Productivity Plan 2024

Harborough District Council

Population of 100,081

40, 413 Households

228 Sq Ms of mostly Rural communities

34 Ward Councillors

5290 Active Businesses

195 Council Employees

£33.2m Gross expenditure budget

Introduction

Harborough District Council is led by a coalition between the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Green Parties, employing 195 staff to deliver essential services to residents, businesses and visitors.

The Council's vision is "Working with our communities we will build a future for the people of Harborough District that gives them the best life chances and opportunities through: -
- Community leadership to create a sense of pride
- Promoting health and wellbeing and encourage healthy life choices
- Creating a sustainable environment to support future generations
- Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous economy

Harborough District is the largest District council area in Leicestershire, at 228 sq miles, primarily rural in nature, with 66% of Harborough's population living in rural parts of the district (according to the ONS). Harborough District has 45 Parishes and is served by 34 ward councillors.

The district has two main market towns, Market Harborough and Lutterworth, along with a number of larger vibrant villages and numerous smaller settlements.

The district borders onto the main City of Leicester and is positioned at the heart of the logistics "Golden Triangle" of the M1, the M6 and the M69, with Magna Park at its core (the largest warehousing and logistics site in Europe, with 32 customers, it provides 13.1million sq ft of sustainable floor space) It covers 500 acres and provides over 10,000 jobs for the area.

The districts central position also makes it a popular commuter area, with travel times from Market Harborough Station to London of about an hour. This, in addition to the rural landscape and picturesque town centres, adds to its attractiveness as a place to live, work and play and is why we are seeing continued growth and prosperity across the area. This growth has given the council the opportunity to invest in its residents and communities and to transform and enhance services as well as increase productivity.

Harborough District Council - Productivity plan 2024

This Productivity Plan has been produced in accordance with the request from the Minister for Local Government in his letter dated 16th April 2024 (appended to this plan).

The letter acknowledges the huge amount that has already been achieved by Local Government and Harborough District Council in ensuring that efficient and effective services are provided for all residents and that value for money is achieved.

This Productivity Plan demonstrates the commitment to continuous improvement and transformation by the Council to ensure high quality, value for money services are delivered now and are sustainable for the future, in line with the current Corporate Plan and Annual Delivery plan.

Corporate Plan | Harborough District Council -

Harborough District Councils is already a transformed and redesigned Council delivering efficient, value for money services.

The Council has a strong approach to efficiency and effectiveness planning, through;

- Innovation and Service design, Strategic Leadership and good governance, Communication and Engagement, Maximisation of Income and the use of resources, the use of technology and data and Collaborative /Partnership working.

A summary of the Councils progress towards maximising the use of resources and efficiency in service delivery is set out below and forms the foundation of this Productivity Plan. The Productivity Plan will cover the 4 main themes as outlined in the Ministers letter – Transformation of Services, the use of Technology, Wasteful spend and Barriers to productivity.

The Productivity Plan includes links to several current key policies and strategies, which will be referenced throughout and are further evidence of the Councils approach towards productivity and performance. The council regularly reviews its policies and strategies to ensure they are still meeting the needs of the council and its residents.

Strong History of Efficiency and Challenging current use of resources for maximum efficiency

During 2021 the Council reviewed its budget via the Budget Challenge 2025 programme (BC25). The programme reviewed all services in three tranches and the total identified annual savings by 2024/25 (the last year of the MTFS at that time) was £3.2m. The BC25 programme saved £8.2m over the 4 years of the MTFS. Details of savings and the current budget position for the council can be found on the following link Budget 2024/25 .

This robust approach to resource management, in addition to growth in both domestic and commercial property locally, has given the council a strong financial position for the future. However, the culture of continuous improvement will continue to be applied and the links between budget and service planning enhanced to ensure maximisation of resources is continued and the council remains sustainable for the future. Where services have been improved particularly through digitisation, there is a high level of satisfaction with 88% of customers scoring our online services between 7-10 (out of 10).

Transformation of Services

Creating the right structure for the Council. - Harborough District Council has been through a period of significant change in the past few years. In late 2021 early 2022 several senior management positions became vacant, including the Chief Executive role. The council at that time wanted to explore the options of a new operating model based on shared management roles before considering recruiting to the vacant positions. Several interim appointments were made whilst the options were explored. A senior leadership review took place in 2022/23 and an alternative delivery model based on a shared management team with a neighbouring local authority was considered. However, it was ultimately decided that it would be more beneficial to invest in the councils' own senior management structure to deliver better outcomes for our residents.

In May 2023 the council's control switched to a new coalition and it was decided to recruit to the vacant post of Chief Executive. The new Chief Executive is now in post and has restructured and recruited to a new management structure. This structure has achieved savings and is now closer aligned to Political portfolios and the corporate direction of the council. Where managers have identified the need to invest in staffing resources to improve service delivery, this has been considered as part of the on-going budget setting process. Key areas that have been invested in for 2024/25 are Planning Enforcement and Compliance, Development Management, Legal Services, Finance and Community Engagement.

This new structure has allowed the Deputy Chief Executive to focus on transformation and provided the opportunity to bring together ICT Services, Project Management, Performance and Communications to lead on the transformation plan. The council has in place a Transformation Reserve to ensure that the activities identified can be fully resourced and is allocated based on business cases for change.

The council is utilising the Local Government Associations Transformation Capability Framework Self-assessment to develop an action plan to deliver its ambitious transformation plans.

This new structure supports the current culture of strong leadership and good governance and further enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of the council. The Councils staff are seen as a vital resource and a refresh of the councils behaviours and values is being undertaken. The Workforce Strategy is also being refreshed to address some of the areas of difficulty in recruitment and we will be working in partnership with East Midlands Councils using the national pilot scheme on this. The Council's Workforce strategy can be found at Workforce Strategy

The Council will continue to look for further opportunities to enhance service delivery and achieve value for money through a rolling programmes of service reviews linked to budgets, a Corporate Peer Challenge and ongoing transformation plans in 2024. The Corporate Peer Challenge scheduled for 14th November will help the council to take stock of its position, ensure the plans we have are focused and seen as an essential part of continuous improvement.

The council has enhanced its governance arrangements by refreshing its constitution, involving members and officers working together, culminating in approval at the Annual council in May 2024. Further work to keep refining the constitution and governance procedures will be undertaken throughout 2024/25, as well as a refreshed approach to recording decisions and delegations. The council's new constitution can be found at HDC Constitution

The council has developed strategies and action plans that reflect the current local challenges it faces, examples of this are the strategies and action plans for Young Persons and Rural Communities which can be found at Young Person Opportunity Plan (YPOP) and Young Person Action Plan , Rural Strategy and Rural Strategy Action Plan .

Preventive approaches - The council recognises that the services it provides to its residents have lasting impacts on the quality of their lives and their health and wellbeing. These services include the provision of homes, through both local planning to ensure there are houses available (the Council has a land supply of over 6 years and is working on its next local plan for submission in June 2025) but also in the provision of help and assistance when residents are homeless (currently 19 families in temporary accommodation).

The council also invests in help and support for skills and employment via our Economic Development team, with regular meetings and job clubs across the district. The Council has also invested in its Leisure Centres through a new contract with Everyone Active accompanied with £6m capital investment. The residents also have access to services that provide for their mental wellbeing which is all evidenced in our Health and Wellbeing Strategy Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan

Sustainable Housing and Economic Growth through the Local Plan. The Council continues to promote Harborough as a great place to live and invest in. Housing completions of more than 500 per year have been achieved and the councils Economic Development approach has promoted Harborough district as a centre for major inward investment and significant business growth, particularly at Magna Park Logistics hub Magna Park Logistics Hub in Lutterworth. Both have significantly increased not only the supply of much needed housing and jobs, but also income through council tax and business rates.

The council recognises the value of community and has provided resources to help community organisations, such as parish and town councils and the voluntary sector and assist them in delivering outcomes for our residents. The 2024/25 budget allocated £1m to grants for Parish and Town Councils. There are also grants for businesses, the environmental, and support to voluntary organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, The Councils Voluntary Sector Strategy can be found at Voluntary and community sector strategy and Criteria for Community Grants to Parish and Town Councils.

Maximising Resources - Delivering the Corporate Property Strategy.

The Council has actively progressed the management of its assets and property through the Corporate Property Strategy. This ensures that existing assets continue to be utilised efficiently, surplus assets are disposed of appropriately, potentially to other community organisations such as parish councils, and opportunities for investment in new assets are backed up by robust business plans. The Corporate Property Strategy concentrates on strategic property decisions based on suitability, sustainability and conditions. Receipts from property disposals are used to support a capital investment strategy alongside strategic regeneration initiatives to promote economic growth and business rate yield. A proactive approach to Invest to Save has been built into the strategy and the Council is currently looking at strategic land purchases to enable the development of key assets for future service delivery and sustainability i.e. a waste depot. A copy of the strategy is Corporate Property Strategy and Asset register

The Corporate Property Strategy has also delivered investment in key assets to help reduce the council's emissions and will continue to do so. The Council owns its own business centres (Harborough Enterprise Centre and Harborough Innovation Centre), which help and support SMEs and the Innovation Centre now has solar panels to reduce energy bills and emissions but also to power the electric vehicle charging points at the venue.

Innovation and Service design - Service Reviews.

The Council has completed a number of significant reviews, some of which are detailed below, and will continue to review services periodically. This will initially focus on high-cost visible services to ensure value for money and high-quality customer service standards.

The commissioning and provision of leisure services to support the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

A new contract with Everyone Active has been agreed, supported by £6m of investment into the district council's two leisure centres and now achieves a management fee instead of paying a subsidy for the service. The contract now also provides better services to residents outside of the normal leisure centre-based activities, actively taking leisure activities in an outreach programme into communities to promote physical and mental wellbeing.

Economic Development securing inward investment and promoting a vibrant SME economy within Harborough District.

The council was awarded £ £2,172,095 funding from the Levelling up funding (2023-2025) for UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and £709,681 Rural England Prosperity funding (REPF). This funding has been used to deliver much needed town centre master planning and improvements in Market Harborough and Lutterworth. REP funding was specifically for agricultural or tourism businesses to develop, diversify, grow or bring something new to the market and this has been done through the Councils Rural Strategy and Action plan.

Some key projects, in addition to the master planning, have included creating a Cultural Quarter in Market Harborough town centre and working with The Canals and Rivers Trust to rebuild a tow-path and promote a local tourist attraction. Foxton Locks

Alternative Service Delivery Models for both front and back-office services.

In 2022, The council brought its Customer Contact Centre back in house and procured the Netcall system as a channel shift solution. This has allowed for a "Digital by Preference" service model for customer contact, allowing more Online and self-service options to be developed and rolled out. The use of Netcall's functionality will be further developed across the whole organisation and has already enabled service delivery changes in other areas of the council. For example:

- Regulatory Services issue a variety of different licences, permits and registrations and has improved the online application functionality
- Significant development has also taken place in partnership with our waste contractor, FCC, to enable the use of Netcall and WhiteSpace technologies resulting in all online forms on the Council website and calls for service (via Netcall) to be fully integrated into the FCC management system. All service demands are raised within FCC without the need for any involvement of Council staff. The AI also checks all addresses where issues have been raised by the customer to see if there are other outstanding matters from the household. This has resulted in significant efficiencies and improvement to customer services.

The Customer Services team are exploring ways that the AI modules within the TalkDesk system can help customer service advisors to answer queries quicker and more effectively, and transcribe key points from conversations with customers, speeding up note taking and allowing more time to be focussed on customers and less on administration.

The Council strives to deliver excellent customer services and the Digital by preference model is helping to do this. Customer satisfaction shows, so far in 2024/25, 88% of customers score our online services between 7-10 (out of 10). With 63% scoring the service at 10 out of 10. Sign-ups to the Customer Newsletter have been encouraged through the customer contact centre and have increased significantly in recent months from 1,536 in December 23 to 7,166 in June 24.

Income Maximisation*. The Council already secures fees and charges from its' activities, as can be seen in the latest budget Fees and Charges details in the budget. Through applying a more commercial approach the Council aims for full cost recovery for the services it provides, unless a subsidised rate has been agreed or it is limited on the fees it can charge. The council is utilising the Local Partnerships commercialisation toolkit as part of its review of services to look at future opportunities. Green bin collections, trade waste, CCTV and Lifeline services are all under review in 2024 to ensure that they remain cost neutral to the council and provide value for money for the customer.

The Council has an excellent record for collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and is part of the Leicestershire Revenues and Benefits Partnership. Council Tax collection rates in 2023/24 were at 98.4%, which was a slight improvement on 2022/23 and ranks the council at 6th place for our CIPFA grouping. The Councils Business Rate collection rate was 98.65% in 2022/23, again performing well against our CIPFA Neighbours at 5th place, with revenues increasing year on year. In 2023/24, £63.79m Gross Revenue was collected compared to £50.88m in 2022/23 Gross Revenue. This was an increase of 25% between the two years. The gross income is shared amongst all preceptors, with the Council share being approx. 40%, further securing the councils financial position and sustainability in the medium term.

Collaboration and Partnerships – including Locally led Reform. The Council works in partnership in the following areas Revenues and Benefits, Building Control, Disabled Facilities Grants (Lightbulb) and Parking Enforcement Services (which is managed by the Council on behalf of 5 authorities). In addition, the council works collaboratively with partners across the local area in a strategic growth partnership, a waste partnership, a resilience partnership and a Community Safety Partnership. The council also commissions services on Internal Audit and Procurement (Welland) from other councils. The council is leading on the "Flex D" project for all Leicestershire authorities on the procurement of electric charging hubs across the county

Become an organisation to champion change. The Council will continue to support initiatives such as the District Councils Network (DCN) so that local district councils have a voice - there is strong collaboration across Leicestershire district authorities.

Use of Technology

Continue to enhance data-driven operational and strategic decision making, alongside continuous Performance management. The council captures both corporate and service performance through the Pentana Risk System - data in the system is used to support business cases, benefits realisation and monitor productivity. Corporate plans are monitored through the system and dashboards created for key areas and topics, such as Climate Change to monitor progress on the commitment to be net Zero by 2030.

Measuring productivity - We measure productivity by benchmarking our performance and costs against local/national PIs, such as LG inform and CIPFA, and have a significant number of services in the upper quartile of performance nationally, such as non-major planning, Finance, complaints. We actively and regularly participate in the LGA's sector led improvement process and several of our senior officers assist in undertaking Corporate Peer Reviews across the country, bringing back ideas as well as sharing good practice.

Performance is monitored by Cabinet and Scrutiny on a quarterly basis and the management team meet regularly to discuss the delivery of projects and the key activities in the Corporate Plan. All Heads of Service and Corporate Directors have dashboards within Pentana which identify any areas of concern. Members also have access to this information and the information is reported to Portfolio Holders monthly.

Corporate Management Team (CMT) review quarterly the corporate risk register, and this is also scrutinised by the Audit and Standards Committee. All risk management sits within the Pentana Risk System. Service level risks also are recorded within Pentana and these can be escalated to the Corporate Risk Register when required.

The Council's Major Projects are managed by the corporate Programme Manager and a recently established team of four project managers. They record and monitor performance of projects and the programme using Smartsheet and Pentana. There is Programme Board oversight with regular highlight reports where project issues, decisions and risks are recorded. Cabinet members are regularly updated on the programme as a whole. The councils internal Project Management approach can be found at Project Management Guide .

The councils Performance Management and Risk Management Frameworks can be found at Performance Management Framework and Risk and Opportunity Management Framework and the latest reported performance report can be found here Cabinet July 2024

Investment in Technology and data. The Council sees the investment in technology as a key enabler of a modern, efficient and effective organisation. The Councils ICT Strategy Information Communication Technology Strategy (harborough.gov.uk) started the council on a Cloud first approach post Covid. Several legacy systems have been or are scheduled to become cloud based. Improvements in the use of Netcall and enhancements to the website are helping to automate services, with a rolling programme of services requests being accessible 24/7 such projects include the introduction of the Iken Legal system, Tech One Finance system, Netcall for Customer Services, Smartsheet for project management, Pentana Risk for management information on risk and performance and CMIS for Committee management and report writing. The council has also recently brought a licence for the CACI System of Acorn Data mapping to help improve our data intelligence in targeting services and hopes to utilise this to evidence decisions on service delivery and measure outcomes.

The Council successfully took part in the Department for Levelling Up's Proptech Round 2 Project in 2022. This provided funding for the development of software to support the assessment of potential sites. The enhanced software was piloted through a public consultation and received useful feedback

Sharing data: The council has several information sharing protocols including the work with the County Council around the arrangements for Homes for Ukraine. In total 180 households in Harborough District were offered a home under the scheme. By sharing information on the scheme applicants, the Council were able to work directly with residents to complete property checks and give ongoing support for guests such as job clubs, housing advice, emergency welfare and support groups.

Wasteful spends

Whilst the letter from the Minister suggested that wasteful spend be considered within the Productivity Plan, the areas covered by this section are not considered wasteful. The Council has for some years been reviewing its spending to ensure its financial sustainability for the medium term. It has undertaken several budget reviews to look for efficiencies and savings and has removed waste and inefficiency each time it has reviewed services. It is a continual process, and the Council considers that the remaining services, whilst still accepting that efficiency can always be looked for, are now at a point that further savings cannot be made without impacting on service delivery and performance. In some case, such as Development Management, efficiencies were made that have now had to be reversed as they had significant negative impacts on performance levels. The Council always considers the value for money in the use of its resources when making decisions on potential changes. The Council has a balanced budget over the medium term but will continue to look for efficiencies and better ways to deliver services for the residents to achieve value for money and to maximise the impact of its spending.

Shared office functions: the council currently shares its offices with Leicestershire County Council (Library and Museum, Adult Social Care and Education Services, Registrars), the Department for Work and Pensions and commercial premises (offices and a café) – this brings in a valuable rental stream and makes our offices a local public services hub. Following more agile working practices being implemented post covid, a review is being undertaken to further develop underutilised areas of the building.

Ensure the council remains financially secure in the long term. **–** the Council Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy is reviewed annually and monitored quarterly via Cabinet - the latest monitoring reports can be found at Cabinet Meeting July 2024
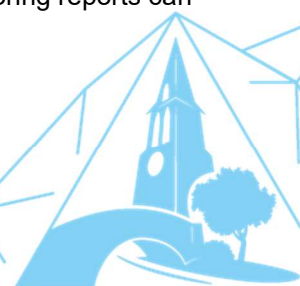
The council continues to work on several invest to save schemes, including;

- Identifying a potential site for a waste depot land acquisition, which could increase competition to deliver the Councils waste service for its next contract procurement
- The purchase of new housing stock to support the growing demand for temporary accommodation and reduce costs of homelessness, removing the need for expensive Bed and Breakfast provisions
- Investments in technology to support more agile ways of working

EDI work - The council employs a part time Equalities & Diversity Officer (E&D), who is also the Safeguarding Lead. The E&D Officer runs approximately six new starter induction sessions per year which covers, Equality, Diversity and Mandatory Safeguarding training. There is also mandatory regular online E&D and Safeguarding learning for all staff, which forms part of an overall learning package. The approximate cost to deliver E&D training in person and online is £1,000 per year. The council considers that the investment in this area is essential and is a relatively small cost to the organisation, which strives to be fair and equal for residents and staff. The councils Equality statement can be found at, [Equality Plan](#) and Equality impact assessments are listed here [Equality Impact Assessment](#)

Establishment & agency cost In 2023/24 the council's total spending was £9,481,270, which was below the budget set by Council, full details of establishment and agency costs can be found here, [Budget Report (Council)](#) As mentioned earlier, the council has been through a period of instability in the senior management team, which has now been resolved and as such the cost of interim appointments and agency staff will be much lower from 2024/25 onwards. However, the need to employ consultants to deliver the work required on our new local plan for submission by the government's deadline will continue during 24/25 and 25/26. The Council also has difficulty recruiting to some areas of the business such as Finance and Legal Services, and as such will rely on interim appointments to ensure the councils business continuity.

The cost of Trade Union activity is negligible, but again essential for the smooth running of the council. In 2022/23, 0.003% of the total staff budget was paid on trade union time and facilitates the ongoing excellent relationship with unions which helps new policies and strategies to be implemented smoothly. This is published annually and can be found at [Trade union facilities time](#)

Barriers

The Council always endeavours to find solutions to the problems it faces. However, the influence that a local council can have is limited and as such the areas below would benefit from some wider central government or market intervention to help find solutions or prevent problems from arising in future.

Short term annual funding agreements Government Annual Financial Settlements do not allow for longer term planning or financial stability**.** To be more effective and efficient longer term multi-year funding security is essential.

Borrowing & Investment policies Make changes to restrictions on borrowing for all councils and set boundaries for all to follow to allow investment in key projects that would result in efficiencies and service improvements for resident.

Additional Government Funding/programmes – ie UKSPF Additional government funded projects have short timelines of application, usually preventing any pre work on bids. Funding bids for more than one grant also puts pressure on resources needed to deliver projects. The parameters specified also make it hard to deliver local need rather than central priorities and any bids are done at risk as funding is not guaranteed. This is a big risk for smaller authorities as bid preparation is time consuming and costly, and potentially wasteful if the bid is unsuccessful. A further review of the grant's regime is needed, combined funding streams and clearer allocations would be beneficial and provide increased certainty which would lead to better value for money and productivity.

Resources and Staff The Council, like most Local Authorities, has significant issues on recruitment and retention for certain professions. Central Government could promote the careers and opportunities in Local Government further, recognising the essential role it plays in the delivery of front-line services, potentially through supported training posts, and especially in key areas such as Legal, Finance and Planning.

Work Collaboratively with suitable partners to reduce barriers Whilst the Council does have numerous partnerships and collaborations, Central Government could remove some regulations that govern this and collective purchasing to allow for the partnerships and joint commissioning to be easily achieved and not overly bureaucratic. Data sharing agreements are occasionally difficult to get agreement to, central governments intervention in this area to ease the concerns over data sharing would help more collaborative approaches to service delivery and increase value for money and productivity.

Implementing new legislation – Central Government policy change across the whole sector, with set dates and deadlines can lead to all authorities competing for the same services and resources at the same time. The Local Planning process and the release of the regulations for the NPPF is a good example of this. This can mean that resources have an inflated price, resources are scarce so there is limited opportunity for reducing costs and achieving best value. A more immediate example is the introduction of Food Waste Collections, which will require new equipment and Fleet across the whole country all at the same time. New legislative burdens often don't have sufficient new burdens funding to implement the changes and in periods of high inflation costs these initial forecasted spends can quickly increase and funding is not increased at the same level, leading to further financial burdens on authorities. New burdens need to be fully funded to enable Local Government to continue to deliver on new services, as it has demonstrated consistently that it can and has done in the past.

Procurement Furthermore, due to restrictive procurement rules and the perceived difficult processes required, local and smaller suppliers may feel precluded from tendering. Greater flexibility is needed to encourage small and medium enterprises to access the framework agreements, without expensive outlays and time-consuming processes. In some cases, there is not a current market available for a new initiative, as the market has not developed sufficiently to provide the services required. An example of this is the insurance requirement for Green EV community carpools. In other areas the cost of new technology is prohibitive, for example Electric Waste Collection vehicles. Whilst the council would welcome the opportunity to introduce these where it could, the costs are too high at present to demonstrate value for money and the range not suitable for rural communities who travel long distances. This is a significant opportunity missed in the new food waste collection requirements.

Investment in infrastructure funding to facilitate growth The limited funds at upper tier authorities has a significant impact on the development of housing numbers and growth. Central Government could provide access to a forward funding finance solution for upper tier authorities to access whilst s106 resources are awaited, helping unlock delivery of infrastructure schemes and progressing growth. This is currently putting constraints on lower tier authorities to meet housing targets as developments are stalled due to site viability issues and the initial cost of infrastructure.

Review of constraints on some fee setting Fees and charges should reflect the resources taken to undertake the services delivered. This can vary from council to council and where constraints are put on fees, such as planning, full cost recovery cannot be achieved, the Council then bears the burden of the shortfall. More flexibility and freedoms to charge cost recovery fees would be helpful in addressing this.

Uncertainty and timing of Valuations on NNDR properties The Valuation Office can take a long time to put commercial properties on the Valuation list, and this is often without notice. The uncertainty for planning Business Rates income and the huge variation that can come quite late in the annual budget setting process makes sound financial management much more challenging. Better communications and notice of forthcoming additions to the valuation list would be very useful and support longer term planning instead of reactive budgeting.

In summary, the Council is committed to transformation of services, using technology and data to improve service delivery and driving savings through continuous improvement, all of which could be enhanced through the removal of these barriers and on-going engagement with Local Government.