



Council Plan 2015-2019

“Allerdale – a great place to live, work and visit”

Foreword

Our Council Plan for 2015-19 is centred around one concept – AMBITION. Quite simply we want the best for our citizens and communities and we want to be the best Council that we can possibly be. That means providing the best Council services but also playing our part in delivering everything that makes our borough a truly great place to live, work and visit. That means the best healthcare, the best education, the best transport and environment and the best chances for our residents to lead full and happy lives in the best houses with the best jobs.

A serious ambition, but not one that we can deliver alone.

Over the next four years we aim to work ever more closely with the key other providers of services and jobs in our area and to engage with new investors and encourage new and innovative initiatives that bring new life and new opportunities to Allerdale. We want them to share our ambition and to deliver nothing but the best.

We have made a good start. Over the past four years we have maintained our high service levels despite reducing funding from central government. And we are delighted to see that our residents clearly feel we have done a good job – satisfaction with the way Allerdale Borough Council provides services has increased by 25% over the period 2012 to 2014 and is now 74% one of the highest in the UK!

In short we accept austerity, but we do not accept second best.

In the past four years we have developed a strategy and action plan aimed at reducing poverty and tackling inequality to help focus our efforts on supporting those most in need in our communities and we have become a Living Wage employer. We have expanded our internal and external apprenticeship schemes to help people into work and run the first Big Allerdale Switch helping people to reduce their household energy bills. We secured a sustainable future for The Wave in Maryport and invested in the Carnegie Theatre and Arts Centre. We have adopted a robust new Local Plan to guide development and have put in place town centre managers and teams to help promote and support our towns. And, we are one of the few councils in the country to invest in a new state-of-the-art sports centre.

We aim to think big and deliver.

Now is the time to really drive our ambition forwards. The opportunities coming to West Cumbria through new energy development and the expansion of our learning offer to young people through initiatives like the UTC, Enerigus and the Westlakes Campus mean that with the right teamwork and the right commitment we can secure a great future for our citizens and truly make Allerdale a great place to live, work and visit.

Alan Smith
Leader

Ian Frost
Chief Executive

Introduction

Welcome to Allerdale Borough Council's Council Plan 2015-19. The Plan sets out our long-term vision for Allerdale, our corporate priority themes and the outcomes that we want to achieve. The Plan is a strategic document that sits next to our Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Plan reflects the challenges facing the area and what people have told the Council is important to them. The Plan does not reflect the entirety of the Council's activities, all of which are important in meeting residents' expectations and needs, but includes those key actions and areas of activity that we believe will help us achieve our vision.

We recognise that with fewer resources we alone cannot deliver our vision for Allerdale. We will continue to lobby, influence and work with others in partnership to deliver high quality public services and wider outcomes to make our borough a great place to live, work and visit.

The context for our priorities

Our places

The borough of Allerdale is located in the north west of Cumbria covering an area of 1,258 square kilometres. Allerdale is a diverse borough, both in terms of geography and history. It includes some of the country's most stunning landscapes and important built heritage. Allerdale has seven distinct areas: the towns of Aspatria, Cockermouth, Keswick, Maryport Silloth Wigton and Workington and their hinterlands.

Our people

Population: Allerdale's population of 96,200 is largely concentrated in the south west around Workington, Maryport and Cockermouth where population density is 450 people per square kilometre. By contrast the Solway Plain has a population density of just 50 people per square kilometre. We lose young people to higher education outside the area and have had the greatest rise (between 2001 and 2011) in the number of residents aged over 85 years in Cumbria and has an older population profile than England and Wales. The population is 'ageing' at a faster rate than the population nationally.

Employment: Unemployment rates for Allerdale as a whole are slightly lower than the regional and national averages, however, there are pockets of unemployment well in excess of the national average in some towns. Allerdale has a higher proportion of its working age population with no qualifications (27%) and a lower proportion with degree-level qualifications (23%) than the national averages (22% and 27% respectively).

The major employers in the borough are in the manufacturing, wholesale/retail, hotel and restaurant businesses, and the public sector. Just

over 80% of businesses in Allerdale are small, employing less than four people. Manufacturing is largely concentrated on the west coast with retail centres in the towns of Workington, Cockermouth, Maryport, Keswick and Wigton.

Deprivation: In terms of overall ranking for deprivation Allerdale is ranked 111 out of England's 326 local authorities (where 1 = most deprived and 326 = least deprived). However, there are significant variations in terms of deprivation across the borough with a fifth of Allerdale's Census areas in the most deprived fifth of Census areas in the entire country. There appears to be a widening of the gap between those areas with high deprivation and those with relatively low deprivation.

Health: Average life expectancies for Allerdale residents have improved over time, but remain lower than the England and Cumbrian averages. Looking across the borough, there is an eight year gap (men) and a six year gap (women) between the most and least deprived areas of the borough. Childhood obesity levels in Allerdale are slightly higher than the Cumbria and national averages. Allerdale has a higher proportion than the national average of both men (44.8%) and women (52.1%) who do not manage any physical activity per week contributing to an adult obesity rate of 24.2%. The rate of stays in hospital due to alcohol related harm, the rate of stays in hospital due to self-harm, and the rate of smoking are worse than the averages for England.

Our community's views

In 2014 we carried out our biennial residents' survey to hear their views on living in Allerdale and what their priorities are for council services. We asked residents to identify what was most important in making somewhere a good place to live and what was most in need of improvement. The things they listed as most important and most in need of improvement were:

- Road and pavement repairs
- Job prospects
- Health services
- Bus services
- Car parking
- Affordable, decent housing
- Clean streets

Looking at responses by our seven areas we can see that residents' views reflect the issues facing them locally. Job prospects were a more important issue for residents in Workington, Maryport and Silloth, whereas affordable, decent housing was a clear priority for our Keswick residents. Wage levels and the cost of living were higher up the list in Keswick, Maryport and Wigton, while in Workington and Maryport clean streets were more of a priority than for the borough as a whole.

Our residents expressed high satisfaction with refuse collection and recycling services and told us how important these services and street cleaning services are to them. These views are reflected in this plan.

Key issues and challenges

Allerdale is a diverse borough with a rich history and stunning landscapes. The area has low levels of crime and many of our residents enjoy an excellent quality of life. However, Allerdale also faces some significant challenges.

The diversity of geography and history across the borough manifests as a broad range of issues and challenges facing the different communities across the borough. On the surface, Allerdale very often seems to mirror the county averages in a range of statistics. However, when you look beyond borough level figures, it soon becomes apparent that Allerdale is a place with a huge amount of variation, where one area can differ significantly from another. As a result, the issues that affect our residents in one part of our borough can be very different to those in another area.

The west coast has a rich industrial history and industry remains very important to the area, but changes in its make-up have left economic and social problems, particularly in the main towns of Workington and Maryport which contain some of the most deprived communities in the country.

The market towns of Cockermouth and Keswick enjoy stunning scenery, with Keswick, located in the Lake District National Park, an important tourist destination. However, both towns and the surrounding rural villages, face problems with a lack of affordable housing.

The north of Allerdale is a predominantly rural area with small villages and three principal market towns - Aspatria, Silloth and Wigton - which have issues such as access to services and economic sustainability.

Both the borough and its residents have been adversely affected by the economic downturn, particularly those communities already experiencing less prosperity. Due to the rural nature of the borough transport connectivity, broadband provision and access to services remain an issue. Affordable housing is a problem for much of the borough, but is particularly significant in Keswick, Cockermouth and parts of north Allerdale.

Local demographic pressures relating to an increasingly elderly population, as well as the impact of welfare reforms, are likely to put pressure on our services. These challenges are set against a backdrop of austerity. The grant that we receive from central government has been reducing year on year – in fact it has fallen by 40% overall since 2011.

We are committed to meeting these challenges, but recognise that with less money and fewer resources we must think and act differently. We will need to look beyond our organisational and district boundaries and work in partnership with other private, public and voluntary sector bodies to deliver both our ambitions for the borough and the continued delivery of excellent quality services for our residents.

Our priorities

Making Allerdale a great place to live, work and visit

Tackling inequality

We aim to reduce poverty and support people facing financial difficulties

Our focus will be on:

- Supporting people to deal with money problems
- Helping to create more affordable housing where it is needed most
- Helping people to improve their prospects by providing skills, education and employment opportunities
- Helping those most in need such as low income families, pensioners in poverty, those experiencing fuel and rural poverty
- Continuing to pay the Living Wage and encouraging contractors and local businesses to do the same
- Helping residents save on their energy bills

Strengthening our economy

We aim to create a strong, sustainable and vibrant local economy and create jobs

Our focus will be on:

- Improving skills and education to enable businesses to recruit suitably skilled staff
- Encouraging businesses to grow or move into the area
- Improving infrastructure
- Supporting the development of renewable energy
- Encouraging tourism to help improve the local economy
- Supporting the development of more homes where they are needed

Enhancing our towns

We aim to create thriving towns that are attractive and welcoming, and retain their distinctive characters

Our focus will be on:

- Assisting and supporting businesses
- Developing thriving and vibrant towns
- Making our towns attractive and welcoming

Improving health and wellbeing

We aim to help people live healthy and active lives, and reduce health inequalities

Our focus will be on:

- Helping to make sure that people have access to high quality healthcare
- Working with partners to create healthier communities
- Providing access to quality leisure and cultural activities
- Maintaining a safe and clean environment
- Ensuring access to suitable and safe housing
- Protecting and promoting health and wellbeing

Creating a sustainable business

We aim to develop a commercially focused organisation committed to delivering high quality, sustainable services to the people, communities and businesses of Allerdale

Our focus will be on:

- Providing great services for people and communities
- Getting the best value goods and services by improving our commissioning and procurement processes
- Thinking and acting more like a business
- Running an efficient and effective council
- Developing our people

Tackling inequality

Why is tackling inequality a priority?

Within Allerdale there is a vast difference between communities and their experience of poverty. Looking at the borough as a whole, poverty does not immediately seem a significant issue, but the reality is that, while parts of Allerdale have average household incomes and life expectancy above the national average, other parts of the borough experience significant deprivation. This means that some of our communities need more focus and specialist services to support them.

The current economic situation in the UK is placing pressures on already struggling families and communities and the Council is committed to helping them through these difficult times. We have developed a Tackling Inequality Strategy Action Plan to focus our efforts in this area. This focuses on the themes of access to credit, access to food and housing, skills, education and employment, accessing benefits, and reducing bills.

Issues for Allerdale include:

- Some wards have levels of child poverty significantly higher than the borough, county and England averages.
- There are a higher percentage of households in fuel poverty in Allerdale and Cumbria than nationally. The nature of the housing stock in many parts of the borough and the county - many of them stone properties in rural areas which cannot be connected to mains gas - means that many properties are poorly insulated and are considered 'hard to heat'.
- A fifth of Allerdale's small Census areas are in the most deprived fifth of Census areas in the entire country. There appears to be a widening of the gap between those areas with high deprivation those with relatively low deprivation.
- Average earnings for residents in Allerdale have dropped below the regional average.
- 10.2% of Allerdale's working age population are in receipt of out-of-work benefits – this figure is more than 20% in a number of wards.
- The median house price in Allerdale as a whole is 5.5 times the median household income, but there are significant variations in housing affordability across the borough with a clear lack of affordable housing in localities such as Cockermouth and Keswick. In Keswick a first time buyer is likely to need over 13 times their income to match house prices.

Read more about our approach to tackling inequality in our Tackling Inequality Strategy

Strengthening our economy

Why is strengthening our economy a priority?

Supporting and growing our local economy is vitally important for the sustainability of our communities. We need to support businesses to develop, grow and facilitate the creation of more jobs. We need to influence investment and provide the conditions to encourage the development of a skilled workforce for the future. We need to work with schools and education providers to promote innovation and enterprise, and to encourage businesses to have more involvement with them.

Issues for Allerdale include:

- In the year to September 2014, the West Cumbrian economy was one of the fastest growing in England at 4.2%, compared to 2.9% for the North West and 3.7% in London.
- Unemployment levels for Allerdale as a whole are in line with regional and national averages, but higher than that for Cumbria. However, there are pockets of unemployment well in excess of the national average in the borough and it remains a concern that the youth unemployment rate in Allerdale rate continues to be higher than the national average.
- Average weekly earnings in Allerdale are below the national average.
- Allerdale has a higher proportion of its working age population with no qualifications and a lower proportion of its working age population with degree-level qualifications than the national and regional averages.
- Levels of educational attainment vary significantly across the wards within the district. Pupils attaining five good GCSEs including Maths and English ranges from 85% in the best performing ward to 18% in the worst.
- There is a need to secure effective transport and broadband infrastructure to encourage economic investment.
- Allerdale has seen a small increase in job density in recent years. In 2012 there were 0.76 jobs available to every person (aged 16-64) in Allerdale. However, an increase in part time jobs may partly explain this.
- The total number of enterprises in Allerdale has remained fairly static between 2010 and 2013, although has increased slightly in 2014.
- There are major opportunities in the energy and environmental technologies. However, there is a predicted skills gap in construction, energy, and nuclear related industries as the result of the predicted additional 28,000 full time equivalent posts that will be created between now and 2021.
- There is a lack of housing for key workers in the health, construction and nuclear sectors.

Read more about our approach to strengthening our economy in our Economic Growth and Investment Plan.

Enhancing our towns

Why are our towns a priority?

Our town centres are vitally important to the local economy. They need to welcome businesses and be attractive places to live, visit and shop. Each of Allerdale's seven main towns has a strong and distinctive local identity, and has its own history and its own needs.

Supporting our towns is crucial for the sustainability of our communities. We need to provide the conditions to encourage local businesses to develop and grow, support and facilitate the provision of suitable housing, and encourage initiatives to draw visitors and shoppers to our towns.

Issues for Allerdale include:

- The total number of enterprises in Allerdale has remained fairly static between 2010 and 2013, although it increased slightly in 2014.
- The latest housing needs survey suggests that just over 1800 households in Allerdale are currently in need of different housing. 65% of affordable housing need is in the urban areas of the borough.
- Clean streets are ranked highly in terms of making somewhere a good place to live by Allerdale residents.
- Perceptions of town centres vary considerably across the borough
- Overall satisfaction with town centres varies from 82% in Cockermouth to 34% in Maryport.
- Satisfaction with the range of shops in Allerdale's town centres varies from 72% in Cockermouth to 22% in Maryport.
- Satisfaction with the cleanliness and appearance of our town centres is high overall at 70%, but varies from 92% in Keswick to 50% in Maryport.

Read more about our approach to enhancing our towns in our [Enhancing Towns Strategy](#).

Improving health and wellbeing

Why is improving health and wellbeing a priority?

Allerdale's overall performance in a range of health and wellbeing indicators disguises significant inequalities in health outcomes for our residents.

In our 2014 residents' survey, people have highlighted health services as an area which needs improvement and there are clearly concerns within the community about access to quality healthcare facilities, both in terms of access to GPs and in terms of access to hospital services as changes are proposed to services at West Cumberland Hospital and the Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle.

Sports, arts and leisure activities can have a significantly positive impact on people's health and wellbeing. In addition to the health and wellbeing benefits from participating in sporting and cultural activities, local festivals and events can also play a significant role in supporting and boosting the local economy. Living in a high quality built environment, with access to open spaces is also good for health.

Issues for Allerdale include:

- Life expectancy in Allerdale is slightly below the England and Cumbria averages, but is eight years lower for men and six years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Allerdale compared to the least deprived areas.
- Allerdale has a higher proportion than the national average of both men (44.8%) and women (52.1%) who do not manage any physical activity per week. Only 31% of adults manage once per week and only 16.6% achieve reach the recommended 5 x 30 minutes each week.
- In 2012, 24.2% of adults in Allerdale were classified as obese.
- Childhood obesity levels in Allerdale are slightly higher than the Cumbria and national averages (School Year 6, 23.4%).
- Levels of breastfeeding and smoking at time of delivery are worse than the England average.
- The rate of alcohol related harm hospital stays, the rate of self-harm hospital stays, and the rate of smoking is worse than the average for England.
- The rate of alcohol-specific hospital stays among those under 18 is worse than the average for England.
- The rate of people killed and seriously injured on roads is worse than average.

Read more about our approach to improving health and wellbeing in our Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Creating a sustainable business

Why is creating a sustainable business a priority?

Our focus is on developing and improving as an organisation in order to respond to people and communities needs and expectations, and to respond to the current pressures and challenges facing the Council. The scale of demographic, social, economic and environmental change means that current service models will neither be affordable nor appropriate to meet our communities' needs while resources are being reduced.

To deliver our Council Plan we must remain financially sustainable. We have a strong track record of making financial savings, but it is clear that we still face significant future financial challenges and the previous approach to transforming the Council will not enable us to meet those challenges – we are developing a new approach. These challenging times present the Council with an opportunity to think differently about how we deliver our services and how we meet our priorities.

The need to continue to deliver services with decreasing amounts of public sector funding requires us to be smarter in the way we deliver and commission our services, create wealth and income for the Council, use our resources carefully and efficiently, and use our role as a commissioner to create different models of delivering services.

Central to the Council's approach is developing a new way of working. The overarching aim of this initiative is to ensure that the people of Allerdale receive the best possible and best value services because we are working more effectively and more commercially. In particular, this will include how we better understand our business and communities in the way we commission, procure and deliver services, goods and works. This involves all services that we deliver to customers as well as internal activities such as ICT and financial services.

Over the next four years we will be redesigning our services by identifying new, different and more effective ways of delivering them - rationalising our assets, and reviewing our procurement and commissioning processes to ensure better value for money in the purchase of supplies and services.

The Council's new approach to working, which is set out above, is about changing the way we think, behave and act – broadly speaking, it is about changing our culture. Developing our workforce is particularly important in this context. Ways of working will change as we change as an organisation and developing and supporting our staff will be vitally important.

Read more about our approach to these challenges in our [Creating a Sustainable Business Strategy](#).

Our approach

Community leadership, partnership and collaboration

Within each priority theme there will be many cases where the Council will not be responsible for delivery and therefore will need to work in partnership with public, private and voluntary sector bodies, influencing and commissioning services or projects where appropriate.

The Council has a key community leadership role in reshaping and diversifying the supply of public services, empowering communities to do things their way, opening up local government to more public scrutiny, and strengthening accountability to local people. We recognise that Allerdale is made up of seven distinct areas and our elected members have a key role to play here in terms of their day-to-day work in those areas with communities and the role that they play in decision making.

Given the changing nature of local government and the continuing financial pressures facing the Council we recognise that we will need to change as an organisation. The role of the Council is becoming less about direct service delivery and more about influencing - particularly in terms of addressing big issues such as jobs and housing. We need to use our unique position to work with partners to bring investment and opportunity into the borough to help our economy grow, and to develop schemes to bring more affordable housing to the areas where it is needed. Through this facilitating and influencing work we also hope to address many forms of inequality in Allerdale.

Access and fairness

We recognise that people have different requirements and preferences when it comes to how they access services. As such, we are committed to providing access through a range of channels. In 2014 we reviewed our customer access strategy to ensure the best possible service while achieving value for money. We also implemented a payments project meaning that our customers can now make payments to us in person at more than 60 Post Offices and Pay Points in Allerdale and thousands nationally rather than just our few Council offices, as well as being able to make payments online or over the phone. This has meant a better service for our customers and savings for the Council as well as helping to support local businesses.

Openness and transparency

The Council believes in the importance of being open and transparent in all that it does. This will provide the public with the information that they need to decide if the Council is performing well and responding to their needs and will also allow the public to hold the Council and councillors to account. The Council also recognises that this approach will deliver better value for money for the public purse.

Reporting on progress

This Council Plan is a four year document, setting out the key priorities and areas of activity for the Council up to 2019. We will review the plan annually.

The Council Plan is supported by a series of supporting strategies and action plans detailing what we will do to meet our objectives. The Council Plan will also be supported by our service plans each giving more detail about how our services will contribute to the delivery of council priorities, together with other statutory responsibilities.

We will review performance against the Council Plan every three months and make these reports available on our website www.allerdale.gov.uk