### 1. Regeneration and transformation in Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest is an area impatient for change.

This energy is conveyed in the Council’s five priorities, the thrust of which is regenerative; focusing on improvement, renewal and revitalization of the borough.

Three of the commitments underpinning these priorities are focused on the physical look and feel of the borough:

- Clean up the front gardens, streets and private land in the Borough so that they match the best in London
- Invest and improve our parks and open spaces for the benefit of all residents
• Regenerate our key sites and develop our housing to re-house 50% of those currently living in overcrowded accommodation.

Another 3 focus on the ‘social’, supporting the most vulnerable within the community;
• Enable vulnerable adults to have a proper choice over their social care
• Find an effective solution to the gang problem
• Help our residents to gain skills to get back into work and support our local businesses.

The final four are a combination of physical and social interventions;
• Provide children and young people with good quality education, welfare and health services, including better school buildings
• Reduce the level of crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough
• Make the Olympics year an unforgettable celebration for our residents
• Achieve a real and lasting impact from the Olympics for our residents.

This balance between the social and physical is critical; focusing simply on the physical in an area like Waltham Forest runs considerable risk of simply achieving ‘tidier deprivation’; that excludes or even displaces its residents. Without a focus on people, as well as place, residents will be unable to thrive or feel a part of their new environment. To achieve a transformational impact within communities, ‘social’ as well as physical regeneration is required.

“…although often undertaken primarily to revitalise the city and communities that are the most socially and economically challenged, it is the disadvantaged who often benefit the least from regeneration activities…In part, this is caused by … differences in views regarding what should be strategic priorities and, particularly, the balance between social and economic activity.”

2. Social regeneration explored

What does social regeneration actually mean and do our social commitments outlined above, fulfil this function? If we look at our social commitments more closely, it is clear that they are not simply about providing a safety net for people at difficult times but rather on giving people the tools to enable them to transform their circumstances. They focus on education, skills, good health and independence; areas we think of as ‘social capital’. Providing people with capabilities as opposed simply to access to resources is an approach to human development developed by Amartya Sen. Poverty, from this perspective, is understood as ‘capability-deprivation’.

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1 This term was used by Dee Dooccey, Chair of the London Assembly’s Economy, Culture and Sport Committee in a recent letter to the Secretary of State Eric Pickles, outlining the risk of relying on capital funding alone to deliver improvements in those areas most badly affected by the summer riots.


3 Sen’s capabilities approach has impacted hugely on approaches to human development and inspired the creation of the UN’s Human Development Index - a popular measure of human development, capturing capabilities in health, education, and income.
“...social capital, like other forms of capital, is only beneficial if it can be put to good use. Social capital is not an end in itself, rather it is a resource which individuals and communities must have the opportunity to use.”

The importance of strengthened capabilities to the successful transformation of our communities is a point made most recently in The Portas Review. In her review of our high streets, Mary Portas states that; ‘Communities need the tools, knowledge and opportunity to have a say – shifting from ‘consumers’ to ‘co-creators’ and prioritises this over physical intervention, adding that; ‘I also fundamentally believe that once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow”.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Informing Change (Dec 2006) - Findings
Between 1998 and 2004, JRF funded a programme of work to investigate the nature of social exclusion in deprived council estates and neighbourhoods and to explore the use of people-based ‘soft’ regeneration strategies to revitalise them. A study of the outcomes found that; “Professionals underestimated the importance of social issues and were more focused on physical regeneration. Residents perceived social factors, - crime and fear of crime, poor life chances for their children, and the consequences of poverty – as the main ones affecting their quality of life, not physical degeneration.”

3. The role of Children and Young People and Adult Services

In addition to the activity highlighted within the Council priorities, the local authority is engaged in a huge variety of work that is focused on developing social capabilities and which thereby contributes either directly or indirectly to regeneration of the borough. Most of the work of Children and Young People and Adult services – the ‘People’ directorates – can be viewed in these terms. Here is just a flavour of some of the services that help to up-skill our residents and support them in achieving and maintaining independence and leading a full and fulfilled life;

- Educational improvement and specialised education for Looked After Children, children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties and those excluded from mainstream school
- Education, skills and employment for 14-19 year olds,
- Turning around the lives of young offenders through the Youth Offending Service,
- Providing positive activity for children and young people through Youth services,
- Pre-empting crises by supporting families early through our Early Intervention service,
- Providing a safe and nurturing environment for the borough’s most vulnerable children and helping them to flourish through our Children in Need and Looked after Children services
- Personalisation that enables people to choose their own care packages

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5 The Portas Review, 2011, p.37
6 Ibid, p.3
• Supporting People Services that increases a person’s independence within the community, avoiding wherever possible, the need to go into a home.

Through our work in schools, we have been able to experience directly the transformational impact of a combined and co-ordinated focus on both physical and social regeneration. Our investment in schools is not only focused on improving many of our deteriorating buildings but together with our school improvement work, transforming the educational experience in Waltham Forest and driving up educational attainment. One without the other is difficult – without strong teachers and the right support and resource in place for students that need it, the best looking building in the world is unable to provide a good education. Alternatively, damp and dilapidated conditions do not provide an environment conducive to learning.

4. Working with families

If enabling individual capabilities can impact upon our capacity to regenerate, then it stands to reason that strengthening capabilities within families can have an even greater transformative effect. Our innovative Gang Prevention Programme, approved as a phase 2 area for the Government’s Community Budget programme, exemplifies this. By working with 30 of the most troubled families in the borough, the project aims to not only reduce serious youth violence and other associated crimes, but also lead to:
- Improved behaviour and attendance at school;
- A move away from out of work benefits for those involved;
- Fewer violence-related hospital admissions; and
- Improved confidence in communities.

Recent figures announced by the Government show that children who live in troubled families are 36 times more likely to be excluded from school and six times more likely to have been in care or to have contact with the police. As well as the considerable social cost this generates both to the individual and the community concerned, it also leads to significant financial cost, impeding investment in other areas. Troubled families are estimated to cost the tax payer £9 billion per year, equivalent to £75,000 per family. This is spent on protecting the children in these families and responding to the crime and anti-social behaviour they perpetrate. In response, the Government has recently developed a Troubled Families Team within DCLG, headed by Louise Casey, to turn around the lives of 120,000 of some of the country’s most troubled families by the end of this Parliament.

The Council has been considering merging Children and Young People and Adult Services into one Families directorate. It has already been acknowledged that such a move could facilitate better co-ordination between health and social care services for children, young people and adults and better meet the full range of needs within families, aiding a ‘whole family’ approach. Viewed from a regeneration perspective, such potential could also be recognised for its essential contribution to successful transformation.