

Section One: Welcome

Welcome to our Corporate Plan which takes us from 2007 to 2010. This is where we set out our corporate priorities and identify the main areas of work we will be focusing on over the next three years. We believe that by identifying clear priorities and actions to back them up we can make the greatest possible impact on the services we provide and the quality of life for everyone in the borough.

In this plan, we also reflect on what has been achieved during last year and give information about how we have performed compared with previous years and how we compare with other councils. The past year has been a busy one. We have been working hard to put in place all those things we set out in last year's plan. Much has been achieved, and many milestones reached for those longer-term projects we are working on. We have also responded to new challenges and taken advantage of new opportunities to contribute towards our overall objectives.

During the past year the culture of the Council has changed and will continue to change in forthcoming years. We are fostering a 'can-do' culture linked to a 'right first time' approach which puts the customer at the forefront of our work. Our new approach has already been recognised outside the Council. We are delighted to have been successful in gaining the Investors in People award this year and our excellent Member Development work has been recognised through the award of the North West Charter for Member Development. Our recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment has been a very positive experience for the Council allowing us to demonstrate how much the council has improved in the last five years.

We are proud of how far we've come – and we pay tribute to the energy and commitment of Councillors and employees, as well as partners and local people, that have made all this possible. We want to achieve even more. We want to make our full contribution towards Rossendale being a Cracking Place to Live! We have set out here what we intend to do next.

Please take the opportunity to read this Plan and let us know what you think.

Councillor Duncan Ruddick

Carolyn Wilkins

Introduction: Rossendale – The Borough

We are one of the six boroughs that make up East Lancashire. As well as our Lancashire neighbours, we border with Rochdale and Bury in Greater Manchester and Calderdale in West Yorkshire. We are uniquely placed to exploit the potential of both the Manchester and Central Lancashire City Regions.

We have a population of 66,000¹ with 3.5% from a minority ethnic background². Christianity is the main faith, with 2.9% people of Muslim faith. The borough is a mix of urban and rural areas, resulting in a population density of 470 people per square kilometre - much less than neighbouring areas which are two to three times more densely populated.

Our environment is a strong part of our identity. The development of Rossendale has been influenced by its geography and its natural resources. The narrow urban valley of the River Irwell, running between the Pennine uplands, means fabulous scenery but a limited number of accessible sites for housing and employment. The borough has a strong industrial past – the legacy of which is apparent today in many of our buildings. English Heritage described Bacup as one of the best examples of a preserved mill town in the country. We have over 260 listed buildings and 8 conservation areas.

This legacy is also apparent in our strong manufacturing base – which still employ over a quarter of the borough's workforce. Despite this local employment base, economic activity in Rossendale is nearly 20% lower than the national average of 74.7%³. This is in part due to our proximity to major employment centres. 14,020 people (46.9% of our working population) commute out of the borough to work – creating transport challenges and the need to provide retail and leisure facilities that encourage people to spend their money where they live, and not where they work. In addition, almost a fifth of all households are wholly retired from work. Permanently sick or disabled households account for just 4.8% of all households, which is lower than the national average of 5.5%. Unemployment in Rossendale at 3.2% is significantly lower than the national figure of 4.7%, but some wage rates are low.

¹ 2005 mid year estimates

² 2001 Census

³ ONS December 2004

We have a total of 29,574 residential properties comprising 28,068 households⁴. The vast majority of households can be classed as owner occupation, with 19,494 (72%) owning their own home. The remaining households are in the private rented sector (2,768 or 10%) or with registers social landlords (4,849 households or 18%). These include tenants of Green Vale Homes who now own the former Council housing stock.

Parts of the borough are well connected via the road network, but rail links are poor. The East Lancashire Railway is currently a heritage railway. Our geography limits our transport infrastructure and there is pressure across our road network.

The 2004 **Index of Deprivation** shows that Rossendale ranks as the 92nd most deprived borough in the country. Super Output Areas are administrative areas which are bigger than the Census's Enumeration Districts but smaller than Council wards – they are used to collect a wide range of statistical information about every part of the country. In Rossendale, we have six Super Output Areas (SOAs) within the worst 25% in the country, comprising 15.6% of our population. In particular, there is a high degree of health deprivation across the borough meaning that we qualify to be a 'spearhead authority'. Life expectancy is below the national average (2 years below for men and over one year below for women) with just over 20% of people suffering from a limiting long-term illness⁵.

Our Ambitions

We are a small council, but our Councillors and officers have big ambitions – both for the organisation and for the communities we serve. At the same time as delivering on our own challenging improvement agenda, we have also driven forward a significant agenda for our borough. We are proud of how far we have come, and are committed to working together to tackle the challenges that still face us.

⁴ (HMR and Strategy Property Database as of October 2004).

⁵ 2001 Census