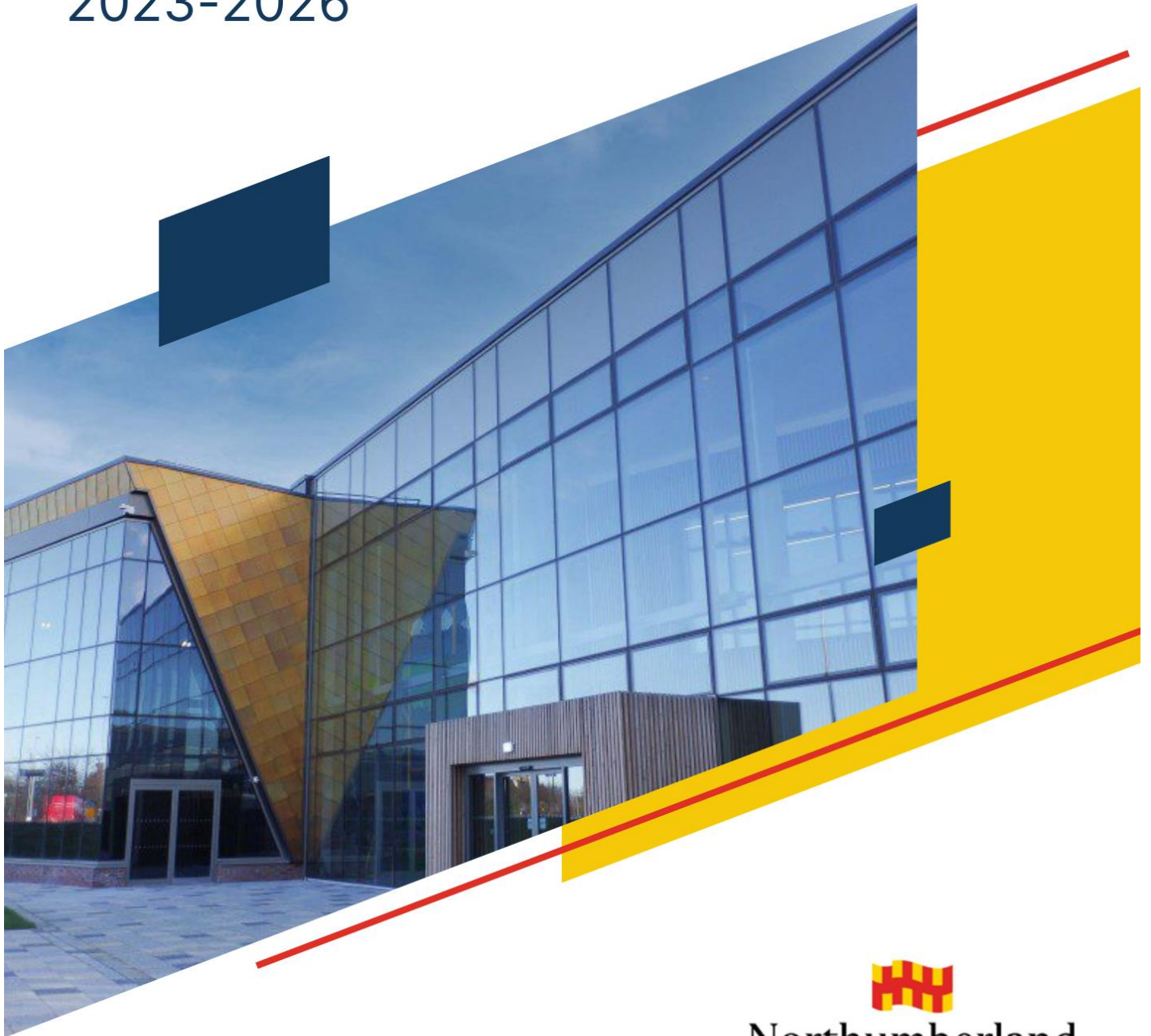


Asset Management Framework

2023-2026



Northumberland
County Council

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Introduction

Northumberland is a proud and diverse county. Spanning over 1,900 square miles it is a mix of vibrant towns and rurality with stunning castles, coastline, and countryside. As the County Council it is our duty to ensure that the county thrives and we are doing all we can to ensure Northumberland becomes a stronger place both economically and socially and continues to be a great place to live, work, and visit.

We also have a duty to ensure we are delivering best value and are achieving value for money in the management and use of our estate. We must ensure that the Council makes the best use of its land and buildings.

Over the last three years the Council, and Northumberland as a whole, have seen significant changes to the way people use public services and how public services operate. As we have emerged from the pandemic we have had to refresh our strategic approach to our land and buildings to reflect those changes and to ensure we are prepared for what the future may bring. These changes also present us with an opportunity to do things differently and explore ways to reduce the cost of our estate.

Our property assets are fundamental to the delivery of our corporate objectives. By making the best use of our land and buildings we are better able to deliver our services and respond to future opportunities and challenges. Working with our communities and partners we want to ensure public services meet the needs of our residents and businesses, are cost-effective and ultimately improve outcomes for everyone.

The way we use our property assets is not just about our own operational use of our estate. Our property assets are also a vital resource that can support community development, stimulate growth and regeneration, tackle inequalities and help to fight climate change.

It is essential that we make best use of our property assets to enable the delivery of our Corporate Plan and improve outcomes for our residents and ultimately have an estate that is:



well maintained and safe for our residents, service users and staff



smaller, more sustainable, effectively managed, efficiently run and used creatively to maximise its impact



fit for purpose to deliver inclusive quality services, achieve council priorities and improve outcomes for residents.

We have developed this **Asset Management Framework** to clearly set out for our residents how we will make best use of our land and buildings to get the estate that we want. It is also intended that the Framework will be used by elected members and officers to support and inform decision making related to our property assets. It should be treated as the key reference point for all future property decisions (alongside relevant policies and strategies).

The Framework has been developed firmly within the context of the Council’s BEST work. BEST guides us in everything we do to provide the BEST services to residents and be the BEST we can be for Northumberland.

The Framework reflects the overall aims of BEST and includes a range of work which is being delivered through the BEST Use of Assets Workstream. This means that the Framework will be central to the work of BEST and the BEST Use of Assets Workstream.

The Framework is in three parts:

	Purpose	Lifespan
1. The Asset Management Policy:	Sets out the principles that will guide our decision making in managing our land and buildings and how we will work managing our resources.	The Policy is a consistent and constant element of the Framework that represents our way of working.
2. The Asset Management Strategy:	Describes our strategic direction with clear objectives for what we are trying to achieve.	The Strategy will be refreshed in line with the Corporate Plan to ensure it fully supports the Council’s objectives.
3. The Asset Management Action Plan	A clear plan for services detailing the tangible actions being completed to achieve strategic objectives.	The Action Plan is updated regularly to reflect progress and to enable a dynamic response to new needs, demands or requirements. As the Action Plan is a ‘living document’ for services it is separate to this document.

The Framework replaces the Asset Management Plan 2019-24 and should be read in conjunction with our Corporate Plan and other plans and policies highlighted throughout the document.

Some elements of our property estate have very specific statutory responsibilities or arms-length management arrangements. For this reason housing, schools, highways, and Advance’s property portfolio are excluded from this Framework.

Strategic Asset Management - A Process



Governance

The Strategic Property Asset Management Group (SPAMG) is responsible for the Asset Management Framework and its effective delivery. SPAMG is a senior officer group that ensures that the Council is making best use of its land and buildings to achieve its corporate priorities and the wider objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

SPAMG provides a forum for robust oversight of the use of the corporate estate and strategic and operational initiatives that impact it. It is responsible for setting the broad strategic direction for property asset management in line with the Corporate Plan. It also ensures the property portfolio remains aligned to Council priorities and service requirements.

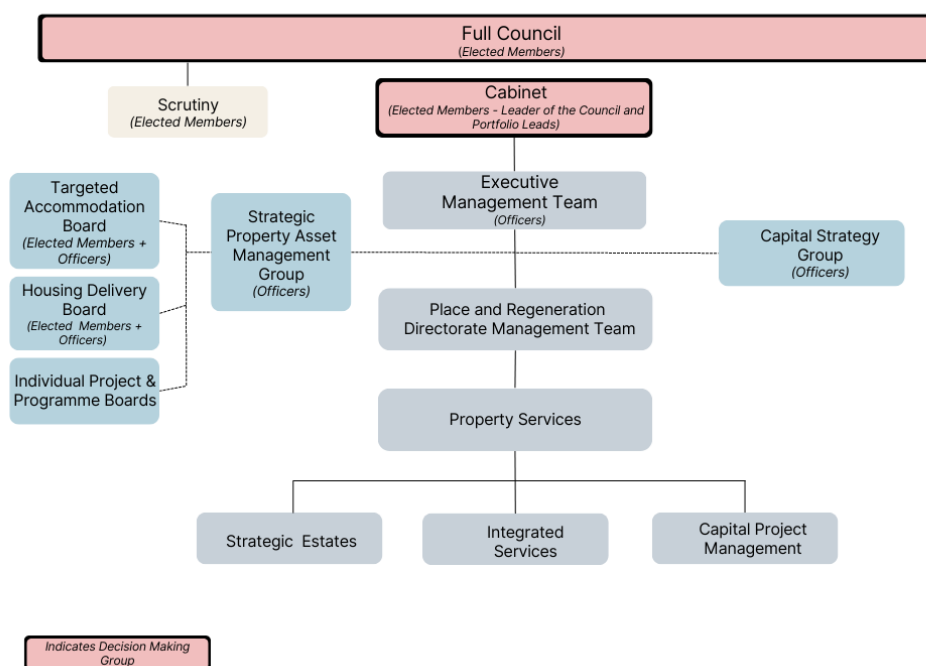
The SPAMG is chaired by the Executive Director of Place and Regeneration and supported by the Strategic Estates Manager who is the nominated Corporate Property Officer.

Member input and engagement is vital and the SPAMG will report quarterly to Cabinet on the Council's property performance and relevant property developments and issues. This allows members to be kept informed of emerging property policy whilst also enabling them to challenge and steer issues.

Decision-making authority on all property matters rests with the Cabinet subject to some decisions delegated to relevant officers as set out in the scheme of delegation.

Member responsibility for property rests with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services. There is regular formal reporting and informal briefing on strategic asset management to ensure clear direction and engagement.

Governance Arrangements




Executive Summary

Asset Management Framework



Our Purpose: To make the best use of our land and buildings to enable the delivery of our corporate plan and improve outcomes for our residents

To achieve an estate that is:

 well maintained and safe for our residents, service users and staff

 smaller, more sustainable, effectively managed, efficiently run and used creatively to maximise its impact

 fit for purpose to deliver inclusive quality services, achieve council priorities and improve outcomes for residents.

What we will do *Our Strategic Objectives*

1. Achieving Value for Money
Ensuring that we achieve value for money in the decisions that we make in how we manage and use our estate.

2. Tackling Inequalities
Using our property assets to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, healthier, more cohesive communities

3. Driving Economic Growth
Using our estate (both existing and through new acquisitions where required) to promote sustainable and inclusive growth

Property Principles

The principles guiding our property decision making

BEST VALUE

Manage property efficiently, effectively and economically ensuring financial sustainability, social value and value for money.

FIT FOR PURPOSE

Property meets current service needs and enables plans for the future.

COMMUNITIES FIRST

Our land and buildings are for our residents and support stronger communities. We will enable local decision making to promote community cohesion and tackle inequalities.

SUSTAINABILITY

Use our land and buildings sustainably to reduce our impact on the environment and support climate change action.

A CORPORATE RESOURCE

Manage our property in partnership with services as a corporate resource that enable the delivery the Council's priorities, services and objectives.

GROWTH

Use our property to stimulate growth and regeneration to strengthen our communities, increase opportunities for our residents, and tackle inequalities.

COLLABORATION

Work collaboratively and in partnership with our communities, across services, and with our statutory and voluntary sector partners to make decisions.

BALANCED DECISIONS

Make evidence based decisions balancing costs, needs and outcomes to achieve the greatest impact.

Property Aims

How we will work

- ✓ Our property is a corporate resource for the benefit of our residents, businesses and visitors.
- ✓ Our property meets current service needs and plans for the future.
- ✓ Our property enables our communities to thrive.
- ✓ Our property is effectively, efficiently and sustainably managed.
- ✓ Our property stimulates development, regeneration, and growth.
- ✓ Our property is used creatively to provide benefits for service delivery and in securing efficiencies.

1. Asset Management Policy

Our Asset Management Policy sets the principles by which we will manage our land and buildings and our aims in managing these significant resources. It informs our strategic decision making and enables us to plan effectively for our estate's future.

Our Principles

(What guides our decision making)

Our principles reflect our corporate priorities, values and service aims and our commitment to making the best use of our assets:

 <p>BEST VALUE Manage our property efficiently, effectively and economically ensuring financial sustainability, social value and value for money.</p>	 <p>FIT FOR PURPOSE Property meets current service needs and enables plans for the future.</p>
 <p>GROWTH Use our property to stimulate growth and regeneration to strengthen our communities, increase opportunities for our residents, and tackle inequalities.</p>	 <p>A CORPORATE RESOURCE Manage our property in partnership with services as a corporate resource that enable the delivery of the Council's priorities, services and objectives.</p>
 <p>COMMUNITIES FIRST Our land and buildings are for our residents and support stronger communities. We will enable local decision making to promote community cohesion and tackle inequalities</p>	 <p>COLLABORATION Work collaboratively and in partnership with our communities, across services, and with our statutory and voluntary sector partners to make decisions.</p>
 <p>BALANCED DECISIONS Make evidence based decisions balancing costs, needs, and outcomes to achieve the greatest impact.</p>	 <p>SUSTAINABILITY Use our land and buildings sustainably to reduce our impact on the environment and support climate change action.</p>

Our Aims

(How we will work)

Our aims describe our commitment to making best use of our land and buildings and how this will be achieved through the approach we take managing our property portfolio.

- Our property is a corporate resource for the benefit of our residents, businesses and visitors.

This means:

- Clear corporate decision-making and challenge on all property matters.
- Property budgets that are managed corporately prioritising key investment needs.
- An effective balance between corporate and service priorities.
- Property performance is scrutinised through the use of robust data and evidence.

- Our property meets current service needs and plans for the future.

This means:

- Working in partnership with our services to understand their current and future needs.
- Providing property that is suitable and sufficient for services to meet operational needs and demands.
- Properties are safe to use, secure and fully compliant with our statutory requirements.
- Using an asset challenge process so that we invest in our portfolio when it is right to do so, dispose of property when it is surplus to our needs and acquire new property when its supports strategic objectives.

- Our property enables our communities to thrive:

This means:

- Considering all our plans through an inequalities lens and asking what can be done 'by' communities first? what do communities need some help with? and what can't communities do that we or other agencies can?
- Encouraging local decision making and working with our communities to make the best use of our assets - through the way we work and our established Town and Parish forums.
- Promoting and supporting Community Asset Transfers where this is in the best interests of our community.
- Procuring and using assets to deliver social value to the community where appropriate.
- Using our estate to support collaboration with public sector partners and other stakeholders.

- Our property is effectively, efficiently and sustainably managed.

This means:

- Financially sound decision making within budget constraints and making use of funding opportunities.
- Challenging how we use our assets to identify innovative and creative opportunities to work differently to meet priorities and service needs.
- Seeking efficiencies in how we use our buildings, challenging the cost of property activities and focusing on performance improvement.
- Meeting and where possible exceeding minimum energy efficiency standards.
- Using our estate to facilitate wider plans for adapting to climate change - being as sustainable as possible in design, construction, operation and maintenance of our buildings and land.
- Considering opportunities for carbon reduction in all property decision making processes.

- Our property stimulates development, regeneration, and growth.

This means:

- Retaining or acquiring property assets to stimulate and support regeneration and inward investment.
- Retaining or acquiring property assets to generate additional revenue to support economic regeneration.
- Identifying property suitable for affordable housing development, employment needs, and community regeneration.

- Our property is used creatively to provide benefits for service delivery and in securing efficiencies.

This means:

- Optimising space through the continued use of flexible working practices and space standards.
- Promoting co-location and joint service delivery with our partners.
- Supporting One Public Estate across Northumberland.

2. Asset Management Strategy

Our Asset Management Strategy describes how we will make best use of our land and buildings to achieve an estate that is:

 <p>well maintained and safe for our residents, service users and staff</p>	 <p>smaller, more sustainable, effectively managed, efficiently run and used creatively to maximise its impact</p>	 <p>fit for purpose to deliver inclusive quality services, achieve council priorities and improve outcomes for residents.</p>
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The Strategy begins with a summary of our county and people, our property estate and its condition, and our arrangements for managing our land and buildings.

It sets out a summary of the main challenges we have in the operation and delivery of our estate and property functions. It is important that we recognise and understand the challenging factors that impact how we can use our estate and the options available to us. But more than recognising the impact these challenges have on our plans we must also take action to address them where we can.

The Strategy then looks to the future and how we will respond to our challenges to make best use of our assets and achieve a modern, efficient local authority estate. What we will do is set out across three strategic objectives, which align to our Corporate Plan:

<h3>1. Achieving Value for Money</h3> <p>Ensuring that we achieve value for money in the decisions that we make in how we manage and use our estate.</p>	<h3>2. Tackling Inequalities</h3> <p>Using our property assets to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, healthier, more cohesive communities</p>	<h3>3. Driving Economic Growth</h3> <p>Using our estate (both existing and through new acquisitions where required) to promote sustainable and inclusive growth</p>
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These strategic objectives will be delivered as described in each section and in line with our Asset Management Policy. The Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed within three years.

Background and Context

Our County

Our people and our geography impact how we shape the availability and organisation of our services to effectively deliver our services and achieve the best outcomes.

Northumberland is the 6th largest county, yet is the 5th most sparsely populated with a resident population of only 322,400. Bordering Scotland and spanning over 1,900 square miles, Northumberland's rurality, castles, towns, and coastlines make it a vibrant and an extremely attractive place to work, live and visit.

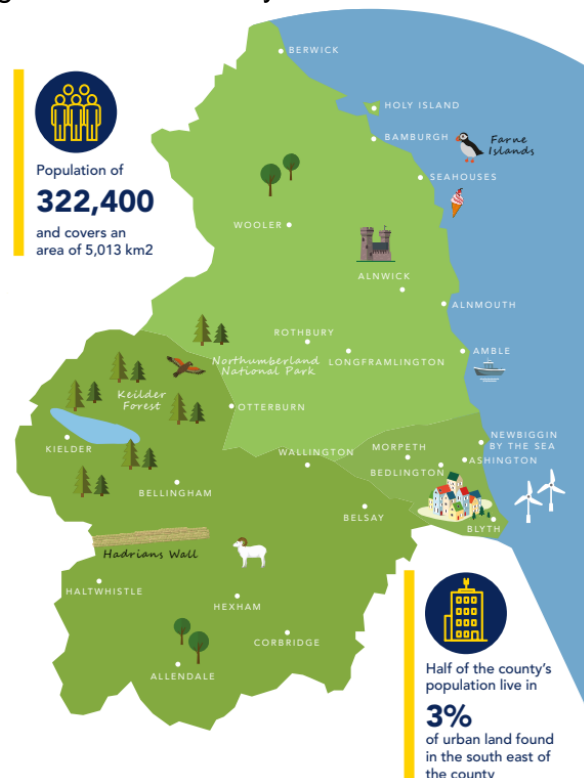
Our people are not evenly spread throughout the county with half of the county living in 3% of urban land in the south-east corner of the county. The other 50% of the population is spread across the remaining 97% of the county. This means we have to ensure our services are in the right places to achieve operational objectives.

There are a number of main towns and secondary service centres spread across the county:

Large Town Centres: Alnwick, Ashington, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth, Crumlington, Morpeth and Hexham

Small Town Centres: Amble, Bedlington, Haltwhistle, Ponteland and Prudhoe

Service Centres: Allendale, Belford, Bellingham, Corbridge, Haydon Bridge, Newbiggin by the Sea, Rothbury, Seahouses, Seaton Delaval and Wooler



Our Land and Buildings

The NCC Estate



319 Operational sites

Sites with buildings used, operated or overseen by our services. Such as offices, depots, community centres, public toilets, playing fields.



125 Carparks

A network of carparks across the county.



464 Plots of land

Plots of land across the county including: 14 plots of agricultural land, 5 allotments, 7 country parks, 13 play areas and 425 miscellaneous open space land.



27 Leased out sites

Sites which are leased out to a range of organisations including statutory partners, community groups and organisations and businesses.



33 Vacant sites

Sites which are no longer in use by NCC. At various stages of planning regarding future use.



171 Educational sites

Schools and educational sites such as first and primary schools, middles schools, secondary schools, special schools and adult education sites.



546 Highways land

Land used to to provide roads and highways across the council.



206 Housing Assets / Estates

Our housing portfolio made up of 8,518 properties.

Not directly within scope of the Asset Management Strategy

1892 separate land and building assets

The Council has a significant property portfolio covering 4,915 hectares and with an estimated asset value for accounting purposes in excess of £500m.

Our assets range from corporate offices and operational sites to community assets including playing fields, car parks and community centres. Since the council was established as a unitary authority in 2009 there have been several programmes to join-up and rationalise our property infrastructure to ensure our property assets reflected our unitary approach. Rationalisation of the estate since 2009 has seen operational assets reduce from 471 assets to 319.

Operational Assets

210

Community Assets

Land and buildings for (mainly) community use

54 Public Toilets	9 Leisure centres
38 Recreation	20 Community Centres
24 Parks	15 Cemeteries
23 Libraries (sole use)	5 Museums
6 Tourist Information Centres	16 Various community assets

109

Service Assets

Land and buildings for (mainly) service use

21 Offices	15 Adult Services
26 Depots/storage	16 Fire Stations
26 Children's Services	5 Other

319

Condition and Maintenance

It is vitally important that our estate is maintained to ensure a safe and appropriate environment to deliver services, support our residents /service users and the workforce. However, some of our buildings are in a poor condition.

Condition surveys are undertaken across the estate on a 5-year cycle. These surveys provide us with a better understanding of items in need of repair (“backlog of maintenance”) and help us to identify where to prioritise our resources.

The current backlog of maintenance is estimated at £13.3m based on the last condition survey completed in 2018 (this excludes schools and leisure centres which have had separate condition surveys). It is expected that this figure has risen since 2018.

We maintain our estate at a level of ‘safe, wind and watertight’ and our backlog of maintenance is prioritised against this using a risk matrix with health and safety items being allocated the highest risk. This means we do not always address fundamental underlying challenges and consequently may result in emergency closures to deal with repairs.

New condition surveys are due to be commissioned in 2024 and will provide a refreshed maintenance backlog figure.

Our Financial Resources

Like many other councils we are facing significant cost pressures as a consequence of the Covid pandemic and recent energy and inflationary increases. During Covid the cost of materials increased significantly and while this has settled slightly costs have not reduced to pre-pandemic levels. This means we must make even more careful decisions about how we use our resources to operate, maintain and develop our estate.

The total cost of running our estate (excluding school running costs) is significant. In 2022/23 the spend against the revenue budget was £34.4m. This includes premises-related expenditure, cleaning, energy costs, rates, insurance, water services, rent and repairs and alterations.

The Corporate Property function is responsible for a budget of £6.5m which includes an annual planned preventative maintenance and statutory testing budget of £1.78m and a reactive maintenance budget of £1.1m to ensure our estate is safe, wind and watertight.

Our annual capital budget for maintenance across the estate is known as the Stewardship Fund and is up to £3m. The Stewardship Fund funds the replacement of major items of plant and equipment, and the external fabric of buildings (e.g., roofs and windows). A separate capital budget in the sum of £1m, the Leisure Remedial Fund, funds the replacement of major items of plant and equipment, and the external fabric of buildings exclusively for leisure facilities.

The Council also generates its own capital resources through the sale of surplus land and buildings. In the period 2019/20 to 2022/23 we generated £12,189,816 in capital receipts from the disposal of surplus property.

One off building acquisitions, new builds or significant refurbishment projects are included separately in the Capital programme which is contained within the 3-year Medium Term Financial Plan approved by Full Council on an annual basis. The value of the Capital Programme for 2023/24 is in excess of £222m.

Read our [2023/24 Capital Strategy](#).

Corporate Property Arrangements

Our corporate property arrangements describe how we manage our estate, key roles and responsibilities and the policies and structures that support and inform this work.

Property Services – Structure

Our property function sits within the Place and Regeneration Directorate. The service includes:

Strategic Estates – responsible for establishing and defining the Council’s property needs in respect of assets and their management.

Integrated Services – responsible for arranging facilities management, repairs, maintenance and statutory compliance assurance across the council’s estate including school sites.

Capital Project Management Team – provides an in-house design and project management service working with external partners, to ensure the effective delivery of property capital projects

Corporate Landlord

All land and buildings used in the delivery of services are either owned or leased by the Council. Services occupy property only to provide a service on behalf of the Council. This is managed through a corporate landlord model.

As corporate landlord we are responsible for providing property assets that are fit for purpose, safe and enable service delivery. This in turn enables our services to focus on the operational aspects of their service delivery

Treating property as a corporate resource strengthens our strategic control of our property assets. It should provide a consistent corporate and collaborative approach to how we review and change the use of our buildings, integrate and share our premises, provide facilities management and maintenance, and develop and refurbish our property.

Currently we have a mixed management corporate landlord model whereby sites which have a multiple services present are managed on a day-to-day basis corporately by Integrated Services. Sites which have a single service occupying them are managed on a day-to-day basis by the occupying service. All repair and maintenance requests, whether it relates to a single use or multiple use site, are

made to the Repairs service within Integrated Services. Integrated Services manages and funds repairs through the corporate repairs and maintenance budget.

Integrated Services is also responsible for planned maintenance and statutory testing across all sites funded through the corporate maintenance budget.

Asset Challenge – Disposals and Acquisitions

A vital part of the corporate landlord model is a robust asset challenge process. Asset challenge allows us to review the use of our land and buildings and determine whether it is still needed to meet council objectives.

Where an asset is identified as surplus to our needs through an Asset Challenge process it will be considered in the context of our Disposal Procedure and, if appropriate, included in the Disposal Programme.

A property will only be disposed of where it has been determined that there is no current or future use for the site by a Council service, a community asset transfer would not be appropriate, or there are no development opportunities.

Acquisition of new property is only considered where existing land or buildings will not achieve the required objectives.

All disposals and acquisitions are signed off within our scheme of delegation.

Use of our land and buildings

Commercial organisations are charged a market rent for the use of Council property. We may at our discretion offer preferential terms, with reduced or minimal rents for community organisations. This is determined on a case-by-case basis.

A Community Asset Transfer is the process for transferring council property to community organisations where there is a need in the locality or where the community organisation is better placed to provide the service. A Community Asset Transfer has the potential to create lasting change in local communities and we are committed to supporting our communities to benefit from the opportunity that a Community Asset Transfer can bring. Our Community Asset Transfer policy will be updated in 2023/24.

Statutory Testing and Compliance

A significant portion of our existing repairs and maintenance budget is spent on undertaking the tests and inspections legally required to ensure our buildings are safe to use. The tests and inspections cover various categories such as Mechanical, Electrical, Water, Asbestos and other. The range of tests include Fixed electrical testing, Gas Testing, Fire Alarm and Emergency Lighting, Water Hygiene, Lift Servicing, Asbestos Monitoring, and Tree Inspections. There are currently 94 compliance contracts managed by Statutory Maintenance Team.

We have a duty to achieve full compliance with a wide range of health and safety legislation to ensure the safety of our buildings for all building users and stakeholders. This is achieved by commissioning a range of external providers, selected through the relevant procurement process. We manage all statutory maintenance inspection and testing contracts which are subject to close monitoring

of compliance and performance, including regular reporting of key performance indicators.

The statutory testing and compliance programme is significant, and 66,992 tests were completed in 2022/23 (including testing at school sites).

Maximising return and generating income

Whilst the Council's commercial investment portfolio is managed by Advance Northumberland, some revenue is also generated through buildings and land managed by Property Services. In 2022/2023 rental income generated circa £550k.

Through a Leasehold Review Project we reviewed all of our leases to look for opportunities to maximise rental income where the Council is landlord or seek to reduce expenditure on leasehold buildings where the Council is the tenant. We are implementing a number of lease renewals and rent reviews as a result of this review. Generally, we are working to withdraw from leases and consolidate into freehold properties wherever possible and appropriate.

A Freehold Review project will be completed to look for opportunities to create further revenue income by leasing out surplus space in Council buildings – where this is appropriate and meets our needs.

Challenges with our Estate

It is important that we recognise and understand the challenges impacting how we can use our estate as these factors can impact our decision making and the options available to us. But more than recognising the impact these challenges have on our plans we must also take action to address them where we can.

1

Condition of our estate

Many of our buildings are in poor condition. Our maintenance backlog is greater than our maintenance budget, refurbishment / replacement costs can be prohibitive to plans.

2

Cost pressures

Estate running costs are increasing impacted by energy costs and inflation on goods and services.

3

Increasing and changing demands

Increasing needs and demands on our estate, related to both resident needs and increasing statutory requirements, place pressure on our ability to flex the use of our estate to respond effectively and efficiently.

4

Opportunities for capital receipts

The estate has reduced significantly since 2007 with the best sites already developed or sold. Remaining opportunities to achieve significant capital receipts are limited due to the location and condition of our buildings. This impacts the potential funding of property maintenance and development.

5

Location of operational buildings

Our buildings may not be in the right places for changing resident needs or to be able support services to deliver services how they want to.

6

Property transaction timescales can be lengthy and complicated

The time it takes to rationalise or develop the property estate can impact how long it takes to make required changes. Prevalence of restrictive covenants can impact timescales and cost.

7

Data doesn't support good and timely decision making

To enable robust estate management good data is critical. Currently our property data is limited and is kept in a range of systems which can make it difficult to use to inform decision making.

8

Northumberland's geography and demographics

We are a large county with some densely populated areas and large rural areas. This impacts how we organise our estate and deliver our services.

Strategic Objectives for 2023-26

How we will use our estate to provide quality services, deliver our Corporate Plan and corporate priorities and improve outcomes for our residents.

Our Corporate Plan sets out the vision for our county and our organisation. Reflecting the role our estate has in providing quality services and delivering our corporate priorities we have set three strategic objectives for 2023/26:

1. Achieving Value for Money

Ensuring that we achieve value for money in the decisions that we make in how we manage and use our estate.

2. Tackling Inequalities

Using our property assets to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, healthier, more cohesive communities

3. Driving Economic Growth

Using our estate (both existing and through new acquisitions where required) to promote sustainable and inclusive growth

In the sections below we describe what each of these objectives mean and describe key pieces of work that will be carried out to achieve these objectives. All of the work described within an objective will impact our estate in some way – whether it is changing how buildings are used by a service, or how buildings are managed, or through the disposal or acquisition of buildings and land to support a specific objective.

Our strategic objectives align to our Corporate Plan and reflect our complex service responsibilities and statutory duties. Our BEST work also guides us in everything we do to provide the BEST services to residents and be the BEST we can be for Northumberland. The Strategy includes a range of work which is being delivered through the BEST Use of Assets workstream. This ensures there is a clear link between the developing BEST work and the operational estate.

Objective One – Achieving Value for Money

Ensuring that we achieve value for money in the decisions that we make in how we manage and use our estate.

We are committed to ensuring that we achieve value for money in how we manage and use our estate. This means what we do and how we do it creates value. Value might be a financial value such as a cost saving or efficiency, or it could mean adding value (such as social value or improved outcomes) for the benefit of our residents, businesses or visitors.

A priority for BEST is redesigning the way we deliver our local public services to ensure we are achieving best value and how we use our property is fundamental to this work. As BEST develops the use of our estate will evolve. The full detail of the breadth of the programme will be developed in the first year of this Strategy, but key projects that impact how we achieve best value in our property estate that are overseen by the BEST Use of Assets workstream. Work to achieve value for money includes:

Fit for Purpose

WorkSmart will continue to be embedded as our key operating model for how our staff deliver their work. Through WorkSmart we will maximise the space in our buildings and reduce our office footprint. A review will be completed on the impact of WorkSmart 'one year on' and to identify opportunities to strengthen this hybrid model of working.

Our estate enables and facilitates the delivery of services across the entire council. By making best of use of our assets, as well as assets across the wider Public Sector, we will support our services to deliver their services and their strategic priorities.

In delivering a good property service we will continue to maintain, repair and enhance our estate to ensure our buildings are safe and we meet the diverse needs of our services. We will also support a range of transformative initiatives to improve operational delivery and outcomes for our residents / service users utilising a range of funding (including capital investment).

Property Review

We have experienced significant changes to our services and ways of working since the Covid pandemic. With WorkSmart and changes since the pandemic services are not using buildings in the same ways and work is required to understand how to make best use of our estate in a post-covid Northumberland and identify opportunity to reduce our property footprint. A property review will be completed to look at how we can optimise the use of our estate through co-location and other opportunities whilst also continuing to deliver the best service to our residents and stakeholders. This review will include how we maximise use of County Hall and determine the best approach for the vacant 'dog-leg' section of the building. Phase One of this review has already commenced and is focused on our depot and storage sites across the county.

Strengthen the Corporate Landlord Model

The Corporate Landlord model enables the Council to utilise its assets to deliver better, more efficient services to communities.

We will strengthen our model of Corporate Landlord by further centralising property budgets so that we can achieve greater efficiencies. We will also look to achieve cost savings through better prioritisation of property needs and an improved approach to spending decisions and procurement processes across our estate.

Improving our use of data and performance information

Good quality data is fundamental to efficient and effective property management.

In 2022 we invested in a new data system, Technology Forge to contain our property asset information in one place and enable us to fully utilise this information to inform decision making. Work is already underway to transfer and update all our existing property data within this new system.

Once the initial data transfer is complete, we will use Technology Forge to make better data-informed decisions about our property. Improved access to property data

will support better performance reporting and monitoring, and improved timescales for property transactions.

Collaboration, Communities and Partners

We will continue to engage with our communities so their voice is equal to data and to understand what they feel is strong in their communities, what could be improved, what could be done by the community, what do they need some help with and what our role is in shaping their communities. We will do this through our established Town Forums, Town Boards and the Borderlands Place Programme and through targeted engagement.

We will continue to support the One Public Estate approach and strategic partnerships including but not limited to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, North of Tyne Combined Authority, North East Local Enterprise Partnership, LA7 North East Councils, and the North of England Natural Capital Group.

We will also continue work with the NHS, Police, Ambulance Service, Department of Work and Pensions to continue to explore more joined up delivery of services.

Enabling Sustainability

The way we use our estate, including new building projects or development initiatives, is key to supporting our carbon neutral target. We will continue to lead the way by reducing the energy consumption of our estate and installing renewable heat and power solutions in our buildings.

Climate change remains a significant long-term challenge for Northumberland and the planet, impacting on all our lives. We are making good progress towards being a carbon neutral Northumberland by 2030, but to achieve our target we must continue to think about our choices and actively work to reduce our emissions.

The way we use our estate, including new building projects or development initiatives, is key to supporting our carbon neutral target. We will continue to lead the way by reducing the energy consumption of our estate and installing renewable heat and power solutions in our buildings. We will also be assessing the carbon impact of all the key policy decisions we make and will be promoting sustainable constructions and clean growth through the progressive promotion of low carbon technologies, walking and cycling, and better countryside management.

Over the next three years we will:

- Work to achieve Minimum Energy Standards across our operational buildings. This will require optimisation of our asset management data, and ensuring all buildings have the relevant EPCs and DEC's where necessary and implementing a programme of works where upgrades to buildings are required to reach B rating.
- Continue to grow our network of electric vehicle charging points. With funding of £222,510 from Office for Zero Emission Vehicles in 2023 we will install 75 new chargers across the County on a range of sites including Council owned sites.

- Continue to explore the potential for our buildings to have renewable energy schemes installed such as solar panels. Where a site is identified to meet the requirements for such schemes we will explore opportunities to fund their installation including business cases for capital investment.
- Continue to reduce our CO2 emissions through sustainable heating options. This includes connecting operational buildings to District Heat Networks utilising low carbon renewable heat sources where available.
- Use our estate to explore opportunities to identify existing woodland sites to be brought into pro-active management that improves carbon sequestration potential and biodiversity of these sites. We will also work with partners to identify new sites for carbon sequestration, including via peat restoration and tree planting.

Find out more on [how we are responding to Climate Change](#) and our current Climate Change Action Plan.

Objective Two – Tackling Inequalities

Using our property assets to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, healthier, more cohesive communities.

The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age are the most important factors in determining good health. In Northumberland we know that some areas will experience better health than others and the Covid 19 pandemic has served to exacerbate these existing inequalities, hitting the poorest and most disadvantaged communities the hardest.

To tackle inequalities, we will work together with our communities and partners to collectively address some of these issues and provide a fairer future for our residents. We know that communities can do great things and can be best placed to manage community assets and we will use our property assets to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, more cohesive communities. Read more about how we are tackling inequalities in our **Northumberland Communities Inequalities Plan 2022-23**.

Where possible we will use our property assets to support opportunities to improve the building blocks of a good life to support local people, community organisations and the community and voluntary sector to create stronger, more cohesive communities.

Key work tackling inequalities includes:

Caring for our children and young people

Where we need to provide a residential placement for a cared for child or young person our aim would be to do so as close to Northumberland as possible so they can remain close to their family, friends, schools and communities. As part of our Placement Sufficiency Plan we are developing two new internally managed and run children's homes that will be able to accommodate up to nine young people. We will

continue to review our needs and will develop further internal children's home provision as required.

Ageing Well

It is important that across Northumberland there are a range of different housing options to support residents who need extra care and support. Our Extra Care and Supported Housing Strategy sets out how we will use our resources and support a range of delivery methods to develop the sector and grow this provision.

We will continue to deliver our Extra Care and Supported Housing Strategy with particular focus on prioritising the provision of supported accommodation for older adults. Through a programme of planned developments, including on some council owned land, we will continue to grow the provision available to our residents. We will also consider opportunities for further development where further Council owned land becomes available.

Stronger more cohesive communities.

NCT will continue to support work to create empowered and sustainable communities, using our estate where it is best placed to support initiatives to create community benefit. This model will work alongside the ongoing Inequalities Programme and Thriving Together by bringing partners together and utilising Community Connectors and Link Workers to signpost and provide information, advice and guidance to residents. The model will be implemented through pump priming community projects that deliver against objectives and enable projects to become sustainable.

We will continue to develop and embed our network of Family Hubs. We will look for opportunities to utilise new buildings within communities to deliver services under the Family Hubs umbrella.

Supporting the Schools Strategy

Access to good schools is essential to support our children and young people to achieve. We will continue to support work undertaken to ensure fit for purpose school organisation in the county led by our School Organisation and Resources colleagues. Over the next 12 months this includes the review of school organisation in Seaton Valley, Amble and Berwick Partnerships.

We will also facilitate the reuse or disposal of surplus school sites. Currently we are reviewing surplus sites at Hexham Middle School, Ponteland High School and Duchess's High School.

Supporting the Affordable Housing Strategy

Improving access to affordable housing for our residents is important. Working closely with the Housing Service we will continue to support work to identify, use and acquire appropriate sites to enable Affordable Housing objectives across the county. We will continue to review existing land within our portfolio for suitability to deliver affordable housing working in partnership with Advance. Sites currently being reviewed include Moorside School, Newbiggin, Seahouses First School, Lanercost Park, and Cramlington.

Sustainable and Flexible Libraries

To plan for a sustainable and flexible Library Service we will continue to seek new ways of working, develop new partnerships and increase collaboration with strong central support and coordination. This is an ongoing mission in the spirit of progressive service delivery. We will continue to extend the reach and capacity of the Service through seeking partnership with local communities where appropriate.

Fit, Active Communities

We want to support our communities to be fit and active with a fit for purpose leisure estate that is accessible and used by residents and visitors.

In 2022 a review of our Leisure Centre provision was completed. The review identified multiple opportunities for improvement including in how we use our leisure facility portfolio. Building on this review we will develop a new service model that will be placed-based where possible and reflective of our communities. We will look for provision to be more tailored to the resident's needs, ensuring accessibility with as much flexibility as possible, so as to increase physical activity and directly impact upon health and wellbeing of our communities. A community-based offer will create strong, resilient and supportive communities with an Asset Based Community Development approach providing sustainable community-driven development. As part of this new model, we will maximise how our leisure centres are used by different services (both Council and external services) and also explore opportunities for growth.

We will also work with community partners to increase the local value of several smaller sport and leisure buildings previously included within the externally managed leisure service. These sites, subject to appropriate robust business and usage plans, will be considered for Community Asset Transfer.

In 2022 we were successful in an expression of interest to the Football Foundation's national PlayZone Programme. PlayZones will provide new or refurbished outdoor mini pitches for football and other sports and activities with the intention of allowing priority groups within communities to be more active. To support the submission of full funding bids we will be engaging with communities across Northumberland about appropriate community-led spaces for PlayZones focusing investment and resources to support groups facing the greatest inequalities (lower socio-economic groups, women and girls, disabled people and people with long term health conditions and ethnically diverse communities). As part of the development of the full funding bids we will explore opportunities to use our existing estate to support this initiative.

Objective Three – Driving Economic Growth

Using our estate (both existing and through new acquisitions where required) to promote sustainable and inclusive growth).

We are committed to supporting the economic growth of all residents, communities and businesses in the county. We will continue to use our estate (both existing and through new acquisitions where required) to promote growth through town centre

and culture-led regeneration, strategic site and development and regeneration, rural growth and innovation, and strategic transport connectivity and infrastructure.

We will continue to promote and support opportunities that will enable growth in the county. This includes the opportunities which will develop from the North East Devolution Deal with central government signed by the North East Combined Authority (which includes NCC). The deal is to secure the means by which the North East can build a stronger economy, generate more and better jobs and improve transport links and skills training throughout the region.

Key work to deliver this includes:

Our visitors have the best experience

We will continue work to improve our parks and Country parks including:

- a new accessible perimeter path around Eastwood Park, Prudhoe
- café improvements and a new bouldering climbing course at Plessey Woods Country Park
- a new play path improvements and landscaping works at Cleasewell Hill Park Choppington
- refurbishment of the terrace garden, formal gardens, aviary, seating area and landscaping works around the entrance to the Turner Garden at Carlisle Park Morpeth.

We will continue to look for opportunities to improve visitor experiences by ensuring good quality accessible facilities are available for residents and visitors. This includes:

- continuing our Public Toilet Refurbishment programme with work in 2023/24 planned in Wooler, Hexham St Mary's, Berwick Castle Gate, and Alnmouth; and
- the permanent pedestrianisation in Narrowgate, Alnwick to enhance the street environment for shoppers and visitors to the town.

Thriving Towns

We will continue to support the development and regeneration of our towns and centres. Over the next three years this includes:

- Energising Blyth - Support the £70m Energising Blyth regeneration programme which aims to grow, renew and connect the town between 2022-2026.
- Maltings Theatre Refurbishments Berwick - Continue the refurbishment of the Maltings Theatre
- Ashington Investment Plan - Developing the Ashington Investment Plan helping to secure the Ashington High Street Improvement Programme, Hirst Housing renewal Masterplan and pipeline of other projects in the town.
- Hexham High Street Heritage Action Zone- Delivering a significant public realm scheme on Priestpople in 2023-24 as part of the scheme and

restoration of the Shambles in the town centre as a key heritage feature complimenting the Hexham Hight Street Action Zone.

Supporting Connectivity – Transport and Infrastructure

For our county to thrive it is essential that that we have the right infrastructure to enable development and growth in our communities and economy.

We will continue to support the Northumberland Line project. As part of this we have worked with North of Tyne to establish a Northumberland Line Economic Corridor and projects are being developed throughout the area to benefit from this new connectivity.

To embrace a progressive, long-term approach to infrastructure and connectivity in the County we will support work to replace the ageing Wide Area Network (WAN) with world-class full-fibre infrastructure which will also provide businesses and communities across the county – including our most rural areas – with access to faster, high-quality, reliable connectivity.