CREATING FUTURES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

OUR PLAN TO IMPROVE LIFE CHANCES

SEPTEMBER 2018
Growing up in 21st century Britain is tough: change and uncertainty is rife, poverty is widespread and inequality is getting worse not better. Our young people are our future – crucial to the borough socially, culturally and economically. In Waltham Forest we are working hard to make life easier for them: investing in childcare facilities, supporting schools and colleges to help young people get the skills they need, and growing the local economy to make it easier to find a job.

But we are working against the tide. Just as inequality is on the rise, councils are being squeezed; our Government grant will be cut by 67% this decade, whilst the demands on our services increase. This context demands a radical approach if we’re going to succeed in our determination to improve life chances: an approach that is evidence-based, community-led, and designed in partnership.

This approach started with the Life Chances Commission, established last year to gather evidence about young people’s life chances in the borough. The Commission has set us 30 recommendations on how to improve life chances – all of which we will implement.

It continued under our Big Youth Conversation, which had 2,500 responses from young people on their aspirations and how the council could help – our biggest ever engagement of young people.

Based on these initial findings, we set out four priority areas for action, and some immediate steps we will take:

- **Ensuring every child gets the best start in life**, by continuing to invest in our Children and Family centres and opening a new centre 'The Junction'.

- **Providing a good quality education for every child**, by developing a Waltham Forest Pupil Premium Standard and implementing an action plan to tackle persistent absence.

- **Supporting young people to be resilient, confident and healthy**, through a mental health charter, a food poverty action plan and an Advanced Life Skills programme.

- **Giving young people the opportunities to flourish**, by establishing an Opportunity Bank to link young people to a range of opportunities, and publishing a new Apprenticeships Strategy.

But this is just the start. We do not pretend to have all the answers. We will work with you – our young people, parents, schools, colleges, businesses and partners – to develop lasting solutions to transform the life chances of our residents. A Creating Futures approach to support our young people in creating their own futures.

The solutions we develop must deliver improved outcomes for our young people. We want to see the ‘school readiness’ of our youngest children improve, better attainment and progress in school, greater awareness about careers options, increased attendance at top universities, greater uptake of apprenticeships, and better paying jobs locally. We will measure these outcomes and we will report on them, adjusting our approach until we succeed.

Most of all, we want our young people to feel empowered and able to fulfil their dreams. We will continue to ask them about their experiences, work with them, and support them. Only through doing this will we tackle inequality and allow every young person in the borough to thrive.

**SUMMARY**

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FOREWORD BY
CLARE COGHILL
COUNCIL LEADER
Growing up in 21st century London is tough. Young people face huge uncertainty, confronted with rapid technological change, an impending housing crisis, and far greater complexity over career and educational choices than ever before.

This uncertainty and complexity is hard for children, young people and their families to navigate, and is contributing to ever growing inequality. Last year the Social Mobility Commission lamented the “fracture line” running through our society, finding that “those on the wrong side of this divide are losing out and falling behind.”

Since the financial crisis, the wealthiest 1 per cent have seen their incomes grow twice as fast as the remaining 99 per cent, deepening and further entrenching social inequality. After eight years of austerity, the burden of reducing debt has not been shared, but placed firmly on the shoulders of hardworking families, and the councils that were built to help them.

The support for children and their parents that had been built up has been stripped away – Educational Maintenance Allowance axed, school budgets slashed, mental health services overstretched. Deep cuts to benefits push more and more people into poverty and indebtedness; low pay and increasingly insecure jobs mean that employment is no longer the route out, illustrated by the fact that the majority of children living in poverty also have at least one parent in work.

As a result, demand for the services local authorities provide has increased at the same time we have been hit with dramatic reductions in our budgets – Waltham Forest alone will have lost more than half a billion pounds in funding from central government by the end of this decade.

Despite the increasingly difficult national context, we have made huge strides forward in recent years. Our schools are improving. Our economy is growing. Employment is the 7th highest in London. We have been named London’s first Borough of Culture. We are a borough on the up, carrying out innovative and inspiring work that others around the country are replicating.

Austerity is not an excuse to give up; retreating to provide just statutory services is not good enough for our residents. Instead, we must find new approaches to meet these challenges head on.

It was for this reason that I set up the Life Chances Commission last year, to take a forensic look at our borough, and to hear from our young people, our businesses, our schools and our experts to understand what more we can do as a council, in collaboration with you and our partners, to improve the life chances of young people.

The Commission, under its Chair Conor Ryan, has done an excellent job. We will implement all of its recommendations, working closely with young people, parents, schools, community groups, colleges, businesses and public sector partners.

This will be a new way of working. We will not abandon our residents, leaving them to navigate the ever increasing complexities of every day life alone. Nor do we expect to come up with all of the answers on our own. We will work with young people to develop ideas and design solutions, provide support where needed, and challenge them to be ambitious. This is the approach embedded in our Creating Futures council strategy, implemented to support our young people to create their own futures.

It started this summer with our Big Youth Conversation, which saw lessons on Life Chances in local schools, and 2,500 young people giving us their views on how they feel about their opportunities and aspirations.

I’m delighted that Cara and Katy – two of the young people who have contributed to this work – have written their own foreword to this report. This is how we want to work towards our goal of eliminating barriers and creating exciting new paths for our young people; by being consultative, collaborative and relentlessly focussed on tackling social inequality.

The solutions we design with our partners will seek to support the needs of every single young person in our borough. It’s clear from the Commission’s work that young people need different things in order to flourish. Some need access to information. Some are looking for mentors and role models. Some need help in building resilience or tackling health issues. This is not a one-size fits all approach: it is one for the 67000 individual young people I see, with different needs and different dreams.

Only an effective government can deliver the change needed to transform our economy and make our society fairer. But within the national context we face, our life chances agenda shows how local government can re-imagine public services to respond to the challenges we face today, and has the potential to transform the lives of the young people we work with.

Our young people are our future and we must do everything we can to give them every chance of success.

Clare Coghill
FOREWORD BY
CARA AND KATY

YOUNG PEOPLE IN
WALTHAM FOREST
We live in the borough and went to school locally, and we know the importance of a quality education that is right for you. The recommendations of the Life Chances Commission reflect the views held by many young people in the borough, and implementing recommendations such as the Opportunity Bank could have a big impact on improving the life chances of the young people that live here.

We want to highlight the contributions of young people in the Big Youth Conversation, which has shown incredible thoughtfulness from our young people, who want to help change our borough for the better. It is great that the council has chosen to listen to the voices of young people; young people want to be listened to, as shown by the 99 per cent of respondents to the survey that wanted to continue to input into how to improve life chances for young people.

We believe in the significance of the issues raised by young people themselves; it is key that young people feel safe, supported and celebrated in the borough they live in. We want to support the council and its partners to improve life chances through a youth led approach. This way, the young people can be a part of and lead the change they want to see.

This is the chance for young people to work with the council to empower our voices and help build our futures. We urge every young person to take the opportunities that will come to shape the work of the council, to make sure your voice matters, and that your hopes and aspirations for the future count.

We want to support the council and its partners to improve life chances through a youth led approach, to support us to meet our aspirations, and share this support throughout our journey. We know this will have a lasting impact on our lives and the entire borough.

We are Cara and Katy and we form part of the borough’s youth engagement team, through the Youth Independent Advisory Group and the Young Advisors. We have been a part of the development of the Life Chances programme from the start, attending evidence sessions with the Life Chances Commission and helping facilitate the Big Youth Conversation. We are really excited for the potential of this work to empower the voices of young people.

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OUR
IMPERATIVE
Inequality in Britain is getting worse and our young people have been hit hard. The Social Mobility Commission has bemoaned the country’s ‘lamentable’ social mobility track record. The Resolution Foundation warned of an intergenerational contract ‘under threat’ as progress stalls for our younger generation. The Institute of Public Policy Research was blunt: young people are on course to be poorer than their parents.

Too many families are trapped in poverty within a societal and economic structure that makes it difficult to escape. 27 per cent of Londoners are living in poverty, whilst those at the top get ever richer: just 10 per cent of London households own over 50 per cent of the total wealth. Inequality is rife in the capital.

It is an issue we face in our borough, where child poverty affects 36 per cent of children.

Poverty and inequality have a profound impact on the life chances of young people. Physical and mental health suffers in families where money is scarce. Family cohesion and relationships can be undermined. Life expectancy is shortened: there is a ten year difference between those living in the poorest and richest parts of the UK.

And it has an impact on the social, cultural and economic future of our borough. A fair economy is a strong economy; conversely where poverty and inequality grow, so do the costs borne on society. Every time poverty holds back one of our young people it has an indirect cost: an opportunity lost to secure our social, cultural and economic future. We need our young people to succeed, to develop the skills that will take us through the decades to come, and to continue to build the cultural future of Waltham Forest.

We have taken important steps to improve the situation for young people, including by investing in our Children and Family Centre model to improve the quality and access to early years care, working with schools to raise educational standards, and leading by example as a London Living Wage employer.

But we need to do more. We are determined to take a stand and help our residents battle against the national tide. Improving life chances and reducing inequality is our fundamental priority – our raison d’etre. We are the ‘family firm’ – supporting our residents through difficulties and helping them to flourish.

This is why we established a Life Chances Commission to advise us, and it is why we are committing to implement all their recommendations, by working with our partners, our residents and our community groups to develop solutions that endure.

Delivering on our ambition in the face of ever greater government cuts will not be easy. By 2020 councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 the government had provided to spend on local services. Waltham Forest alone will have lost more than £500m in funding from central government by the end of this decade. Austerity has left councils across the country struggling to offer core services, let alone go further to support their residents.

But we are determined to be different. And we are determined to succeed.

We will deliver on our vision that every young person has what they need to thrive; a place with the opportunities to fulfil aspirations; where each individual’s needs are matched by unique solutions shaped by the community.

We will achieve this by doing things differently; operating within our constraints by acting creatively; working in collaboration with our residents, businesses, community groups and partners; using the talent and cultural power across the borough to find solutions to the problems of inequality.

We do not have all the answers, nor should we. Today we set out some initial steps that we will take to improve life chances, but much more will come through collaboration with those who know better than we do how to solve the challenges they face.

This is the essence of our corporate strategy – Creating Futures; building on the strengths of our residents and community groups, our businesses, schools and colleges, to develop new ways of working to tackle the problems we face.

This will be change from the ground up. It will be unique. It will be Waltham Forest.
WHAT’S HAPPENED SO FAR?
2.1 We are determined to tackle inequality, and our residents agree that this is the priority. Last year, through our Coffee and Conversation roadshow, our residents told us that ‘improving life chances’ should be a key priority of the council. It is wrong that our young people can have vastly different opportunities to succeed; it is not a level playing field.

2.2 Last year we established a Life Chances Commission to make sure our efforts to improve life chances are informed by leading experts in the field. The Commission focused their attention on actions that would improve the life chances of our young people, given the importance of the initial stages of life in shaping aspirations and opportunities. **We welcome the Commission’s report and commit to implementing all of its recommendations.**

2.3 As well as this expert view, we wanted to hear from our young people about their lives, the challenges they face, and how they can best be overcome.

2.4 This summer, our Big Youth Conversation saw over 2,500 young people give their views on their aspirations, opportunities and what more can be done to help them – our biggest ever engagement with young people. We met young people at festivals and fun-days, organised lessons in schools and assemblies, and reached out online to gather views.

2.5 We heard that young people wanted more opportunities for work experience, traineeships and part-time jobs, better careers advice in schools, and more support for applications to top universities. And we heard that 99 per cent of young people told us they want to be involved in decision making and the design of actions to improve life chances, with a majority wanting to do this through sessions in school classrooms. It is clear that our young people are ready to take an active role in shaping their own life chances; it is only right that we engage with young people to allow that to happen, taking a radical approach that will see shared design and ownership of solutions.

2.6 Our plan to improve life chances will meet the challenges posed by the Life Chances Commission and the Big Youth Conversation head-on. Our approach will focus both on providing a supportive environment that allows every young person to have the information, knowledge and skills to succeed and achieve their aspirations, and delivering additional targeted support to those most in need within our communities. We want to provide an individualised offer to young people that matches their individual needs – their personality, their preferences, their dreams.

2.7 Only through doing this will we tackle the scourge of inequality and allow every young person in the borough to thrive.

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**WALTHAM FOREST LIFE CHANCES COMMISSION**

Eight commissioners were appointed from across business, academia, as well as local schools and colleges. The Commission was chaired by Conor Ryan, then Director of Research at the Sutton Trust.

Working independently of the council, though with council support, the Commission investigated how Waltham Forest Council can improve the life chances of our young residents.

The Commission heard from young people, local residents, local businesses and education institutions, and considered evidence from other London boroughs and beyond.

In total, six evidence sessions were held, built around the themes of early years, family cohesion, the low wage economy, difference between cohorts of young people, progression to university, and apprenticeships. Three further sessions were held to consider and define recommendations.

The Commission’s findings are published alongside this report. They have set out 30 recommendations to the council that reflect the collective view of the Commission on how to improve the life chances of young people in the borough.
AN INITIAL PROGRAMME OF DELIVERY
3.1 We have listened to the views of both the Life Chances Commission and our young people. We are committed to an initial programme of work to tackle the inequality and boost the life chances of our residents. Our programme will focus on four key areas: ensuring every child gets the best start in life, providing a good quality education for every child, improving youth resilience, and supporting a smooth transition to adulthood.

ENSURING EVERY CHILD GETS THE BEST START IN LIFE

3.2 Leading childcare experts agree that the first 1,000 days of a child’s development are some of the most significant, with a material impact on their long-term development. All young people in Waltham Forest deserve the best possible start in life, with no-one left behind.

3.3 We are proud of the strides we have made to strengthen our early years offer, strides that have been commended by the Life Chances Commission. We have already invested in comprehensive provision of Children and Family Centres, working in partnership with the NHS and local and national charities. These centres reflect a cutting-edge approach – introduced in 2016 – that brings together support across many areas of development, health and wellbeing in one centre. This model includes the provision of specialist support in areas including infant feeding, speech and language, healthy eating, as well as child health clinics. The proportion of our 0–4 year olds registered at a Children and Family Centre increased by four percentage points in between March 2017 and 2018, taking the total registered up to 80 per cent.

3.4 We have also made big strides in improving the quality of childcare provision, making us a leader in London and nationally. The proportion of our three and four year olds achieving a ‘good level of development’ at early years foundation stage in the borough has increased by almost 20 per cent over five years and has been above the national average for both boys and girls for the duration of that period. The proportion of our three and four year olds taking up their early years places at a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ provider has reached 98 per cent, higher than the London average (95 per cent) and England average (93 per cent). The borough is 7th best in the country for early years achievement among children eligible for free school meals; 67 per cent of these children achieved a “good level of development” in 2016/17.

3.5 In spite of significant reductions in government funding, we will continue to invest in our children and family centre offer to ensure our children continue to benefit from the best of start in life. We are opening a brand new Children and Family Centre in Leytonstone, ‘The Junction’, which will bring together adult education, children and family services, a community library, and Job Centre Plus.

3.6 A key challenge identified by the Commission is making sure the most disadvantaged in our borough can access our early years offer, from our Children and Family Centres to our free early education provision. Just under half of eligible two-year olds in the borough were taking up their free early education entitlement in January 2018; we want to increase this to at least 80 per cent by 2022. Given the lasting benefits of interacting with other children and receiving a high quality early years education, it is
vital that we encourage take up for the most disadvantaged 2–4 year olds – for whom an early years place can make a significant difference.

3.7 Increasing take up of free early years places will also have the important impact of boosting parental employment. This is particularly important to help new mothers in the borough back into work.

3.8 To address the challenge of low take-up of early years places, we will improve signposting of our entire early years offer, on and offline, by delivering periodic focussed communication campaigns via an updated Waltham Forest Directory, as well as direct marketing to parents, carers and local businesses.

3.9 Our transformational Connecting Communities programme will help us link families most in need with our early years offer. We will use the programme’s intensive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training offer, alongside development of parent-champion and peer-to-peer support networks, to raise the profile of our early years offer in communities where take-up is low.

3.10 In the autumn we will publish a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy that will set out our approach to increasing the take up of free early education places and early years pupil premium funding.

3.11 In addition, we have commissioned a new Childcare Sufficiency Assessment to report by the end of March 2019 to ensure sufficient early years places. The assessment will provide an understanding of the current barriers to take-up of free early education places, and what we can do to make sure all Waltham Forest children can benefit from this provision.

3.12 For early years care to effectively improve life chances, it needs to be high quality. This requires us to ensure our early years professionals are of the highest standard. To support settings in attracting and retaining the top professionals, we will work in partnership with schools and childcare providers to support them in implementing the Mayor of London’s Healthy Early Years Award. We will also hold a formal celebration event to recognise exceptional early years providers.

3.13 To maximise the impact of our efforts to improve life chances in early years, we must consider our early years offer across all of our activities. In the first instance, we will ensure that our Local Plan delivers sufficient early years and childcare facilities as we redevelop parts of the borough.

3.14 Alongside supporting our youngest residents in their first 1,000 days, we will continue our current programmes to support parents. This includes our evidence-based parenting support strategies such as Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities and the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme. In addition to these programmes, parents will also reap the benefits of our wider work on life chances, particularly in terms of improving skills and expanding employment opportunities through flagship interventions such as the Opportunity Bank.

A GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD

3.15 Providing a good education for young people is a fundamental part of improving their life chances. A positive school experience can be transformational. It is our job to make sure all our young people benefit from that positive experience.

3.16 Our schools in Waltham Forest are already above the London average – and results are improving. The Commission reports that schools in Waltham Forest are generally better than the national average: 97 per cent of Waltham Forest schools are rated by OFSTED as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, making us the 4th best borough in London. In 2017, 68 per cent of pupils achieved an ‘expected level of development’ in Key Stage 2, above both the London and national average.

3.17 However, our most disadvantaged students do less well: early figures for 2018 suggest that pupils eligible for free schools meals are behind their Waltham Forest peers by 12 per cent in achieving an ‘expected level of development’ for Key Stage 1, and by Key Stage 2 this increases to 15 per cent.

3.18 We can only address inequality if our schools are acting to support the most disadvantaged. We will work with settings, schools and colleges to develop a Waltham Forest Pupil Premium Standard that sets out best practice for spending pupil premiums, and we will establish a training and development offer to support schools in its delivery. Our Pupil Premium Standard and training offer will be co-designed with our schools, utilising crucial networks such as the Waltham Forest Learning Partnership. This will allow us to meet a key recommendation from the Social Mobility Commission’s 2017 State of the Nation report, that ‘every local authority should develop an integrated strategy for improving disadvantaged children’s outcomes and Pupil...
Premium funds should be invested in evidence-based practice.

3.19 More broadly, we will continue to work with schools to drive up educational standards. We will work with our Teaching Schools and the Waltham Forest Learning Partnership to target training and support to schools with the biggest gaps in attainment between groups, high numbers of disadvantaged students, and high rates of persistent absence.

3.20 Critically, to benefit from the improving standards a young person has to be in school. Too many of our young people are regularly out of classrooms: 15.3 per cent of secondary school pupils were persistently absent in 2016–2017 in Waltham Forest, compared with an average of 11.9 per cent for the other London boroughs. To tackle this we have published an action plan on persistent absence, which includes measures to improve family engagement in attendance and attainment. Our action plan will be a catalyst for change in our schools, and will build capacity across the education sector to sustain good practice in attendance management.

3.21 The experiences of our young people are complex, varied and unique. Matching individual needs to individual solutions is a central thread of our plan to improve life chances.

3.22 We will provide a holistic support offer for wider life skills, careers advice, emotional well-being, and general preparedness for adult life—taking our support beyond the school setting. This will include commissioning vital mentoring programmes with community partners, seeking opportunities for additional funding, and exploring wider provision of mentorship through a borough-wide Opportunity Bank. We want our young people to be resilient to the difficulties that life can throw at them; be confident in taking the opportunities that arise; and be supported in tackling any health issues they have.

3.23 We must and we will keep our young people safe. The recent publication of ground breaking research into gangs, conducted by London South Bank University, and our response as a council, will reshape our existing gang prevention programme. We will also fund our first ever financial investigation team to increase capacity in the borough to seize criminal assets under the Proceeds of Crime Act. Gangs should have no place in Waltham Forest.

3.24 We will tackle the stigma of mental health by drawing on the resources in our community and utilising our position as the first Time to Change Hub in London. Time to Change is a national mental health campaign, and we will have Time to Change champions in our schools in the new school year.

3.25 Emphasising the importance of community connections, we will introduce a Young Person’s mental health charter. Working with schools and other partners, this will be a shared commitment to improving the mental health and wellbeing of children.

3.26 In addition to this, we are launching a digital support and online counselling service for 11–18 year olds this year. This will support Tier 1/Tier 2 mental wellbeing needs, providing a platform for self-help such as information, moderated forums,
signposting, as well as access to a counselling service.

3.27 No child in 21st century Britain should be hungry, but we know that sadly many are. We also know that physical health can be detrimentally affected by child poverty. We will do all we can to help avoid poverty leading to physical problems in our young people. We are developing a food poverty action plan with local partners to create solutions to food poverty in the borough. This includes promotion of breastfeeding and healthy start vouchers for fruit, vegetables and milk for eligible families.

3.28 In addition to our food poverty action plan, we have brought the charity Kitchen Social to the borough to provide some relief for children from holiday hunger. We are also on track to achieve UNICEF baby-friendly accreditation, indicating that our borough is breast-feeding friendly.

3.29 In Britain we too often focus on academic skills for young people, neglecting the life skills that many take for granted. We will deliver an Advanced Life Skills programme to reduce the prevalence of risk taking behaviours in young people and promote healthy choices, an exciting evidenced based programme for 8 – 14 year olds that originated in the United States.

3.30 Life chances is not only about career and academic advances, but also the right to a life free from violence. We must ensure that violence against women and girls does not prevent our young women reaching their full potential; harassment on the street, at school, and at work inhibits life chances and will not be accepted in Waltham Forest. We will expand our whole school approach to tackling violence against women and girls using the Healthy Schools Framework, which combats attitudes and practices that allow violence to occur.

3.31 The right to a life free from violence extends to the home-setting; no-one should feel unsafe at home, but we know that roughly one in five children are exposed to domestic abuse in their family home in the UK. To protect young people against domestic abuse we will introduce the Safe and Together Model. Safe and Together has been developed internationally over the past 20 years and offers a broad spectrum of resources and tools to improve the response to domestic abuse, including how to work better together with the families affected.

3.32 Waltham Forest is growing, and our borough is changing. The cultural power of our places and people are creating new opportunities, despite the difficulties young people face. We are determined that this means meaningful local opportunities for our young people – they should be the ones who benefit from local growth; Waltham Forest will undoubtedly benefit as a result.

3.33 To achieve this, young people must have the information and advice they need on the myriad options they have to forge their futures; again, matching individual need with individual solutions. We want our young people to feel prepared for their transition into adulthood after school, whether that is to employment, vocational education or university.

3.34 Both through the work of the Commission and the Big Youth Conversation, we have heard that our young people do not feel that they receive effective careers advice, that they need more opportunities for work experiences, jobs and apprenticeships, and that they need more support with university applications. The Commission and our young people think we can do more. We agree.

3.35 To give our young people the information and resources they need to succeed, we will establish an Opportunity Bank, co-designed and produced with Waltham Forest young people. The Opportunity Bank will give young people access to information on opportunities, including job vacancies, work experience and traineeships, apprenticeships, volunteering and skills training, as well as advice on health and housing.

3.36 The Opportunity Bank will also link young people to the diverse pool of residents that are willing and able to help them succeed, whether through sustained mentorship or one-off help with a university application. The bank will be designed to harness the rich social capital in Waltham Forest. It will be a place where our residents and community groups can support our young people directly with their skills and knowledge.

3.37 In addition to advice provided by the Opportunity Bank, we will develop a borough-wide approach to careers advice and guidance, including finding innovative ways for young people to receive timely and appropriate advice and information. These measures will build on our existing work, including careers fairs hosted by the council in the autumn. We will also develop an ambitious work
experience scheme in the council to give our young people invaluable first-hand experience at work, encouraging our partners to do likewise.

3.38 In order to support students who want to attend university, we will use the Opportunity Bank to facilitate a ‘buddy scheme’ of current university students from the borough and local prospective students. This will give a human face to elite institutions and inspire our students to succeed. Support with university applications will also be offered within the buddy scheme, making sure our students can stand out amongst the best in the country.

3.39 We must also do more to support students who do not want to go to university. Apprenticeships offer an attractive alternative to university, allowing young people to develop experience at work whilst earning a salary and avoiding tuition fees. The Life Chances Commission stressed the need to increase availability and take-up of apprenticeships, and to tackle the misconception of apprenticeships as a “lesser qualification”.

3.40 To create a leading apprenticeship culture in the borough, we will develop a gold standard apprenticeships scheme. The details of this scheme will be set out in a new Apprenticeships Strategy published later this year, which will take account of all the Commission’s recommendations relating to apprenticeships. We will co-design, test and grow our improved approach to apprenticeships, using our Opportunity Bank to share what works with schools, partners and local businesses.

3.41 As part of our Apprenticeships Strategy we will launch a borough-wide campaign that increases positive perceptions of apprenticeships. We will work with schools and partners to change perceptions so that apprenticeships are a first-choice route to employment, skills and a long-term career.

3.42 For young people not seeking further education or who have recently completed their programmes, we need to ensure access to decent, well-paying jobs locally. Our Think Work programme is focussed on creating quality, sustainable careers for all residents and developing a quality workforce to support our local economy. We will use Think Work to boost opportunities for our young people.

3.43 Working with a partner organisation, SLENKY, we are the first London local authority to co-develop a digital platform connecting young people aged 13 – 24 with paid and unpaid opportunities. Building on this work, we will use the Opportunity Bank to connect young people with meaningful work, and will expand our Steps into Work programme to ensure young people are prepared for the opportunities they seek.

3.44 Seizing a career opportunity is one challenge, but to improve life chances it should provide financial security.

3.45 We are already a Living Wage Employer and require our suppliers to both pay the London Living Wage and promote the London Living Wage through their procurement policy and supply chain.

3.46 We will also invest in CompeteFor, a service that will allow our contractors to advertise their supply chain opportunities locally to small and medium enterprises, boosting local jobs and opportunities. It will also allow us to monitor whether suppliers adhere to the sustainability standards we set.

3.47 The transition to adulthood is vital in determining the life chances of young people. We will make sure that every young person has access to the opportunities they need to thrive and succeed.
4.1 We have designed an initial programme to improve life chances, but **we do not pretend to have all the answers**. We know that solutions are most effectively designed and implemented through partnership with those involved.

4.2 We need an approach that galvanises the support of residents and mobilises our communities to deliver real change and make a sustainable and lasting difference. One that not only consults but meaningfully engages partners in the public, private and voluntary and community sector. One that embeds youth participation as business as usual and allows young people to drive the change they want to see. One that sees Waltham Forest as a large interconnected community and our role within that not just as a safety net, but as a facilitator and enabler. Our Big Youth Conversation was the start of this new Creating Futures approach. But it was just the start: this will be a new way of working, evidence-based, resident-led, and delivered in partnership.

4.3 This is the approach at the heart of our Creating Futures corporate strategy, which focuses on new ways of working to develop radical and responsive public services that reflect the needs of residents in the 21st century. It’s the approach we are taking through our Connecting Communities programme, to bring different groups together to build civic society and tackle the issues we face together. And it’s the approach we will put at the heart of our efforts to improve life chances.

**CREATING FUTURES**

Our Creating Futures corporate strategy sets out how we will work, as an innovative and forward thinking council, to tackle the key priorities of our residents. It focusses on five principles that will underpin all of our activity: building on our strengths, return on investment, people focussed, new relationships and new ways of working.

A key focus of the strategy is on working with our partners to build the relationships that can sustainably tackle some of the societal problems we face. As a council we need to be smarter at working collaboratively to develop solutions, and better at empowering our residents and community groups to deliver for themselves.

This approach will be central to our work to improve life chances. Working with partners to establish the issues, and co-designing the most appropriate, and most transformational solutions.
EMBEDDING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

4.4 The council’s Big Youth Conversation was only the beginning of our commitment to embed youth participation and involvement in council decision making. The Big Youth Conversation survey – which had over 1800 respondents – revealed that 99 per cent of the young people surveyed are keen to engage with the council on life chances; and a majority favoured in-class sessions in schools as the way to engage.

4.5 We will repeat the Big Youth Conversation survey each year to continue to get feedback from our young people, including through Life Chances lessons in our local schools every summer. This will be a crucial for us to monitor and track our progress in delivering the Life Chances programme.

4.6 We will use the next 6 months to trial innovative approaches to youth participation; mapping projects in the council that need youth input – from the Town Hall regeneration to the legacy of Borough of Culture - and using them to develop different approaches.

4.7 To kick off our new approach to youth participation this Autumn term, we will work with Techmix to engage young people in the design of the Opportunity Bank, and run tech camps that equip young people with entrepreneurial skills.

ENGAGING PARENTS

4.8 Engaging parents is another key priority, as ensuring parents have the support and resources they need is vital to improve life chances, from the best start in early years through to decisions about future careers in young adulthood.

4.9 We will endeavour to reach all parents, especially those who have had no previous contact with the council, by working with schools and the voluntary sector to find new opportunities to engage, such as parents’ evenings, PTA meetings and parent’s groups in the community.

4.10 We will host quarterly parents, workshops to share information with parents and work collaboratively to strengthen our support offer for parents.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

4.11 Meaningful improvement in life chances cannot be achieved by the council alone. To maximise our impact, we need to coordinate our approach with our key partners; from parents, schools and higher education institutions, to local businesses and the voluntary and community sector.

4.12 We will work with schools on an individual basis and also through the Learning Partnership to deliver the Life Chances programme. We will also establish links with Higher Education institutions across the UK and beyond to give more Waltham Forest young people first-hand experience of these environments and increase the number of our young people going on to top universities.

4.13 We will engage local businesses and top employers by attending Top 20 Business Partnership meetings, mapping out local businesses and establishing individual links, and tapping into networks being developed as part of Borough of Culture 2019.

4.14 We will seek opportunities to work with voluntary organisations as delivery partners, as well as seeking to build fundraising and management capacity in the voluntary sector. This will bring even more great projects to the borough that boost life chances.

4.15 We will continue to work closely with public sector partners, such as our Clinical Commissioning Group and central government, to act as design and delivery partners.

A FOCUS ON EQUALITY

4.16 The council is committed to ensuring no one is left behind in our goal of improving life chances, and thinking carefully about our approach to equality is a big part of how we deliver.

4.17 In our engagement, design and delivery processes we commit to an approach that actively promotes equality. We will be sensitive to the different needs and experiences of girls and boys, LGBT young people, BAME young people, disabled young people, and other minority identities. We will also recognise that a person can have more than one of these identities, and that these different inequalities can interact and combine to have great impact on a person’s life. We will work with equalities groups in the community and beyond to deliver this and ensure our actions and interventions take account of their impact on different groups.
Planting trees at the Wetlands – May 2018
MEASURING SUCCESS
5.1 It is not sufficient to develop a programme of work to improve life chances: we need to ensure that the programme delivers the outcomes that it should for young people.

5.2 Some interventions – for example improving early years care – will take more than a decade to translate into improved life outcomes as an adult. In other areas, such as our Opportunity Bank, it will take time for the intervention to take hold and lead to improved outcomes.

5.3 Ultimately, we will monitor our success by listening to our young people. Through an annual Big Youth Conversation we will ask our young people how they feel about their opportunities to fulfil their aspirations, and how the council and its partners can help them. This survey portion of the Big Youth Conversation, which this year was undertaken by more than 1,800 young people, will be used to monitor the perspectives of different cohorts of young people as they progress through school and beyond.

5.4 In addition, we will focus on measuring some of the individual outcomes that would contribute to young people having improved life chances. There are myriad outcomes that could reflect life chances, and we feel these five allow us to make a robust start in planning the monitoring and evaluation component of the life chances work:

- **Improved ‘school readiness’ for our youngest children** with a focus on the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, which would indicate that early years care was improving in making sure children have the skills they need before they start school.

- **Better attainment and progress of our young people in school**, focusing on specific groups which are being left behind, which would indicate that teaching and learning in school was improving, such that they leave school with better prospects.

- **Greater awareness about careers and educational options**, which would indicate that young people were being provided with more effective information to help shape their educational and career paths.

- **Greater attendance at top universities and increased uptake of apprenticeships**, which, given that relatively few young people in the borough take up these opportunities at present, would indicate that the plethora of opportunities was being communicated and encouraged more effectively.

- **Better paying jobs locally**, which would indicate that young people can build more effective careers in the borough or within commuting distance.

5.5 We will use these outcomes to measure performance over time, and use this to evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions. We will engage and consult young people and other key partners in the process of identifying these indicators, as part of our ongoing co-design process.
APPENDIX

The Life Chances Commission made 30 recommendations grouped into eight key priorities. In this appendix we set out the initial actions that we will take forward in order to deliver them.
Key action: 1. increase the take up of the early years offer for those who need it most

- Conduct a new Childcare Sufficiency Assessment starting in October 2018 and reporting by March 2019.
- Improve data sharing and partnership working arrangements with public health and children's centres which facilitate the provision of information to parents/carers about their free early education places and the benefits of taking them up.
- Develop programme of parent champions/volunteers to encourage parents/carers to take up their free early years entitlement.
- Gather information from parents/carers on a regular basis to understand if and why they are not taking up places.
- Improve signposting of our early years offer through periodic focused communication campaigns via an updated Waltham Forest Directory, and direct marketing to parents/carers and local businesses.
- Continue to invest in our Children and Family centres and open a new centre in Leytonstone, 'The Junction'.
- Ensure the development of new childcare provision is included in the council's regeneration, planning policy and economic growth strategies including the Local Plan.
- Exploit funding options for the development of new childcare premises, for example through S106 funding, developer contribution/conditions and grant funding from the Department for Education.
- Work with teaching schools to increase the number of Senior Leaders in education with an early years specialism.
- Further develop the early years Systems Leadership Model, which builds on the established expertise within Waltham Forest's early years sector and provides a peer to peer quality improvement model across all early years providers.
- Work in partnership with Public Health to implement the Mayor of London's Healthy Early Years Award and hold a formal celebration event to reward excellent early years provision for those who achieve the award.
- Continue to promote use of digital learning books, which are currently being used across all Children and Family centres in partnership with parents who can upload observations including videos and photos.
- Develop a vlog for Children and Family centres, which will include regular short videos with activity ideas to promote learning at home.
- Deliver our 'All Talk communication project', which will provide a range of resources including digital webcasts and webinars to support childcare providers in promoting home learning with parents/carers that use their services.
- Promote our 'stay and play' offer in Children and Family centres to encourage repeated use of services.
- Continue to support parents into free early education provision by individual calling and cross checking of DWP lists with early years staff.
- Define more fundamentally the partnership offer for two year olds, particularly those with additional needs through more effective partnership working with key workers such as Portage Workers in DES and Health Visitors, S&L therapists, Social Workers.
- Coordinate relationship between Think Family and Think Work to support increased numbers of parents into work, with a particular focus on women and maternal employment.
- Maximise opportunities from increased ESOL provision in the Connecting Communities programme to ensure the activity benefits children in early years.
- Upgrade and update Waltham Forest Directory to ensure that parents are easily able to access information regarding free early education.
- Run a marketing and communication campaign to ensure all parents receive postcards regarding their free early education offer.
- Promote free early education and Children and Family centres in the birth register booklet provided by the registrar service.
- Maximise opportunities for early years in the Connecting Communities programme by ensuring benefits reach families with early years children, for example the benefits of mentorship, volunteering, and peer-to-peer learning.
Key action: 2. Pupil Premium Enrichment Card

- Work with Teaching Schools to target specific training at schools with under-performing groups of pupils.
- Ensure persistent absence is a key priority for the Learning Partnership and that we collectively tackle high rates of persistent absence through delivery of our persistent absence Action Plan.
- Commission and deliver an Advanced Life Skills programme.
- Work with settings, schools and colleges to develop a Waltham Forest Pupil Premium Standard.
- Establish a training offer to support schools in delivering the Waltham Forest Pupil Premium Standard, including creating a section on the The Hub offering high quality resources and examples of best practice.
- Consider in-borough offers for the development and introduction of a Pupil Premium Enrichment “Card”.
- Use our status as London Borough of Culture to deliver on an ambition that all school children in the borough attend a Borough of Culture event.
- Work alongside children and young people to deliver London Borough of Culture legacy programmes, including a creative education partnership, cultural leadership programme and a potential school for the creative arts.

Key action: 3. Good quality careers advice

- Develop a borough-wide approach to careers advice and guidance, including finding innovative ways for young people to receive timely and appropriate advice and information. Support schools to implement requirements of Careers Strategy.
- Build on some of the existing work, including careers fairs, to allow for real choice and bolster the offer locally.

Key action: 4. Opportunity Bank

- Establish an Opportunity Bank to match young people’s individual needs with individual solutions, providing access to opportunities for work experience, employment, higher education, apprenticeships, and other resources such as mental health and housing information. The council sees this as one of the key enablers to improving young people’s life chances. The council will ask young people to help to shape the Opportunity Bank, alongside parents, carers, local colleges, businesses and other key partners.

Key action: 5. Community mentors

- Develop mentors and peer to peer support as a fundamental part of the Opportunity Bank. The council will act as a broker to identifying potential mentors and matching appropriately to young people, as well as providing support to mentors/mentees and monitoring the quality of the mentor-mentee relationships. The council sees this as part of its wider developments on community assets, alongside its Borough of Culture ambassadors, Time to Change champions, Care Navigators, and the Connecting Communities programme.
- Use the Opportunity Bank and work with organisations such as Speakers 4 Schools to promote a diverse programme of guest speakers to go into schools and talk about their life experiences and achievements.
- Introduce a schools Mental Health Charter by Easter 2019.

Key action: 6. Gold Standard Apprenticeship scheme

- Work with businesses, employers and young people to co-construct the Waltham Forest gold standard apprenticeship scheme. This will include the creation of a meaningful work experience scheme and will be supported by a commitment to developing perception of apprenticeships as a credible route into sustainable employment.
- Publish an Apprenticeships Strategy in autumn 2018 to support delivery of these interventions.
- Run a marketing campaign to improve perception of apprenticeships as a credible route into sustainable employment as part of apprenticeships strategy.

Key action: 7. The University Challenge

- Seek to develop stronger and more meaningful relationships with higher education institutions across the UK and beyond.
• Use the Opportunity Bank, and other avenues to provide real-time information to support young people and their families’ decision-making.

• Create more opportunities for young people to have first-hand experience of higher education institutions, contact with alumni, support for writing personal statements, and to understand the correlation between their qualification pathway choice and their future career/careers.

• Use the Opportunity Bank to develop a ‘buddy’ system that links young people from Waltham Forest attending the same university, establishing links with Russell Group Universities and other higher education institutions.

**Key action: 8. Council to lead by example**

• Work across services to embed youth participation into council decision making and policy development.

• Over the coming months, work with young people to identify up to six council projects/programmes to use as pilots for innovative approaches for youth participation. Ensure that learning from these pilots is used to effectively build in youth engagement processes into wider council activity.

• Embed a youth focus into the work of the ‘Think Work’ programme, the Council’s forward programme for design and delivery in business, growth and investment activities.

• Use our relationship with the ‘Top 20’ group of businesses in the borough to encourage apprenticeships, placements and internships, and seek to boost opportunities to employment for young people, by ensuring young people are a consistent agenda item at ‘Top 20’ business group meetings, and by exploiting the potential of the Opportunity Bank.

• Expand the ‘Steps into Work’ programme through the Opportunity Bank and identifying new funding sources.

• Continue to require suppliers that work on council premises to pay London Living Wage and promote London Living Wage through procurement policy and supply charter.

• Develop a Living Wage Zone in Waltham Forest.

• Invest in CompeteFor platform and exploit opportunity bank to work with local employers and council suppliers to encourage local recruitment and sourcing of services.