



# Building communities, transforming lives

**THE MJ**

The London Borough of  
**Barking & Dagenham**  
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# An urban renaissance in East London

The borough is going through rapid changes but there is a lot of optimism about the future and a new confidence in the community.

There is something quite special happening in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

On its way out is the low profile, conventional municipal image of an area that grew up in the shadow of the giant Ford Motor Company works at Dagenham, which in its heyday dominated the local economy and employed some 60,000 people.

In its place, a brighter, more vivid and more confident Barking and Dagenham is taking shape, donning the mantle of a busy and diverse cosmopolitan community at the forefront of major regeneration projects, promoting excellence in education and skills and pioneering new standards of environmental improvement.

For long one of London's poorest boroughs, Barking and Dagenham is slowly but surely being transformed into one of the capital's most dynamic and upbeat communities with a raft of changes that are transforming the whole look and feel of the area.

At the forefront of these

changes is a major programme of physical and economic regeneration with the flagship Barking Riverside development that promises to build 10,800 new mixed tenure low carbon homes.

Alongside this are plans for new transport links with a local extension to the Docklands Light Railway and the East London Transit scheme both linking to Crossrail to improve access to and through the borough and link it more closely with central London, which is just 11 miles away.

Its schools are among the most rapidly improving in London and the country with year on year gains in GCSE results, up from 20 per cent gaining five good passes just 10 years ago and now more than 50 per cent and rising.

All this builds on a firm record of achievement that starts in the borough's primary schools with the latest results showing that 77 per cent of Barking and Dagenham 11 year-olds achieved the nationally expected Level 4+ in English; 76 per cent achieved Level 4+ in Mathematics and 87 per cent in Science.

Crime levels are falling significantly in the borough with an overall reduction of some 14 per cent since the beginning of the financial year and a dramatic 35 per cent reduction in residential burglary throughout

**"The best thing about this job is that customers really appreciate your help - especially if you have gone the extra mile".**

**"We all look after each other here and you feel good about coming into work. It's a lively and buzzy atmosphere and every day is different."**



**Lee Smart, Senior Customer Services Officer**

**"I am about to start my third year as an elected member of BAD Youth Forum. The forum is made up of young people in the borough and gives them a real voice in the community."**

**"My next ambition is to go to university and as a result of my experience in the forum, I might even consider a career in politics or public life."**



**Brian Taylor, BAD Youth Forum member**

the borough this year.

Charles Fairbrass and Rob Whiteman share a strong sense of pride in these achievements and in their community and an even stronger belief in the potential for further improvements over the next 15 to 20 years.

As the council leader and chief executive respectively, they are both passionate about promoting a strong sense of place and share a pride in its history and a commitment to the borough's mission to "build communities and transform lives".

The first member of his family not to work in the docks, Charles Fairbrass, who went to school in the borough, was a maintenance manager with British Telecom before he retired. He was first elected a councillor in 1971 and has a wealth of local government experience as chair of the education committee from 1982 to 1998 and as deputy leader from 1990 until he took over as council leader in May 1998.

Under his stewardship the borough began working closely with local schools and teachers on the long march of educational improvement, with the council pioneering work that led to the National Numeracy Strategy, achieving Beacon Status for transforming secondary education and establishing a national reputation for its suc-

cess in developing initiatives to tackle educational underperformance among white working class youths.

His work has attracted national plaudits and awards and the former Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote a personal letter to congratulate the Council on its educational achievements.

As council leader Charles now devotes the same energy leading a wider agenda to tackling social exclusion and promoting community harmony, making sure that the full benefits of regeneration are enjoyed by local people.

"Experience has shown me that you can't just tell people what they should do, you need to work with people, understand their needs and make sure they are fully involved," he explains.

"The borough is going through rapid changes but it is an exciting time and there is a lot of optimism about the future. It is a long term process but I think we are already beginning to enjoy the benefits and see a new confidence in the area."

A qualified accountant, Rob Whiteman began his management career in retailing with W.H. Smith after graduating in economics and government from the University of Essex. Rob says that his work in retailing taught him never to forget

**Barking and Dagenham Council**

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**Rob Whitoman (left) and Charles Fairbrass**

that the customer is always king. Briefly training as an opera singer, he moved into the public sector with jobs in the finance departments at Newham and Camden before several roles at Lewisham culminating as deputy chief executive.

In just two short years since Rob took over as chief executive at Barking and Dagenham in January 2005, the borough has moved swiftly up the ranks of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment reviews from being a one star, fair local authority to three star, good and improving well. With improvements across the board in performance indicators, the Audit Commission describes the borough as "amongst the best performing" councils in London.

His target, not surprisingly, is to see Barking and Dagenham as a four star excellent and strongly performing authority at the very top table of local government delivery and performance.

And the secrets of his success – effective partnership, improved management capability, high energy and ambition, building on the borough's established foundations of strong political leadership, financial stability and a staff that shares his commitment to improvement and the local community.

Work setting up the Barking and Dagenham Partnership got underway in 2002 with repre-

sentatives from local statutory, voluntary and community organisations with groups covering a range of key service areas from children and young people, healthier communities and older people, economic development and enterprise and safer stronger communities.

Partnership work is overseen by a Public Services Board and more recently this has agreed to set up an Adult Trust along with a group covering social inclusion, equalities and diversity. Interestingly the LSP groups double up as statutory partnerships to avoid duplication and the Council does not see the need to have boards within its organisation that mirror LSP working. Instead the Council works transparently with partners, and all managers in statutory and voluntary agencies share experience on key issues through shared induction, networking and learning and development opportunities.

Twice yearly LSP conferences of more than 300 participants including residents, elected members and other stakeholders ensure all partnership working is rooted in community needs and priorities.

Not for nothing has the Council been chosen as one of the national pilots for Local Area Agreements and been picking up a steady stream of major national awards for a range of services from customer services and staff train-

**"There could not be a more exciting time to be working at the Council – especially in my area of delivering housing-led regeneration schemes.**

**"I moved to the Council from a career in medical research but still consider myself to be in a profession that puts quality of life at its heart.**

**"I joined as a trainee with PATH National, a programme that aims to increase the representation of black and minority ethnic groups in management and the professions.**

**"The most enjoyable aspect of my role is turning ideas into a physical reality that brings positive benefits to the people of the borough."**

**Arabi Iqbal,  
Principal Regeneration Officer**

ing to the council's website.

Barking and Dagenham has also become the first council in the country to be awarded the Committed to Equality - c2e Diversity Award Standard and recently it won The MJ's 2007 achievement award for partnering with health services.

Great importance is placed on the current programme of rolling out of neighbourhood management linked to intensive community development in areas of highest deprivation. This investment of £500k+ per annum is funded by impressive efficiency gains made through partnering arrangements, massively reduced use of agency staff and making terms and conditions of employment more flexible.

"This is a tremendous place and it is good to see the Council getting the recognition it deserves," says Rob. "There are huge opportunities here and the Council has a pivotal role to play in providing community leadership and in building effective partnerships.

"A great deal of what we are doing is to create the conditions in which people can enjoy the opportunity of finding good housing and steady employment and the confidence to develop their own skills and abilities.

"Certainly the area is going through some fairly dramatic changes, but in the end it will be a better place for us all to live in, work and enjoy with an even stronger sense of community."



# Transforming lives through regeneration

Right from the beginning the Barking Learning Centre was to be a catalyst for change for the whole community.

If you want to fully appreciate the transformation underway in Barking and Dagenham, a good place to start is in the new Barking town square.

The contrast couldn't be greater. One side is the imposing Barking Town Hall, built in the 1950s, and on the other side the award winning Barking Learning Centre. In between the two is the town square, one of very first of the Mayor of London's '100 Public Spaces' projects to be completed in the capital.

Sid Kallar, Barking and Dagenham's executive member for regeneration, says that when planning the regeneration work, the Council was determined to make optimum use of one of the prime central locations in the heart of Barking town centre.

"Right from the beginning we wanted the Barking Learning Centre to be a catalyst for change for the whole community. We wanted services that would encourage the development of skills, life long learning and improve the employability of local people.

"It was clear that in order to achieve this, a range of services were required and so we worked hard with our partners to ensure that they were all provided under one roof."

In one visit to the Barking Learning Centre you can go to the library and borrow a book and access the internet, sort out your council tax at the Council's new One Stop Shop, attend one of a range of courses organised and run by the University of East London and Barking College, and visit

the new art gallery.

And quite literally on top of all of this, are 250 new residential apartments with a communal rooftop garden.

Not surprisingly, the building won the 2007 MIPIM Architectural Review future projects award for a mixed use building, seeing off stiff international competition.

A key requirement was the provision of education and training opportunities linked to the public service areas of health, education, social care and administration. This is because additional workers are required in these areas, to support the population of Barking and Dagenham.

Courses on these subjects and others are provided at the centre by the University of East London and Barking College.

Bob Little, executive member with responsibility for life-long learning, is particularly proud of the library:

"This is a very powerful example of Barking and Dagenham's commitment to high quality library services, fit for the 21st century.

"As well as an extensive stock of non-fiction, fiction and reference books there is a dedicated children's library, a range of IT facilities and computers allowing free internet access," he explains.

"Library users can borrow and renew books online with reminders of when books are overdue or booked by other readers."

The new town square offers a striking example of the Council's commitment to creating attractive focal points for



**"My personal interest is in bringing people of all ages together so they can see, feel and touch 'real history'.**

**"I'm keen to see the archives service play an active role in all aspects of the Council's work.**

**"As well as working with schools and community groups, we are talking to therapists about the mental health benefits provided by genealogical research and to the new neighbourhood management teams about using the community archives as a unifying force."**



Judith Etherton, Borough Archivist

the community through high quality designed buildings and spaces.

A key feature of the square is the 'Secret Garden' - a seven metre high folly made from architectural relics and reclaimed bricks. The idea was to create a mythical history in the shape of a ruined building to contrast with the modern buildings in the square, highlighting the role that heritage can play in regeneration.

The Secret Garden has attracted praise for its novelty as a large-scale public art project, and won popular support from residents and visitors alike.

The second phase of development is now underway around the town square which will include an 'urban arboretum' of mixed specimen trees.

The arboretum will include sunken woodland areas with different local ecologies built

between the library and buildings. There will be dedicated spaces amongst the trees for quiet reading and performance art.

Peter Bishop, director of Design for London which is responsible for overseeing the Mayor of London's design agenda and worked on the project, says: "It's important that centres like Barking have public spaces which are inspiring, accessible and that everyone can use - to appreciate, walk through, sit, relax and enjoy. Working with Design for London, the Council has successfully achieved this with the new square."

As Cllr Kallar comments: "The new learning centre and square are major landmarks for the borough in more ways than one. These projects support and reflect the growing confidence and ambition this community now has."

# Reaping the benefits of a long term commitment to education

Working closely with its schools, Barking and Dagenham Council is committed to introducing innovations into the classroom.

**R**aising the standards of achievement and opportunity for all children and young people in Barking and Dagenham has been a long-standing priority for the Council.

Jeanne Alexander, executive member for children's services, is clear why education is so important for the Council:

"Barking and Dagenham has the lowest skills base in the country which is why we also have the lowest average wage in the whole of London.

"The only way to break this cycle is to ensure that the children and young people of this borough have the knowledge and skills they need for today's high skilled and high wage jobs."

This commitment has resulted in a step change in the educational achievements of young people in the borough, thanks to highly effective long standing partnerships between the Council and local schools.

It's not just about national test performances, although these results speak for themselves.

The latest results for 11 year-olds and improvements in secondary schools makes the education authority amongst the most improved in the country.

These results prove that the Council's determination to narrow the gap between the performance of local pupils and national examination standards is clearly paying off.

Other improvements cover a whole range of educational



achievements from the work of the special school rated outstanding by Ofsted; award-winning teams supporting children in care and families at risk; improved attendance rates; more young people in work, education or training; and more going on to university.

At the heart of the partnership between the Council and local schools is a shared commitment to introducing innovations into the classroom that address the priorities of the community.

For example, the Council's work in the 1990s to tackle low achievement in primary school mathematics influenced the National Numeracy Strategy.

Barking and Dagenham's partnership with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and its work with Professor Robin Alexander for the use of speech, discussion and dialogue contin-

**"I am one of several new members of the marketing and communications team. We all come from different backgrounds including the private, agency and charitable sectors and the Council welcomes that range of experience.**

**"It is a rewarding and challenging environment and we work within a highly mobile and diverse community undergoing rapid change.**

**"I moved to the borough with my family a few years ago and am a governor at a local school. Now that I live and work in the borough, it is even more exciting to be part of such positive change."**



Diane Reay, Marketing Manager

ues this tradition of research and innovation.

The award-winning network of children's centres, linked to schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the borough, is another example of Barking and Dagenham's innovative support for young children and their parents.

The next significant stage in the Council's commitment to driving up the quality and provision of education in the borough is its involvement in the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme.

The Council has recently submitted its proposals for a range of major initiatives which if successful, will result in over £200m of funding.

Jeanne Alexander is clear about the opportunities this will bring, and says: "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the provision of secondary school teaching in all our schools in the borough.

"A key element of the programme is to ensure that secondary schools become an asset for their local community, providing a range of services and facilities with extended hours."

Barking and Dagenham has already achieved this with its extremely popular Jo Richardson Community School on the Castle Green community complex which includes a library, gym and conference facilities alongside the school. The school has also benefited from a substantial investment in information and communications technology.

One particular project the Council is exploring with the Government under the Building Schools for the Future programme is the establishment of a new studio school. This will specialise in the provision of vocational education so that young people who want to follow a pathway in technical or vocational studies have access to first class equipment, facilities and teaching.

Roger Luxton, corporate director of children's services, explains: "This Council has a first class track record for project delivery of inspirational buildings which provides a sound basis for our Building Schools for the Future proposals.

"But more important than the buildings is what's happening inside these new spaces, as this is what ultimately drives forward the pace of education transformation in the borough."

# Putting residents in the driving seat

Local people are actively encouraged to get involved and work alongside the Council, police and other organisations.

**N**eighbourhood management is at the heart of Barking and Dagenham's new approach to delivering the services that local people need and want.

An ambitious borough-wide initiative, it is designed to forge close links between the community, Council departments and partnership organisations, to make sure that people in every neighbourhood area benefit from real improvements in their local services.

This includes improving the local environment, reducing crime and the fear of crime, and encouraging community safety.

Central to Barking and Dagenham's neighbourhood management initiative is to make sure that it is local residents who take the lead in shaping and designing the services in their own areas.

Executive member Mick McCarthy, who is in charge of the initiative, explains: "Neighbourhood management gives residents the chance to say what they think is most important for their area, and get involved in making a difference."

Residents are asked to identify the priorities for action in their neighbourhood, and are actively encouraged and supported to get involved in working alongside the Council, police and other agencies to make sure that these changes happen.

Neighbourhood management was originally piloted

in four wards, which provided useful experience for the eventual rolling out of the initiative across the whole borough, which began this summer.

The most deprived wards each benefit from a dedicated neighbourhood manager, a community development officer and a neighbourhood support officer. Elsewhere in the borough, neighbourhood co-ordinators each work in two wards.

The teams are in regular contact with residents and other local stakeholders, and so develop a detailed understanding of local issues. They can also draw upon extensive data for each ward in order to help identify priorities, including information on employment, health and disability, education, skills and training and housing.

Cllr McCarthy says: "The teams give local people greater confidence that their views are being listened to and make sure the improvements that are important to them are being delivered."

"As a Council, we need to actively listen to residents and act upon their concerns, in partnership with them. Neighbourhood management will help us achieve that."

As the initiative develops, local partnerships including residents, local stakeholders and ward councillors will guide and oversee the delivery of annual action plans. These will set out actions needed to address local priorities, with wards having



**"I started work for Barking and Dagenham Council in 2002 as an agency road sweeper and transit van driver. I was encouraged to study for qualifications at the Council's Frizlands Learning Centre and gradually worked my way up."**

**"It's a challenging but worthwhile job keeping the borough clean. When I first started here as a road sweeper I never thought I'd become a manager."**

**"I've been really supported here and do feel valued. It is nice to work for an organisation that has high ambitions and drive and I want to be part of that."**



**Mark Robertson,  
Waste Area Manager**

up to £20,000 for local projects.

Council leader Charles Fairbrass believes the initiative will help build strong communities.

"This new approach will be a valuable way to tap into residents' experiences and skills and involve them in

how we deliver services," he stresses.

"By giving residents a greater voice and influence over local decisions, and by helping them to be part of the solution, this will deliver real benefits and bring communities closer together."

## Community Safety

Tumbling crime levels in Barking and Dagenham are a clear indication of the successful close partnership working between the Council's community safety team, the police and other partners.

So far this year there has been a 35 per cent reduction in burglaries from homes and a 13 per cent fall in the number of personal robberies. Thefts from vehicles, criminal damage, cases of wounding and assault also showed significant reductions.

Not surprisingly there has been a significant increase in public satisfaction with the police and victim support services – from bottom of the satisfaction level to top in the space of a year.

All this has been achieved by the Council investing heavily in local crime reduction and prevention programmes and developing an innovative new team which integrates community safety, the drug and alcohol action team and the youth offending service. Appropriate interventions are based on the regular analysis of the latest data on criminal activity.

# 26,000 new homes to be built in the borough

Pioneering housing company model will enable Barking and Dagenham to build council houses for the first time since 1989.

Tackling the shortage of good quality and affordable homes lies at the heart of Barking and Dagenham's commitment to 'building communities and transforming lives'.

A shortage of housing is ironic given that the borough is home to the Becontree Estate, in its heyday the largest social housing estate in Europe. It was built between 1921 and 1932 and was home to many of the workers employed at the rapidly expanding Ford car plant, with around 90,000 people living in 27,000 homes ranging from flats to spacious family houses with gardens.

However, the popularity of the 'right to buy' scheme has reduced the Council's stock of homes – especially the larger family homes – from 40,000 in 1980 to just 20,000 at present.

All this is about to change. The Council has drawn up an ambitious programme that will see 26,000 new homes built over the next 20 years, offering residents an unprecedented choice of sustainable, high quality homes of mixed tenure types.

The Council's imaginative so-

lution to tackle the borough's housing shortage is good news for the 10,000 local residents currently on Barking and Dagenham's waiting list.

Liam Smith, executive member with responsibility for housing, says that a key vehicle for the provision and management of new properties will be a new local housing company.

"This is an incredibly exciting time for us, as we will be able to fund, build and manage new council homes for the first time since 1989."

The Council's ground breaking work in this area has paid off with Barking and Dagenham being one of 14 pilot authorities to take forward a new housing model, as announced by the Government in its recent Green Paper on housing.

A new not-for-profit housing company will be set up to build, own and manage the social housing element of the flagship Barking Riverside development. Social housing will make up some 40 per cent of the development – 4,500 of the 10,800 homes planned over the next 15 years.

Barking Riverside will offer a

**"I moved from the private sector to Barking and Dagenham eight years ago and have never regretted the move.**

**"The Maples is a day centre for adults with learning disabilities and provides people with a safe and stimulating environment. The best thing about my role is seeing the people who come along to the centre develop their skills and confidence.**

**"There is a modernisation programme underway that means things will get even better. Staff training is excellent and we have plenty of opportunity for career development."**



**Pam Cooper,  
Manager, The Maples**



broad mix of homes with different tenure options, from rented and shared ownership to affordable homes for sale. The plan also includes housing for key workers, such as nurses, teachers and police officers. As for elsewhere in the borough, the Council is keen to make sure that half of all new housing across the borough are three or more bedroom family homes.

There will also be new schools, shops and open spaces, with good transport links to London City Airport, Docklands and central London.

The Council is also committed to the development being a model for sustainable living in the 21st century, drawing on best practice and setting new ecological standards for 'green' low carbon construction.

Liam Smith says that a second housing company will be set up to oversee house building in other parts of the borough, including a major new housing development on the site of The Lintons tower blocks in Barking.

"The three tower blocks

which have dominated the Barking skyline for the past 30 years will be demolished and replaced with a mixture of flats and houses, as well as a new enterprise centre for small businesses," he says.

"We will be involving local residents to get their ideas on the layout and design of the new development."

Ken Jones, Barking and Dagenham's head of housing strategy says that this work represents the next stage in the Council's long tradition of housing a significant part of the population in good quality and affordable social housing.

"There is a tremendous demand for family homes and one of our top priorities is to make sure we are able to offer people a much wider choice of good quality and affordable local housing.

"Housing is a central part of our whole commitment to making sure that we develop services that respond to the community's needs and make Barking and Dagenham an attractive place to live and work."



# Bold and dynamic

Enterprise - Barking and Dagenham - style is to encourage people to grab the many life-changing opportunities within their reach.

Creating a dynamic and expanding enterprise culture in the borough is a top priority for Barking and Dagenham Council.

The decline of mass employment at Ford's has contributed to the large number of local people without work. It has also left the legacy of the borough having the lowest level of skills base in the country – ironic for a Thames Gateway borough on the edge of a world class capital city and in the booming South East of England.

But like many other things in Barking and Dagenham, all this is changing too.

Barking and Dagenham Enterprise was set up last year after the Council successfully won £15.5m of Government Local Enterprise Growth Initiative funding over three years – one of only ten local authorities nationally to do so.

It is overseen by a board heavily led by private sector organisations, and with representation from the Council and other public sector bodies.

Creating and supporting a new enterprise culture in the borough is an imperative says Judy Chapman, executive director. For her team, Barking and Dagenham quite simply means 'Bold and Dynamic'. Even their email address ends '@BoldandDynamic.co.uk'.

"Enterprise, Barking and Dagenham style, is about encouraging all sorts of people to be bold and dynamic, be it to take responsibility for their lives, manage their own finances, or grasp the many kinds of life-changing opportunities that are within their reach for the first

time in a generation.

"Many of the new jobs are going to be created by small and medium sized businesses, which is why creating and supporting an enterprise culture amongst the community is so important."

Judy firmly believes in catching people young when it comes to encouraging people to become entrepreneurs. A new team of enterprise advisors have been put in place, spreading the enterprise message through activities in primary and secondary schools across the borough.

"If we can encourage people to think entrepreneurially from an early age, this can only add to the buzz we are creating in the borough," she says.

Barking and Dagenham Enterprise is certainly hard at work creating and supporting new businesses.

One project, the Barking and Dagenham Small Business Centre, has been inundated with enquiries since it was set up in January, and has helped start up 120 new small businesses, ranging from a property maintenance company to a jewellers.

Two more enterprise centres are planned for the borough, providing easy-in, easy-out, serviced accommodation for new and expanding businesses.

One unique project is the LifeLine team, who go out to cafes, doctors' surgeries and other places to encourage people to acquire new skills and training.

Another priority is to promote Barking and Dagenham as a business friendly borough to external audiences.

Judy points to the wealth of

**"A few years ago Barking and Dagenham might not have seemed an attractive career option but things have definitely changed.**

**"I came to teach at Robert Clack secondary school six months ago and I now take every opportunity to tell people that this is a great place to work.**

**"Our school has an excellent leadership team and supportive staff, a high level of discipline and children who are pleasant, keen to learn and well-supported at home. Academic results are high and improving year on year."**



Zara Muirhead, Teacher, Robert Clack School

**"I joined Barking and Dagenham six months ago. It was a great opportunity to be at the cutting edge of implementing neighbourhood management, joining up existing services and shaping them to the needs of residents at a local level.**

**"One of my challenges is changing residents' perceptions. I want to involve residents in creating more of a community spirit and an environment they can feel proud of. I'm proud to be associated with a forward thinking Council."**



Shawn Frazer, Neighbourhood Manager, Gascoigne Ward



**The iconic Voltac building is an award winning warehouse and offices which incorporates a suite of 12 eco-initiatives designed to significantly reduce energy and water consumption, cut carbon dioxide emissions, utilise recyclable materials and slash operational costs. It is just part of the £27m of private sector investment flowing into Dagenham Docks on the back of the Council-led regeneration projects.**

opportunities in the borough, including the opportunities created by the proximity of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, businesses that have been edged out by the Olympic regeneration work seeking to relocate locally, and the fact that the borough has excellent transport connections which make it easily accessible to the City, Canary Wharf, London City Airport and Heathrow Airport.

"We are on an exciting jour-

ney to create entrepreneurs aged six to 60 and beyond, and to make business outside the borough wake up to the huge range of opportunities and facilities that exist in Barking and Dagenham," says Judy.

"Linked to everything else that is happening in the borough, we are laying the foundations for a brighter and more prosperous future for people, to enable them to seize the many opportunities that are open to them."