

My journey with the **London Borough of Barking & Dagenham** (2015 – 2018 and beyond) incl. Testimonials

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The Challenges

1. People

Over the last 20 years Barking and Dagenham has become one of the fastest changing communities in Britain. Change is everywhere, but the Council remains committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all and establishing a 'one borough' sense of community. The population of Barking and Dagenham rose from 164,000 in 2001 to just under 200,000 in 2015, the year when I joined the Council. Since then population growth has continued to rise to 220,000 in 2020 and is set to increase to 275,000 by 2037.

The population is much more diverse than 20 years ago – since 2001 the proportion of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased from 15% to 50%. That proportion is projected to increase to 60% over the next 20 years. Like other London boroughs, there is also rapid movement of people: between 2012 and 2014 approximately 50,000 new residents came to the borough, and roughly the same number left, meaning that the 'turnover' was almost a quarter of the total population.

2. Financial Pressures

Those changes have increased demand for services, adding to the huge financial challenge. Demand for services will continue to increase as the population changes and increases – but the reductions in funding imposed by central government have made it impossible to meet those demands. Without a change in approach, we would not have been able to meet the most basic needs of residents.

By 2020 the cuts in funding meant that the Council would have had roughly half the amount of money that it had to spend in 2010. At the same time, the pressures caused by the growing population and more complex needs meant that we needed an additional £50 million to meet rising demands. Overall we estimated that, if we did nothing, there would have been a shortfall in the Council's budget of £63 million by 2020/21.

3. National Policy Changes

The Government has also been implementing reforms in national policy and legislation that have a major impact on council services, residents and local businesses. They include Reform of the housing and planning systems; Welfare reform, including a reduction in the cap in household benefits, and a freeze on working age benefits; Reform of adult social care, and health and social care integration; Promoting 'devolution deals' at regional or sub-regional levels; and Proposals for schools to become academies.

The combined impacts of austerity, population change and government policy meant that we could no longer afford to meet the needs of residents by spending more money on the kinds of services the Council provided. Instead we needed to re-focus what we did so that we could identify the root cause of need and tackle it, so that people have a better chance of living more independently. Our job had to be to build resilience so that people are better able to help themselves.

4. Expectations and Outcomes

We also needed to change because what the Council had done in the past was not good enough in meeting what our residents needed and expected. The borough's residents were at the bottom of too many London league tables. People in the borough died earlier, had poorer health, and lower levels of education and skills than in most other London boroughs. Too many were insufficiently skilled, too many were in low paid work, too many struggled to find suitable accommodation to live in.

On many measures of health and well-being, residents had significantly worse health outcomes than national averages – including lower life expectancy, and higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and smoking prevalence.

The Prize of Economic Growth

The unprecedented challenge caused by the financial pressures, social and demographic change, and the policy priorities of central government were not unique to the borough. But unlike most other areas, we had a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure the benefits of huge economic growth for residents, so that no-one was left behind.

No other part of Greater London has the potential to play the role that Barking and Dagenham does in the expansion of London's economy. Over the next 20 years, we had the potential for over 35,000 new homes and over 10,000 new jobs in the borough. We could stand by and watch things happen, seeing inequalities increase and the weakest driven out of the borough – or we could shape the future so that the whole community benefits and prospers.

Our Response to the Challenges

In summer 2015, the leadership of the Council launched two major pieces of work:

- A panel of independent experts – the **Growth Commission** - to review the Council's ambition to be London's growth opportunity, and to recommend how to maximise the contribution of the Borough and the people to the London economy. Their report was published 6 months later.
- We set up our '**Ambition 2020**' programme within the Council to re-examine every aspect of what the council does and how we are organised, a programme I have designed and subsequently took the lead on.

'Ambition 2020' began in summer 2015, designed to create a sustainable organisation that can live within its means; tackle the challenges the borough faces; respond to the Growth Commission findings and deliver the Council's vision. The starting point was the challenge of finding £63 million in savings over the next 4 years, on top of the £90 million savings which the Council had to find since 2010. Traditionally, local authorities reduce spending by department. But we could not continue to do that. Other local authorities also outsource or privatise services and dramatically reduce the size of the workforce. We had no desire to take those paths.

1. The Approach

We combined the enduring core values of the public sector, with the community involvement and flexibility of the voluntary sector, and the commercial-mindedness of the private sector.

Our fundamental values of public service, integrity, and social justice continued to underpin everything the Council does. But we needed the full involvement of local people to build relationships of trust, and the flexibility to respond in ways which help to break the cycle of dependence. And we had to be more commercially minded and entrepreneurial so that our services can be financially self-sufficient wherever possible. In short, we had to transform the organisation to work in a very different way.

A Barking & Dagenham of the future needed to excel at five things:

- **Providing consistently outstanding customer service** – we needed to improve how customers get access to information and services and find innovative ways to enhance the customer experience and build trust whilst reducing demand and therefore cost.
- **Shaping a place that people choose to live in** – That meant creating and maintaining areas that are attractive and affordable. That included excellent schools, a safe and clean environment, culture and leisure facilities, and heritage.
- **Being commercially minded and financially self-sufficient** – Making our Council commercially astute, with the capability to innovate and to maximise income, and a constant drive to improve our efficiency and productivity.
- **Building public engagement, greater responsibility and civic pride** – this included a focus on clean streets and enforcement, holding private sector landlords to account for the condition of property they own, and running a wide and varied Council events programme promoting a sense of community and attracting people to the borough.
- **Reducing service demand** – A coordinated approach to reducing demand through early and effective intervention including key services such as social care, housing and integrated health.

We also rejected the approach of wholesale outsourcing or privatisation of services, where the benefits and profits are realised by the private shareholders.

2. The Organisation

We established a new operating model for the Council, moving away from an organisation which was designed around professional service silos, to one that was designed around what we needed to achieve for our residents.

We had already established a new Strategic Leadership Team within the Council. The Strategic Directors were accountable for delivery of the key goals, and for ensuring that all the statutory duties of the Council are met. This entailed a new approach to leadership and accountability which can work with a 'mixed economy' of service provision – whether directly by the Council, working with partners, or by others who are commissioned or contracted to provide services.

The corporate 'core' would also provide support functions such as HR, Finance and IT and would own the Council's main customer access channels. The changes to the structure and operation of the Council, together with improving efficiency in our transactional support services enabled us to make £5 million of back-office savings by 2020/21.

3. How we provide Services

We would no longer have separate functional departments or directorates. We shaped our organisation around the needs of people, the place, and our goals. The delivery of services would be undertaken by a range of 'Service Delivery Blocks'. Some of them were in-house, and some at arm's length, so that they were able to generate the income to become self-funding and to re-invest.

4. Supporting People

At the core of our people-focused services, we established '**Community Solutions**' to identify and resolve the root cause of an individual's or family's problems. We moved from separate departments to coordinated and integrated services for residents who need help. In the past, most services often worked in functional silos, tackling single issues and failing to address the underlying reasons why a person may be looking for help. The combination of rising demands and financial pressures meant that we had to re-think our approach. So we established a single service for those who believe that they need help - whether that concerns housing, welfare, employment, social care, or other issues.

The purpose of the service is an early resolution and problem-solving to help residents to become more self-sufficient and resilient. It tackles the multiple needs of households in a joined-up way and at an early stage. It comprises multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams that collaborate closely with the voluntary and community sector and others to deliver early intervention and preventative support.

This service is the engine room of the Council's vision to see residents benefit from growth. It is driven by an ethos of resilience and self-help. For most adults of working age the route out of poverty is **employment**. The service therefore has a strong orientation to helping individuals to obtain work or to develop skills to obtain better-paid jobs.

Access for customers for council services is provided through a single digital platform that enables seamless on-line, phone and face-to-face contact.

A new customer access strategy ensured consistency across all services and contact channels with the overall aim to make our Council "**Digital by Design**". We ensured that people will no longer be asked for the same information multiple times and can access live updates about their own requests. Customers are kept informed of events and changes to services that are relevant to them, and they receive progress of their contacts in a way they prefer, without having to chase. £5.7 million savings were delivered by 2020/21 through streamlined processes, reduced demand, and reductions to the workforce.

We created a revitalised and consolidated **enforcement** service to promote civic pride and to shift the behaviour of those who act irresponsibly or without due regard for others. The service brings together all those council functions which are involved in enforcement and regulation.

We developed an intelligence-led, highly visible enforcement service in the borough, which is located where it will have the greatest impact. It is able to respond to emerging high-profile issues swiftly and is a self-funding service which provides value for money. This includes the functions in relation to private sector landlords. £2.9 million of savings were delivered by 2020/21, primarily from increased income, with some workforce changes.

5. Shaping Places

'My Place' is an innovative new service designed to maintain the Council's assets and to support a broader approach to place management that benefits the whole community. It is a new service that has become a local managing agent and handles all resident affairs relating to property. It acts as the commissioner for services which maintain public spaces, using the best placed provider. An additional income of £600,000 from managing agent services and lettings agency income was generated by 2020/21.

'My Place' drives local environmental improvements by commissioning and performance managing the Council's **refuse and street cleansing services**. £1.2 million of savings was achieved from workforce related savings and waste volume reduction by 2020/21. We established a new service designed to breathe life back into the Borough's flagship parks and open spaces with a particular emphasis on exploiting their commercial potential for the benefit of all users.

Barking & Dagenham is a green borough with some 32% of land being parks and green spaces. The borough has 25 **parks and open spaces**, but the quality of many was poor. Our ambition was to see our parks and open spaces as assets that help deliver our growth ambition. We were seeking to become a destination of choice and it was vital that the public realm looks the best it possibly can. We ran a public competition to generate the best ideas that will make turn our parks into attractive destinations. £0.6 million of additional income was generated by 2020/21, and £0.6 million savings from workforce and operational changes.

We retained the **Heritage Service** in-house with a vigorous mission to promote the borough's past and its connection to the present and future. We implemented an improvement programme to increase visitor numbers, income and volunteering whilst reducing operational costs. The service continues to source external funding opportunities wherever possible while driving up visitor numbers and maximise commercial opportunities. Better promotion of the heritage attractions in the borough boosted its reputation as a place to live and visit and generated an additional income of £80,000 by 2020/21.

6. Growth and Investment

We established '**Be First**', a new commercial growth and regeneration company charged with accelerating the pace and scale of economic, infrastructure and housing development in the borough in line with the Council's vision and 20 year goals. A commercially dynamic social enterprise, owned by the Council, it ensures that any profits generated are returned to the Council.

The new company leads the identification of investment opportunities for the Council to pursue as a commercial investor in its own right. Many of these investments - in property, for example - are then managed by the newly set up "My Place" service. 'Be First' generated £6 million in net benefits by 2020/21 through additional income.

We set up three other council-owned social enterprises. Putting these services on a new footing enabled them to create additional levels of income and generate new business.

'**Home Services**' has revitalised the repairs and maintenance service contracted by the Council to maintain and repair the Council's own portfolio of properties. The aim was to create a service that could trade, in particular offering a service to local landlords, providing the opportunity for the service to generate additional income by broadening its customer base. This is a social enterprise, owned by the Council and which was supported initially by external commercial expertise. 'Home Services' generated £1.7 million savings by 2020/21, primarily in workforce savings, with some additional income from trading activity.

'**BDT Legal**' is the council trading subsidiary with Thurrock Council, to provide legal services to councils, other public sector organisations and charities. This is a local authority traded company. It builds on the success of the previous traded activity of the shared legal team. BDT Legal generated £550,000 additional income annually by 2020/21 for both councils.

'**Traded Services**' is a social enterprise, owned by the Council, that offers a range of support functions initially to the family of schools in the borough and to schools in other locations but also explores wider markets. £260,000 additional annual income from traded services was generated by 2020/21.

The **leisure service** is the only council-run service where we proposed to transfer the management and operation of the service outside council ownership to a 'not-for-profit' operator. The Council retained ownership of the assets and lease the facilities to the operator for the contract term. £1.2 million net annual benefits were achieved by 2020/21.

The Facts & Numbers

Improved outcomes for residents

- 5.9%** unemployment below previous year (7.7%) above East London average (5.3%)
- 68.9%** employment above previous year (68.2%) below East London average (72.2%)
- 77%** additional affordable homes above previous year (10%) above East London average (39%)
- 93% of Schools** Good or Outstanding
- Non-decent homes down to 10%**
- 79.4%** level 1 qualifications above previous year (74.2%) below London average (84.8%)
- 33.0%** level 4 qualifications above previous year (30.7%) below London average (53.1%)
- 7.66** life satisfaction above previous year (7.50) above London average (7.52)
- 7.95** worthiness self-perception above previous year (7.74) above as London average (7.73)
- Improved bin collection and reduced refuse complaints**

A more efficient organisation

New Ways of Working and asset strategy has reduced buildings from 29 locations to 2 main offices, saving **£28m** in the process. The award-winning Town Hall has revolutionised flexible working

Staff engagement and satisfaction is much improved since 2014

- I am proud to work for the council: **81%**
- I would recommend the council as a great place to work: **71%**
- I feel committed to the council's priorities: **86%**

Sickness absence

We have reduced average days sickness absence from over 10 days to nearly **6 days**. The current London average is 8.2 days.

Agency staff

We have reduced the use and reliance on agency staff from 601 to 325 since October 2016

One borough, one community, no one left behind

New companies: Financial returns

Latest forecasts of financial returns from LBBD wholly or partially owned companies are better than targets set in their current Business Plans

In future years the position is even healthier

	2019/20 Q1 forecast	2019/20 Business Plan target
BeFirst	£5.49m profit	£127k (£5.36m)
BUSP School Improvement Partnership	£75k Surplus	all surplus is reinvested into school improvement
London Reside	£719k income to MTFS	£91k (£628k)
London Reside	£2.1m total benefit	£310k (£2.07m)

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Financial savings

A2020 needed to deliver £49m of savings across the life of the MTFS

This was an enormous risk for the organisation to hold but we've managed that risk down

Savings risk profile

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Improved customer experience

	Then	Now
Call volumes	63,000 (May 2017)	52,000 (May 2020)
Calls answered	75% (May 2020)	92% (May 2020)
Wait to answer	5.8 minutes (Jan 2017)	3.3 minutes (Jan 2020)
IVR Menu	16 options	6 options
E-forms completed	500 p/m	8,200 p/m (Sept 2020)

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The deep progressive change

Borough Manifesto Targets

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Temperature Check headlines

Communication, change and recognition is more of a mixed bag

- 86%** understand the need and reason for change
- 83%** say that the Staff Briefing keeps them informed about changes
- 83%** say that they see the Staff Briefing regularly
- 59%** feel able to speak up and challenge the way things are done in the council
- 59%** say they get appropriate recognition for the work that they do
- 67%** say that they achieve the correct work/life balance
- 53%** say they have had the opportunity to give their views when changes have been planned to their role.

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National and international recognition

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Testimonials (1/2)

“ Jens is a results orientated Interim Executive who is able to cut well through red tape. His direct, non-nonsense approach and extensive experience in delivering big programmes enables him to constructively challenge senior stakeholders and he always puts the interests of the organisation at the centre of everything he does. Jens is not afraid to ask those questions that others often avoid and it is this “constructive disruption” that enables him to inject pace into his work. With a relentless focus on delivery and outcomes, Jens works well in an environment where change has to be delivered quickly. He is a self-starter, is able to influence and manage stakeholder behaviour, deals well with conflict and operates comfortably at board level.

On a personal level, I enjoyed working with Jens tremendously. His energy is infectious and he uses his positive can-do attitude and humour to motivate his teams and the people he works with. His brain rarely seems to rest and he continues to act as a useful “sounding board” for me for questions relating to transformational change. ”

Chris Naylor

CEO, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Interim CEO, Birmingham City Council

Steve James

HR Director, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

“ Jens is exceptional at what he does. I have worked alongside many transformation directors over the years but Jens operates at another level to anyone else in his field. He has a unique skill set that frames, plans and delivers large scale transformation no matter how complex or challenging the circumstances. He has an intuitive understanding of how organisations function and has the integrity, strength of character and emotional intelligence to create the teams and environments that ensures that change happens and that it sticks. “

“ It was amazing working with Jens on the Ambition 2020 programme in Barking & Dagenham, one of the most transformative change programmes in UK local government. Jens is a master at change delivery; he does this with unmatched energy and determination. In setting up a corporate PMO, we took the organisation from one with little visibility across it’s cross-cutting programmes to a highly dynamic, data-driven and fully transparent governance machine within 6 months. He is unafraid to ask difficult questions and break down barriers to innovation; by doing so Jens leaves an impactful and sustainable change in the organisations he works in. On a personal note, there is never an un-entertaining day with Jens! His authenticity speaks volumes. “

Pye Nyant

Head of Insight & Innovation, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Nick Coldicott

Programme Delivery Director and Head of PMO, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

“ Jens is an exceptionally talented and truly inspirational leader with a unique ability to cut to the chase and quickly identify and resolve issues. I have worked on two major transformation programmes with Jens and his personal commitment and contribution have been major factors in achieving hugely ambitious and successful outcomes. Jens is able to rapidly develop, mobilise, motivate and coordinate high performing programme teams within a robust governance framework to deliver agreed outcomes at pace. Jens has a refreshing and direct approach that challenges and empowers delivery teams His approach is always pragmatic drawing on his vast and unparalleled experience. “

Testimonials (2/2)

“Jens is a driving force for public service reform, most recently demonstrated at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. A rare breed, he can lead and support ambitious organisations with large scale transformation from inception, through design, and into implementation. Jens has an exceptional grasp on portfolio, programme and project management and how to apply and tailor these disciplines to different political bodies. He also brings a wealth of experience in commissioning and managing transformation consultancy and contractor support, bringing together sector experts and best of breed to deliver real change. Bringing an experienced voice to any transformation board, Jens is not afraid to ask the difficult questions to get to the bottom of risks and issues in support of success. Finally, Jens brings a unique style and sense of humour that is greatly appreciated in those high-pressure programme periods. “

Paul Knight

*Portfolio Director,
Commercialisation &
Growth, London Borough
of Barking & Dagenham*

Gideon Botha

*Operations Manager,
Barking & Dagenham
Energy Ltd.*

“I've worked with Jens on more than one transformation programme. On each of those, I've seen how his willingness to ask difficult questions helped steer and move on the programme and his uncanny ability to predict sticking points weeks, sometimes months, in advance is testimony to his vast experience. Jens has been a great mentor to many and not only does he challenge the status quo but, if evidence based, he is happy to be challenged himself. His approach is to look at the data, highlight issues early and then help to mobilise resources to get the work done. It's not often where someone can bring both strategic thinking and delivery together, but Jens does it comfortably. “