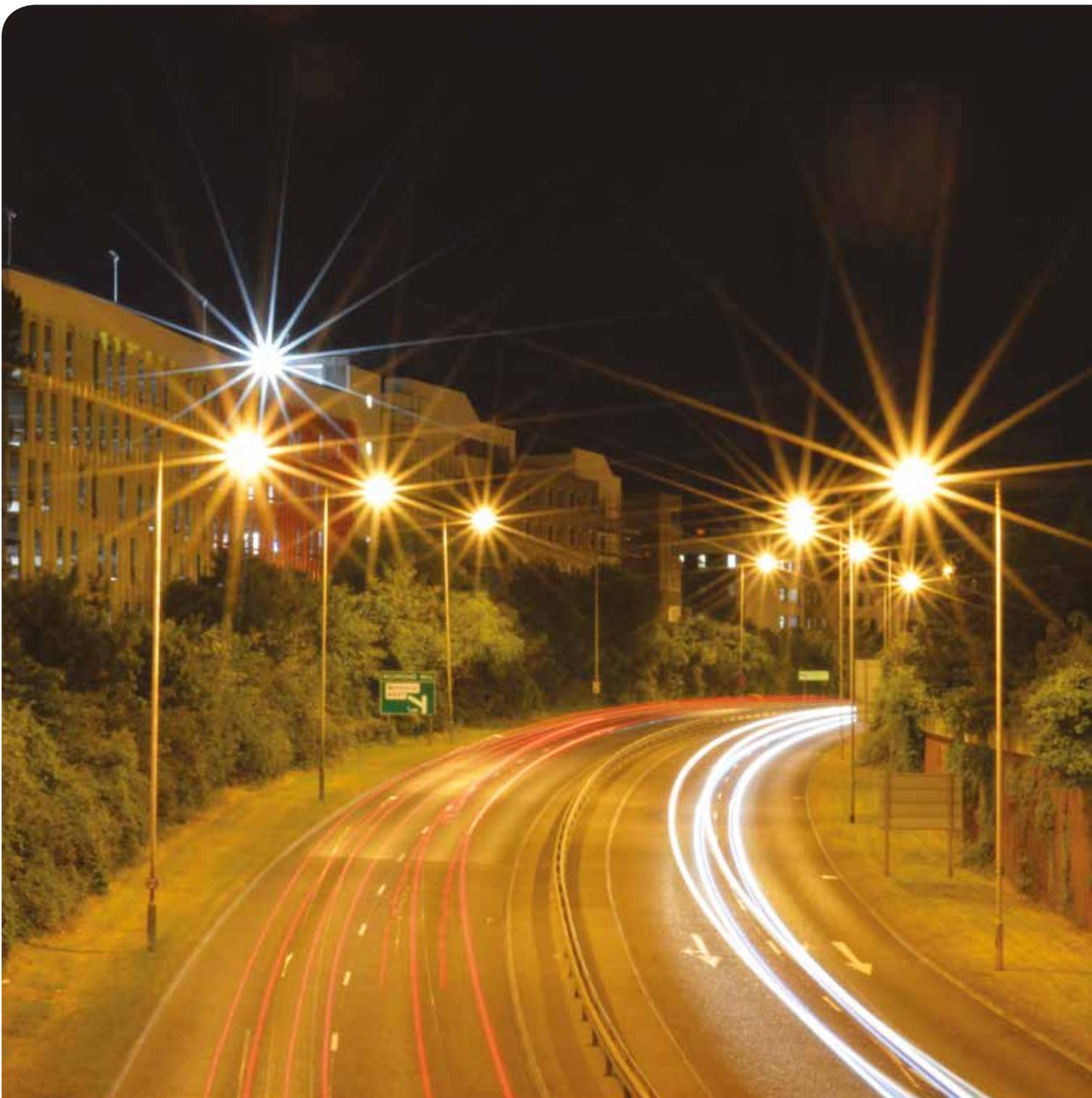


# Improvement and innovation

Best practice from Conservative  
local government



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# Introduction

This is the second edition of the Local Government Association (LGA) Conservative Group's best practice directory. I am delighted that we are once again able to highlight the innovative work of Conservative councils around the country and demonstrate how they are making a real difference to the lives of their local residents.

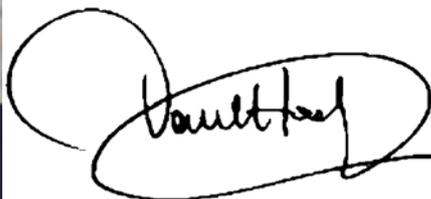
The case studies cover a wide range of policy areas and demonstrate how Conservative councils are supporting local businesses, helping to create jobs, providing training and employment opportunities, helping residents to get on the property ladder, protecting and enhancing local environments, supporting vulnerable residents and much more besides.

In an age of budgetary constraint, Conservative councils have also risen to the challenge of reductions in grant funding by working in partnership with other local authorities to reduce backroom costs and secure efficiencies through new ways of working. A common theme of such initiatives is that they can often improve services whilst simultaneously reducing costs.

The directory demonstrates that Conservative councils can be trusted to deliver high quality, value for money public services and also that being a Conservative councillor is a uniquely rewarding experience which allows you to make a real difference to your local community.

Further information on the case studies included in this directory, including contact details from the relevant councils, can be obtained from the Paul McCannah in the LGA Conservative Group: paul.mccannah@local.gov.uk or 020 7664 3254.

I hope that you find the document interesting and informative. If your council has a best practice example that is not included here please email us at lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk so that we can include it in the next edition of the directory.



**Cllr David Hodge**

Leader of the LGA Conservative Group

# Housing: getting homes built and helping people get on the property ladder



## Ashford Borough Council's ABC Lettings Scheme

Conservatives passionately believe in home ownership. We understand how good it feels when you have worked long hours, saved money for years and finally take possession of the keys to your first home.

However, for years, people have been finding it harder and harder to get on the housing ladder. Under Labour, housebuilding fell to its lowest peacetime level since the 1920s. Developers were building too few homes and the aftermath of the banking crisis saw young people struggling to raise a deposit.

Since 2010, the Government has introduced Help to Buy, making it much easier for people to secure a mortgage whilst the Right to Buy scheme has been reinvigorated, extending home ownership to a whole new generation of social tenants. As a result, over 200,000 people have been helped either on or up the housing ladder.

The 2015 Conservative Party manifesto set out proposals to build on this success, including a commitment to the construction of 200,000 Starter Homes which will be sold at a 20 per cent discount and which will be built exclusively for first time buyers under the age of 40.

The Conservative Government is committed to introducing a new Help to Buy ISA and extending the Right to Buy to housing associations.

Local government has a key role to play in delivering this agenda and in ensuring that there is enough housing to meet the aspirations of our residents. As such, Conservative councils across the country are working hard to attract the investment that meets local housing need in a sustainable manner whilst also supporting, through a range of innovative local schemes, those who wish to buy their own home.

**Ashford Borough Council** has formed ABC Lettings, a social lettings agency, to increase housing available within the private rented sector to households in the area.

This operates like a high street lettings agency but is focused on those people who may not otherwise be able to afford to rent in the private sector, with the council guaranteeing that the rent will be paid to the landlord.

ABC Lettings now successfully manages 59 properties. A recent promotional event to recruit more landlords into the scheme used an empty shop in the town centre as a lettings agency for one week, resulting in over 30 landlords expressing interest in the scheme.

Meanwhile, in December 2013 **Ashford Borough Council** purchased Christchurch House at auction and has subsequently transformed it into good quality short-stay accommodation for up to eight families for whom it has a homeless duty or who are being assessed.

This has reduced the need for bed and breakfast accommodation and during the five months since it opened the scheme has been fully utilised, helping 23 homeless families.

It is expected that the scheme will save the council around £75,000 a year, meaning that it will pay for itself in a short period of time.

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council** has developed a simple scheme, BFC My Home Buy, to help first time buyers. It enables local residents to identify a home that they want to buy (within agreed price parameters) which the council then purchases and sells back at least 50 per cent of the equity to the household. It charges a rent on the unsold equity which begins at 1 per cent and increases by a further 1 per cent each year until it reaches 5 per cent, at which point it is capped.

The scheme has supported the local housing market and generated a return on the council's investment. To date, 30 households have been helped to buy their home by the scheme.

**Daventry District Council** has completed the first phase of a development to build 45 new homes to be rented out to private tenants by the Daventry Estate Company Limited. The homes are built to high environmental standards and the 'Building for Life Gold Standard.'

House prices in East Hertfordshire are among some of the most expensive in the East of England, with mean prices in 2013 being £324,000 or 9.4 times mean annual earnings.

In recognition of the fact that there are first-time buyers in stable employment who cannot afford the level of deposit required by the banks, **East Herts District Council** decided to introduce a local authority mortgage scheme in association with Lloyds Bank.

The council's commitment is to underwrite 20 per cent of the 25 per cent deposit required and at the end of 2014 a total of 24 mortgage contracts had been secured through this scheme.

**Hillingdon Council** has reclaimed its 181st council house from tenants who were not using their home for their own personal use. Such action allows families in genuine need of a council house to move in. The council's housing investigation team follow up tip-offs and information from credit reference companies to thoroughly investigate claims of social housing fraud and the most serious cases are prosecuted.

**Kent County Council** has a proven track record when it comes to tackling long term empty properties. No Use Empty (NUE), the award winning and longest running empty property initiative across the UK is delivered by the council in partnership with all 12 district councils.

The overall aim is to substantially increase the number of long-term empty homes returned to use as good quality housing through a range of measures, including providing financial assistance to owners who want to refurbish empty homes and return them to use.

Since 2005, NUE has returned more than 3700 long-term empty properties back into use including providing £12 million in short-term secured interest free loans. Combined with owners' contributions, the total investment has now exceeded £28.6 million.

This initiative has also benefited local businesses and contractors, with the investment being spent on materials and helping to secure existing jobs or create new ones.

The council has shared its experience with the Scottish and Welsh Governments, both of whom have subsequently launched their own empty property initiatives.

In 2011, four councils in Kent – **Canterbury, Thanet<sup>1</sup>, Dover and Shepway** – established a single Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), East Kent Housing, for their 18,000 homes. This has significantly reduced costs for each of the councils involved and secured £175,000 in additional rent collected.

**Kettering Borough Council** has secured grant funding of £152,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency under its Empty Homes Programme. So far, the council has purchased five empty properties, four of which have been refurbished and let. The average length of time that the properties had previously stood empty for was 18 months. This has the dual benefit of providing affordable homes for local families and bringing empty properties, which are often the target of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, back into use.

**North Leicestershire Council** successfully helped more than 130 households in 2014 to avoid homelessness. The council's Housing Choices Team finds accommodation for homeless people whilst also working to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place by providing advice and mediation to people who are in danger of losing their home.

After taking control in 2010, the new Conservative administration in **Richmond-upon-Thames** created the role of Tenants' Champion in response to the large number of complaints that councillors were receiving from residents about their housing providers.

This has developed into a well-respected role with over 170 residents having been directly helped. At least a third of the cases relate to anti-social behaviour and the role has allowed the council to look strategically at how such cases are managed. Close relationships have been forged with key partners such as the police, mental health trust, voluntary sector, drug and alcohol support workers and housing associations to tackle the most complex problems.

**Stafford Council** has brought more than 60 empty properties back into use over a 15 month period. As well as providing housing for local people, this has secured New Homes Bonus funding from the Government and extra revenue in council tax.

The council has been working with homeowners to refurbish properties to either be sold on or rented out. One way in which it has helped bring properties back into use is through an 'Empty Homes Loan' scheme which provides interest free loans of up to £10,000. The loans are either paid back in full once the redeveloped property is sold on or in instalments over a period of two years if the owner chooses to rent the property out.

**St Albans City Council** is developing 10 under-utilised garage sites and other vacant land into 79 new homes for people on its housing register to rent. These are in addition to the 10 affordable homes that have been delivered on three former council-owned garage sites.

The council is also working to turn four sheltered housing schemes into modern affordable homes for rent by people of all ages and needs. It has already refurbished four other sheltered housing schemes in the area in partnership with housing associations.

<sup>1</sup> Thanet Council is now UKIP-controlled

# Reducing costs, improving outcomes



## Adur and Worthing Councils shared services

In 2010, the Government inherited a terrible financial mess from Labour and it is likely that public sector budgets will remain constrained for the foreseeable future.

In recent years Conservative councils have pioneered the development of partnerships with other authorities to reduce backroom costs and secure efficiencies through new ways of working. A common theme of such initiatives is they can often improve services whilst simultaneously reducing costs.

At the same time, councils have also demonstrated their ability to work with other public sector partners across a range of policy areas.

For example, research from Ernst and Young shows that, following the success of the pilots, rolling out community budgeting nationally could potentially save up to £20 billion over five years.

Meanwhile, the Troubled Families programme has already helped to turn around the lives of over 40,000 families, representing a potential saving to the taxpayer of £29,000 per family.

The case studies on the following pages show how, through an innovative approach to public service reform, Conservative councils are securing better outcomes for local residents.

**Adur** and **Worthing** district councils have saved local taxpayers £13.6 million since they first pioneered shared service working in 2008.

**Bexley Council** has signed a contract with **Kent County Council** for it to deliver registration services to its residents.

**Kent County Council** manages the day-to-day delivery of services and provides back office support, such as a centralised call centre and related ICT systems. As a large authority, Kent has more registration experts and the deal has resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of management guidance available to Bexley staff as well as improvements in service development and delivery.

User satisfaction levels regularly reach 95 per cent and Bexley has saved £40,000 per annum on management overheads whilst income levels have remained stable.

Meanwhile, **Bexley First** is a business transformation project which has consolidated 10 council offices into a single site and yielded over £10 million for investment in community facilities and schools in some of the most deprived wards. The transformation, which will save over £56 million by 2030, has also led to the development of almost 600 new homes.

Since 2012, **Chiltern** and **South Buckinghamshire** district councils have been working closely together to save money and improve services in both areas.

As a result of this partnership, both councils now share a chief executive. When combined with a rationalisation of senior management positions this has saved the two councils over £266,000 per year.

Other areas of joint working include sharing the same audit system and a joint fraud team which covers the whole of the south of Buckinghamshire.

**East Herts District Council** shares IT services with **Stevenage Borough Council**<sup>2</sup> which is yielding savings across the two councils of over £416,000 per annum.

2 Stevenage Borough Council is Labour-controlled.

East Kent Services, formed by **Canterbury**, **Thanet**<sup>3</sup> and **Dover** councils, is a combined joint working group overseeing customer services, revenues and benefits, human resources and IT. It has reduced costs for the partner councils, for example, by £900,000 in relation to joint procurement and by £696,000 in running costs, whilst maintaining excellent service levels.

**Gloucestershire County Council's** new payroll system has saved the council £250,000. The self-service programme offers super-fast processing and eliminates significant amounts of paperwork. The programme has also allowed the council to successfully offer its payroll service to external customers on a shared service basis.

A pioneering joint working partnership has been formed between **Hampshire County Council**, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and Hampshire Constabulary – the first example of its kind between three such public sector organisations in England. The partnership is projected to deliver combined savings of up to £4 million each year.

Central to its success is the Integrated Business Centre (IBC), which provides transactional and business support services in order to remove duplication, save money and increase future resilience. The IBC is now one of the largest transaction operations in the country and in July 2015 **Oxfordshire County Council** will join the partnership.

**Huntingdonshire District Council**, **South Cambridgeshire District Council** and **Cambridge City Council**<sup>4</sup> have agreed to share services across a range of areas.

Legal and ICT are shared between all three councils whilst there is a waste and recycling partnership between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire.

3 Thanet Council is now UKIP-controlled.

4 Cambridge City Council is Labour-controlled.

The three councils currently spend just over £6 million a year on ICT and it is expected that the joint working will save nearly £1 million. Further savings of over £250,000 are expected by joining up the councils' legal teams which will help share expertise and reduce the need for specialist external advice.

**Mendip District Council** has agreed to team up with four other local councils – **South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, Hart and Havant** – to explore whether savings could be made if they jointly bid for a new business support services contract. By working together in a joint procurement exercise contract they hope to secure greater competition, better prices and to wield greater collective influence over contractors.

The councils have secured £125,000 in funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government through a successful Transformation Challenge bid. It is estimated that they could jointly expect to make savings of at least £5 million over a seven-year period.

The creation of 'Shape Partnership Service – Law and Governance' is the result of **Mendip District Council** teaming up with **Taunton Deane Borough Council** and **West Somerset Council** to provide one shared legal service across the three authorities.

The new tri-council partnership is expected to deliver savings of between 10 per cent and 15 per cent for each of the councils in addition to improved customer service, decreased fixed costs and improved resilience and access to a greater level of professional expertise.

**North Hertfordshire District Council** has introduced new payment services to improve customers' experiences and save money. The system overhaul will produce savings of £20,000 per annum, make it easier and safer for residents to make payments whilst also providing a variety of different ways for them to do so.

**Northamptonshire County Council** and **Cambridgeshire County Council** have created a shared services partnership covering back office support services such as HR, procurement, IT and property management. As a result of this initiative the two councils have saved over £24 million in the last three years.

**Peterborough City Council** hosts a collective switching scheme which is run by iChoosr for a number of authorities. The scheme is designed to enable residents to 'group purchase' their energy tariffs resulting in savings on their bills. Thus far eight switching rounds have been completed, securing an average saving of £207 per household.

# Protecting the local environment and regenerating communities



## Trafford Council's #Be Responsible campaign

The condition of our local environment affects both our quality of life and the way that we behave. Areas that are untidy, disordered and neglected are not only visually unattractive but can also spiral into further decline. It is therefore critically important to tackle problems such as vandalism, graffiti and litter whilst also regenerating neglected areas.

At the same time, residents also expect waste and recycling services which are good value for money and which meet the needs of local communities.

We are therefore proud to showcase the examples below in order to demonstrate how Conservative councils are working hard to make their local areas cleaner, greener and more attractive places to live and work.

Waste collections, recycling services and street cleaning in **Chiltern** and **Wycombe** district councils are now being delivered by a new contractor, Serco.

The seven-year contract, which started in March 2013, is a new, joint working relationship between the two councils. It aims to improve service delivery, increase recycling rates in both areas to 60 per cent and improve street cleanliness. This represents a major change in service delivery and, by achieving joint savings of £1.2 million a year, it also demonstrates how collaboration between councils can bring tangible benefits for local residents.

The award-winning North Solihull Regeneration Programme has ensured that even in the recession Solihull was one of the few places where housebuilding and neighbourhood renewal continued. The programme has delivered a mix of social and affordable housing, replacement schools, new health centres and business units as a result of partnership working between **Solihull Council**, private housebuilders and Solihull Community Housing.

The recycling of council assets and the use of small areas of unused land has also led to the creation of new public facilities such as parks and community venues. The programme also includes the replacement of unsuitable 1960s properties, demolition of some tower blocks and improvements to other properties. Overall, it is delivering 4,000 new homes for rent or sale and improvement to some 14,000 properties in the Solihull area.

The pioneering Sleaford Renewable Energy Plant secured by **North Kesteven District Council** has entered commercial development as the first straw-burn combined heat and power plant in the UK, eight years after initially being proposed.

It will turn 240,000 tonnes of locally grown wheat straw into enough electricity to power 65,000 homes annually, pumping surplus heat and hot water into five local facilities for free, including the council offices and Sleaford Leisure Centre.

This development is an excellent example of a council working closely with developers to ensure community benefit. The plant is a £165 million investment generating an extra £9 million annually to the local economy whilst the operation is carbon neutral.

**Stratford-on-Avon District Council** is amongst the leading performers for recycling with rates of around 60 per cent. In surveys it consistently records over 90 per cent satisfaction from its residents.

The council has recently extended the range of materials that can be recycled, including roadside collection of 'WEEE' type electrical appliances, textiles and household batteries.

It has also been able to renegotiate its waste services and street cleansing contract to achieve savings of £400,000 per year as a result of increased rebates for the total waste sent to the materials recycling facility.

Fly-tipping, litter and dog fouling are the top three environment related complaints received by **Trafford Council**. The condition of the local environment has an impact on everybody who lives in, works and visits the borough and also on how local people feel about their area.

The #Be Responsible campaign seeks to tackle these problems by focusing on changing behaviour rather than issuing fixed penalty notices. For example, the popular 'Bling Your Bin' scheme helps people identify their own bin in areas where lack of recognition was leading to fly tipping and contaminated and stolen bins.

Residents bring their wheelie bins to be cleaned and spray painted for free with a unique personalised design. This has resulted in better ownership and retrieval of bins and has helped prevent many of the problems that were previously being experienced.

Working closely with key partners such as the Greater Manchester Police and Manchester United, as well as community groups and residents' associations, the team has organised over 100 local events and engaged with more than 4,200 residents, visitors and businesses.

This new approach has yielded dramatic results with, for example, complaints about dog fouling falling by 30 per cent. Across the borough some of the most problematic areas for fly-tipping and litter are now places that residents feel proud to live in.

**Trafford Council** has also received a positive response from residents to its new weekly food and garden waste recycling service, with non-recyclable waste collection rates on target to decrease by 60 per cent by 2016.

The new collection service will save the council £1 million a year by reducing the amount of waste being sent to landfill. The council has also involved a local primary school to create a short film explaining the changes to the recycling and refuse process.

**The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead** has increased the number of community wardens from 14 full time equivalent posts to 18 since 2011. The wardens visit schools, day centres, businesses and liaise closely with other agencies and departments within the borough to try to solve problems in the community as quickly and efficiently as possible whilst also providing a visible, reassuring presence.

In addition to the growth in numbers, there has been a focus on providing the wardens with the necessary training to enhance their ability to help residents. Following the appropriate training the wardens are now able to enforce a variety of powers. For example, in 2013/2014 they issued 512 fixed penalty notices for litter offences and are also able to intervene in school and disabled parking disputes.

Meanwhile, following a successful pilot the **Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead** allows residents to inform the council of any illicit actions such as unauthorised tree felling, planning contraventions and late night noise, as they are taking place rather than having to wait for normal office hours. For an annual cost to the council of just £30,000 a duty team of experienced officers is on call on a rota basis. Not only does this service give local people the chance to speak urgently to the council about issues that are immediate but it also acts as a deterrent to illegal activity.

Wellingborough Norse, an environmental services company established by **Wellingborough Council**, has generated a surplus of more than £250,000 for the council in its first year of operation as well as improving local service standards and employing local people.

The company was formed as a joint venture between the council and Norse Commercial Services to take on responsibility for a range of duties including emptying 34,000 wheelie bins each week, keeping streets clean, removing fly tipping and graffiti, preparing and maintaining graves, looking after public toilets and taking care of parks and open spaces.

The venture allows the council to keep significant control over the services it delivers whilst also benefiting from half the profits generated. Over the course of the ten-year contract it is expected to save the council several million pounds as a result of profit sharing, increased buying power, reduced costs and increased income from recycling.

# Driving the economic recovery: supporting local enterprise and getting Britain working again



## Bournemouth Town Centre regeneration

Five years ago, Britain was reeling from the chaos of Labour's Great Recession. In 2014, by contrast we were the fastest growing of all the advanced economies – we grew 75 per cent faster than Germany, three times faster than the Eurozone and seven times faster than France.

Industries are coming back to life. Companies are striding into new markets. Manufacturers are returning to our shores. More tech companies are starting up here than anywhere else in Europe.

We have overtaken France as the third largest car producer in Europe and there are 760,000 more businesses than in 2010, all creating jobs and wealth across the country.

Locally, Conservative councils have played their part in the economic recovery by supporting local businesses, working proactively to attract jobs and investment to their areas, procuring services locally, paying their bills on time and providing jobs and opportunities for residents.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are not unique and can take many forms. However, the Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV) partnership between **Bournemouth Borough Council** and Morgan Sindall Investments, embodied in a 50:50 investment in the Bournemouth Development Company (BDC), is one of the most innovative and forward-thinking PPPs in the country, and represents an exemplar for other local authorities who are considering ways of unlocking value in surplus assets.

Based on a 20 year period, and with a development value of £500 million, the BDC is undertaking a wholesale regeneration of the town centre, constructing much needed affordable housing and student accommodation, and improving the transport infrastructure.

The proven success of the BDC has catalysed the business community into channelling more investment in the area.

With £50 million of development completed, £160 million currently in the construction phase and £300 million in the pipeline in the next three years, Bournemouth Town Centre has seen an unprecedented level of development activity. Perhaps what is most striking is that there was very little inward investment in the so called boom years of 2002-2007. All of this has been achieved in one of the most challenging funding climates, outside London, for a generation.

In 2008 **Bournemouth Borough Council** established the annual Bournemouth Air Festival. Now in its seventh year and drawing in over one million spectators from around the world, the festival injects over £25 million into the local economy. Building on this success, 2014 saw the inaugural Bournemouth Wheels Festival which drew in thousands of visitors over a three day period and generated over £9 million for the local economy.

Thousands of the most rural homes and businesses in the Cotswolds will soon be able to access ultra-fast broadband after **Gloucestershire County Council** agreed terms on a new roll-out contract worth £10 million. The deal with Gigaclear will hook up

6,495 properties to internet connections with upload and download speeds of up to 1Gbps.

Putting Kent on a path to long-term sustainable growth requires businesses of all sizes to reach their full potential. However, businesses looking to expand often run into problems as they may have to move beyond areas of existing expertise. Likewise, new businesses with potential can lack the expertise to construct their business plan and raise the finance they need to get going.

In response, **Kent County Council** funds the 'High Growth Kent' service through Business Support Kent CiC. Its coaches are recruited from business to provide expertise when it is needed and in whatever capacity to overcome the barriers to growth experienced by start-ups and small businesses. The project has created over 500 new jobs and generated in excess of £30 million in investment over the last three years. It has also provided tailored support to businesses benefitting from the council's Regional Growth Fund business finance schemes and access to companies with potential to the Growth Accelerator programme.

In 2011 the Conservatives took control of **Northampton Borough Council** for the first time in 24 years. Since then it has kick-started over 40 regeneration projects, including a new railway station, a new bus station and new university accommodation. It has also been awarded an Enterprise Zone which has created hundreds of new jobs.

Working with its Local Enterprise Partnership, Herts Regional College and WENTA (a local enterprise association) **East Herts District Council** has invested £35,000 in establishing an incubator unit on the Ware campus of Herts Regional College. This provides early support to business start-ups, including: hot-desking, PC and broadband facilities, specialist legal and financial advice and business training and networking events.

**North Dorset District Council** has been highly commended by the Federation of Small Businesses in its annual Wessex Regional Awards for the assistance it gives to local small businesses. Initiatives highlighted included a £57,000 fund to stimulate economic growth, integrating economic development with planning services and promoting government funded schemes to help those businesses affected by the storms last winter.

Rushmoor Employment and Skills Zone (RESZ) creates employment opportunities in the **Rushmoor Borough Council** area and supports local people to improve their skills, aspirations and opportunities.

For example, when Costco came to Rushmoor they worked with RESZ to develop a training and employment plan which included a commitment to help residents from the most deprived parts of the borough to secure employment. As a result of that project 150 new jobs were created, of which 65 per cent came from Rushmoor.

The Conservatives retained control of **Staffordshire County Council** in the 2013 local elections. This was a tremendous achievement since prior to them taking control in 2009 the council had been controlled by Labour for 28 years.

The Conservatives campaigned hard on their record of supporting the local economy, with a key success being persuading Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) to build its new engine plant in South Staffordshire.

When JLR approached the council there was a great site – i54 alongside the M54 – but no motorway junction. Within days of the approach a partnership had been formed between the county council, **Wolverhampton City Council**<sup>5</sup> and **South Staffordshire District Council** to secure the investment.

Within three weeks the key decisions were taken, using localism powers, to jointly fund the junction, with the county council investing £25 million.

This commitment secured JLR's initial £355 million investment in the site, creating 750 jobs. The company was astounded by the speed with which the councils reacted to their expression of interest and cited this as a key reason for choosing the site.

Since then, JLR has announced a further extension with another 700 jobs, making a total of 1450 new high skilled jobs in the recently opened factory, significantly helping the local, regional and national economies.

**West Lindsey District Council** has introduced the 'Gainsborough Growth Fund' to help create new jobs in the area. Grants and loans worth between £10,000 and £100,000 will be given to new or existing businesses. The fund has been split into two sections, 'Feasibility and Planning' and 'Development.' The former offers grants of up to £10,000 to help cover professional fees and technical costs for developing sites and premises or technology which would help growth. The latter provides grants or loans of between £10,000 and £100,000 to support capital investments for sites, premises and purchasing equipment.

5 Wolverhampton City Council is Labour-controlled

# Providing opportunities for young people and supporting families



## Kent County Council apprenticeship programme

Supporting children and young people and their families is a key priority for both the Government and Conservative councils.

This encompasses a massive agenda, including improving educational attainment, ensuring that vulnerable children lead safe and happy lives and providing the necessary training to allow young people to enter the jobs market with the skills that they need.

Over the past five years, the number of apprenticeships has reached record levels – 2.2 million – and more people are going to university than at any time in history.

As the examples below demonstrate, Conservative councils are working hard to provide real opportunities for our children and young people.

**Bexley Council's** 'Local College First' (LCF) programme provides a long-term education choice for young adult learners with learning disabilities. Before LCF the majority of the borough's young adult learners with high needs took up placements at residential colleges outside the borough. The LCF encompasses education, life skills and work experiences for young people in their own community and encourages greater independence.

Adopt Berkshire will see **Bracknell Forest Council** and three other Berkshire councils – the **Royal Borough of Windsor** and **Maidenhead, West Berkshire Council** and **Wokingham Borough Council** – working together to provide adoption services for both children seeking homes and for families looking to adopt.

The new service aims to increase the number of older children and siblings being adopted, as well as improving training and support for prospective parents.

A key benefit of having a shared service covering a wide geographical areas is that a larger range of prospective parents can be recruited, including couples, lone carers and more mature carers who can offer a loving family. It will also enable the best practice that previously existed separately within the four authorities to be pooled.

A new provider is serving up freshly cooked meals from locally sourced quality ingredients to schoolchildren in Gloucestershire. Following the agreement with **Gloucestershire County Council**, Caterlink provide 17,000 meals accredited to the Food for Life Gold Standard to 185 primary schools each day.

**Hertfordshire County Council** has announced an innovative plan to improve the lives of families after being awarded £4.86 million for children's social care. This is the largest grant given to a council from the Government's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme.

The money will fund a new project focusing on the highest-risk children and families with the aim of keeping the families together and improving the children's health and educational outcomes.

It will also enable the council to extend the work of safeguarding teams to work alongside community psychiatric nurses, domestic abuse specialists, schools, children's centres, health visitors, police officers and the voluntary sector to ensure that children have the opportunity to live in a caring home where they can thrive and prosper.

**Kent County Council** has an excellent record in engaging with those young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), with over 11,260 young people aged 16-24 now engaged in apprenticeships.

For example, via the Kent Apprenticeships programme the council offers grants of up to £2000 to businesses who take on a young person aged 18-24 who has been claiming out-of-work benefits. The programme has been set up as a flexible grant fund to encourage local businesses to take on young unemployed people and meet their skill needs. This has generated over 450 apprenticeship starts.

Internally, the council is continuing to develop its own apprenticeship scheme, recruiting over 100 apprentices each year. It has also changed its recruitment policy so that apprentices can be recruited to a range of positions and progress within the authority.

**Kent County Council**, in partnership with Coram, has significantly improved adoption options for both children and adopters. For example, 145 children were adopted between April and March 2014, almost 38 per cent higher than the same period in 2013. In addition, 167 adopter households were approved in 2014, compared to 87 households for the same period in 2013, a 92 per cent increase. A multi-disciplinary team is now providing post-adoption support to adopted children and their families.

This successful partnership has now been formalised through the establishment of a voluntary adoption agency, Coram Kent, which will bring together the best skills, expertise and resources from the voluntary and public sectors to further develop post-adoption support services and achieve improved outcomes for children in the care system.

**Swindon Council's** Learning Pathways website has been created to provide details of learning options available to post-16 year olds. With information about qualifications, full-time courses, alternative learning, apprenticeships and links to other useful sites, the website provides a central resource to allow young people to fully explore their options.

**Lincolnshire County Council's** 'Birth to Five Service' works to improve outcomes for young children and their families by ensuring that good quality early years education and childcare is accessible across the county. There is a particular focus on children that live in areas of disadvantage in order to reduce inequalities in child development and school readiness.

The service provides mentoring, challenge, support, training and information to all early year providers in Lincolnshire, including schools, pre-schools, nurseries, children's centres, registered child minders and, as appropriate, to out of school provision.

An indication of its success is that in 2014 67.3 per cent of Lincolnshire pupils achieved the 'good level of development' measure in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile.

**Northamptonshire County Council** is to invest £1 million in a new school improvement programme in a bid to make it one of the highest performing councils for education by 2020.

'Race To The Top' will involve top performing schools in Northamptonshire being asked to share good practice and businesses providing mentoring and work placement opportunities.

Schools will also use the latest research on pupil performance to create a new format for the school day by looking at start times, the number of breaks and longer days. They will also set challenging targets for all pupils and work with voluntary and independent organisations to provide after-school clubs focusing on excellence in sport, culture and work-readiness.

An innovative Strategic Education and Skills Partnership Board will be created to lead the programme, bringing together education and business leaders.

Meanwhile, **Northamptonshire County Council's** new Social Work Academy has been praised by the Government's Chief Social Worker for Children and Families.

Isabelle Trowler visited the Academy in April 2015 to find out more about the training and support it offers to newly-qualified social workers and to meet the first group of graduates due to complete the programme in the summer.

Ms Trowler commented: "Visiting the Social Work Academy was fascinating. Newly established, it is truly innovative in its approach and has the potential to radically change how newly-qualified social workers are supported. Having received intensive on the job coaching, social workers spoke of their very positive experience and their readiness to take their next steps into practice. They are a great team with a strong focus on getting it right for children and families."

The council launched the Academy in October 2014 with the aim of recruiting the best newly-qualified social workers to work in Northamptonshire by offering a year-long intensive training and support programme as well as a competitive salary.

Graduates spend the first six months of the academy in a dedicated learning environment with a minimum of one day a week working within a social work team. For the second half of the programme, they are based mostly in the field with structured support from the academy.

**North Yorkshire County Council** is the first council to take the Troubled Families model and make it a mainstream approach for children and young people services. The new Prevention Service has adopted the Troubled Families model of one plan and one dedicated worker for each family in need and will use it to deliver the whole of its 0-19 programme.

Prevention teams will provide highly targeted, consistent and effective support on the ground at times when families are most in need in order to prevent problems escalating. The new service builds on the successful Developing Stronger Families scheme which turned round the lives of 845 families.

**Solihull Council's** successful 'Step Up' programme works with local businesses to inspire young people about their future career opportunities. The businesses have signed up to work with schools on a range of activities designed to provide young people with realistic aspirations, an understanding of the workplace and career opportunities and, crucially, good information and advice about the skills that they need to be ready for work.

Activities include visits to companies and taster days in working environments, business mentoring to provide one-to-one counselling, help with CVs and interview techniques and a programme of apprenticeship and career fairs for students and their families.

Now in its second year, the programme has played a major role in bringing down youth unemployment, particularly in those parts of the borough that have traditionally suffered from generational unemployment.

**Surrey County Council** is focused on improving the prospects of young people. Starting working life with a criminal record can severely limit opportunities and lead to further offending. That is why, in partnership with Surrey Police, it has introduced the Youth Restorative Intervention (YRI) initiative.

YRI is a restorative approach, not an easy option. Specialists work with both victims and offenders to understand what happened in each case, exploring underlying causes and impacts. Those involved are encouraged and supported to reach an agreement to repair the harm that has been done and restore respect. Where this is completed satisfactorily no formal criminal sanction is imposed.

In the last five years there has been a 90 per cent reduction in the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time. This means that 5000 fewer young people in Surrey have entered adulthood with a criminal record and can apply for college or go to job interviews without having to disclose a criminal offence.

As well as improving outcomes for young people, local communities are also reaping the benefits as there has been a 52 per cent reduction in youth crime since 2010 and a £4.2 million saving as a result of keeping offenders out of the criminal justice process.

**Surrey County Council** is creating 200 apprenticeships by making them a condition of securing contracts with the authority. Last financial year, over 140 organisations committed to filling the 198 apprenticeships that have been created so far. In combination with corporate apprentices and grants awarded to employers for taking on Surrey young people as apprentices, 715 apprenticeships starts were achieved during 2014/15. Places have been created across sectors including social care, vehicle maintenance and hospitality.

The Government has estimated that across the 'tri-borough' councils of **Westminster City Council**, the **Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea** and **Hammersmith and Fulham**<sup>6</sup>, there are 1540 troubled families who cost the taxpayer £150 million.

In response, the three councils launched the Family Recovery Programme in 2013. This provides a service to families with issues in relation to youth offending, anti-social behaviour, poor school attendance, exclusion and unemployment.

This has turned around the lives of 1,123 people since its launch, with successes including more than 80 per cent of children increasing their school attendance and more tenancies secured (avoiding costly evictions). For every £1 invested, £2 has been saved for the taxpayer.

<sup>6</sup> Following the 2014 elections, Hammersmith and Fulham is Labour-controlled.

# Looking after the elderly and vulnerable and delivering excellent social care



## Bexley Council's Moving On scheme

Social care is going through a period of major change. From the passing of the Health and Social Care Act in 2012 to the exciting opportunities offered by the Better Care Fund, councils have had to demonstrate flexibility in response to rapidly changing circumstances.

Demand for social care is continually rising due to demographic changes which mean that people are living longer than ever but often with complex needs. The LGA estimates that 38 per cent of the population will be over 50 by 2019, and that proportion will continue to increase.

Building on the introduction of the Better Care Fund, Conservative local government has stepped up to the challenge and is leading the way in delivering new models of social care which are co-ordinated around the needs of the individual.

As the examples below demonstrate, they are also helping people to plan for later life and stay out of the system, thus enabling them to live independent lives for as long as possible.

Moving home can be challenging, especially for those who need extra support. To make the process easier, **Bexley Council's** 'Moving On' team comprises staff who have a particular expertise in helping people with learning difficulties to find suitable accommodation.

Choosing the right type of housing, finding a home and getting the right mix of support is crucial. Each person is assessed to determine the level of support they require and there are various options to choose from. Some people choose to live independently with the help of support workers whilst others live with family or friends. Telecare (special equipment such as monitors, sensors and alarms) also helps many people to live independently.

At the beginning of the programme, which has now been running for over a year, 5 self-contained flats were opened. These were quickly filled with people who had been living in residential care but who wanted greater control over their lives. To date there have been 26 successful moves which have resulted in a saving of nearly £1 million for the council and, more importantly, helped those involved to live more independently.

**Buckinghamshire County Council** faces growing cost pressures from the increasingly complex needs of an ageing population. In response, it has developed a preventative social care model that supports people to live independently in their own homes for longer.

The new model can save as much as £13,900 per user per annum based on the avoidance of adverse conditions, including preventing depression, hospital admissions and entry into care. This is against an estimated cost of £1,000 per person for delivering the service.

Hundreds of the county's residents will be helped to return to their homes after **Essex County Council** signed four new contracts to encourage independent living.

The contracts will see four dedicated residential reablement units established across the county, enabling residents to, for example, avoid moving from hospital into residential care.

The units, where residents will be able to stay for up to six weeks in preparation for returning home, will help them regain skills and confidence following an illness, accident or disability.

Residents will be given the support needed to tackle everyday tasks such as preparing meals, managing medications, personal care, shopping and laundry. The new units will allow social care teams to refer up to 800 residents a year.

**Hampshire County Council** has formed an innovative partnership with PA Consulting to offer comprehensive telecare services to local residents. PA Consulting are responsible for all aspects of the telecare service including promotion, assessment, installation, monitoring and maintenance. Just under 2000 installations took place in the first year, resulting in better outcomes for the users and a net saving for the council.

**Hertfordshire County Council** works in close partnership with its district councils to secure improvements in residents' health and wellbeing and has distributed £200,000 of its public health budget to the councils. In response, **East Herts District Council** has allocated a further £200,000 from its New Homes Bonus priority reserve fund to support this work. The funding supports initiatives such as supporting those with dementia to live in their own homes and sport and physical activity programmes for the over-50s.

Meanwhile, **Hertfordshire County Council** has been awarded £500,000 for its 'Healthy and Active in Herts' programme, one of just 16 successful grants across the country. This will be matched by £200,000 by the council, £300,000 from Herts Valley and East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Groups and £25,000 from **Broxbourne Borough Council**.

Healthy and Active in Herts is a unique three year programme in which physical activity specialists go into GP surgeries to support people who are at risk of long-term health conditions such as heart attacks or strokes, and those who have mental health issues.

The specialists will help these people to build more activity into their lives and will link them with the range of physical activity and sports opportunities in their local areas.

**Staffordshire County Council**, in partnership with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent NHS Partnership, has established the UK's biggest integrated health and social care provider.

The decision, confirmed by the Department of Health, involved nearly 1000 care staff and a £153 million budget transferring from the council to the Partnership NHS Trust. It is now responsible for all adult social and community healthcare in Staffordshire and all community healthcare in Stoke-on-Trent, delivering everything from physiotherapy to day care.

By reducing duplication and streamlining the delivery of integrated care, savings of £24 million have been achieved and reinvested in additional care. Patients have benefited as more people receive care in their own homes rather than in hospital or a residential home.

# Library and leisure services



## Solihull Council's new libraries programme

Innovation in public services can offer both better value for taxpayers' money and improved outcomes for local communities. The best councils are those that are constantly looking out for new and better ways to design and deliver services. Many recognise the potential of social enterprises and community groups to provide high-quality services at good value, and deliver services with and through them.

This is particularly evident in library and leisure services where Conservative councillors are working with local residents to deliver modern and accessible facilities.

Every one of **Hertfordshire County Council's** 46 libraries will remain open following the approval of its innovative 'Inspiring Libraries' strategy.

The strategy aims to increase the number of volunteers in libraries, extend opening hours in some cases, enable people to learn new skills and invest in digital technology such as tablet computers. All libraries already have wifi, and a new Library App is now available.

In December 2014, **Huntingdonshire District Council's** One Leisure site in St Ives won the Grassroots Sports Ground Team of the Year award at the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) awards. This followed One Leisure's success the previous year in winning the IOG award for having the best maintained artificial pitch in the country.

The 52-acre St Ives site accommodates a host of sports including cricket, football, rugby league and hockey plus a full size athletics arena with an eight-lane running track.

**Lincolnshire County Council** has agreed to hand over 30 libraries to volunteers in order to secure their future. A further 15 'core libraries' will remain under the council's control.

Cllr Nick Worth, the executive member for libraries, has welcomed the innovative approach: "The way in which libraries are used is changing, not just in Lincolnshire, but across the country, and it's important we adapt with the times."

All of **Northamptonshire County Council's** libraries are open every Sunday afternoon, including the mobile service which has reach into over 300 rural and suburban communities.

The library service also delivers registration for children's centre services and has trained its frontline customer advisers in basic debt avoidance and money management advice.

In recognition of its successes, the service won the MJ 'Best Council Services Team' award in June 2014 followed by the national 'Libraries Change Lives' award in September 2014.

Sunday library opening at the **Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's** libraries was rolled out in 2014 following a successful pilot. This has been achieved through a combination of staff and volunteers, with 170 volunteers registered to support the scheme. Since April 2014 there have been around 14,000 visits and 17,000 loans on Sundays.

**Solihull Council** has opened new libraries at the Parkgate shopping complex in Shirley and the Bluebell Centre in North Solihull. With an innovative design and modern facilities these new libraries are attractive to residents and benefit local traders due to the increased footfall.

Residents in Hale will keep their own library facility after **Trafford Council** approved a joint plan by Hale Community Trust and Hillcrest Homes to build a new 6,000 square foot community hub on the site of the current bowling green. Library services in the village will be transferred to a new purpose-built building at the Hale Village Bowling Green pavilion.

The existing library on Leigh Road will now be purchased for what is likely to be a significant capital sum, while the freehold of the bowling pavilion will also be purchased. All future maintenance and running costs will be covered through the development agreement, meaning the council has no on-going liability.

Construction will be funded by the redevelopment of the old site into six houses, a shop and office with two flats above.

The plan has the enthusiastic support of a partnership of local businesses and community groups, including Hale Civic Society, Friends of Hale Library, Altrincham and Sale Chamber of Commerce and Hale Bowling Club.

# Making local communities safer



## Tonbridge and Malling taxi driver training scheme

Crime is down more than 20 per cent since 2010 according to the independent Crime Survey, and is at its lowest level since records began. Lower crime means fewer robberies, less violence on our streets, fewer lives ruined and more people able to feel confident about their future.

However, community safety remains a concern for many people. It is a consistently high public priority and affects the quality of life for both individuals and neighbourhoods.

The case studies on the following pages illustrate how Conservative councils are helping to make their communities safer both through the services that they deliver directly and in partnership with other organisations.

**Arun District Council** has an anti-social behaviour team which works very closely with the police and is co-located in police stations. Early intervention is a critical factor in effectively managing and stopping problematic behaviour and since 2008 there has been a 5 per cent or lower re-offending rate in relation to more serious anti-social behaviour.

Examples of the activities that have been undertaken to achieve this include school visits, Firebreak courses run by the fire service to develop young people's contribution to the community, prison visits and patrols with neighbourhood policing teams.

**Cheshire East Council's** Youth Engagement Service provides a comprehensive response to anti-social behaviour. This involves working with the council's community safety team, the police, the probation service, health agencies and schools to respond early whenever nuisance behaviour begins in a locality. In particular, the team works with families and young people to assess what is happening, how much of a problem it is to local people and to assess what can be done to prevent its escalation into more serious anti-social behaviour.

**Rushmoor Borough Council** has joined up with **Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council** and **Hart District Council** to form one Community Safety Partnership for North Hampshire. The shared service arrangement facilitates a strategic approach to reducing crime and disorder, re-offending and combating substance abuse.

Meanwhile, **Rushmoor Borough Council** and **Hart District Council** have successfully developed a jointly owned CCTV service which includes a single control room. The project was developed at a time when both councils needed to upgrade their equipment and it was clear that there were considerable benefits in working together to provide a modern, well-equipped CCTV service which would achieve economies of scale in investment.

The single control room now serves both councils and has resulted in a capital saving of £114,000 and an annual revenue saving of £90,000 to the councils.

**Sevenoaks District Council's** Community Safety Partnership Judo project is a twelve week programme for young people who are on the cusp of anti-social behaviour or have been the victim of bullying. The programme, delivered in partnership with Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue and British Judo, works with participants to show them how their behaviour has an impact on other people and also the wider community whilst also giving them the chance to gain a yellow belt in Judo.

**Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council** is piloting training sessions on 'Safeguarding children abused through sexual exploitation.' This is the first time that these sessions, which are provided in partnership with Kent Safeguarding Children's Board, will be given in Kent.

The training will provide awareness through case studies and highlight the signs that taxi drivers should be looking out for when transporting children and young people. These include any patterns in journeys and whether drivers are being asked to go to the same address on multiple occasions. The two pilot sessions for managers, supervisors and drivers will be rolled out to 584 Hackney Carriage and private hire drivers in the borough.

Cllr Brian Luke, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, comments that: "With the recent high profile cases in the press we are making this training mandatory for all new applicants and taxi drivers who are currently licensed with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. This will ensure that operators, managers and drivers are aware of the signs to look out for and know who to contact if they have any concerns."

Together with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), **Westminster City Council**, the **Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea** and **Hammersmith and Fulham Council**,<sup>7</sup> are investing £2 million over two years to pay for a project to reduce reoffending.

The project focuses on offenders who serve short prison sentences but prior to February 2015 received no formal post-release support. It has established a custodial referral team which will screen offenders on arrest for a range of problems including learning disabilities and mental health issues, as well as alcohol and drug misuse, in order that their specific needs can be assessed immediately and they can be referred to the appropriate support.

By tackling these issues early and head-on the councils expect to reduce re-offending by 10 per cent.

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<sup>7</sup> Following the 2014 local elections, Hammersmith and Fulham is Labour-controlled.

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