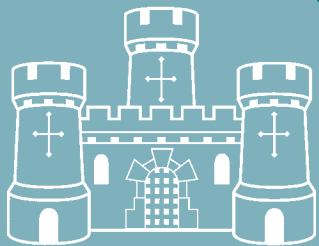


# ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024



NEWCASTLE  
UNDER LYME  
BOROUGH COUNCIL





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# Introduction

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Welcome to the Council's Annual Report for 2023-24, which outlines the progress we've made against the priorities for the Borough during Year 2 of our 2022-2026 Council Plan. Alongside a review of the Council's performance, the Annual Report also highlights some of the common issues facing our residents and how we have engaged with local communities to help shape local solutions and service improvements. It also looks at the financial challenges faced by the Council and across the local government sector as a whole, and our plans to continue providing value for money services.

There has been considerable progress across our priorities during the first half of the Council's 4-year Plan, including being crowned national champions in the prestigious Britain in Bloom awards as well as scooping our 21st consecutive Gold. 2023 was also the year in which we celebrated the 850th anniversary of the Borough's royal charter with a year-long schedule of community events. As an organisation, we have successfully completed our One Council transformation programme, driving efficiency through service redesign and digital investment, coupled with staff development and a strengthened focus on performance management. The programme has achieved its ambitious target of financial savings and is now releasing over £1m from our annual spend. In January, we again welcomed a group of Peers from the Local Government Association who evidenced the progress we are making and were "impressed with how the council manages its finances" and "felt the energy and ambition of the council."

We have secured once-in-a-generation funding of over £50m through Town Deal and Future High Streets programmes – a level of government funding which is unprecedented for the area, and which is being used to transform our town centres and drive economic growth. We are pleased to be able to share some of that progress here, as we reset the local economic landscape for generations to come. The Council continues to actively support its communities, whether that is through facilitating intensive multi agency support via our 'sector leading' Vulnerability Hub, which was nationally recognised this year, or championing resident concerns at Walleys Quarry through legal action. We enjoy strong and creative partnerships across the public, voluntary and statutory sectors and work together to improve outcomes for our residents in terms of health, employment, and community safety. In July 2024, we welcomed our new Chief Executive, Gordon Mole, who takes over from Martin Hamilton's highly successful five-year tenure.

Our Vision is: to deliver good local services, a prosperous Borough, safe and welcoming places for all. This Annual Report demonstrates how we are achieving that. We hope you find it interesting and informative!



*Cllr Simon Tagg*  
**Leader of the Council**



*Gordon Mole*  
**Chief Executive**







# Newcastle-under-Lyme Facts and Figures

**28%**

OF THE POPULATION  
ARE AGED  
**60** AND OVER



**90%**

OF RESIDENTS  
IDENTIFY AS  
'WHITE BRITISH'

**38%**

OF RESIDENTS HAVE  
**RQF LEVEL 4**  
OR ABOVE



**MEDIAN  
HOUSE PRICE**  
**£180,000**

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH  
FOR MALES IS  
**78.0 YEARS**  
AND FEMALES IS  
**82.3 YEARS**



AVERAGE WEEKLY SALARY OF  
**£629** FOR FULL-TIME  
WORKERS

**89.6%**

OF RESIDENTS AGED  
**16 - 64**  
WERE ECONOMICALLY  
**ACTIVE**



**18%**  
OF HOUSEHOLDS  
IN THE BOROUGH  
**LIVE IN**  
FUEL POVERTY

# Section 1:

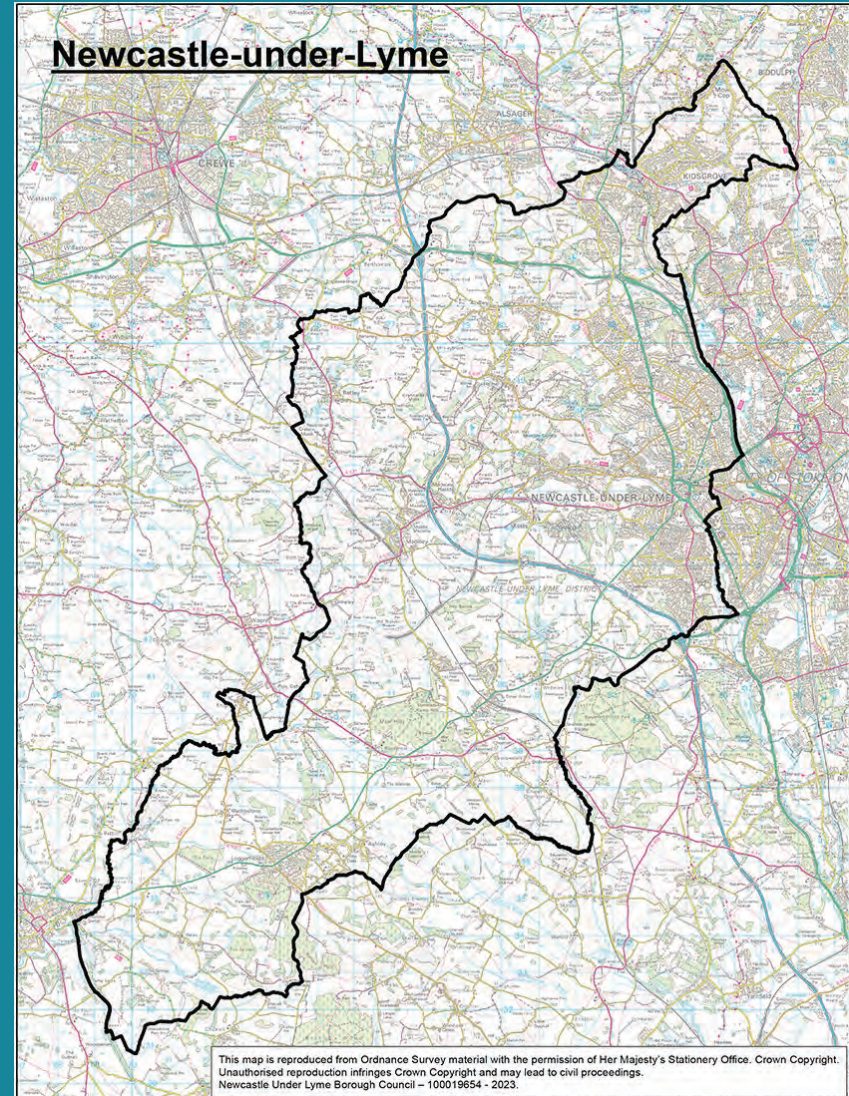
## Understanding our Communities

Our historic Borough is a place of marked contrasts. We are the home of a world class University at Keele, a leading light known internationally for its research and sustainability record, which stands side by side with former mining communities including some which register amongst the most deprived areas in the country. Our Borough is also a mixture of urban centres, affected by some of the same social issues facing our neighbouring city, Stoke-on-Trent, but also outstanding rural landscapes containing many smaller settlements with their own challenges. Our plans and priorities aim to address the needs of all our communities.

The Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme covers an area of 211 square kilometres and has a population density higher than that of Staffordshire at 584 residents per square kilometre. The population of the Borough, based on the 2023 Mid-year Estimate, is 128,100 with 51% female and 49% male. The 53,400 households are spread across a mix of urban and rural areas, with two town centres – Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kidsgrove - and a number of rural and urban villages across the Borough.

We recognise the importance of place data in decision making and service design and produce an annual '[State of the Borough](#)' Digest, which includes key facts and figures on the make-up of the Borough and the common issues being faced by our residents. We have highlighted below two of the known challenges and how we are addressing them, often in conjunction with our local partners.

**Skills, Qualifications and Employment** - According to the 2023 annual population survey an estimated 38% of residents in the Borough have a Level 4 Qualification (RQF) or above, which is significantly lower than the national rate of 47% and the regional rate of 43%. Throughout 2023, an average of 89.6% of residents aged 16-64 were economically active, a higher rate than for the region (78.8%) and the country (78.8%). However, employees who live in the borough tend to earn less; an average weekly salary of £629 for full-time workers, compared to £652 across the West Midlands region and £682 for Great Britain.





## Spotlight on: Encouraging Skills and Employment

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, we will be allocating over £3m across 30+ projects in 2024-25 and aim to create at least 70 jobs, attract over 20,000 new visitors to the town and surrounding area, and see over 25 new businesses created including 500m2 of green space regenerated.

Last year we created several Business Support themed work streams:

- **Supporting businesses to develop and grow** - Assisting both established SMEs, Social Enterprise Companies and potential start-ups
- **Access to Financial Support** - Providing both financial support and guidance to SMEs with regards to financial assistance in order to grow their companies
- **Support to assist businesses with innovation** - Encouraging and promoting innovation such as proof of concept, product design and development, testing and marketing for new products, process and service.

Here's a just few of the programme's achievements from last year:

**Moving Ahead** – A keele university project which supports business to develop detailed, fundable proposals for intensive Research, Development and Innovation projects. Targeting 12 companies the project has submitted two bids and are in discussions with another one.

**Flourishing Keele** - Targeting 60 companies overall this includes the recruitment of at least 60 internships who are placed within the companies.

**Community Connects** – there has been an increase in referrals to the Employment & Skills team as a result of outreach interventions. Evidence from the Workshop suggests that older adults prefer face to face meetings and require more support in returning to, or accessing work. 170 information, advice and guidance for employment and employability sessions took place last year with eight job starts, 14 jobs sustained (13-week measure), and 40 CVs created.

**Growth Hub** – Since October the Hub has engaged with six businesses giving advice, support or signposting. The recent recruitment of a dedicated business advisor and marketing specialist has taken place and at least 20 companies have received one-to-one introduction support.

**Staffordshire University** – Digital technologies: the project has engaged with five companies and purchased commercial software licences. The student placement has resulted in innovation consultant work looking at CAD, prototypes and digital services support.

**Kidsgrove TH** – Kidsgrove Town Hall is to be a business hub for local businesses and also provide an accessible customer service base for Aspire Housing and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council staff. The UKSPF has funded the upgrade of the facility to meet its green emissions targets and become more efficient for future users.



**Crime** – The Borough recorded lower than average crime rates of 70 per 1,000 population in 2023, compared to 93 in the region and 90 nationally. Addressing instances of anti-social behaviour and of nuisance remain a key priority for the community safety partnership, alongside supporting the nighttime economy through safe space provision and the innovative street medics approach, which reduces pressure on the local NHS.

### Spotlight on: Safer Communities

The Council works in partnership on community safety issues and together we have made targeted improvements in line with residents' priorities for action:

- A Public Space Protection Order was adopted to formalise the gating of public rights of way that have been subject to crime and anti-social behaviour. The order remains in place for 3 years
- Safer Streets funding - Additional CCTV cameras have been installed in the town centre to help provide reassurance to the public. This infrastructure is pivotal for the detection of crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre
- Street Medics - 2023 saw the Street medics being introduced to coincide with the Safe Space. The medics act as a triage in support of the nighttime economy. The aim of the project was to reduce resource and demand on A&E at the Royal Stoke hospital
- Safe Space - The project continues to run with volunteers on Friday evenings from 9pm-2am. This space is used to provide a hub for those who are on a night out
- A member of the team is now an accredited trainer in spiking awareness - training is to be rolled out to licenced premises in the next 12 months.





# Section 2:

## Listening to our Communities

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Consultation and engagement with our communities continues to play an important role in informing decision-making across the Council, helping to ensure that we deliver for local people.

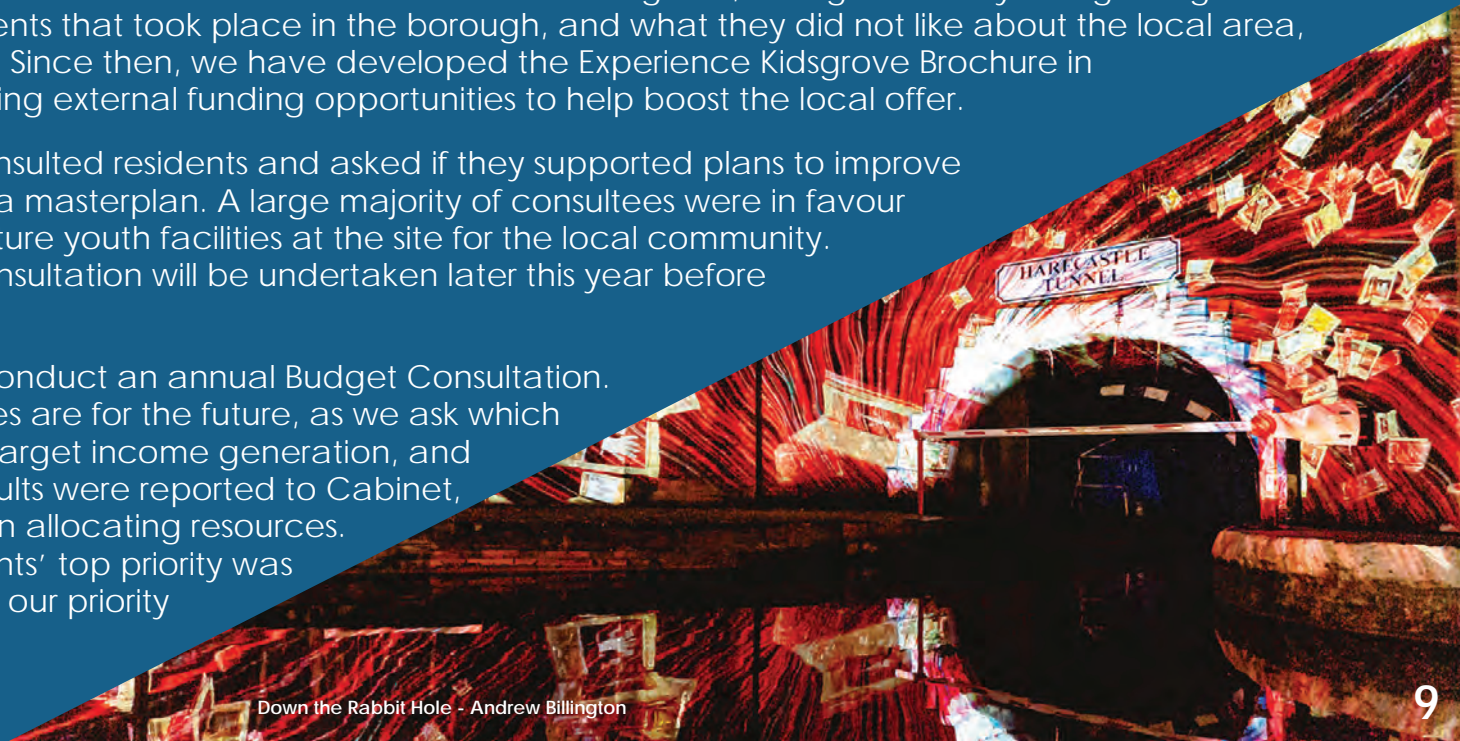
Throughout 2023/24 we have conducted annual satisfaction surveys and ad hoc consultations to enable evidence-based decisions and the shaping of future service delivery. We are careful to ensure that our consultations capture the views of a range of residents to really understand what matters.

**Safer Communities** - In Summer 2023 residents gave a clear indication that they supported the Council's proposals to restrict the number of dogs taken by individuals into certain areas, and for preventing dogs to be allowed on marked-out sports pitches. We saw and reported back that a large majority of residents also wanted certain restrictions on people being allowed alcohol in open containers, thereby supporting the Council's restrictions in this area being continued.

**Kidsgrove** - In Spring 2023, we reported back on consultations with business owners in Kidsgrove, asking what they thought might increase footfall, asking if they were aware of certain events that took place in the borough, and what they did not like about the local area, allowing teams to target appropriate resources. Since then, we have developed the Experience Kidsgrove Brochure in conjunction with partners and are actively seeking external funding opportunities to help boost the local offer.

**Healthier Communities** – In Summer 2023 we consulted residents and asked if they supported plans to improve facilities at Bradwell Dingle and the creation of a masterplan. A large majority of consultees were in favour of the proposals and have helped shape the future youth facilities at the site for the local community. Funding is now in place and further detailed consultation will be undertaken later this year before work commences on site.

**Strong Financial Discipline** – Each Autumn we conduct an annual Budget Consultation. This enables residents to tell us what their priorities are for the future, as we ask which services they value the most, where we should target income generation, and what we could do to improve their lives. The results were reported to Cabinet, allowing members to make informed decisions in allocating resources. The results of this consultation told us that residents' top priority was continued town centre regeneration in line with our priority of town centres for all.



# Section 3:

## The Financial Context

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*"The peer team continue to be impressed with how the Council manages its finances" (LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Visit, Jan 2024)*

The Council is committed to the delivery of high-quality services. Integral to this is the need to effectively target financial resources in line with our stated aims and objectives whilst also working against the background of an adverse economic situation nationally. For more detailed information you can read the published [Statement of Accounts](#).

### Revenue

The Council actively manages its resources to ensure it delivers the services that local people need, and to prepare for future challenges. The priority actions under 'One Council Delivering for Local People' include workforce development, community engagement, partnership working, financial discipline, high quality value for money services and delivering the transformational One Council Programme, which won a bronze award for 'Best Transformation Team' category in the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2023. The programme has to date made recurrent savings of £1.173m.

During the year, the Council has had to use resources (both financial and staff time) in dealing with an environmental crisis due to Hydrogen Sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S) escaping from a local landfill site. This problem, which has been debated in Parliament and which the national press has used to characterise the village of Silverdale as "Britain's Smelliest Village," has generated over 20,000 complaints to the Council. The scale of work undertaken by the Council on this issue required a huge amount of corporate resource but has resulted in an improved situation for residents and securing an Abatement Notice against the site operator – a rare achievement on an Environment Agency regulated site. Unfortunately, this site continues to remain a problem for the residents of the Borough and the Council continues to work with partners to resolve this issue.

### Capital

A Capital Programme totalling £31.360m was approved for 2023/24. Of this total £17.863m relates to the total cost of new schemes for 2023/24 together with £12.497m for schemes funded by external sources (Town Deals Fund, Future High Streets Fund and Disabled Facilities Grants) and £1.000m contingency. In addition, £24.013m was brought forward from the 2022/23 Capital Programme (including £22.771m from the Town Deals Fund and the Future High Streets Fund), resulting in a total Capital Programme of £55.373m for 2023/24.

A mid-year review of the capital programme for 2023/24 has been undertaken as part of the Efficiency Board and budget setting process. The revised capital programme for 2023/24 totalling £55.433m (including a £1m contingency and agreed carry forwards from 2022/23) was approved by Cabinet on 5 December 2023. In addition to the revised 2023/24 Capital Programme additional capital expenditure of £0.124m regarding the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts was incurred as well as expenditure that was fully funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (£0.344m).



Planned expenditure financed via capital for 2023/24 therefore totalled £55.901m. Actual expenditure has totalled £11.630m, £44.271m below that planned. This relates to expenditure that has been rolled forward into 2024/25 (£42.174m) including projects planned under the Town Deals and Future High Streets funds that will be progressed during 2024/25 (£25.641m), the Council’s contribution towards the construction of a new multi storey car park (£8.100m) and fleet replacement (£4.751m). There is an unused amount of capital contingency (£0.922m) and a number of projects whereby costs have been value engineered or whereby a decision has been made not to progress with the project until a future period (£1.173m).

**Financial Recovery**

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out the Council’s financial position over the next 5 years. This is aligned to the Council Plan 2022-2026 and is the key vehicle for targeting resources to priority areas. The updated MTFS was reported to Cabinet on 16 January and 6 February 2024, and reflects the impact of the Local Government Finance Settlement. The MTFS provides for a gap in 2024/25 of £2.692m and a revised gap to reflect the continued review of the capital programme, over the 5-year period of the MTFS of £6.885m.

A number of savings and funding strategies have been identified as being both feasible and sustainable, via a rigorous Financial Efficiency Board process. The Financial Efficiency Board is made up of the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Town Centres, the Cabinet Portfolio Holders, the Corporate Leadership Team, and Finance Officers. During the summer months service directorates are asked to provide saving plans for the coming financial year and future years. These saving proposals are then challenged and discussed with the Financial Efficiency Board. Once the saving proposals have been reviewed and challenged, the approved savings are put forward as part of the MTFS update and form part of the budget setting process. Savings proposals put forward can be revisited at any time.

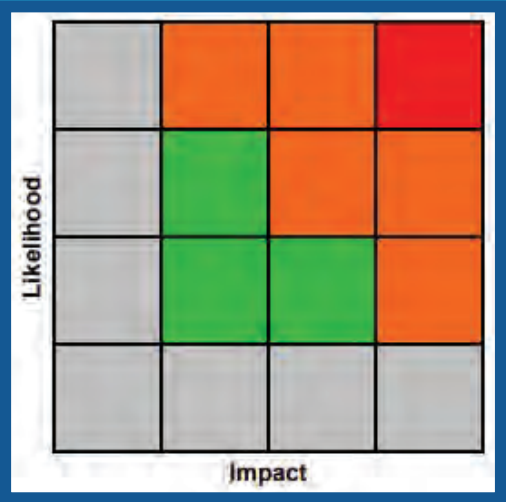
One Council is a “spend to save” programme with an agreed investment of £1.2m. Recurrent benefits of £1.173m have been achieved (£0.196m achieved in 2021/22, £0.601m achieved in 2022/23 with a further £0.376m in 2023/24).The Council has a Borough Growth Fund which was established in 2020 for the purpose of enabling investment in corporate priorities. The Borough Growth Fund is required to be used to invest in initiatives that are forecast to generate on-going revenue savings through reducing the costs of service delivery or through the generation of additional income.

The savings and funding strategies identified will enable continued investment of £0.250m in the Council’s priorities through the Borough Growth Fund. The Borough Growth Fund will continue to be used to provide pump priming investment in initiatives, including Digital Delivery, which are forecast to generate on-going revenue savings by reducing the costs of service delivery or through the generation of additional income.

The Council intends to consider ways it can facilitate and participate in the commercial and industrial development of the Borough and thereby gain access to income streams to contribute to a sustainable revenue budget. The basis for this is set out in the Commercial Strategy and the Investment Strategy.

**Managing Key Risks**

The Council continues to develop and maintain a systematic framework and process for managing corporate, strategic, operational, project and partnership risks and reviews this framework annually. This includes assessing risks for impact and likelihood, identifying, and allocating responsibility for their mitigation, and receiving assurances about ongoing management of these risks. The Council’s Risk Management Strategy sets out the roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors, including escalation and clear reporting lines. The Council’s ‘risk appetite’ has been agreed and mitigating actions are required for all risks that exceed this threshold.



# Section 4:

## Our Vision and Priorities for the Borough

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Good local services, a successful, sustainable borough, and safe and welcoming places for all

Outcomes	Priorities	Approach
In Newcastle		
 Residents have easy access to good quality services	 One Council Delivering for Local People	 Our Employees will be supported and empowered to succeed
 Businesses flourish and residents have access to good, well paid, jobs	 A Successful and Sustainable Growing Borough	 we will work closely with valued partners to deliver skills, jobs and growth
 Everyone has the opportunity to be active, healthy and fulfilled	 Healthy, Active, and Safe Communities	 We will support our communities to improve lives and life chances
 Town Centres are vibrant places to live, work and visit	 Town Centres for All	 We will develop opportunities which will help our town centres thrive and grow

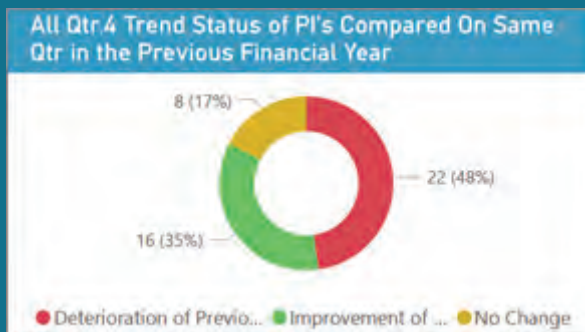


# Section 5:

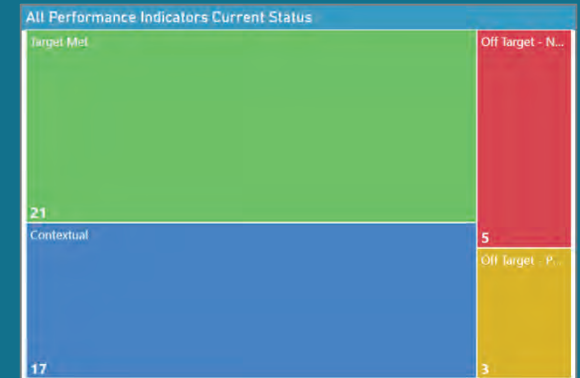
## Our Achievements

### Overview of performance in 2023-24

In 2023/24 the Council reported against 46 core performance indicators. These indicators are aligned with the Council Plan to ensure that progress against the Council's priorities and objectives can be measured. We conduct annual value for money benchmarking studies to help inform our target setting processes and drive performance improvement. The continued use of business intelligence tools to present the data has enabled ongoing comparison between previous years to understand seasonal and annual trends.



The 46 indicators collected were split into two key categories, contextual and targeted. Contextual measures do not have targets but are compared to previous year's data to help understand overall performance. Measures with set targets are reviewed both against the target value and in comparison to previous year's data. Of the 29 targeted measures, 72% met their targets in 2023/24, with eight measures being deemed to be off target. Of these off-target measures, 38% demonstrated improvement when compared with the previous financial year of 2022/23. When looking at only the Contextual measures, 47% showed an improvement or no change from the previous financial year.



Overall, 52% of all performance indicators either improved upon or maintained their previous year's result.

In addition to performance indicators, the Council also had 26 projects/priority actions targeted for delivery in 2023/24. 21 of these projects were classed as progressing as expected and are anticipated to be delivered on time. Three of the 26 were completed within the year - the One Council Programme which successfully delivered £1.2m in targeted savings, the expansion of the street warden scheme which saw the implementation of the Neighbourhood Delivery team and neighbourhood rangers, and lastly the development of a Town Centre Strategy for Kidsgrove. Two projects were highlighted as not progressing as expected - the successful resolution of Walleys Quarry which saw an increase in complaints during Quarter 4 despite a lot of progress taking place in the year and further legal action now being progressed. The second being the delivery of the £16m Kidsgrove Town Deal which saw delays in relation to the Railway Station project.



# Priority One:

## One Council Delivery for Local People



- **Deliver services to a high standard every day**

- We inspected 88% of top category food premises on time and less than 1% of food premises in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough were deemed to have a zero- or one-star national food hygiene rating during 2023/24
- In its 80th year Brompton Museum won Gold in the Small Visitor Attraction of the Year category at the Staffordshire Tourism Awards
- We were shortlisted for the small team of the year award for our work supporting vulnerable people
- We continued to improve our processing time for Housing Benefits new claims/change events, which took just 2.8 days to process. We outperformed our internal target of 10 working days and outperformed the national average of 6 working days.



- **Ensure our services are efficient and accessible**

- 2023/24 saw the successful completion of the One Council programme, which delivered numerous efficiencies and improvements to service delivery within the Council and recurring savings of over £1.2m. During the year, the council recorded 80,873 digital transactions, up 8,678 transactions from the previous year. This increase was partnered with a reduction in phone demand from the year previous by a total of 17,676 calls; freeing up more time to answer calls from those who are unable to interact digitally
- Enhanced digital delivery at J2 through the development of an app and kiosks, increasing online bookings by circa 20%
- Fully digitised the booking of cremations by funeral directors

- **Ensure strong financial discipline across the Council**

- Bringing in capital receipts of circa £2.3m
- Set a balanced budget for 2024/25
- Received positive feedback from the Corporate Peer Challenge during the follow up review, which described the Council as continuing to have "Strong and Healthy Finances"
- Collected 97.8% of Business Rates, surpassing our target by 0.5%
- Collected 97.4% of Council Tax in 2023/24 adding additional reminder runs to our recovery schedule to improve collection



- **Further increasing recycling rates across the borough with a particular focus on food waste**
  - Over 48% of household waste sent for reuse, recycling, and composting
  - We met our target for residual waste per household in 2023/24, bettering it by 27kg and perform better than the national average
- **Secure a step change in street cleanliness and the quality of the public domain**
  - The Council continued the use of land audit surveys throughout 2023/24 to monitor and measure street cleanliness within the Borough and identify grot spot areas. Graffiti and Fly-posting all received 100% survey scores. Litter and Detritus whilst performing lower at 92.78% and 97.22% respectively, still met their set targets
  - The Council successfully completed the project of delivering the expansion of the street warden scheme and creation of the neighbourhood delivery teams with the new Neighbourhood Delivery team now fully staffed and operational. The Neighbourhood Rangers are fully deployed in Newcastle town centre, Kidsgrove and the remaining neighbourhoods of the Borough on a rolling basis
  - Parks and Open Spaces PSPO now adopted for a further 3 years. This Order looks to address dog controls and alcohol prohibitions in our Parks and Open spaces. This will allow the team to take necessary enforcement action against those not complying with the Order
- **Continue to keep Council Tax low for the Borough's residents**
  - We effectively managed the Council's commercial property portfolio and achieved a 90.6% occupancy rate, bringing in revenue in excess of £1m
  - Achieved a 54% increase in income generation at the Brampton
  - Introduced direct cremations securing an initial revenue of circa £15,000 to date
  - Delivered a successful overpayment of Housing Benefit project that created £83k in savings
- **Develop professional talent across the Council and provide opportunities for staff to grow their careers**
  - Achieved "Thrive" Bronze Accreditation, which is issued by West Midlands Combined Authority for demonstrating a commitment to well-being and inclusion, we are now working towards Silver Accreditation
  - Our annual values survey demonstrated improvements in employee engagement and satisfaction
  - Developed a new training policy for emergency response roles as part of the council's responsibilities as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act
  - Procured and co-ordinated corporate manual handling training



# Priority Two:

## A Successful and Sustainable Growing Borough



- **A strong and sustainable economy where everyone benefits**
  - Commenced delivery of the new £12 million Castle Car Park at Ryecroft
  - Successfully supported a range of elements of the Borough's 850 celebrations, including refurbishment of a subway next to Queens Gardens and 35 events which helped achieve a 15% increase in visitor numbers to the Brampton Museum
  - Completed refurbishment of a property in Merrial Street to enable it to open as the Philip Astley Centre
  - Commenced refurbishment of Kidsgrove Town Hall
  - Funded delivery of a new pedestrian crossing at Gallowstree Roundabout
  - Continued to work with an array of partners in rolling out key projects under the UKSPF including business enterprise coaching
- **Support the sustainable development of our towns and villages**
  - The Final Draft Local Plan (at Regulation 19 stage) was considered at Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee on the 11th of July and at Full Council on the 24th of July 2024 with a recommendation to consult on the Local Plan for a minimum of six weeks. This is with the intention of submitting the Local Plan for examination by the end of 2024. The Plan is supported by a suite of evidence-based documents and will consider the comments received to the First Draft Local Plan consultation held over the summer of 2023
  - We helped to support developments within the borough by ensuring 91% of major and 95% of non-major applications were processed in time. The Council also maintained a high performance in dealing with minor and other planning applications which in turn put the Council within the top quartile when measured against other local districts and government targets





- **Protecting our communities by improving how we use our enforcement powers.**
  - We published a new Enforcement Policy, updated our web pages, and introduced an online form for reporting alleged breaches of planning control
  - 66 category 1 (high risk) and 220 category 2 hazards to health were removed from homes through regulatory activities
  - 17 Housing Enforcement notices served
  - We carried out 348 checks on DBS certificates to ensure the continuing suitability of our taxi drivers
  - Officers inspected 342 premises and 133 new food businesses
  - We reviewed 447 noise complaints and 253 pollution related complaints
  - The Council continued to expend considerable time and resources in monitoring the Walleys Quarry odour problem in order to secure a successful resolution to this issue through our limited enforcement powers. The escalation in complaint numbers in January and February 2024 was subject to an officer review that concluded that breaches of the Abatement Notice had occurred. At the Council meeting on 10 April 2024, it was agreed that legal action would be prepared
- **Ensuring that the Council's operations are carbon neutral by 2030**
  - Re-lamped the bulk of Midway Multi-Storey car park with LED lights
  - Delivered Phase 5 of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy (tree planting at 6 more sites) and commencement of the UKSPF Clough Hall Park project
  - The Brampton Museum was highly commended in the 'Ethical, Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Awards'
  - The Garage Workshop successfully replaced four Streetscene vehicles with four 100% electric ones, plus an additional two for the Neighbourhood Delivery – making big steps in fleet decarbonisation. Additionally, after a successful trial we have placed an order for industry-leading 100% electric bin lift, low emission fuelled freighters for the operations team
- **Ensure that there are good homes for everyone and that every citizen has a safe and secure place to live**
  - 27 empty homes have been brought back into use
  - We have managed 465 Emergency Homeless presentations
  - We have managed 287 Emergency out-of-hours calls about homelessness
  - The Council continued to run well attended homeless hubs twice a week – 22 people have now been accommodated because of their attendance
  - A project on damp and mould in the private rented housing sector has now started
  - The number of verified rough sleepers remain static throughout the year, with just 7 recorded at the end of the year, significantly lower than previous years. Of the 7 rough sleepers counted, four had a Stoke connection, one from Stafford and two from Newcastle. The work with the Multi Agency Homelessness Hub is enabling us to link in with other providers to ensure individuals are receiving the right support to get them to access provision in their area.



# Priority Three:

## Healthy, Active and Safe Communities



- **Reduce anti-social behaviour and crime in our communities**

- The Council continued to build on our effective partnership work with Staffordshire Police and the introduction of the neighbourhood delivery team also assisted with strengthening this partnership working. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is looking to review policies and protocols in relation to ASB and how different partnerships use legislation, and a new best practice guide is being worked on. We demonstrated close working with the PFCC to ensure that we are compliant with the new Serious Violence Duty
- By the end of the year, we had 29 open Anti-Social Behaviour cases. New cases fluctuated throughout the year but comparing Quarter 4 directly with Quarter 4 from the previous year there were 53 fewer ASB complaints seen
- Additional CCTV cameras have been installed in the town centre to help provide reassurance to the public
- Introduced the gating of public rights of way that have been subject to crime and ASB
- 2023 saw the Street medics being introduced to coincide with the Safe Space. The medics function as a triage in support of the nighttime economy. The aim of the project was to reduce resource and demand on A&E at the Royal Stoke hospital
- Safe Space - the project continues to run with volunteers on Friday evenings from 9pm-2am. This space is used to provide a hub for those who are on a night out



- **Ensure that our most vulnerable residents are supported through the impact of the rising cost of living.**

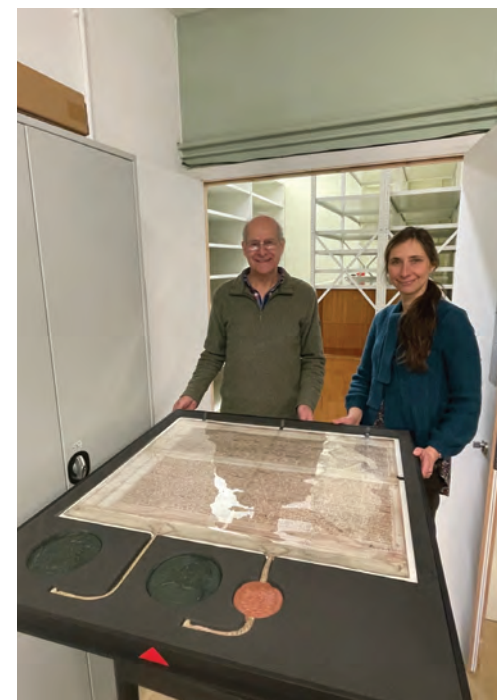
- Over the course of the year there were 190 referrals regarding vulnerability by participating organisations at the Daily Hub. This important partnership resource helps vulnerable people to find the right support within the Borough.
- We continued to work collaboratively with the Newcastle Partnership to help our vulnerable residents. We are progressing working groups around vulnerability, cost of living and mental health. The Borough Council is also the designated chair for Better Health Staffordshire in Newcastle and is in receipt of grant funding to impact on health inequalities through a new referral programme.



- **Delivering an economic and cultural legacy from the celebration of the borough's 850th anniversary in 2023.**
  - Secured £48,114 to deliver Beat the Street to ten schools in the Borough as part of the Council's 850th celebrations
  - During the 850 year the Brompton Museum held 35 separate events including talks, film shows, art workshops and musical events. The highlight was Celebrate Newcastle in June, which featured medieval combat on the park. The 850 programme at the museum attracted 4,666 people
  - The original town charters have been conserved and placed in new bespoke enclosures as well as being digitised and published online for wider public access
- **Support the development of community solutions to local problems**
  - Achieved planning permission for a football changing rooms at the Wammy, with delivery to start in May 2024
  - Jubilee2 saw growth of 900 in its membership throughout the year, providing greater fitness support and opportunities for members of the public to exercise within the Borough. To improve customer satisfaction work is taking place to improve the ease of on-line booking and increase awareness amongst our customers of the availability of qualified instructors.



Appetite - Celebrate Castle - Andrew Billington



Conserved Royal Charter



# Priority Four:

## Town Centres for All



- **Increasing the number of people living, working and using Newcastle town Centre**
  - Britain in Bloom (regional category and overall winners 2023, national category and overall winners 2023 – small city)
  - 2,022 children came to the museum on educational visits. This is an increase of 50% on numbers from last year
  - The town centre continued the trend of increasing footfall figures. There were 2.8 million visits in the town centre throughout the year, this figure was an increase of 27,349 visits from the previous year
  - The town centre footfall increase was mirrored by a growth in the number of car parking tickets that were purchased in the Borough last year. We hit our target regarding the number of car parking tickets sold with 368,987 tickets sold in 2023/24
  - The vast improvement of the market occupancy has also been seen in 2023/24 with the average stall occupancy sitting at 72% beating the target measure and improving over the year previous by 15.25%
- **Continuing to work with key partners to deliver the redevelopment of opportunities across the borough**
  - All businesses were vacated out of York Place in February to enable the redevelopment of the site. Updated demolition proposals for planning have been submitted and the procurement process to select a demolition contractor has commenced
  - The Council continues to work with several key partners, including Aspire Housing, to bring a variety of plans for different uses on the Ryecroft site. We are working with Capital and Centric to bring forward the site plans and negotiations have also commenced with McCarthy Stone for the purchase of the land for their element of the redevelopment
  - We have attracted social investment developers Capital and Centric as a key delivery partner for Newcastle town centre on schemes at Ryecroft, York Place and the Midway
  - We have enabled Keele University to commence work on Keele in Town
- **Developing a Town Centre Strategy for Kidsgrove**
  - The Experience Kidsgrove [brochure](#) has been developed in conjunction with Kidsgrove Town Council and Go Kidsgrove and is now published on the Council's website. Funding bids are being prepared for trial events in Kidsgrove
- **Further enhance the historic market and public realm and boost our signature specialist market programme**
  - Delivering a programme of event markets throughout the year – Castle Artisan Market, Greyhound Gap, Vegan Festival and Record Fair and commencing the FHSF Market Stalls and Public Realm Improvements project (to be completed in July 2024)





# Section 6:

## Value for Money Services - Are we delivering?

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For the Council to know how it is performing we don't just look at our targets and trends but also at how we compare to other councils; both in terms of cost and performance. In this way we can demonstrate that our services to our customers and communities represent value for money.

### Top of the Class!

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council performs amongst the top 25% of Councils in the country for the following services:

- ✓ High percentage of minor planning applications processed on time
- ✓ Low cost of collecting Council Tax
- ✓ Quick processing of Benefit change events
- ✓ Number of affordable homes delivered
- ✓ Low numbers of successful planning appeals - quality of planning decisions
- ✓ Low numbers of households in temporary accommodation

In addition, we perform amongst the top 50% of Councils in the country for:

- ✓ Low numbers of complaints
- ✓ Low waste collection costs
- ✓ Low fly-tipping incidents
- ✓ Low cost of development control
- ✓ Low residual household waste
- ✓ High Recycling rates
- ✓ Low business 'deaths,' meaning more businesses survive in the Borough

Nevertheless, there are some areas where we would like to improve the Council's relative performance and we're already making good progress through harnessing technology, targeting hot spot areas and working in partnership on joined-up problem solving in order to design and deliver the best services we can for our customers and communities:

**One Council Programme** – In March 2024 we concluded our transformation programme to drive efficiency through service redesign and digital investment, coupled with staff development and a strengthened focus on performance management across the organisation. The transformation programme has seen huge successes in improving digital access to services, self-serve for residents and businesses, widening the capacity of our customer hub and launching a new website for the Council. The programme had an ambitious target of financial savings and is releasing over £1m from our annual spend.

This investment in technology has allowed us to speed up claims processing times and revenue collection rates, making for a better customer experience and more efficient services.

**Environmental Enforcement** - We have been working hard to create an effective and efficient process to deal with fly tipping. Streetscene supervisors have been trained to retrieve evidence from fly tips, to take photos for evidential purposes and to write statements. The fly tip is then removed at first point of contact with no need for officer duplication.

We have also increased the Fixed Penalty Notices for fly tipping, littering and duty of care offences from the 1st of April in line with Government guidance and will be promoting this widely.

Our Neighbourhood Delivery team officers are also taking a proactive approach to improving the environment by targeting a number of grot spot areas, educating residents on waste matters and if necessary, taking enforcement. Silverdale has been used as a test pilot and we have seen compliance improve in these areas. This project will then be rolled out to other areas over the next 12 months.



**Active Lifestyles** – We know that activity is a key factor in a healthy lifestyle, and we are aware that activity levels across the Borough are lower than in some council areas. We are committed to supporting healthy and active communities through a range of strategies, such as the provision of first-class sporting facilities. At Jubilee2, the council-owned and run leisure facility in Newcastle, there have been over 5,500 attendances on our 'Good Boost' therapeutic aquatic exercise programme in 2023-24, which is designed for people with injuries and musculoskeletal conditions to help improve mobility. Users ranged from 20 to 91 years of age and over half reported an improvement to their health following the sessions.

We also participated in Beat the Street last year, which transformed parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme into a giant game. Aimed at school-aged children the game challenged young people to get active by seeing how far they could walk, cycle, run, scoot and wheel in just 4 weeks. We saw over 1,440 players in Newcastle-under-Lyme join the game and they covered over 4,000 miles from September to October of last year. The programme saw a 12% reduction in less active children and a 9% increase in activity amongst adults, and over 80% of participants lived in the 40% most deprived areas.

Last summer the Council worked in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association to refurbish 14 park tennis courts in Newcastle-Under-Lyme. In the year since the boost to facilities we have seen 4,648 bookings at Westlands Sports Ground and 1,326 at Wolstanton Park. Customers can now book in advance and sign up for alerts providing information on special offers and tennis coaching opportunities. In 2024 the courts at Clough Hall Park are being upgraded and should be completed during the summer.





At the Brampton, the 'Wild about Brampton' project restored and enhanced the wildlife pond in Brampton Park as a freely accessible public space for people and wildlife. Through 2023, 31 volunteers gave over 169 hours to the project, meeting as a monthly gardening club to clear the wildlife space, put in new plants, build a dead-hedge fence and bug hotel, and helped design a new self-guided eco-wellbeing trail and signage. The beautiful new space was then brought to life with activities for younger families and older people. The project has now moved into its second phase offering nature therapy wellbeing sessions in the transformed garden every Friday. This includes some gentle yoga and gardening.



The Council was also successful in obtaining funding through the Staffordshire Police and Fire Commissioner to run the 'Space' summer memberships at Jubilee2. There were 435 universal memberships and 30 targeted memberships for 8- to 16-year-olds, which were used over the school summer holidays. Priced at just £10, all 435 of the universal memberships were sold out before the start of the summer holidays! During the 'Space' period we had 257 male, and 208 females take up the membership offer, resulting in 1,953 attendances.

Finally, the Council is playing a key role in a new Better Health Partnership for the Borough, which seeks to work across system boundaries to improve activity levels and overall health outcomes across Newcastle-under-Lyme. Our new Active Life Referral Programme is launching in 2024/25 and will provide seven health pathways offered at a reduced cost or free to use basis.





# Section 7:

## External Assessments and Awards – don't just take our word for it!

Blooming Marvelous! Council takes the national crown for Britain in Bloom

Newcastle-under-Lyme has crowned its landmark anniversary year by winning the top Royal Horticultural Society Britain in Bloom award for the whole country!

In the year we celebrated the Borough's 850th anniversary, first Newcastle won its category as the best 'small city' in the United Kingdom, along with a Gold Award for the quality of its entry - and then claimed the overall prize for best winner. Announced on the BBC's One Show, the national triumph came just days after Newcastle swept up at the region Heart of England in Bloom awards, winning first place in the small city category, collecting its 21st consecutive gold award and receiving a judge's discretionary award for outstanding achievement. We also received a certificate of Achievement in Sustainable Gardening.

The national inspection took place earlier last summer and as well as seeing traditional set-piece floral displays, judges visited projects undertaken by community groups and volunteers. Starting at the Brampton, judges toured parts of Bradwell, Knutton, Silverdale, past Keele and then round to south-west Newcastle before returning to the town centre. Queens Gardens was planted with annual bedding on the theme of the 850th celebrations, and the entry took a sustainable approach by providing herbaceous and perennial planting on town centre roundabouts, including for pollinators, and native tree planting as part of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy. Considerations for the judges included the extent of community involvement, the restoration of habitats and evidence of good ecological practices and year-round activity by volunteers, as well as the range of plant species and work to support wildlife. This year volunteers have already donated the equivalent of 4,000 hours of work. Our thanks go out to the community and to our dedicated teams who design, plant, and maintain the stunning floral displays across the Borough.





## Brampton Museum grabs Gold!

The best of the best of Staffordshire tourism and hospitality were crowned at this year's Enjoy Staffordshire Tourism and Good Food Awards and NBC's Brampton Museum scooped Gold for the Small Visitor Attraction of the Year!

Alongside the top prize, the team at the Brampton were also awarded:

- ✓ Bronze for Business Venue of the Year
- ✓ Bronze for Accessible and Inclusive Tourism, and
- ✓ Highly Commended for Sustainable, Ethical and Responsible Tourism

Congratulations to our Housing and Vulnerability Team who reached the national finals in the Small Team of the Year category in this year's Local Government Chronicle Awards. Newcastle's submission highlighted the groundbreaking work of the Vulnerability Hub and Homelessness Hub, which was also recognised in our recent Corporate Peer Challenge, and the work done by the team to help some of the Borough's most vulnerable residents.

Recycling and Waste Services were selected as a finalist in the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards for the 'Best Service Team: Waste Management and Recycling Service.' The nomination is a recognition of all the hard work staff have put in to reinvigorate our health and safety priorities and build on the strong welfare culture created during the pandemic. The nomination "Stepping forward – Safely" demonstrated success in driving buy-in, positivity, and improved skills and awareness across the entire Team. It delivered savings, improved crew collections, and created a shift in Team culture.

Huge Congratulations to all the winners and to all colleagues contributing to the Council's success!



## External Assessment

The “ambition” and “energy” of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has been acknowledged by local government experts following a second visit to the authority.

The complimentary comments are just some of the many positive aspects of a new report by the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighting developments and further achievements at the final stage of an independent review.



An experienced team from the LGA, comprising an experienced council leader and senior officers from other local authorities in England, carried out a full assessment of the Council’s performance in March 2023 as part of a Corporate Peer Challenge.

At the time, the peer team found that the Council has strong leadership, financial stability and is poised to deliver once-in-a-lifetime regeneration projects thanks to the ability to attract “enviable” amounts of Government funding. Also singled out was the ability to work jointly to deliver good services, a rigorous savings programme and staff’s pride in the borough.

Now – responding to a progress review carried out in January 2024 – the latest report reveals that “good progress is being made against eight key recommendations” and “that some of the things talked about are now moving to fruition”. It notes how “2024 is the year of delivery for the Council and its ambitions for the borough”, “regeneration remains an important focus” and once again highlights the continued delivery of a “strong and impressive approach to partnership working”.

The report also notes:

- ✓ Increased levels of employee satisfaction and engagement which is a real testament to how the organisation is run
- ✓ Staff the peer team met with again underlined their commitment to the Council and its aims and continue to be a tremendous asset to the organisation and the Borough
- ✓ The peer team were impressed with the Council’s ambitions where it is aiming to be ‘industry leading’ in its approach to delivering regeneration
- ✓ The peer team continue to be impressed with how the Council manages its finances
- ✓ The peer team were impressed with the strength and depth of the partnership working and the active role which the Council plays

You can read the original report, action plan and progress visit report - which marks the formal end of the challenge process - on the Council’s [website](#).



