



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Opening up on a success story

Over the last decade there's been a ruthless focus at Telford & Wrekin Council on working to be the best. I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved in everything from children's services to adult social care to economic development.

As a co-operative council, we've worked hard to make sure it's a true partnership between members, officers and the community. We invest in and empower our staff and residents. It's about values and the way in which you hold yourself up to being judged.

Geographically, we're on the periphery of a region and that's sometimes defined our role. But we're

ready to become a more prominent player as an organisation and as a place that has a huge economic contribution to make.

When I talk to organisations like Ofsted, ADASS and the LGA, they can't quite believe the transformation we have made and how we've done it under the radar.

We rolled up our sleeves and for a long time we just got on with the job. But now we want to share our story and inspire others while continuing to learn from fellow local authorities to improve and make sure next year is even better.

Cllr Shaun Davies
Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council



‘The council can be very proud of what it is achieving, with it clearly being very ambitious, top-performing in key areas and striving constantly to deliver for local people... There is strong and effective political and managerial leadership of the council. The leader and chief executive are held in very high regard both within and beyond the organisation, but it clearly isn’t just them. Phenomenally hard work has been delivered over many years to get the organisation to where it is.’

LGA corporate health check, 2021



A new sense of place

From top-performing services to a radical approach to place-shaping, Telford & Wrekin is making a name for itself. **Austin Macauley** reports

Telford & Wrekin Council has spent a decade under the radar quietly creating one of local government’s biggest success stories.

But when you’re transforming an entire town and have ‘outstanding’ children’s services and ‘exceptional’ adult social care, it’s unlikely to stay a secret for long.

In the last few months the authority has been named overall council of the year at the APSE Service Awards and scooped co-operative council of the year from Co-operatives UK.

The cat is well and truly out of the bag.

A recent glowing report from an LGA corporate peer review team concluded it’s time for the council to ‘establish the higher profile and enhanced reputation that its track record and successes deserve... We see real opportunity at the regional and national level for the council as an influencer and innovator’.

Music to the ears of leader Cllr Shaun Davies and chief executive David Sidaway.

Both Telford born and bred, they have a shared ambition for their borough to be recognised as an exemplary council and play a much bigger role in the West Midlands and beyond.

‘Over the last decade we have just been getting on with it,’ says Cllr Davies, who was elected leader in 2016 - becoming the youngest council leader in England and Wales.

‘It’s been about getting our heads down and working to improve services to the point that we’re at now. We’re ready to open our doors to help people learn from what we’ve done, as well as us going out to learn from others.’

That journey has been one of a relentless focus on evidence-led improvement, investment in the workforce - 92% of staff understand how their work contributes to the council’s priorities - and a community focus wedded to co-operative values.

Telford & Wrekin is a founding member of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network and Cllr



Cllr Shaun Davies



David Sidaway

Davies’ first role in the cabinet was to embed that approach. It’s evident in the co-produced nature of the way the organisation goes about its business in collaboration with communities and is what turns the council’s vision to ‘protect, care and invest to create a better borough’ into reality.

The council is financially savvy, creating various income streams and attracting inward investment so that it can continue to invest in the organisation, its services and the borough.

Finishing the job

Cllr Davies admits the downside to getting your head down and driving improvement is perceptions of a place end up 10-15 years out of date.

But when you’re a new town, battling with preconceptions and clichés comes with the territory. In Telford’s case, being a disjointed town without a true centre, where the railway station is half a mile away, didn’t help.

The award-winning £250m Southwater scheme has rectified the first issue - creating a focal point and night-time economy to rival anywhere in the region - while Station Quarter is tackling the latter (see page 4).

Historical blockages to the borough’s wider economic development and regeneration have also been dealt with head on.

Telford was born in 1968 as part of a third wave of new towns and at the time it was Britain’s largest land reclamation scheme involving over 2,000 hectares

of brownfield sites that once made up the East Shropshire Coalfield.

Although the town grew rapidly, vast swathes of Government owned land was never developed and sat dormant. In a nutshell, the Telford that had been envisioned - a settlement designed at over 200,000 people - was never finished.

That was until the council took the initiative and struck an innovative 10-year deal with Homes England six years ago, a move that David describes as ‘a game changer’.

‘We are continuing and driving investment in the new town, creating jobs and homes. The amount of things that have been delivered is incredible - we’ve already leveraged in £300m of private sector investment, 2,000 new jobs, 1,000 new homes, created so many opportunities for skills and learning - and generated income for the council.’

The scale is impressive but what sets Telford Land Deal apart is it allows the council to not only take control and realise the potential of these sites but do so in a manner that fits in with the wider vision for the borough. Development has to fit in with the area’s USP - 70% of the borough is rural - and fulfil the needs of not just Telford but historical surrounding towns like Ironbridge, birthplace of the industrial revolution and home to a UNESCO world heritage site.

A prime example of the deal in action is T54 business park, where the council invested upfront in infrastructure, including new electricity supply, addressing barriers to ensure the park was truly ‘shovel ready’. Located just off the M54 and two miles from Telford town centre, it has attracted a host of major employers, including one of the largest UK investments in the last 10 years. In some cases it’s allowed locally based firms to expand while others have relocated from other parts of the UK.

Unlocking growth

Cllr Davies hopes Telford & Wrekin’s decade of



Striving to remain outstanding

Telford & Wrekin's children's services has seen rapid transformation and it's now supporting other local authorities. But there's no let up on its improvement journey

success will persuade Government to back the borough by committing to major investment. Like other new towns of its era, Telford's infrastructure is ageing and some estates are 20 years past their use by date. It is also crying out for better rail links with proposals afoot for a £300m electrification of the Shrewsbury-Wolverhampton line vital to boosting capacity and unlocking further growth by linking this fast-growing town with the West Midlands conurbation.

'When I talk to other new towns there's a sense of over-reliance and under investment by Government. We're still building 1,000 new homes a year and are consistently in the Centre for Cities' top three local authorities for housing growth.

We are contributing to housing and economic growth and have enormous potential but need regeneration money to deliver more and ensure all our communities benefit. If the Government is serious about a green industrial revolution, affordable housing, addressing fuel poverty, upskilling communities and taking the pressure off the south east then you have to invest in new towns like Telford. And not just in new build but being serious about estate renewal in order to address the legacy of the new town.'

Telford & Wrekin is now growing into the role foreseen by the LGA peer review.

Cllr Davies recently took on a national role as chair of the LGA's resources board and the council's children's services is now a sector-led improvement partner. Similarly, the success of adult social care is informing practice across the country, including its Pathway Zero approach to discharging people from hospital which has been formally recognised in the national Covid-19 discharge guidance. It's another area of strength with ADASS describing the council's Shared Lives scheme, which supports vulnerable adults, as 'exceptionally caring' and offering an 'outstanding' service.

'We owe it to the local government family to share and talk about some of the amazing things we have delivered,' says David.

'Being stronger in our profile regionally and nationally, offering support to the local government family. Now we are doing it.'

It's often said that successful organisations have one thing in common: a never-ending desire to innovate and improve.

That trait certainly applies to children's services at Telford & Wrekin Council, which are regarded as being among the best in the country.

As one of the Department for Education's Sector-led Improvement Partners, the council supports other local authorities and it is often asked to share best practice at national conferences.

In particular, it is regarded as an exemplary authority when it comes to contextual safeguarding, with Ofsted noting its strong offer to children and young people in both its 2016 and 2020 inspections. The same goes for corporate parenting, which the watchdog described as 'exceptionally strong'.

For Jo Britton, executive director of children's and family services, speaking opportunities and working with other authorities are an opportunity to share the learning from what's been an incredible and inspirational journey.



Jo Britton, executive director of children & family services

I'm really grateful for support of the leaving care team, especially since becoming a mum. The whole team has been there for me and that's made me feel less worried and isolated. You always get the feeling that the council has the best interest of care leavers at heart and is fighting our corner.

Roxanne Penwright
former care leaver

Telford & Wrekin is only the second council to go from 'requires improvement' to 'outstanding' in one leap. The story is one of total system change to create an environment where staff are empowered, interventions are evidence-led and families receive intensive support.

Earlier this year Jo won the corporate director of the year title at the MJ Achievement Awards.

Alex Latham, engagement advisor at the national Care Leaver Covenant, described the council's children's services as 'national trailblazers' around support for those leaving care. He viewed the award as 'testament to Jo's leadership and a team that delivers opportunity, creates choice and empowers its children and young people'.

Despite the plaudits, there's no resting on laurels.

'We want to keep ahead and not be complacent,' she explains. 'I drive everyone mad by always asking: what's next?'

Jo and colleagues continue to pore over latest data to better understand what works and where

the next challenges lay. The latest area of focus is around support for new parents, particularly those who have previously had children taken into care. Like all of its initiatives, it's part and parcel of a preventative approach that links back to the council's overriding mission to create a better borough.

'We are still learning and developing and responding to need,' says Jo. 'That's where we use data. Scanning the horizon all the time. The senior management team are always looking at the dashboard to see how data is driving improvement.' It's an example of the buy-in that's essential for continued success.

'In children's services we're pushing on an open door, a really open door. We have a really committed leader and cabinet members, who want to make a difference for children, and total support from the senior management team.' That commitment and strategic focus and investment that flows from it is vital, she says, but in Telford & Wrekin there's an extra ingredient.

'Since I have worked in Telford there's always been a sense of providing opportunities for innovation and betterment. It's always been the environment in which you are allowed to have creative ideas and be innovative. You are never made to feel that you can't try something.

'I have worked in other local authorities where you might have the investment, vision and drive but that freedom to innovate is one aspect I haven't experienced elsewhere.'

TELFORD & WREKIN'S SUCCESS STORY

- 'Outstanding' children's services
- 'Outstanding' in-house adult social care provision
- Consistently in the top three local authorities for housing growth (Centre for Cities)
- One of the country's greenest boroughs (Telford Town Park is ranked top 10 in the UK and best in the West Midlands)
- 92% of staff understand how their work contributes to the council's priorities
- 91% of residents felt well informed by the council during the pandemic
- Telford Land Deal will see £44.5m of land receipts from sale of Homes England owned sites recycled back into the local area



Challenging perceptions

It makes me very proud every day I go into the town.'

Shortly before David Sidaway left Telford & Wrekin for a five-year stint at Stoke-on-Trent Council, he led the award-winning Southwater scheme.

The £250m regeneration project created the heart the town had always lacked while turning Telford into a major leisure and retail destination that's now in the top 10 nationally for town centre footfall.

'It's unrecognisable from when I was a kid,' says David. 'It was built as a new town that didn't really have any mixed use development across retail with residential and commercial – that's what we have addressed through Southwater. We will never lose sight of the borough's five towns and are investing in those high streets as well but the critical thing is that now we also have a core.'

The next piece of the jigsaw is Station Quarter, which will plug the gap between the railway station



and the rest of the town with a £34m 'transformational development' of new homes, leisure facilities, offices, public realm and green spaces.

Backed by £22.3m from the Towns Fund, it will also feature a digital skills and enterprise hub run by Telford College and University of Wolverhampton, bolstering the latter's growing presence in the town and helping to address skills gaps to meet employers' needs.

The end result will be a walkable urban neighbourhood that prioritises pedestrians and encourages sustainable

travel habits. David believes Station Quarter will have an even bigger impact than Southwater by continuing to challenge perceptions of Telford as a place to live, work, study and enjoy a night out. The regeneration of Telford and other success stories like T54 business park – backed by the Telford Land Deal – have not come about by chance, he says. Like the council's many other achievements, they are based on investing in the workforce, taking a proactive approach and ensuring things are done with communities, not to them.

'We put more people into our economic development team to drive inward investment. We've created a single point of contact and made it so easy to come to Telford and invest.

'Crucially, as a co-operative council we work in partnership with residents and our business community. We do a lot of great things because they are co-produced with the people we serve and I think that's what sets us apart.'

Generation game



Like many local authorities, Telford & Wrekin Council has sought to take greater control of its financial destiny through income generation.

It's proved to be a highly successful strategy that now accounts for around a fifth of the revenue budget.

The council has diversified into a range of activities that deliver a healthy return.

They include a growing property portfolio that now generates £8m a year and the creation of a commercial services team that last year generated over £21m. The latter trades on the excellence of the council's in-house services, for example through support for schools, colleges and businesses across everything from ICT to procurement to professional development and communications. Let's Clean provides cleaning services for variety of clients including local firms and sporting facilities while Help at Hand offers practical support

A mixture of prudent investments and trading on the council's strengths are proving to be a winning combination

to enable people to live independently. Back in 2014, the council became only the second local authority in the country to build a solar farm. Based on a site

Telford Growth Fund (the council's investment fund to grow its commercial investment portfolio) has so far seen £47m go into the construction and retention of new commercial floor space schemes in order to support inward investment – delivering a return of £3m+ year on year.

at Hadley, north of Telford, it generates a surplus of around £200,000 a year while reducing the borough's reliance on fossil fuels.

Indeed, the biggest success stories have been ventures that provide a wide range of benefits. During his previous stint at the authority, David Sidaway led the launch of a wholly-owned council company that has had a transformative impact on the local housing market.

The council's £45m Pride in Our Community programme is supporting a wide range of projects, from town centre regeneration and commercial training for local firms to social enterprise pop-up shops

NuPlace has delivered a range of high-quality developments that have raised the bar in the private rented sector while generating around £1.2m in revenue during the last financial year – along with an additional £2.3m in council tax and New Homes Bonus.

The outcome is hundreds of much-needed new homes for market and affordable rent, managed by a trusted brand in the shape of NuPlace, which are built to high environmental standards that cut tenants' fuel bills & reduce the carbon footprint of developments.

