

Annual Report

2014/15

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Section 1: Profile of the District

Place

East Hertfordshire is the largest of the 10 districts in the Hertfordshire, and is where the historic county town of Hertford is situated. The predominantly rural district spans over 475 square kilometres and accounts for nearly a third of the county's size and just over an eighth of its population.

Of the 141,076¹ people living in the district, many will live in one of five market towns. The biggest is Bishop's Stortford (with 38,816 residents) which is followed by Hertford (27,703), Ware (19,268), Sawbridgeworth (8,717) and Buntingford (5,581)². The remaining 40,991 live in one of the many villages or hamlets scattered across the district.

Almost 91% of East Herts is green space and it has a number of heritage parks and gardens.³ Rye Meads and woodland in the south of the district at Wormley West End and Brickenden are internationally recognised sites. In addition there are 42 conservation areas.

In recognition of its history, more than 10 museums and heritage centres are spread across the district, in its rural villages as well as its town centres. In Datchworth, a museum in an old blacksmith's forge tells the history of the village with many objects donated or lent by local people. Another renowned site is Scott's Grotto, an enchanting grotto built into the hillside in Ware, by the Quaker poet John Scott in the 1760s.

Whilst the district itself is very rural, its close neighbours include the busy towns of Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City and Harlow, as well as Stansted Airport.

People

The average age of residents in East Herts is 40.2 years, compared to the East of England regional average of 40.6 years. The age distribution in East Herts largely mirrors that of the East of

¹ Mid 2013 Population Estimates, ONS

² Mid-2013 Small Area Population Estimates, ONS

³ Land Use Statistics (Generalised Land Use Database) 2005, ONS Neighbourhood Statistics

England. Two exceptions are the 20-24 and 45-49 age groups; the former is significantly lower than the East of England average and the latter is higher.⁴

Being a heavily rural district, the car remains the major transport method for residents. Car ownership is high, with 87.2% of households owning at least one car. This is above the East of England rate, where 81.5% of households own a car.⁵ 57.9% of residents use a car to travel to work.⁶

Prosperity

The employment rate in East Hertfordshire is high, with 79% of the district's population in employment, in comparison to a rate of 72% nationally.⁷ Weekly earnings are also above the national average, at an average of more than £624.⁸

Over a third of people are educated to level 4 or higher e.g. bachelor's degree (33.5%, 36,867). However under a fifth of the population have no qualifications (17.2%, 18,959)⁹.

Many residents seek work outside of the district, with 36,164 residents commuting outside the district compared to 22,140 workers commuting into the district.¹⁰

House prices are among the highest in the country; latest figures show that the average property price was £366,300. This compares to an average of £265,300 in England.¹¹ There is a shortage of affordable housing in the district.

⁴ 2012-based Sub National Population Projections, ONS

⁵ 2011 Census – Car Availability (from Neighbourhood Statistics)

⁶ 2011 Census - Travel to work

⁷ Regional Labour Market: LI01 - Local Indicators for Counties, Local and Unitary Authorities, May 2015, ONS

⁸ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2014 Provisional Results, ONS

⁹ 2011 Census - Qualifications and Students (KS501EW), NOMIS

¹⁰ 2011 Census – Commuting Patterns

¹¹ Herts LIS – House Prices 2015, October to December 2015

Did you know?

East Herts Council in 2014/15:

- Awarded £147,379 in both revenue and capital grants to 126 different voluntary groups, community groups and young people, including charities and parish councils
- Sold nearly 12,000 tickets to the 2014 Christmas Pantomime at Hertford Theatre – this is an increase of around 2,000 tickets compared to the previous year
- Supported 6,173 housing benefit customers and 6,623 council tax support customers in East Herts.
- Had more than 14,208 visitors drop off post at its customer service centres in Hertford and Bishops Stortford – the majority of postal items dropped off are for our Housing Options and Benefits departments
- Overall, had 175,119 visits to the council's five pools in each of its towns at Hertford, Ware, Sawbridgeworth, Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford and 214,713 visits to the council's gyms in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford
- Processed 2,319 planning and related applications
- In total collected over 53,941,000kg of waste in the district – this is around 904kg of waste per household
- The recycling rate for waste collections over the year was 49.6%
- Undertook 397 programmed food hygiene inspections across the district
- Collected 117 stray dogs
- Continued to grow its social media following and had 4814 followers on Twitter and 252 likes on Facebook by March 2015
- Received 330,121 visitors to the Council website – the top landing page from search engines was 'View Planning Application Decisions'.

Section 2: 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 overarching aim is underpinned by three corporate priorities, based on what residents said they wanted.

These priorities in 2014/15 were:

<u>People</u> – Fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute
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<u>Place</u> – Safe and Clean

<u>Prosperity</u> – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities

Each priority was further defined by a series of objectives which were set out in our four-year Corporate Strategic Plan for 2015/16 – 2018/19. These priorities and objectives were shared with many of our partner organisations to enable a combined approach in service delivery, helping to eliminate service gaps and duplication whilst promoting efficiency.

Those priorities begin to express the council's purpose and show that being **Here to Help** is central to the work and ethos here at East Herts Council.

- It is central to the services and support that we provide to residents and businesses and how we provide them.
- It is the main driver that underlies the community leadership role of our elected Members.
- It underpins staff engagement and organisation improvement activities

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 3: Progress against 2014/15 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 for those who are vulnerable and to deliver strong services

What we want to achieve	What we have done
<p>Objective: Improve the health and well-being of our residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published our Health and Wellbeing Strategy which sets out our plans for combining our resources and skills to promote healthier lifestyles in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), NHS Trusts, volunteer organisations and others. • Been recognised by The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) for our strong commitment to public health and for our achievements in health promotion strategy and initiatives designed to maximise public health opportunities. • Welcomed the first UK Women’s International cycling tour through East Herts. • Implemented '3G' all-weather football pitches at Hartham Common in Hertford. There has been strong demand for football pitches in the Hertford area. The new pitches can be used all year round, including when weather conditions prevent the use of traditional pitches. East Herts consulted with residents and decided to install two pitches and retain one tennis court. The scheme will also generate additional income for the council which helps to keep the cost of leisure services down. • Strengthened our scrutiny of external public bodies and partners. We now have an East Herts councillor representative on the county’s Health Scrutiny Committee, which contributed to a number of scrutiny reviews on various NHS and health service providers (This included visits to the SurgiCentre at Lister Hospital, Kingfisher Court, Watford General Hospital, the Hazard Response Team in Cambridgeshire and a meeting about urgent care).
<p>Objective: Reduce fuel poverty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched a revised Home Insulation Grant scheme, which offers 50% contributions towards certain insulation measures. Additionally, the availability of some free

schemes increased. As a result just five East Herts funded grants were required, at a cost of £665. The measures represented annual savings of four tonnes carbon dioxide, and estimated total energy savings of £974 per year. Such initiatives offer a real help to the estimated 7.5% of households in fuel poverty in East Herts. Insulation schemes were widely promoted through our website and other publicity, such as a “bin hanger” card to households on the wheeled bin collection. The council is currently exploring the potential for expanding the East Herts Home Energy grants scheme to encompass a wider range of home energy efficiency measures which are currently excluded from the nationally available schemes.

Objective: Increase community engagement

- Awarded £147,379 in both revenue and capital grants to 126 different voluntary groups, community groups and young people, including charities and parish councils. This included:
 - **Summer Activities** – Our summer activities grants programme for 2014 was very well received and more than 2,000 children and young people attended the various activities. Events included summer archery, Flying Circus at Courtyard Arts, tennis coaching, community picnic and Pop School. There were 7,607 total attendances over all activities reported in 2014 compared to 5,664 in 2013.
 - **Community Activity Grants** – Held six funding rounds and awarded 63 grants to health and social care charities, older peoples’ groups, youth, sports and other leisure clubs. Later in the year, criteria relaxed, and funding was opened to village halls and parish councils. This grant fund was used to support, among others, a Parkinson’s support group, a WWI Remembrance event and to support carers with their launch of discount passports for unpaid carers. Grants were also awarded to support grass root community and voluntary groups with their

running costs. One of the highlights of the year was supporting the local Alzheimer's Society to set up a new Dementia Café in Bishop's Stortford.

➤ **Community Capital Grants** – Awarded 26 capital grants worth almost £89,000 in total for community-led projects to improve well-used facilities or services. Examples include: the council helped Bishop's Stortford Rugby Club replace its roof in anticipation of the many extra visitors around the Rugby World Cup this summer; provided Buntingford Cougars with portable goals to support their coaching sessions and helped Hailey Day Centre in Sawbridgeworth with a kitchen upgrade so they could continue to provide hot, healthy meals to frail elderly.

➤ **Performance to Excellence Grants** – Awarded 21 grants to young people (11-18 year olds in the district) who were achieving excellence in their chosen sport. This fund was oversubscribed and we used some of the Community Activities Grants budget to cover these requests.

- Held the fourth annual Community Sports Awards. This annual event, funded by East Herts Council, aims to celebrate achievements and contributions to sport as well as inspiring our local sporting talent to go on and reach their full potential. 19 awards were presented in total across nine categories.
- Held our annual rural parish conference where more than 40 parish councils attended. The event provides a popular forum for engaging with parish councils on rural issues. There was particular interest this year on the information that the Community Voluntary Service (CVS) presented on the community car scheme.
- Held a conference for more than 50 volunteers who give up their time to run village

	<p>halls and community buildings. The event was jointly organised with Community Development Action (CDA) for Hertfordshire and with support from various voluntary and community groups. Attendees had the opportunity to discuss common problems, learn from each other and share their experiences, helping them to maximise the potential of halls for the benefit of their local communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully delivered a councillor training and development programme to all elected members to help them fulfil their community engagement role. • Successfully implemented Individual Electoral Registration (IER). IER has been rolled out across the country to modernise the way people register to vote and to help tackle electoral fraud. 97% of the electorate has now registered under Individual Electoral Registration. • Supported National Voter Registration Day by encouraging residents across the district to register to vote. Young people in particular were encouraged to get involved and vote for whom they want to represent them.
<p>Objective: Deliver strong and relevant services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped older residents in the district to stay fit, active and independent through the Ageing Well Project by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Launching subsidised Fitsteps dance classes in Bishop's Stortford and Ware. The classes are aimed at older residents, providing the health benefits of regular activities. Fitsteps is a national fitness programme which was created following the popularity of the TV programme, Strictly Come Dancing. The Bishops Stortford class had numbers between two and eight. The number of residents attending the Ware class varied from 20 to as high as 40. Due to its success the initial pilot was extended with reduced funding and sessions are now running

independently

- Supporting a grant from the LSP Health and Wellbeing Group to the Herts Sport Partnership to provide 'Fellas Fitness'. The initiative is aimed at older men to help build and maintain their fitness levels, whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to meet and interact with others.
- Working in partnership with Active East Herts, Riversmead Housing Association and Wodson Park Sports Centre to run chair-based exercise classes for residents aged between 68-89 years of age at Calton Court in Hertford. The pilot scheme worked on posture, balance and strength. Weekly sessions ran from May-July 2014.
- Became a partner in a Shared Anti-Fraud Service for non-benefit and corporate fraud with Broxbourne Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council. The shared service will provide fraud prevention, detection and investigation services and will enable the council to meet its duties in relation to safeguarding public funds and minimising the loss to fraud. Ultimately this helps councils to spend the maximum possible on delivering local services. The new venture uses shared intelligence among the partners to target fraudulent activity across the county. The service went live at the start of financial year 2015/16.
- Agreed a new Customer Services Strategy for 2015–2020 to deliver customer focused services. The council needs to understand the changes among its communities over the last 10 years, identify the key issues that have impacted service delivery and look ahead to predict the pressures in the next 10 years in order to 'future proof' our services.

Objective: Improve outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals

- Undertook a housing survey so we have a clear understanding of the housing requirements in the district. All councils are required by central government to carry out a housing survey every few years. The results help us develop our housing strategy and planning policies. 25% of residents (from a sample of 9,000) took part in the survey and the results are due to be published in September 2015.

Case Study 1: Housing Benefit Claims Performance

Housing Benefits are delivered through the East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Revenues and Benefits Service. For 2014/15, the service was set a performance target of ten calendar days to process housing benefit applications. The service faced increased demand and, at the start of the year the service was performing under-target. In October 2014 the service was averaging 14.1 days to process an application.

Demand on the service had risen as not only have caseloads increased since 2013/14, but there has been a considerable increase in complexity of caseload. For example, many more residents are now working on a 'zero hours' contract which means claimants have to notify the Housing Benefit team of a change in circumstances every week or month as their income varies. The service then has to process every individual's change event - contributing to an overall increased volume of work, an increase of more than 3% when compared to the previous year.

East Herts and Stevenage have collaboratively invested more resources into the service in order to achieve an average time taken to process new housing benefit claims or change of events at ten calendar days from the first application, in East Herts. This surpasses the average time taken across other districts in Hertfordshire.

What we were unable to finish during 2014/15: Website Accessibility Review

We had hoped to undertake a review of the council website to optimise the accessibility of the website and ensure we

remain in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. An action plan was due for March 2015. The council last undertook an accessibility review in 2011 and recommendations were implemented in 2012. However, since then, a number of minor changes have been made to the website, particularly the front page.

The council started work on reviewing the council intranet and it was sensible to run projects concurrently. This had the knock-on effect of pushing the accessibility review project back. However, the project largely fell behind schedule at the procurement stage: we had tendered for a company to undertake a review of both the usability and accessibility of the website but following the wider scope of the project, we were then unable to elicit any bids from any of the prospected suppliers in the market.

Negotiations have since been undertaken with a separate organisation, SOCITM (The Society of IT Management), on the wider usability of the website. The accessibility review of the website now sits as a separate project, with a revised completion target of the end of September 2015. The website currently remains fully compliant with accessibility guidelines but the council will continue to make further improvements.

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 want to achieve	What we have done
Objective: Reduce residual waste and increase our recycling rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduced the use of compostable caddy liners in kitchen caddies that can be disposed of in the brown bin. Residents told us that composting food waste was messy without them, and therefore made it more difficult. Nearly a third of waste put in the black bin for landfill is food, and the council wanted to make it easier and encourage residents to put it in their brown bin for composting.
Objective: 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreed carbon reduction target of 25% by 2020, from the baseline year of 2009. Carbon dioxide emission figures for 2014/15 are not yet available, but up to 2013/14 there has been a reduction of 17% in total CO₂ emissions from the council's operations. This was a 2% improvement in 2013/14 when compared with the previous year. 2014/15 figures will be released early November• The waste collection contract has delivered considerable ongoing carbon dioxide savings. The total reduction in carbon emissions achieved since 2008/09 to date is 27%.
Objective: Maintain our clean streets and reduce litter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieved the RSPCA Gold Footprint award. This certification is given for the quality of stray dog services, housing and animal welfare principles. An effective stray dog services is essential to ensuring dog fouling is kept to a minimum through education and responsible dog ownership, so this is a pleasing result for the council. Last year

	<p>the council achieved a silver footprint and the year before that, a bronze. The council also scored top marks for its consistent promotion of responsible dog ownership, including micro-chipping, which becomes compulsory for all dogs in Britain from June 2016. In 2014/15 the council picked up 117 stray dogs compared with 114 in the previous year.</p>
<p>Objective: Reduce anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed, as part of the East Herts Community Safety Partnership, to the reduction in recorded crime and anti-social behaviour across the district. Anti-social behaviour has reduced by 26% from 3,280 incidences in 2012/13 to 2,423 incidences in 2014/15.
<p>Objective: Ensure future development best meets the need of the district and its residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation responses on the District Plan have been reported back to the District Plan Panel along with supporting and technical evidence. This will inform the production of the next stage in the District Plan. • Brought forward the development at Bishop's Stortford North (permission now granted) whilst seeking to resist what we consider are unsustainable development proposals coming forward in advance of the District Plan. These are proposals where the supporting infrastructure is not in place – and will not be delivered as part of the development. A number of proposals at Buntingford were resisted because of this impact. • Approved a small development of sustainable homes in Waterford. The homes are expected to become the biggest group of naturally ventilated homes in the UK, serving as a working model for buildings elsewhere in the country. They will also exceed the highest ranking in the Code for Sustainable Homes, which measures new homes performance in categories such as energy efficiency, water use and health and wellbeing.

Case Study 2: Pride in Our Parks

Among the council's objectives is to maintain our parks, play areas and open spaces in good order. The council values its green space and we are proud that the prestigious Green Flag award, which recognises and rewards the best green spaces in the country, has been retained for our parks at The Ridgeway in Hertford (for the sixth year running) and Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford (for the seventh year running). As part of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013 – 2018, we are reviewing our play areas for a second time and looking at ways to create more opportunities for visitors of all ages to get fit and healthy in our parks. Whilst we still maintain that our open spaces are crucial to providing social and play opportunities for young people, we are expanding this ethos for our older residents. Our parks are not only important for environmental reasons but also fitting in with the wider 'health and wellbeing' and 'ageing well' agendas.

We have created new circular walking routes in Hertford around the Foxholes Woodland and in Bishop's Stortford, linking five of the town's parks and open spaces. To promote and develop accessibility of our parks, new signage and interpretation boards have been developed and installed at Foxholes Woodland and Hartham Common in Hertford. We have also continued to promote our health walks for older residents which have remained very popular and there are now regular well attended walks in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware.

Younger people across the district have benefitted from our ongoing Play Area Development Programme. A new bespoke toddler play area at The Bourne open space in Ware has been completed, and a new multi-use games area (MUGA) and additional play equipment for older children installed at the play area in Watton-at-Stone.

We celebrated Love Parks Week across the district, by hosting two free fun family events, "Get Park Active 2014" at Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford and Pishiobury Park in Sawbridgeworth. Activities encouraged everyone to get out and have fun in the parks. Southern Country Park activities included a family activity trail, orienteering and new for

2014 'slacklining', with the ever popular annual dog show and making wooden medallions with the Friends group. The council teamed up with Dogs Trust to offer free dog micro-chipping. At Pishiobury Park visitors could picnic, try out the family fitness activity trail and meet the Longhorn cattle, as well as go on a guided bug hunt with the Friends group. Over 800 attended these two events.

Improvement and promotion of our parks and open spaces will continue in line with our Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013–2018.

What we were unable to finish during 2014/15 to complete: Flood alleviation

As part of the council's Risk Management Authority role, we initiated a programme of Surface Water Management Plans (SWMPs) in high risk flood locations across the district. The intended outcome is to provide a reduction in flood risk and damage to natural environments, and the project will help to reduce demand for council resources in reacting to floods. This project was programmed to be completed by the end of March 2015

In reaction to the 2014 Central Government flood grant schemes, the council had to focus the resources of the Environment & Engineering team towards providing these flood grants. The scheme aimed to help communities recover from the severe weather experienced during winter 2013-2014 and reduce flood risk for future years. As a result of this additional workload, the council has not been able to deliver the full SWMP programmed for 2014/15. However as part of the initial stages of producing data for this SWMP, the council has gathered large amounts of information on the existing drainage infrastructure, such as its condition and extent. This has enabled us to understand and assess why an area is prone to floods and the nature of what remedial works will be required to improve the system against flooding for the future.

From April 2015, the council will resume the concluding elements of the SWMP which will detail long term or medium-term

infrastructure repairs, capital upgrades and routine or special maintenance recommendations.

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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 want to achieve	What we have done
<p>Objective: Deliver value for money and reduce our reliance on central government funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Installed new seating and an auditorium floor at Hertford Theatre to provide a better customer experience.• East Herts has considered how to make best use of its resources and through Audit Committee agreed a framework that allows wider options in terms of investing its money. This includes being able to make use of Property Funds. It is anticipated that the increased income from these investments will be able to close gaps in the financial model in future years as an alternative to having to look to make further savings. Two property funds have been identified and agreed and the council is currently on the waiting list to be able to place our money with them. This is anticipated to happen during September 2015.• Agreed a new senior management structure that focused resources in a different way. This included the investment in a new Head of Business Development; the officer's remit includes considering improved ways of working, a more commercial approach to delivering council services and working alongside service areas to consider future efficiency savings. Further investment has also been made in other areas including Procurement to enable wider working with our suppliers and to encourage greater competition.• Continued to implement our 'Here to Help' organisational development programme.

Following on from the success of staff workshops in 2014 where ideas and suggestions were put forward to help improve what we do and how we do it. A number of projects were rolled out from June 2014, for example, to help improve the telephone system and review the council's performance development review scheme.

- For the second year running, the council has undertaken a budget challenge to consider our allocation of resources, and in particular highlight those areas where there have been underspends in prior years, to free up resource to reallocate to other priority areas.
- Undertaken very detailed income modelling against all our major sources of income, and used the results to assist our medium term financial decision making. By doing more detailed and robust modelling, we were able to close the expected budget gap within our financial plan in future years.
- Agreed to work with North Herts District Council on producing an outline business case to evaluate the possibility of a joint Waste Collection and Street Cleansing contract and assess the implications to both authorities in improving the cost effectiveness of these services. The strategic outline case was presented to members in June 2015.
- Taken robust action against fraud and have prosecuted five people, issued five administration penalties and two cautions. This means that the council is recovering a combined total Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit/Support overpayments of £425,340.81 against these 12 sanctions and other overpayments determined as fraudulent. A further £6,109.54 in overpayments of Department for Work & Pensions benefits was also identified.

Objective: Enhance the economic well-being of East Herts

- Celebrated 'Love Your Local Market' week by holding a special market where locally made ice-cream, meats and game, cheeses, pickles, alongside the weekly fishmonger and greengrocer, could be enjoyed. The council also provided pitch spaces free of the usual rental charge, to encourage and support small businesses to take part.
- Following extensive public consultation agreed to implement free 30 minutes parking for visitors to East Herts Council car parks in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware. As part of the council's ambition to increase the vibrancy of the district's town centres, 30 minutes free parking has been introduced in most car parks, adding to the free bays on street and increasing availability and convenience.
- Supported 'Small Business Saturday' – a national day held annually on the first Saturday of December – by allowing free parking all day in East Herts car parks in Bishop's Stortford and Hertford. Market traders in the two towns also received a reduced rent.
- Held our first urban conference, bringing together town, district and county councillors, town clerks and chief officers to discuss how best to tackle issues in our urban areas. Discussion topics included the best ways to communicate with town residents, night time economy, sustainable community transport and leisure and cultural provision.
- Contributed to an East Herts Local Strategic Partnership project called "Get East Herts Working" to help people between the ages of 25–49 looking for work. Led by Jobcentre Plus, participants were able to take part in activities such as facilitated work clubs in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware, recruitment events and work placements. The project was a success and supported 2,471 participants, against an

	original target of 500. Of those that participated, 44% were recorded as coming off active benefits at the end of the project.
Objective: Protect the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced a new Buildings at Risk register. Farm buildings, thatched cottages and traditional stone walls whose future is at risk are among the historic structures that have been listed, in addition to milestones, bridges, churches and many other distinctive features of the built landscape. To compile the register, the council carried out a survey using Historic England's checklist of criteria. Buildings are usually at risk of loss due to neglect, decay and inappropriate development.

Case Study 3: Rural Development Programme Europe (RDPE)

The council is very pleased to have succeeded in secured £1.8 million from the Rural Payments Agency for a Rural Development Programme across the rural parts of East Herts, Uttlesford, Epping Forest and North Herts. Previously, the council received funding covering 2009-2013. During that period, the programme achieved more than £4 million of investment in the rural economy and created 67 new jobs. This was achieved through a range of projects such as farm diversification, tourism, community and business projects among others.

Following the success of the programme, the four districts agreed to collaborate further to secure funding from the new Rural Development Programme due to start in 2015. 2014 was a transition period, focused on gathering an evidence base for the application. Consultation was held with members of the Local Action Group (comprised of members from the public and private sector across the four districts) and the wider rural community to help formulate local priorities. This consultation fed into the production of our Local Development Strategy and Portfolio of Projects for 2015 – both of which were key documents in the bid in September 2014. Ultimately, approval of the application was granted in February 2015.

The focus of the new programme will be on sustainable rural growth and to support the development of rural businesses up until 2020. East Herts Council is the lead agency and accountable body in delivering the programme. Throughout 2015 the team will be working towards putting in place the application procedures and staff training.

What we were unable to finish during 2014/15: Web-based self-service systems

We had hoped to implement web-based self-service systems for our customers. The primary aim was to increase the range of services that customers could access online, which would include making appointments for some environmental services and to pay for ad-hoc services where customers are not supplied invoices or specific payment identifiers (such as council tax reference numbers). It would have the added benefit of reducing the number of telephone calls and associated staff resources, achieving mid-term financial planning targets. The council initially aimed to complete this by December 2014.

The council has succeeded in creating an online service, 'My East Herts', for refuse and recycling route information alongside other address-related information such as contact details for local councillors. However, the project has proved to be more resource-intensive than anticipated and ultimately some initial ideas were agreed to be out of scope. It was particularly problematic following the transition from one service contractor to another but a considerable amount of effort from internal staff has delivered an easy to use tool for customers. The My East Herts tool is currently in final testing and review, we expect this to be launched before September 2015.

This is the first of the new self-service tools to be deployed and it is expected that this will be closely followed by a new council tax and benefits self-service system. This is due to go live by October 2015.

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Section 4: 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 2014/15 among other consultations the council consulted on the:

- **Community safety annual consultation:**
Consultation was held with residents through web-based questionnaires and at community meetings.
- **Proposed new Community Fitness Trail at Grange Paddocks open space:**
Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre provided customers with paper questionnaires. There were also web-based questionnaires. The council used press releases and the council website to engage with the wider community.
- **District Plan:**
Consultation responses have been reported back to the District Plan Panel along with supporting and technical evidence. This will inform the production of the next stage in the District Plan.

Following the 2013 Residents Survey, we carried out three Residents' Survey focus groups in June 2014 with voluntary groups, community organisations, residents and members.

To view all our current open consultations and results of closed consultations go to www.eastherts.gov.uk/consultation.

Section 5: 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.

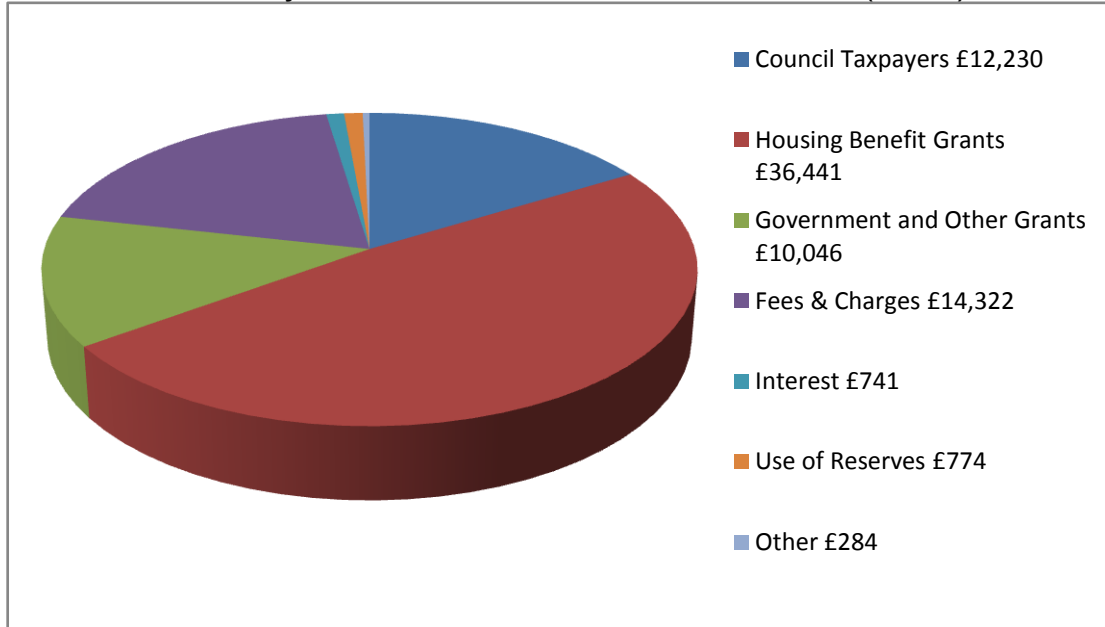
The protected characteristics set out in the Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership. The East Herts Council Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy 2012-2015 supports and drives the council's 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 6: Financial Information

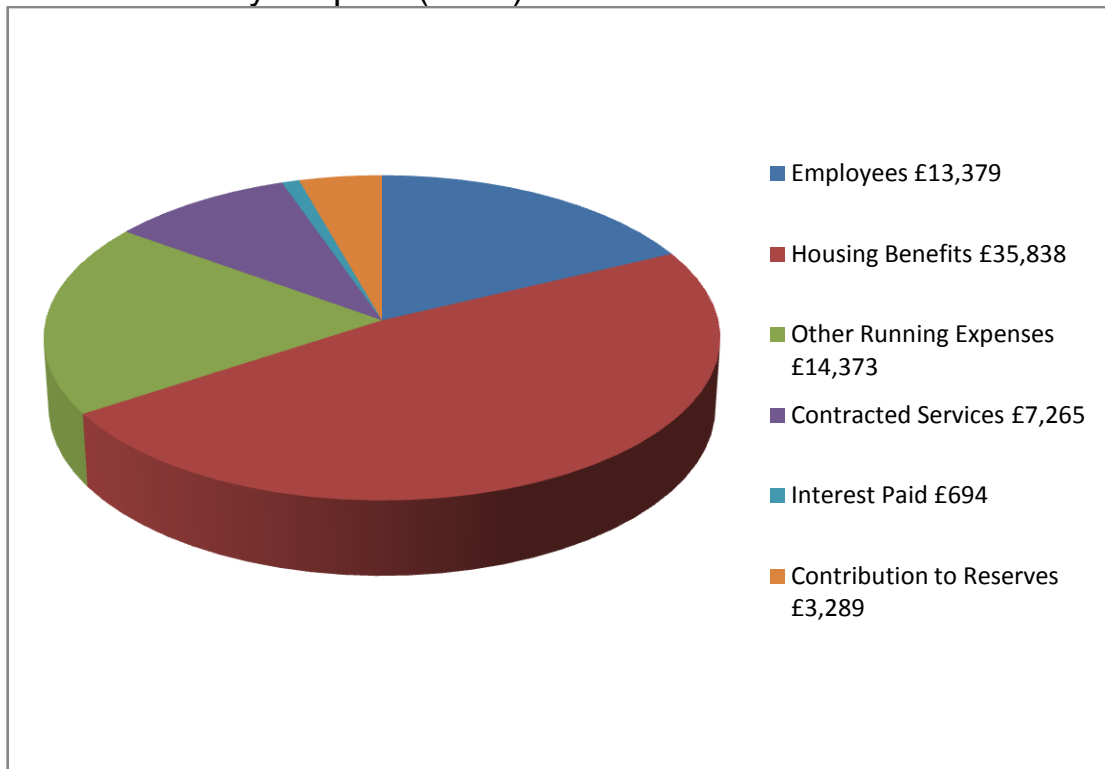
The following summarises East Herts Council's statement of accounts for the financial year from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015¹².

Where the money comes from - Sources of income (£000)

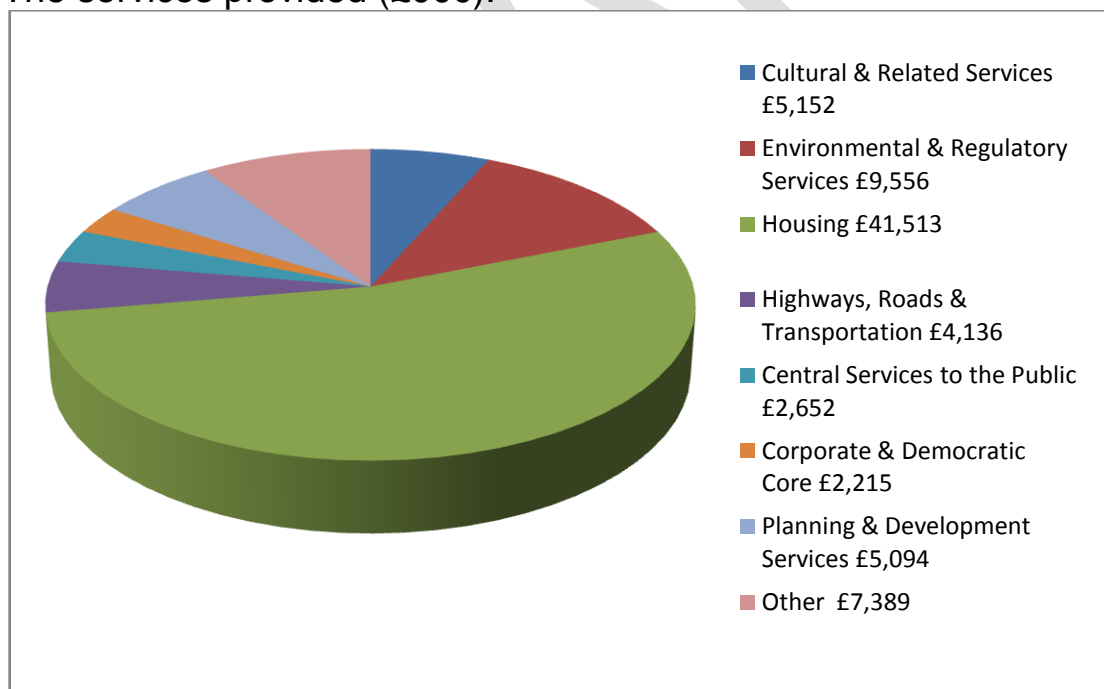


¹² Draft accounts prior to audit

How the money is spent (£000):



The services provided (£000):



The cost of "The services provided" includes capital charges, revenue funded from capital under statute, capital government grants and other financing costs totalling £2,869,000 which have been excluded from the previous charts.

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

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Section 7: 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 2014/15 there were no such transfers.

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Section 8: Performance Indicators

Corporate priority performance measures for 2014/15.

The 2014/15 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 - <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/councillors> 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

If you need any further information please contact us:
Office Opening Times: 9am 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

Email: performance@eastherts.gov.uk

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- Wallfields, Hertford
- Charringtons House, Bishop's Stortford.