

# **Realising our Ambitions for Swale**

## ***Partnership priorities for the borough to 2031***

# Foreword

Welcome to *Realising our Ambitions for Swale*, the Swale Locality Board's updated vision for the transformation of our borough.

The predecessor to this document, *Ambitions for Swale*, was published in 2009 as the borough's sustainable community strategy. Since then, the country has experienced a period of financial crisis and recession from which recovery remains uncertain and which has ushered in a period of unprecedented fiscal restraint. This has had a major impact on many Locality Board partners, in terms both of reduced funding and increased demand for services.

No less significantly, the new government in Westminster has set out its ambition to de-monopolise the public service landscape, offering new freedoms and flexibilities to the local public sector while also encouraging voluntary and community groups to take charge of the services which matter in their neighbourhoods. In addition, the way that agencies work together within Kent has been revised with the advent of the Kent Forum and district locality boards, and is set for further transformation as pooled budgets and joint commissioning of services become the norm for local agencies.

Yet many of the challenges which were identified as facing Swale in 2009 remain valid today. Some parts of the borough continue to lag behind the rest of the South-East in terms of prosperity, with a few areas suffering from some of the worst overall deprivation in the country. Swale's ability to expand its economic base remains hampered in some cases by a relative lack of key workplace skills among local residents.

We knew when we published our *Ambitions for Swale* nearly three years ago that ours was a long-term vision, and one that would require sustained focus and strong partnership working across organisations and sectors to realise. We are proud of what we and our partners have achieved since then, including some key pieces of vital infrastructure, and being much further along the road to a regenerated Town Centre for Sittingbourne.

Still, there is a long way to go. This updated document sets out the Locality Board's shared long-term priorities, along with the key actions that will shape our joint working between now and 2015. It is therefore both a long-term vision for the borough and a roadmap for working in partnership in the medium term. It has been developed and agreed jointly by all the organisations represented at some level in the Swale Locality Board's partnership structure, and is thus truly a vision and a strategy for the whole of the borough.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles, Chair of the Swale Locality Board**

# The Swale Locality Board and *Realising our Ambitions for Swale*

The Swale Locality Board's overarching vision for the borough is to transform its economic, social and environmental prospects, making it one of the best places in Britain in which to live, work, learn and invest.

The Swale Locality Board brings together elected representatives from both Kent County Council (KCC) and Swale Borough Council (SBC) to enhance the effectiveness and democratic accountability of local public services. The Board comprises six members of the SBC Cabinet plus all of the KCC members who represent constituencies in Swale. It is chaired by the Leader of SBC, who also represents Swale at the Kent Forum, the most senior democratic grouping in the county, made up of the leaders of the county and district councils.

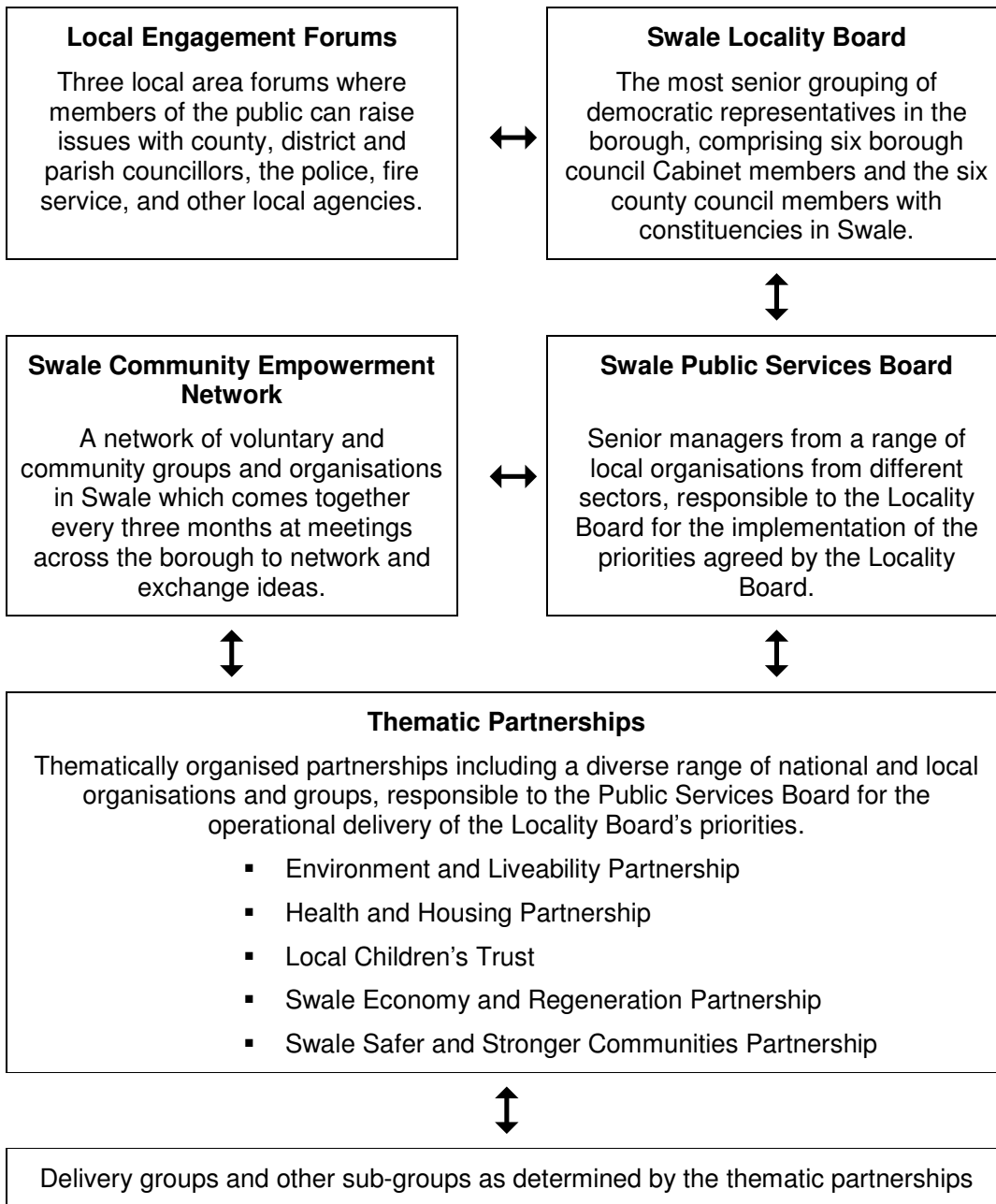
The Swale Public Services Board (SPSB) is responsible to the Locality Board for the management of local agencies' implementation of the partnership ambitions agreed by the democratic representatives on the Locality Board. SPSB is made up of chief officers and senior managers from a comprehensive range of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Implementation of the ambitions at an operational level is devolved to five thematic partnerships, which report into the SPSB.

Each of these thematic partnerships has contributed a chapter to this strategy, setting out the shared long-term priorities for the partners involved and identifying a number of joint medium-term actions. Some of the partnerships have been working together for several years, while others are newer and less well established. The actions identified in each chapter are in part a reflection of this, with some being based on plans on which the partnership has been working for some time, and others representing the outcome of more recent discussions of how partners can derive maximum benefit from working together over the coming three years.

Taken as a whole, the document therefore represents the priorities for working in partnership of the Locality Board architecture in its entirety, developed by the thematic partnerships, agreed by the Locality Board and managed by the SPSB. It follows on from and updates the *Ambitions for Swale* published in 2009.

One of the advantages for the borough of the locality board model is that it brings the county and borough councils closer together at the most senior level to encourage a more collaborative approach to overseeing and commissioning services. Ensuring that this vital relationship goes from strength to strength, and that the Locality Board is involved with those services which are not traditionally delivered in partnership, will be key areas for development over the next few years. *Realising our Ambitions for Swale* therefore also sets out the contributions Swale will make to achieving the Vision for Kent, the overarching set of countywide ambitions developed by the Kent Forum.

**Figure 1: Summary of the Swale Locality Board partnership structure**



# Children and Young People

## **Our strategic objective:**

To improve the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people growing up in Swale by ensuring a collective effort and joined-up response among partner agencies.

## **Introduction**

The Swale Local Children's Trust Board will drive forward this objective through the delivery of the Swale Children and Young People Plan. The partnership brings together Kent County Council, Swale Borough Council, Kent Police, Connexions, Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust, Swale CVS, AmicusHorizon and local schools, while also working very closely with voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Trust Board will provide strategic leadership and maximise the collective efforts of its partners through a joined-up approach where appropriate, to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people within the borough. Champions for each priority will drive forward this work.

The Trust Board will also have an opportunity to influence local commissioning decisions that affect children and young people in the borough, including those made by the Kent Children and Young People Joint Commissioning Board and the Swale Locality Board. This will include work on transforming youth services, but the Trust Board will also have influence over commissioning decisions for early intervention and prevention services, as well as youth diversionary services.

It is important that children and young people are able to voice their views on issues that affect them and to be involved in the delivery of the solution. Engagement of children and young people will be a priority for the Board, and this is already being progressed through the development of the Youth Forum and Youth Advisory Group.

## **Baseline: Children and young people in Swale today**

A data collection exercise was undertaken to inform priority setting in the Children and Young People Plan for 2011, which showed that:

- as of 2007/08, 23% of Swale children live in poverty compared to the Kent average of 17%;
- Swale has the second-highest number of looked after children in Kent and also the highest rate of hospital admissions for children and young people caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries (168 per 10,000 in 2008/09);
- Swale also has the highest number of children with a Child Protection Plan in Kent at 51 per 10,000 children and young people;
- Swale has the second-lowest rate in Kent for the proportion of mothers who breastfeed for six to eight weeks, at 27%;
- levels of obesity of children in Reception year are lower than the Kent average, but by Year 6 this level has risen significantly to 17%, which is below the Kent average, but still a large proportion of Swale children;
- communication, language and literacy skills of primary-aged children are poor, with reading scores being the second-worst in the county. Numeracy skills are also very low;

- almost 7% of 16-18 year olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET), which is above the Kent and national average;
- Swale has seen a small reduction in teenage conceptions, but still has high levels, the second highest in Kent;
- there has been an increase in the number of young people presenting as homeless to Swale Borough Council, especially 16 and 17 year olds; and
- the Swale Local Area Perception Survey in 2011 showed that residents consider activities for teenagers to be something most in need of improvement within the borough. Additionally, 52% of respondents were dissatisfied with youth services and the services provided for teenagers by their local council.

Clearly then, the borough's children and young people face a number of challenges, not least as a result of the current economic climate, and those who are most vulnerable will require ongoing support to help them achieve the best possible outcomes. The Swale Children and Young People Plan explains these issues in more detail and shows how the Trust Board will work to resolve these. However, this in itself is a challenge, with reductions in resources being experienced across all partners, requiring new ways of working to be developed.

A good deal of work has already taken place to tackle issues affecting children and young people, including investment in children's centres in the most deprived parts of the borough to provide support to families at the earliest possible opportunity. During 2011, work commenced on the community budgets project, which aims to engender a new way of working with families with complex needs to address their collective issues in a holistic way.

### **Long-term priorities for children and young people**

Our priorities for children and young people to 2031 are:

**Reducing family poverty**, by reducing the number of families living in poverty, increasing the number of adults accessing employment, and increasing publicity for support services.

**Safeguarding children and young people**, by ensuring safe and positive environments for children and young people and helping parents and practitioners to recognise and respond to signs of adverse experiences.

**Improving emotional and mental health of children and young people**, including ensuring they have access to suitable support and early intervention services.

**Creating a healthy start in life**, by improving breastfeeding rates and take-up of MMR jabs, and by reducing the number of obese children.

**Improving primary-aged children's learning**, by increasing take-up of early years education, improving attainment at Key Stage 2, and improving outcomes for looked after children.

**Increasing adolescent engagement and improving school attainment**, by effectively managing challenging behaviour and offending, reducing the number of children not in education, employment or training (NEET), and reducing the number of teenage conceptions.

**Improving housing and reducing homelessness**, by improving housing conditions for vulnerable households, reducing the number of families living in temporary accommodation, reducing the number of young people at risk of homelessness, and improving energy efficiency to reduce fuel poverty.

Our key actions for children and young people between 2012 and 2015 are:

- 1. Delivery of the Swale Children and Young People Plan**, a detailed action plan intended to address the long-term priorities identified above.
- 2. Continuation of support to allow for participation and engagement of children and young people in service design and delivery**, through mechanisms such as Swale Youth Forum and Swale Youth Advisory Group.

# Economy and Regeneration

## **Our strategic objective:**

To see the borough become a more prosperous place, with a distinctive identity and image that will help us attract new investment, visitors and jobs.

## **Introduction**

Over the past year the Swale Economy and Regeneration Partnership (SERP) steering group has taken a close look at three key issues affecting the economic well-being of the borough:

- prosperity;
- learning and skills; and
- transport.

Discussion and debate has helped the steering group identify both the barriers to progress and the issues where the partnership can make the greatest impact. SERP has worked to articulate its priorities, which are set out in this document, and it is our intention to secure the support of local partners, and the business community in particular, to build a shared agenda around these and ensure that Swale is 'open for business'.

## **Baseline: The economy in Swale today**

The steering group has examined evidence, looking not only at the data, but also tapping into the knowledge of a range of organisations in its consideration of the issues facing the borough. These include:

- the need to build a better image for the borough, building on its unique assets as a place to visit and promoting the substantial improvements in its offer as a business location;
- addressing remaining infrastructure constraints on securing new growth, in particular at Junction 5 of the M2, and a need to improve public transport options for local residents;
- the area's strength in manufacturing, transport and logistics and other key sectors, but lower levels of higher-skilled employment in the service sector;
- a low ratio of jobs relative to the working-age population, despite overall growth in the economy during the past decade;
- low skill levels in the resident workforce;
- higher than average dependency on out-of-work benefits and, especially, unemployment amongst young people; and
- significant pockets of deprivation, driven by lower levels of employment and incomes.



## Long-term priorities for economy and regeneration

Our priorities for economy and regeneration to 2031 are:

**Increasing prosperity**, by creating the right environment to attract business, encouraging a diverse range of quality jobs, improving access to them for local people, and promoting the opportunities and brand of Swale.

**Improving the borough's skills profile**, by promoting learning provision that meets the needs of business and gives residents the best chances of accessing suitable employment, and by expanding the vocational opportunities available to young people.

**Securing investment in transport infrastructure**, by lobbying for improvements to Junction 5 of the M2, promoting a southern relief road for Sittingbourne, and maximising opportunities to improve local public transport.

## Medium-term actions for economy and regeneration

Our key actions for economy and regeneration between 2012 and 2015 are:

### 1. Increasing prosperity:

- Support tourism and bring together key organisations and businesses, to build an umbrella brand for the borough.
- Communicate Swale's unique advantages and the improvements to local infrastructure more widely.
- State the business community's support for investment in key regeneration projects and major employment locations.
- Review the business support that is currently available and seek to fill gaps in provision, where most needed.
- Enlist the support of the local business community, to generate a clearer voice for business in dealing with decision-makers.

### 2. Improving the borough's skills profile:

- Encourage and promote the creation of new apprenticeship opportunities by helping employers and young people access the right support, including any available funding.
- Push for information, advice and guidance for young people to ensure employment with training attracts the right quality of candidates into local businesses.
- Support opportunities to build upon local learning provision that makes sense for key sectors of the borough's economy.

### 3. Securing investment in transport infrastructure:

- Press the case for staged investment to secure a solution to the issues of over-capacity at Junction 5 of the M2.
- Support the formation of a Quality Bus Partnership, in particular to help secure service provision that helps provide better access to major employment areas.
- Engage in the consultation for the new Integrated Kent Franchise for rail services, seeking affordability, integration with other transport modes and support for the Sheerness to Sittingbourne branch line.

# Environment and Liveability

## **Our strategic objective:**

To focus effort and align resources across the public, private and voluntary sectors to improve the borough's environment and the leisure and cultural opportunities it can offer to residents and visitors.

## **Introduction**

Swale benefits from a diverse natural environment including an area of outstanding natural beauty and a number of sites of particular environmental or ecological importance. These need to be safeguarded through positive long-term management and sensitive development. We need to ensure that housing and population growth, which is expected to continue for the foreseeable future and which will bring significant economic benefits to the borough, is managed in an environmentally sustainable way.

Continuing to maximise the value of our green spaces, both as havens of environmental conservation and as recreational and health facilities for local people, will be a key means of shaping and consolidating a sense of belonging among both new and established communities. But liveability is also about improving aspects of the local quality of life which have an impact on everyone, from keeping the streets clean to ensuring that Swale is well prepared to adapt to a changing climate.

No less important will be encouraging a vibrant and diverse cultural scene, and ensuring that everyone in the local community has equitable access to high-quality cultural opportunities. The Government's localism and 'Big Society' initiatives hold out some significant opportunities to strengthen Swale's civil society and improve the borough's environment and liveability through better cross-sector working.

## **Baseline: The environment and liveability in Swale today**

In developing its long-term priorities and medium-term action plans, the Environment and Liveability Thematic Partnership has undertaken a thorough review of the available evidence, which includes:

- Some 32% of Swale's household waste is currently recycled, which places the borough below the median within the 2008/09 (latest available) national dataset. This figure is expected to undergo a 'step' improvement when the current waste contract expires at the end of 2013.
- The borough's total emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> have fallen from 9.7 tonnes per capita in 2007 to 7.9 tonnes in 2009 (the latest available year). This is a faster rate of decline than that for England as a whole, but the total emissions are still considerably higher than the national figure of 6.4 tonnes per capita. This is largely accounted for by Swale's relatively significant industrial sector.
- Some 6,600 households in the borough suffer from fuel poverty, representing more than 12% of all households, compared to an average in the South-East of less than 10%.
- In Swale only 39% of children and young people in school years 1-13 are physically active for the recommended three hours per week, compared with 54% in Kent and 55% nationally. In addition 52% of adults are inactive (zero days participation in moderate sport and physical activity per week) compared to 48% nationally. Inactivity is significantly higher in adults 55+ (70%), lower socio-economic groups (62%) and people with a limiting disability (77%).

- Significant health inequalities exist across the borough. Some 31% of adults are obese compared with national figures of 24%. Early deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer are higher than county averages, with a health cost of physical inactivity to Swale of £1.9m per 100,000 population.
- According to the local area perception survey conducted by Swale Borough Council in 2011, 70% of the borough's residents are generally satisfied with their local area as a place to live, significantly lower than the national figure (based on 2008 data) of 80%. However, the survey showed wide variations in satisfaction between different parts of the borough.
- The local area perception survey also showed that residents ranked clean streets as the second most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live. However, clean streets were ranked as the seventh factor most in need of improvement locally, with only 44% satisfaction rating. In contrast, physical surveys on the ground show that the borough's streets are among the cleanest 25% in the country.
- The local area perception survey showed that residents ranked access to parks and open spaces as the sixth most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live, although it ranked low among factors most in need of improvement locally.
- It is estimated that in 2009 around 4.4 million tourism day trips were made to Swale, up 8% compared to 2006. The overall number of nights spent in Swale by domestic visitors was 1.24 million up 9%. In total, around £188m was spent on trips to Swale in 2009 by overnight and day visitors. Twenty-three percent of this expenditure was made by domestic staying visitors, 6% by overseas staying visitors and 71% by day visitors. This income to the local economy is estimated to have supported around 2,900 full-time equivalent jobs and 4,200 actual jobs (with the addition of seasonal and part-time employment).

### **Long-term priorities for the environment and liveability**

Our priorities for the environment and liveability to 2031 are:

**Improving Swale's cultural and leisure offer**, maximising the opportunities available to residents and visitors and taking account of local needs and preferences.

**Creating a cleaner and greener borough and rising to the challenge of climate change**, sustaining high standards of cleanliness, reducing household waste, further improving recycling rates, and promoting environmental sustainability while ensuring the borough's successful adaptation to a changing environment.

**Safeguarding and enhancing Swale's natural and built assets**, supporting the Green Grid and fully realising the environmental, recreational and economic value of the borough's green assets.

**Maximising the opportunities for Swale of the localism agenda**, realising the potential contribution of all sectors and supporting neighbourhoods and communities to build the 'Big Society'.

## **Medium-term actions for the environment and liveability**

Our key actions for the environment and liveability between 2012 and 2015 are:

### **1. Improving Swale's cultural and leisure offer:**

- Support the development of Swale as a tourist destination for resident communities and those visiting from across the south-east.
- Assist with the implementation of heritage activities including community outreach programmes, volunteer cultural ambassador scheme, residencies, festivals and events, community garden and orchard development.
- Promote increased access to programmes and activities that encourage participation in sport and physical activity through a range of targeted initiatives.

### **2. Creating a cleaner and greener borough and rising to the challenge of climate change:**

- Work with partners to help increase the awareness of climate change for coastal communities as part of the Coastal Communities 2150 project.
- Support a 'communities living sustainably' programme on Sheppey by strengthening existing partnerships to mitigate and adapt to climate change and build more resilient communities.

### **3. Safeguarding and enhancing Swale's natural and built assets:**

- Support the development of the cross-Sheppey greenway and assist in bringing together key partners to exploit fully the cultural, health and tourism potential of the project.

### **4. Maximising the opportunities for Swale of the localism agenda:**

- Continue to strengthen the Environment and Liveability partnership to take advantage of new freedoms and flexibilities and build capacity within the community sector.

# Health and Housing

## **Our strategic objective:**

To tackle disadvantage and create a borough in which people lead healthier lives, with access to high-quality services and homes which meet their needs, and where people continue to want to live, whether in new or existing communities.

## **Introduction**

Swale exhibits significant health inequalities, reflecting the economic disparity that exists between the most disadvantaged wards (mostly on the Isle of Sheppey and in Sittingbourne) and the more affluent parts of the borough. Where people live, and the conditions they live in, are important to health, with poor housing conditions being closely associated with poor health outcomes, for example through inadequate thermal comfort, excess damp, mould, or low standards of fire safety. Our ambition is to reduce these inequalities, improving the health outcomes for those living in our most deprived communities.

Swale has a growing population and a significant demand for new homes, jobs and services. Ensuring that there is sufficient affordable housing provision suitable for local needs is therefore a high priority. The economic downturn of recent years has adversely affected our ability to deliver affordable homes through the planning system. In addition, the forthcoming reform of the welfare system present a major challenge in ensuring that everyone has access to decent affordable housing, with the potential to increase homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

The Locality Board and its partners are working hard to respond to these challenges and take advantage of any new opportunities that arise through national policy changes such as the Localism Act. With the potential reduction in new affordable housing delivery, focus on private-sector housing is more important than ever, and actions have been identified that seek to expand the role of existing housing in meeting needs and aspirations.

The Health and Housing Thematic Partnership supports the development and delivery of the Swale Locality Board's priorities for health and housing, as well as the development of the local Health and Wellbeing Group. The new Clinical Commissioning Group(s) will also play a significant role in the future in ensuring that the benefits of the reform of the national healthcare system are maximised for Swale's residents.

## **Baseline: Health and housing in Swale today**

Overall, Swale's health outcomes are somewhat worse than elsewhere in England, as the information below indicates:

- the average life expectancy in Swale is just over 77 years for males and 81 years for females, compared with just under 79 years and 83 years respectively across Kent as a whole;
- rates of smoking and obesity are high in the borough, with 25% of adults smoking (compared with 21% in Kent as a whole) and 30% of adults obese (compared with 24% in England as a whole);
- diabetes is also prevalent, with 6.24% of people having received a diabetes diagnosis in Swale, compared with 5.40% in England as a whole;
- there are 80 early deaths from heart disease and stroke per 100,000 people aged under 75 in Swale, compared with just 64 deaths in Kent as a whole (based on age-standardised figures);

- there are 4.67 teenage conceptions for every 100 females aged 15 to 17 in the borough, compared with 3.63 conceptions in Kent as a whole. Just 70% of new mothers initiate breastfeeding in Swale, compared with nearly 74% nationally;
- more than 22% of children live in poverty in Swale, compared with just 17% across Kent;
- twenty-nine percent of private-sector homes within the borough do not meet the national 'decent homes' standard, and one-third of those are occupied by vulnerable households. Thirty-seven homes which had been empty for more than six months were brought back into use during 2010/11;
- more than 4,000 households are currently seeking affordable housing within Swale through the Housing Register. There were 465 affordable homes let within the borough during 2010/11, a reduction of nearly 30% on the previous year. 155 new affordable homes were built in 2010/11, 43 of them Social Rented Homes;
- eighty-two households were accepted as homeless during 2010/11, with 65 of those being in temporary accommodation at year-end. Homelessness was prevented by the council for a further 368 households that year; and
- some 175 home adaptations were carried out during 2010/11 through the Disabled Facilities Grant Programme, with more than 200 currently on the waiting list.

Some of these indicators are among the worst in Kent. For instance, the proportion of adults who are obese is the highest of any district in the county, while the proportion who smoke is the second-highest. However, these figures mask significant differences between parts of the borough, which generally correlate with wider inequalities. Life expectancy, for example, is eight years higher in West Downs than it is in Sheerness West.

Over the coming years, Swale will also need to deal with the challenge of an ageing population, with 0.8% of the population expected to be aged 85 or above by 2026, compared with 0.5% for east Kent overall. Due to the projected changes to the age structure of the population, Swale is also expected to experience one of the greatest increases in the occurrence of dementia.

### Long-term priorities for health and housing

Our priorities for health and housing to 2031 are:

**Reducing the gap in health outcomes**, by improving outcomes in the worst-performing wards.

**Promoting healthy lifestyles**, reducing smoking and obesity and increasing sustained patterns of breastfeeding, beyond the initiation period.

**Improving access to health facilities**, especially in the borough's most disadvantaged areas.

**Increasing housing supply**, including affordable housing, to meet identified local needs.

**Improving housing condition and local neighbourhoods**, by improving the quality of existing accommodation and increasing integration between new and existing communities.

**Supporting vulnerable people**, ensuring effective provision of, and access to, housing and support services, whether public, commercial or voluntary.

**Tackling disadvantage and improving quality of life**, helping to reduce fuel poverty and identifying and responding to changing patterns of homelessness.

## Medium-term actions for health and housing

Our key actions for health and housing between 2012 and 2015 are:

- 1. Reducing the gap in health outcomes and improving overall health and wellbeing:** Develop and implement a programme of work to tackle health inequalities, aligning with the Kent and Medway Health Inequalities Plan and supporting the long-term priorities and medium-term actions of the Local Children's Trust and other thematic partnerships.
- 2. Promoting healthy lifestyles:** Adopt and implement the Swale sports and physical activity framework to encourage active and healthier lives through regular participation in sport and physical activity.
- 3. Improving access to health facilities:** Fully engage with the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board and local Clinical Commissioning Group to support and influence the allocation of resources for health facilities and services.
- 4. Increasing housing supply:** Work in partnership with affordable housing providers to implement the National Affordable Homes Programme and the Rural Housing Needs programme.
- 5. Improving housing conditions and local neighbourhoods:** Promote the Landlord Accreditation Scheme, tackle empty homes, complete the Rushenden Retrofit Programme, and review potential opportunities to roll out retrofit works across other parts of Swale under the Green Deal initiative.
- 6. Supporting vulnerable people:** Develop a new allocations policy in line with new flexibilities in the Localism Act. Implement the new Kent Assessment for all agencies supporting vulnerable people to access affordable housing.
- 7. Tackling disadvantage and improving quality of life:** Maximise opportunities to enable households facing fuel poverty to access funding through the Green Deal initiative. Secure funding for Staying Put to safeguard the future of the home improvement agency services within Swale. Adopt and implement the Swale Homelessness Strategy.

# Safer and Stronger Communities

## **Our strategic objective:**

To reduce crime, reoffending, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour, and to enable stronger and more cohesive communities.

## **Introduction**

The Swale Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership leads on this objective through the delivery of the Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy. The Partnership brings together Swale Borough Council, Kent County Council, Kent Police, Kent Police Authority, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Probation and Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust, working closely with the local housing associations such as the largest, AmicusHorizon, and voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Government has announced its ambition to create a 'Big Society' – to shift the relationship between citizens and the state and put more power and opportunity in people's hands. The Government sees charities, cooperatives, social enterprises and voluntary organisations as the vanguard of this change, involving citizens and helping them to take responsibility for, and control over, their lives. It is committed to supporting such organisations and making it easier for them to play a central role in influencing decisions and resolving local issues.

The challenge of realising the 'Big Society' and continuing to make our communities safer must be understood in the context of difficult financial circumstances, with the public sector facing large budget cuts and, in some cases, major restructuring such as the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners. Local agencies are responding to these challenges with creativity and innovation, such as work to align budgets and resources in order to improve outcomes for families with multiple problems, aiming to reduce demand on a wide range of public services in the longer term.

## **Baseline: Safer and stronger communities in Swale today**

A strategic assessment was undertaken by the Safer and Stronger Partnership to inform its key priorities and locations for action at the end of 2011. This analysis has shown that:

- the level of crime between October 2010 and September 2011 fell by 4.4% (415 crimes) compared with the same period in the previous year, continuing the downward trend of the last few years;
- economic pressures are thought to be having an impact on local crime levels. Crime types such as theft and handling have seen an increase when comparing 2011/12 with the previous year – in particular theft of metal, which is directly linked to its increasing scrap value;
- the local area perception survey conducted by Swale Borough Council in 2011 indicated that while the level of crime is the number one factor cited by residents in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live, it is ranked only eighth among the factors that are most in need of improvement locally;
- an audit of the voluntary and community sector undertaken by Swale Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) in March 2010 showed that the total number of volunteers in respondent organisation was 2,120, with average volunteer hours per week of 4,664, and that the annual equivalent wages bill for volunteers would amount to approximately £1.5m at the current minimum wage; and



- the proportion of Swale residents engaged in regular volunteering showed an increase between 2008/09 and 2010/11 from 22% to 25%. High levels of volunteering are a sign of strong and active communities.

Spatial inequality remains high across Swale as a result of the disparities between the most and least deprived areas of the borough. Significant efforts to combat local deprivation have been made and have started to yield results, including the investment in children's centres across the borough and a number of significant regeneration programmes. Yet the deprivation statistics frequently remain poor, reflecting the need for sustained long-term investment in order to achieve a meaningful reduction in inequalities.

The Safer and Stronger Communities Action Plan sets out the Partnership's approach to tackling these issues in the medium term. To date, these have included leading on the community budgets project, a new focus on the most prolific perpetrators, and continued support to repeat and vulnerable victims, all as a means of ensuring a more targeted use of the limited resources available.

Encouraging the growth of the 'Big Society' is something that partners in Swale have been doing for many years, and this will become even more important in an era of dwindling state resources. We need to continue to support local residents and the voluntary and community sector to take the lead on local issues. Developing strong relationships between the voluntary and public sectors within the borough is one method that can be best utilised in achieving this.

### **Long-term priorities for safer and stronger communities**

Our priorities for safer and stronger communities to 2031 are:

**Creating safer communities** by aiming to reduce crime and disorder, reoffending, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour.

**Enabling stronger communities** through building capacity and encouraging participation in community and civic life.

**Developing targeted responses** to the needs of individual communities to combat localised issues, and to work with neighbourhoods and the voluntary and community sector to both design and deliver local solutions.

## **Medium-term actions for safer and stronger communities**

Our key actions for safer and stronger communities between 2012 and 2015 are:

### **1. Delivery of the priorities and cross-cutting themes within the Swale Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy:**

- **Priorities:**
  - Domestic abuse.
  - Crime (acquisitive and fraud/forgery).
  - Anti-social behaviour, including deliberate fires (focusing on vulnerable/repeat victims).
- **Cross-cutting themes:**
  - Address needs of vulnerable adults to reduce re-offending.
  - Tackling substance misuse.
  - Prevent young people from offending.
  - Help create stronger communities.

**2. Delivery of support to the voluntary and community sector by all partners,** including capacity building, governance, service delivery and commissioning, and delivery of community partner days.

**3. Delivery of innovative new approaches,** including community budgets as part of the 'troubled families' agenda, and the introduction of the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

# Realising our Ambitions for Swale

In addition to setting out the long-term priorities for each of the five thematic partnerships of the Swale Locality Board, this document has also established the medium-term actions which each partnership will focus on between 2012 and 2015.

Progress is regularly monitored against these actions by the thematic partnerships, with partner organisations holding each other to account for delivery. In addition, progress reports are reviewed by the Swale Public Services Board from two thematic partnerships on a rotating basis at each of its bimonthly meetings. Each thematic partnership also reports its progress once per year to a meeting of the full Swale Locality Board.

# Realising the Vision for Kent

The Vision for Kent\* is the Kent Forum's statement on the challenges facing Kent and the priorities for the county. It sets out three countywide ambitions which will guide the direction of public services in Kent for the next ten years. These are:

## **1. Grow the economy**

This means supporting businesses to be successful, improving skills and career aspirations, providing apprenticeships and training opportunities, and improving Kent's infrastructure to support business, including good transport and high-speed broadband.

## **2. Tackle disadvantage**

This means a good quality of life for everyone: helping unemployed people get back into work, encouraging Kent's young people to make the most of opportunities to learn and prepare for their future, and providing choice and quality in health, social care and housing.

## **3. Put the citizen in control**

This means involving people in making decisions, working with them to design services that meet their needs and suit them, and supporting Kent's voluntary and community sector to do even more to improve the lives of people in Kent.

Along with the other boroughs and districts within Kent, the Swale Locality Board is committed to playing its part in achieving these countywide ambitions. In addition, none of the Swale priorities set out in this document should be regarded as unrelated to any other priority – there is much cross-over and synergy between them.

Figure 2 shows how the priorities and actions set out in this document will support and complement the achievement both of each other and of the Kent-wide ambitions within Swale.

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\* Available at:

[http://www.kent.gov.uk/your\\_council/priorities\\_policies\\_and\\_plans/priorities\\_and\\_plans/vision\\_for\\_kent.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/priorities_policies_and_plans/priorities_and_plans/vision_for_kent.aspx)

**Figure 2: Cross-over among Kent and Swale ambitions**

|                         |                                | Children and young people | Economy and regeneration | Environment and liveability | Health and housing | Safer and stronger communities |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Kent ambitions</b>   | Grow the economy               | ✓                         | ✓                        | ✓                           |                    |                                |
|                         | Tackle disadvantage            | ✓                         | ✓                        | ✓                           | ✓                  | ✓                              |
|                         | Put citizens in control        | ✓                         |                          | ✓                           | ✓                  | ✓                              |
| <b>Swale priorities</b> | Children and young people      |                           | ✓                        |                             | ✓                  | ✓                              |
|                         | Economy and regeneration       | ✓                         |                          | ✓                           | ✓                  | ✓                              |
|                         | Environment and liveability    | ✓                         | ✓                        |                             | ✓                  | ✓                              |
|                         | Health and housing             | ✓                         | ✓                        | ✓                           |                    | ✓                              |
|                         | Safer and stronger communities | ✓                         | ✓                        | ✓                           | ✓                  |                                |