fair Funding Review will allow us to reinvest in critical services and enable longer-term budget planning. We remain in a strong position, poised to transition a flourishing Watford to the new local government structures.

We have sound reserves, a proven track record of attracting external investment and a clear commitment to responsible, value-driven spending.

This foundation ensures we can continue delivering excellent services while helping shape the future local government landscape.



Challenges and opportunities

Local government across England is operating under significant pressure.

Councils everywhere are dealing with rising demand for services, workforce shortages in specialist roles and growing expectations for modern, responsive and digitally accessible services.

We have responded to this challenge robustly and creatively, taking it as an opportunity to examine our services with renewed vigour and think differently about how we work, thus helping to protect valued services.

Watford is also grappling with a set of local challenges which are intensifying the national pressures we are managing.

As a small and densely populated urban borough with high housing demand and limited land supply, the constraints on housing,

transport, green space and environmental services are manifold.

Local government reorganisation adds a further layer of complexity, requiring preparations for transition whilst continuing to maintain stable services and protecting local identity.

Despite the scale of these challenges, as set out in this review we have used sound financial management, our agile and innovative culture, continuous improvement and collaborative systems leadership to not only maintain high quality services but to go above and beyond for Watford.

Seizing groundbreaking opportunities, such as the Riverwell regeneration scheme and the Town Hall Quarter programme, are instrumental in securing a prosperous future for our town and communities.



Awards and recognition

Our ambition for Watford and our commitment to excellence are frequently recognised by external bodies, validating that what we achieve sets us apart as a national exemplar in local government delivery.

In 2025, we were named iESE Council of the Year and were shortlisted for Council of the Year at the MJ Awards - despite exceptional competition from much larger unitary councils.

These are among the most prestigious accolades in local government, recognising councils that demonstrate outstanding innovation, leadership and impact.

This followed our Gold Award for People, Value and Culture in the iESE Public Service Transformation Awards 2023, which celebrated our approach to embedding organisational values that put residents and staff at the heart of everything we do.

Our commitment to optimising how we work gained further national attention when we were commended at the MJ Awards 2023 for Workforce Optimisation, acknowledging our innovative approach to ensuring our teams are empowered, efficient and focused on delivering excellence for our community.

The quality of our frontline services continues to set the standard nationally. Our leisure centres have been rated 'outstanding' multiple times in the Quest facility operations quality assessment - a standard reached by only five leisure centres in England.

This recognition of operational excellence extends to our green spaces, with Cassiobury Park featuring in the top 10 of Keep Britain Tidy Green Flag People's Choice Awards for the past four years and Oxhey Park also making the list in 2022.

Another endorsement of our partnership with Veolia in delivering these exceptional services was being shortlisted for 'Best Service Team of the Year (Parks, Grounds and Horticulture Service)' at the APSE Awards 2023.

Our strategic vision has also set benchmarks for others to follow. We received the 'Best Plan' award at the 2023 RTPi East of England Awards for our Local Plan, recognising our vision for sustainable, inclusive growth that balances the needs of our community.

Our innovative approach to place-making was further recognised with the LGC 'Future Places' Award (2025) and an RTPi Digital award (2024), demonstrating our leadership in using technology and forward-thinking strategies to shape Watford's future for the Green Loop project.

While the London Energy Efficiency Awards commended our efforts to assist residents in reducing energy consumption, lowering household bills and combating fuel poverty through a range of grants and loans.

Recently, we have also been shortlisted in the LGC Awards 2026 Economic Support Category for 'A connected town centre shaped for long-term success'.

It has been transformed through a clear, town-wide strategy that treats it not as separate areas but as one continuous journey, shaped around economic resilience, greener travel, culture and community life.

In addition, Watford has been named one of England's top 10 most sustainable places to run a business and the town centre is one of the UK's strongest performing, consistently achieving some of Hertfordshire's highest footfall.



Our Certificate for Excellence awards for AI in the iESE Public Service Awards 2026 applauds how we have coordinated digital innovation, combining AI telephony, chatbot technology, Live Chat support and co-browsing, to transform outcomes for all users.

You can read more about this in the case study section on page 14.

The iESE Public Service Excellence Awards 2026 also shortlisted us in two further categories, a huge accolade for the council:

- Green Public Service Award - Embedding Sustainability reflecting the impact of our long-term environmental programme, including restoring the River Colne, boosting biodiversity, improving sustainable travel, reducing carbon emissions and introducing the Green Loop.
- Efficiency and Effectiveness Award - Leading Change, Shaping Place recognises the scale of our transformation work, from major place-shaping projects like the Colosseum and the Town Centre to our growing digital and AI capability, our approach to the Community Safety Partnership and housing, our commitment to sustainable growth and the continued delivery of Riverwell.

These awards provide a useful test of our ambitions and delivery, as well as being a huge endorsement for Watford, bolstering our reputation as a town with big ideas and that gets things done.

Another huge test of our performance came in November 2023, when we took part in a Local Government Association Peer Challenge.

This thorough and independent assessment was an invaluable opportunity to honestly reflect on our progress, trial our approach and identify where further improvement would add real benefit with the support of local government experts.

The findings recognised the significant stride we have made, highlighting strong leadership, clear ambition for the town, effective partnership working and sound financial management.

The team also provided constructive recommendations, which we developed into an action plan. The final report concluded that "WBC is delivering hugely ambitious plans for Watford, with an unwavering focus on the outcomes for its residents". The follow-up review confirmed that we have made good progress against the recommendations.

These are just a handful of the accolades we have received but collectively, they demonstrate consistent, independent endorsement of our approach. This helps us to maintain our outward-looking focus, which in turn ensures we continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of our communities and the shifting challenges of the day.





Leveraging our reputation: external funding success

Our reputation for delivery excellence has positioned Watford as a council that national funding bodies trust to turn investment into tangible impact.

This credibility has enabled us to regularly secure substantial external funding, with multi-million-pound awards becoming a hallmark of our financial strategy throughout 2022-26.

We successfully secured £16million of transformational government funding for the Town Hall Quarter and Watford Colosseum regeneration, enabling the renewal of the area into a vibrant cultural and commercial hub.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund recognised our commitment to preserving Watford's rich heritage by investing £2.45million in our museum, ensuring future generations can connect with Watford's story.

Our environmental leadership has attracted £1.8million through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, enabling us to implement cutting-edge sustainability measures across key civic buildings.

Meanwhile, £1 million of UK Shared Prosperity funding has empowered us to invest in the economic future of our community – supporting everyone from international businesses that call Watford home to flourishing SMEs.

National funding bodies have also backed our infrastructure ambitions, providing £592,000 for EV charging infrastructure that makes sustainable transport accessible to all, and £198,000 for the Rediscovering the River Colne programme, which reconnects our community with our natural environment.

The council also secured £717,764 from the Brownfield Land Release Fund, supporting enabling works within the wider £500m Watford Riverwell regeneration programme

This consistent success in attracting external investment – totalling many millions of pounds – reflects something crucial: national recognition that Watford delivers on our promises. Our proven track record, evidenced through awards and tangible outcomes, positions us as a trusted partner capable of turning ambition into reality.

What residents say

The Big Watford Conversation asked for people to consider a range of areas and issues about life in the borough, including what makes somewhere a good place to live and what they see as the priorities for Watford's future.

The top five factors for making somewhere a good place to live for our residents were:

- a good quality hospital and health services
- feelings of safety at home and in the local area
- well-maintained parks and open spaces
- clean and tidy spaces good waste and recycling services.

They also highlight Watford as a welcoming community, where people from different backgrounds get on well, and they recognise that the council keeps people informed and is working to make Watford a better place.

As part of the local government reorganisation work, along with our partner councils across Hertfordshire we have gathered the views and insights of local residents and stakeholders.

They have clear aspirations for the future:

- protect local relationships, which underpin community trust and effective service delivery
- keep doing what works and build on our strengths make it simpler for residents to access the services they need
- retain our local identity and local accountability
- provide efficiency, clarity and value for money for the communities we serve

Essentially, people want local government that delivers the basics well, spends public money wisely and makes it easy to understand who is responsible for what.

Our community has great aspirations for Watford and we acknowledge our responsibility to keep local people at the centre of how local government is shaped for the future.



Theme 1: A council working for our community and serving our residents

Watford is a different kind of council, championing bold values and innovative ways of working.

Our Council Plan commits us to strong leadership, agile and collaborative working, developing our own talent and recognising achievement.



Council Plan commitments:

- Make sure we deliver an outstanding customer experience and the high-quality services our community expects.
- Pioneer new ways of working that challenge us to innovate, transform and consistently improve.
- Focus and challenge how we manage our budget, so it is concentrated on delivering our commitments and securing greater investment for Watford.
- Lead by example, securing our reputation as a forward thinking, caring and inspiring organisation where colleagues can thrive and achieve their best for our residents and businesses.

What we have achieved

Case study: Connected digital services transforming customer experience

To deliver the vision to create a seamless, inclusive, and proactive customer experience, we have built a cohesive digital ecosystem.

The tools include a 24/7 AI switchboard, a bespoke multilingual chatbot, co-browsing to support digital confidence and customer feedback loops. The strength of the model is in how each tool connects to the next.

AI enables faster resolutions, improved accessibility and frees staff to focus on residents needing personalised support.

Sensitive issues are always directed to a human adviser, ensuring empathy is not crowded out by an ideological focus on digital channel shift.

The outcomes of this approach have been:

- 24% reduction in the overall CSC budget, with no reduction in service quality.
- 33% improvement in switchboard call answer rates.
- Chatbot satisfaction consistently above 80%.

Using data, technology and modern service delivery

We have undergone a major organisational transformation, delivering a modern, digital-first approach that has improved services for residents and strengthened internal capability.

The technology-driven approach adopted for our front facing services has been matched by stronger use of real-time performance dashboards, supporting earlier intervention for residents at risk of unsafe housing conditions, financial difficulty or health-related vulnerabilities.

In housing specifically, digital tools have reduced form abandonment, improved the accuracy of applications and helped residents access support more quickly, ensuring vulnerable households receive timely advice and improved outcomes.

Strong financial management in a challenging national climate

Despite sustained pressures, we have continued to deliver a financially resilient programme of investment and service delivery.

We have overseen an ambitious capital programme, while maintaining tight financial controls and leveraging significant external funding.

Clear, forward-looking budget management has allowed us to keep council tax increases as low as possible in order to safeguard priority services and direct resources to where they are needed most.

We have also delivered significant savings so that the limited resources available could be focused where the maximum impact could be delivered.

Embedding a modern organisational culture

We have made significant progress in strengthening and supporting our workforce, creating an environment where staff can thrive and deliver their best for residents. We have embedded a new learning and development offer alongside the launch of a new performance framework.

Investment in a refreshed People Strategy and a modern behavioural framework has helped entrench our values into everyday practice. We have also expanded opportunities for early careers, continuing to champion apprenticeships that give local people the chance to build long-term careers in public service.

We remain committed to nurturing talent, supporting wellbeing and creating a modern, motivated and high-performing organisation dedicated to serving the local community.



Case study: Community Grants Programme

Local groups have been supported through a range of grant and funding programmes that help deliver projects, events and initiatives making a real difference to the community. From improvements to buildings or spaces, supporting cultural celebrations or essential services, this funding is having a positive impact right across the town.

Launched in 2023, the Watford Community Lottery raises money within the community for the community. It's already raised over £80,000 for 65 local causes and even created a £25,000 jackpot winner!

Funds raised through the lottery help support the Watford Community Fund, with 10p from every ticket sold going directly to it. Recent projects include Alternatives Watford's baby boxes, Jazz Junction's music festival, and Kenyans in Herts CIC's cooking sessions promoting mental wellbeing.

Additionally, the Neighbourhood Grant has awarded just under £1 million to over 60 projects since it also launched in 2023, to improve local facilities. Funded projects have included the development of the Whippendell Wood mountain bike trail area, the installation of solar panels at Fullerians RFC, upgrading Harebreaks Community Hub, improvements to the not-for-profit Random Café and many more!

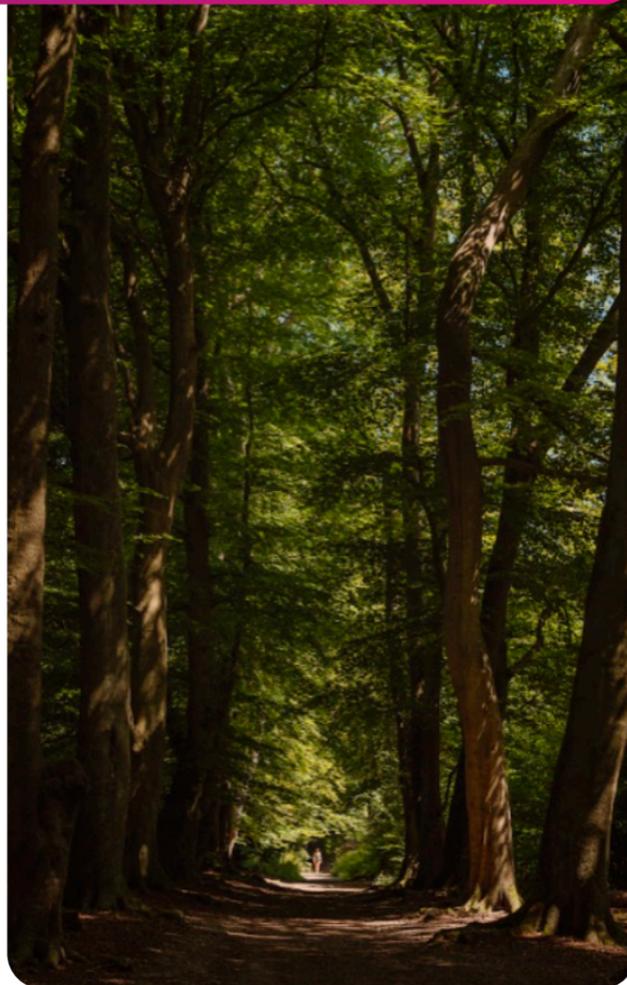
The Mayor's Small Grants Fund also awards grant annually, including £50,000 to 32 projects in 2025/26, such as Watford African Caribbean Association's storytelling workshop, new kit and equipment for WD FC and two local boxing clubs, and events by Parkrun and Sea Lion Swimming Club.

Theme 2: A greener, brighter future

Delivering a greener and more sustainable Watford has resulted in notable progress, alongside some ongoing challenges. We remain committed to embedding sustainability across all our services.

Challenges have included securing national funding, meeting technical construction requirements, and coordinating the complex work needed across organisations involved in delivery.

By working closely with residents, businesses and local organisations, we are building a greener, healthier, and more resilient town where people and nature thrive.



Council Plan commitments:

- Encourage people to make greener travel choices, reducing congestion and improving the health and wellbeing of the town.
- Promote improvements to Watford's biodiversity to enhance the range of habitats, plants and wildlife in the town.
- Work alongside our community and businesses to find the right ways to reach net carbon neutral, seeking not just to learn from others, but to explore innovative solutions that will work for Watford.
- Encourage residents and businesses to recycle more, reusing materials and reducing waste and what they throw away.

What we have achieved

- 17 Green Flags - the highest in Hertfordshire
- Planted our goal of 20,000 trees three years ahead of schedule
- Reduced council carbon emissions by 8.3% from 2019

Expanding sustainable travel through the car club

Watford's Car Club continues to grow, now operating nine bays with over 180 members.

Residents have already completed over 650 journeys, almost 33,000 miles and saving over three tonnes of CO².

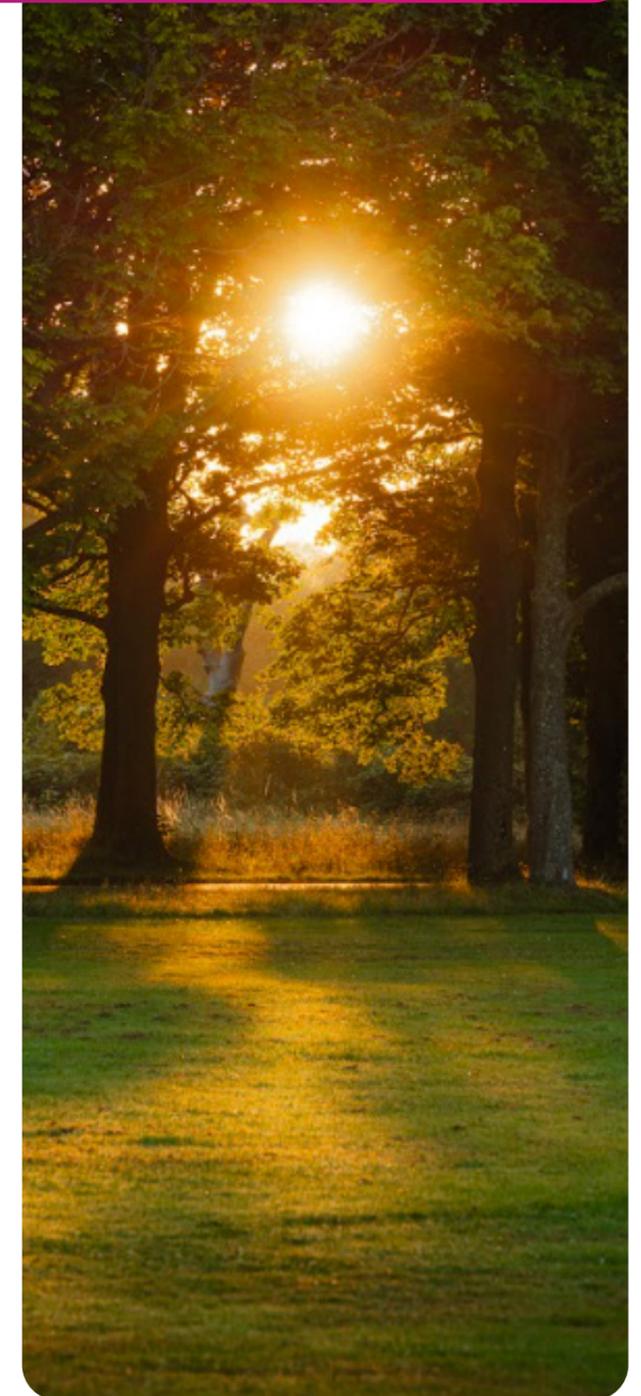
This low-cost, low-carbon scheme is helping people switch to greener travel while reducing congestion.

Accessible electric vehicle network

We have delivered 100% of our ORCS Phase 2 charging sites and installed most Phase 3 roadside chargers.

With over 80 public charge points now live, residents can confidently make the shift to electric vehicles.

Further lamp-column chargers are in progress, expanding accessible, neighbourhood-based charging for all.



Revitalising Cassiobury Wetlands

Following investment and environmental improvements, Cassiobury Wetlands now benefits from a robust management plan and new community-designed signage.

The watercress beds, which declined after not being actively managed since 1991, have been restored. A wildlife pond has been increased in size tenfold and a linear wetland

fed by the River Gade restored. To improve access, new footbridges and other routes have been provided.

Once the wetlands are fully mature, the area will become a valuable habitat complete with reeds, ponds and scrapes. It will also preserve the flood plain functionality of the watercress bed area.



Case study: Rediscovering the River Colne

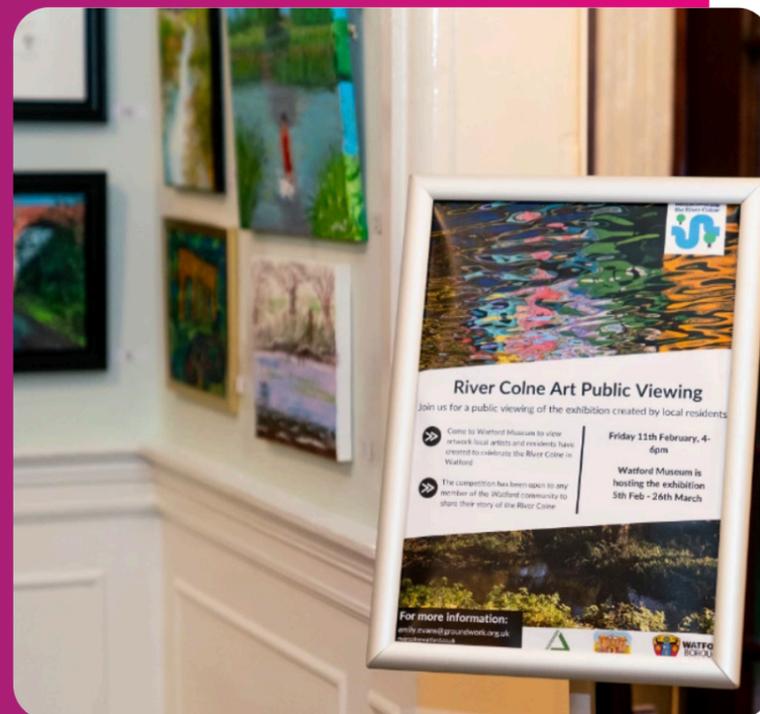
The River Colne programme is delivering a major transformation of the central river corridor across the town, with over a kilometre of river already restored.

Significant progress has been made across multiple sites, including work completed at Knutsford, Timberlake and Island Fields, alongside ongoing improvements at Waterfields and planned enhancements at Radlett Road.

The programme is powered by strong community involvement, with more than 1,700 young people, hundreds of adults and an active network of citizen scientists contributing over 7,700 volunteer hours.

Public engagement has been exceptional, reaching tens of thousands through events, activities, social media and the Tales of the River Colne arts and heritage programme.

These efforts are restoring biodiversity, improving water quality and reconnecting residents with a healthier, more vibrant River Colne.



Case study: Bike share scheme - accelerating the shift to sustainable travel

Watford's bike share scheme is a cornerstone of our ambition to create a modern, low-carbon transport system that supports a greener, healthier town.

Since its launch, it has enabled hundreds of thousands of journeys and more than a million kilometres of low-emission travel, embedding cycling as a genuine alternative to short car trips and strengthening connections between key destinations around our borough.

The scheme demonstrates how strategic investment in active travel can reshape everyday movement patterns.

Strong public adoption, resilience across seasons and changing travel behaviours underpin the scheme's success. Usage trends demonstrate a consistent role in commuter travel as well as wider community uptake, supported by targeted enhancements. In a compact urban area, these shifts in daily choices deliver tangible benefits for congestion, air quality and the public realm.

This initiative shows how focused, forward-looking investment can drive real behavioural change and help shape a more connected and future-ready town.

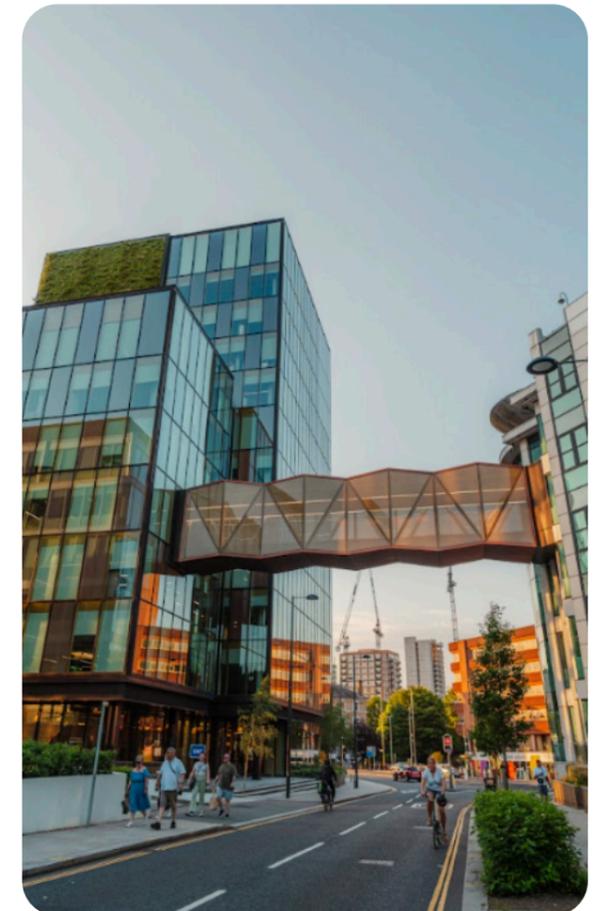


Theme 3: An inspiring, thriving and creative town

Watford is a town where creativity, enterprise, and regeneration come together to shape a vibrant local economy and a strong sense of place. Our ambition is to nurture talent, support collaboration and create neighbourhoods and public spaces that reflect Watford's character, heritage and diversity.

Our location provides exceptional connectivity and economic opportunity, but it also creates pressures on affordability, land use, and sustainable growth. Our Local Plan provides the long-term framework for how Watford will grow, ensuring development is sustainable, well designed and aligned with the joint strategic ambitions for South West Hertfordshire.

The approach to placemaking focuses on creating the conditions for community life to thrive through investment in green spaces, cultural venues, active travel routes and high-quality public realm.



Council Plan commitments:

- Position Watford as a town where startups and business innovation can thrive, supported by strong local skills, generating a range of job opportunities, including for our young people.
- Tell Watford's story as a great location for businesses, where they can invest, grow and succeed as part of our flourishing business community, and for networks that connect people.
- Create a distinctive and successful neighbourhood at the heart of our town, providing space and time for residents, businesses and the community to enjoy and experience.
- Ensure the right mix of facilities, services and transport links, as part of new developments to create successful, well designed new communities.
- Make sure we have quality homes to meet the needs of residents, including housing that is affordable through direct ownership, private rental, affordable and social rent housing.

What we have achieved

- Four successive years in the top 3 places in the LSH Vitality Index for quality of life, economy, and environment.
- Delivered the award-winning Green Loop
- St Mary's Churchyard enhancements
- Award-winning Local Plan
- Developed a Town Centre Strategy through One Watford

Case study: Riverwell

Riverwell is delivering long lasting social value for Watford by turning 70 acres of brownfield land into a healthier, better connected and more inclusive community. Led through a long-term partnership between Watford Borough Council and Kier Property, the programme has invested in essential infrastructure, including £44million for new routes and improved access to Watford General Hospital.

This work has been supported by an average of £9million construction GVA each year and around 120 construction jobs annually. The development now supports 350 operational jobs, with 200 held by Watford residents, and generates £7.5million in local spending each year.

The council's involvement has helped secure 580 new homes so far, including 85 affordable homes and 255 senior living apartments. New green space and a community hall are strengthening community life. Restoration work along the River Colne has improved biodiversity and access, while 145 homes in the senior living scheme have supported better housing choices for older residents.

The wider public value continues to grow. Over time, the scheme is expected to return meaningful additional income to the public sector, helping support local services.

Affordable homes are delivering £535,000 in annual rent savings. Improved health and care outcomes save the NHS £1.2million a year, and the scheme is also associated with improvements in local safety and community confidence.



Investing in a vibrant and successful town centre

We have strengthened the town centre through focused investment and a clear vision set out in the new Town Centre Strategy.

Local businesses continue to benefit from the Shop and Eat Local campaign and the renewed energy at Watford Market.

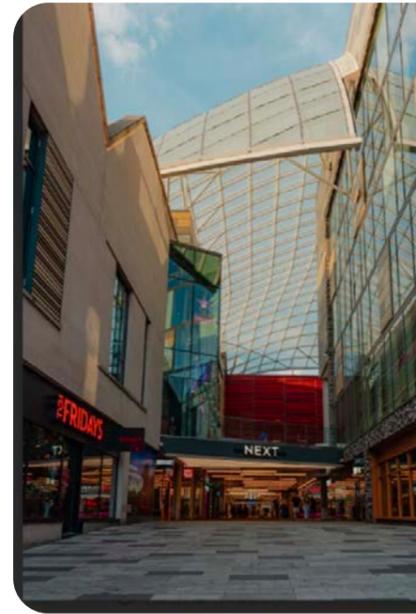
Strong backing for the Town Centre BID means coordinated investment and a confident voice for the business community.

The Town Hall Quarter programme will support long term economic growth and create a more vibrant destination.

These actions show our commitment to a town centre that is lively, welcoming and ready for the future.

Supporting Watford's businesses and local economy

We have delivered a comprehensive package of support to help local businesses grow. This includes investing in quality commercial space to targeted programmes that build skills, confidence and future potential. Strong engagement with networks has ensured businesses have a powerful voice in shaping opportunities and influencing future investment.



Case study: Supporting business growth and local prosperity

One of our key priorities is shaping a strong, well-connected local economy through business support initiatives. Key to this is the Watford Business Pledge, an initiative launched two years ago to support businesses in making a meaningful impact on the local economy, environment, and community. The Pledge is structured around five key commitments:

- Being an employer of choice
- Supporting local employment
- Buying locally
- Adopting green practices
- Focusing on social value



We also lead Watford Business Connect, an annual event that brings together more than 70 businesses to share insight, access support and influence future plans. It is consistently oversubscribed and provides a clear route for the business community to engage directly with local leaders.

We are driving local supply chain development through the Fit to Bid programme and Meet the Buyer events. These sessions link SMEs with major employers, including Warner Bros Studios Leavesden, Heathrow Airport and Berkeley Homes. Nearly 400 Watford businesses have taken part so far, and several have secured new contracts.

This work is underpinned by our Economic Growth Strategy which sets out Watford's role in the wider South West Hertfordshire economy and prioritises growth in creative and screen, digital and professional services, retail and hospitality, and construction services. By convening partners, creating new opportunities and responding to what businesses need, we are helping shape an economy that is resilient, collaborative and innovative.

Transforming Watford Business Park

The £25 million 'Inspire' redevelopment has transformed 4.3 acres at the gateway to Watford Business Park from an old surface-level car park into a modern, eco-conscious employment hub.

Part-funded by £5 million from Hertfordshire Futures, the scheme offers 13 high-quality industrial units and a café designed to attract businesses in high-value sectors.

Sustainability has been embedded throughout, with solar panels, EV charging points and well-ventilated buildings achieving a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating. New green infrastructure enhances biodiversity and creates a healthier environment for workers and visitors.



Theme 4: A diverse, happy and healthy town

Delivering the services that enable residents to thrive and enjoy a good quality of life remains a priority for Watford.

Like councils across the country, Watford faces significant pressures around housing, homelessness and affordability. Culture, heritage and the arts shape Watford's identity and strengthen community pride.

Bringing together local organisations around a shared vision animates public spaces with festivals, events and public art and ensures diverse voices are represented and empowered.

We have supported active lifestyles by investing in high-quality sporting facilities at Woodside, Oxhey Activity Park, our leisure centres and in our parks.



Case study: Town Hall Quarter (THQ)

A once-in-a-generation programme, THQ is regenerating and transforming Watford's civic and cultural heart. Focused on the Town Hall and Colosseum, the programme combines heritage restoration and retrofit with long-term investment in culture, enterprise and public life.

A flagship achievement is the refurbishment and reopening of the Watford Colosseum, one of the UK's most acoustically renowned venues. Supported by £8 million of Government funding, the restoration was completed in partnership with AEG Presents UK and it reopened in August 2025. Upgrades include a new stage, refurbished bars, improved wayfinding, a reopened historic entrance and modern technical equipment. The venue now hosts a strong programme of nationally recognised artists and is expected to attract thousands of visitors each year, injecting millions of pounds annually into the local economy.

The Grade II listed Town Hall is also being transformed into a new home for the Museum of Watford, supported by National Lottery Heritage funding. The museum will offer an inclusive heritage service and showcase items linked to Warner Bros, Elton John, Mary Portas and Watford FC, creating an engaging and modern space for telling the town's story. It will also house a new Innovation and Incubation Hub designed to support entrepreneurs, start-ups and high-growth businesses.

Through a joint venture with Mace, the New Neighbourhoods project will further enhance connectivity, unlock new housing and commercial opportunities, and support integrated NHS facilities. Together, these investments ensure the Town Hall Quarter is not an isolated project, but part of a coherent and ambitious long-term vision to strengthen the whole town centre.



Council Plan commitments:

- Continue our investment in our outstanding parks and open spaces so they remain the best in the area.
- Celebrate and promote our town's rich and diverse culture and creativity.
- Promote our welcoming and respectful town.
- Listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.
- Support improved health and wellbeing across the town.
- Bring together ways to help our residents who might be struggling financially.



What we have achieved

Supporting families and young people - holiday activities and inclusive programmes

We continue to deliver an exciting and inclusive programme of holiday activities and events. These free activities ensure children and young people can take part in enriching experiences that support physical activity, social connection and wellbeing. This commitment to year-round support helps young people and families feel connected, confident and well supported.





Transforming Watford's greenspaces and playgrounds

Residents value our greenspaces and we have prioritised upgrades to local parks and play areas.

Recent improvements at Meriden Park include a refurbished footpath network, new benches, picnic tables, tree planting and wildflower areas, creating a more welcoming and biodiverse environment.

We have also enhanced playgrounds at Garston Park, alongside accessibility and biodiversity improvements at Lea Farm Recreation Ground and St Mary's Square.

At King George V Playing Fields, a new Learn-to-Ride track helps children build cycling confidence.

This investment has resulted in Watford achieving 17 Green Flags and demonstrates how we are enabling thousands of residents enjoy the benefits of nature, play, exercise and community connection.

Healthy Hub - improving wellbeing and early support for residents

Our Healthy Hub continues to play a pivotal role in supporting residents' physical and mental wellbeing, offering vital guidance on issues such as menopause, mental health and access to wider support services.

The service ensures residents who face barriers to accessing information are properly supported. The work is strengthened through strong partnerships with health organisations

and community groups, allowing early intervention for those most at risk. This proactive, joined-up approach means more residents receive the right help at the right time, improving overall community wellbeing.

Tackling inequalities and strengthening community support

Through our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework, we deliver strong community focused support through services such as Shopmobility, helping people access the town centre safely and independently. Recent outreach aims to ensure more residents can benefit from this free service.

Meanwhile, our partnership with Citizens Advice has helped support thousands of residents with issues ranging from housing to financial advice. This early intervention approach ensures residents get timely, accessible help and reduces the risk of crisis, homelessness and isolation.

Enhancing leisure and active lifestyles - investments in sports and facilities

Significant progress has been made to improve local leisure facilities, including upgrades at Central Leisure Centre as part of a £3.1 million redevelopment programme.



New features include improved changing rooms, a modern cycle studio and enhanced sports hall facilities.

These improvements support our wider Sports and Physical Activity Framework, which aims to increase access to high-quality sports and wellbeing opportunities.

Case study: Transforming our housing service

In recent years, our service has moved to a more strategic and proactive housing solutions service. Operational teams work closely with the strategic housing team so that residents' needs are understood and support is focused on securing safe, affordable and suitable homes.

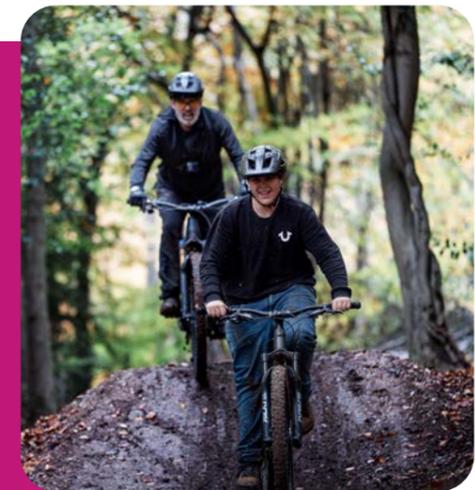
Residents' lived experience, stakeholders and staff have shaped how we design support, make decisions and work with partners to improve outcomes. The programme set clear priorities, including strengthening early intervention and prevention, bringing together the homelessness approach and redesigning roles and structures.

We now have a stronger focus on prevention and a confident and more resilient Housing team as a result. Independent feedback from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government described the transformation as extraordinary, highlighting the strong culture of continuous improvement that now underpins the service and the review resulted in the fewest recommendations ever issued to a council.

Case study: New Mountain Trail puts Watford on the mountain biking map

With mountain biking growing rapidly in popularity, the new purpose-built mountain bike trail Whippendell Wood has brought another exciting outdoor facility to Watford and making the most of the town's fantastic green spaces.

Created in partnership by the council and Bike Park Chilterns, it offers a progressive riding experience just minutes from the town centre, making Watford one of the first areas in the UK to offer a council-led semi-urban mountain bike facility.



Case study: Cervical screening outreach

To improve screening uptake, we worked with Herts and West Essex ICB on a six-month programme to support women who had not responded to routine invitations. Funded by the East of England Cancer Alliance, the project introduced a dedicated Coordinator to offer personalised follow-up that GP practices, under high demand, could not easily provide.

By contacting patients directly, the project helped resolve common barriers, such as anxiety about the procedure, misunderstandings about screening, language needs and previous negative experiences. Clear information, reassurance and access to interpretation services meant more women felt confident to book an appointment.

The project saw a 78% conversion rate for women attending who had been contacted. It demonstrated the significant added value of council-led, targeted outreach and showed this model could benefit other screening and immunisation programmes.

Case study: Transforming our collaboration with the voluntary sector

We have co-developed a new collaborative approach with the voluntary and community sector, establishing strong foundations for consolidating and strengthening our relationship. A key part of this work is the creation of the new Community Network, designed to bring partners together around a shared purpose.

Since its launch, the bi-annual Community Network event has been attended by over 100 different organisations, helping to build stronger connections across the sector. These relationships have directly led to increased collaboration, partnership projects, and joint funding applications for local initiatives. Feedback from participants has been consistently positive and has helped to co-design and shape future Community Network meetings, ensuring they continue to reflect sector needs and priorities.

As part of the new approach, the monitoring of our commissioning framework now captures emerging community needs. By drawing on a range of evidence sources, we can better target our efforts, ensuring that local needs are identified early and met effectively. This also includes embedding a clearer focus on prevention with our health partners, enabling us to anticipate issues early.

Feedback indicates that they now feel we are working in genuine partnership, seeking opportunities to enhance delivery together, rather than operating through the traditional funding relationship. This shift has strengthened trust and collaboration, supporting a more coordinated, responsive and community-focused approach to addressing both known and developing needs across the borough.



Looking ahead

As Hertfordshire prepares for change in local government, our priorities remain clear:

- deliver high-quality, value-for-money services
- maintain strong partnerships
- protect Watford's unique identity
- keep local people at the heart of what we do

The transition to a new unitary authority and a potential devolution deal for Hertfordshire offers huge opportunities to simplify access to services, strengthen prevention, and align housing, health, transport and community support more effectively.

With a collective determinism, our aim is to leave a legacy of investment in our town to benefit current and future generations, while retaining Watford's unique identity.

By approaching reorganisation and devolution with confidence and ambition, we will ensure Watford is in the best possible position to flourish in the new era that is emerging.

Likewise, the resilience, pragmatism and creativity that has marked us out as a leading example of local excellence will continue to be reflected in everything we do as we move forward and help shape a prosperous future for Hertfordshire.





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