

# Annual Report

2013/14

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## **Section 1: Introduction**

### **Message from the Leader and the Chief Executive**

2013/14 has been a year of further developing and delivering already sound services, keeping any eye on the future and the challenges it inevitably brings.

As you read this annual report, you will learn about the improvements to the recycling services, what we are doing to make sure streets are clean and your parks and open spaces are well maintained and welcoming places. We know these things are important to you and you have told us that satisfaction levels are high. You will also read about some of the innovative ways we work in the community to help improve the longer term health of residents by encouraging exercise and good life habits and how our efforts have been recognised by our health professional partners.

Although we know that East Herts is a relatively healthy and affluent area, we are proud of the work and resources we have put in to help and support the more vulnerable of our residents. In particular our significant work with the Citizens Advice Bureau offering support to those with a range of issues; making sure that applications for benefits are processed quickly; working with partners to develop young person's accommodation in the district are just some examples.

At the same time as delivering services and support, we have been looking to ourselves to see how we can deliver ever more effective services and better value for money. By sharing services with other councils and by finding ways of reducing costs we have maintained a strong financial position such that we were able to reduce council tax for 2013/14 having already had no increase for 4 years!

Importantly, a draft new District Plan was prepared and went out to consultation during the year; a mammoth task which has stretched the capacity of ourselves and councils across the country. A 12 week consultation using a variety of methods to reach as many people as possible commenced in February 2014 which will be used to further inform its development.

The challenges facing the council and the public sector show no sign of easing, but as we look forward to the future residents and businesses can be reassured that East Herts Council will continue to do its utmost to deliver optimum quality and value in everything it does on behalf of its residents.

Councillor Anthony Jackson

***Leader of the Council***

George A Robertson

***Chief Executive and Director  
of Customer & Community  
Services***

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## **Section 2: Profile of the District**

### **The Area**

East Herts is the largest of the 10 districts in Hertfordshire. It covers 47,568.68 hectares, around a third of the county, and offers a blend of rural and town living. The benefits of this mixture are greatly appreciated by the 141,076<sup>1</sup> people who live in the district.

The majority of the people who live in the district live in one of the five towns. Bishop's Stortford has the largest population at 37,800, followed by Hertford (26,800), Ware (18,800), Sawbridgeworth (8,500) and Buntingford (5,400).<sup>2</sup>

Although the district is mainly comprised of farmland, five busy market towns (Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware) and more than 100 villages and hamlets are scattered across the area.

East Herts is a beautiful and historic area. It has 42 conservation areas, over 4,000 listed buildings (including curtilage listed buildings), 31 scheduled monuments, 450 sites of archaeological significance and 11 registered historic parks and gardens.

Areas of nature conservation are equally abundant. Rye Meads and woodland in the south of the district at Wormley West End and Brickendon are internationally recognised, and there are a further 16 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 582 Wildlife Sites.

East Herts is regarded as an attractive rural location for those moving out from (and commuting into) London because of its excellent transport links.

### **The Economy**

The people of East Herts are predominantly employed and enjoy higher than average earnings (£589.90 gross weekly pay for full-

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<sup>1</sup> Mid 2013 Population Estimates, ONS

<sup>2</sup> 2011 Census - Population estimates from the 2011 Census using whole MSOAs (produced by Community Information and Intelligence Unit, Hertfordshire County Council)

time workers compared to £518.10 for the whole of the country<sup>3</sup>). Unemployment is very low (1.3%<sup>4</sup>).

Over 50% of people travel to work by car and 12% travel by train. Less than 2% of people travel by bus/coach. 12% of people work at or from home<sup>5</sup>.

House prices are among the highest in the country; in 2014 for the period April to June the average property price was £338,000<sup>6</sup> while the average salary in 2013 was £31,548 compared to £31,949 in Hertfordshire. 29.9% of properties are semi-detached in East Herts, followed by 27.9% which are detached<sup>7</sup>. There is a shortage of affordable housing.

## The People

A fifth of people are under 16 and a fifth of people are over 60. The average age in the district is 39.5<sup>8</sup>.

More than half of people (aged 16 and over) are married and over a quarter are single. 10% of people are separated or divorced and 6% are widowed<sup>9</sup>.

Over 89% of people were born in England, 3% were born in other countries in the European Union and 4% in other countries<sup>10</sup>. The main religion is Christianity but almost a fifth of people have no religion<sup>11</sup>.

East Herts has a low ethnic minority population of just 4.5%. The largest ethnic minority group is Asian/Asian British at 1.9% with Indian being the highest within that group. The second largest minority group is mixed/multiple ethnic groups at 1.6%<sup>12</sup>.

The people of East Herts enjoy very good health and 9% provide unpaid care<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 2013 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - Resident Analysis, NOMIS, ONS

<sup>4</sup> April 2014, Total Claimant Count, NOMIS, ONS

<sup>5</sup> 2011 Census - Method of travel to work, Table CT0015EW, Hertfordshire Local Information System Atlas (Herts LIS)

<sup>6</sup> Average Property Price for all house types, Quarter 1 2014, Hertfordshire Local Information System Atlas (Herts LIS)

<sup>7</sup> 2011 Census - Dwellings, Household spaces and Accommodation type (KS401EW), NOMIS

<sup>8</sup> 2011 Census - Age Structure (KS102EW), NOMIS

<sup>9</sup> 2011 Census - Marital and Civil Partnership Status (KS103EW), NOMIS

<sup>10</sup> 2011 Census - Country of Birth (KS204EW), NOMIS

<sup>11</sup> 2011 Census - Religion (KS209EW), NOMIS

<sup>12</sup> 2011 Census - Ethnic Group (KS201EW), NOMIS

<sup>13</sup> 2011 Census - Health and Provision of Unpaid Care (KS301EW), NOMIS

Over a third of people are educated to level 4 or higher e.g. Bachelor's degree (33.5%, 36,867). But under a fifth of the population have no qualifications (17.2%, 18,959)<sup>14</sup>.

Car ownership is high, with 46.5% of households owning two or more cars or vans and 40.8% of households owning one car or van<sup>15</sup>. 44.4% of people travel to work by car or van and 9.6% travel by train. Less than 2% of people travel by bus. 5% of people work from home<sup>16</sup>. However the rural nature of the district means that those that do not have access to a car or other means of transport face difficulty accessing services.

### **Did you know?**

#### **East Herts Council in 2013/14:**

- Cleaned 36,592, 923 linear kilometres of roads and streets – That's the same as flying to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil 3,952 times.
- Processed 2,326 planning and related applications.
- Carried out 15,570 building control inspections – That's 60 inspections (on average) every working day of the year.
- Supported 6,361 housing benefit customers and 6,961 council tax support customers in East Herts. Across the shared revenues and benefits service for both East Herts Council and Stevenage Council the service administered housing benefit and council tax support to almost 30,000 accounts.
- Processed 110,574 changes in housing benefit and council tax support circumstances across East Herts and Stevenage – That's 425 cases processed (on average) every working day of the year.
- Processed 3,098 land charge search enquiries – that is a 24% increase compared to the previous year.
- 156,245 people visited Hertford Theatre – That's just about enough to fill the O2 arena eight times over.
- On average every 'Monday' 1,000 people visit the council website and the most popular search term our visitors use is

<sup>14</sup> 2011 Census - Qualifications and Students (KS501EW), NOMIS

<sup>15</sup> 2011 Census - Car or Van availability (KS404EW), NOMIS

<sup>16</sup> 2011 Census - Method of travel to work (QS701EW), NOMIS

“planning”.

- The council is making more use of video and is building a presence on YouTube – this year our council videos, not including the committee webcasts, have had over 5,000 views with a total of more than 200 viewing hours.

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### **Section 3: Our Vision for the District**

East Herts Council's vision for the district is:

*To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that is best in East Herts*

This overriding aim is underpinned by three corporate priorities which reflect local needs as identified through public consultation and feedback.

These priorities in 2013/14 were:

<b><u>People</u> – Fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute</b>
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<b><u>Place</u> – Safe and Clean</b>
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<b><u>Prosperity</u> – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities</b>
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Each priority was further defined by a series of objectives which were set out in our four year Corporate Strategic Plan for 2013 - 2017. These priorities and objectives were shared with many of our partner organisations to enable a joined-up approach in service delivery, helping to eliminate service gaps and duplication whilst promoting efficiency.

This annual report cannot include everything we have achieved. However, it does identify those achievements which we believe will be of most community interest due to their impact and benefits.

#### **Section 4: Progress against 2013/14 Corporate Priorities**

**PEOPLE** – Fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute

Our priority is to focus on enhancing the quality of life, health and wellbeing, particularly those who are vulnerable and deliver strong services

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What we wanted to achieve	What we have done
<p><b>Objective:</b> Reduce health inequalities, for example, by addressing obesity, smoking and physical inactivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased the overall number of swimmers accessing the council's pools by 2.2% when compared to performance in the previous year. This is due to a successful promotion of junior swims by SLM (Sports and Leisure Management – Everyone Active) and their investment in equipment (inflatables) to encourage junior fun swims as well as adding several additional fun swim sessions aimed at younger swimmers.</li> <li>• Raised awareness of the dangers and social impact of tobacco to young people as part of an East Herts Council project to reduce smoking. The campaign is set to be rolled out to schools across Hertfordshire from the Autumn term in 2014. As part of the campaign students will be able to use an interactive website to watch films about the exploitation of children in tobacco plantations, see how friends and family can be affected by smoking related illness and take part in a range of activities designed to encourage a smoke-free life.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Reduce fuel poverty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered options for a partnership model to support the introduction of the Green Deal in 2013. However, national uptake of the Green Deal (GD) scheme remains very low, so developing a Hertfordshire option is not considered viable at this stage. In the interim, East Herts Insulation Grants, which can be used by customers as a useful adjunct to the Green Deal scheme, were re-launched in October 2013. In total four insulation grants were awarded during the year. This low figure is due to a free cavity /wall and loft scheme that was just starting across the district and therefore the council has been directing customers to it in conjunction with an energy insulation company (funded through the Energy Company Obligation and at no cost to East Herts). The existing East Herts grants scheme has been used to provide any loft/cavity measures that could not be provided for within the free scheme.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successfully promoted “Keep Warm Stay Well” (KWSW) last winter and it is intended that an enhanced KWSW scheme will operate again from October 2014. KWSW is a scheme that offers support to vulnerable residents who are struggling with the cold or with paying their fuel bills. To help reduce residents vulnerability KWSW provides a range of free support that includes insulation and draught-proofing, emergency heaters and advice on making their home more energy efficient. There is also advice on paying bills, including entitlement to grants and benefits that could help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Increase community engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked in partnership with Inspirational Arts and the Hertfordshire Music Service to give young performers the opportunity to step into the limelight with the 3music project. Over the years 3Music has successfully acted as a starting block for many young performers seeking a career in the theatre and music industry.</li> <li>• Held the third annual Community Sports Awards event to recognise local sporting talent and celebrate achievements of East Herts Schools in Herts School &amp; Youth Games. 16 awards were presented in 9 categories with individuals winning Sports Performer of the Year (over &amp; under 18), Volunteer of the Year (over &amp; under 18), Coach of the Year (over &amp; under 18) and Service to Sport Award and clubs winning Sporting Achievement of the Year and Club of the Year. Award winners came from across the district - Bishops Stortford Canoe Club winning Coach of the Year and Bury Rangers Football Club winning Club of the Year and individual performers in swimming, cycling, badminton and canoeing coming from Hertford, Ware, Great Amwell and Bishops Stortford. There was good press coverage of the Awards. These awards help to support the council’s priorities in relation to health and well-being.</li> <li>• Revised all councillor role descriptions to highlight the requirements of community engagement as well as providing a programme of support to help members respond</li> </ul>

	<p>to this increasing role. In addition three community engagement grants have been allocated to councillors to support public engagement meetings within their constituency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook 'likes' have increased slowly but the number of twitter 'followers' has almost doubled and this channel is now being used as a primary communication tool. The council has also started to make use of video and is building a presence on YouTube. The videoclips will be used to give the public information (e.g. about specific wards), demonstrate changes to services (e.g. sorting of recycling) or provide a record of consultation events. The development of these social media channels is important as new ways of communicating and customer preferences are changing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Deliver strong and relevant services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertook our biennial residents' survey which showed 70% of residents were satisfied with the way the council runs things. This is an increase of 19% when comparison is made to the 2011 level of 51%. (2013 and 2011 residents' survey). However there were some key services which fell into the 'high priority/most in need of improvement' category which were not the responsibility of the council. These areas will be shared with relevant partners and feedback concerning East Herts as a council and as a service provider will be explored further through a series of focus group sessions.</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction with face to face contact continues to improve, with 80% (2013/14) of customers rating the contact as 'Good' compared to 79% in 2012/13 and 77.2% in 2011/12. For the second year running the most cited reason was the response time, with nine in ten customers choosing this option.</li> <li>• Scrutiny committees reviewed the council's basket of performance indicators to ensure they were fit for purpose and supported the council's priorities. The review</li> </ul>

resulted in a number of indicators being deleted and new measures being introduced, for example new performance indicators to support the shared service revenue and benefits service. Scrutiny committees play a key role in ensuring the council is accountable in the delivery of its priorities and that it produces the right information to be able to demonstrate this.

- Ensured information was easily accessible and transparent for our customers by:
  - Redesigning the council's website and greatly reducing the number of mouse clicks needed to get through to priority pages/tasks. The new redesigned site is now deemed Level 1 'accessible' by the RNIB and we are working towards gaining Level 2.
  - Enhancing the information publication and freedom of information self-service by the establishment of East Herts Council information 'Home Page' with self-service links. Over the last year there have been 4953 visits to individual FOI (Freedom of Information) case records/responses published on the council website, from visitors outside of the council network, covering 1467 case records (obviously, some cases have had more visits than others). The online "Make an FOI Request" e-form has seen 43 visits. There have been 144 visits to the council Publication Scheme, and 785 visits to the Spending Disclosure. Although visits to these self-service links does not mean that an FOI request was avoided in its own right, it does demonstrate how effectively the council is making information accessible.
- Launched an online permit renewal system as part of the council's ongoing programme to provide customers with self-service options. Residents in controlled permit zones are no longer required to visit council offices in normal opening hours to

	<p>purchase their permits. Since the facility went 'live' on 13 November 2013, the council has have issued 648 renewal letters and in that same period 302 permit holders have used the online renewals facility. This would indicate a take-up rate of approx. 47%.</p>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Improve outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced the amount of time it takes to process new housing benefit claims or change of events from 18 days to 9 days by investing more resources to support the growing demand of the benefits service.</li> <li>• Contributed, as part of the East Herts Local Strategic Partnership to jointly funding a new time banking scheme in Buntingford in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council. The scheme is run by the North Herts Centre for Voluntary Service. Participants who sign up are able to donate time towards helping others in any way they feel they are able. In return they receive an equivalent amount of time back from somebody helping them. The scheme is aimed at engaging some of the most vulnerable members of society, but is open to anybody to join in. The scheme will help to raise the awareness of the value of giving time and inspire a new generation of volunteers.</li> <li>• Helped a group of widows and widowers aged 70 plus develop their cooking skills and to reduce social isolation that is increasing in this age group. A seven week course held at Dixon Place sheltered housing, facilitated a supportive atmosphere for people to develop their cooking skills, consider portion size, increase their confidence and build friendships.</li> <li>• Developed a three-year agreement which will provide East Herts Citizens Advice Service with £129,000 on an annual basis, subject to a yearly review. This will help to ensure a wide range of support on many issues affecting people's lives continues to</li> </ul>

be provided, specifically housing debt, benefits and housing advice.

- Built a young persons supported accommodation in Hertford. The new accommodation provides 14 flats to support up to 28 East Herts residents aged 16 - 24 that are in housing need. In addition residents also receive training and support whilst living there. The accommodation opened on 18 October 2013. This scheme is the result of a joint project between Hertfordshire County Council and East Herts which identified the need for supported accommodation for young people in the Hertford and Ware area. Hertfordshire County Council provided the revenue funding, East Herts Council provided the land and Aldwyck Housing Association funded the capital cost of the building.
- Agreed a new Homeless Review and Strategy at full Council on 11 December 2013 as required under the Homelessness Act 2002. The strategy is now published and its purpose is to address homelessness by ensuring suitable accommodation, support and advice is available and accessible to all client groups and to encourage a multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness. The council's Housing Options approach is prevention focussed and relies heavily on the residents of East Herts being able to access timely, high quality advice and assistance to help them resolve their housing problems well before their situation reaches crisis point and homelessness. There has been a reduction in the number of homelessness presentations (30%) and acceptances (17%) over the last 3 years for East Herts which is indicative of an effective preventative Housing Options Service.
- Financially supported, through the discretionary grants programme, 134 voluntary and community organisation and youth athletes. 68 grants were awarded to small voluntary and community organisations ranging from grass roots groups to parish councils and health and social care charities. More than 2,000 individuals benefitted



from this pot alone. Of the projects funded, 43% supported older or vulnerable people, combatting loneliness and helping them live more fulfilling and independent lives. Additional monies were awarded to organisations to improve well-loved community assets such as village halls, sports pavilions and play areas and to arts and sports organisations and other groups to deliver activities for young people over the summer holidays. This helped organisations to improve their cultural offer, thus improving diversity and access.

### **Case Study 1: Shared Services**

The council provides good services however we cannot be complacent and financial challenges will grow in future years. We will need to be creative and innovative to be able to maximise what we can do with our resources. We have already joined up with Stevenage Borough Council to provide housing benefit, council tax, business rates and benefit fraud investigations and have continued to explore a range of shared service provision with other councils to help improve service continuity, resilience and quality as well as secure cost savings and efficiencies through economies of scale. In 2013/14 we have:

- Joined forces with Stevenage Borough Council to provide ICT (Information Communication Technology), Business Improvement, Print and Design Services in partnership. As well as delivering financial savings, the shared service will strengthen resilience and improve the efficiency of the services we provide to our customers.
- Jointly procured a new cleaning contract with Stevenage and North Herts Council so that we can improve the level of cleanliness in council offices within the budget we have and now share a Payroll and HR system with Stevenage Council, to improve resilience and ensure we are RTI (Real Time Information) compliant.
- Ensured the monitoring arrangements for the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) are well-embedded through the Director of Financial Support Services, the Manager of Corporate Risk (Audit Champion) and Audit Committee with

regular reporting arrangements. Savings envisaged of £9.3k from the original SIAS budget for 2013/ 14.

In the future we are considering the possibility of the provision of Building Control services through a Social Enterprise Partnership. This is likely to include a number of the district and borough councils across Hertfordshire. The aspiration is that it will enable Building Control services to be more responsive to customer need providing a flexible range of services and at the same time be more resilient both financially and because of the attractive professional roles it will be able to provide.

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## Place – Safe and Clean

Our priority is to focus on sustainability, the built environment and ensuring our towns and villages are safe and clean.

What we wanted to achieve	What we have done
<p><b>Objective:</b> Reduce residual waste and increase our recycling rate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched SPARC (Separate Paper and Recycling Collections) to remove cardboard from the organic waste stream due to the changes in EU standards applied to compost and provide residents with more recycling opportunities with the introduction of the blue lidded bin for cardboard, glass, plastics, cans and tins. Recycling tonnages are up with 49% of waste recycled or composted an increase of 1.5% on the previous year. The recent residents' survey shows an increase in public satisfaction with waste and recycling services from 77% in 2011 to 80% in 2013.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from our own operations by 25% by 2020 and work with partners to reduce the emissions of households and businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduced measures and changes to ensure the council is on target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from its own buildings and the services it provides. Changes that have been introduced include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pool covers at Fanshawe and Ward Freeman leisure centres as well as motion sensor lighting to reduce lighting use. Energy-efficiency glazing has been installed at Grange Paddocks to reduce heating costs.</li> <li>➤ Solar reflective blinds in the council's Wallfields offices in Hertford.</li> <li>➤ Sensor-controlled lighting and new glazing at Hertford Theatre.</li> <li>➤ Newer more efficient vehicles as part of the waste contract and the rescheduling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>of collection rounds to maximise efficiency by using mapping software</p> <p>All these initiatives have contributed to a 13% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since 2009.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put forward plans for a small scale micro hydro scheme that would harness the power of one of the weirs close to Hertford Theatre to generate electricity for use by the theatre. The local community were invited to see the plans at an afternoon exhibition in January 2014. A planning application is expected to go forward in summer 2014.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Maintain our clean streets and reduce litter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued to maintain clean streets with the level of detritus being reduced by 2% when comparison is made with the level last year and met cleanliness targets for graffiti and flyposting.</li> <li>• Supported litter picking campaigns across the district to help improve environment cleanliness, encourage as many people as possible to pick up litter and promote policies that will stop people littering. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ware Beavers took part in a litter pick in Ware and the council provided each Beaver with a litter picking set.</li> <li>○ Staff from Hanbury Manor Hotel and Country Club in Ware walked along the River Lea towpath from Ware to St Margarets collecting litter.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Worked with local housing associations and the Dogs Trust to provide free micro chipping as part of a campaign associated with a national drive to encourage responsible pet ownership. Micro chipping pets ensures they can be reunited with owners quickly should they stray and helps reduce kennelling and re-homing costs. During the campaigns 148 dogs were 'chipped'. From 2016 it will be a legal requirement for owners to have their dogs micro chipped.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Won the silver footprint RSPCA award, which is a national scheme that recognises local authorities that have clear procedures and policy on stray dogs. Up to end of March 2014 the council received 326 reports of stray dogs (both lost and found). 114 were collected by the council of which 70 were reunited with their owners. The remainder were rehomed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Maintain our parks, play areas and open spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulted on the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for the next five years, to ensure that our green spaces, parks and playgrounds continue to be looked after. Consultation was held with 30 external stakeholders and 42 other interest groups. Responses and comments were integrated into the strategy and it was approved at the Executive on 1st October 2013.</li> <li>• Hartham Common joined a national scheme - the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge - to provide a permanent legacy of the Diamond Jubilee 2012 and the London 2012 Olympics. The green space is one of 2,012 sports pitches, woodlands, play areas, gardens and parks across Britain joining the challenge which has committed to ensuring these sites are preserved for the future.</li> <li>• Raised awareness and use of open spaces by marking Love Parks Week, at Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park. The Get Park Active events are designed to promote outdoor leisure and healthy lifestyles.</li> <li>• Retained our two Green Flags for The Ridgeway in Hertford (for the fifth year running) and Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford (for the sixth year running).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Reduce anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched 'Who should I call?' leaflet in partnership with Hertfordshire Police and Hertfordshire County Council. It lists the most common subjects that people are unsure about from potholes and street lights to anti-social behaviour and includes</li> </ul>

telephone, website and Twitter contact details.

- Grant funded 20 projects in partnership with CVS (Community Voluntary Services) to provide summer activities for young people. The activities ranged from outdoor games and sports, holiday play schemes, gardening for people with learning difficulties, dance, drama and podcasting activities to den building, educational events, fun days and trips out. For the first time, we were able to expand our popular Play Ranger project into Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford. In 2013, more than 2,800 children and young people took part. This is slightly lower than the participation level in 2012 of 2,980 children and young people. The reduction is due to fewer providers putting forward high volume programmes in 2013.
- Contributed, as part of the East Herts Community Safety Partnership to the reduction of recorded crime and anti-social behaviour across the district. Recorded crime in East Herts has fallen by 11% 8,261 in 2012/13 to 7,362 in 2013/14 and anti-social behaviour has reduced by 28% 3,039 in 2012/13 to 2,175 in 2013/14. However the first quarter of 2014/15 is showing that figures are starting to increase for the first time in a number of years. This coincides with the upturn in the economy and the pressure upon police forces to make savings. East Herts reputation for being a safe and fairly crime free area attracts criminals from areas where policing is much more intense, with many of our victims homes being left unlocked and property unattended and insecure. However when our 2013/14 performance is compared with our Home Office Benchmarking Group we were the fourth safest area overall for all crime, with Mid Sussex, West Oxford and the Vale of the White Horse performing better than us. We have the lowest weapons and drugs crime rates of the entire group; the rate for criminal damage, burglary, theft, violence and sexual offences is well below the average and our crime rates for shoplifting and theft from vehicles are average.

**Objective:** Ensure future development meets the need of the district and its residents

- Increased the percentage of major, minor and other planning applications that have been processed within the agreed timescales. For example the processing of minor applications has increased by 3%, when compared to performance in 2012/13.
- Agreed proposals for up to 2,200 homes and related infrastructure, known as Bishop's Stortford North. As part of the proposals developers will contribute £53.8m to new infrastructure in the area which includes £30m towards primary and secondary school provision, £3m for sports facilities and £2m for community buildings.

### **Case Study 2: Draft District Plan**

The Local Plan 2007 is the current plan for the district, along with other plans prepared by Hertfordshire County Council. It includes a number of locations where the council has planned for significant new development to go, as well as policies that explain what type of development should take place in these locations and elsewhere. National planning policies have changed since this plan was put in place and so it needs to be updated. The council's new plan will be the East Herts District Plan.

The new District Plan is similar but will allow us to plan to 2031. It maps where the council thinks new development should go and the type of development this should be. It provides a framework for what new development should provide, such as new homes, schools, parks and playgrounds and places for people to work.

Consultation on the draft District Plan commenced in February 2014 and finished in May 2014.

The Plan affects everyone who lives in East Herts and therefore we made sure that everyone in East Herts got a chance to tell us whether they think we have got the plan right or not. Printed copies of the draft Plan were made available at local libraries, at East Herts Council offices and at local Town Council offices and leisure centres. Also summary brochures were sent out to every home in the district.

2014/15 will focus on analysing all the comments made on the draft Plan and making changes to it, where necessary. Once we have produced the final plan we will then send it to a Planning Inspector for an examination in public, before the council can adopt the Plan.

**What we were unable to do:**

- We had hoped to implement a project to reduce recycling contamination at communal properties however due to the changes in EU standards for compost the council had to prioritise the delivery of a new recycling service, SPARC, during 2013/14. Following successful implementation of the scheme work has started to look at expanding the new recycling service to as many communal properties (flats) as possible in 2014/15. This will also include the introduction of compostable bags in kitchen caddies to increase food capture and the removal of soft plastics (like plastic bags) from the comingled recycling to help improve quality, reduce recycling contamination and hence value of the material.
- The number of affordable homes delivered for 2013/14 was 76. The figure is lower than our target of 200 for two reasons. Firstly the number of new private developments being built directly affects the number of affordable homes as this is the primary route for accessing new affordable homes. There have been private development sites that have been slower on site than previously predicted and some significant delays. Secondly a number of asset sites that the housing associations proposed to build new homes on have been delayed or postponed and it is now anticipated that those with planning permission will be completed in 2014/15.



## **Prosperity – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities**

Our priority is to focus on safeguarding and enhancing our unique mix of rural and urban communities, promoting sustainable, economic opportunities and delivering cost effective services.

What we wanted to achieve	What we have done
<p><b>Objective:</b> Deliver value for money</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched the ‘Here to Help’ programme to allow managers and staff to contribute to the development of the council’s values and behaviours and to help identify ways to improve the way we work. This development programme commenced in January 2014 and will continue in 2014/15. It will play a key role in helping to support the council in the future as resources continue to reduce, whilst at the same time demand in the council’s services increase.</li> <li>• Reduced the total number of sickness absence days per FTE (full time equivalent) staff in post by 0.37 days from 6.26 days in 2012/13 to 5.89 days in 2013/14.</li> <li>• As a result of identifying further efficiency savings, the council agreed to a reduction of 1% in its council tax for 2013/14. The reduced council tax requirement is due in part to changes in the Government’s funding regime. In addition, changes in the benefits system have resulted in a change to the way the tax base is calculated.</li> <li>• Taken robust action against fraud and during 2013/14 have prosecuted 11 people, issued 31 administration penalties and 17 cautions. This means that the council is recovering a combined total of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit/Support overpayments of £278,673.81 against these 59 sanctions and other overpayments determined as fraudulent. A further £35,854.48 in overpayments of Department for</li> </ul>

	Work & Pensions benefits was also identified.
<p><b>Objective:</b> Enhance the economic well-being of East Herts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributed, as part of the East Herts Local Strategic Partnership to the development of a Work Club. Hertford Fire and Rescue Service in partnership with Jobcentre Plus formed a work club at their Hertford based headquarters to help support the Get East Herts Working Initiative. Championed and awarded funding by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), the scheme is aimed at helping people who are looking for work who do not have access to IT facilities at home, get online and find employment.</li> <li>• Supported the Love Your Local Market initiative by showcasing locally grown produce regularly available at Hertford's markets in May 2013.</li> <li>• Made additional short stay parking available at Gascoyne Way car park in Hertford on Saturdays, making visits to the Town easier. All four levels of the car park will give customers the option of parking for 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 hours on Saturday. The change comes in response to public feedback, backed up by the council's own findings, that the bottom two floors are sometimes unable to meet short stay parking demand on Saturdays.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Deliver sustainable rural business growth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented, in partnership with North Herts and Uttlesford District Councils and Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, £2.1 million funding to help rural enterprises. Since the start of the programme 19 projects in East Herts have been allocated funding totalling £1,226,086.55 and 49.5 new jobs have been created. Projects supported include for example five farm diversification projects, three tourism projects and three community based projects. In addition 77 micro –enterprises were supported and businesses developed as part of the rural advice scheme. The council has successfully bid for transition funding to enable preparation to bid for a further</li> </ul>

	programme for 2015/16.
<b>Objective:</b> Protect the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitated a habitat restoration project to protect the wet grassland and botanical species at Thorley Wash Nature Reserve (a Site of Special Scientific Interest). The project was awarded money from a number of agencies, including £64,288.80 from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), managed by East Herts Council. Funding was also secured from Growth Area Funding via Harlow Council, the Environment Agency, and the Highways Department of Hertfordshire County Council.</li> </ul>

### Case Study 3:

The central government funding that we receive directly for services has continued to reduce and is predicted to reduce further in future years. In order to mitigate the risk of having to make significant service reductions as funding reduces, there is a need for East Herts to identify new and/or additional sources of revenue income. While the council will continue to find new efficiencies and more joined up and innovative ways of working, greater self-reliance in terms of income generation can assist with ensuring key services are secured.

As a part of this work, the council agreed an investment strategy in November 2013 that considers how to make the best use of our assets, be they cash in the bank or property that we own or could invest in. Through our Treasury Management strategy, we consider where we place our money to get the best return whilst securing our money and have been successful at earning interest on our money despite the reducing interest rates available. In addition, we own a number of properties and do our best to secure lease income from them and ensure we make a good rate of return to invest back into other services. We are also considering investing money into other funds, such as Property Funds and into further direct property, in order to secure further returns on investment to invest back into our services and secure them in the longer

term.

**What we were unable to do:**

We had hoped to implement a self-service project, based on 'Fix My Street' which is a fault-reporting website. Unfortunately there have been delays in developing the "self-service" project due to technical difficulties with IT systems, however, Environmental Services is continuing to work with the ICT Team to develop a solution which will allow residents to report problems in their local environment using a mobile phone based 'app'.

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## **Section 5: Consultation**

The council is committed to engaging with local people directly about key issues so they can help shape the future of the district. During 2013/14 amongst others the council consulted on the:

- 2014/15 Budget with local businesses
- Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
- Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy
- Draft District Plan
- Conservation Assessments for Bishop's Stortford, Green Tye, Hertingfordbury, Hunsdon, Much Hadham, Puckridge, Stanstead Abbots, Standon and Watton-at-Stone

The council also undertook its biennial residents' survey. The results showed that the percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied has increased by 19% from 51% in 2011 to 70% in 2013. The findings from the survey will help inform the development of the 2015/16 Corporate Strategic Plan.

To view all our current open consultations and results of closed consultations go to [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk).

## **Section 6: Equalities**

The Public Sector Equality Duty, part of the Equality Act 2010, places an obligation on the council to meet the needs of all individuals in the way we work, when shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to our own employees. The Equality Act 2010 states that the council must have due regard to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics set out in the Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership.

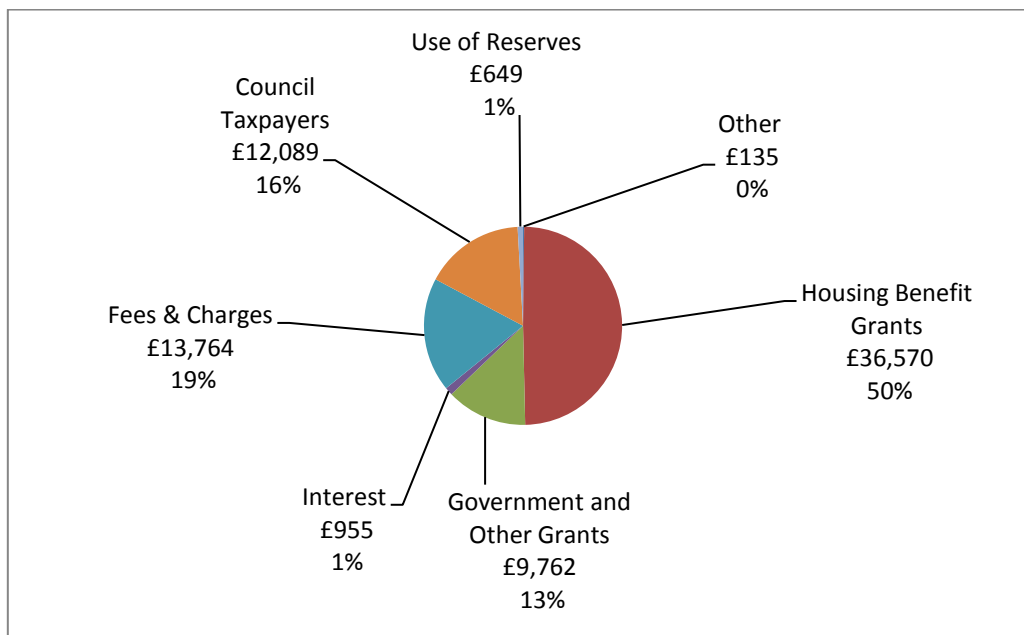
The East Herts Council Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy 2012-2015 supports and drives the council's commitment to better meeting the needs of the district's diverse communities and delivering better services for our customers and ensuring access is fair and reasonable for all.

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## **Section 7: Financial Information**

The following summarises East Herts Council's statement of accounts for the financial year from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014<sup>17</sup>.

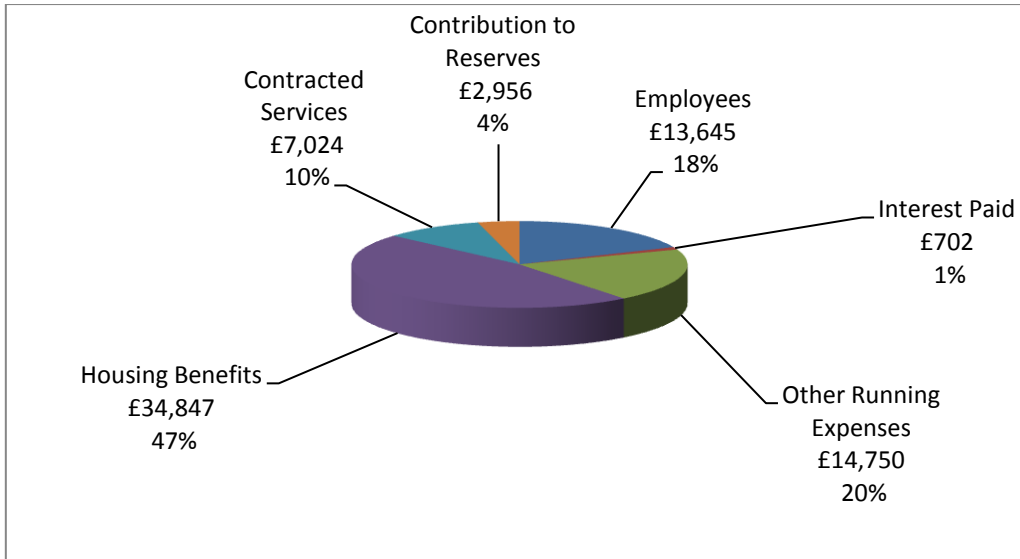
### **Where the money comes from Sources of income to the council £000**



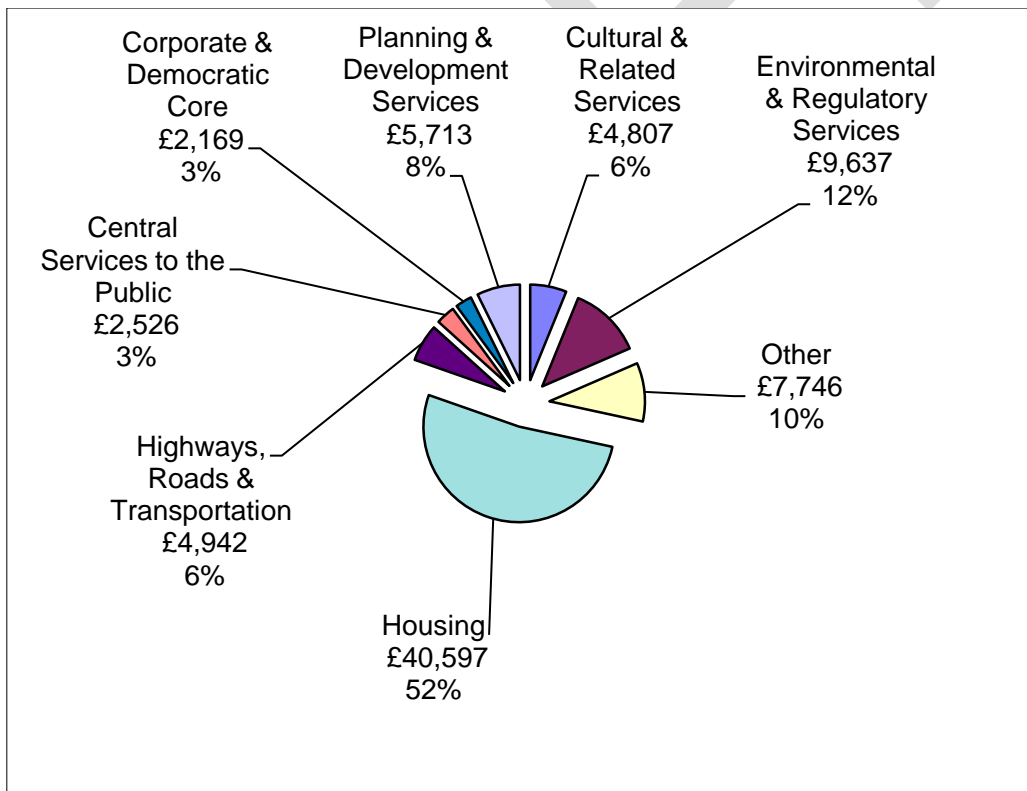
It can be seen that the largest source of the council's income is from Housing Benefit Grants.

### **How the money is spent £000**

<sup>17</sup> Draft accounts prior to audit



**The services provided  
£000**



The cost of "The Services Provided" includes capital charges, impairments, revenue funded from capital under statute and capital government grants totalling £ 4,213k which have been excluded from the chart "How the money is spent".



The full statement of account can be found at [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk) along with a full set of previous years audited accounts.

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## **Section 8: Statement on Contracts**

In making changes to the way in which services are delivered, there will be times when the council awards contracts that involve the transfer of employees out of council employment. In 2013/14 there was a shared service initiative with one other council to provide ICT, Business Improvement, Print and Design Services. Staff were transferred through TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations) to the appropriate council.

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## **Section 9: Performance Indicators**

Corporate priority performance measures for 2013/14.

The 2013/14 performance indicator outturns will be inserted here at the design stage.

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## **Appendix A Contact your councillor**

Contact details for all 50 councillors can be found on the council's website - [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk) or by contacting Democratic Services on 01279 655261.

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***Inserted on the back of the report***

If you would like a translation of this document in another language, large print, Braille, audio or an electronic format, please contact Communications at East Herts Council on 01279 655 261 or email [communications@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:communications@eastherts.gov.uk)

If you need any further information please contact us:  
Office Opening Times: 9.00am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

**We welcome your feedback on this Annual Report.**

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**Write:** East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford SG13 8EQ

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