






APPENDIX 1

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2022-23

<p>Leader of Council</p>	
<p>Embedding a new ‘top team’ to take forward the Council’s ambitions</p>	
<p>In February this year, the Council was delighted to welcome its new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Paterson. Formerly Chief Executive at Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, Helen brings a wealth of local government experience to the role – including as an Executive Director at Sunderland City Council and Chief Executive of Wrexham County Borough Council. 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. Importantly, 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.</p>	
<p>Improving the Council</p>	
<p>The Council remains on target to deliver, on schedule, all of the actions and initiatives in our Improvement Action Plan. This includes work to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose constitution, refresh of the Corporate Plan and Member Development Plans. Also, the introduction of ‘Policy Conferences’ in the past year has helped foster wider Member involvement in Council policy-development.</p>	
<p>Working in partnership in the region</p>	
<p>In the past year the Council has continued to play its full part in the North of Tyne Combined Authority, ensuring residents, communities and businesses in Northumberland benefit from devolved funding. Most recently, 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. The money will be used in a range of ways such as skills training for small businesses.</p> <p>In December last year, Government announced a “minded to” devolution deal with the seven councils across the North East</p>	  

<p>(Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland Councils).</p> <p>The expanded deal which the Council has helped to secure will see a significant shift of powers, funding and responsibility which will enable the Councils to pursue their ambitions for inclusive growth. In total, it will provide £4.2 billion of additional investment to the region over 30 years, including a £1.4bn investment fund alongside significant funding for transport, education and skills, housing and regeneration.</p> <p>As this deal has been developed, the Leader of Council ensured the interests of the County have been well reflected and that the County Council will have significant responsibilities within the new Combined Authority. The Leader also played a key role in ensuring the Devolution Deal brings significant and improved funding to the region.</p>	
<p>Ensuring the Council helps to shape national policy and representing our communities interest nationally</p>	
<p>Responding to the challenges many of the County’s farming communities face, the Leader of Council commissioned an independent report into the future of farming. The aim of this is to help shape farming policy nationally and, ultimately, to sustain this vital sector for future generations. In February this year, the Council’s Cabinet received the report, written by experts from the sector. Following this, the Leader of Council has written to the Secretary of State inviting her to visit Northumberland to discuss how we respond to the findings of our future of farming report.</p> <p>Last year, the Council made representations on Government proposals which could have had a detrimental impact on fishing communities in the County. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had been considering whether to designate Holy Island a <i>Highly Protected Marine Area</i> (HPMA), meaning a ban on fishing in the waters off the island. In March this year, the Council welcomed news that Government plans for a fishing ban off Holy Island had been dropped. The Council is pleased to have played a part to support local communities to ensure their voices were heard by DEFRA on this matter.</p> <p>Indeed, across a range of important policy areas, the Council has ensured regular and positive engagement with Government. Most recently, the Council has facilitated visits to the County by the Transport and Levelling Up Secretaries, helping secure significant Government investment for Northumberland’s communities.</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains three vertically stacked icons. The top icon is yellow and features a scale of justice, with the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The middle icon is green and features a hand holding a plant, with the text 'Driving Economic Growth' and 'Place' below it. The bottom icon is blue and features a building with columns, with the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>

Supporting the County’s residents to mark national events and celebrate heritage

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 mark the Jubilee. A spectacular Platinum Jubilee beacon lighting ceremony was held on Hadrian’s Wall and screened live on national TV. It was one of over 2,000 beacons lit across the UK and the Commonwealth. Northumberland communities celebrated the historic occasion of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee as towns and villages became a blaze of red, white and blue, with street parties, parades, Church services, tree planting schemes and much more with schools, businesses and communities all getting involved.

Sadly, September saw the death of our Monarch, with communities across the County coming together to mark the passing of the Queen with respect and solemnity. Following consultation with communities on the most fitting ways to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II, the Council has made available additional budget for a number of park enhancements spread across the County, including: Eastwood Park in Prudhoe; Carlisle Park, Morpeth; Valley Park, Cramlington; Cleasewell Hill Park; and, Warkworth Beach.

As we look forward to the Coronation of our new King in May, Over 120 community groups have applied for King’s Coronation Community Grants to celebrate this historical event.



The Council has also worked with partners to celebrate 1900 years of Hadrian’s Wall, ensuring this World Heritage Site continues to attract and inspire current and future generations from across the region and the wider world.



In addition, the restoration of the 202-year-old Union Chain Bridge, the oldest vehicle suspension bridge in the world still open to traffic, is nearing completion. The famous structure connecting England and Scotland has been rebuilt piece by piece over the past two years involving an award-winning partnership approach between Northumberland County Council, Scottish Borders Council, Museums Northumberland and charity The Friends of Union Chain Bridge.



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Strengthening partnership working on tackling inequalities

Following adoption of the Tackling Inequalities Plan by County Council in September last year, the Inequalities Plan has now been signed by key partners across the County and beyond, demonstrating the commitment by all partners. The Plan outlines key goals that can be delivered at scale over the coming years to level off and start to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy.

Partner's demonstrating their commitment include:

- Children's and Adults Safeguarding Board;
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust;
- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust;
- Healthwatch;
- Local Medical Council;
- Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust;
- NHS England;
- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board;
- North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee;
- Northumberland County Council;
- Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service;
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust;
- Northumbria Police;
- Voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.

This Tackling Inequalities Plan is so significant because it goes far beyond mere words and commits Council resources, services and projects to making a difference to communities. It is also builds on in-depth collaboration with partners and communities.



Delivering on the Council's Climate Action Plan

Since the Great Northumberland Forest was announced in 2019, over 700 hectares of woodland creation and 240,000 trees have been planted. These have been delivered through Forestry Commission Grants, Forestry England delivery, Countryside Stewardship, Green Recovery and private financed schemes. Equally, the pipeline for future woodland creation is also looking healthy with over 800ha planned for this season and approx. 3,000ha awaiting agreement via the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) application process.



In July 2022, the Council launched a pilot of on-street 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. These supplement the Council's existing network of 114 EV chargers located mainly in town centre and other public car parks.






These chargepoints represented the council's first move towards 'on-street' kerbside EV charging and a further 75 of these charging points are now being rolled out in other areas in the county, with further phases planned for the next 2 years with funding support from Government, so that those homeowners who don't have their own driveways on which to charge an EV have access to EV charging infrastructure. This is a key element of the council's Climate Change Action Plan which aims to have 30% of cars in the county electric by 2030. The Council has continued work to develop district heating networks which will 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 saplings up for being distributed for planting 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.

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<p>Playing our part internationally</p>	
<p>Working with residents and partners, the Council continues to support the refugees who have fled their homeland as a result of the war in Ukraine. Currently the County has 160 hosts providing a safe and much needed home for 460 refugees, of whom 177 are children.</p> <p>As the war continues, more Ukranian refugees could be arriving in the county over coming months. Another 97 visas have been issued - giving them permission to come to Northumberland if they wish – and an additional 41 have been confirmed.</p> <p>Earlier last year, Firefighters from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service made a series of trips across Europe to help their colleagues in Ukraine. This included delivering fire appliances, together with an incident response unit and a 4x4 paramedic unit donated by the International Fire & Rescue Association to help Ukraine's emergency services.</p>	
<p>Strengthening local decision-making and listening to communities</p>	
<p>In October last year, Council’s Cabinet agreed a revised Charter to support working between towns, parishes and the County Council. In January, 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. And, the Council has continued to hold large “drop in sessions for the public through Town Forums, underlining the Council’s commitment to listening and engaging.</p>	
<p>Alongside this, the Council has supported a Member-led review of Local Area Council working. This review is nearing completion and will be reported to County Council in the coming months.</p>	

Deputy Leader and Corporate Services

Agreeing an ambitious Budget for the County Council

In February this year, County Council approved a budget focused on protecting frontline services, investing in the future and looking after the most vulnerable.

Among the priorities agreed for the year ahead are:

- Protecting and maintaining key frontline services;
- Looking after the most vulnerable and supporting everyone with cost-of-living issues;
- Continuing work to re-open the Northumberland Line;
- Delivering new school builds and ongoing education improvements; and,
- Investing in leisure centres, open spaces and town-centre regeneration.

The Budget contains an ambitious £223 million capital programme for 2023-24, including £92 million to improve and regenerate towns and communities across the County, over £19 million for housing, £31 million for schools and £35 million for road and path repairs and flood prevention schemes.

Reflecting what residents said was most important, the Council significantly increased the budget for Adult Social Care by 16% (from £111m to £129m (net)) as well as Children’s Services funding - net budget increasing from £67.194 million to £74.889 million (an increase of 11%).



The average Council Tax increase residents will pay next year is 3.6%.




It had already been agreed to keep 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%. Pensioners will continue to be eligible up to a maximum of 100% of their Council Tax liability. The cost of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022-23 is forecast to be £25.8 million




A number of other new hardship payments are also being introduced for both Council Tax Support claimants and Council Housing tenants for the coming year.

Savings of £17 million were agreed for the coming year, although these will not be at the expense of frontline services. These savings will be achieved by doing things differently, transforming the way the Council delivers its services and being more efficient, year-on-year.



<p>Investing in efficient, new systems to support customers</p>	
<p>The Council procured a contract with a communications provider to deliver significant improvements to school broadband connectivity. Through providing an SLA to a community of schools in the county, the Council is able to provide full fibre connectivity to over 110 schools at an affordable rate.</p> <p>Wide Area Network (WAN) - The Council procured a long term (20 year) contract that will 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.</p> <p>The Council replaced its aging telephony systems with modern, digital Teams based telephony. This helped address cyber security risks and significantly reduced energy usage by an estimated 350,000 kw per year.</p> <p>The Council moved its old contact centre systems to the cloud-based, digital, Amazon Connect platform, helping it to provide a more reliable, resilient and scalable platform to manage surges in call volumes.</p> <p>The Council connected 639 rural premises to fibre to the premises (FTTP) using Rural Gigabit Voucher funding of £1.071 million (average of £1,675 subsidy per premise). 237 rural premises also benefited from Borderlands top-up voucher funding, totalling £0.476 million.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p> <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>
<p>Distributing grants to support residents</p>	
<p>The Council issued 126,835 payments of £150 under the Government's Energy Rebate Payment scheme to those households living in Band A to D council tax properties.</p> <p>In addition, 25,475 payments totalling £0.651 million were issued under the Council's own Discretionary Energy Rebate scheme to assist certain households not covered by the national scheme and to top up the most vulnerable households. Payments were made as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £20 top up to 24,861 households in Council Tax bands A to D in receipt of council tax support • £170 to 360 households in Council Tax bands E to H • £400 to 219 households classified as off the main electricity grid 	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £150 to households in receipt of a Class U Council Tax exemption where the recipients are classed as having a severe mental impairment <p>The Council has processed 18,387 Government Hardship Scheme payments of up to £25 (£0.458 million in total) to the Council Tax accounts of eligible claimants to reduce their liability for 2023-24.</p> <p>The Council has processed and funded 18,242 Hardship payments of up to £175 (£2.063 million in total) to eligible Council Tax support claimants.</p> <p>The Council has processed and funded 124,635 payments of £17.21 (£2.145 million in total) to 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.</p>	
<p>Supporting small, local businesses</p>	
<p>The Council designed and supported a new e-procurement platform (OPEN) that will transform how businesses find and bid for contract opportunities. The Council has engaged suppliers in the development and supported them to register free of charge.</p> <p>The Council has introduced a supplier incentive programme and embedded early payment facilities into its contracts to strengthen prompt payment to small and local suppliers and unlock additional efficiencies.</p>	 
<p>Delivering modern, efficient and fit-for-purpose services</p>	
<p>The Council's Strategic Change Programme has set out to redesign the way the Council delivers local public services within the context of the ongoing challenges. Phase 1 of the Council's Strategic Change Programme began in July 2022. This included key discovery and opportunity assessment activities, including data and information collection and analysis, multiple engagement workshops with key stakeholders and service experts.</p> <p>A draft Business Case was developed and reviewed by key internal stakeholders through multiple sessions and agreed by the Council's Cabinet in January this year. This sets out a proposed programme of improvement projects. These will deliver sustainable savings and service improvements across the Council in the coming years.</p>	

Local Services	
Helping to tackle food waste	
<p>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.</p> <p>The trial will help the Council assess the financial, environmental and operational impacts of providing a recycling collection service for food waste, to help inform plans for the expansion of the service across the rest of the county. The first collections have now taken place and have got off to a good start with staff reporting over 4,500 kilograms of food waste being collected in the first week. Once collected, food waste is recycled at an anaerobic digestion plant. The contents are processed to generate renewable energy and make a natural fertiliser for growing crops.</p>	 
Investing in cycling and walking	
<p>In October last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed plans for new cycling and walking routes for three areas in Northumberland. The development of high-quality Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure routes for Ponteland-Callerton and in Ashington and Blyth will create stronger and greener links for commuting and within towns for work, education and leisure purposes. The work in Blyth will tie in with the pedestrian and cyclist improvements made to the Waterloo Road / Renwick Road junction which was completed in June 2022.</p> <p>There are currently 11 LCWIP projects active in Northumberland, including Blyth, Ponteland, Ashington, Hexham, Bedlington, Haltwhistle. Some projects will start their construction phase during 2023 while others are under early preliminary design stages.</p> <p>The new improved cycling and walking routes link in with the Big Northumberland Gear Change campaign, which encourages people to adopt more sustainable ways of moving around the county by walking, cycling and using public transport more often.</p> <p>At the same time, Cabinet approved a £150k grant to the Kielder Water and Forest Park Trust to deliver the first phase of The Reivers Trail initiative.</p> <p>Following this, In January, Jan 2023 – the Council secured almost £15m funding towards new cycling and walking routes</p>	

for Tynedale and Bedlington. In Bedlington, the scheme will provide new and upgraded active travel infrastructure to improve the east to west link across the town, connecting key residential and employment areas with the planned Northumberland Line station. Additional benefits include connections to schools across the Town. The Council also has funding for cycling in the Blyth Town Deal which will help to create a properly integrated transport network linking to the Northumberland Line.

In Tynedale there'll be an active travel link between Hexham train station and Corbridge, improving both local connections within Hexham and facilitating active travel trips between Hexham and Corbridge.

Maintaining high-quality parks and open spaces

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.

Northumberland's winning green spaces are: Alexandra Park, Cramlington; Astley Park, Seaton Delaval; Bolam Lake Country Park, Carlisle Park, Morpeth; Castle Vale Park and Coronation Park, Berwick; Doctor Pit Park, Bedlington; Eastwoods Park, Prudhoe; Hexham Parks; Hirst Park, Ashington, Plessey Woods Country Park and Ridley Park, Blyth.

The Green Flag Award is a prestigious benchmark of quality for a park or green space. This international award, now celebrating its 26th year, is a sign to the public that the space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities.

The Council has committed to an on-going capital programme to improve its parks and country parks.





Ensuring winter readiness across the County

In May last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed to replace equipment at the Council's existing winter service weather stations as well as creating four new weather forecasting sites at a total cost of £400,000. The Council uses live and historical data gathered from the weather stations in conjunction with specialist weather forecasting to make decisions on winter services actions on the treatment of the road network each day. This also secures environmental benefits by ensuring we more efficiently target salt-spreading.

A further £1.261m was also invested as part of our fleet replacement programme to replace nine of our gritter fleet that



<p>were at the end of their economic life with new state-of-the-art gritters, ensuring that our staff have modern, fit-for-purpose and reliable vehicles to support the delivery of the winter maintenance service.</p>	
<p>Investing in infrastructure to support local communities and economies</p>	
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new car park for Amble opened in August 2022, increasing the number of spaces available from 47 to 134. The new car park provides seven disabled parking bays and six electric vehicle bays. Spaces for motorcycles and bikes are also provided. Around 2,500 tonnes of recycled road making material were used saving the Council over £125,000 in tipping fees and over £100,000 in the purchase of quarried stone - as well as saving around 17 tonnes of carbon. The newly-expanded carpark is free for the first hour and also has some larger bays suitable for parking motorhomes. • In November last year, Morpeth Town Centre’s newest free carpark opened for business – providing hundreds of new spaces for residents and visitors. The Goosehill carpark, on the site of the former first school, contains 128 standard parking bays, eight disabled bays and six electric vehicle charging spaces. The carpark is free with a maximum stay of 24 hours. • And, in December, Hexham’s newest carpark officially opened, with 250 spaces, including electric vehicle charging provision. This will operate as a long-stay facility, helping alleviate the pressure on Wentworth car park. Following public feedback earlier this year the council will also be keeping around 100 long-stay spaces in Wentworth carpark in the Town Centre. 	 <p>The icons are arranged vertically. The top one is yellow with a scale icon and text 'Tackling Inequalities People'. The middle one is green with a plant icon and text 'Driving Economic Growth Place'. The bottom one is blue with a building icon and text 'Achieving Value for Money Council'.</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>We also saw in the past year the completion by Advance of the new dock at Cambois which facilitated the arrival of JDR Cables. The Council and the LEP joined to invest in the development which otherwise would have seen the site left empty and unused.</p>	 <p>The icon is green with a plant icon and text 'Driving Economic Growth Place'.</p>

In June last year, a new pilot boat for the Port of Berwick which will help safeguard its commercial operations for years to come was officially unveiled. This 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. Thanks to the Council funding, the Harbour Commission was able to buy a purpose-built pilot boat from the Port of Sunderland. The new pilot boat will support the Port in its two distinct areas of operation:

- Commercial – handling and storing dry bulk cargoes with the stevedoring/piloting expertise it has within the operational capability of the harbour; and,
- Local amenity and leisure – developing an area separate to the commercial activity for visiting yachts, and cruise passenger visits.



At a time when, many councils have cut back on public toilet facilities, the Council has in the past year continued to invest in a network of public conveniences across the County. In November last year, refurbished public toilets opened at Alnwick to improve the services in one of the County's main towns.

And, in July – work was completed in toilet facilities at Low Newton, including a beach wheelchair storage area funded by local donations.

These improvements form part of a wider £1.35m three-year programme of works to improve the standard of all of the 54 public toilets in the County for which the Council has responsibility. These will improve the standards of public toilets for residents and visitors, with facilities in the larger main towns and key tourism destinations getting a programme of full refurbishment and modernisation. All remaining County Council toilets will undergo essential refurbishment, so facilities are brought up to a decent standard of repair and are easier to keep clean and maintain.



Investing in the County's roads

During the past year, the Council has continued to invest in roads across the County. This includes investing in state-of-the-art technology to help keep Northumberland's roads running smoothly.

A £23m Local transport Plan capital programme has been delivered focusing on maintenance of roads and bridges and improvements to the highway network including road safety schemes, improvements for pedestrians and cyclists and reduced speed limits, including introduction of 20mph at school schemes which are nearing completion.

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.

Design works have been completed and a contract let to carry out the complex repairs needed to resolve the long-term landslip affecting the B6344 at Rothbury with works expected to commence in spring 2023. After the Council's successful bid to the DfT Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund, work is now nearing completion on the £4.8m Steel Bridge Refurbishment Project to paint and refurbish eight of the Council's major steel bridges.

In October last year, the Council purchased a *JCB Pothole Pro* following a successful trial last year of the rapid road repairer. The machine, which has numerous tools and attachments to completely repair a pothole or stretch of road surface, was put through its paces by the Council last summer and will now 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, costing a total of £740,000, are more efficient with the latest engines, and advanced gully and drain cleaning technology. The gully tankers are slightly larger than the previous vehicles, with greater capacity to allow more gullies to be cleaned and fewer trips needed to the gully waste disposal facility. This will make the routine cleaning operation more efficient and this will reduce the reliance on external support to help unblock drainage pipes.



Tackling Inequalities

People






Driving Economic Growth


Place



Achieving Value for Money

Council

<p>Repairing local environments</p>	
<p>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. The Council has allocated £5m to clean up this stretch of coastline and stop historic waste deposits from washing into the sea. All the necessary regulatory consents for the scheme have now been secured, along with the final waste recovery permit from the <i>Environment Agency</i>. In the meantime, Council teams continue to visit weekly to monitor and remove material from the beach, where safe to do so.</p>	
<p>Children and Young People</p>	
<p>Maintaining our high standards in Children’s Services</p>	
<p>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 as “good” across the board.</p> <p>Inspectors returned to carry out a focused visit in July 2022, as part of the overall inspection framework, to shine a spotlight on the local authority’s arrangements for planning and achieving permanence for children who are ‘looked after’, including adoption.</p> <p>Inspectors found that in Northumberland, parents are appropriately supported to provide the best opportunity for children to remain living at home with them. This included safe and timely discharge of care orders for children who are placed at home with their parents. Where it is not possible to maintain a child with or return them to their parents, prompt action is taken to ensure the child is placed with permanent carers at the earliest opportunity. This includes timely and effective legal work.</p> <p>The report said that children’s permanence plans meet their individual needs. Family members are considered as alternatives to foster care and where long-term foster care is right for children, they are carefully matched to long-term foster carers.</p> <p>Where children are adopted or move to carers under a special guardianship order, those parents and carers receive enhanced support to help the children develop early attachments.</p> <p>Sensitive and child-centred social work helps children to engage with plans and understand their journey.</p>	 

<p>Young people who are supported in Northumberland Adolescent Service benefit from access to a range of professionals, including emotional well-being and youth justice practitioners, where appropriate, who provide wrap-around care.</p> <p>Managers offer positive supervision and support to workers. All workers spoken to by inspectors were positive about working for Northumberland.</p>	
<p>Investing in state-of the-art school facilities</p>	
<p>The Council continues to work in partnership with schools across the County to ensure young people have access to the best educational facilities. To deliver this, Council investment is, of course, important but so too is consultation with schools, communities, parents and pupils.</p> <p>Work is underway on the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth, a new special free school for Northumberland. The state-of-the-art school will provide education for up to 80 students aged 11-16 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) needs. Gilbert Ward Academy is part of Northumberland County Council’s wider strategy to increase special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) support across the County. A bid for an 80-place secondary SEMH special school was made by the Council in 2018 as part of the Government’s Free Schools programme.</p> <p>Detailed designs for new school proposals in Amble will go on display for the first time. 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). Further investment will also be made to refurbish the South Avenue site of JCSC to create new facilities for Amble First School and a satellite provision for Barndale House School to provide 50 new places for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The new school will use innovative technologies to create a “net zero carbon in operation school, supporting the Council’s ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030. The enhanced facilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An all-weather running track; • A floodlit 3G full-size football pitch; • A Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA); and, • A series of football and rugby pitches. <p>And, 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.</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains two logos. The top logo is a yellow rectangle with a circular icon of scales of justice and the text 'Tackling Inequalities' above 'People'. The bottom logo is a dark blue rectangle with a circular icon of a building and the text 'Achieving Value for Money' above 'Council'.</p>

Following extensive consultation, the £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. Sports facilities including indoor and outdoor sports pitches and a swimming pool will also be available for use by the wider community.

All of this follows the redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth High School and Hexham Middle School which recently won a national award. The Council has also pledged investment for schools in Berwick.

Supporting educational excellence and choice for parents and young people

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. A total of 4,114 pupils applied for places, a rise from the 4,037 applications last year, with 95.45% (3,927) receiving their first choice, 4.04% (166) their second choice, 0.44% (18) their third choice and 0.07% (3) their fourth.

In addition, a record 89.6% of schools are rated good or outstanding, with the Council’s School Improvement Team working in close partnership with our schools and academies to make sure all remaining schools are on track to improve. This is above the national average for school performance and represents the best performance ever for the County.



Giving children the best start in life

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.

The County’s network of Children’s Centres relaunched as Family Hubs in September 2022 after the Council successfully bid to join the Government’s programme.

Midwives, health visitors, early years and mental health professionals, youth staff, and a host of other services - including relationship and parenting programmes, and financial advice – are brought together into a vibrant ‘one-stop-shop’ that meets the needs of families with children and young people of all ages.

Now, the Council has been recognised as one of 14 “trailblazers” and awarded additional funding to help lead the way in the national rollout of the programme particularly around perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships, infant feeding, and parenting support.



The Family Hubs network is made up of 19 hubs, including outreach posts in more rural areas, mobile play vans, digital and virtual support. Every day, the timetables are packed with activities – and there are also digital and virtual services too to make sure the support is accessible for all.

Healthy Lives

Investing in excellent sport & leisure facilities

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.

Last year, Berwick’s new sports and leisure centre opened to the public with residents enjoying the new swimming pools, spa and fitness suite, a café, an indoor bowling area and much more.

Berwick’s new facility boasts a 20 x 24 metre, four-court hall and can be used for a wide range of uses and activities including 5-a-side football, netball, badminton, martial arts and volleyball.



In September, the new look Newbiggin sports and community hub opened to the public following a major refurbishment project. The £1.9m County Council-funded scheme has seen the centre refurbished and remodelled to provide a new and improved sporting offer and a community hub.

A new, modern and welcoming reception area, a library area with public access PCs, and the creation of a community café and hub has provided a welcoming social space for local people. Here they can access a range of services, support and events, with opportunities to learn new skills, seek help finding employment and receive health checks and advice.

On the sporting side, 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. There are new and improved changing facilities for sport and community use, including changing places that are designed to be fully accessible for those with additional needs. Outside there will be a community garden and a new football pitch is being laid.

Alongside this, the £21m construction of the new Morpeth Leisure Centre is nearing completion and on track to open to the public in early 2023. The main swimming pool has now been filled with water – a total of 450,000 litres – which took five days to fill. The new leisure centre will incorporate a six-lane swimming pool with spectator gallery, a learner pool, spa



<p>facilities, a four-court sports hall, a new 100 station gym, a dedicated spinning studio, two fitness studios, a cafe area and soft play. It will also incorporate a new community services hub which will see the Town's Library move back to its former home on Gas House Lane, a customer service centre and a new adult learning facility with classrooms for STEM learning and catering.</p>	
<p>Delivering innovation in our Libraries</p>	
<p>Libraries continue to be at the heart of local communities and National Libraries week in October last year proved the ideal platform to relaunch the County Council's service. The Council celebrated its 21st century offering by "Turning the Page on a New Chapter". Improvements in Libraries across the County have started with new looks at Bedlington, Ashington and Newbiggin which will be rolled out across Northumberland.</p> <p>This follows the Service playing a vital role in the Covid pandemic when thousands more people signed up to fill the empty lockdown hours and borrow books remotely via the eLibrary service. Library staff also made hundreds of doorstep deliveries and Reading Friend phone calls.</p>	
<p>Supporting events that promote healthy lives</p>	
<p>As part of the Big Northumberland Gear Change over 8,200 people visited our Bike Festival in Blyth. Partnering with <i>Dr Bike</i> and <i>3Sixty, Fat Creations, Cycle with Jan</i>, and <i>Cycling for Everyone</i> it was a day residents left their cars at home, got on their bikes and joined in the fun.</p> <p>And, over 500 young people from schools around the county took part in a School Games Live event at The Alnwick Gardens to celebrate the 2022 Commonwealth Games.</p>	
<p>Last year, the Council signed the Healthy Weight Declaration and, we are working towards the 16 commitments alongside the Hospitals Trust and North Tyneside Council.</p>	

Community Services

Delivering affordable housing

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.

Over the last five years, around 1,300 affordable homes have been secured through the planning process. Of these, around 800 were affordable homes for rent, delivered by the Council and partner housing associations. Around 180 were for shared ownership, and around 320 were available for purchase at a discount. In addition, there are about 190 affordable homes planned that the Council will manage including sites in rural locations. The Council is also working on a number of schemes with housing associations to deliver around 1,200 affordable homes for rent, shared ownership and 'rent to buy'.






As part of this approach, the Council is to build four new bungalows in Felton which it will rent out at an affordable rate. The Council's North Area planning committee has approved the scheme which will see the two- bedroomed bungalows built on a County Council garage site Felton. Zero carbon technologies will be used to power the new homes. The eco-friendly bungalows will have an insulated timber frame and roof, air source heat pumps and solar panels to help reduce bills for new tenants.



After consulting local residents and receiving some valuable feedback, some modifications were made to the original scheme including reducing the number of bungalows from five to four.




Planning permission has also been granted for a Council and Advance led scheme to build nine affordable bungalows at New Hartley near Seaton Delaval, providing housing for residents in need. The two-bedroomed bungalows will be available for affordable rent. These properties will be made available to a range of residents who require accessible ground floor accommodation, regardless of age. The properties have been specifically designed to allow residents to remain in their homes for as long as possible should their physical or mental health needs change.

In February this year, to mark National Empty Homes Week, the Council highlighted the work taking place to address the problem of empty properties in the County and is appealing to anyone who owns or knows of a long-term empty property to get in touch. With affordable housing in short supply, the Council has been taking action in a number of ways to help bring unused properties back into residential use. The




<p>Housing Services, Private Sector housing team has assisted in returning over 540 empty properties back into use over the last 5 years.</p>	
<p>Securing improvement in the Fire & Rescue Service</p>	
<p>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.</p> <p>The recommendations centred on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the management and recording of the working time of dual contract personnel; • Ensuring the meeting of statutory requirements could be evidenced; and, • Maintaining appropriate rest breaks for operational staff welfare. <p>In publishing the revisit outcomes, Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services, recognised the robust plans the Service now has in place and commitment to make the improvements that are needed.</p>	 
<p>Planning for the future of the County</p>	
<p>On 31st March 2022 - the first ever comprehensive Local Plan covering the entire county was formally adopted by the Council. This signalled a final break from the plans of the former district and County Councils and will guide all future planning applications for the period up to 2036.</p> <p>The Northumberland Local Plan, which includes new planning policies, will guide and detail the scale and distribution of development. It sets out a range of development proposals as well as planning policies, which will be used to assess applications and guide the location of future development in the county up to 2036.</p> <p>At a local level, the Council's Planning Team continues to support neighbourhoods to develop Neighbourhood Plans. In September, the Haydon Parish Neighbourhood Plan was formally 'made' at the Council's Cabinet Meeting. This took the total of Neighbourhood Plans in the County to 19.</p>	  

Adults' Wellbeing	
Supporting residents deal with rising costs of living	
<p>Throughout the Winter, residents have received a 'warm welcome' thanks to Northumberland's network of warm spaces. With partners, the Council has grown a network of over 150 warm, safe spaces where residents can enjoy a hot drink, have conversations with others or join in activities. Libraries, community hubs, village halls, churches and cafes are among the venues taking part.</p> <p>The Warm Spaces network is just a part of the support available to residents - in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northumberland Communities Together continued to deliver a seven-day-a-week helpline, advising on the support available to residents; • The Council distributed The Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to those most in need, both directly to residents and through the community and voluntary sector to provide support 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. There was also support for young people in education settings throughout the year, such as hygiene products, learning equipment, and school uniform support; • Children and young people made memories and enjoyed nutritious food through the Holiday Activity and Food programme; and, • Community-led food partnership Nourish Northumberland worked together to make sure everyone in Northumberland could access safe, healthy and affordable food. <p>Additionally, there has been Public Health Grant investment in building community resilience, warm homes schemes, support for children and 'community fridges'.</p>	
Valuing Care Workers	
<p>Since April 2022, the Council has been offering all the organisations it commissions for Adult Social Care services additional funding in return for a commitment to pay care workers the Real Living Wage.</p> <p>In the past, care workers in many services have been paid little more than the statutory minimum wage. As well as recognising the importance of the work which they do, the</p>	

<p>Council's support aims to address current pressures on care services at a time when workforce shortages are affecting many sectors of the economy.</p> <p>From December 2022, the Council has been operating a further scheme specifically targeted at the home care services which visit people in their own homes to provide care and support. Home care workers in rural Northumberland often need to drive between visits, and increasing fuel costs meant existing rates paid to cover mileage expenses were falling behind the real cost. The Council now funds home care providers to pay the maximum mileage rate approved by HMRC – in many cases an increase of as much as 80% on what they were previously receiving.</p>	
<p>National recognition for our Social Workers</p>	
<p>Two social workers from Northumberland were shortlisted for the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022.</p> <p>A Team Manager for the North Mental Health Team, was selected as a finalist for Team Leader of the Year, Adult Services award, and a Team Manager, in Northumberland's Adult Social Care Social Work Academy was selected as a finalist for the Practice Educator of the Year award.</p>	
<p>Investing in equipment for disabled people</p>	
<p>Northumberland County Council's Joint Equipment Loans Service has installed a state-of-the-art industrial cleaning machine which will enable independent living equipment to be recycled and reused, and will also contribute to the Council's climate ambitions.</p> <p>The service provides more than 58,000 pieces of community equipment to people in Northumberland each year to help them to live safely at home. Equipment is loaned free of charge following an assessment by a health or social care professional.</p> <p>The service recycles 75% of used equipment to help reduce its carbon footprint. Last year the service recycled almost 30,000 returned items which would otherwise have been scrapped.</p> <p>The new machine, which is expected to last for at least 20 years, will provide increased capacity to allow the service to recycle even more efficiently.</p>	 

<p>Supporting independent living</p>	
<p>Planning permission has been granted for 13 Dementia friendly affordable bungalows which will be built at Lyndon Walk in Blyth as part of the Council's overall commitment to increase the availability of housing to meet the needs of all residents.</p> <p>The bungalows have been designed to support residents who are living with Dementia and Alzheimer's enabling them to live independently in their own home, with support from their spouse, family or carers.</p> <p>They will be available for affordable rent and allocated via a special allocations process led by the Council's Adult Social Care service. Extra care and respite care will be provided by a new team. The development has been designed throughout to suit Dementia clients, with features including level access wet rooms and a technology system in each bungalow that will allow carers to be seen by the resident on a two-way screen. Outside, there will be an inner sensory garden that is safe and secure for residents to experience.</p> <p>This follows the opening of a new supported housing scheme in Berwick in October last year, giving young adults with learning disabilities the chance to live independently with support in their local community. The scheme forms part of the Council's Extra Care and Supported Housing Strategy. Henderson Court consists of ten flats with 24-hour support to help the residents build their life skills, manage their tenancy and be part of the local community.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p>  <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>
<p>Business</p>	
<p>Connecting Northumberland's residents and businesses</p>	
<p>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. When fully operational, it will see journeys between Newcastle and Ashington with no need to change trains.</p> <p>Passengers in the North-East will be able to connect with friends and family and enjoy greater access to business and education opportunities when the historic Northumberland Line reopens.</p> <p>Not only will the restoration of passenger services connect communities, but it will also boost the region's economy through improving access to jobs. Once complete, the journey time between Newcastle and Ashington will be reduced from 70 minutes to just 35, with services operating regularly seven</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p>  <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p>  <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>

<p>days a week, providing easy access to jobs, education and tourism opportunities in the City Centre.</p> <p>The Line's construction work alone has created almost 100 high-skilled jobs and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Congestion is expected to reduce, improving air quality as people will be encouraged away from their cars and onto trains.</p>	
<p>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.</p> <p>All 146 council sites are due to be connected by July 2024 and by late 2026, Commsworld plans to have 262km of new fibre installed across the County, enabling Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) access to more than 120,000 residential and business properties, many of which have never enjoyed access to gigabit-capable fibre networks before.</p> <p>Commsworld will be implementing and supporting the service over a 20-year period. The contract represents a step change by the Council, to embrace a progressive, long-term approach to infrastructure and connectivity in line with its digital strategy. It involves replacing its ageing Wide Area Network (WAN) with world-class full-fibre infrastructure which will also provide businesses and communities across the county – including its most rural areas – with access to faster, high-quality, reliable connectivity.</p> <p>It will future-proof Northumberland's digital backbone, by building and migrating services on to the new world-class dark fibre digital infrastructure. For instance, Commsworld will utilise the infrastructure established by the recent Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) project funded by Government through its Project Gigabit, which will result in a significant uplift in internet connectivity for 110 Northumberland schools, delivering a further boost to digital learning.</p> <p>The contract will also see Commsworld work in partnership with iNorthumberland, Community Action Northumberland and the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) to tackle digital poverty, alongside digital skills and confidence within the communities of Northumberland.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p> <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>
<p>Attracting and supporting investment</p>	
<p>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 for Northumberland.</p>	

<p>The recent acquisition of <i>British Volt</i> by <i>Recharge</i> Industries has now been concluded.</p>	
<p>In a significant milestone for the Borderlands Growth Deal, the Ad Gefrin Distillery in Wooler is on track to open to the public on 25th March. Attracting thousands of visitors and providing good-quality local jobs, Ad Gefrin will bring a boost to the local economy.</p>	
<p>Regenerating and revitalising our towns</p>	
<p>In October last year, the Council’s Cabinet approved a new programme to help reinvigorate Ashington town centre. The Ashington High Street Innovation Programme will see a range of projects delivered in the Town over the coming months, worth over £2.3m.</p> <p>Around £1.9m of the funding was secured in a successful bid to the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) Towns and High Streets Programme, which identified Ashington as one of three centres that would benefit from targeted funding to support innovative projects aimed at revitalising the Town Centre and High Street.</p> <p>The three key projects are:</p> <p>Public Realm Improvements and Connectivity – to make it easier for pedestrians to navigate around the town and create attractive and greener routes to key destinations.</p> <p>This will include creating a more visible access to bring visitors through to Portland Park and connecting this area with the high street. The area will be remodelled to create an attractive and welcoming gateway to leisure and retail.</p> <p>There’ll also be improvements to signage and the look and feel of Station Road West and the Town Centre with new planting and street furniture.</p> <p>Animating Ashington – this project will deliver a programme of cultural and heritage inspired events based on colour and animation. This will improve the Town’s current cultural offer including a programme of events throughout the year and activities could include festivals, makers, craft and lifestyle markets.</p> <p>A creative team will be commissioned to work with residents, schools and local businesses and develop and deliver the cultural programme.</p> <p>The Accelerate Ashington Business Support Programme - this will be delivered by Advance Northumberland, providing a support service to a range of</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains three vertically stacked icons. The top icon is yellow and features a scale of justice, with the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The middle icon is green and features a hand holding a plant, with the text 'Driving Economic Growth' and 'Place' below it. The bottom icon is blue and features a classical building facade, with the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>

businesses and individuals looking to grow or create new businesses within the town and in particular the centre.

The aim is to develop an increased sense of pride and community across the Town, demonstrating to local business owners how they can, and do, positively contribute to the overall success of Ashington and can continue to do so in the future.


In February this year, the Council welcomed Government's announcement on investment to level up Blyth by upgrading housing, tackling health inequalities, improving access to local jobs and cutting crime. The measures announced include:

- **Housing:** An £18 million boost will repurpose run-down and empty homes into high-quality affordable housing to rent and convert under-occupied offices into new apartments. Some of the funding will also go towards making social housing more energy-efficient.
- **Employment support:** Almost £1.5 million will fund new high-tech training equipment at the Town's Energy Central Campus, providing local young people with a route to high-quality jobs on their doorstep.
- **Anti-social behaviour:** A £200,000 initiative to reduce crime in Blyth including by extending CCTV provision in the Town Centre and establishing a new partnership between local businesses and the Police. These interventions will target anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and theft.
- **Health:** Government will strengthen local partnerships between Jobcentre Plus and NHS services in Blyth so more disabled people and those with health conditions are supported to start, stay and succeed in work. DHSC is also working with the Council to support more smokers to quit, complementing the £35 million recently allocated to address health inequalities across the whole of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System over the next 3 years.

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.

The Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ scheme) was established as a £2.4m scheme in October 2020 as part of a national programme and funded by Historic

<p>England, with the Council and private sector match-funding contributions.</p> <p>It will revitalise the Town's historic centre making it an even more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work, invest and visit.</p> <p>As part of this, some £300k will be allocated to the refurbishment of The Shambles, a prominent grade II* listed structure. The funding will support much needed repairs, improvement work to the timber beams, timber and stone columns, roof and flooring to restore this historic asset in the heart of the Town Centre.</p>	
<p>Investing in learning and supporting apprenticeships</p>	
<p>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.</p> <p>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. This adds to the current offer of Port Training Services and STEM Hub, Newcastle University, Northumberland Skills Welding & Fabrication Centre, Blyth Tall Ship and Northumberland College.</p> <p>Once built, Energy Central Learning Hub will deliver STEM education and sector-related vocational and work-based learning in high-quality specialist training facilities.</p> <p>It will also house major conferencing capabilities as well as a visitor centre to encourage collaboration between employers, education institutions and Northumberland residents.</p> <p>Energy Central Learning Hub is a flagship project for Energy Central which is a strategic partnership between Northumberland County Council, Port of Blyth, Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult and Advance Northumberland.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	