Introduction
We have so many things to be proud of: our communities, our people, our staff, our heritage, our wonderful green spaces and buildings. And as a community we are at our most resourceful when we work together; from the good citizen who looks in on her elderly neighbour to social workers who help transform the lives of a child in care.

Since 2010 we have reshaped the Council, delivering savings of more than £100m, yet still managing to improve services. As a result, streets are cleaner and safer, social care is stronger and more than half our residents now contact us online. We have also invested in new leisure facilities, a new railway station and the highest rate of affordable housing in London.

But we are facing uncertain times. Council funding is changing, we do not yet understand the impact of Brexit and our population is ageing. We are on the cusp of huge technological change which will transform the way we live and work. From driverless cars to robots to augmented reality, the world is changing at a rapid pace.

Our ambition for the borough is to create strong and sustainable communities where people support themselves and each other. This requires a fundamental transformation of the way we work, in our relationship with residents and businesses, in how we connect communities and people together, in how we harness new technology for the greater good and how we make the most of the borough’s amazing strengths.

This document sets out our response to this opportunity and challenge. We will provide the people of Waltham Forest with a Council to meet their needs now and in the future. We aim to be bold, harnessing the power of our greatest strengths – our staff, our people, our communities and our places – unlocking their potential to create futures.

There is a buzz about our corner of London. People want to live here, raise a family and start a business here. The area is bursting with culture and energy, bringing with it many opportunities that we want everyone who lives or works in Waltham Forest to share in.

Martin Esom
Chief Executive

Cllr Clare Coghill
Leader of the Council
The Council has adopted three priorities following our biggest ever consultation with residents. These are:

- Keep Waltham Forest clean and safe
- Work to ensure everyone has a decent roof over their head
- Improve our residents’ life chances.

To achieve these aims we need to create strong and sustainable communities where people are enabled to support themselves and each other.
Creating Futures: A strategy for uncertainty

Creating Futures is a strategy devised for the times we face. There are things we can always predict, influence and shape. However, we are increasingly affected by national and global changes we cannot easily control: population growth, social and economic change, breakthroughs in new technology. Our strategy needs to be flexible to cope with the onset of rapid change, and draw upon the borough’s inherent strengths as a Council and a place in London.

It is clear to us that the ways of the past cannot meet the challenges of the future and top-down interventions have ceased to work if they ever did. Our aim is to draw on our own energy, strengths and ideas to take charge of leading a positive future for our borough which is shaped and delivered locally.

Creating Futures: Our approach

Creating Futures aims to achieve the best possible outcomes for our community by creating opportunity, choice and confidence in the future. With less predictability and reliability in our operating environment, Creating Futures will draw on the borough’s inherent strengths and maximise them through our approach. We will look for both traditional and innovative methods and solutions.

The Council of the future will be very different from the one we work in today. It will act as a platform, connecting the Council with people and partners to find the right way forward, acknowledging that the community often has the best solution.

Central to this approach is a commitment to focus on our assets, both the assets in our community – people’s talents, strengths and skills – and the physical assets in our place: our open spaces, our heritage and our buildings. By harnessing the power of these assets, we can unlock the potential of our borough and create a future where we can prosper and be self-reliant as a borough. The programme represents a radical change to our approach. It is about building a genuinely transformed Council and is a bold departure from our previous transformation strategies.

In short, through Creating Futures we will:

- Use the strengths and assets throughout our borough and community to find the best local solutions and services
- Offer options and choices to our residents and partners
- Be imaginative and resourceful in everything we do.
Creating Futures: Our five driving principles

Our unique strengths

Our greatest asset is our community, with its wealth of talent, energy and resilience. We want to build on this by giving residents the tools to strengthen their networks and improve their health and wellbeing. There are also specific challenges we want to help people tackle.

Too many of our residents are in low paid jobs or are locked out of the job market, while others cannot imagine ever owning their own home or do not even have a decent roof over their head. We need to support them with prospects, opportunity and choice.

The borough has many wonderful assets from its green spaces to its rich cultural heritage. But it is at a significant crossroads. The pace of change as east London develops is greater than ever before. We want to harness that change, and ensure every resident gets to share in the benefits. To do this, we aim to work with our residents and businesses to provide more leisure facilities, an improved night time economy, better health and GP facilities, and the social infrastructure that will ensure Waltham Forest is a place for everyone.

Within the Council, our greatest assets are our people, who are committed to improving the life chances of our residents. We need to properly value them, support them and enable them to deliver services in an efficient and friendly way.

The Council’s greatest physical asset is the Town Hall. We need to make the very best of the opportunity to regenerate this site, creating an amazing place to visit, the most efficient site to work from, an exemplar of partners working in unison, and a place open to residents who have a stake in it.
Return on investment

Strong financial grip has been one of our core strengths over the past eight years. Independent financial assessments undertaken in Autumn 2017 have strongly endorsed our financial strategy and approach. In their words, we are in an enviable position to plan our next moves. This position not only needs to be maintained but enhanced.

Creating Futures will help us relentlessly focus on achieving maximum return on any investment made. If activity does not achieve an outcome we should not be doing it. If we are not properly managing and targeting demand, we will need to refocus. We will be looking for those interventions, innovative or traditional, that most make a difference.

We will benchmark against the best and if our return on investment is lower, we will learn, change and improve. This approach will be applied unwaveringly to our service provision. We can no longer continue to provide services or intervention where we cannot prove strong outcomes which make people’s lives better. Although this sounds hard-edged, the financial and people impacts of failing to focus reduced resources on those things which make the biggest impact is unsupportable. We will work with our community to find the best ways to deliver interventions and support.

Our investments will look to maximise ethical returns. We will invest directly and indirectly to create the conditions to encourage external investment. Through this we will achieve a competitive edge and be the first choice for investment. By reinvesting in our social and physical infrastructure, we will enable all our community to benefit from the prosperity we can achieve. This approach can already be seen in the Council’s approach to redeveloping the Town Hall Campus and our wider estate, where we will bring 350 new homes into the borough while investing in service provision and our heritage buildings.
People focussed

People are not service requests and they are not case numbers. We need to treat people like people. They are individuals with hopes, aspirations, wants and needs. Creating Futures will focus the Council on how we can better serve those that need us in a modern, friendly and efficient way, making things easier and more immediate through technology.

We will extend and enhance our ‘think family’ approach, helping those that need our help through their lives in a seamless way and enabling others to help themselves. We will protect and keep safe our most vulnerable residents while adopting an approach which acknowledges that self-directed care within a supportive community environment provides the best possible outcomes for individuals and families.

New relationships

Creating Futures will create a new relationship with our residents; changing the way we work with one another, empowering residents and connecting communities. We will commit to ensuring residents are more engaged and involved in the decision making of the Council, recognising that they are often better placed to decide how services are shaped or deliver them directly themselves. By empowering residents, we aim to encourage greater citizen participation encouraging residents to support community activism, volunteer or set up a social enterprise. We will provide residents with the tools to support and help one another.

By collaborating even further with our partners, we aim to eradicate health and social inequalities in the borough and provide better value for money for council tax payers by reducing duplication. We are much stronger and more able to tackle issues such as gang crime, mental health, homelessness and radicalisation if we work together, utilising all the assets of the community.

New ways of working

Creating Futures will shift the culture of our workforce to enable the Council’s asset-based approach. We will support our staff to be more engaged with the community we serve, more commercially-minded and more technologically savvy. New technology will enable the Council to support and connect people and communities in new, more efficient and effective ways. Prototyping and piloting new solutions before adopting them will allow us to pick what works best for our community.

The skills and the way the Council deploys its resources will need to change. We will need to invest in capability to achieve maximum return on investment and demand management. We will disinvest in those areas that fail to achieve this. We will invest in productive technology and community engagement and disinvest in processes that are wasteful or not delivering sufficient return.
A Waltham Forest approach

Over recent months, we have worked with our creative community to develop a new strategy for arts and culture in Waltham Forest, and the broad engagement we undertook generated three key themes: be radical, make and create, act with fellowship.

We believe these same themes can define our approach to Creating Futures and help us deliver a uniquely Waltham Forest transformation. So, in future, be radical, make and create and act with fellowship will be our watchwords, our guiding principles and our values.

What does be radical mean?

Creating Futures requires a revolution in our approach to public service. In the past, we asked ourselves how we could deliver services that were better, faster and cheaper. In the future, we need to stop thinking about the Council as a service provider and start asking ourselves a new question: how can we draw on the assets in our borough to help individuals and communities solve problems for themselves?

It’s a fundamentally different approach that calls for nothing less than a reinvention of the Council. We need to be radical and encourage everyone who works for us and with us to think differently, tap into new ideas and embrace innovation. Whether it’s handing more power and resource to communities or investing in cutting-edge technology, we must be prepared to stretch our collective mindset, challenge the status quo and take bold, courageous action.
What does make and create mean?

What does make and create mean? Waltham Forest has a rich cultural heritage, providing the borough with its unique sense of identity and inspiring the creative communities who live here today. We need to harness this artistic, imaginative spirit as we make and create new ways of working and new infrastructure to support our communities.

This will mean being more open to experimentation and trying things out. We want to draw on creative tools and techniques to better understand people and work with them to generate new solutions, which we then test out in practice. With this approach, things won’t always be right first time – but we’ll learn from the process of doing and continuously improve.

Key to this will be an approach where the Council does not have all the answers or solutions. To develop the best future, we will need to make and create with everyone who has a stake in our borough – the council, our community, our partners and business.

What does act with fellowship mean?

Fellowship is uniquely distinct to Waltham Forest. A key tenet of William Morris’s work, “Fellowship is life”, adorns landmark buildings and is the motto for our borough. To deliver Creating Futures, we need to act with fellowship. This means bringing people and organisations together, generating a spirit of co-operation and collaboration, and sharing responsibility for solving problems and making decisions. It doesn’t matter if we don’t have all the answers – in fact, we don’t expect to. What matters is working it through together.

Getting this right will depend on trust. We don’t expect to be trusted because of our mandate, role or position. We want people to trust us because they recognise our commitment, our integrity and our ability to deliver. And in return, we plan to put our trust in people – it’s their knowledge, their skills, and their solutions that we need to focus on to bring about change in the lives of individuals and communities.

Delivering Creating Futures

Underpinning this strategy document will be a transformation plan which sets out the practical work we will undertake to make Creating Futures a reality.

In the coming months we will work with staff, residents and partners to develop that transformation plan and hold a series of events for staff to launch Creating Futures.