

East Herts Council Report Council

Date of meeting: 22 July 2026

Report by: Councillor Ben Crystall, Leader of the Council

Report title: Annual Report for 2025/26 and refresh of LEAF Priorities

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary – this report provides Council with an update on performance against LEAF priorities over the 2025/26 year and refreshed priorities going forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL:

- a) That Council review performance over the 2025/26 year.
- b) That Council adopt the refreshed LEAF priorities for 2026/27 and beyond (see sections 2.8 – 2.11).

1.0 Proposals

- 1.1 That Council review progress against last year's LEAF priorities and adopt changes to these priorities going forward

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 28 February 2024, Council approved its new "LEAF" corporate priorities. These set out the strategic priorities of the Council and were grouped under the following four headings:

- Listening, Open and Transparent
- Environmentally Focused
- Acting with the Community
- Fair and Inclusive

- 2.2 Under each of these headings are a series of sub objectives and actions which officers were tasked with delivering. The paper to Council can be found here: [New Corporate Plan for 2024/25 onwards](#)¹
- 2.3 A further, more detailed set of actions, projects and measures were then implemented at an operational level. This framework helped inform the delivery plans for services, teams and individual staff performance goals. In theory, every East Herts Council staff member should be able to relate their day-to-day actions to strategic delivery of LEAF priorities agreed by Members.
- 2.4 The LEAF priorities are kept under review by Executive on an annual basis and adjusted/ amended as required. This enables The Council to change priorities to accommodate new challenges (e.g. in national legislation) and local issues as well as progress against key objectives.
- 2.5 Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update in 2025 on progress over the 2024/25 year and made recommendations to Executive. These were considered by Executive and Full Council and refreshed priorities were adopted. The same process has been followed this year, and Overview and Scrutiny reviewed the annual plan on 9 June 2026 ahead of Executive consideration on 14 July 2026.
- 2.6 Appendix A sets out updates against each area over the 2025/26 year in detail. A short video has also been produced highlighting some of the achievements which can be found here: [East Herts Council Annual Report Video 2025 2026 - YouTube](#)
- 2.7 Executive have also recommended a refresh to some elements of the LEAF priorities for 2026/27 and onwards, as follows:

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<https://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s65262/East%20Herts%20Council%20Corporate%20Plan.pdf?J=3>

2.8 Listening, Open and Transparent:

- Listen and be open and transparent in decision making and actions. We will prioritise improved consultation, engagement and conversation with our communities and evaluate the impact
- Strive to achieve excellent customer service, focusing on improved response times
- Encourage residents to use our digital communication channels where they can. This will help us focus resources on those residents who are not digitally able, allowing them to more easily talk to us by phone or in person
- Engage the community and Councillors in Local Government Reorganisation
- Engage with residents through Community and Development Management Forums, to enhance planning outcomes at strategic sites

2.9 Environmentally Focused

- Implement our new Air Quality Action Plan to cut pollution and improve health
- Implement our Parking Strategy and other options including the LCWIP to encourage active travel
- Encourage the reduction of carbon emissions from homes and businesses through training and by supporting “Energy Hubs” in towns and parishes
- Roll out more EV chargers in urban and rural locations across the district
- Encourage residents to play their part in supporting local wildlife and improving our natural environment and support delivery of the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Strategy
- Maximising the positive environmental impacts of the new waste contract

2.10 Acting with the Community

- Consult with communities to update our Local Plan, prioritising improved sustainability standards
- Prioritise actions that can provide housing which is truly affordable

- Help create thriving high streets, by encouraging local markets and by working positively with partners
- Support transfer of assets into community ownership when appropriate
- Support voluntary sector groups to continue their work in helping the whole community
- Support more communities to create or update their Neighbourhood Plans

2.11 Fair and Inclusive

- Deliver the Cultural Strategy, with support for art and cultural events
- Maintain and improve council services for all residents during LGR, and make provision for those who are vulnerable or digitally excluded
- Support those facing homelessness or recovering from it, and include them in consultations
- Deliver our Thriving Together Plan to promote physical exercise, healthy lifestyles and support other measures including healthy hubs that boost community wellbeing
- Communicate council tax and other support schemes to residents

2.12 Appendix B presents the refreshed LEAF priorities against last year's priorities, highlighting changes and the proposed reasons. The overall LEAF framework has been maintained with some priorities amended in recognition of progress made and also in anticipation of Local Government Re-organisation.

3.0 Reason

3.1 The LEAF Corporate Plan helps residents understand the priorities of the Council and how resources are used to achieve them. The plan also drives service, team and individual performance goals.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 LEAF priorities have been developed by the Joint Administration with support and advice from officers on deliverability, risks and financial implications. Executive Members are able to recommend changes to priorities for adoption at Council following an assessment of progress to date.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 There is no legal requirement for councils to develop a corporate plan, however, should the Council fail to refresh priorities there may be a risk that resources are not directed towards achieving key priorities.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The new Corporate Plan priorities will guide the organisation's work over the coming years. They will be reviewed on an annual basis and agreed at Council. A key priority is to ensure that consultation is carried out effectively.

Community Safety

Not directly however some of the priorities and subsequent actions will be focused on supporting community safety

Data Protection

None arising directly from this report.

Equalities

As the Corporate Plan is translated into operational priorities, individual equalities impact assessments will be undertaken where there is a change to service delivery

Environmental Sustainability

Actions under the Environmentally Focused section of the Corporate Plan will address issues around Sustainability

Financial

None arising directly from this report.

Health and Safety

None arising directly from this report.

Human Resources

None arising directly from this report.

Human Rights

None arising directly from this report.

Legal

None arising directly from this report.

Specific Wards

No

Background papers, appendices and other relevant material:

Appendix A – Annual Plan for 2024/257

Appendix B – Changes to LEAF priorities

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