



# Northumberland

## County Council

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:**

**Enquiries to:** Nichola Turnbull

**Email:** [nichola.turnbull@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:nichola.turnbull@northumberland.gov.uk)

**Tel direct:** 01670 622617

**Date:** Tuesday, 23 January 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC** to be held in **CONFERENCE ROOM 1 - COUNTY HALL** on **WEDNESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2024** at **2.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson  
Chief Executive

**To Communities and Place OSC members as follows:-**

**N Oliver (Chair), M Mather (Vice-Chair), D Carr, E Cartie, G Castle, A Dale, B Gallacher, N Morphet, J Lang and J Reid**



**Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive**  
County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF  
T: 0345 600 6400  
[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)



## AGENDA

### PART I

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

#### 2. MINUTES

(Pages 1  
- 12)

Minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 29 November 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

- a) Which **directly relates to** Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.
- b) Which **directly relates to** the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.
- c) Which **directly relates to** their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.
- d) Which **affects** the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.
- e) Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring

Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact [monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk). Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

#### **4. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS**

(Pages  
13 - 28)

1. To note the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting together with latest Forward Plan of key decisions. Any further changes made to the Forward Plan will be reported to the Committee.
2. To feedback to the Committee on how the Cabinet responded to its recommendations regarding Planning Service Performance.

### **OVERVIEW**

*The Cabinet Member requested to attend for the following items is Councillor Cllr Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Lives.*

#### **5.1 Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report 2022-23**

(Pages  
29 - 102)

To receive Active Northumberland's Annual Outcome Report 2022-23 which contains a review on how the Active Northumberland Service Plan had been delivered for the previous financial year.

#### **5.2 Update on Delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-32**

(Pages  
103 -  
114)

The purpose of this report is to update the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on:

- National and Regional Visitor Economy partnership arrangements
- Visit Northumberland's accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northumberland
- Delivery against the Destination Plan for Northumberland 2022-32

### **SCRUTINY**

*The following report was presented to Cabinet on 7 November 2023 by Councillor Wearmouth. Cabinet noted the report.*

*The Cabinet Member requested to attend for the following item is Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader, and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services.*

#### **6.1 Corporate Feedback Performance 2022/2023**

(Pages  
115 -  
124)

The report reviews the operation of the complaints process over twelve months (01.04.2022 to 31.03.2023), including statistical data, and provides the local authority with how it keeps itself informed about how effective its

current arrangements are for handling customer complaints.

The Committee is requested to consider issues arising from the report.

## **REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

### **7. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MONITORING REPORT**

(Pages  
125 -  
132)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates within a work programme which is agreed at the start of the Council year. The programme is reviewed at each meeting so that it can be adjusted to reflect the wishes of the Committee and take account of any changes to the latest Forward Plan (which outlines decisions to be taken by the Cabinet). The Committee is asked to review and note its work programme for the 2023/24 council year.

### **8. URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair, should, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

**IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:**

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Date of meeting:</b>	
<b>Meeting:</b>			
<b>Item to which your interest relates:</b>			
<b>Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):</b>			
<b>Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?</b>		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

## **Registering Interests**

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

**"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest"** means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

**"Partner"** means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

### **Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest**

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

### **Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests**

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

### **Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests**

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –

- a. your own financial interest or well-being;
- b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
- c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied

9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:

- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

## Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
<b>Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation</b>	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
<b>Sponsorship</b>	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
<b>Contracts</b>	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
<b>Land and Property</b>	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. ‘Land’ excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
<b>Licenses</b>	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
<b>Corporate tenancies</b>	Any tenancy where (to the councillor’s knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
<b>Securities</b>	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body



	<p>where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</li> <li>ii. if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</li> </ul>
--	--

\* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

\* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

## Table 2: Other Registrable Interests

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
  - i. exercising functions of a public nature
  - ii. any body directed to charitable purposes or
  - iii. one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

This page is intentionally left blank

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 29 November 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

#### PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Carr, D.	Lang, J.
Cartie, E.	Mather, M.
Dale, A.	Morphet, N.
Gallacher, B.	Reid, J.

#### CABINET MEMBERS

C. Horncastle	Looking After Our Environment
---------------	----------------------------------

#### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Murfin	Director of Planning and Housing
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
E. Sinnamon	Head of Planning
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

1 member of the press.

#### 24. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Castle and Wearmouth.

#### 25. MINUTES

In response to questions, it was confirmed that:

##### Minute No 22.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026 Action Plan Progression

- An update would be obtained regarding advice given to young homeless people regarding ringing 999.
- The updated Action Plan had been circulated by email after the meeting. It would be forwarded to Councillor Morphet.

##### Minute No 22.2 Update on Implementation of Fix My Street

- The issue of Councillors being unable to report problems via Fix My Street on their Council iPhones had been referred to IT.
- Further training on the Fix My Street was welcomed.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 25 October 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## 26. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting with the latest Forward Plan of key items (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

Updates were requested at an appropriate time in the future on:

- The Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Great Northumberland Forest

A member also requested that any sums of money in reports should be referred to in thousands and not, for example, as £0.005 million.

The investment in the replacement boating pontoon in Wansbeck Riverside Park was welcomed.

**RESOLVED** that the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet and the Forward Plan of key items be noted.

## 27. SCRUTINY

### 27.1 Corporate Feedback Performance 2022/2023

A report reviewing the operation of the complaints process over the twelve-month period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 had been considered by Cabinet on 7 November 2023. The Communities & Place OSC were requested to consider issues arising from the report.

The Chair reported that unfortunately no officer was able to attend the meeting due to unexpected illness and officer availability and he queried whether the report could be noted, with any questions being emailed to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator/Chair/Vice-Chair or whether the item needed to be deferred.

Comments made by members included:

- Circulation of the complaints process would be helpful to members of the committee.

- An email regarding the complaint procedure being ineffective received by members was to be forwarded to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator to pass to the Corporate Complaints Manager to respond. The Chair was requested to acknowledge the email and confirm that he had asked that the issue has been referred for examination.
- A member had a number of questions and thought it would be useful that these be emailed.

The Chair proposed that the report be noted with any questions being emailed to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator/Chair and Vice-Chair. This was seconded by Councillor Reid. This motion was not supported with more votes against the proposal.

Councillor Dale proposed that the report be deferred to the next meeting which was seconded by Councillor Gallacher and upheld.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that there were a number of items to be considered at the next meeting in January and that members should be prepared for a long meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the report be deferred.

## **28. OVERVIEW**

### **28.1 Planning Services Performance Report**

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the performance monitoring and assurance arrangements currently in place for the Local Planning Authority function of the Council. (A copy of the report was enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Director of Planning and Housing explained that officers had to balance a large number of performance indicators, including speed, quality of outcome, and delivery, all whilst reflecting public opinion. This was not always possible as it often resulted in one (or more) parties being dissatisfied. If emphasis was placed on one metric, it often impacted on others. This was demonstrated via a focus on the performance of major applications determined within 13 weeks during/after the pandemic to aid economic recovery, which had resulted in a dip in performance of minor applications determined within 8 weeks. The latter had since improved.

Benchmarking was undertaken with other local authorities as well as officers leading on national work in areas such as validation and performance agreements. Some elements of performance could be improved, such as speed, if an approach was adopted which refused applications within an early timeframe if they were not up to standard. However, he explained that this Council worked with applicants to secure investment, which was reflected in the higher-than-average approval rate.

It was noted that there were fewer complaints upheld against the Council by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the merit of decisions by the Planning Inspectorate, than the national average. For many of the key performance indicators, the Council was in the top 25% of authorities and top 1% for some indicators. For reference, there were 470 local authorities who dealt with planning applications.

The following information was provided in response to questions raised by members:

- The Council met all statutory targets.
- When an application was received, advice was obtained from technical bodies such as the Lead Local Flood Authority, Environment Agency, Natural England, National Highways to see how schemes could be improved. A balancing exercise was also sometimes required of the differing responses from statutory consultees whilst responding to concerns raised by members of the public, or town and parish councils.
- Some delays arose by insufficient information being submitted by applicants. Officers had participated in a national piece of work to review how applications were validated with a view to increasing the quality of submissions. A triage approach was now being adopted with some non-starter applications being refused at an earlier stage rather than spending many months working on them. This had to be balanced against losing more appeals if too many applications were refused.
- Training sessions had been held for town and parish councils to improve understanding as well as the quality of residential development through the production of design guides.
- Requirements by Government included the delivery of the majority of affordable housing through the land use planning system, biodiversity net gain and ecological improvements.
- The Council was in the top 15 LPAs for the highest number of major planning applications received per year and an average total number of applications annually of between 5,000 to 6,000. Balancing the various elements resulted in either a developer, resident, or government being upset or not delivering the Council's corporate priorities.
- A copy of a recent LGA report would be circulated which referred to the increasing backlog of enforcement activity which was being experienced by English local authorities. The Council had adopted a new enforcement strategy in February 2023 which focused on major schemes rather than neighbour disputes. Comparison was made with the number of enforcement officers employed by the district councils prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) of 1.5-2.5 which equated to between 1-15 officers and 4.5 officers across the county now. It was noted that as enforcement activity did not generate fee income, it was difficult to justify enforcement staff.
- Approximately 20,000 emails were received annually in the central planning mailbox with 26,000 comments entered via the public access system all of which had to be actioned or responded to. Officers therefore had to be firm as to when they would respond to correspondence although some local authorities did not permit any form of direct contact.

- New planning applications fees were to be introduced which had been incorporated into budget assumptions. The matter of enforcement was to be considered by the Senior Leadership Team and whilst it was not expected that there would be a return to pre-LGR staffing levels, it was hoped 4 enforcement teams could be established which mirrored the Development Management structure rather than one central team, with an increase in the number of enforcement officer.
- Discussions were being held with the Monitoring Officer regarding the creation of a rolling fighting fund to be utilised for taking direct action rather than existing budgets, which would see a charge placed on land and when monies were recovered, this would be returned to the fund.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of enforcement notices served by this authority over the last 18 months following a more assertive approach, which had stretched resource to capacity. It was suggested that more could be done to raise awareness of successful cases similar to the press releases issued by Public Protection for successful prosecutions.
- Enforcement notices were drafted by the Planning Enforcement Officers which were then checked by legal who also had to co-ordinate who the notice was served on which included any party with an interest in the land and not just the person who had undertaken the unauthorised activity but also the owner of the land and mortgage company. The legal team also drafted section 106 notices as well as work for housing and other departments across the council with a finite resource.
- Senior officers received many emails from members querying enforcement action being taken as well as advocating zero tolerance. Some cases were down to genuine mistakes, acting on bad advice from a contractor /builder or wilful disregard. More direct action was being taken; however, it was extremely expensive, and consideration needed to be given on how costs were recovered.
- The Council was required to produce an annual Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which summarised all financial and non-financial developer contributions each financial year. A copy of the IFS for 2021/22 would be recirculated.
- There had been underperformance of the delivery target for affordable housing for the last 12 months as stated within the report on Corporate Performance. However, approximately 1,400 units had been negotiated which were built at a slower rate than the negotiation of agreements. It was suggested that it would have been more helpful to provide an additional explanation regarding the time lag. Different routes to delivery were being used in the event of the market slowing which would also impact on the delivery of affordable housing. The 7-year period coincided with the housing need assessments carried out as part of the work for the local plan. 2016 was the starting period for the current land supply strategy. The target was for 17% of market housing to be affordable. The annual average equated to 16.4% which was just below the aforementioned figure identified in the latest countywide needs assessment. In conclusion, there were sufficient agreements in place to ensure delivery of affordable housing over the next few years. However, this was supplemented by the Council's own build programme through partnership working with Homes England, North of Tyne Combined Authority etc to lever in additional funds to enable this.

- The new Northumberland Local Plan set higher standards in many areas including quality and sustainability. The strength of this could be monitored via the successful defence of appeals, which at 82% was higher than the national average of 63%. The local plan was a set of guiding principles and set out where applications would be approved or refused, unless there were compelling reasons to do otherwise, for example where the quality of a scheme was not of a high enough standard or very special circumstances in the Green Belt.
- Staff turnover had not been aided by direct emails from another local authority inviting planning officers to apply for jobs. A number of others had left for jobs with the Planning Inspectorate. The latter could be taken as compliment on the quality of the Council's staff and training. New staff participated in an internal training programme which included technical aspects and decision making etc.
- Appendix A of the report set out 108 types of planning applications all of which had different validation requirements, different information requirements and different procedures and occasionally an error occurred, however, the council performed better in respect of LGSCO complaints than the local authority average and also with other areas within the county council.
- Special training had been held on highways matters which generally related to capacity, design or road safety issues. More training by Highways officers would perhaps be beneficial to explain the background for decisions including recent changes to legislation which required reasons for refusal on highways grounds only if there was a severe impact, the role of road safety audits, sustainable transport and active travel.
- Enhancements had been made to the pre-application process for complex schemes with a view to assisting the development industry submitting applications which met the council's requirements, saving money and time, enabling problems to be solved at an earlier stage. As this had only been introduced in October 2023, it would be beneficial to review the process and impact after 12 months.
- Clarification was provided on the various types of affordable housing which gave options to suit people with different personal circumstances.
- The local plan incorporated provision to permit affordable housing, in locations where market housing would be refused which would be and would aid provision in rural areas via Neighbourhood planning and community led housing processes.
- If an enforcement notice was served due to an extension, for example, not meeting building regulations or planning requirements and although not followed up, this would be problematic for most people in society as they would not be able to sell their house.
- Officer undertook expediency tests on potential enforcement cases where there might be a minor technical breach or to prevent becoming involved in protracted neighbour disputes.
- Only applicants could appeal to the Planning Inspectorate and often these were for non-determination within the specified period rather than refusal. The Council was also successful in defending many of these cases.



- Whilst regular surveys were completed which included resourcing, it wasn't easy to make direct comparison due to different local authorities including different elements. Northumberland County Council had carried out benchmarking with Durham County Council as part of a restructure several years ago as they were similar in size at that time and had employed more officers, but current data was not available. A restructure would be needed in the near future to respond to The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act.
- The Enforcement Strategy included a flow chart which set out the process.
- Minor costs had been awarded against the Council for minor applications. Significant costs had been awarded against the Council in respect of historic decisions on major schemes in New Hartley and Lancaster Park, Morpeth where there had been a planning hearing, but these were generally rare compared to some cases in the Southeast England.
- The Council set stretch targets were set above all of the national targets and the Enforcement Team had been tasked to close cases as quickly as possible. An aggressive target had been useful in pushing performance.
- NCC had partnered with the London Borough of Redbridge Council several years ago as they performed exceedingly well on speed-based performance indicators. However, it was noted that they were operating under different market conditions where there would be alternative schemes waiting if permission was refused on a site, unlike the position in this county where inward investment often had to be encouraged in a weaker market. Whilst they refused permission very quickly, the approach was likely to be less successful in Northumberland as it would be more difficult to achieve affordable housing outcomes. The planning reform could see more refusals despite being labelled as developer friendly.

Several members expressed their appreciation for the information contained in the report. They also commented on the following:

- A Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) report had resulted in changes to procedures to ensure assessments were documented.
- Planning officers in Northumberland were dealing with almost double the average case allocation during peak periods compared with typical English LPA allocations (as documented on page 44 of the papers). Enforcement officers were working under similar caseload pressures and also enormous expectations.
- Changes of planning officers had resulted in different opinions.
- Whether any delays in the issuing of enforcement notices were due to the time taken by the legal team and whether there was evidence to substantiate this. Others noted that following the correct legal process could take many years. It was also queried whether cases should only be progressed where success was guaranteed.
- Planning officers carried out a difficult role which was demonstrated by the turnover of staff leaving for other jobs which offered more money and a reduced workload. It was important to ensure new staff understood planning policies and procedures.

- The robustness of the recently adopted local plan and settlement boundaries.
- Frustration with strength of enforcement powers, particularly where construction had been halted following the serving of an enforcement notice and schemes were not progressed.
- It would be useful to receive more information on numbers rather than percentages.
- It was difficult to contact the planning helpline or have dialogue with officers.
- There was concern regarding the delivery of affordable housing, particularly in rural areas. Concern that affordable housing targets were not being met and could struggle to be achieved in future years with difficult markets or unexpected conditions on site.
- More information was requested on resourcing, the enforcement process and the costs awarded against the Council. How had resourcing changed over the years and how it compared to other councils.
- It would be helpful to create a chart for a 7-year period which showed:
  - The number of houses delivered each year;
  - The percentage delivered which were affordable housing;
  - The number of permissions granted;
  - The percentage permitted which were affordable housing.

The Director of Planning and Housing gave a short update on The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 which had been given Royal Assent in October 2023 which intended to facilitate growth in all parts of the country. The summary on planning matters included:

- Development Plans (Local and Neighbourhood) - introduction of supplementary policies into “supplementary plans” as part of the development plan to support regeneration work in a town.
- National Development Management Policies (NDMP) – introduction of standard NDMPs which will form the starting point for evaluating all planning applications, driven by a request for consistency from the private sector for firms operating in different parts of the country. These could potentially be more restrictive in some areas. Development proposals not in accordance with the development plan and NDMPs must demonstrate material considerations that strongly supported a proposal otherwise there would be an even greater presumption against development that is not in accordance with policy.
- Heritage – strengthen arrangements for heritage and listed buildings with a new duty to have “special regard” to the desirability of preserving or enhancing specified heritage assets for plan-making and decision-taking. Emphasis was placed on ‘enhancing’ and that plans must be of good quality to be approved. Stop notices were to be introduced for listed buildings.
- Street Development Orders - following a similar principle to existing “local development orders” (or LDOs) in the sense that they allow for specified classes of development to be given planning permission, without needing a separate planning permission, for example, solar panels on roofs in a street, potentially similar to neighbourhood plan work.

- Expansion of the different types of planning applications listed in Appendix A.
- Commencement Notices – where construction had been started within 3 years of the planning permission having been granted, this would give powers to compel a developer to finish the work. More information was awaited on ‘the alleged circumstances of potential breaches of slow progress’.
- Planning Enforcement – the immunity period was to be extended from four years to ten years for a breach of planning control before it would be deemed lawful.
- Infrastructure Levy – to replace Section 106 agreements or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Every developer would be required to pay an amount on meter<sup>2</sup> which would then be placed in a fund and allocated as per the local strategy and with local discretion on the rates charged across the county. If the system worked similar to the CIL provisions, town and parish councils would receive between 15-25% automatically if neighbourhood plans and action plans were in place to specify the allocation of funding. There had been concerns previously regarding the implementation of a tariff-based funding arrangements, the new system was expected to deliver the same, if not more, affordable housing.
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be rebranded as ‘National Landscape’ areas with powers closer to those of National Parks. New management plans would be required.

He concluded his update by referencing new planning performance measures in section 6 of the report which he was pleased to report that the Council already measured. Higher performance could be achieved if more applications were refused shortly after submission, rather than working proactively with applicants and statutory consultees to address issues. However, this would impact on the objectives of the Corporate Plan, Tackling Inequalities and Driving Economic Growth.

Members suggested that it would be beneficial if the new supplemental plans could be utilised to aid affordable housing in rural areas.

In answer to a question, the Director of Planning and Housing stated that information was awaited as to whether a 200% fee would be introduced by for retrospective applications once the new fee structure was bedded in, as there was to be an annual increase in fees.

Councillor Colin Horncastle, Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Environment, commented on his satisfaction in seeing the contents of report which set out performance measures from validation to decision making and enforcement which exceeded most Government targets and stretch targets. He was therefore disappointed with what he perceived as criticism of the planning department and officers’ morale given their workloads and willingness to do extra, such as planning training. He confirmed that enforcement and affordable housing was regularly monitored and acknowledged that the latter was particularly hard to deliver in the north and west of the county. He referred to a recent Affordable Housing Policy

Conference which had been held as a hybrid meeting to facilitate attendance remotely, but less than half of councillors had participated. Identification of potential plots of land required suggestions by ward members, particularly in rural areas.

He also made reference to the new Enforcement Strategy and a number of different circumstances, where parties opposed to a planning application, would monitor and log issues which had to be recorded and investigated. Not all would be considered significant.

The Chair commented that the role of the meeting was to scrutinise and that the systems within the Council and planning department were working well and exceeding government targets. Members had strong opinions regarding enforcement as issues were regularly raised by residents in their wards. They were reassured that the Portfolio Holder and Senior Leadership Team were monitoring and looking for ways to address issues. The committee were keen to ensure that the Planning Team were supported given the concerns regarding caseloads and increasing resources.

The Director of Planning and Housing made reference to the different types of enforcement activity undertaken by the Council which in addition to planning matters, included licensing, building control and public protection and potentially involvement by multiple departments. He commented that he was in discussion with the Monitoring Officer regarding:

- The establishment of an Environmental Enforcement Board, possibly with elected member representation, to identify priority cases and lead departments.
- The role of members to identify rural exception sites for affordable housing, working with communities and parish and town councils to ascertain if there was consensus in the local community before these were brought to planning.
- Potential circulation of a comprehensive social and affordable housing data report, on a quarterly or half yearly basis.

He confirmed that the presentation and video from the Affordable Housing Policy Conference and a transcript of Questions and Answers was to be circulated to all members.

Several members expressed their support for the establishment of a separate enforcement working group / committee or policy conference. It was reported that training on enforcement matters had been requested by the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Committee.

The Chair thanked the Director of Planning and Housing and Head of Planning for their report and presentation.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The contents of the report be noted.

2. Members of the committee noted the potential for increase in planning income and recommended to Cabinet to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work.
3. Cabinet to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received.

**29. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report**

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2023/24 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

This page is intentionally left blank

# Agenda Item 4

## DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET SINCE LAST OSC MEETING AND FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS - DECEMBER 2023 TO 16 JANUARY 2024

DECISION	CABINET DATE/DECISION
Cabinet Papers – 12 December 2023	<a href="https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2257">https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2257</a>
Budget 2024-25 – Draft Engagement Document	12 December 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that the Draft Budget Engagement Document be agreed as the basis for consultation with residents, business and partners on the 2024-25 Budget proposals.
Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-2028	12 December 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that:  (a) Cabinet review and note the revisions to the assumptions (and the risks) within the 2024-25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan;  (b) Cabinet note that further work is required to refine and finalise the Medium-Term Financial Plan;  (c) Cabinet note that the revenue implications of the Capital Programme are still to be updated; and  (d) Cabinet note that there are still budget balancing measures required to be identified over the term of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that it is intended that budget balancing measures for the two years 2024-25 and 2025-26 are agreed at the full Council meeting on 21 February 2024.
Setting of the Council Tax Base	12 December 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet approve the council tax base for 2024-25 as detailed within Appendix A, equating to 112,185.46 Band D equivalent dwellings. This is an increase of 2,033.16 Band D equivalents from 2023-24.
Risk Management Report Update	12 December 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that:  (a) Cabinet agree the contents of the report in accordance with its responsibility for ensuring effective risk management throughout the organisation; and  (b) Cabinet note that this report will be presented to the next meeting of Audit Committee as a source of assurance in its role of monitoring the effective development and operation of risk management and risk-related issues across the County Council, and as part of its ongoing

	evaluation of the framework of governance, risk management and control within Northumberland County Council's accounting group boundary.
<b>Financial Performance - Position at the end of September 2023</b>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve the re-profiling to the Capital Programme of £55.961 million from 2023-24 to 2024-25 to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year; and.</p> <p>(b) Cabinet note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the projected overspend on services of £0.593 million and the assumptions outlined in this report.</li> <li>the projected net overspend of £0.949 million after accounting for outstanding inflationary pressures and the utilisation of the Exceptional Inflation Reserve and contingency.</li> <li>the supplementary estimates at Appendix A and the required changes to the budgets.</li> <li>the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix B.</li> <li>the use of the contingency shown at Appendix L.</li> <li>the use of reserves shown at Appendix M.</li> <li>the virements requested by services shown at Appendix N; and</li> <li>the details of capital project reprofiling shown at Appendix O.</li> </ul>
<b>Q2 Corporate Performance Report</b>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> the progress against the three Corporate Priorities as summarised in the report be noted.</p>
<b>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</b>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>(1) Blyth Relief Road</b></p> <p>(a) Cabinet authorise the allocation of £0.561 million from the 2023-24 budget allocation for the Salt Barns project to the Blyth Relief Road project. Then subsequently reallocate £0.561 million from the Blyth Relief Road project to the Salt Barns project in 2024-25; and</p>



	<p>(b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the Medium-Term Financial Plan spend profile for the Blyth Relief Road as set out in Table 2.</p> <p><b>(2) Kyloe House New Recreation Area</b></p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve spend of £0.271 million for a recreation area and secure walls to the High Dependency Unit at Kyloe House. Note the spend is externally funded by the Department for Education (DfE); and</p> <p>(b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the capital programme as outlined in the spend profile in Table 1.</p> <p><b>(3) Kyloe House New Media System</b></p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve spend of £0.043 million for a new media system at Kyloe House. Note the spend is externally funded by the Department for Education (DfE); and</p> <p>(b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the capital programme to include the proposed spend in 2023-24</p>
<b>Adaptations for Disabled People</b>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve the revised version of the Council's discretionary housing grants policy attached as the Annex to the report, which adds to the existing policy two new elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a scheme under which non-means-tested grant of up to £6500 (a figure which may be revised to take account of changing costs) will be offered to fund the cost of urgently-needed adaptations for people with a rapidly-progressing health condition that is expected to result in their death;</li> <li>• the transfer to the adaptations budget of funding responsibility for ceiling track hoists, which are currently funded through the Council's equipment loan service, and an amendment to the discretionary grant policy to enable the full cost of this adaptation to be covered by grant, so that people who need it will still not be required to contribute towards the cost, regardless of their financial means;</li> </ul> <p>(b) the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing &amp; Wellbeing be requested to prepare a future report on the options for further changes to the discretionary housing grants policy, at a point when the future level of costs chargeable against the capital grant from the</p>

	<p>Government for adaptations and other social care capital costs can more confidently be predicted; and</p> <p>(c) Cabinet confirm the inclusion of the additional Disabled Facilities Capital Grant funding of £290,484 in 2023/24 to the Council's capital plan, and note that a small further addition to the national total of this Capital Grant is expected in 2024/25, though the allocation of 2024/25 funding between local authorities has not yet been confirmed.</p>
<p><b>Outcomes of the Tender for New School Buildings for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools</b></p>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the outcomes of the tender process and agree to delegate the final award of contract to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet agree to issue an early works instruction as an extension of the current preconstruction services agreement (PCSA) up to the value of £1.4m to prevent any increases in cost or delays in programme until the award of contract is complete in February 2024; and</p> <p>(c) Cabinet note the revised allocation of £50,427,220 capital funding (an increase of £13,282,200, £10,282,200 NCC borrowing, which is subject to Full Council approval) to amend the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 to deliver the scheme.</p>
<p><b>Education, SEND and Skills Report 2022-23</b></p>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>(1) Cabinet agree that Members provide scrutiny and challenge to the service responses and developments detailed in the Education, SEND and Skills Annual Report for 22-23 as appropriate;</p> <p>(2) Cabinet receive and review the annual report and recognise the performance given the continued challenges in bouncing back from the impact of the pandemic;</p> <p>(3) Cabinet note the education achievements of our children, young people, and residents across Northumberland in 2022/23; and</p> <p>(4) Cabinet note the valuable support provided to all learners within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Early Years Settings and Schools</li> <li>· Special Education Needs support and service</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Virtual School</li> <li>· Learning and Skills Service</li> <li>· School Organisation and Resources</li> </ul>
<b>Northumberland Leisure and Wellbeing Procurement and Provision</b>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Cabinet acknowledge that the delegated authority decision notice was approved on 14th November 2023 enabling the award of this contract to be made by the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities to the successful operator, to deliver the Northumberland Leisure and Well-being Service;</li> <li>(b) Cabinet note and accept the report as a conclusion of the leisure procurement conducted in accordance with the Contract Concessions Regulations 2016;</li> <li>(c) Cabinet agree, in principle, that the Dave Stephens Centre and Blyth Beach Huts are packaged within a combined Community Asset Transfer to Blyth Valley Enterprise from 1 April 2024, and that the transfer is supported with a one-year revenue allocation of £50,000 and a £72,000 capital allocation to cover outstanding maintenance;</li> <li>(d) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Northburn Sports and Community Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £58,000 per annum;</li> <li>(e) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Druridge Bay Fitness Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £61,000 per annum;</li> <li>(f) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Rothbury Sports Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £48,000 per annum;</li> <li>(g) Cabinet agree to support Hirst Welfare Centre Trustees to commence management of the Hirst Welfare Centre from 1 April 2024 with a year one contribution of £250,000, a year two contribution of £180,000 and a year three contribution of £100,000 (funded from the Public Health Grant); and</li> </ul>

	<p>(h) Cabinet note the preferred bidder and the outcome of the procurement exercise is Places for People Leisure Management Limited (PfPLM).</p>
<p><b>Merger of North and South Northumberland Coroner Areas</b></p>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet agree:</p> <p>(a) to the merger of the North Northumberland and the South Northumberland Coroner areas and to endorse the Business Case for the merger included on the agenda as a confidential appendix for submission to the Ministry of Justice;</p> <p>(b) that the name of the new service will be the ‘Northumberland Coroner Area’;</p> <p>(c) to authorise the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Looking After our Communities to take all necessary steps to progress the Business Case including (but not limited to) making amendments or adjustments to the Business Case and to authorise the submission of the Business Case to the Ministry of Justice on behalf of the Authority; and</p> <p>(d) to authorise the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Looking After our Environment, to take any further steps necessary to facilitate the merger of North and South Northumberland Coroner areas on behalf of the Authority.</p>
<p><b>PFI Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&amp;E) Responsibilities</b></p>	<p>12 December 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that</p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve the removal of the FF&amp;E element of the current NEFRA PFI contract, in order to realise efficiencies in the region of £1,375,750 from its proposed effective date of 1st April 2022 up to the expiration date of the contract in 2035/36 and delegates authority to the Chief Fire Officer to authorise the deed of variation to be entered into, to effect this variation; and</p> <p>(b) an earmarked reserve be created to facilitate an alternative more cost effective solution for FF&amp;E ongoing repair, maintenance and parts, following the proposed withdrawal from the existing FF&amp;E element of the current NEFRA PFI contract. The reserve will be created from the remainder from the efficiency saving of £1,375,750 after the existing savings target of £60k pa has been realised.</p>

<b>Cabinet Papers - 16 February 2024</b>	<a href="https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2288">https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2288</a>
<b>Planning Service Performance</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the recommendation from Scrutiny to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work be accepted;</li> <li>(b) the recommendation from Scrutiny to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process; and</li> <li>(c) a policy conference around the planning process and enforcement be set up.</li> </ul>
<b>Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 Update</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the update be noted.
<b>Budget 2024-25 , Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 and 30 Year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cabinet approve the Housing Revenue Account 2024-25 budget as detailed within Appendix 1, which will reduce the balance on the HRA reserve from £28.175 million at 31 March 2024, to £19.193 million at 31 March 2025; and Northumberland County Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Tuesday, 16 January 2024 Agenda Item No Topic Decision 2 note the indicative budgets to 2027-28 which will reduce the balance of the HRA reserve to £13.708 million;</li> <li>2. Cabinet note that from 1 April 2024, social housing rent will be increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1.00% as per the previously agreed Rent Standard. The budget detailed in Appendix 1 assumes that rents will rise by CPI 6.70% plus 1.00% with recoverable service charges also rising by CPI plus 1.00% for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025;</li> <li>3. Cabinet approve the increase of 7.70% for housing rents from 1 April 2024 in line with the Government rent standard;</li> <li>4. Cabinet approve the increase of 7.70% for housing service charges from 1 April 2024;</li> <li>5. Cabinet approve the Non-Recurrent Growth Item Hardship Fund of £0.350 million for 2024-25 to support NCC tenants who may, due to their income, not be eligible to receive any financial assistance through existing benefits (Housing Benefit/Universal Credit/Discretionary Housing Payment) (detailed in points 6.5 &amp; 6.11);</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Cabinet approve that any unspent balance in relation to the Hardship Fund for 2023-24, can be carried forward as an earmarked reserve into 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.5) and added to the 2024-25 in-year budget allocation;</li> <li>7. Cabinet note the indicative 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan as detailed within Appendix 1;</li> <li>8. Cabinet approve the estimated pay inflationary increase for 2024-25 of 4.00% totalling £0.447 million (detailed in point 6.10);</li> <li>9. Cabinet approve the Non-Pay Inflation Schedule for 2024-25 totalling £0.280 million (detailed in point 6.10);</li> <li>10. Cabinet approve the Recurrent Growth as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Housing Disrepair of £0.275 million from 2024-25 to cover the costs of housing disrepair mitigation and resolution; and note that the budget will be reduced by £0.150 million after 5 years (detailed in point 6.11).</li> <li>b) Additional staffing budget of £0.367 million from 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.11).</li> <li>c) Additional budget for consumable materials for void properties of £0.159 million from 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.11).</li> </ol> </li> <li>11. Cabinet note the Recurrent Saving in relation to the Introduction of phased Service Charges for Sheltered Housing tenants, with estimated additional income of £0.120 million in 2024-25 (50.00%), £0.180 million in 2025-26 (75.00%) and £0.240 million 2026-27 (100.00%) as agreed within the budget and MTFP 2023-24 (detailed in point 6.12);</li> <li>12. Cabinet note and approve the expenditure plan relating to £41.434 million which has been set aside over the 4-year period 2024-25 to 2027-28 in the HRA Capital programme to invest in Affordable Housing. Details are set out in Appendix 1; and</li> <li>13. Cabinet approve an amendment to the Housing Rent policy, to enable re-let of HRA properties at Formula Rent from April 2025 (detailed in point 6.29).</li> </ol>
<b>Notification of the Estimated Collection Fund Balances 2023-24 – Council Tax and Business Rates</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Cabinet approve the declaration of a surplus on the Collection Fund for the year ending 31 March 2024 in relation to Council Tax of £4.486 million to be distributed</li> </ol>

	<p>to the Council and Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner in accordance with Council Tax regulations; the Council's share being £4.149 million;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet note the overall estimated surplus on the Collection Fund for the year ending 31 March 2024 in relation to Business Rates of £6.943 million; the Council's share being £3.471 million;</p> <p>(c) Cabinet note the distribution of the estimated Collection Fund surplus for Council Tax to the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner of £0.337 million, and the distribution of the estimated Collection Fund surplus for Business Rates of £3.471 million to the Secretary of State; and</p> <p>(d) Cabinet note the inclusion of the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balances distributable in 2023-24 of £4.149 million surplus and £3.471 million surplus for Council Tax and Business Rates respectively, within the Council's budget 2024-25.</p>
<p><b>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</b></p> <p><b>(1) Greensfield Farm Alnwick</b></p> <p><b>(2) Lyndon Walk</b></p> <p><b>(3) Dene Park Windows</b></p> <p><b>(4) Energising Blyth Programme – Energy Central Institute</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>Cabinet approve the spend of £0.333 million to acquire 2 3-bedroom houses on the Wynyard Homes Greensfield Farm development in Alnwick. Note this will be funded using in year capital receipts and retained capital receipts within the Housing Revenue Account.</p> <p>(i) Cabinet approve the updated spend of the Lyndon Walk 13 bungalows proposal of £2.796 million. This will be funded from Housing Revenue Account reserves; and</p> <p>(ii) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme for the updated spend as profiled in the report.</p> <p>(i) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.184 million to replace the windows at Dene Park House. Note that the funding for this project will come from the existing Property Stewardship Budget allocation within the Capital Programme; and</p> <p>(ii) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.184 million from the Property Stewardship Budget to Dene Park House in 2023-24.</p> <p>(i) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to establish the Energy Central Campus Phase 2 (Energy Central Institute) as a defined project in</p>

	<p>the Capital Programme with a total budget of £15.421 million as profiled in the body of the report.</p> <p>(ii) Cabinet approve the proposal to accelerate capital spend of £1.404 million in advance of business case approval to drive forward project development inclusive of spend in 2022-23.</p> <p>(iii) authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into a contract to the value of £1.060 million to appoint a multidisciplinary Design Team, subject to the appropriate procurement processes being followed.</p> <p>(iv) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.750 million to commence work on demolishing Keel Row Shopping Centre and 3-5/7-9 Bridge Street.</p> <p>(v) authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into a contract for the demolition of Keel Row Shopping Centre and 3-5/7-9 Bridge Street, subject to the appropriate procurement processes being followed.</p>
<b>(5) Energising Blyth Programme – Technical Fit-Out and Equipment</b>	<p>(i) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to establish the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Fit-Out and Equipment as a defined project with a total budget of £1.450 million as profiled in the body of the report.</p> <p>(ii) Authority be delegated, in accordance with the Local Assurance Framework, to the Council's s151 Officer following consideration by the Energising Blyth Programme Board to approve the Full Business Case and report any capital implications to Capital Strategy Group for consideration in the Capital Programme.</p>
<b>(6) Woodhorn Lift Replacement</b>	<p>(i) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.121 million to replace the lift in the Winding House at Woodhorn. Note that this is funded from the existing Property Stewardship budget in the Capital Programme.</p> <p>(ii) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.121 million from the Property Stewardship Budget to Woodhorn Lift Replacement.</p> <p>(iii) Cabinet approve the novation of the MEND grant and accept the Grant Funding Agreement Terms (subject to Legal review) from the Arts Council for the sum of £0.107 million.</p>
<b>(7) County Hall – Print Room Refurbishment</b>	<p>(i) Cabinet note the spend of £0.125 million for the refurbishment of the County Hall Print Room. Also noting that the refurbishment work commenced on 28 November</p>



	<p>2023, and that this is funded from the existing Property Stewardship budget in the Capital Programme.</p> <p>(ii) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.125 million from the Property Stewardship budget to County Hall – Print Room Refurbishment.</p>
<p><b>Ashington Regeneration Programme – Update, Funding and Site Acquisitions</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve the following in respect of site acquisitions and required funding:</p> <p>i) that the Council complete the acquisition of the Wansbeck Square site with vacant possession, as previously agreed in principle, at a market value of £1,365,000, plus Stamp Duty Land Tax.</p> <p>ii) that the Council complete the acquisition of the Woodhorn Road site with vacant possession, as previously agreed in principle, at a market value of £210,000 plus Stamp Duty Land Tax.</p> <p>iii) that the Council approves an allocation of up to £160,000 of revenue funding from the Council's Regeneration Reserve Development Fund to pay for the holding costs which will be incurred, following acquisition of the Wansbeck Square and Woodhorn Road sites as set out in Section 6 of the report;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet note that following a competitive tender process, Identity Consult has been appointed as the Design Team to take forward ambitious plans for the redevelopment of Wansbeck Square and progress the designs for the Public Realm and Connectivity project, which will enable the creation of Grand Corner Gateway; and</p> <p>(c) Cabinet approve the development of a high-level business case to the North of Tyne Combined Authority in order to secure funding from the Northumberland Line Economic Corridor Investment Fund for the redevelopment of Wansbeck Square, with approval of the final bid submission delegated to the Council's S151 Officer. The Accountable Body will monitor the use of funding subsequently awarded and ensure adherence to the Grant Agreement.</p>
<p><b>National Funding Formula &amp; School Funding 2024-25</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>(a) Cabinet approve the proposals for the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula for 2024/25 as agreed previously, in line with the recommendation of the Schools Forum meeting of 22</p>

	<p>November 2023 and the results of the subsequent consultation exercise held with schools;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet approve the transfer of up to 0.5% funding from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block, in line with recommendation of the Schools Forum meeting of 22 November 2023 and the results of the subsequent consultation exercise held with schools; and</p> <p>(c) approval of the final formula values be delegated to the Executive Director of Children Young People &amp; Education and Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People in line with the principles agreed at Schools Forum on 22 November 2023, once the final budget allocations are released by the Department for Education in December 2023.</p>
--	--

## FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS

<b>Adult Social Care: Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy</b>  To present the updated Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy	13 February 2024
<b>Budget 2024-25, Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28</b>  The report presents the updated Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-2028 to Cabinet (for recommendation to County Council) following the receipt of the provisional local government settlement which is due to be announced in December 2023. The report will also include an update on the deliverability of savings.	13 February 2024  Council 21 February 2024
<b>Corporate Fraud Policies for 2024-25</b>  To provide an update on the County Council's policies in relation to Corporate Fraud activity and seek approval for updated policies.	13 February 2024
<b>North East Investment Zone</b>  The report provides an update on the North East Investment Zone. Cabinet are asked to note the regional proposals and asked to approve the inclusion of a Business Rates Retention Site.	13 February 2024
<b>School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2025/2026 Academic Year</b>  This report informs Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation on School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2025/26 Academic Year as required by the School Admissions Code 2021. Approval (determination) of these admission arrangements is also sought.	13 February 2024
<b>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</b>  This is a summary of all of the reports discussed by the Capital Strategy Group on 20 December 2023	13 February 2024
<b>Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26</b>  To replace the expiring Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23 and to set out our intended strategies for reaching our climate change targets across the next three years and beyond.	12 March 2024
<b>Financial Performance 2023-24 – Position at end of December 2023</b>  The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 31 December 2023.	12 March 2024

This page is intentionally left blank

## COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC

### REPORT FROM CABINET

31 JANUARY 2024

#### Planning Service Performance

On 16 January 2024, Cabinet considered the minutes of the discussion and recommendation at the Communities and Place OSC meeting held on 29 November 2023 on the report which provided an overview of the performance monitoring and assurance arrangements currently in place for the Local Planning Authority function of the Council.

The following is an extract from the draft Cabinet minutes:

*Cabinet was asked to consider a report from the Committee on the above (copy of report attached to the signed minutes).*

*The report was presented by Councillor Oliver, Chair of the Communities and Place OSC. Councillor Oliver set the context to the review which Scrutiny had undertaken, and the current challenges facing the planning service. There had been much change in the last few years.*

*There seemed to be a perception that enforcement was not happening as much as it should and that it was not consistent enough. However, the service had to rely on potential breaches being reported and therefore additional resource would be helpful in this area. It was suggested that the changes introduced by the Government to the way local authorities could charge for planning applications could provide additional revenue to support this.*

*There had been some discussion about affordable housing, and the point made that this was a joint venture with housing providers, and it was up to the Council to find the best way of ensuring that more of this type of housing was provided.*

*There had also been discussion around planning performance and whether the service had sufficient resource. There were challenges in recruitment and retention and it was felt that thought needed to be given to how this could be addressed, and that some additional resource was needed in this area as well as in enforcement.*

*Councillor Horncastle agreed that the report was excellent and represented a well balanced argument. There were issues within the planning service arising from the pandemic which had created a large backlog of applications to be dealt with by a reduced complement of staff. This backlog was now under control and more staff had been recruited so the service was almost back to full levels.*

*Recently the Council had agreed a new enforcement strategy. Every single enforcement enquiry had to be responded to and it had been agreed that Local Area Committees would receive some training on enforcement when agendas were quiet as it had been identified that there was a lack of knowledge on the subject. This*

would allow members to respond more effectively to queries from the public and town and parish councils.

*Councillor Wearmouth welcomed this and suggested it would be useful to also do this with town and parish councils. He also complimented the work done by Scrutiny on this issue, which was an excellent example of the role Scrutiny should be performing*

*Councillor Riddle commented that the Authority was in the top 15 in the country for receiving major planning applications and this was because business was encouraged to come to the County. Staff should be complimented for the work they did and he reminded members that the Authority had met every one of its statutory duties, and that enforcement was not a statutory duty.*

*The Leader echoed these comments and proposed that a Policy Conference be arranged on the planning process and enforcement, which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.*

**RESOLVED that:-**

- (a) the recommendation from Scrutiny to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work be accepted;*
- (b) the recommendation from Scrutiny to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process; and*
- (c) a Policy Conference around the planning process and enforcement be set up.*

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to note Cabinet's response to the Planning Performance Report.

**COUNCILLOR NICK OLIVER**

**CHAIRMAN**





ACTIVE NORTHUMBERLAND  
**ANNUAL SERVICE  
REPORT 2022/2023**



## Contents

---

Our Vision .....	2
Our Background .....	2
Increasing Health & Social Impact .....	3
Active Northumberland – Service Plan Success 2022-23 .....	17



## Our Vision

Our vision is “To be the Best Community and Wellness Provider in the UK” at delivering quality leisure, physical activity, and sporting opportunities across Northumberland and to improve the health and fitness of the population of Northumberland in line with the Northumberland Health and Wellbeing strategy.

People in Northumberland will have a better quality of life as a result of their participation in physical activity and sport. Active Northumberland is not just about sport, it is about “wellness” and feeling fitter, with a focus on improving health and wellbeing and preventing ill health and social isolation.

## Our Background

Active Northumberland (AN) is a registered charity (company limited by guarantee) formed in 2014 from a merger of several different leisure service providers.

AN has circa 830 employees consisting of a mix of contracted (both full and part time) and casual staff, and a Board of 10 non-executive Directors (trustees) with a diverse and relevant range of expertise and senior level management experience. AN operates nine large leisure centres (some of which combine library services) and several smaller facilities, including community facilities and welfare facilities. All of AN’s facility and service management contracts are delivered within the county of Northumberland.

The majority of the facilities operated by AN are owned by Northumberland County Council (NCC) and are leased to AN, who in turn manages the operation of leisure facilities and services for NCC under an Operating or Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Agreement, coupled with a performance management framework ensures progress is appropriately recorded and acknowledged, and that under AN’s management, NCC’s leisure assets and resources are optimised and successfully contribute to NCC’s Corporate Plan priorities and objectives.

## Increasing Health & Social Impact

As part of the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2028, we are working to deliver the strategic priorities together with, and complementing the work of, our partners.

### Providing children and young people with the best start in life

We aim to encourage Children and Young People (CYP) and their families to make positive lifestyle and social choices that will help their physical, social, and mental health wellbeing.

We believe that every child and young person has the right to be active, to benefit from being active in a safe, positive, and trusted environment, and to have an equal chance to achieve their potential.

Positive experiences at an early age help build the foundations for an active life. If children and young people have experiences that feel fun, positive and give them a sense of confidence, they are more likely to want to be active in the future.

We have put an even stronger spotlight on safeguarding, so that children and young people feel safe when being active, and parents are confident that we are a safe choice with the welfare of their children being paramount. To achieve this, we have reviewed our safeguarding policy and now ensure that all our colleagues have read and understood it, by making it part of our mandatory training.

We provide fun and positive learning experiences across the Service for Children and Young People from birth right through to apprenticeships within our facilities.

#### Q1

Our Nursery at Hirst Welfare currently has 42 children attending on a regular basis, where our dedicated officer works alongside the early years team to create a personalised curriculum based on the Hirst Welfare ethos, being unique to our setting.

The staff listen to the children; take their ideas and wants and needs into consideration, allowing them to make some decisions and put some of their ideas into practice. The environment is always safe and secure. Each child has their own key worker so that a trust and caring relationship is built.

We continue to run courses to educate parents and carers and during Q1 we successfully ran both an oral health course and a healthy eating course to try and educate families on the importance on these things and what the parents can continue to do at home to encourage the children to continue to make sensible choices, these all link into the curriculum.

Our Mams on the Move Scheme is designed to help support physical and mental health for new mums after giving birth and continues to grow both in numbers and sites that we operate from. During Q1 we redesigned our membership offer to include mams on the move sessions, whilst increasing accessibility and opportunities for new mams to widen their health and social opportunities.

As the scheme continues to develop, we are delighted to work in partnership with Public Health and the midwife team to deliver antenatal Aquatic sessions at both our Berwick and Wentworth Facilities as part of the Mams on the Move scheme.

Mams on the Move featured in the evening chronicle during Q1, and a strong marketing push saw the Facebook page hit 1800 members.

We continue to support schools within Northumberland by giving opportunities to develop whole school approaches in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity (PESSPA) with the intent to develop positive attitudes to physical activity for CYP. The aim is for CYP to learn to have a lifelong positive attitude to physical activity which will in turn lead to healthy active lifestyles throughout their lifetime. We continue to embed fundamental skills of physical literacy in schools to ensure the necessary building blocks are in place for a good start for CYP.

We remain unique to any other leisure providers by using experienced qualified PE teachers to deliver a bespoke programme of Physical Education and an advisory service within first, primary, middle, secondary, high, and special schools. We continue to be the trusted and preferred provider within the county of Northumberland and have SLA agreements with 30 schools.

The four School Games Organisers (SGO) have continued to deliver the national programme into schools across the four areas of Northumberland and have worked closely with the Active Partnership RISE and the other two SGO areas to ensure every school has received a consistent School Games offer.

We promote good physical health and wellbeing of CYP in Northumberland by offering schools and families a voucher system to attend centres in holiday times and support school staff with their health & wellbeing by encouraging them to join Active's corporate gym membership, currently 26 members of school staff have taken up the offer.

Our junior gym saw significant growth during Q1 and grew by a further 8% during Q2. At the end of the quarter, we had 1,129 junior members between the ages of 11-15 years. During the summer holiday period, we added a number of additional junior gym sessions resulting in 7855 visits over the holiday period.

Our Learn to Swim Framework not only gives each child gives children confidence in their ability to swim, but it also promotes strong mental wellbeing and provides the skills and

motivation to lead a healthy and active lifestyle through regular swimming through to their adult life.

During Q1 we increased our participation by an average of 33% in comparison to the same period in 2020 and operated an average occupancy level of 93% across all lessons within the scheme.

School Swimming is directly attributable to achieving one of the KS2 outcomes in education and we continue to support 150 schools across the County, although Q1 indications suggest that the pandemic has impacted upon the ability of year 6 pupils failing to achieve the 3 national outcomes.

In Q1 this year, we relaunched our apprenticeship programme and began the recruitment campaign for nine new leisure operation apprentices (one at each of the largest sites) and a business support apprentice (central). By relaunching our apprentice programme, we continue to contribute to giving young people the best start in life at the higher end of the age group.

## **Q2**

In Q2 we delivered a county wide inclusive Commonwealth Games Live Event collaborating with Alnwick Garden and Castle as well as other stakeholders. The event's aim was to target CYP from across the county that were most in need of a physical activity intervention with the intention to improve their physical, social, and mental health wellbeing. We continue to deliver the Barclays and FA girls' football program in Berwick-Upon-Tweed.

During Q2, our Nursery colleagues began to explore opportunities to introduce maths and English into the Nursery setting, whilst also concentrating upon Oral Health that was initially introduced in Q1. The Nursery is also looking to undertake the Better Health at Work Award, with the aim of achieving Bronze within 12 months.

As the Mams on the Move scheme is currently being delivered via the reserves from Sport England funding, during Q2 we began to plan for delivery of the scheme without central funding. During meetings with key personnel, we mapped a desire to create a pathway of exit routes from the Mams on the Move Scheme to pre-school activities and then to junior memberships. This pathway would create additional physical opportunities for the pre-school age group, whilst the income would help make the post self-funding.

Junior "Elevate" is our session to ensure that our younger members are safe and confident to use our gym equipment, whilst providing a framework to ensure their training is effective and fun. During Q2 we delivered a total of 420 'Elevate' sessions to our junior facility users.

During Q2, we also piloted two family group exercise classes at Ashington Leisure Centre, enabling parents/carers and their children to participate in a class together. These classes have proved to be an initial success, in particular the family clubbercise class proved to be a real hit and we hope to launch similar types of classes throughout the county during Q3.

Within our facilities we continue to deliver valuable life skills to CYP, through a wide range of coaching and tuition opportunities.

Our Learn to Swim Framework not only gives each child gives children confidence in their ability to swim, but it also promotes strong mental wellbeing and provides the skills and motivation to lead a healthy and active lifestyle through regular swimming through to their adult life.

During Q2 our participation has grown by 37% in comparison to the same period 2020, We are operating at an average of 94% occupancy level.

### **Q3**

During Q3 we increased our junior gym sessions at Blyth and Concordia by an extra hour a day to increase opportunities for our younger members to access the gyms, whilst we also scoped opportunities to change the booking system to increase access during term time and prevent drop off due to lack of opportunity.

At Hirst Nursery, as a consequence of some of the children struggling with speech and language issues, the whole team have been working with speech and language therapists to be better placed to support the children with one of team undertaking a specialist speech and language course.

The Nursery staff also continue to update their knowledge of child protection and are preparing for their next OFTSED inspection, which could be due in the very near future.

In Q3 The PESS teaching team continued to deliver high quality Physical Education across partnership schools. Each school receives CPD (Continuous Professional Development) for their staff and ensures that all are competent and confident to deliver all aspects of the Physical Education curriculum.

Berwick Academy have made full use of the new bowling green in the sports centre by teaching primary pupils how to play indoor bowls. The sessions will continue over the next couple of months and will hopefully lead to some of the youngsters wanting to continue in their spare time.

During Q3 we delivered a total of 305 'Junior Elevate' sessions across our facilities ensuring our young members can exercise safely and effectively.

During Q3 we developed a new programme called 'Active Babies' which will launch in the new year. Active Babies is a 6-week course incorporating fun, interactive dance, and movement for babies 6 weeks and older. We have also planned to launch 'Active Tots' which will be focused on activity for toddlers. Both courses will form part of our 'Mams on the Move' programming promoting physical activity for new parents and children.

### **Q4**

In Q4 the PESS team delivered bespoke whole school CPD in addition to their weekly provision. Schools benefitted from specific gymnastics CPD and welcomed the opportunity to become more confident and competent at delivering PE (Physical Education) sessions.

Every school in the PESS partnership attended a Health & Wellbeing festival for their Y4 children. This was an opportunity for 180 children to visit Blyth and 210 children to visit Morpeth to participate in physical activity and healthy eating activities. The team collaborated with local supermarkets and received donations of fruit and vegetables to give away to the children. A further 60 children at the Wise Academy received in-school delivery.

The team continues to forge links with schools that are not part of the partnership SLA and have delivered playground leadership sessions into a number of schools. They continue to deliver School Games support and the County Final took place at Ponteland Leisure Centre. A KS3 Inclusive Festival for students with SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) was held at Concordia where 120 students were able to participate in bowling and other multi-sport activities.

We continue to support girls' activities through FA funding and delivered a Disney inspired Girls football session at Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub. 50 children attended that had been identified by their schools as those in need of inspiration to participate in PA. We also ran a CPD event for 10 teachers in parallel to the festival, this was a good opportunity to collaborate with NCT and make use of joint facilities.

Hirst Nursery continues to work towards their Ofsted inspection which could happen at any time now. A mock inspection has been arranged with the early years team to help prepare the staff for the format and expectations of an inspection as not all the team have taken part in an inspection yet. The Nursery is full for babies on a Wednesday and the children are learning about Ramadan as a member of the team is celebrating this. Safeguarding continues to be a huge focus for the team.

## **Summary**

Throughout the year at Hirst Nursery we have ran a number of courses on a number of topics aimed at educating parents and families. Through delivery it is hoped parents will be equipped to encourage children to make sensible choices. The Mams on the Move programme has continued to operate and develop. We have increased provision to include more facilities and have introduced a membership offer to increase accessibility and opportunities to engage in physical activity along with their newborns. As part of the Mams on the Move programme, we have introduced 'Active Babies' and 'Active Tots' sessions to further promote physical activity for new parents and children. The four School Games Organisers (SGO) have continued to deliver the national programme into schools across the four areas of Northumberland and have worked closely with the Active Partnership RISE and the other two SGO areas to ensure every school has received a consistent School Games offer. We have introduced Junior Elevate sessions this year within our gym facilities and have delivered over 1000 sessions to safely and successfully onboard our young members.

**Empowering people and communities**

Our definition of what makes us love where we live may vary, but factors like opportunity, safety, feeling we belong, and that people care for each other are common.

Sport and physical activity are not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when people consider what makes a great place, certainly compared to some of the bigger concerns in life, but we believe it can be a huge force for good.

We advocate the value of sport and physical activity as not only an essential tool to improve lives and strengthen communities, tackle inequalities, and create great places to live, but as a tool that local leaders can use to confront other issues.

We recognise the need for a collaborative approach and working with local decision makers on their local priorities, helping them use sport and physical activity to deliver the outcomes they want, and their communities need.

Our partnership working with Public Health ensures that we continue to provide an approach to physical and mental health that relies upon exercise as opposed to medicine, whilst also supporting residents to manage and understand their own health care.

## **Q1**

Although funding for the Mams on the Move has ended, we continue to deliver the service in partnership with Sport England from unspent reserves that have been carried forward because of the pandemic. The challenge for this year is to deliver the same outcomes in the communities, without the reliance upon external funding.

Through the development of the scheme in Q1 to introduce classes as part of our membership offer and by extending to the delivery of antenatal sessions in Wentworth and Berwick, we are widening the scope of the scheme whilst signposting the mams to exit routes to maintain their health journey beyond the scheme.

We will also look to ensure that some of our apprentices, once appointed, are supported in gaining the appropriate qualification to deliver mams on the move sessions, to help the sustainability of the scheme and to release the lead officer to meet with midwives and GP Surgeries to increase visibility and signposting from the health professionals.

To support the great partnership work that we undertake with Public Health to deliver both referral and cardiac rehabilitation sessions, we are constantly looking to strive and improve on our volunteer led sessions that are delivered in and around our local communities.

We continue to deliver walking session in partnership with the Ramblers Association and in Q1 delivered an average of 18 weekly wellbeing walks across Northumberland, equating to an average of 200 people walking on a weekly basis, led by our 123 volunteer walk leaders.

We continue to seek to promote the benefits of walking, whether through our organised walks or just walking in general, by working with the Public Health team as part of the walking steer group set up to help develop and promote the benefits of walking participation.

We continue to work strategically with Northumberland Communities together to support them to deliver on their local priorities, outcomes, and community needs. We have been working

closely with the team to deliver projects in Hirst Welfare and the refurbishment of Newbiggin to greatly enhance the site as a community hub.

During Q1, we were invited to be a strategic partner as part of the leisure collaborative group, working with NCC, PH and RISE to deliver a coordinated approach for the improvement of health and well-being of the residents of Northumberland and working together in reducing health inequalities. As part of this collaboration, Active has shared key usage and membership data that will help formulate a strategy of the group to tackle health inequality in the County.

## **Q2**

As the Mams on the Move scheme is currently being delivered via the reserves from Sport England funding, during Q2 we began to plan for delivery of the scheme without central funding. During meetings with key personnel, we mapped a desire to create a pathway of exit routes from the Mams on the Move Scheme to pre-school activities and then to junior memberships. This pathway would create additional physical opportunities for the pre-school age group, whilst the income would make the post associated with the scheme self-funding.

At the end of Q2, we celebrated our health walkers with our annual walking event at Kielder as part of the Kielder Marathon weekend. Despite the appalling weather, over 100 walkers were involved in the event and had the option to take part in a 2-, 4-, 6- or 8-mile walk, all finishing at Kielder Waterside. Joined by the Senior Management Team on all the walks, the event provided a useful opportunity for the walkers and the walk leaders to meet the wider management team and discuss issues and ideas around the walking programme and access to our facilities. All walkers were transported to and from Kielder and upon completion of their chosen walk were provided with a medal, goody bag and refreshments.

We continue to seek to promote the benefits of walking, whether through our organised walks or just walking in general, by working with the Public Health team as part of the walking steer group set up to help develop and promote the benefits of walking participation.

During Q2, the capital works to Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub were completed. The centre has undergone a £1.9m facelift, which has seen it refurbished and remodelled to provide a new community hub and improved sporting offer, along with a function room, community allotment and football pitch. It now has a new, modern, and welcoming reception area, a library area with public-access PCs and a community café, which aims to be a welcoming social space for local people. Visitors will be able to access a range of services, whether it be learning new skills, help in finding employment or even health checks and advice. The hub will be a focal point for the community and have a real focus on support and development of skills, friendships and health and wellbeing.

## **Q3**

The PESS service have continued to use our facilities to deliver both partnership and school games events/festivals to support young people to use our facilities, whilst also increasing daytime usage.



Partnership school staff continue to encourage students to sign up to the corporate gym offer to support them with their physical wellbeing and mental health.

Active Northumberland worked with Cramlington Town Council, Northumbria Police and Cramlington Youth Initiative to use North Burn as a pilot site for delivering youth football sessions on the Muga on a Friday evening to detract from anti-social behaviour in the area.

The General Manager continues to forge a partnership with all concerned parties to provide opportunities within Cramlington, resulting in a theatre performance also being delivered within Concordia prior to Christmas.

#### **Q4**

The last quarter has seen us pilot two preschool sessions at our Blyth facility. Active Babies and Active Tots have been developed to support new mums following on from the post-natal classes we have on offer as part of our mams on the move program. We have incorporated these sessions as part of the Active Northumberland membership to encourage new mums to retain their membership throughout their pregnancy and immediately after their pregnancy through allowing them to attend pre/post-natal classes and Active Babies/Active Tots as part of their membership. The sessions have seen great levels of engagement from both our members and casual members and as a result we will look to expand the Active Babies/Active Tots sessions into some of our other facilities over the coming months. This week we started to deliver a post-natal class at our Berwick facility and the early signs have been fantastic with some good levels of engagement.

#### **Summary**

Although funding for the Mams on the Move has ended, we continue to deliver the service in partnership with Sport England from unspent reserves that have been carried forward because of the pandemic. The challenge for next year is to deliver the same outcomes in the communities, without the reliance upon external funding. As discussed previously, work has been undertaken to expand provision and increase income generated within the programme to ensure its viability. We have continued to be part of the leisure collaborative group, working with NCC, PH and RISE to deliver a coordinated approach for the improvement of health and well-being of the residents of Northumberland and working together in reducing health inequalities. As part of this collaboration, Active has shared key usage and membership data that will help formulate a strategy of the group to tackle health inequality in the County. We have continued to develop our Wellbeing Walks programme throughout the year. We continued to hold the Kielder Walk which engaged over 100 walkers. Next year we will continue to work with Public Health and the Health Trainer service to further develop the Wellbeing Walks programme.

## Tackling some of the wider determinants of health

“Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age. These conditions influence a person’s opportunity to be healthy, his/ her risk of illness and life expectancy. Social inequities in health – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status across groups in society – are those that result from the uneven distribution of social determinants.”

Active Northumberland continue to work with NCC and partners to tackle the wider determinants of health and achieve the outcomes as stated in the Health and Wellbeing strategy, noticeably in relation to recreational and leisure opportunities, social exclusion (in rural areas), employability and the wider health inequality picture.

### Q1

As one of the largest employers in the County, we strive to offer employment opportunities for residents and then improve our retention through offering a fair salary with added benefits to our people. We continue to be a national living wage employer, ensuring all ages employed receive the same salary. During Q1 we ensured that our band 1 and 2 colleagues were moved onto £9.50 per hour (in line with the NLW increase) and commenced negotiations with our trade unions partners in relation to an appropriate pay award for our people for 2022/23.

During Q1, we launched our new Apprenticeship Programme in partnership with Creative Sport & Leisure to recruit 9 positions throughout the county with the learners undertaking the newly accredited CIMSPA Leisure Team Member Apprenticeship. This apprenticeship will train apprentices “from no qualifications to fully qualified” in multiple operational roles. This will help us fill hard to recruit areas as such Lifeguards, Swimming Teachers and Gym Instructors and offer school leavers a progressive pathway into employment.

During Q1, we signed 9 existing colleagues to a Duty Manager apprenticeship, improving our retention of middle managers, whilst offering personal development.

We continue to provide up-skilling opportunities to our aspiring Duty Managers with a further 2 team members undertaking the Leisure Duty Manager apprenticeship, bringing the total to 11 colleagues who have now signed up for this program.

As mentioned earlier within this report, we continue to work with Public Health to deliver health improvement programmes that rely upon exercise and movement as opposed to prescribed medication.

During Q1, we received 292 referrals into our Exercise on Referral programme which is on target to achieve our referral target for the year, and we completed 180 initial assessment appointments for those waiting to join the scheme.

During Q1, 76 participants attended their 12-week assessments, and 91 participants completed the scheme. At the end of Q1, there were 369 participants live on the Exercise on Referral programme which is the highest number since returning to delivery from COVID.

During Q1 we received 129 referrals into our weight management programme. This is below the target we would set to achieve our yearly target for referrals, however promotion around the programme and an increase in referrals is expected later in the year.

We had 61 participants who started the programme in Q1, and 59 participants completed the programme within this period.

Active Northumberland have been identified as a partner to sit on the steering group for the weight management health care needs assessment in Northumberland aiming to co-develop an approach to managing healthy weight in adults across the county.

We have continued to run the Escape Pain programme at Blyth Sports Centre during Q1 with further cohorts planned for delivery in Q2.

Quarter 1 has also seen us join many other colleagues from within the NHS and Public Health to form a weight management service health care needs assessment steering group. This group will help formalise a pathway that will help breakdown some of the barriers to clients through offering a more collaborative approach.

## Q2

We received 60 applications for the apprentice scheme and at the beginning of Q2, these applications will be shortlisted, and interviews undertaken by our Quality Assurance Manager and GM's.

We continued to advertise our apprenticeship positions as there were 5 positions still available. During Q2, we were able to recruit to these remaining positions and now have 5 apprentices already undertaking training on some of the specific courses to achieve key industry qualifications such as the NPLQ Lifeguarding qualification and level one gym instruction.

During Q2 we received 328 referrals into the exercise on referral programme and 201 referrals into the weight management programme. Although the number of referrals on the weight management programme increased from Q1, we still continue to be slightly under target. We do, however, expect to make up the shortfall in Q4, following the festive period.

During the same period, we undertook 170 initial assessments for Exercise on Referral, which is on target to achieve the commissioned 1000 referrals.

The number of participants live on the Exercise on Referral programme at the end of Q2 was 347, which is slightly down on Q1.

During Q2, 100 participants completed their 12-week assessment, and 89 participants completed the scheme. The % of Exercise on Referral participants who adhere to the programme at 12 and 24 weeks continues to be above target however uptake to the programme from referral is below target.

The total number of attendances for Exercise on Referral sessions during Q2 was 3601, increasing from Q1 and in spite of the summer holiday period where attendance can sometimes reduce as participants are often used for childcare.

Active Northumberland have been identified as a partner to sit on the steering group for the weight management health care needs assessment in Northumberland aiming to co-develop an approach to managing healthy weight in adults across the county. Steering group meetings have continued throughout Q2.

During Q2, we continued to deliver Escape Pain at Blyth Sports Centre.

### Q3

During Q3 we were able to continue with our focus on employability as part of our strategy to contribute to tackling some of the wider determinants of health in our communities.

During this quarter, we appointed a further 4 apprentices across the estate. As part of our training and development programme we successfully recruited 2 Business Administration Level 3 apprentices who commenced work in December, working within the business support team at Concordia. These apprentices will be working with our partners Creative Sport & Leisure on an 18-month programme tailored to administration within the leisure environment.

We have 3 remaining apprenticeship positions available (Wentworth, Prudhoe & Berwick) which we will hope to fill in Q4. Our Leisure Team member apprentices are working through the key elements of the apprenticeship with most of them already achieving the NPLQ qualification.

We have held meetings with Northumberland Skills at Blyth as to how we can develop a volunteer scheme within our facility, specifically around refugees, to provide some appropriate work experience in the community.

We have also worked with local providers to be able to store sports wheelchairs at Blyth that enables the delivery of wheelchair Rugby within the Sports Hall (as seen on ITV news). The introduction of wheelchair rugby to Blyth further strengthens the links that the site has to disability groups and groups with accessible needs.

Willowburn were also heavily involved in raising the awareness of people who have stomas, supporting a challenge to swim 10 miles by a local resident with a stoma.

Throughout Q3 the PESS team continued to support schools with developing their daily 60 active minutes as requested by the Chief Medical Officer. They are using student voice to empower young people to lead active healthy lives. We feed information to the NCC Strategic Partnership Group and work collaboratively to ensure all young people are given the best opportunity to have choices.

During Q3 we received 306 referrals into the exercise on referral programme and 251 referrals into the weight management programme. The referral numbers for the exercise on referral programme remain ahead of target to achieve our commissioned 1000 referrals. Again, we have seen an increase in the number of referrals received to the weight management programme. During Q3 we have prepared for the influx of weight management referrals we typically see in the new year and have planned to deliver multiple programmes at several sites.

During Q3 we carried out 203 initial assessments, 86 participants completed their 12-week assessment, and 101 participants completed the scheme. The % of Exercise on Referral

participants who adhere to the programme at 12 and 24 weeks continues to be above target however uptake to the programme from referral is below target.

The total number of attendances at our exercise referral and Active Life was reduced during Q3 because of the break in sessions over the Christmas period.

#### **Q4**

In total we received 1292 referrals to our exercise referral scheme for the year. This is above the 1000 referrals we are commissioned to deliver. Overall, the number of those on the waiting list to join the scheme has increased. This is largely due to an increase in the number of referrals we have received in Q4 for Berwick. The large number of referrals we had waiting to join the program in Cramlington was reduced at the end of Q4.

Overall, we received 935 referrals for our weight management programme over the course of the year. In Q4 we started 11 programmes across the county. As expected, referrals to the service were high in January and February and as a result additional courses will run into the next financial year in order to provide a service for these referrals.

The number of participants live on the exercise referral programme at the end of Q4 was 342. In Q4, we carried out 191 initial assessments, 81 participants completed their 12-week assessment, and 102 participants completed the scheme. Attendance numbers at exercise referral sessions at the end of Q4 were the highest they have been throughout the year.

As a result of the removal of funding for the weight management service for 23/24, during Q4 we have planned how we adapt our service to deliver the best outcomes for our referrals.

#### **Summary**

As one of the largest employers in the County, we strive to offer employment opportunities for residents and then improve our retention through offering a fair salary with added benefits to our people. We continue to be a national living wage employer, ensuring all ages employed receive the same salary.

In total we received 1292 referrals to our exercise referral scheme for the year. This is above the 1000 referrals we were commissioned to deliver. We also received 935 referrals for our weight management programme. As a result of the removal of funding for both exercise referral and weight management in 23/24, we have worked to remodel our offer to provide the best outcomes for our service users. We will continue to deliver exercise referral in 23/24, incorporating those referred for a BMI 25+ who previously would have accessed weight management, into the programme.

### **Adopting a whole system approach to health and social care**

Over the last few years there has been an unprecedented increase in the demand on health and social care, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. The whole system approach in

Northumberland is aligned to the concept of a collaboration of people, services and buildings which have the health and wellbeing as a common concern and interest.

As a charitable organisation and as the largest leisure provider in the County, we are well placed to not only directly provide a health and wellbeing service, but to also link into other organisations to either support or deliver their plans and goals.

## **Q1**

During Q1 we have continued to work closely with Public Health to deliver our exercise on referral and weight management schemes, with the latter designed to help tackle the obesity problem in the County.

As part of the leisure collaborative group, we have provided valuable insight into our membership and usage data to assist with a wider assessment of health inequalities and equity of access to leisure opportunities across the County.

We have also been identified as a strategic partner to sit on the steering group for the weight management health care needs assessment in Northumberland aiming to co-develop an approach to managing healthy weight in adults across the county.

During Q1 we have continued to encourage our colleagues to make every contact count as part of their interactions with every customer and these conversations continue to encourage changes in behaviour that have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and populations.

In January, we also opened our doors to residents who were directly affected by the storms, working closely with partners to ensure that residents had a safe haven, food and drink, and shower facilities at a time of personal distress for many.

## **Q2**

During Q2 we offered our sites up to NCC as Warm Zones for the coming winter months, where residents can use our facilities to keep warm and have a hot drink/meal /shower without having to worry about their own utility costs.

This, of course, could impact upon our ability to reduce our subsidy through increased demand for warm areas and hot water.

During Q2, we continued to deliver Escape Pain at Blyth Sports Centre. Escape Pain is a group rehabilitation programme for people with chronic joint pain that integrates educational self-management and coping strategies with an exercise regimen individualised for each participant. It helps people understand their condition, teaches them simple things they can help themselves with, and takes them through a progressive exercise programme so they learn how to cope with pain better. Musculoskeletal-related pain has a major impact on individuals and society. In the United Kingdom, an estimated 9.3 million working days were lost to musculoskeletal (MSK) pain between 2008-2009 with back, neck, shoulder and knee pain being the most commonly reported MSK problems. MSK-related pain is the second most

common reason for GP visits and accounts for approximately 20-30% of all GP consultations in the UK. Through collaboration with local GP practices in Blyth, we aim to reduce the burden on the NHS and through Escape Pain ensure appropriate self-management techniques are taught reducing further NHS visits.

### **Q3**

Berwick Sports & Leisure Centre continues to trailblaze in the County and following on from the introduction of exercise classes for those who suffer with Parkinson's, the site has now joined with the MS Society Alnwick and District Group to deliver exercise classes to MS sufferers. Thought to be the first of its kind in the County, the class already has 10 regular members who benefit from both chairs based and standing exercises, along with the mental health benefits of a cuppa and a chat afterwards.

Also in the North, at Willowburn, we have worked with Hospice care and NUFC Foundation to deliver dementia football at Willowburn, providing physical activity for dementia sufferers and their carers along with a social gathering afterwards.

Active Northumberland has always taken pride in the service that it has delivered for commissioned services through Public Health, particularly in relation to exercise on referral. Data collated by Active has been used in the production of medical articles and journals to provide national evidence as the success of funding and the wider success of intervention measures to not only improve participants health, but to reduce further costs and burden on the NHS.

In December, we were advised that the funding that was received from Public Health for this critical part of our service was to be withdrawn from the start of the 2023/34 financial year.

Whilst we have adopted the whole system approach to health and social care and worked to deliver to Public Health outcomes, the withdrawal of funding removes a critical piece of this jigsaw.

Nevertheless, as a Company, we believe that there is sufficient evidence to show that this scheme makes a difference to outcomes in the County and work will commence in Q4 to review how we can deliver the same outcomes but through a different methodology and delivery plan.

### **Q4**

As a result of the removal of Public Health funding for our exercise referral and weight management programmes in 23/24, during Q4, we have worked to see how we can remodel our scheme in order to still deliver the best outcomes for our users. From Q1 next year, we plan to continue to deliver our exercise referral scheme. However, those with a BMI of 25+ who previously would have been eligible for referral to our weight management programme, can now be referred to exercise referral. This is a delivery model Active Northumberland have experience in delivering, having previously delivered the scheme in this format before working with Public Health to remodel the scheme to incorporate a tier 2 weight management service.

As a result of these changes, Active Northumberland will no longer deliver a tier 2 weight management programme. We will however continue to explore options for delivery of a tier 2

service. We have attended primary care network meetings to communicate these changes and have written to GP practices.

In Q4, we were identified as a partner to contribute to the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) in relation to Ageing Well. This workshop will take place in Q1 next year.

During Q4 we have been working with Reed Wellbeing who deliver the National Diabetes Prevention Programme in Northumberland. We are working with a wide range of partners to deliver an engagement event to be held in Cramlington at Concordia Leisure Centre. The engagement event will look to bring partners together and raise awareness of activities and services available for those at risk of becoming type 2 diabetic.

Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre have continued to deliver exercise classes for those with Parkinsons and MS. The classes continue to be well attended and provide both physical and social benefits for the participants.

### **Summary**

Active Northumberland has always taken pride in the service that it has delivered for commissioned services through Public Health, particularly in relation to exercise on referral. Data collated by Active has been used in the production of medical articles and journals to clearly evidence we are committed to providing an evidence-based service and contribute to the evidence base around physical activity interventions. In December, we were advised that the funding that was received for this critical part of our service was to be withdrawn from the financial year 2023/34. During the last quarter of the year, we have worked to remodel our scheme and will continue to deliver exercise referral in 23/24. We will continue to work with local GP practices and the wider system including social prescribers, physios, and health trainers to ensure referrals into the programme and that we are providing outcomes to the community. We are looking to expand our delivery of targeted interventions and specialist classes including our exercise sessions for Parkinsons, MS and Escape Pain.

## **Active Northumberland – Service Plan Success 2022-23**

Our annual service plan outlines our intentions to achieve our objectives and improve our organisation. This section covers how we have met our objectives and improved our organisation to date.

### **Improving service quality**

We continue to strive to improve service quality across the organisation, against the backdrop of significant economic challenges facing both the Company and residents.

#### **Q1**

The global shortage of chlorine has continued to be an issue across the whole of Q1, with supplies of liquid sodium hypochlorite becoming scarce, on top of the lack of availability of



HTH products. We have again managed to keep our swimming pools operating during this difficult time by sourcing different suppliers to ensure that we always have a chlorine supply.

We have continued to improve the look of our trading areas and have upgraded the café furniture at Prudhoe Waterworld, with furniture at Concordia due to be delivered Q2.

We have also commenced a roll out of repairs to the furniture at Blyth.

During Q1 we upgraded the Bowling point of sale system at Wentworth, allowing easier booking for customers by introducing online bookings.

We have resurrected our plans for increasing the number of swimming lessons that we deliver as part of the learn 2 swim scheme and hope to begin consultation with staff around this change in Q2. This will increase the number of weeks that we deliver lessons from 46 to 50, ensuring that the service is more accessible across the full year.

## **Q2**

During Q2, HR drafted letters ready to be shared with Unions and contracted swim instructors and we now hope to have full agreement by the end of the year.

Due to the success and growth of the current scheme, we suspended new entries to the scheme as we were faced with a bottleneck in the middle stages. This temporary arrangement allowed for the swim teams to accommodate and move existing people within the scheme to create some movement though the creation of higher stage lessons.

During Q2, we adjusted the lesson structure to increase the amount of middle stage classes. The increase has helped those customers to move classes but as the demand still high and the growth continues to stretch the scheme.

During Q2, the capital works to Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub were completed. The centre has undergone a £1.9m facelift, which has seen it refurbished and remodelled to provide a new community hub and improved sporting offer, along with a function room, community allotment and football pitch. The ground floor gym area has been reconfigured to provide a dedicated cycling/spinning studio while the first floor has been converted into a new gym area with weights and state-of-the-art cardio equipment. In addition, the three squash courts and viewing gallery have been refurbished, and the six-court sports hall has been upgraded. Since opening at the back end of Q2, 84 people have joined the facility with a membership.

In preparation for the summer holidays during Q2, we launched a cross-sell feature on our booking app allowing customers the opportunity to view available activities at other facilities during a period where a lot of activities at their primary facility would be occupied. The cross sell in the app drove upwards of 8k bookings and £30k revenue and provided customers an alternative facility to carry out their activity when their primary facility may have been fully booked.

Responding to customer feedback, work is underway with a digital and marketing agency to create and develop a website that portrays Active Northumberland as a nationally recognised go-to provider for leisure facilities in our County. The aim is to get more people active by delivering a digital experience that attracts more customers by showcasing our places,

products, brands, and activities. To achieve this, we aim to deliver a seamless booking experience which people want to use again, and again.

### **Q3.**

During Q3 we commenced our first meetings with service improvement groups at each site, with the goal of collaborating with onsite teams to improve on how we deliver our services at each site.

Initial meetings were attended by the Director of Operations, Operations Manager and Health and Safety Manager, along with a diverse spread of the work groups at each site. Although the initial meetings tended to be a scoping exercise, some key actions have already been identified that, when implemented, will improve the overall service that we deliver to our customers and communities.

In Q3 we have secured further funding from the FA to deliver girls Disney Inspired festival and teachers CPD event. This is working in collaboration with the Ashington & Coquet girls Football partnership and aims to ensure all girls have equal access to football both in the curriculum time and extracurricular.

Q3 saw the Active team commence the new website design project with Drummond Central (DC) being appointed after a competitive procurement process. The discovery phase of the project including 1-1 interviews with members of staff at Active Northumberland including General Managers, Senior Management team, MEAs and the contact centre to get a rounded view of the business's requirements for content.

The findings from the discovery phase formed the basis of the web design. The pillars of which were:

- Showcase our places: Our buildings, spaces and places
- Showcase our products: Our services – both leisure and fitness
- Showcase our people: Our teams and how they support our customers

The design process included several workshops to create an informative and inspiring series of web pages, and used component-based design which allows Active to manage all of the content internally through the Umbraco platforms Content Management System.

Build was started in November and completed in December, with the Active team uploading all the content for the centres, activities, and information. Photoshoots were undertaken at key centres to showcase the product further including covering accessibility.

Finally, staff members were invited to review the website to help understand any gaps in information or areas of opportunity. The goal being to launch the website on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

### **Q4**

Q4 saw the development of an Elevate focus group to share best practice and highlight any issues with delivery and the onboarding process with our new members. The focus group

included input from our fitness teams and MEA's. The focus group highlighted a consistent approach to Elevate delivery with our core membership. However, the focus group also highlighted that we could engage better with our junior members. Focus group meetings will continue and will focus on our junior members and how we can broaden activities that are available to them.

Quest continues to be the Sport England recommended Continuous Improvement Tool for leisure facilities and sports development teams, designed to measure how effective organisations are at providing customer service. During Q4, three of our facilities were assessed across a range of modules including Operational Management, Customer Journey, and Tackling Inequalities. Berwick were awarded with 'Very Good' quest accreditation.

During Q4 the new website launched which incorporated a mobile first design. The new website increased content for service users around our facilities and activities. Content was added around our Health and Wellbeing services, school services, enhanced accessibility, and environmental strategy. New photography was undertaken to better showcase our services and facilities. The evolved app presentation will make it easier for service users to book popular activities. In addition, app integration with the website will provide a seamless app to web experience and consistent content.

## **Summary**

Responding to customer feedback, we have worked with a digital and marketing agency to create and develop a website that portrays Active Northumberland as a nationally recognised go-to provider for leisure facilities in our County.

The aim is to get more people active by delivering a digital experience that attracts more customers by showcasing our places, products, brands, and activities. To achieve this, we aim to deliver a seamless booking experience which people want to use again, and again. We have launched our new website and continue to look at how we can improve our services. Work is underway to incorporate automated timetables into the website, allowing service users to book popular activities and have access to the latest and up to date content more easily.

We continue to explore how we can improve our business intelligence, tracking our most popular landing pages and activities to enhance our customer journey. We are also developing a help centre page containing frequently asked questions allowing service users to access information that may be relevant and useful.

## **Improving operational efficiency**

### **Q1**

During Q1, we were able to conclude the transfer the management of two facilities out of our portfolio and thereby reduce our operating cost at each of the facilities.

The management of Prudhoe Football & Sports Centre was transferred back to the school on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, with no TUPE implications.

The operation and management of the Pegasus Riding Centre was successfully transferred to Kirkley Hall in May, along with the TUPE transfer of associated staff.

Discussions with Bedlington High school have also commenced with a view to transferring the management of the Sporting Club Bedlington back to the school from September 2022.

## **Q2**

This transfer was successfully concluded during Q2 (31<sup>st</sup> August) with the Northeast Learning Trust taking responsibility for the management of their facility from this date and without the requirement for any TUPE transfer of colleagues. One contracted member of staff and one long term casual team members both chose alternative roles at Hirst and Newbiggin and to stay with Active Northumberland. The Executive Management team continue to work on final reconciliation figures to understand any in year savings that may be achieved.

## **Q3**

Consultation with the swimming instructors over increasing the learn 2 swim programme from 46 weeks to 50 weeks commenced in December, with the objective of having the increased programme being delivered from February 2023, thereby increasing revenue from the programme.

Environmental initiatives that were planned in Q2 were rolled out and implemented across the portfolio. Any initial impacts of these measures will be analysed during Q4.

## **Q4**

During Q4, we concluded the Swimming Instructor Consultation. Current Non-True Casual Swimming Instructors were offered a new 52 week or 39 School / Term Time contract. 40 NTC have now accepted contracts. 24 Contracted Swimming Instructors now have contracts based on their specific delivery. This has offered more job security to those employees and greater control on delivery for Active. Implementation will be the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

Alongside the consultation we have successfully implemented a Market Force adjustment for the Level 2 role. This MFA - D increase has attracted new members of staff from outside the organisation. This will help with the increasing success and growth of the current scheme.

During Q4 we have undertaken several scoping sessions focusing on continued delivery of exercise referral scheme. Through this process, we are looking to develop a scheme which continues to deliver outcomes for service users, whilst improving operational efficiency.

## **Summary**

Throughout the year we have transferred management of a number of facilities out of our portfolio and therefore reduced some of our overall operating costs.

## Improving service usage and retention

### Q1

Through the work of the newly appointed Membership Experience Advisor (MEA) positions the number of new members classified as a sleeper (not attended within 30 days) within the first 90 days of their membership has reduced from 15% to 10% since the start of the quarter.

MEA's have been tasked with ensuring new members are onboarded successfully within their facility. Through ensuring new members are using the facility and are getting the most out of their membership it is hoped that both individual usage and retention will improve.

The newly branded membership journey pathway 'Elevate' was launched for customers at the end of Q1. In June there were 459 'Elevate' sessions booked by customers with an increase expected in Q2. The new member journey will continue to be assessed throughout the year.

This quarter we also launched a fitness challenge that ran across all our facilities to improve member engagement. The challenge required members to join a team headed up by one of our Fitness Managers. The team that generated the most 'MOVES' through using Technogym equipment within our facilities would be the winning team. This challenge engaged over 600 of our members who contributed 'MOVES' to their teams total.

Due to the new Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre, usage at this facility continues to grow. When compared to the last 6 months usage at the old facility, the first 6 months usage at the new centre has seen an 113% increase in gym usage, 75% increase in fitness class usage and 34% increase in public swim usage.

### Q2

'Elevate' sessions have continued throughout Q2. During Q2 we have delivered a total of 2555 Elevate sessions. This includes 1083 'Getting Started' sessions, 694 'Getting Active' sessions, 358 'Stay Focused' sessions and 420 'Junior Elevate' sessions. 'Elevate' sessions are designed to onboard our newly acquired facility users effectively, ensuring they have the relevant knowledge and confidence to exercise towards their fitness goals.

The overall number of facility visits has increased from Q1 in Q2. This is largely driven by an increase in facility usage during the summer holidays. The number of non-member visits increased by 13% during Q2 when compared to Q1. The increase in non-member visits was primarily driven by increases in swimming and softplay facility visits.

MEA's have continued their focus on onboarding our new members who are newer to exercise and continue to engage with the longer-term aim of retaining our members for longer.

During Q2, work has started to assess our digital and virtual physical activity offers across our facilities. Through this work we aim to increase access to physical activity for our members and as a result improve engagement and retention.

### **Q3**

During Q3 we have worked with Northumberland Skills at Blyth to provide lunch time vouchers for those who attend Northumberland Skills sessions.

We introduced pickleball sessions at our facilities at Blyth and Concordia offering a new activity to take place in our sports halls. Pickleball is a form of indoor short tennis for people of all abilities.

'Elevate' sessions have continued throughout Q3. During Q3 we have delivered a total of 2071 Elevate sessions. This includes 834 'Getting Started' sessions, 560 'Getting Active' sessions, 372 'Stay Focused' sessions and 305 'Junior Elevate' sessions. 'Elevate' sessions are designed to onboard our newly acquired facility users effectively, ensuring they have the relevant knowledge and confidence to exercise towards their fitness goals.

Membership Experience Advisors 'MEA's' continue to be in post and have continued their focus onboarding new members to the 'Elevate' programme. MEA's work to ensure new members are booked onto each step of the Elevate programme and therefore receive a personalised fitness programme and support with their goals. It is hoped through ensuring this personalised service and increasing the level of support to our new joiners that more will achieve their goals and retain their membership as a result.

### **Q4**

Due to the increased volume of joiners in the new year, we have delivered an increased number of Elevate sessions in Q4. We delivered a total of 3199 Elevate sessions. This includes 1216 'Get Started', 935 'Get Active', 493 'Stay Focused' sessions and 555 'Junior Elevate' sessions.

Q4 has seen an increase in the number of visits to the facilities. Both member and non-member visits have increased, with a sharp rise in the number of PAYG visits to the gym facilities. PAYG fitness class visits have not risen as sharply due to the high occupancy rates of fitness classes already attended by members. The February half term holidays saw a high number of PAYG swim visits, particularly at Concordia, Prudhoe Waterworld, and Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre.

Despite cost-of-living pressures, retention rates for members coming to the end of their contract remains strong. In Q4 we retained on average 82% of members whose contracts were coming to an end each month.

Active Babies and Active Tots have been developed to support new mums following on from the post natal classes we have on offer as part of our mams on the move program. We have incorporated these sessions as part of the Active Northumberland membership to encourage new mums to retain their membership throughout their pregnancy and immediately after their pregnancy through allowing them to attend pre/post natal classes and Active Babies/Active Tots as part of their membership. The sessions have seen great levels of engagement from both our members and casual members and as a result we will look to expand the Active Babies/Active Tots sessions into some of our other facilities over the coming months.

At Willowburn in the February half term we offered £1 child sessions across a range of activities including multi-sports, bouncy castles, and balance bikes to increase participation in activities for children. Willowburn have also adopted a reduced price for softplay as a trial to try and increase participation and target local groups.

## **Summary**

Compared to 21/22, recorded attendances at our facilities have increased by 95% in 22/23. With the opening of the new Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre it is hoped that this can further increase in 23/24. Work is underway to assess the impact of our MEA's and Elevate service on customer retention. Work is also underway to review our customer journey to ensure new joiners are provided with the support they need to feel empowered to attend our facilities more often.

## **Improving the community representativeness of service**

### **Q1**

During Q1 we initiated our first customer forum groups at Wentworth, engaging with a range of customers on their views of the booking system and the facility timetable for both swimming and fitness.

We also altered our Group Exercise program at Ponteland Leisure Centre to accommodate school exams in our fitness studios over a six-week period, ensuring that we gave the pupils the best opportunity to succeed during their GCSE's.

### **Q2**

During Q2 we continued to liaise with community groups and local partners through our representation at the Ponteland School and Leisure Management Committee.

We also continued to liaise with key partners at Hirst Welfare on a bi-monthly basis and held a series of meetings with customers in relation to the re-opening of Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, culminating in an open day prior to the official opening in conjunction with NCT, signposting residents to the opportunities available to them within the refurbished facility.

As part of the energy crisis and cost of living crisis, we have offered our sites as Warm Spaces, where we hope to be able to offer warm and welcoming buildings to residents to reduce their requirement to operate heating during the winter months.

As part of our Kielder walk event, participants were able to complete their chosen walk alongside members of the Active Northumberland management team. This provided a useful opportunity for the management team to engage with members of the community and a platform for participants to provide feedback of their experiences with Active Northumberland.

### **Q3**

Our sites were officially accepted and advertised as warm spaces, an area where any member of our communities could visit and sit to keep warm or take advantage of our catering offers across the portfolio.

Due to the size and nature of our facilities it is currently difficult to assess how many residents have utilised the sites through this scheme and we would always hope that our facilities are naturally warm and welcoming without the need to publicise that they are warm spaces.

Our GM in the Southeast met with several Age well participants in relation as to how best we can develop their sessions in line with their needs and requirements.

#### **Q4**

We are currently planning a forum with some of our disabled users at Ponteland Leisure Centre to understand their experience of attending our facilities.

In partnership with the Northumberland FA, our facilities are taking part in the Grassboots project. The project seeks to collect good quality, preloved football boots and kit – which has often been grown out of but is still in great condition - and re distributes it to children and families who need it most. Donation points have been set up at a number of our facilities. As well as promoting sustainability, the project aims to address the current cost of living crisis, helping to keep children playing football by removing financial barriers.

During Q4 at the Willowburn Leisure Centre, we continued to support charities by being a drop off location for essential clothing for Ukrainian refugees.

At Berwick, work continued with the NCC Sport Development and the Newcastle United foundation as part of the Get Onside project. Get Onside is a rallying cry to be on the side of change when it comes to gender equality in football. Organisations and individuals across football are committing to take action to improve the landscape for women and girls in the game. As part of this work new sessions and courses have been developed including adult multi-sport, ladies soccercise and an emerging talent centre for girls. During Q4, Berwick LC also supported a local resident with pool time and social media exposure to help raise awareness and funding for motor neuron disease. In total £3525 was raised for swimming 39 miles (62,618 metres).

Our facilities have continued to support Healthwatch Northumberland. Healthwatch Northumberland is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. They are there to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Northumberland and to hear about residents' experiences of using local health and social care services. We are supporting this work by hosting monthly drop ins and advertising these events on our social media channels.

#### **Summary**



Throughout the year we have worked to ensure our services are representative of the communities they serve. We have held customer forum groups, receiving feedback on the range and times of available activities, informing timetabling within facilities. We have worked with a wide range of partners and charities to help support communities. We are often hosting organisations such as banks or those in the VCS to provide access to the community using our facilities.

We continue to work with the sports development team to ensure a range of accessible activities across the county. This is an area we will look to further develop in 23/24. As a result of COVID, a number of specialist sessions for those with disabilities had stopped. This is something we will look to enhance provision of in 23/24.

## Improving service user satisfaction

### **Q1**

As detailed earlier, we suspended entry to the learn to swim scheme to allow movement of existing users to higher stage lessons to remove a bottleneck created by the success of the scheme and the lack of teachers to deliver additional lessons. Once the bottleneck is removed, we will reopen the lower stages to meet the current demand.

During Q1 we received 423 customer comment cards. Over 60% of these comments were responded to within 2 days and 43% of these comments were resolved within a 2-day period. Assessing our customer feedback monthly allows us to identify areas of the business in which the number of comments has increased and allows us to address any issues that have arisen.

Active Northumberland, in conjunction with Sport England and Moving Communities are contributing to research to understand the participant experience of using public leisure centres and their activity habits. The Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey was sent out to our facility users during Q1. This survey aims to assess customer perceptions and satisfaction with their chosen facility with the aim of improving facilities and services going forward.

### **Q2**

During Q2, we received 479 customer comment cards. 60 % of these comments were responded to within 2 days and 46% of these comments were resolved within a 2-day period.

In this quarter we completed a brand tracking exercise giving the opportunity for our members and non-members to feedback what the Active Northumberland brand meant to them. This allowed us to assess the current market and drivers of attendance and membership. We were able to get valuable feedback on the awareness and perceptions of the Active Northumberland brand. We also received NPS (net promotor score) and CSAT (customer satisfaction) scores for our facilities along with valuable individual centre feedback.

### **Q3**

During Q3, we received 407 customer comment cards. 64% of these comments were responded to within 2 days and over half of all comments resolved within a 2-day period.

During Q3 we began to develop a survey for users who had booked and attended an 'Elevate' session in order to gain valuable customer feedback.

#### **Q4**

During Q4 we received 704 customer comment cards. 46% of these comments were responded to within 2 days and just under half of these comments were resolved within a 2-day period.

As part of our brand tracking, we have asked members for feedback regarding the service we provide. 66% of member respondents agree our centres have 'friendly, helpful staff'. 74% of members respondents agree we are their 'preferred place to work out'.

During Q4 our facilities took part in the 'Lets Move for a Better World' challenge ran by Technogym. The global event challenges gym facilities across the globe to donate 'MOVES' by completing physical activity within a facility. The challenges pits facilities across the country against each other in order to be the facility with the highest amount of 'MOVES' donated. The challenge proved a success with over 45,921,811 MOVES logged in the UK alone and Active Northumberland seeing two of their centres in the top 20 spots. Berwick Sports & Leisure Centre came an impressive #15 in the country with 514,829 MOVES and Blyth Sports & Leisure Centre achieved #17 in the country with a close 512,880 MOVES. As a combined total Active Northumberland achieved an impressive 2,155,152 MOVES. The challenge allows members within the facility to work together to increase the facilities total, increasing the sense of community within facilities.

During Q4 there were various small upgrades that took place across facilities to improve service user satisfaction. At Willowburn, upgrades including repairs, painting and decorating took place within the facility.

#### **Summary**

As an organisation we continue to collate and respond to customer feedback. Our process for addressing customer comments and complaints ensures a quick response and resolution. Throughout the year we have completed brand tracking exercises, gathering feedback from our service users regarding the service we provide and areas for improvement.

As part of our QUEST assessments, we have received feedback and comments on areas which we can improve. As a result of these comments, a service improvement plan will be created and implemented to ensure we provide the best possible service for our users.

### **Improving employee satisfaction**

As reported in our outcomes report in 2021/22, we launched Version 2 of the Future Fit learning and development platform providing the Active workforce access to a wide variety of online courses including Equality and Diversity, Fire Safety, Mental Health Awareness and Safeguarding. The new platform enables all Active team members access to the full library of

courses available. We have been monitoring our completion rates and encouraging those who are not fully compliant to undertake all required modules.

## **Q1**

During Q1 we have continued to focus on encouraging our colleagues to undertake the appropriate training to ensure that they have all the skills required to undertake their roles. At the end of Q1, we had achieved 83% compliance for all required learning and our teams had completed 6025 modules.

To support this focus, we have developed a staff area on our app, where colleagues can not only access their training, but can also access our people policies and receive push notifications to improve our communication channels.

To encourage personal development amongst our middle management team, we had 9 Duty Managers initially sign up for a Duty Manager apprenticeship.

As part of our budget setting exercise, we agreed to continue to offer Westfield Health staff benefits for this financial year.

In response to the staffing shortage in the industry, we offered our colleagues a financial incentive to refer a friend to work with us, resulting in the reward being paid after their friend has worked with us for 3 months and worked an average of 10 hours a week.

## **Q2**

Our team members continue to work through our mandatory training modules and Active Northumberland specific Policies. At the close of Q2 we have 84.5% of the workforce fully compliant, 5.5% with training which has expired and 10% which is overdue. The General Manager team continue to monitor their sites performance and encouraging their workforce to make sure they are compliant.

We continue to provide useful service updates through our app and internal communications to ensure staff are up to date with the latest news and changes.

The number of Duty Managers who have signed up to the Duty Manager apprenticeship has increased from 9 to 11 at the end of Q2. This provides a personal development opportunity amongst our middle managers and should help to retain them as part of our team.

During Q2 we launched our Active Heart scheme for Active Northumberland staff. Each month the management team highlight members of staff within their facility who have delivered great customer service or performed exceptionally within their role, and they are nominated to receive an Active Heart. Winners are shared as part of the weekly staff

communications. This has been introduced as a mechanism to recognise and reward staff for their hard work and to ensure this does not go unnoticed.

Work to provide a staff awards night has continued in Q2 and will take place in Q3. Again, this will provide an opportunity to ensure staff feel their work is valued and recognised.

### **Q3**

With the desire to increase our learn 2 swim scheme to 50 weeks, we commenced consultation with our swimming workforce around our proposals. During consultation we advised that this was an opportunity to reward our instructors with permanent contracts, which has been an action plan to achieve since just before the pandemic began. Once we complete the consultation, we will be able to move some of our non-true casual colleagues onto appropriate contracts of employment.

During this period, we also took the opportunity to undertake a competitor analysis into pay rates for instructors, both swimming and exercise, due to the difficult nature of attracting new staff into these roles. The review concluded that in order to be competitive, we would need to increase our hourly rate for both swimming and exercise instructors.

A paper was presented to Board, where it was agreed to pay market force supplement to swimming instructors and to increase the market force supplement for exercise instructors. This would ensure that we would pay £17 per hour for a swimming instructor and £22 per hour for exercise instructors but allowing us to attract and retain professional colleagues to support the ongoing delivery of our programmes.

Our team members continue to work through our mandatory training modules and Active Northumberland specific Policies. At the close of Q3 we have 86.2% of the workforce fully compliant, 8.5% with training which has expired and 5.3% which is overdue.

During Q3 we developed a new suite of FLEX reports for the Senior Managers designed to assist the General Managers in identifying up-and-coming expired modules. Since its introduction we have managed to cleanse our sites (removed staff from the database) and updated the staffing information to make the reports more accurate. We will continue to work with Future Fit to develop the next wave of weekly reporting in Q4.

During Q3 we hosted our staff awards night to celebrate the achievements of our workforce throughout the year. Over 200 staff were present, and transport was provided to and from each of the facilities ensuring employees from all over the county could attend. Various awards were presented on the night including centre and employee of the year. Overall, the night was a big success and well received by members of staff.

### **Q4**

During Q4, we concluded the Swimming Instructor Consultation. Current Non-True Casual Swimming Instructors were offered a new 52 week or 39 School / Term Time contract. 40

NTC have now taken a contract. 24 Contacted Swimming Instructor now have contracts based on their delivery. This has offered more job security to the employee and greater control for Active. Implementation of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

Alongside the consultation we successfully have implemented a Market Force Allowance to the Level 2 role. This MFA - D increase has attracted new members of staff from outside the organisation. This will only help with the increasing success and growth of the current scheme,

In Q4 we continued to develop additional reporting methods and information gathering for our Mandatory Training Platform FLEX. The platform now identifies the CPD points allocated to each of our Mandatory Training Modules. Our modules equate to 16.5 annual CPD points, 6.5 more than the annual CPD points recommended by CIMSPA.

### **Summary**

As an organisation we have implemented a number of initiatives throughout the year to ensure our employees feel valued and satisfied within their roles. During Q3 we hosted our staff awards night to celebrate the achievements of our workforce throughout the year. Over 200 staff were present, and transport was provided to and from each of the facilities ensuring employees from all over the county could attend. We also took the opportunity to undertake a competitor analysis into pay rates for instructors, both swimming and exercise, due to the difficult nature of attracting new staff into these roles. The review concluded that in order to be competitive, we would need to increase our hourly rate for both swimming and exercise instructors which has now been implemented.

We continue to support our staff through access to CPD. Our Flex platform allows access to a range of courses and CPD which is constantly being updated to reflect changes in the industry. Access allows staff to feel confident within their job roles to deal with a wide range of challenges.

This year we have also launched our Active Heart Scheme, allowing staff to be nominated by their fellow employees for delivering great customer service or performing exceptionally within their role. This ensures staff feel appreciated and acknowledged for their hard work. We have also continued to invest in Westfield Health to ensure our employees have access to wellbeing services.

## Reducing environmental impact

We are fully aware that the carbon footprint of our portfolio, is one of the largest in the Council and combined with the spiralling cost of energy, the noticeable increase in the impacts upon global warming, we have a responsibility to work with the Council towards their target of being a net zero County by 2030.

The Capital investment strategy of the Council will ensure that by the end of this financial year that three of our older leisure centres will be replaced by new energy efficient buildings that have been constructed using high efficiency building materials, including high density insulated cladding, high energy-efficient glazing with thermal screening, air source heat pumps (Morpeth) which use outside heat to help power the buildings, LED lighting throughout, and photovoltaic (PV) solar panels. These will all help to reduce the carbon footprint of the new and contribute to the council's vision of a net zero-carbon economy.

The ventilation systems at these sites, will also use the latest 'smart' technology to increase control and efficiency through the building management system.

### Q1

Despite several issues with the completion of the Ground Source Heat Pumps at Willowburn, they were commissioned for Q2, but will run alongside the operation of the Gas Boilers in the first instance. Work to install solar panels at Blyth was completed during Q1, completing the installation programme following from the installs at Prudhoe and Wentworth.

We will continue to work closely with the Council's Energy Team to monitor energy consumption, although benchmarking against the last two years will be difficult due to facility closures during periods of lockdown and operating restrictions.

To support our carbon reduction initiatives, we will focus upon reducing our waste by increasing our efforts to design out waste, keeping materials in operation and productive use for as long as possible and work with NCC to increase recycling across the Estate.

During Q1 we have worked with Neighbourhood Services to review our waste contracts, with a view to increase the number of commercial waste collections that we currently receive. To support this, we have also reviewed how we collect recycling waste across the Estate and hope to have new internal recycling bins within our facilities that will ultimately reduce our waste to landfill.

As we continue to build on our HIVE brand, one of the key elements that we are very passionate about is wherever possible we have selected local suppliers and ensure both parties have strong environmental ethos. We try to be kinder to the environment by using plant based and compostable packaging.

During Q1 we have continued to operate our ventilation at increased levels to ensure that we continue to bring fresh air into the building to protect both colleagues and customers from the increase in Covid in the County.

Having recognised the importance of swimming pool covers to reduce heat loss in our swimming pools, we have taken costs to the capital strategy group to consider for replacement of worn covers.

## **Q2**

During Q2 we updated our Environmental Policy to recognise the exponential global rise in energy costs, the visible effects that climate change is having upon the world in which we live and the requirement of the Company to demonstrate responsible behaviour to contribute to a sustainable environment for everyone. One of the key areas of the strategy is to create an Environmental Management System (EMS) that will provide the company with a framework through which our environmental performance can be monitored, improved, and controlled, by setting out objectives and targets as part of our strategy.

The Senior Management team have subsequently created an action plan to reduce energy costs across the Estate, to be implemented over the next 12 months:

- Operate leisure pools at 30C (Q3)
- Operate standard pool at 28C (Q3)
- Operate learner pools at 28C (Q3)
- Reduce pool air temps (Q3)
- Reduce Sauna Temps to 80C (Q3)
- Reduce Spa temps to 36C (Q3)
- Review operation of BMS System
- Review operation of VSD
- Switch off fitness equipment overnight
- Switch off catering equipment overnight
- Install Pool covers where required
- Explore the option of reintroducing Biomass at Wentworth.
- Cost up early closure of Morpeth Pool

To help with the delivery of energy reduction plans, we launched a recruitment strategy to identify 10 Energy Champions across the estate. These Energy Champions will make sure that good housekeeping and carbon reduction measures are a daily habit. The Energy Champions will be supported by an Environmental Control qualification delivered by our partners Right Directions.

In order that we are transparent on our environmental strategy, we have planned for the introduction of public facing environmental boards to display our key environmental messages to the community detailing how we intend to manage our carbon footprint reduction and recycling plans, and how they can contribute.

## **Q3**

During Q3 we began to implement some of the energy saving measures, as highlighted above in order to reduce our energy usage and costs across the portfolio. The Executive team explored the opportunities of mothballing the swimming pool at Morpeth Riverside prior to the new facility opening but decided that the loss of income would be too great.

At Concordia, work commenced and was completed on the replacement of the air handling unit in the swimming pool area. During this period, the centre team were able to keep the pool open to the public, despite having no heating in the changing rooms and the pool hall being

heated by electric blowers. The new air handling unit should prove to be more energy efficient.

As part of the environmental strategy, the order for new recycling bins was placed, which will allow increased recycling opportunities for customers and colleagues.

We also met with our waste provider (NCC) to identify how we could increase the amount of recycling that is collected by the refuse team, agreeing that the waste team would undertake a detailed review of the opportunities available at each site. This will lead to reduced waste sent to landfill and hopefully a reduction in the number of collections required on a weekly basis.

Environmental champions were appointed in Q3 and will receive appropriate environmental training in Q4. Following the environmental training the champions will undertake a series of energy reducing measures, including an out of hours survey, creation of energy consumption league tables and introduce an environmental management section on our daily walk the floor check sheets.

#### **Q4**

Our new public facing environmental boards were installed across all sites, publicising our commitment to reducing our environmental impact across the County. The Boards provide a great visual for both staff and customers to understand our current impact at each site in terms of utilities, water, and waste to landfill, along with our policy and plan to reduce consumption in each of the reported areas.

We also met with representatives from NCC to discuss any early impacts of the energy reduction measures that have been implemented.

During Q4, three of our facilities (Ashington, Berwick & Wentworth) were QUEST assessed. The assessment is the UK's Quality Scheme for Sport & Leisure Operators which concentrates on five specific modules and Environmental Management was one of them. Our facilities scored very good for our environmental management, the second highest score, within the assessment.

#### **Summary**

As an organisation, we updated our Environmental Policy to recognise the exponential global rise in energy costs, the visible effects that climate change is having upon the world in which we live and the requirement of the company to demonstrate responsible behaviour to contribute to a sustainable environment for everyone. One of the key areas of the strategy is to create an Environmental Management System (EMS) that will provide the company with a framework through which our environmental performance can be monitored, improved, and controlled, by setting out objectives and targets as part of our strategy. As part of this work, we recruited and trained environmental champions to ensure carbon reduction measures are a daily habit. We have installed public facing environmental boards across our facilities, ensuring we are transparent with our commitment to reducing our environmental impact across the county. As part



of QUEST, our facilities scored very good for environmental management, the second highest score possible in the assessment.

## Reducing public subsidy:

The public sector continues to face unprecedented financial, health and social challenges due to the cost-of-living crisis, compounded by the war in Ukraine and the ongoing problem of Covid.

Against the financial demands faced by the Council and the Company, we believe that Active Northumberland continues to be best placed to help the Council meet these health and social challenges and to help readdress health inequalities and to help break down barriers to enable residents who are socially excluded, disadvantaged, isolated and vulnerable to participate in physical activities to achieve their wellness goals.

We believe that, despite the rising utility costs, the service that we deliver continues to offer a significant amount of social return on investment. Our services can be directly linked to reducing the amount spent by the NHS on medication, surgery, cancer care and post operative surgery alone.

Any increase in memberships, exercise referrals via a GP, self-referrals for Obesity, Cardiac Rehabilitation, walkers, children undertaking physical activity, increases the social return on investment and reduces the public subsidy.

However, our commitment to working with the Council to reduce public subsidy does not stop at just operating a leisure service on behalf of the Council. We believe that we can reduce the public subsidy by undertaking significant support work for the Council, that is often not seen as part of our role.

As mentioned earlier in this document, the role that we were able to undertake to support the Civil Contingencies team and the emergency services by providing rest and welfare facilities for our residents during the January storms, would have saved the taxpayer should the Council have had to pay for private businesses to offer this support in these areas.

We continue to work with the Council with their review of Leisure Services and are in dialogue around a potential new partnership agreement to run concurrently from when the current extension to the agreement ends in March 2023.

## Q1

We have reduced our subsidy in Q1 through the transfer of Prudhoe Sporting Club and Pegasus Riding Centre to the relevant educational trusts and continue to work with NCC as part the wider leisure service review.

Q1 operating for the new Berwick Leisure Centre has seen increased income, led by a substantial increase in new memberships and an increased demand for public swimming (the first 6 months usage at the new centre has seen a 113% increase in gym usage, 75% increase in fitness class usage and 34% increase in public swim usage).

## **Q2**

Although we would have reduced our subsidy through the transfer of Bedlington Sporting Club to the Northeast Learning Trust in Q2, this amount of saving pales into insignificance with the exponential energy costs that the Company now faces.

We have undertaken significant costing exercises with our Finance Manager to understand the significant impact that energy costs will increase by the end of the year and are working closely with NCC to reduce our energy costs wherever possible (see Environmental Impact section for detail).

At the other end of energy savings, comes our community responsibility and during Q2 we offered our sites up to NCC as Warm Places for the coming winter months, where residents can use our facilities to keep warm and have a hot drink/meal /shower without having to worry about their own utility costs.

This, of course, could impact upon our ability to reduce our subsidy through increased demand for warm areas and hot water.

## **Q3**

Although we have not been providing management arrangements for the Sporting Club Bedlington, we have been unable to finalise the accounts due to the inability of the school to provide utility information and outstanding costs.

The specific programmes that we have created for sufferers of MS, Parkinson's, and Dementia in Berwick and Willowburn will ultimately reduce demands on the NHS through increased mobility and improved mental health of the participants and their carers.

We have implemented our energy reduction plan in a bid to reduce our energy usage and ultimately our energy costs, thereby reducing our subsidy.

Despite the cost-of-living crisis, direct debit membership at the end of Q3 remains higher than the beginning of the financial year. We have forecast for our membership to grow further during Q4 with strong sales expected in January and February. We will continue to closely monitor the number of cancellations related to financial reasons.

Due to our Christmas promotion the number of annual payment members has increased at the end of Q3. 316 customers purchased either a 7- or 12-month membership to one of our facilities with the promotion as a whole generating over £80k in income.

#### **Q4**

Despite cost-of-living pressures, we have achieved over 5% growth in the number of direct debit members at our facilities from the start of the year. In addition, due to the success of our Christmas promotion and the addition of a one-month upfront membership, the number of our annual payment members has increased by 50%. We have also seen growth within our Learn 2 Swim programme.

Over the last year we have continued to optimise our operating costs through reducing our energy and water consumption, as well as recycling more of our waste. We have also reviewed our suppliers to ensure we are getting the best value for our members. Our aim is always to make our services as accessible as we can but the unprecedented pressure on costs means we now find it necessary to review our pricing. However, as a not-for-profit charity we have aimed to keep any increase as low as possible. Pricing changes will come into effect in April 2023. There will be no increase in price for the following memberships:

- Junior members
- Armed forces
- Concessions members that are linked to qualifying income support / benefits

#### **Summary**

Throughout the year we have transferred management of a number of facilities out of our portfolio and therefore reduced our operating costs. We have implemented our energy reduction plan in order to reduce our energy usage and as a result reduce our energy costs and subsidy. Despite cost-of-living pressures, we achieved over 5% growth in the number of direct debit members at our facilities from the start of the year, increasing income as a result. We continue to strive to ensure our services are as accessible as possible, however unprecedented pressures on costs have resulted in a small pricing increase to be implemented in 23/24. We continue to be rigorous with our competitor analysis, ensuring we provide the best possible service for our users at a competitive price point.

## Growing revenue

#### **Q1**

Through the proposed changes to the learn to swim scheme, we should grow our revenue in line with the increased number of weeks that we will deliver the scheme. The risk of cancellation from customers is mitigated by the fact that our learn to swim scheme continues to grow across the board, with an average occupancy rate of 93% (against a target of 85%) and an average increase in the number of participants of around 33% compared with pre-pandemic figures.

- April - Participants 6299 - 34% increase on March 2020 with an Occupancy of 92%
- May - Participants 6352 - 35% increase on March 2020 with an Occupancy of 95%
- June - Participants 6190 - 32% increase on March 2020 with an Occupancy of 91%

To support our plan to grow revenue in this area, we launched our aquatics helpers programme, where 12 candidates volunteered 30 hours of shadowing alongside our Level 2 Instructors and have successfully now passed their SEQ Level 1 course. 8 are ready to move onto their SEQ Level 2.

By the end of Q2, we hope these 8 candidates are successful in passing the SEQ Level 2 course and with an additional 30 hours of supported delivery will be ready to start delivering.

## **Q2**

The scheme reopened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August

- July – Participants 5858-Occupancy of 87%
- August - Participants 6021-Occupancy of 90%
- September - Participants 6450-Occupancy of 94%

During Q2 we have had 11 candidates successfully pass their Swim England Level 2. qualification, they are now delivering lessons and helping to maintain Learn 2 Swim Scheme.

In conjunction with the Institute of Swimming, we also commenced recruitment to our next academy intake, commencing in September. Our initial advert attracted 28 hopefuls, and the IOS successfully identified the 12 candidates who will commence their level 1 course in September, hopefully then progressing onto level 2 by the end of Q3.

We are pleased to also report that our number of monthly fitness direct debits has grown 2.4% from the start of the financial year to the end of Q1 and that our membership yield has increased since the start of the financial year, as those on an NCC offer membership are now starting to pay.

We are balancing cancellations against sales to ensure we maintain an overall growth; this is certainly challenging at this time of year however we feel with the intervention from the MEA's this will really help retention.

We do, however, continue to face significant challenges whilst growing revenue due to the current economic climate and the financial pressures facing both businesses and individuals, which could be greatly increased in the Autumn when both heating costs and usage will increase.

Increased transport and fuel costs is already having an impact on some school's bookings for the 2022 - 2023 academic year with some schools, especially those in outlying areas, reducing their bookings by 50%.

The number of monthly direct debits has increased 3.89% from the end of Q1 to the end of Q2. This is despite an increase in membership turnover driven by an increase in cancellations. The proportion of memberships that are being cancelled due to financial reasons has increased in Q2.

During Q2 we have had 11 candidates successfully pass their Swim England Level 2. qualification, they are now delivering lessons and helping to maintain Learn 2 Swim Scheme.

In conjunction with the Institute of Swimming, we also commenced recruitment to our next academy intake, commencing in September. Our initial advert attracted 28 hopefuls, and the IOS successfully identified the 12 candidates who will commence their level 1 course in September, hopefully then progressing onto level 2 by the end of Q3.

### **Q3**

We continue to make changes to the learn to swim scheme, based on the demand for middle stage classes and the workforce pressures. We have witnessed a drop in numbers for this quarter, which goes with the trend of dipping before Christmas. Maybe owing to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. We will monitor this closely over Q4. Trends would suggest that there is normally an increase in numbers during Q4.

- October – Participants 6391 -Occupancy of 92%
- November - Participants 6350-Occupancy of 91%
- December - Participants 6101-Occupancy of 87%

However, our plans to increase our learn to swim programme to 50 weeks moved one step closer as we commenced consultation with our swim workforce. During the initial consultation period, we held meetings with both contracted and non-contracted colleagues, with initial feedback being very positive.

During Q3 we have been working with the IOS to organise and plan courses to train and qualify new swimming instructors for 2023 with the apprentices looking to complete their SEQ Level1 course in February.

### **Q4**

We continue to make changes to the learn to swim scheme, based on the demand for middle stage classes we have adjusted the programme to help with the bottlenecks within the Stage 4 & 5/6 classes. The Recruitment Academy and the Aquatic helper programmes have helped with the stability of the workforce pressures. We will continue to drive recruitment to help expand the North, Central and Southeast areas. We haven't significant witnessed a drop in numbers for this quarter, which goes against the trend of Q3. Maybe owing to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. We will monitor this closely over Q4. Q4 has proven the normal increase in numbers during Q4.

- January – Participants 6358 -Occupancy of 92%
- February - Participants 6418-Occupancy of 91%
- March - Participants 6470-Occupancy of 90%

We have successfully implemented the plans to increase the Learn 2 Swim programme to 50 weeks. With the completion of the consultation with our swim workforce.

During Q4 we have launched round three of the Recruitment Academy. A staggering 22 applicant were shorted listed from 48, the largest number of applicants to date. The implementation of the MFA, increasing the hourly rate to £17 per hour has help attract those looking for a change of career. We continue to grow our own Aquatic Helper programme, successfully helping six through their SEQ Level 1 qualification.

We have a series of job adverts on Indeed, Northeast Jobs and our careers page of our website to help attract qualified swimming teachers to our facilities. We have seen an increase in applications since the hourly rate increase and since we have made the adverts site specific.

We have seen strong sales performance in Q4. As expected, there was an increase in direct debit sales in January, however, sales in February and March have also been above target. Despite the strong sales performance, the overall number of direct debit members has only increased by 3.7% from Q3. The opening of a Puregym in Blyth has had an impact on the number of direct debit members at the facility, with a number of male members 18-35 cancelling their memberships. Despite this, in anticipation of the opening of the new Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre the number of members at this facility has increased, with further increases forecast for Q1 next year.

## **Summary**

Despite cost-of-living pressures, we have seen over 5% growth in direct debit members since the start of the year. With the new Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre opening in 23/24, it is hoped that the overall number of direct debit members will increase in 23/24. Alongside cost-of-living pressures, we have also seen the introduction of some budget competitors in some areas of the County. We will continue to monitor the impact of this on our membership and penetration in the relevant areas. Despite trying to ensure services are as accessible as possible, we have taken the decision to implement a small price increase in 23/24 which will generate further income. The Learn to Swim programme has continued to grow and as a result generate more income. Work is underway to redevelop and rebrand our party offering across our facilities. 'Active Parties' will ensure a consistent approach across sites to party delivery and will ensure enhanced capacity to deliver, generating more income as a result.

## **Ensuring performance against budget profile**

Our Senior Executive team continue to meet with our Finance Manager from NCC on a monthly basis to receive a detailed budget report that is then presented bi-monthly to our finance and audit committee.

Our Senior Management team have re-commenced monthly finance meetings with the NCC Accounts Team to discuss their budget in detail in order that they fully understand their performance and forecasted budget position.

Although current fitness direct debit membership forecasts suggest that income will exceed the budget figure at the end of the financial year, the potential impact of the cost-of-living crisis could have the potential to alter this projection.

To achieve the fitness direct debit budget this year the number of cancellations each month should not exceed the number of joiners. This has been achieved so far and future months will be closely monitored.

## **Q1**

At the end of Q1 the current budget position on fitness direct debits forecasts additional income of circa 50K compared to budget at the end of the financial year.

The current Learn to Swim forecasts also suggest overperformance compared to budget. This is despite the current suspension on enrolment of new learners into the scheme. To reflect this, forecasts will be monitored and amended as required each month to assess the financial impact.

One area which is currently performing under budget is casual fitness class income. Due to the high occupancy rates of our classes and the number of direct debit and annual payment members attending, there are a limited number of spaces for casual users to attend. This reduction in income will be offset by the increase in direct debit income. This will continue to be monitored monthly.

As previously mentioned, Increased transport and fuel costs is already having an impact on some school's bookings for the 2022 - 2023 academic year with some schools, especially those in outlying areas, reducing their bookings by 50%. The financial impact of this will continue to be monitored.

## **Q2**

We continued to overperform in fitness direct debit sales during Q2 at all nine large facilities, resulting in us now forecasting additional income of circa 185k compared to budget at the end of the financial year. However, despite strong sales performance we did see an increase in fitness direct debit cancellations at the end of Q2 which we will monitor closely during Q3.

We reopened enrolment to our learn2swim program during Q2 and have continued to see continuous growth in income. We are now forecasting additional income of circa 215k against

budget by the end of the financial year. However, by the end of Q2 we were once again achieving maximum occupancy levels for the program resulting in very few opportunities to grow the scheme.

### **Q3**

During Q2 we began to see an increase in the number of cancellations. This has continued throughout Q3 no doubt in part due to the cost-of-living crisis. We are continuing to monitor our cancellation reasons closely to assess any increase in proportion cancelling for financial reasons. We are also monitoring cancellations by index of multiple deprivation to monitor whether a higher proportion of members from the most deprived quintiles are cancelling their memberships. Despite the challenges we are facing with cancellations the number of direct debit memberships at the end of Q3 was higher than the beginning of the financial year, and with growth scheduled for January and February we remain confident of achieving against budget.

At the end of Q3 the current forecast for health and fitness direct debits indicates additional income of 338k against budget by the end of the financial year. The Learn 2 Swim scheme forecast indicates additional income of 287k against budget.

### **Q4**

We have seen strong sales performance in Q4. As expected, there was an increase in direct debit sales in January, however, sales in February and March have also been above target. The number of direct debit memberships increased by 3.7% from Q3. As a result, the direct debit income received in Q4 so far has increased from Q3. At the end of Q4, the current forecast for health and fitness direct debits indicates additional income of 500k against budget. A successful Christmas promotion over the festive period and the New Year saw an increase in annual payment income in January. At the end of Q4 the current forecast for pre-payment memberships indicates additional income of 170k against budget. Increases in casual gym usage in Q4 has seen an increase in PAYG gym income in January and February. PAYG income for fitness classes has also increased in Q4, however, due to limited availability throughout the year due to classes being occupied by members, overall PAYG fitness income is set to underperform against budget. The Learn to Swim scheme continues to perform strongly and forecasts indicate additional income of 306k against budget for the financial year.

### **Summary**

Despite cost-of-living pressures and an increase in the number of cancellations throughout the year, forecasts suggest an improved position against budget for the majority health and fitness departments. Alongside financial pressures facing service users, we have also seen competition increase for their service with budget competitors opening in the Southeast of the County. Notwithstanding these challenges, the end of the financial year will see us perform above budget expectations. With the opening of the new Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre



early in Q1 next year, it is hoped we can further increase income and memberships as a result.

## Attracting external grant support

Although not an external grant, as such, the apprenticeship levy is a form of taxation designed to help companies offer more apprenticeships.

During Q1 we undertook a review of the amount that was held within our fund and devised the 2022/23 plan as to how to use the funds to best suit the needs of the business.

The plan has already been mentioned in several sections within the document.

## Capital Investment

The continued capital investment in a number of leisure facilities has progressed well and work continues to move in the right direction. Since the completed refurbishment of Blyth Sports Centre in October 2021, investment works have continued to take place across three main developments at Newbiggin, Berwick and Morpeth as part of the agreed investment programme.

### **Refurbishment of Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre**

We see Newbiggin Sports, and Community centre open, which has been a welcome boost for the community.

As part of the wider development £250k Football Foundation funding was secured to complete works to the external football pitches. The pitch maintenance works have now been completed during quarter 1 however due to the bedding in of the new pitches they will be out of use until summer 2023.

### **Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre New Build**

The external works to the car park and landscaping as well as the demolition of the old centre are projected to be fully completed by Summer 2023. We have started to decant the old site ready for closure.

### **Morpeth Leisure Centre New Build**

During the first quarter construction works have continued to progress well on site at the new site on Gas House Lane. No significant issues have been identified which could disrupt the building program and therefore the development continues to be on track for a Spring 2023 opening.

The new centre will contain a spa facility, a new gym and fitness area, a dedicated cycling (spinning) studio and two other fitness studios, a cafe area and soft play.

The development on Gas House Lane will also incorporate the town's library, a council customer service centre and Northumberland Skills' new learning facility for school leavers and adults.

Work has continued throughout Q4 to ensure the facility is ready to open early in Q1 next year.

### **Leisure Remedial Programme**

Active Northumberland continue to work closely with the Council's Property Services department and Capital delivery team to implement a Planned Preventative Maintenance programme (PPM) which in the first instance address es key remedial works identified in leisure site condition surveys. The programme priorities have identified a number of key remedial works following a review of both condition survey priorities and on-site operational input where any backlog maintenance issues could have a significant impact on key operational and financial aspirations, reduced levels of customer satisfaction and unplanned closures.

By the end of quarter 1 progress continues to be made on a number of major leisure remedial projects including;

The appointment of Malones as the chosen contractor to undertake the Air Handling Unit replacement work servicing the pool hall area at Concordia Leisure Centre. During quarter 1 preparation works have been taking place with regards to the roof reinforcement works with onsite works due to take place between September-December 2022.

Proposal and costings exercise completed for the replacement of a new sports hall floor at Concordia Leisure Centre. The floor has been subject to ongoing maintenance over the 45-year period and although the sub floor is structurally sound the top finish is now in a poor state of repair. The most cost-effective option is to replace the current floor (Granwood) with a specialist sports floor finish laid on top of the existing floor. The new product proposed is Tarkett Omnisport's Active Loose Lay.

Phase 1 proposal completed for the refurbishment and installation of a Hive café and Softplay area at Wentworth Leisure Centre. The scheme will now be subject to a full tender process for the appointment of a contractor to undertake the works later in the year.

A review of the current 22/23 and the proposed 23/24 Leisure Remedial programme is planned for quarter 2.



## Active Northumberland Review

2022/2023 performance vs 2021-2022  
Alongside 2023/2024 year to date

# Contents



1. About Active
2. Vision and strategy
3. Financial performance
4. Membership numbers
5. Usage and trends
6. Products - Health & wellbeing
7. People
8. Places

# 1. About Active

Active Northumberland formed in 2014, and was born from a merger of five leisure providers across the region with the goal to improve the overall service offering under a collective vision:

## To be the best community leisure centre and wellness provider in the UK

A registered charity, Active Northumberland manages, operates and maintains 14 leisure centres and community facilities on behalf of Northumberland County Council under a Partnership Service Level Agreement focused on providing the best leisure and fitness experience for the county whilst successfully contributing to Northumberland County Council's corporate plan.

The business encompasses fitness and gym memberships, aquatic services, catering, vending and retail, and leisure attractions; operated by a highly experienced leisure management team and overseen by an independent board of directors.





## 2. Vision and strategy

Whilst we continue to see ever changing and challenging external factors across the industry, our mission and vision remain the same as we stay focused on our goal **to be the best community leisure and wellness provider in the UK.**

We will achieve this through the delivery of our mission.

### OUR MISSION

**To have the best people in the best places delivering the best experience for our customers enjoyment and fun**

#### **The best people.**

Having highly skilled teams providing industry leading leisure and fitness experiences for our customers, communities and each other.

#### **The best places.**

To build, manage and maintain market leading facilities that are operated to the highest standards; safe, efficient and environmentally friendly.

#### **The best product.**

To design and deliver products and services that excite and engage our customers and communities. Always enhancing our offering; from fitness to food, activities and entertainment.

#### **The best partners.**

Delivering services that ensure the people in Northumberland will have a better quality of life as a result of their participation in physical activity and sport; feeling fitter and healthier and preventing ill health and social isolation.



### 3. Financial performance

Page 77



## 3.1 Financial performance

	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Fitness memberships	£4,662k	£6,732k	+£2,070k	£6,074k	90%
Aquatics	£2,665k	£3,330k	+£665k	£3,097k	93%
Leisure	£543k	£643k	+£100k	£624k	97%
Trading	£716k	£1,328k	+£612k	£1,343k	101%
Hire and pitch fees	£2,235k	£2,492k	+£257k	£1,916k	76%
Management fees	£2,160k	£2,060k	-£100k	£980k	47%
Grants and funding streams	£2,190k	£1,123k	-£1,067	£-	na
Position	£15,174k	£17,712k	+£2,538k	£14,034k	79%





## 4. Memberships

Page 79



## 4.1 Market share

	Users Oct 23	Market share
Alnwick	1,683	96%
Ashington	4,361	51%
Berwick	2,316	103%
Blyth	4,154	53%
Concordia	4,235	38%
Morpeth	4,443	107%
Ponteland	3,579	87%
Prudhoe	2,379	40%
Wentworth	2,550	85%
Total	29,700	61%

### 61% market share in Oct 23

Assumes 15.1% of population has a leisure and fitness membership.

#### Key points

- Berwick and Morpeth have saturated current markets.
- Morpeth will be pulling usage from Concordia and Ashington.
- Blyth seeing some impact of PureGym for 18-35s.
- Ponteland continues to gain market share as it matures.

**Definition:** Market share is based on all users (member and PAYG) within the last 3 months across a 10 mile radius of the individual centre.

Source: Datahub.

Note: 15.1% penetration from *State of the UK Fitness Industry Report 2023*



## 4.2 Fitness memberships

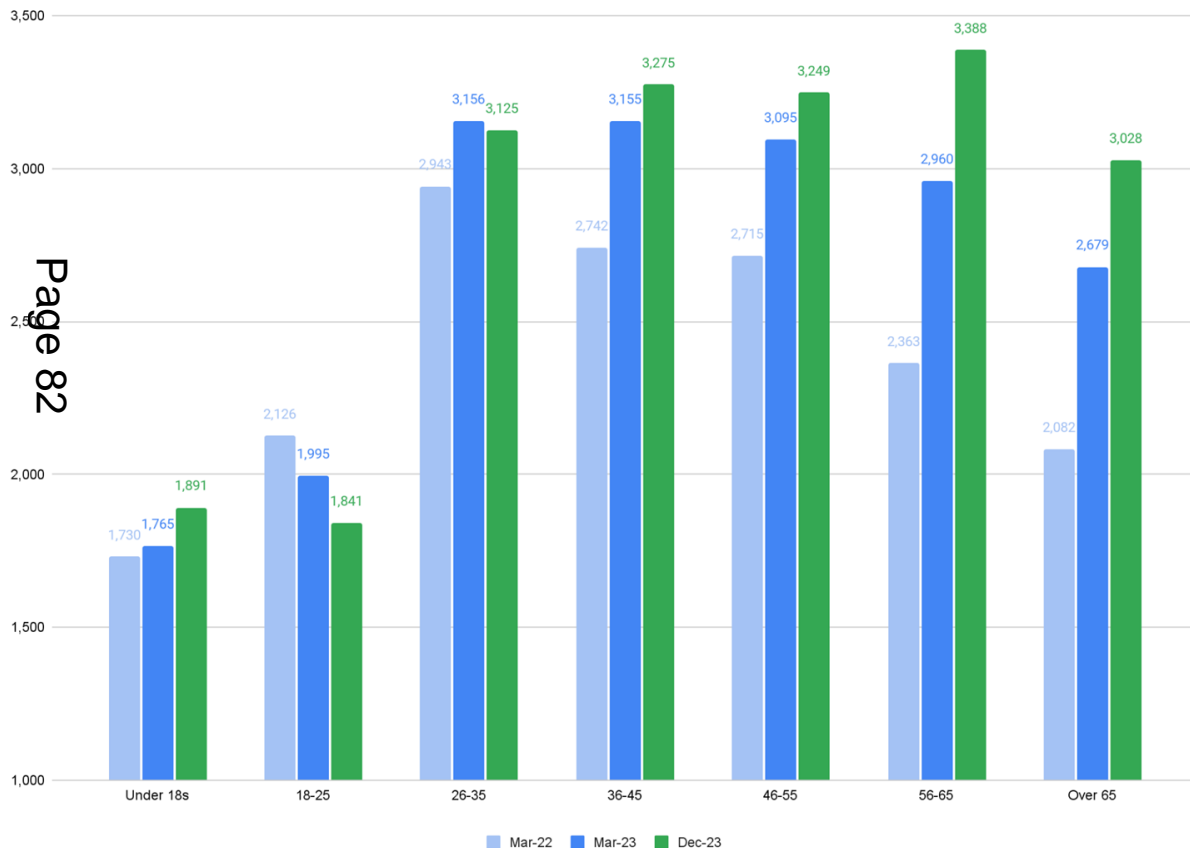
	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Alnwick	1,172	1,233	+61	1,330	+97
Ashington	3,250	3,523	+273	3,390	-133
Berwick	1,331	1,681	+350	1,713	+32
Blyth	2,417	2,123	-294	1,969	-154
Concordia	2,106	2,321	+215	2,313	-8
Moorehead	1,053	1,770	+717	2,829	+1,059
Pooleland	2,281	2,603	+322	2,650	+47
Prudhoe	1,032	1,179	+147	1,196	+17
Wentworth	1,818	2,064	+246	2,155	+91
Total Big 9	16,460	18,497	+2,037	19,545	+1,048
Non Big 9 Total	243	353	+110	290	-63
Total members	16,703	18,850	+2,147	19,835	+985

+12.9%

+5.2%



## 4.3 Fitness Memberships by age

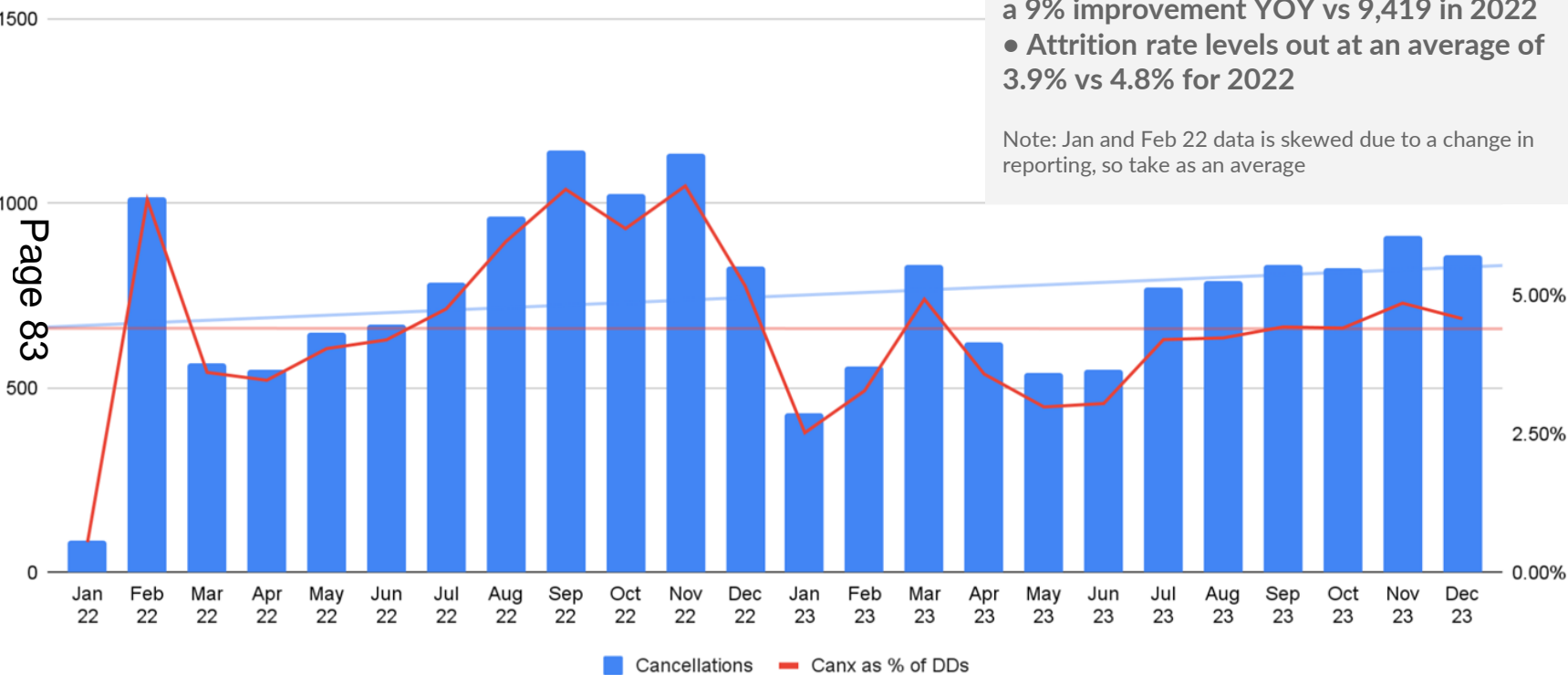


- Continued growth in U18s following continued success of Junior memberships which is now available to those under 18
- Decline in 18-25s impacted by PureGym in Blyth
- Continued growth vs core 26-55 year olds
- Large increases in 55 yrs+ driven by daytime activities such as Badminton, Fitness classes and leisure offering



# 4.4 Cancellations and attrition DD fitness memberships

Cancellations and Canx as % of DDs



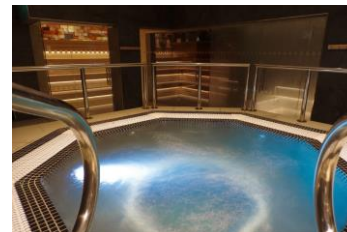


## 4.5 Swim lessons - Learn2Swim

DD and AP	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Alnwick	605	702	+97	659	+54
Ashington	590	523	-67	671	+148
Berwick	232	318	+86	370	+52
Blyth	648	676	-28	785	+109
Concordia	185	198	+13	286	+88
Morpeth	419	443	-24	683	+240
Ponteland	1208	1,304	+96	1,412	+108
Prudhoe	1016	1,142	+126	1,067	-75
Wentworth	1167	1,158	-9	1,111	-47
Total	6,136	6,470	+334	7,044	+574
			+5%		+9%

## 4.6 Spa membership

Members	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Ashington	214	266	+52	247	-19
Berwick	127	140	+13	135	-5
Blyth	123	123	0	123	-
Concordia	152	167	+15	138	-29
Morpeth	6	146	+140	148	+2
Poneland	198	227	+29	215	-12
Other Active	6	30	+24	30	-
Spa VIP	-	309	+309	455	+146
<b>Total</b>	<b>826</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>+582</b>	<b>1,491</b>	<b>+83</b>
			+170%		+5%
PAYG	Mar-22	Mar-23	23 v 22	Dec-23	% to FY 22/23
Spa income	£98.5k	£178.5k	+£80k	£155.4k	87%
			+181%		



Note: Spa VIP membership launched 24th May 2022





## 5. Membership trends

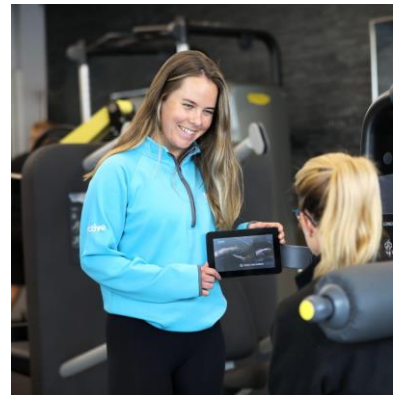
Page 86



## 5.1 Gym usage

	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Alnwick	40,136	45,378	5,242	37,083	81%
Ashington	110,283	121,819	11,536	82,616	67%
Berwick	45,682	83,964	38,282	65,416	77%
Blyth	103,934	113,499	9,565	67,773	59%
Concordia	77,301	89,532	12,231	62,754	70%
Moorehead	36,052	37,000	948	92,220	249%
Pooleland	100,434	117,042	16,608	84,250	72%
Prudhoe	34,264	31,550	-2,714	17,765	56%
Wentworth	59,099	79,787	20,688	70,777	89%
Total Big 9	607,185	719,571	112,386	580,654	81%
Non Big 9 Total	15,282	29,389	14,107	26,044	89%
Total members	622,467	748,960	126,493	606,698	81%

+20%





## 5.2 Swim usage

	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Alnwick	56,201	69,806	13,605	43,930	63%
Ashington	76,496	110,071	33,575	65,417	59%
Berwick	68,222	107,407	39,185	66,136	62%
Blyth	63,433	79,790	16,357	49,413	62%
Concordia	97,994	112,629	14,635	89,332	79%
Moorehead	39,241	48,263	9,022	64,691	134%
Ponteland	74,986	91,931	16,945	53,424	58%
Prudhoe	79,757	85,085	5,328	59,026	69%
Wentworth	79,555	90,990	11,435	55,638	61%
<b>Total</b>	<b>635,885</b>	<b>795,972</b>	<b>+160,087</b>	<b>547,007</b>	<b>69%</b>

+125%



Source: All users in the month inc members and PAYG  
Excludes small sample of under 5 swimmers

## 5.3 Fitness class attendance

	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	% to FY 22/23
Alnwick	13,064	21,075	8,011	20,606	98%
Ashington	54,722	78,726	24,004	52,992	67%
Berwick	16,296	28,099	11,803	22,778	81%
Blyth	35,100	55,632	20,532	40,936	74%
Concordia	39,423	56,230	16,807	46,533	83%
Magdalen	23,380	28,864	5,484	67,692	234%
Northumberland	42,313	56,293	13,980	45,999	82%
Prudhoe	20,642	33,115	12,473	29,937	90%
Wentworth	27,989	45,792	17,803	38,926	85%
Total Big 9	272,929	403,826	130,897	366,399	91%
Non Big 9	1,915	7,527	5,612	7,617	102%
Total	274,844	411,353	136,509	374,016	91%

+150%





## 6. Products - Health & wellbeing

Page 90



## 6.1 Health and wellbeing services

	Exercise On Referral	Cardiac	Escape Pain	Parkinsons	MS Group	Wellbeing Walks	Mams On The Move	Active Kids	Aquanatal	Elevate	Good Boost
Alnwick	✓					✓	New			✓	
Ashington	✓	✓				✓				✓	
Berwick	✓	✓		✓	✓		New			✓	✓
Blyth	✓		✓			✓	✓	New		✓	✓
Concordia	✓	✓				✓			New	✓	
Morpeth	✓					✓	✓			✓	
Newbiggin						✓					
Ponteland	✓					✓	✓			✓	
Prudhoe	✓	✓								✓	
Wentworth	✓	✓			New	✓			New	✓	✓



## 6.2 Health & wellbeing services - participation

23/24 YTD	Exercise on referral	Active Life	MOTM	Escape Pain	Elevate
Alnwick	658	688			359
Ashington	2,482	683	52		725
Berwick	1,069	135	373		996
Blyth	1,771	4,509	877	73	734
Coatbridge	2,441	2,756			603
Doncaster	1,725	1,840	467		1,371
Ponteland	592	485	51		882
Prudhoe	856	101			490
Wentworth	1,331	658	267		833
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,925</b>	<b>11,855</b>	<b>2,087</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>6,993</b>

22/23 participation	14,486	13,726	1,608	131	5,455
Achieved to date v 22/23	89%	86%	130%	56%	128%

- Exercise on referral: Lower participation than we would have liked in 23/24 due to loss of Weight Management funding from public health
- Active Life demonstrates ongoing participation from those from the Exercise on Referral programme
- Mams on the Move increased participation due to programme being incorporated into our main programme.
- Elevate programme maturing in year two as part of structured onboarding process.



## 6.3 PE & Community Services

What P	What was achieved	When was it delivered	Any stats relating to that	Any content or context that will help us write about that specific achievement
Product	School Games Commonwealth Games Legacy	June 2022	400 KS2 Children	Working in collaboration with RISE, Alnwick Castle and Alnwick Gardens to deliver a day of School Games Physical Activity for a group of least active Children
People	School Staff development	March 2023	10 Primary teachers	Working with the FA we delivered a session to primary teachers on how to use Disney storytelling to deliver Football based PA skills
People	Secondary Staff Development	April 22-July 22	25 Secondary teachers	CPD support to upskill secondary PE teachers to ensure all their hard to reach YP are engaged in PA
People	AN Teaching staff Development	Sep 22-March 23	4 teachers	External Coaching sessions as part of staff performance management
Product	FA Girls Funding	March 2023 Girls only festival working with local Wildcats clubs in Alnwick & Berwick	60 KS2 girls identified as those not physically active	Support Girls to have equal access to football in the curriculum and after school clubs in Alnwick & Berwick

Delivering Physical Education to 30 schools within the county through our teacher qualified teaching team.



## 7. People

Page 94

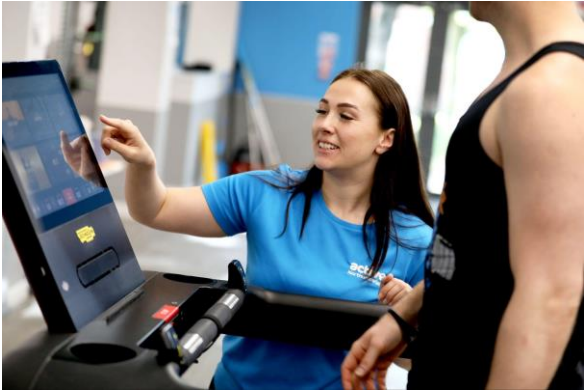


# 7.1 Employees

	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 22/23 v 21/22	Dec-23 YTD	vs 22/23
Assignments	712	829	+117	860	+31
Contracted	380	448	+68	492	+44
Casual	332	381	+49	368	-13
Ratio Contracted v Casual	53 : 47	54 : 46		57 : 43	

- Significant increase in the number of role assignments from 22/23 due to increased activities, services and memberships.
- Focus has been to ensure as many casual staff are converted to contracted where appropriate, and this has been ongoing through 23/24.

• Apprenticeships undertaking CIMPSA Leisure Team Member Apprenticeships.  
• 1 team members undertaking Leisure Duty Manager Apprenticeships.





## 8. Places

Page 96

## 8.1 Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub



## 8.2 Capital investments in 22/23

Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub  
£1.9m refurb



Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre works  
continue for completion in Summer 2023



Gaining industry leading accreditation with  
three centres being classified as 'very good'



**Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre**  
**Ashington Leisure Centre**  
**Wentworth Leisure Centre**





## 8.3 Environmental stewardship in 22/23

Launched our new environmental strategy to reduce energy costs and our carbon footprint, including:

- The appointment and training of environmental champions across the business.
- Placed environmental awareness boards in sites.
- Reduced operating temperatures of swimming pools and spas.
- Reduced air temperatures around buildings.
- Reduced the amount of waste going to landfill by installing recycling stations across our centres.

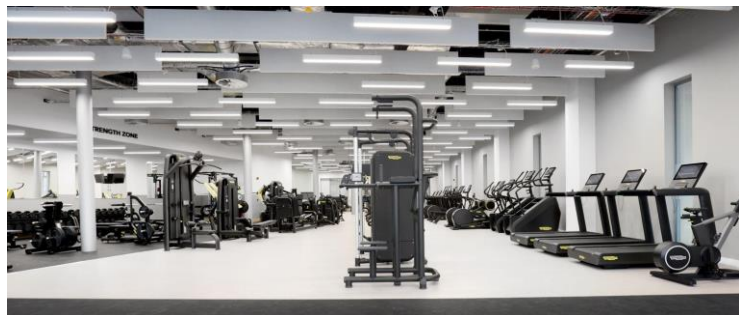
Invested in more energy efficient buildings through the use of:

- High density insulated cladding
- High energy- efficient glazing with thermal screening
- LED lighting and solar panels.

All of these initiatives significantly contribute to the Northumberland County Council's vision of a net zero-carbon economy.



## 8.4 Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre



## 8.5 Capital investments in 23/24

Opening of £21m Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre in April



Two of our centres being rated as the top two centres in the country by Quest



Number 1  
Morpeth Sports  
and Leisure Centre



Number 2  
Ponteland  
Leisure Centre

This page is intentionally left blank





## Northumberland County Council

Communities & Place OSC

Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

### **Update on delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destinations management Plan 2022-2032**

**Report of Councillor(s)** Cllr Jeffrey Watson, Cabinet Member for Healthy Lives

**Responsible Officer(s):** Simon Nielson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

#### **1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

This Report is relevant to the Driving Economic Growth priority in the Corporate Plan which identifies the role of a thriving and sustainable visitor economy in supporting inclusive economic growth.

#### **2. Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to update the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on:

- National and Regional Visitor Economy partnership arrangements
- Visit Northumberland's accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northumberland
- Delivery against the Destination Plan for Northumberland 2022-32

#### **3. Recommendations**

The Communities & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- a. Note the achievements of Visit Northumberland's efforts to maximise the visitor economy's contribution to the Northumberland economy; and
- b. Consider and comment on progress made in the delivery of actions against the priorities of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan.

#### **4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

The report does not require a key decision and is not urgent.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1 Post-covid recovery of the visitor economy was prioritised by Government through the publication of the Tourism Recovery Plan in June 2021 by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Tourism Recovery Plan set out the role that the UK government would play in assisting and accelerating the tourism sector's

recovery from COVID-19. It also set out a framework for how the government would work with the sector to ensure that every nation and region would benefit from the sector's recovery, with visitors staying longer, growing accommodation occupancy rates in the off-season and high levels of investment in tourism products and transport infrastructure, while employing more UK nationals in year-round quality jobs.

- 5.2 Visit Northumberland was established as the county's Destination management Organisation to lead the coordination and management of the Northumberland visitor economy to ensure that Northumberland can effectively manage tourism growth sustainably, and ultimately, contribute to the Government's recovery objectives. It is funded via public and private investment, providing a vehicle for business engagement, and a partnership and collegiate approach across the sectors involved. Visit Northumberland is responsible for bringing together other public agencies, tourism producers and communities.
- 5.3 Prepared by Visit Northumberland through a process of multi-partner coordination and collaboration, the Northumberland Destination Management is the blueprint for the strategic development and management of the county's visitor economy. It is a living document, with specific actions established to deliver outcomes of identified priorities required to achieve this sustainable growth to contribute to the Government's recovery objectives. These actions and outcomes require annual refresh to ensure the Plan remains relevant and demonstrates progress.

### **Delivery of National Tourism Objectives**

- 5.4 In response to the DCMS Tourism Recovery Plan, the Government acknowledged that England's Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) had an important role to play in recovery and Levelling Up and, it was necessary to transform the DMO landscape at a local level to harness their potential to grow visitor spend.
- 5.5 An immediate action of this report undertaken in 2021 was the De Bois review of DMOs aimed at strengthening the tourism delivery infrastructure in England, leading to improved collaboration and investment.
- 5.6 Key recommendations from the de Bois Review were to bring coherence to England's DMO landscape using an accreditation process to create a national portfolio of DMOs known as LVEP's (Local Visitor Economy Partnerships) and wider regional Destination Development Partnerships, a geographic hub of LVEPs working together in partnership to collaborate on projects on a size and scale to bring wider regional benefit.
- 5.7 VisitEngland, the national tourism board were tasked by Government to create this framework and the process of LVEP accreditation commenced in Autumn 2022. Concurrently, Government also committed to creating and funding one national pilot DDP programme, also coordinated through VisitEngland who would seek to identify a geography that contained LVEPs that represented multiple aspects of the destination to include coast, city and countryside, local authority areas with an interest in the visitor economy but no operational tourism body in place and partners with a

willingness and ability to collaborate at pace. The Government would provide core funding to the DDP of £2.25million over a 2.5 year period to March 2025.

### **Delivery of Regional Tourism Objectives**

- 5.8 Visit Northumberland achieved LVEP accreditation from VisitEngland in February 2023, alongside 14 other destinations across the country, including NewcastleGateshead Initiative and Visit County Durham from the north east region.
- 5.9 At the same time, the North East of England was selected to operate a new DDP pilot, under the leadership of NewcastleGatehead Initiative. Visit Northumberland became a primary LVEP partner in the North East Destination Development Partnership pilot alongside Visit County Durham.
- 5.10 The role of the DDP is to develop and oversee the delivery of region wide activity and lead on advocacy, partnership working, funding bids, major events, data and business support. The immediate impact of the DDP has been the strengthening of the regional dialogue about the importance of the visitor economy, including a commitment in the North East devolution deal to write a ten-year strategy for the North East allowing for projects to be delivered at scale beyond the lifespan of the initial pilot.

### **Visitor Economy in Northumberland**

- 5.11 The Visitor Economy is a vibrant and important sector in our economy and has the potential, with careful management, to attract more visitors to stay longer, at all times of the year, and spend more. As outlined in the Northumberland Corporate and Plan and Economic Strategy, we are committed to create an environment for tourism and the visitor economy to develop and flourish sustainably for the benefit of local communities, businesses, visitors and the natural environment.
- 5.12 Headline indicators are measured annually via a tourism economic impact modelling process which enables the measurement of the volume and value of tourism using local data, tourism performance and visitor survey data. In 2022:
- The Northumberland visitor economy recorded the highest ever gross value contribution to the Northumberland economy of £1.169billion.
  - Northumberland welcomed 9.97million visitors, an increase of 28% over the previous year.
  - The recovery in spend is being driven by growth in overnight stays which are now just 0.2% off pre-covid levels, and growing at a faster rate than day visitors. Staying visitors account for 19% of visits and 67% of spend.
  - There has been a significant shift in the contribution of food and drink to the visitor economy, which is now the biggest contributor to direct economic impact (48.3%) and direct employment (39.9%).
  - 14,683 jobs are supported by the visitor economy, 12,004 directly employed in the sector.

## **Delivery of Northumberland's Tourism Objectives**

- 5.13 The Visit Northumberland Local Visitor Economy Partnership provides the leadership, influence and strategic drive essential to realise the vision of Visit Northumberland being the recognised voice of the Northumberland visitor economy.
- 5.14 Visit Northumberland aims to be an LVEP which proactively leads the tourism business community in Northumberland, provides expert advice and information, and champions and delivers projects to showcase and develop Northumberland as a premier visitor destination. Its strategic priorities are:
- Leadership and engagement
  - Increased visitors – quality over quantity
  - Sustainable product and destination development
  - Better use of data and intelligence
  - Focused and co-ordinated communication, PR and Marketing
  - Business and people development
- 5.15 A two-year Partnership Agreement between Northumberland County Council and Visit Northumberland Ltd sets out how the Partners have agreed to work together, and what commitments each Partner has made and describes the shared objectives. The partnership agreement commenced 1 April 2022 and will be renewed from 1 April 2024.

## **The Northumberland Destination Management Plan**

- 5.16 Visit Northumberland is responsible for the development and updating of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan (DMP). Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience.
- 5.17 A Destination Management Plan is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take. The DMP is owned by all partners through collaboration and partnership and Visit Northumberland's role in addition to curation and oversight of the plan, is to identify how partner policies and services can support the visitor economy on one hand and be supported by it on the other. The Northumberland DMP feeds into the DDP strategic priorities, and the DDP activities support the delivery of the Northumberland DMP.
- 5.18 The strategic aims of the DMP are to ensure Northumberland:
- is a successful, integrated destination providing a high-quality and distinct visitor experience.
  - is a tourism destination which is respectful of the needs of the economy and communities, local people, and the natural environment.
  - creates an environment where the tourism industry can develop/ increase its contribution to the Northumberland economy.
  - is regarded as an environmentally responsible destination.

- 5.19 The DMP sets the strategic direction for Northumberland and guides the apportionment of resources through objectives and prioritised actions within an annual rolling programme, identifying individuals and organisations is responsible for their delivery. The priorities are:
1. Data, Evidence and Intelligence
  2. Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity
  3. Position and Profile
  4. Business, Product and People Development
  5. Cross-cutting: Sustainability

### **Delivery of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan**

- 5.20 The Northumberland Destination Management Plan is now into its first full year of delivery and structures are well established. Governance to oversee the delivery and provide quarterly and annual updates of the plan are in place and a review to ensure the plan's 10-year vision remains relevant and aligned to strategic developments within the sector will be taken forward in 2024.
- 5.21 A Destination Management Plan Board, made up of the priority leads and subject specific advisors oversees the delivery of actions emanating from an Action Planning Forum of c80 invited visitor economy stakeholder, partner and business interests.
- 5.22 This board oversees the implementation of the priorities within this plan with a primary objective to oversee the delivery of actions and identify immediate issues, risks and challenges and outline potential solutions or mitigations. An update on actions for year 1 are included in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **DMP Review and Relaunch 2024**

- 5.23 The DMP has a 10-year vision with outcomes monitored quarterly through the DMP Board and reviewed annually to ensure priorities remain valid and actions relevant and achievable. A report on activities and key achievements will be delivered at the annual Visit Northumberland Tourism Conference on 30 January 2024 and progress will be fed into the annual review process. The review will progress the plan from one with a focus on post-covid recovery to one with a focus on sustainable growth and development.
- 5.24 The DMP will be reviewed by 31st March 2024 and will be coordinated by Visit Northumberland. It will involve internal and external stakeholder engagement and integrated into the Action Planning Forum process scheduled to take place on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- 5.25 The review will incorporate:
- A destination audit to assess the impact of work and/or change in identified strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats, replacing any expired and adding new where appropriate. This will refresh priorities as appropriate.
  - Update actions and the roles, responsibilities and action planning groups.
  - Ensure there is strategic alignment with all relevant national and regional tourism delivery structures and strategies particularly, the VE Growth Plan

for Northumberland, the North East Destination Development Partnership and North East Mayoral Combined Authority. In addition, there is a need to identify the relevant strategies and policies which exist and affect the visitor economy which the DMP needs to align with or influence.

- Data and intelligence review to develop a deep understanding of the full value of tourism to the national, regional and local visitor economy.
- Management and monitoring – review the reporting of the delivery of the Plan and how the monitoring, management and communications can be enhanced to reflect the benefits and impact the Plan is making to funders, stakeholders and all visitor economy businesses.

- 5.26 The refreshed plan will be reviewed and updated with the Action Planning Forum, stakeholder briefings, through the Visit Northumberland schedule of networking events and regional Destination Development Partnership monthly briefings from 1 April 2024.
- 5.27 A full programme will also be established aligned with the development and delivery of an internal communications plan and strategy devised as an outcome of the Position and Profile group to better report on the achievements of the Plan.

## 6. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	The Destination Management Plan is fully aligned with the Corporate Plan, the Northumberland Cultural Strategy 2018-2030 and the Northumberland Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	LVEP status and DDP involvement provides a platform of future collaborative working and scale to benefit Northumberland. The DMP provides an evidence base and strategic context for potential future external funding applications and investment.
<b>Legal</b>	N/A
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human resources</b>	N/A
<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	No - not required at this point .

<b>Risk assessment</b>	A detailed risk register for the Destination Management Plan is maintained, enabling risks to be monitored and mitigating actions to be introduced. These risks are monitored through the DMP Governance structures.
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer considerations</b>	The DMP was informed by extensive stakeholder and industry engagement. Its DMP Board and Action Planning Forum are well established made up of industry stakeholders.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The DMP has a cross cutting priority of sustainability with the aim to identify measures and actions which underscore Northumberland's ambition to be regarded as a responsible destination which supports sustainable tourism development.
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	N/A
<b>Wards</b>	All wards

## 7. Background papers

N/A

## 8. Links to other key reports already published

- Visit Northumberland Destination Management Plan  
[https://www.visitnorthumberland.com/VisitNorthumberland/media/VisitNorthumberland/Downloads/Northumberland-Destination-Management-Plan-2022-32\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.visitnorthumberland.com/VisitNorthumberland/media/VisitNorthumberland/Downloads/Northumberland-Destination-Management-Plan-2022-32_WEB.pdf)
- Place and Communities Overview and Scrutiny report October 2022 – Endorsement of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-32  
<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12022/Endorsement%20of%20the%20Northumberland%20Destination%20Management%20Plan%202022-2032.pdf>
- Cabinet Report October 2022 - Endorsement of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022 - 2032
- <https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12203/07%20Endorsement%20of%20the%20Northumberland%20Destination%20Management%20Plan%202022-2032.pdf>

## 9. Author and Contact Details

Maria Antoniou, Senior Economic Development Manager  
Economic Development and Growth – Economic Development  
Place and Regeneration Directorate  
E: [maria.antoniou@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:maria.antoniou@northumberland.gov.uk)

**Appendix 1 - Northumberland Destination Management Plan Update**

OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES	ACTIONS – YEAR 1	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<b>Data, Evidence and Intelligence</b>  The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to have robust evidence and intelligence to inform and shape destination management.  It is led by Ian Thomas, Destination Director of NewcastleGateshead Initiative and the national North East Destination Development Partnership pilot.	Audit current data and research studies collected for Northumberland by NE strategic partners to identify gaps and challenges to industry.	Undertaken an audit and mapped out survey requirements to enable better understanding of requirements and shift emphasis from reliance on reactive data reporting to proactive data collection.
	Request regular insight from select accommodation and attraction providers.	Data is being collated to help create a Northumberland dashboard to demonstrate the importance of the visitor economy and encourage investment in the sector.
	Discuss a collaborated approach to regional data collection and reporting.	Taken advantage of a growing opportunity for collaboration across the region via the North East Destination Development Partnership with Northumberland datasets emerging from regional accommodation, accessibility and sustainability studies, with opportunities for Northumberland businesses to participate as these evolve.
	<b>Next Steps</b>	Focus on identifying and collecting additional information or data required by priority leads to take their work forward, and what approach is best suited to meet those needs.
<b>Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity</b>  The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to have infrastructure that attracts visitors, aids visitor management and provides benefits to residents and communities.	Convene Tactical Visitor Management Group.	Convened the Tactical Visitor Management working group through the summers of 2022 and 2023 to review community issues to aid visitor management and mitigate issues as they arise. The multi-stakeholder 'Love it Like It's Yours' campaign has been delivered through Northumberland County Council communications team, driving behaviour change messaging via visitnorthumberland.com
	Undertake audit of infrastructure to improve quality of visitor experience..	Overseen the delivery of a significant capital investment programme which impacts on, and improves services, within the Northumberland visitor economy with improvements to car parking, public toilets, and leisure facilities.



OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES	ACTIONS – YEAR 1	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>It is led by Paul Jones, Director of Environment and Transport at Northumberland County Council.</p>	<p>Establish a strategic transport working group.</p>	<p>Identification of the most effective approach to taking forward strategic transport initiatives ensuring the voice of tourism is adequately represented in existing groups as appropriate within the development of facilities and tourism products within established activities to develop EV charging stations, motorhome camping facilities, walking routes etc</p>
	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p>	<p>Focus on the better understanding of activity being delivered that can be included as a progress to the plan's delivery outside of the local authority responsibility, and with support of the data, evidence and intelligence group, an audit of infrastructure to improve quality of visitor experience.</p>
<p><b>Position and Profile</b></p> <p>The objective of this priority is for Northumberland to be known as a responsible tourism destination to attract domestic and international visitors.</p> <p>It is led by Sonya Galloway, Marketing and Communications Manager for the Vindolanda Charitable Trust. Sonya acts as Chair of the DMP Board and is Deputy Chair of the Visit Northumberland Board.</p>	<p>Create a framework for adoption of shared destination message and brand proposition.</p>	<p>Overseen the creation of a working group to lead the adoption of an industry-wide approach to celebrate Northumberland and support the delivery of the 'Love it Like It's Yours' visitor management campaigns, and encourage partner use of Visit Northumberland's seasonal campaign tagline 'Discover somewhere...' to suit their product.</p>
	<p>Encourage all stakeholders to adopt a destination proposition and messaging. Support champions to oversee delivery of DMP actions.</p>	<p>Developed a Northumberland Pledge to encourage visitors to act responsibly and sustainably whilst visiting to underline Northumberland as a responsible tourism destination.</p>
	<p>Promote thematic tourism products and events.</p>	<p>Promote thematic tourism products and events with campaigns focussing on lesser visitor attractions and destinations away from the coastal hotspots, monthly thematic promotion of themes to drive visits to refreshed content on visitnorthumberland.com and from the Autumn 2023 Northumberland's Dark Skies.</p>
	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p>	<p>Focus on the development of an internal communications plan and strategy to better report on the achievements of the Plan and support champions to oversee delivery of DMP actions, and encourage stakeholder participation and adoption of the Pledge as the</p>

OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES	ACTIONS – YEAR 1	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p><b>Business, Product and People Development</b></p> <p>This priority has three objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Northumberland's visitor economy businesses will thrive in an environment of collaboration and have agility to adapt to every opportunity.</li> <li>2. Quality, longer staying visitors, will be inspired by an array of experiences based on a solid understanding of their motivations, needs and wants.</li> <li>3. A skilled and knowledgeable visitor economy workforce will stimulate quality improvements and an improved visitor experience.</li> </ol> <p>It is led by Mark Brassell, Director of The Alnwick Garden, with support on business development by hospitality consultant Debrah Dhugga; on product development by leisure consultant Rob Aubrook; and on people development by Robert Stewart, Visit Northumberland board member</p>		continuation of the tactical visitor management campaign to create a movement towards responsible tourism visiting.
	Develop business partnerships.	Developed and delivered the New Adventures and Dark Skies Star Trails product development programmes with a Winter Trails programme underway with an initial focus on businesses in and around Alnwick to March 2024. In addition, an Active tourism working group established and supporting new product in development.
	Business improvement.	Provided business development opportunities to over 100 businesses through Visit Northumberland partner engagement activity and product development strands and widened the partnership programme to include events, and suppliers to industry with food and drink and previously lapsed partners a focus on business development.
	Develop relevant product	Initial focus has been the continued development of thematic experiences and activities through funded programmes to augment Northumberland's Dark Skies product and engage with bookable product and experience development.
	Promote tourism as a viable, rewarding career.	Relaunched "Know your Northumberland" to support industry's people development priorities, identified all establishments offering career training in tourism related industries and developed education resources for teachers, and encouraged more Northumberland organisations involved in Visit England inspections and Tourism Award entries.
	<b>Next Steps</b>	Focus on what can be done to attract more businesses to actively engage in the development of the sector and what is needed to help them grow. Initial focus will be on the continued development of thematic experiences and activities that demonstrate working and operating in the visitor economy is desirable and rewarding. Expansion and accreditation of the Know your Northumberland programme is also progressing, to be implemented for 2024 delivery.

OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES	ACTIONS – YEAR 1	OUTCOMES TO DATE
responsible for skills from Northumberland College.		
<b>Cross-Cutting: Sustainability</b>  The objective of this priority is to identify measures and actions which underscore Northumberland's ambition to be regarded as a responsible destination which supports sustainable tourism development.  It is led by Duncan Wise, Visitor Development and Tourism Officer for the Northumberland National Park Authority.	Develop business partnerships.	Developed and delivered the New Adventures and Dark Skies Star Trails product development programmes, and will deliver a Winter Trails programme with an initial focus on businesses in and around Alnwick to March 2024. In addition, an Active tourism working group established and supporting new product in development.
	Creation of a sustainability advisory group.	Overseen the creation a sustainability advisory group with representatives from the county's protected landscapes, climate action team and interested parties to address sustainable transport, accessibility and broadening participation in the Green Tourism Accreditation Scheme, sustainable food practices to help support food and drink product development and waste recycling.
	Regenerative tourism and championing the circular economy.	Participation as an active member of the North East England Regenerative Tourism Advisory Taskforce to show how the framework of the DMP can demonstrate a destination committed to regenerative tourism when setting the benchmarks for a future rural Global Destination Index for Northumberland.
	Become a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on climate action in tourism.	Work to identify which stakeholders and at what level of authority would be require to progress this, and what steps and simple actions could be taken for Northumberland to become a signatory of the Glasgow declaration.
	<b>Next Steps</b>	Focus on what businesses/organisations need to do to demonstrate a commitment to the principles of sustainability to demonstrate progress towards being a responsible tourism destination through case studies, benchmarking and reporting.

This page is intentionally left blank



## Northumberland County Council

### Cabinet

7 November 2023

---

#### **Corporate Feedback Performance 2022/2023**

**Report of** Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader, and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

**Executive Director:** Gill O'Neill, Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities  
Julie Dennitts, Corporate Complaints Manager

---

#### **1. Purpose of the report**

The purpose of the Annual Report is to review the operation of the complaints process over twelve months (01.04.2022 to 31.03.2023), including statistical data, and to provide the local authority with how it keeps itself informed about how effective its current arrangements are for handling customer complaints.

The same statutory reporting framework does not govern the Corporate Complaint process as Adults and Children's Complaints; however, it is deemed best practice to provide an analysis of Corporate Complaints received from customers. It should be noted that Corporate Complaint Annual reports from here on will be produced in alignment with the framework for Adult and Children's Complaints.

#### **2. Background**

The 2020/2021 Annual Report advised that the Corporate Complaints Manager had reviewed the current reporting mechanisms as part of the broader Complaints Improvement Framework. One of the main improvements identified was to update the case management system.

The existing system needs to be updated and bespoke for complaints management; it is cumbersome, and staff engagement could be more consistent. This makes data retrieval and analysis challenging and unreliable. A new case management system has since been procured, and work is being undertaken to start using it from October 2023.

However, this report is based on the current data sets available within the confines of the existing software.

#### **3: Summary**

The key findings in this report are:

- 111 complaints were resolved within 24 hours and recorded as informal resolutions.

- 1484 stage 1 complaints were received, and 83 (5.5%) were escalated to stage 2.
- 1048 (80%) stage one complaints were closed in timescale, and 40 (63%) stage two complaints were completed in timescale.
- 16 cases were upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) following detailed investigations.

#### **4. What we did well**

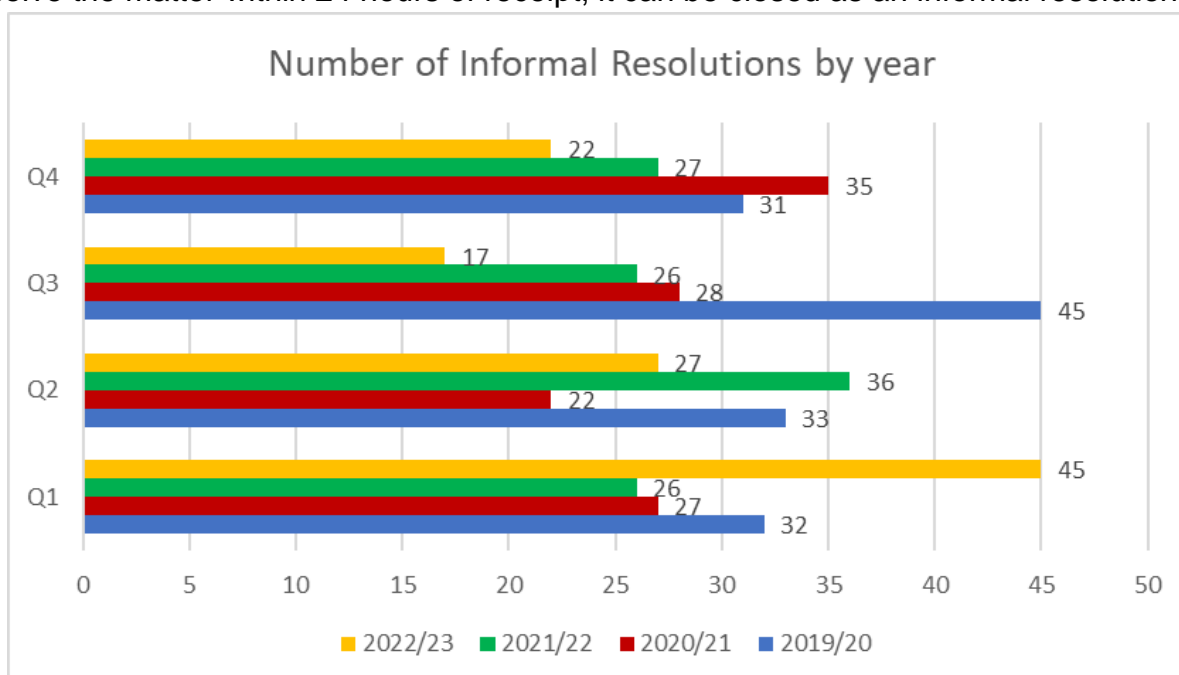
- Understand that sometimes, the best way to deal with a complaint is to initiate local resolution. As a matter of course, any staff member being presented first-hand with a complaint will attempt to resolve the issue.
- Continuously review processes to ensure these are consistent and current.
- Able to resolve complaints at stage one, negating the need to escalate to stage two.
- Demonstrated a positive culture to the LGSCO about the benefits of responding to and learning from complaints.
- Identifying individual needs and treating everyone respectfully
- Continuously review processes to ensure these are consistent and current.
- Manage complaints in line with policy and legislation.

#### **5. What do we need to improve?**

- Keep sight of what we do well.
- Share trends and outcome reports more widely across the service area to ensure everyone handling complaints can view and consider these.
- Provide guidance and training sessions on all aspects of complaint management.
- retrospective sessions with the service to consider what could have been done better and highlight areas of good practice.

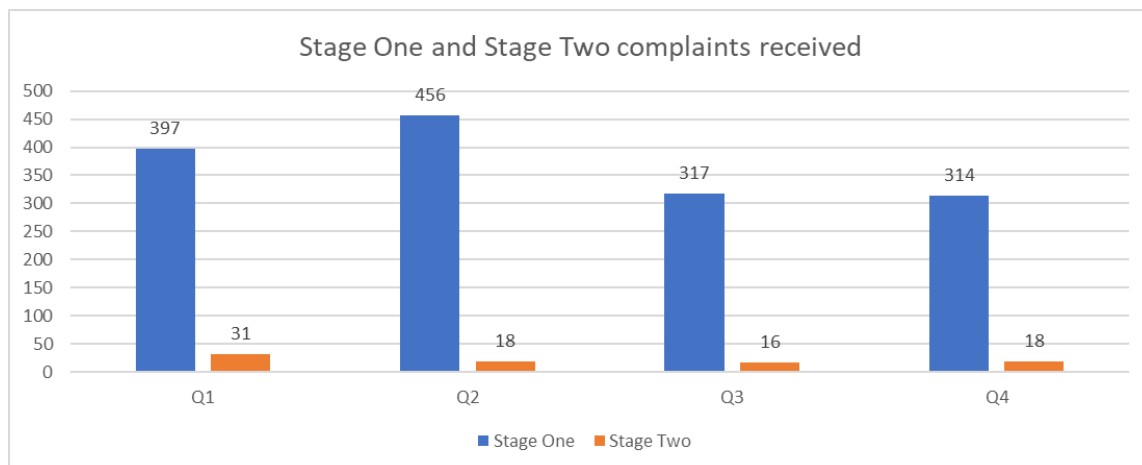
#### **6. Informal Complaints**

The current process for corporate complaints involves customers submitting their complaint, which is then sent to the appropriate service area. If the service can fully resolve the matter within 24 hours of receipt, it can be closed as an informal resolution.



## **7. Complaints Received**

During 2022-2023, the County Council received 1484 Stage One corporate complaints. Of these, 83 (5.5%) stage one complaints were escalated to stage 2.

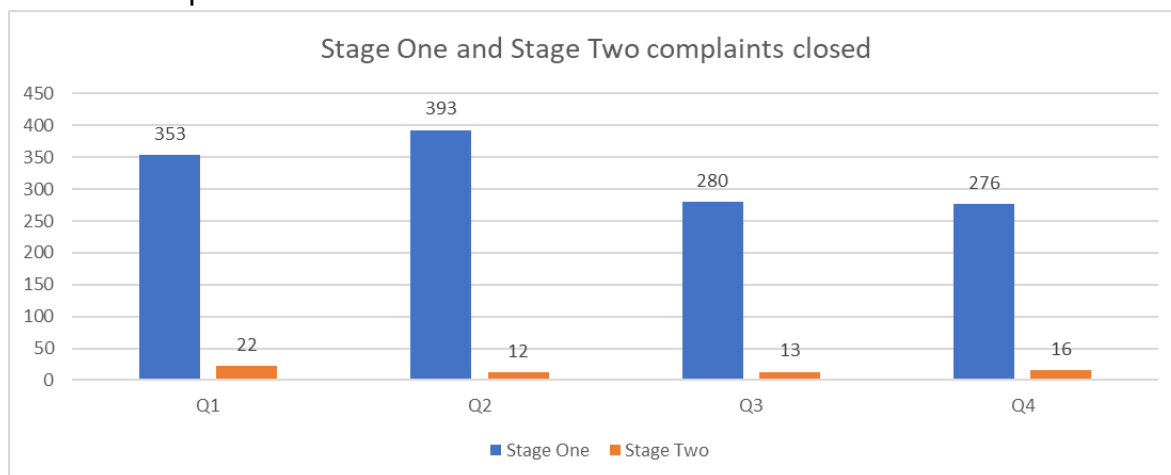


## **8. Closed Complaints**

Closed complaints have been allocated an outcome, and a response has been given to the customer. The number of closed complaints differs from the number of received complaints. This is because some 2022/23 closed complaints were received in 2021/22. Similarly, some 2022/23 complaints will be completed in 2023/24 because their target date falls into the next reporting cycle.

Of the 1484 Stage 1 case received, 1048 (80%) were closed in timescale, and of the 83 Stage 2 cases received, 40 (63%) were completed in timescale. This indicator represents the number and percentage of complaints at each stage closed in full within the predetermined timescales of 15 and 20 working days. However, it doesn't recognise those cases where extensions exceeded those timescales agreed in advance.

Services are encouraged to analyse those complaints escalated to stage 2 to see what was done differently to resolve these. The aim is to establish some practical learning that can be provided to those staff who deal with complaints at stage 1 to reduce escalation and resolve complaints earlier for the customer.



## **9. Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

The (LGSCO) is the organisation that handles complaints about public services in England. The Ombudsman service is independent of the government and must act impartially. The LGSCO also shares learning from its work to improve service delivery across the spectrum of public service in England. The office carries out awareness-raising activities with the public and bodies under their authority and promotes good complaints handling by public service providers.

The LGSCO does not differentiate between Corporate or Statutory Complaints when providing annual data; therefore, the following includes oversight of all complaint functions within the County Council. The Ombudsman upholds complaints when they find fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before they investigated.

### **10. LGSCO detailed investigations**

The Ombudsman upholds complaints when they find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before they investigated. Out of 19 detailed investigations, the Ombudsman upheld 16 complaints (84%). It is important to note that in 2022/23, 34% fewer cases were accepted by the Ombudsman to carry out complete detailed investigations.

The Ombudsman recommends ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with their recommendations. Failure to comply is rare, and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern. Out of 15 cases, the Ombudsman were satisfied that all action was undertaken (100%).

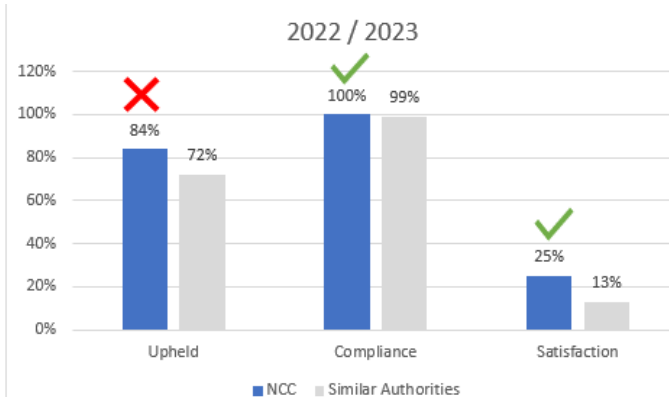
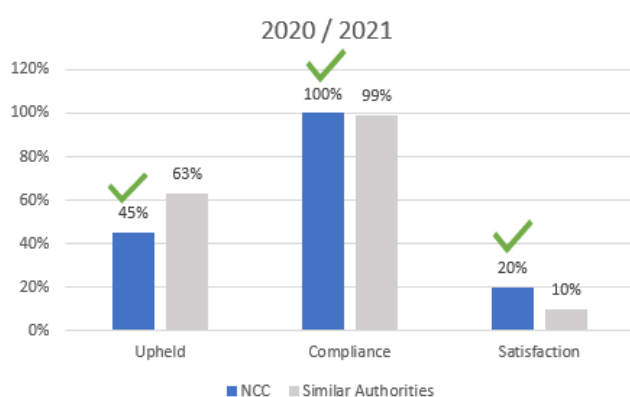
If the Ombudsman determine there has been a satisfactory remedy provided by the authority, this means the authority upheld the complaint, and they agreed with how it offered to put things right. They encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Out of 16 detailed investigations, the Ombudsman were fully satisfied with 4 remedies (25%).

A Public Interest Report - was issued concerning a complaint raised by a resident regarding the Post 16 Transport Policy. In August 2022, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman issued a Public Interest Report into what they identified as "flaws" in the Council's Post-16 Transport policy. The LGSCO believed the Council were not clear enough within their policy regarding how they considered progression through course levels and distance from learning establishments when making decisions concerning post-16 transport applications. The decision to issue a Public Report rather than an individual finding, was due to the case being considered a *"significant topical issue and represents systemic problems and wider lessons"*.

The LGSCO compares the three key annual statistics with similar authorities to provide an average performance marker. It is noted that the Council continues to perform well against other similar authorities.





## 11. LGSCO recommendations for upheld complaints

The final decisions and recommendations made for the 16 upheld cases were as follows:

<p><b>Adult Care Services Domiciliary Care 16-May-2022 (21 016 410)</b></p> <p>Summary: We upheld a complaint about end-of-life care. The Care Provider will apologise and review its procedures for record-keeping.</p>
<p><b>Adult Care Disabled Facilities Grants 05-Jun-2022 (20 014 396)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mr X and his parents, Mr and Mrs Y complained about the Council's failure to ensure adaptations to their property, funded by a Disabled Facilities Grant, were carried out to an acceptable standard and related matters. We have found the Council to be at fault because it did not properly record variations to the Schedule of Works. The Council has agreed to apologise for the frustration caused to the complainants. We have not identified any other areas of fault. The Ombudsman is unable to interfere with the Council's professional assessment that the overall standard of the adaptation was acceptable.</p>
<p><b>Adult Care Safeguarding 21-Jun-2022 (21 011 766)</b></p> <p>Summary: The Council was at fault for ending its support of Mr X without warning and without considering referring him to an advocate. The Council has agreed to apologise to Mr X, pay him £500 and take action to improve its service.</p>
<p><b>Commercial and Contracts 29-Jun-2022 (21 011 559)</b></p> <p>Summary: Ms X complained about the Council's handling of her request to use its land for car parking. We found no fault in the Council's substantive decision making. But its poor communication caused Ms X avoidable distress and frustration, which it had suitably put right with its apologies and offer to waive its £250 legal costs. The Council also agreed to formally adopt and publish a policy about use of its land for car parking.</p>
<p><b>Planning Applications 24-Jul-2022 (21 014 608)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mr X complains about the Council's granting of planning permission for his neighbour's extension and its failure to take enforcement action due to increases in the height of the extension and patio. We do not find fault in how the Council considered the retrospective planning application for the increased extension height. However, the Council has accepted it failed to consider the increased patio height and the impact this would have on neighbouring amenity when granting planning permission. This fault has caused of loss of amenity for Mr and Mrs X. To remedy this, the Council has agreed to apologise to Mr and Mrs X and make them a payment.</p>
<p><b>Disabled Children 02-Aug-2022 (21 009 137)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mrs X complains the Council failed to provide adequate support to her daughter during the transition to new services, which meant she did not receive support. Mrs X also complained about how the Council communicated about the timeframe for the transition. The Ombudsman intends to find fault with the Council for how it managed the transition to the new provider. The Ombudsman does not intend to find fault with the Council for how decided the timeline for the transition. The Ombudsman recommends a financial remedy and service improvements.</p>
<p><b>School Transport 17-Aug-2022 (21 004 235)</b></p> <p>Summary: Miss X complained about the Council's decision not to provide her son, Y, with transport to college. Miss X said the Council failed to properly consider Y's circumstances and her appeal, and its communication was poor.</p>
<p><b>Child Protection 24-Aug-2022 (21 015 998)</b></p>

<p>Summary: Miss X complained about the way the Council handled the child protection process for her child, S, about delays in the statutory children's complaints procedure and about the Council's refusal to accept one element of the stage 3 panel's findings. The Council was at fault for not actively engaging with Miss X's domestic abuse support worker and for delays in the complaints process. It should apologise and pay Miss X a further £150, making a total payment of £250, to remedy the frustration and distress caused.</p>
<p><b>Planning Applications 25-Aug-2022 (22 000 583)</b></p> <p>Summary: Ms B complained that the Council failed to properly consider an application for planning permission for a development next to her property. We find the Council was at fault in that there were inaccuracies and omissions in the case officer's report. However, we do not consider this affected the decision on the planning application. The Council has provided a satisfactory remedy for the injustice caused to Ms B.</p>
<p><b>Childrens Care Services 31-Oct-2022 (22 009 991)</b></p> <p>Summary: We have upheld this complaint that the Council failed to adhere to the timescale set out in the statutory procedure for children's services. The Council has agreed to resolve the matter by providing a suitable remedy.</p>
<p><b>Childrens Care Services 31-Oct-2022 (22 009 991)</b></p> <p>Summary: We have upheld this complaint that the Council failed to adhere to the timescale set out in the statutory procedure for children's services. The Council has agreed to resolve the matter by providing a suitable remedy.</p>
<p><b>Assessment and care plan 20-Dec-2022 (22 002 090)</b></p> <p>Summary: We found fault in the way a Council, Mental Health Trust and GP Practice supported a vulnerable man in the community for over two years. Each of the organisations has accepted its failings and the impact of them and has taken steps to prevent recurrences, so we have not recommended any further action. We also found a Hospital Trust failed to properly assess the man's mental capacity while he was an inpatient. This has left the man's family with uncertainty which is an injustice to them. The Hospital Trust has agreed to provide an apology and to offer a small financial payment to address this.</p>
<p><b>Local Welfare Payments 06-Jan-2023 (22 006 688)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mrs F complained the Council failed to publish the discretionary energy rebate scheme in a timely manner. She also said it provided her with misleading information and its complaints handling and communication was poor. We find the Council was at fault for its communication with Mrs F and its complaints handling. The Council has agreed to our recommendations to address the injustice caused by fault.</p>
<p><b>Planning Applications 12-Jan-2023 (22 001 758)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mrs X complains her home is overlooked because the Council failed to properly consider a planning application. There was fault by the Council, but this did not cause injustice to Mrs X.</p>
<p><b>Enforcement 13-Jan-2023 (21 013 353)</b></p> <p>Summary: Mr X complains about the Council's handling of a planning enforcement investigation about a gazebo built by his neighbour. We find the Council at fault for failing to consider the correct distance between the structure and Mr X's boundary. But we do not find this caused Mr X a significant injustice as the incorrect measurements were unlikely to change the Council's decision not to take formal enforcement action. The Council has accepted it failed to fully respond to Mr X's emails and provide timely responses. We find the Council has suitably remedied the uncertainty and frustration this caused Mr X as it has apologised to him and carried out a related service improvement.</p>
<p><b>Childrens Care Services 17-Jan-2023 (22 012 112)</b></p> <p>Summary: We will not investigate this complaint that the Council has delayed consideration of a complaint under the statutory procedure for complaints about children's services. This is because the Council has upheld the complaint and offered a suitable remedy for the injustice caused by the delay.</p>

Not all cases referred to the LGSCO are accepted for detailed investigation. On occasions cases may fall outside their investigative remit or be directed to the authority for further local resolution.

## **12. Comparative analysis against previous years**

The Ombudsman has advised that nationally their average uphold rates for all investigations has increased this year, and the organisations may find the uphold rate is higher than in

previous years. Comparing previous years should carry a note of caution. Although the percentage of overall complaints upheld has increased for the authority, it is essential to note that there has been an overall reduction of 34% of complaints (10) accepted by the Ombudsman compared to 2021/22. The Annual Report does not consider this but should be considered when understanding our performance.

The authority was compliant with 100% of the recommendations in 25% of the upheld cases, they found that the authority had provided satisfactory remedy before the case reached the Ombudsman.







The authority continues to perform well compared to similar organisations, although it is disappointing to note that over a quarter of cases did not complete remedies within the agreed timescale. All services must agree with the Ombudsman's findings or provide a good reason that they do not agree. Although this is rare, and our compliance rate is 100%. However, recommendations can sometimes become entrenched in more comprehensive projects or benefit from having a more specific line of responsibility.

The authority continues to deliver a framework developed to improve complaint handling within the authority; this includes a new case management system due to go live by November 2023. A welcomed function within the system will allow for detailed action plans to be completed, owners assigned to tasks and through a configurable task system and improved reporting, progress can be monitored to ensure compliance.

While the evidence outlined in this report suggests that overall complaint handling performance is reassuring, due to the issues highlighted in the 2019-20 Annual Complaints report concerning the use of the system and inconsistent ways data is captured, it is proving unreliable as performance data.

It should be stressed that the number of complaints taken alone is not necessarily a reliable indicator of performance.

The volume of complaints should be considered alongside the uphold rate (how often we found fault when we investigated a complaint). This new indicator will be incorporated into future frameworks and reporting mechanisms when using a new case management system capable of more granular analysis.

Feedback Type	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	Direction of travel
Informal Complaints	153	141	112	115	111	
Stage 1 Complaints	970	1328	1366	1758	1484	
Stage 2 Complaints	50	65	83	94	83	
Stage 1 closed within the timescale.	683 (70%)	902 (81%)	1038 (79%)	1317 (75%)	1048 (80%)	
Stage 2 closed within the timescale.	28 (56%)	30 (85%)	31 (42%)	79 (84%)	40 (63%)	
LGSCO complaints upheld	15 (83%)	9 (35%)	10 (45%)	15 (52%)	16 (84%)	

### **13. Service update**

Given the amount of contact the Council received in the past year, these figures suggest that the Council is well placed to deal with customer concerns as they occur effectively and, where possible, can either resolve the matter or provide an adequate explanation.

Similarly, to the data provided in the 2021/22 report, it is widely accepted that the authority performs well compared to similar authorities in 2021/22. Authorities in the Northeast hold the lowest amount of total upheld complaints.

The authority was compliant with all Ombudsman recommendations, evident by the 5% increase in offering satisfactory remedies that the authority increasingly recognises the importance of being open and accountable.

This year, the Ombudsman has highlighted the continued view that complaint functions have been under-resourced in recent years, a trend only exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. The Ombudsman urges organisations to prioritise complaints, particularly regarding capacity and visibility. Adequately resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members can provide valuable insight into an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery. The authority continues to deliver a framework developed to improve complaint handling within the authority, including various ways to utilise complaints as a positive learning tool, increase resources, and procure a bespoke case management system.

### **7: Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	By collecting and analysing corporate feedback, services can use the results to determine, shape and influence future policies.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

<b>Legal</b>	Where appropriate, advice is sought from the Legal Team on specific matters regarding complaints.
<b>Procurement</b>	Not applicable
<b>Human Resources</b>	Not applicable
<b>Property</b>	Not applicable
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Not applicable
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Not applicable
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	As a Council, customers must give us feedback and feel that their views and opinions are fully considered and dealt with appropriately.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Not applicable
<b>Wards</b>	All

#### **Background papers:**

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2021/22

#### **Report sign-off:**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Name
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Neil Masson
Service Director Finance & Interim S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Gill O'Neill
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	CLlr Richard Wearmouth

#### **Author and Contact Details**

Julie Dennitts, Corporate Complaints Manager  
07870 365966

This page is intentionally left blank

Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2023-2024

## 1. Terms of reference:

- (1) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- (2) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
  - Development Planning
  - Neighbourhood Planning
  - Conservation
  - Housing
  - Climate Change
  - Countryside, Biodiversity and Landscape Quality
  - Waste Management and Energy Use
  - Public and Community Transport Network and Travel to School
  - Highway Maintenance, Streetscape and the Local Environment
  - Local and Neighbourhood services
  - Crime, Community Safety, and Fear of Crime, including CONTEST, Prevent and Channel
  - Antisocial Behaviour and Domestic Violence
  - Fire and Rescue
  - Emergency Services and Emergency Planning
  - Customer Services
  - Provision of Cultural and Leisure Facilities
  - Improving Quality of Life through Access to Culture and Leisure;
  - Supporting Economic Growth in the Arts, Culture and Leisure Sectors

## 2. Issues to be Timetabled/Considered

This will include work that the OSC can be more proactive in early stage development work in formulating new policies and strategies; to investigate matters of interest and concern to the wider community, and to keep under review the performance and financial position of the Council. Issues identified by the Committee for inclusion on the work programme are:

- North East Transport Plan
- Local Cycling Walking Investment Plans – development of the programme



- Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings.
- Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- New Section 106 system
- Green / Open spaces review
- Local Nature Reserve Strategy

Northumberland County Council  
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

**28 February 2024**

**Social Housing**

To consider the implications of the new Social Housing Regulations.

**Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service  
Inspection Report**

To consider His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection report.

**27 March 2024**

Page 12

**Northumberland Infrastructure Funding  
Statement**

To consider the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement in respect of Section 106 Agreements.

**Library Service Strategy 2021-26**

To update the Committee on the implementation of the Strategy.

**24 April 2024**

Northumberland County Council  
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report 2023-2024

Ref	Date	Report	Decision	Outcome
1.	31 May 2023	<b>Fire and Rescue – Contamination</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet be recommended to agree that financial support for the recommendations made by the fire and rescue service be provided to ensure that Northumberland was leading to reduce the risk of contamination and supporting fire and rescue personnel.	Recommendation was agreed by Cabinet on 11 July 2023.
2.	31 May 2023	<b>Food Waste Recycling Pilot</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the presentation be received and food waste trial results to date be noted.	The OSC to receive further updates as appropriate.
3.	27 July 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Improving Our Roads and Highways</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix My Street (with links to Network Management Plan / road hierarchy)</li> <li>• North East Transport Plan</li> <li>• Local Cycling Walking Investment Plans – development of the programme</li> <li>• Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings.</li> <li>• Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
4.	27 July 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Environment</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Housing Regulation Bill</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Section 106 system</li> <li>• Green / Open spaces review</li> <li>• Local Nature Reserve Strategy</li> <li>• A task and finish group on the environment</li> </ul>	
5.	27 July 2023	<b>Update on the Development of a Tree Management Policy</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The progress made on developing the Tree Management Policy be noted.</li> <li>2. The draft structure of the Tree Management Policy was supported with comments made as above.</li> </ol>	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
6.	27 September 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Review by Active Northumberland</li> <li>• Presentation by future leisure services provider</li> <li>• DDP and DMP</li> <li>• Joint review with CSEG ESC on broadband.</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
	27 September 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities</b>  <b>Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Performance Report</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The contents of the NFRS Annual Performance Report be noted and its review be included in the work programme on an annual basis including information on the scrutiny of core measures and the E&amp;SV toolkit.</li> <li>2. The item listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger Local Resilience Forum pilot and COMAH exercise.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
8.	27 September 2023	<b>Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Public Interest Report</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the report be agreed, and</li> <li>(b) a report on planning performance including numbers of applications, resourcing, enforcement</li> </ol>	A report on Planning performance be added to the OSC's work programme.

			including the legal process and costs of decisions against Council decisions.	
9.	25 October 2023	<b>Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 – 2026 Action Plan Progression</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the contents of the report be noted and the updates regarding actions that have been taken to meet the priorities identified to supports our residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	The Committee may seek further updates on the implementation of the action plan as appropriate.
10.	25 October 2023	<b>Update on Implementation of Fix My Street</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the progress made on the development and implementation of the Fix My Street system be noted.	No further action required.
11.	29 November 2023	<b>Planning Service Performance Report</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The contents of the report be noted.</li> <li>2. Members of the committee noted the potential for increase in planning income and recommended to Cabinet to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work.</li> <li>3. Cabinet to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received.</li> </ol>	Cabinet consider the OSC's recommendations on 16 January 2024 and resolved that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <i>the recommendation from Scrutiny to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work be accepted;</i></li> <li>(b) <i>the recommendation from Scrutiny to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process; and</i></li> <li>(c) <i>a Policy Conference around the planning process and enforcement be set up.</i></li> </ol>

This page is intentionally left blank