



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 22 MARCH 2023

Council Achievements 2022-23

Report of: Cllr. Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council

Responsible Officer: Philip Hunter, Interim Senior Service Director

Purpose of report

To highlight key achievements of the Council in the year 2022-23.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

1. Note the achievements of the Council in the year 2022-23.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report links to all three Council priorities.

Key issues

- It is important for Members to consider key progress and achievements against the Council's priorities, alongside the Council's performance reporting.
- Commencing with this Report, it is proposed to bring a 'Council Achievements Report' in March every year. This will be followed by an annual performance report after quarter four of the performance cycle.

Background

1. Starting in September last year, Officers have worked with Members to refresh the Council's Corporate Plan. This included a Policy Conference focused on the Corporate Plan, held in January 2023. Further engagement with Members on the Plan is planned for the coming months.
2. The refreshed Corporate Plan will set the overall strategic direction for the Council, setting the context for service planning, appraisal and capital investment. Therefore, it's important for Members and Officers to understand Council delivery and performance in the context of the Corporate Plan priorities. This helps Members to

track progress against the Council's priorities and informs debate on resources, action-planning and policy development.

- Appendix 1 of this Report outlines the key achievements. These are set out against eight Cabinet Portfolios and cross-referenced against the Council's three priorities of Tackling Inequalities; Delivering Economic Growth; and Achieving Value for Money. These achievements are summarised below.

Summary of key achievements

4. Tackling Inequalities

- Following the adoption of the Tackling Inequalities Plan by Full Council in September last year, the Inequalities Plan has now been signed by key partners across the County and beyond.
- In June 2022, around 200 community groups received funding from the Council's £70k Queen's Platinum Jubilee fund which was launched to help communities celebrate the Jubilee.
- Continuing to support the refugees who have fled their homeland as a result of the war in Ukraine. Currently the county has 160 hosts supporting 460 refugees.
- In February this year, County Council approved a budget focused on protecting frontline services, investing in the future and looking after the most vulnerable. The average Council Tax increase residents will pay next year is 3.6%.
- Continuing the Council Tax Support unchanged for the next year - with the Council's scheme still one of the most generous in the region at a maximum level of 92%.
- The Council issued 126,835 payments of £150 under the Government's Energy Rebate Payment scheme and some 25,475 payments totalling £0.651 million were issued under the Council's own Discretionary Energy Rebate scheme.
- The Council has processed and funded 18,242 Hardship payments of up to £175 (£2.063 million in total) to reduce Council Tax liability in 2023-24 for those eligible.
- The Council has processed and funded 124,635 payments of £17.21 (£2.145 million in total) for households, not in receipt of Council Tax support, and not an empty property or a second home to reduce their Council Tax liability for 2023-24.
- Last year, the Council commenced a new food waste recycling trial, with thousands of homes taking part. As the Council continues its drive to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, the new pilot scheme involves collecting the weekly food waste from around 4,500 households across four areas within the County.
- There are currently 11 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) projects active in Northumberland. Some projects will start their construction phase during 2023 while some others are under early preliminary design stages.
- In September last year, Ofsted Inspectors praised Northumberland's Children's Services for their work to provide young people with safe and secure long-term care. This followed the last full inspection in 2020, when Ofsted rated Children's Services at as "good" across the board.
- Work is underway on the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth, a new, special free school for Northumberland.

- The Council has already approved a multi-million investment in the Coquet Partnership of schools, including a new building for James Calvert Spence College (JCSC).
- In December last year, planning permission was granted for a new school that is set to transform education for young people in Seaton Valley for generations to come.
- Following extensive consultation, a £40m project will see Astley Community High School and Whytrig Middle School rebuilt on a new shared campus to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for over 1,000 students
- In March this year, the vast majority of Northumberland pupils moving up to middle and secondary schools in September received offers for their first-choice school (95.45%).
- A record 89.6% of schools are rated good or outstanding. This is above national average for school performance and represents the best performance ever for the County.
- The Council secured additional Government funding to help give children in Northumberland the best start in life after the Council was recognised as a “trailblazer” in the development of Family Hubs.
- At a time when many councils are closing sports & leisure facilities, the Council has in the past year continued to invest in modern facilities and leisure services that meet the changing demands of residents and visitors to the County including in Berwick, Newbiggin and Morpeth.
- Last year, some eleven Northumberland parks were awarded prestigious Green Flag Awards by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, which recognises them as some of the very best in the country.
- Improvements in libraries across the County have started with new looks at Bedlington, Ashington and Newbiggin which will be rolled out across Northumberland.
- As part of the Big Northumberland Gear Change over 8,200 people visited our Bike Festival in Blyth.
- The Council has used a range of approaches to help create more affordable housing in areas of identified housing need. The Council has allocated £45m which will be used over the next five years to create some 400 affordable homes.
- In February this year major works to tackle historical pollution on the coast at Lynemouth received all the necessary planning and regulatory consents, meaning the scheme can get underway later this year.
- In April last year, the Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as fully discharging all recommendations made in its report published in 2021.
- With partners, the Council has helped create a network of over 150 warm, safe spaces where residents can enjoy a hot drink, have conversations with others or join in activities.
- The Council distributed The Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to those who need to help with food, energy and water and other essential household costs.
- Families continued to receive vouchers during the school holidays towards food, energy and other essential costs.

- Delivering a £1.35m three-year programme of works to improve the standard of all of the 54 public toilets in the county.
- Since April 2022, the Council has been offering all the organisations it commissions to provide Adult Social Care services additional funding in return for a commitment to pay care workers the Real Living Wage.
- Two social workers from Northumberland were shortlisted for the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022.
- Northumberland County Council's Joint Equipment Loans Service has installed a state-of-the-art industrial cleaning machine which enables independent living equipment to be recycled and reused, and will also contribute to the Council's climate goals.
- Planning permission has been granted for 13 Dementia friendly affordable bungalows which will be built at Lyndon Walk in Blyth as part of Northumberland County Council's overall commitment to increase the availability of housing to meet the needs of all residents.
- The Council procured a long-term contract to provide 25 x faster connections across its corporate sites, 262 km of new fibre in the ground and helps address digital exclusion, by providing access to ultra-fast broadband to over 120,000 properties.

4. Delivering Economic Growth

- Main construction work has now started on the Northumberland Line rail scheme, with six new stations granted planning approval. This follows the closure of passenger services some sixty years ago. The line's construction work alone has created almost 100 high-skilled jobs and apprenticeships.
- In March this year the Council awarded Commsworld, the UK's largest independent network provider, a 20-year contract worth £22m. The contract is forecast to attract £114m of private investment into the region to transform and support the County's digital infrastructure.
- The Council has continued to work with businesses and partners to facilitate the building of a gigafactory at Blyth which will secure thousands of high-quality jobs. The recent acquisition of *British Volt* by *Recharge Industries* has now been concluded.
- In a significant milestone for the Borderlands Growth Deal, the Ad Gefrin Distillery in Wooler is on track to open to the public in March. Attracting thousands of visitors and providing good-quality local jobs, Ad Gefrin will bring a boost to the local economy.
- In October last year, the Council's Cabinet approved a new programme to help reinvigorate Ashington town centre. The Ashington High Street Innovation Programme which will see a range of projects delivered in the Town over the coming months, worth over £2.3m.
- In February this year, the Council has welcomed Government's announcement on investment to level up Blyth by upgrading housing, tackling health inequalities, improving access to local jobs and cutting crime. This includes an £18 million boost which will repurpose run-down and empty homes into high-quality affordable housing to rent and convert under-occupied offices into new apartments. There will also be £1.5 million to fund new high-tech training equipment at the tTown's Energy Central

Campus, providing local young people with a route to high-quality jobs on their doorstep.

- This additional investment will support the Town's transition to a leading clean energy port. Since 2019, the Council has secured Government investment in Blyth of over £56 million.
- The Government announcement for Blyth follows the Council's Cabinet approving, in December, over £1million extra funding to support a scheme to restore and revitalise Hexham's historic Town Centre.
- Work started in February to make way for a new state-of-the-art-learning facility, the Energy Central Learning Hub at the Port of Blyth. The new 2,396 sqm hub is phase one of Energy Central Campus and will build upon the success of the existing industrial training cluster in Blyth.
- As part of the ongoing commitment to the NCC apprenticeship programme the council has recruited 66 apprentices in the last 12 months. And, the Council has attracted over 200 attendees to apprenticeships events. Engagement in NCC campaigns has reached 300,000+ impressions with over 10,000 engagements.
- Last year also marked the completion of the Bates Clean Energy Terminal, where the Council was accountable body, working in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Port of Blyth.
- We also saw in the past year the completion of the new dock at Cambois by Advance which facilitated the arrival of *JDR Cables*. The Council and the LEP joined to invest in the scheme which otherwise would have seen the site left empty and unused.
- In February this year, Members were informed of the Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan supported by the North of Tyne Combined Authority. The £9 million funding secured from NTCA for Northumberland will be used to provide help across Northumberland including targeting the most difficult to reach parts of the County.
- Since the Great Northumberland Forest was announced in 2019, over 700 hectares of woodland creation and 240,000 trees have been planted.
- In July 2022, the Council launched a pilot of electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints as part of our ongoing commitment to make electric vehicles more accessible. On-street chargepoints were installed at seven locations across the county including in Ashington, Felton, Berwick, Alnwick, Haltwhistle, Corbridge and Bellingham.
- The Council has continued work to develop district heating networks which could utilise mine water from the former Bates Colliery as a heat source to provide low carbon heat to commercial and domestic properties around Blyth.
- The commencement of the County Hall Solar Car Port is a significant investment in renewable energy for the Council and one of the largest of its kind in the UK.
- The Council has continued its free tree scheme with 15,000 being made available during the Winter months. This hugely popular scheme encourages residents to get directly involved in achieving Northumberland's target to become carbon neutral by 2030.

- In June last year, a new pilot boat for the Port of Berwick was delivered after the Council's Cabinet approved a £60,000 grant from its Strategic Regeneration Budget to the Berwick Harbour Commission for a replacement boat.

5. Achieving Value for Money

- In February this year the Council welcomed its new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Paterson.
- The new Chief Executive taking up her new post comes alongside the appointment of a new top team of Executive Directors to deliver on the Council's priorities.
- The Council's Staff and Appointments Committee have agreed a new Monitoring Officer and this recommendation will go forward to the March meeting of County Council.
- The Council remains on target to deliver on schedule, its actions and initiatives in the Improvement Action Plan. This includes work to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose constitution, refresh of the Corporate Plan and Member Development Plans.
- The introduction of 'Policy Conferences' in the past year has helped foster wider Member involvement in Council policy development.
- In October last year, Council's Cabinet agreed a revised Charter to support working between towns, parishes and the County Council.
- In January this year, the Leader of Council led three successful Town and Parish Council conferences to listen to the views of local councillors on what works well and areas and issues most in need of improvement.
- The Council has continued to hold large "drop-in sessions for the public through our Town Forums, demonstrating a listening and engaging Council.
- The Council has supported a Member-led review of Local Area Council working. This review is nearing completion and will be reported to Full Council in the coming months.
- Phase 1 of the Council's Strategic Change Programme began in July 2022. This will deliver sustainable savings and service improvements across the Council in the coming years.
- In May last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed to replace equipment at the Council's existing winter service weather stations and at the same time create four new weather forecasting sites at a total cost of £400,000.
- The Council has continued to invest in car parking across the County, encouraging local residents to 'shop local' and sustain their local economies. Key schemes delivered include: new car parking for Amble; Morpeth and in Hexham
- A £23m Local transport Plan capital programme has been delivered focusing on maintenance of roads and bridges and improvements to the highway network. An additional £2.5m investment has been made in the Council's U and C roads using additional Council capital investment, with over 30 individual lengths of U and C roads resurfaced.

- In October last year, the Council purchased a 'JCB Pothole Pro' following a successful trial last year of the rapid road repairer. The machine will help maintain some of the county's 3,000+ miles of road.
- Earlier in the year, the Council unveiled its new fleet of cleaner and greener road cleaning machines. The four new state-of-the-art vehicles, which cost a total of £740,000, are more efficient with the latest engines, and advanced gully and drain cleaning technology.

Next Steps

6. Achievements against the Corporate Plan priorities will be reported to Council in March each year.

Implications

Policy	This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Whilst this Report contains no direct financial implications, delivery of the Council's achievements has financial implications set out in the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and other reports to the Council's Cabinet and Full Council.
Legal	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, delivery of the Council's achievements may have legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the delivery of specific actions are set out in past reports and / or will be brought forward in future reports.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	Links to the appraisal and performance frameworks.
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime Disorder &	N/A

Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All Wards

Background papers:

Corporate Plan 2021-24

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Acting Chief Executive	Audrey Kingham
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	-
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Glen Sanderson

Author and contact details:

Philip Hunter, Interim Senior Service Director
 Philip.hunter@northumberland.gov.uk