



Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Annual Portfolio Report – Promoting Healthy Lives Report

Report of Councillor(s) Councillor Jeff Watson, Cabinet Member for Promoting Healthy Lives

Responsible Officer(s): Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration, and Gill O'Neill, Executive Director for Public Health (DPH), Inequalities & Stronger Communities

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

Culture and Tourism

- **Achieving Value for Money** – the Portfolio contributes to this priority by securing best value in all contracting and commissioning, working closely with local businesses and communities to ensure we add value and efficiency in shared projects and programmes.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – the Portfolio is fundamental to Tackling Inequalities by providing access to employment and training opportunities in the visitor economy and the culture and creative sector. In addition a broad range of quality cultural activities are available to support confidence building, development of skills and better health and wellbeing.
- **Driving Economic Growth** - the Portfolio is essential in expanding significant regeneration programmes in the creation of placemaking. We utilise and draw on our wealth of heritage, cultural and natural assets through the strength of our creative industries. The Corporate Plan also highlights the role of a thriving and sustainable visitor economy in supporting inclusive economic growth.

Libraries, Archives and Leisure

- **Achieving Value for Money** – the Portfolio contributes towards this priority by aiming to innovate in its ways of working, looking to extend reach and impact whilst realising value for money and securing best value when commissioning services.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – the Portfolio in provides residents with access to heritage, archival and life long learning and reading resources, assets which provide communities with places to network, collaborate and grow together and facilities and opportunities to promote physical activity and healthy living for all supports the Council's commitment to tackling inequalities.

- **Driving Economic Growth** - the Portfolio in its community led and broad geographical reach and level of service delivery aims to support a constantly growing economy by providing learning, development and healthy living opportunities for all residents.

2. Purpose of report

This is the Annual Performance Report from the Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives. The report provides context in relation to the delivery of the Portfolio objectives and priorities, highlights achievements over the past year and sets out areas of focus for the coming year.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Council to note the Cabinet Member for Promoting Healthy Lives Portfolio Report.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

The report is to note and does not require key decisions.

5. Background

- The Annual Portfolio reports from each of the Council's Cabinet Members provide a valuable opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. This strengthens the important link and accountability between key decisions taken by the Cabinet and achievement of the three priorities of the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- The Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its Annual General Meeting on 17 May 2023. The Plan establishes three priorities for the Council, underpinned by our approach to tackling Climate Change. The Annual Council Achievements Report sets out overall progress against the three priorities whilst this Portfolio report provides an opportunity for Members to drill down further into the work of Public Health and tackling inequalities.

5.1 Portfolio Achievements

a) Achievements: Library Service

Partnership Working

- The service continues to work in partnership to develop new aspects to our established relationships, but also to particularly initiate activity with new community partners.
- Our *Bookstart* partnership will feature as a model of good practice on the Booktrust website in March 2024, highlighting our work to support resettled Afghan families, using book packs to engage parents with shared reading, improving their English language skills at the same time, and promoting the Northumberland Library Service as a beacon of excellence.

- Schools Library Service (SLS) have maintained the book stock available to families across the Family Hubs network as part of our joint ambition to engage families and support them to become independent users of their local library. This strengthens the best start in life NCC are committed to provide to children across the county enabling families to benefit from the positive impacts of reading for pleasure and participation in a range of high quality, free and cost-effective activities ranging from story times to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) activities such as coding and constructive playtime activities such as Lego clubs.
- Exchange of information and intelligence between Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) Locality Coordinators and Mobile Library service staff to improve provision of information and signposting to support for customers from rural areas.
- Health Trainers have successfully piloted the delivery of some of their services using the neutral, safe and inclusive environment and social setting of Hexham Library with a view to roll out to other libraries across the county.
- Where key regeneration projects are developing e.g. Blyth, libraries are facilitating the sharing of information with the public (exhibition and hosting public engagement), supporting cultural elements e.g. artist workshops as well as delivering our own programme of activities and events that support the initiatives
- The service has delivered a programme of events, activities and displays this year that reflects corporate priorities by working in partnership with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team to support initiatives e.g. Northumberland Pride, Autism Awareness, Carers Week and our Climate Change team.
- Hosting a collection of balance bikes at Bedlington Library and managing their loan on behalf of the Sustainable Transport team, promoting physical activity and active travel.
- Collaboration with Barclays saw the bank previously located on Westgate in Haltwhistle in a traditional banking setting, relocate to the Mechanics Building in Haltwhistle, and be co-located with the library in a broad community setting. This initiative offered Barclays a solution which would enable them to stay in Haltwhistle and continue to offer face to face banking support to customers via their pop-up cashless banking site. It has also presented some collaboration and digital learning opportunities in tandem with the library where for example customers have been able to access opportunities to digitally upskill, gaining confidence and moving towards being able to independently bank and transact online.

Library Service Prospectus

- The Library Service has developed and designed a Prospectus which will be representative of each Local Area Committee (LAC) locality and aligned to the five hub libraries (Berwick, Hexham, Morpeth, Blyth, Cramlington). By using data and business intelligence the Prospectus sets out the service delivery priorities of the Library Service beyond the Universal Library Offer, which will support the community in meeting their informed needs and enable NCC to tackle inequalities

and achieve corporate priorities. Additional partnership working and opportunities to support partner initiatives will be driven by the Prospectus initiative. Each Prospectus aligned to a hub library and its locality will be presented to each LAC no later than summer 2024 for discussion and awareness.

An Evolving Service

- The Library Service has worked with colleagues from the Homeless Unit to develop digital channels which directly connect library staff to Duty Officers in a timely manner to support homeless customers at that first point of contact, ensuring that those in need who present at any of our 30 libraries are signposted and supported as a priority.
- In April 2024, Morpeth Library relocated from a commercially rented property into the new purpose-built leisure centre development in the town. Staff completed the relocation on time and met the anticipated surge in new membership uptake and increased usage. Since then, staff have established a programme of activities and events to further raise the profile of the library in its new location, offering a range of events from performance to community groups and encompassing all age demographics.
- The Library Service and Customer Service teams based at Hexham Library in Queens Hall have developed a blended way of working which focuses upon first point of contact resolution for those residents who present in person at this location seeking support and service across a range of areas. Working to the principles established as part of the BEST Service to Customers workstream, this initiative delivers operational efficiencies alongside excellence to customers. This new way of working will be extended across the library network.
- The Prison Librarian based at HMP Northumberland was selected by Arts Council England to attend a two-day residential course ‘New and emerging library lead officers programme’ at Warwick University in January 2024. The course is designed to support officers who are on a career pathway to become a senior leader in libraries, helping them build the skills and networks that will support their development. The programme helps officers develop the strategic thinking that joins up library activities with wider outcomes and approaches that support local communities, cross cutting council priorities and partnership working. This initiative is part of ongoing succession planning in the service.
- A restructured pricing model (developed in response to customer feedback and good practice elsewhere) introduced by School Library Service has resulted in an increased number of subscriptions, thereby ensuring a high-quality selection of reading and project resources for pupils to use for study and pleasure and priority access to author visits throughout the year. Networking opportunities with leadership teams from the county school network are presented and capitalised upon by working in tandem with the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education.

- During the calendar year 2023, the Library Service saw an increase in issues from libraries with 470,703 physical items borrowed (an increase of 4% from the previous year) and 321,674 digital items borrowed (an increase of 22% from the previous year). In addition, 12,152 new members joined the library and the service hosted 3,021 events which 39,899 people attended. The in person and online event programme goes from strength to strength and in March 2024, Haltwhistle Library will welcome Simon Armitage the UK Poet Laureate as he visits and hosts an event as part of his nationwide library tour.

Supporting Economic Growth

- Steps taken to increase the study and workspace at Hexham and Morpeth Libraries have been well received by those who use these spaces, as demonstrated by increasing numbers and the established user base continues to grow.
- Continuation funding for our three local Business and Intellectual Property centres in Berwick, Hexham and Morpeth from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund enables businesses and entrepreneurs to access information and expert advice close to home or work. Regular events and local meet ups such as 'Breakfast Coffee and Catch Up' networking and support meetings enable local business people to connect and be part of a thriving and supportive community. Several Northumberland businesses feature on the BIPC website as successful support case studies such as EvaAnna Leisure and Adventurous Coaching Morpeth.
- The Library Service has delivered a programme of events that has developed a following beyond residents of the county. For example, a couple who had previously travelled into the county to visit the HW1900 exhibition hosted in Haltwhistle Library, returning for their second stay in the county to attend the recent Humphrey Davy poetry workshop hosted in Morpeth Library and in doing so, contributed to the visitor economy. Regular author events hosted across the library network prioritises the employment of local authors, particularly those who are fledgling, invests our budget locally and provides them with the opportunity to develop their presentation skills.

b) Achievements: Archive Service

Funding and Innovation

- The Archive Service have completed development of an online shop that will promote the purchase of digital images and other archive-related products in a user friendly and convenient manner. Production of the online shop has been entirely grant funded by the Covid Recovery Fund. Our aspiration is that the convenience of the online shop will increase sales and therefore income but also allow for the provision and production of some images without staff intervention enabling customers to self-serve and promoting best use of resource.
- Working with our charity (Northumberland Archives Charitable Trust) the service has collaborated to raise £46,985 to support archive projects since March 2023. Projects focus on cataloguing, digitisation and education work. Some of these monies have

funded the engagement of a part-time Digitisation Assistant post at Berwick. All the monies raised by our Charitable Trust have been grants from bodies that are inaccessible to Local Authorities.

- In partnership with the Friends of Berwick & District Museum and Archives, the service has collaborated to raise funding for community projects. These projects have supported the work of the Berwick Record Office specifically in the North Northumberland area. They have raised £9,399 to support community projects in Eglingham and Kyloe parishes and a Coronation exhibition at Berwick.
- The Archive Service is a partner to the Village Halls Heritage Project. The project has engaged with 30 village halls encouraging them to research and celebrate their heritage. Archives staff have provided training in archival skills and oral history, have digitised content for the group and will develop an exhibition to be shown in County Hall from 11 March 2024.
- A grant award of £103k by the National Lottery Heritage Fund has been secured by the Archive Service to work with youth groups in two rural areas of Northumberland. The project named 'Digitally Disrupting the Archives' will commence in April 2024 and run for 12 months. The project will engage with young people who do not traditionally engage with Archives and will culminate in public community events, developing digital, creative and team working skills across delegates.

Collaboration with Partners and Our Communities

- Over the previous 12 months, the service has increased presence in rural communities by engaging with audiences that do not traditionally interact with our services via attendance at county shows at Allendale, Bellingham, Glendale and Swarland. This has been received very well by our rural communities, and plans are in place to attend six county shows in 2024/25.
- In 2023, the service ran a high-quality education project 'Blyth To The Future' with 207 children from four schools in Blyth over one term. The project allowed children to plan and visualise what Blyth might look like in the future and was aimed to raise the aspirations of children in the town and consider future careers linked to STEM subjects. As part of the project the children visited Northumbria University to carry out research and learn about higher education and its opportunities. Funding for this work was provided by the Platten Fund via the Community Foundation, which kindly donated £10,000 to support this venture.
- The project is being repeated, this time known as 'Ashington To The Future' with funding once again provided by the Platten Fund, with £15,000 provided as a grant. Children recently visited the Farrell Centre in Newcastle which focuses upon architecture and cities and spent the day using historic photographs of Ashington to create a film about what their town may look like in the future. Building on the success of the Blyth and Ashington projects, the Archive Service hopes to roll this learning and development opportunity to more children across a broader range of Northumberland communities.
- The continuation of the Living Barracks Project has seen pilot work with community groups over the past year develop and has allowed Berwick Record Office to work with the King's Own Scottish Borderers to deliver talks and practical archives

sessions to groups who do not normally engage with archives. These include Memory Laners (dementia group); Headway (brain injury group) and Young Carers.

- The Archive Service County Hall offer. Archives have had significant engagement with the exhibition offer at County Hall, developing exhibitions and supporting the exhibition programme. In January 2024 the service began to have a regular one day per week presence in the reception study space offering free mentor sessions to members of the public and staff. These activities along with our regular monthly County Hall talks aim to encourage members of the public who do not visit the search rooms in Berwick and Woodhorn to engage with our service and early indications are that this will prove successful.

Supporting Regeneration

- The Living Barracks Project is a partnership project involving English Heritage, The Maltings, Kings Own Scottish Borders Museum and Northumberland County Council. It is intended that the Berwick Record Office will move onto the site and have a permanent home for the archives it stores and a public search room facility. This project is now in a Stage 1 Development Phase and NCC officers are involved at both Board and Task Group level shaping the application for the future of this project, undertaking pilot work and contributing to the site layout and museum design and themes. This project will help regenerate the town of Berwick through Heritage Regeneration. It is expected that the Archive Service will fully relocate from the Walkergate Building in Berwick to the Barracks site during 2027.

c) Achievements: Leisure

Opening of the New Morpeth Leisure Centre

- In Spring 2023, we were incredibly proud to open a new Sports, Leisure, and Community Hub to serve the people of Morpeth, its surrounding communities, and visitors to the town. The facility incorporates a community services hub, including a new improved library accommodated over two floors and an extensive adult learning facility complete with classrooms. Barclays Bank and Citizens Advice both now operate from this site offering convenient community services. A six-lane swimming pool with spectator gallery, flexible learner pool, spa facilities, fitness spaces, a multi-use sports hall and large studio space provide an excellent range of physical activity facilities. A cafe, poetry garden and outdoor terrace space act as a social space for families and tourists alike. The new Centre is expected to result in a 69% reduction in carbon emissions compared to the previous traditional leisure facility that it has replaced.

Leisure Review and Leisure Transformation

- Northumberland County Council (NCC) has invested heavily in leisure and sports facilities in the county over recent years and the portfolio is deemed to be one of the highest quality in the country. The review of the current leisure service which concluded in September 2022 presented a unique opportunity to focus future investment and service delivery based on tackling inequalities and impacting positively on the health needs of Northumberland residents. The findings and recommendations of the leisure review were presented to Cabinet in November 2022

where the decision to proceed with a formal tender exercise for future management of Leisure Services was made. Cabinet also gave formal approval for the development of a new Service Specification which would maximise the health and wellbeing impacts of the Council's investment into leisure, both through facility-based activity and through wider community engagement and provision.

- A further key recommendation of the Leisure Review was that the smaller facilities included in the current contract should be excluded from the scope of the new arrangements, and that asset-based community development principles should be considered for the following sites:
 - The Dave Stephens Centre, Blyth
 - The Blyth Beach Huts
 - Northburn Sports and Community Centre, Cramlington
 - Druridge Bay Fitness Centre, Hadston
 - The Hirst Welfare Centre
 - Rothbury Sports Centre
- The newly developed operating contract and service specification for the Northumberland Community Leisure and Well-being Service Contract is for a 10-year period and includes the following facilities:
 - Ashington Leisure Centre, Ashington
 - Berwick Sports & Leisure Centre, Berwick
 - Blyth Sports Centre
 - Concordia Leisure Centre, Cramlington
 - New Morpeth Leisure Centre, Morpeth
 - Newbiggin Sports & Community Hub
 - Ponteland Leisure Centre, Ponteland
 - Prudhoe Water World, Prudhoe
 - Wentworth Leisure Centre, Hexham
 - Willowburn Sport & Leisure Centre, Alnwick

The Leisure Procurement Process

- Under procurement law the authority must conduct a procurement process to ensure the authority is receiving good value for money and the best services possible. The Council has used this opportunity to transform the current model of provision to a Community Leisure and Wellbeing Service.
- Following a comprehensive and robust procurement process, Places for People Leisure Limited (Places Leisure) will manage the Council's Leisure Centres from 1 April 2024. The award of the contract is for a period of ten years with the opportunity to extend for a further five years. The value of the contract is circa £250m (based on turnover).
- Places Leisure submitted the most economically advantageous tender in terms of the cost but also scored highest overall on the qualitative criteria including partnership working, approach to tackling inequalities and the delivery of corporate priorities.

- Places Leisure is one of the UK's leading social enterprises and leading leisure management contractors, currently employing over 6,000 staff and operating over 100 sites on behalf of 33 local authorities.

Community Assets

- The six 'Community' sites currently managed by Active Northumberland vary significantly in terms of origin, purpose, condition, and usage. NCC Officers worked with stakeholders to assess the potential of the six smaller sites to be managed by community partners and potentially, if the business case is sustainable, that applications for Community Asset Transfers are considered. The aim being to ensure that residents and local organisations gain maximum benefit from the sites and that they are programmed according to local need and opportunities. This process has been undertaken in the context of the NCC Community Asset Transfer Policy.

The Dave Stephens Centre and Blyth Beach Huts

- An application for a combined Community Asset Transfer of the Dave Stephens Centre and the Blyth Beach Huts was received from Blyth Valley Enterprise Limited (BVEL). This application was considered by an Officer Panel and approved by Cabinet. The terms of transfer of both assets to BVEL will be developed by Strategic Estates, for implementation from 1 April 2024.
- The transfer to BVEL is being supported with a one year allocation of £50,000 to cover transition, and a £72,000 allocation to cover outstanding repairs.

Druridge Bay Fitness Centre, Northburn Sports and Community Centre, and Rothbury Sports Centre

- Based on consideration of the Asset Transfer Policy, financial considerations and the need to ensure continuity of vital highly valued community provision, Northburn Sports and Community Centre, Rothbury Sports Centre and Druridge Bay Fitness Centre will be managed by NCC on an interim basis from April 2024.
- These interim arrangements will enable a period of close working with local communities to determine the most appropriate and sustainable future management arrangements. Due to the similar nature of the facilities, it will allow NCC to manage the sites collectively bringing economies of scale and a central oversight of programming and operation. These arrangements, whilst ensuring continuity of provision, will also allow consideration of the community outreach potential of the new leisure delivery arrangements. To support the interim operation of the sites, NCC have allocated a funding provision of £111,000 for the financial year 2024/25, and £89,000 for 2025/26.

Hirst Welfare Centre

- The Hirst Welfare Centre remains a prominent asset of community value and is very much in the long-term plans and aspirations of both NCC and the Ashington Town Board. The Hirst Welfare Centre features within the current consultation and engagement regarding a future Hirst Masterplan and has the potential to play a pivotal role in helping address inequalities within communities.

- To ensure the continuation of both the leisure and early years offer operating from the site and to help prepare the foundations for the development and delivery of a wider Community Welfare offer, the Board of Trustees will be supported to manage the transition away from Active Northumberland back to a Local Community Management provision from 1 April 2024. The Trustees are being supported with a year one contribution of £250,000, a year two contribution of £180,000 and a year three contribution of £100,000 (funded from the Public Health Grant).

Current Leisure Centre Performance

- Membership numbers for Active Northumberland have increased in 2023, building upon the 2022/23 total membership of 18,850, to 19,835 for year-to-date December 2023 (a 5.2% increase on 2022/23). In January 2024, following the best sales month to date where 1,788 new members joined, membership levels rose further to 20,737.
- Fitness memberships by age continue to be monitored with growth seen in the under 18 junior membership, and 35 to 65 age range categories. A large increase in the 65+ age group is attributed to a targeted marketing campaign which has focused on the availability of daytime activities such as badminton and fitness classes.
- The Learn2Swim programme continues to develop with 6,464 total swimmers taking part in 2022/23. Year to date in January 2024, programme attendance has risen to 7,441, with a further two months remaining. General swim usage figures show that during 2022/23 795,972 sessions took place, and year to date in January 2024 547,007 swim sessions have taken place with Morpeth Leisure Centre proving to be the most popular site.
- Quest is the Sport England recommended continuous improvement tool for leisure facilities designed to measure how effective organisations are at providing customer service and good quality facilities. During 2022/23, Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre, Ashington Leisure Centre, and Wentworth Leisure Centre were classified as 'Very Good' in terms of Quest accreditation, and during 2023 Morpeth Sports and Leisure and Ponteland Leisure Centre were accredited as 'Excellent', the highest Quest accreditation achievable.

Northumberland Physical Activity Strategy

- At 70.1%, Northumberland presently has the highest percentage of adults who are physically active in the North East. This compares to 65.4% regionally, and 67.3% across England. This performance continues to be built upon by the NCC Physical Activity Strategy (PAS).

5.2

- The PAS is currently under review and focus continues to be on the target groups of women and girls, people with a long-term health condition, and those from a lower socio-economic background in the county. The work of the review will look to understand whether any additional underrepresented population subgroups require representation as part of this strategy.

c) Achievements: Visitor Economy

Accreditation

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

Destination Management Plan

- Visit Northumberland is also responsible for the development and updating of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan (DMP). Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience. A Destination Management Plan is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take. The Northumberland Destination Management Plan is now into its first full year of delivery and structures are well established. Key achievement include:
 - Convened a Tactical Visitor Management working group through the summers of 2022 and 2023 to review community issues to aid visitor management and mitigate issues as they arise. The multi-stakeholder 'Love it Like It's Yours' campaign has been delivered through Northumberland County Council communications team, driving behaviour change messaging via visitnorthumberland.com
 - Development and Launch of a Northumberland Pledge to encourage visitors to act responsibly and sustainably whilst visiting to underline Northumberland as a responsible tourism destination.
 - Development and promotion of thematic tourism products such as Dark Skies and Step into Alnwick and promotions of events with campaigns focussing on spreading activity across Northumberland and extending the duration of visits.
 - Provided business development opportunities to over 100 businesses through Visit Northumberland partner engagement activity and product development strands and widened the partnership programme to include events, and suppliers to industry with food and drink and previously lapsed partners a focus on business development.
 - Relunched "Know your Northumberland" to support industry's people development priorities, identified all establishments offering career training in tourism related industries and developed education resources for teachers, and encouraged more Northumberland organisations involved in Visit England inspections and Tourism Award entries.

- Established a sustainability advisory group with representatives from the county's protected landscapes, climate action team and interested parties to address sustainable transport, accessibility and broadening participation in the Green Tourism Accreditation Scheme, sustainable food practices to help support food and drink product development and waste recycling.
- Building on opportunities through the North East Destination Development Partnership, have expanded the evidence base with Northumberland datasets emerging from regional accommodation, accessibility and sustainability studies, with opportunities for Northumberland businesses to participate as these evolve.

d) Achievements: Culture

Support and Funding

- The Council provides core funding to 15 organisations as part of the Council's commitment to Culture and the positive benefits in relation to regeneration, economic growth, skills development, employability, health, and wellbeing. This includes Museums Northumberland (MN) to deliver a Museums Service on behalf of the Council and four theatres in Berwick, Alnwick, Blyth, and Hexham that act as cultural hubs reaching out to communities beyond their buildings. It also provides funding to 10 organisations that range in art form from internationally recognised, Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival to award winning youth theatre company Mortal Fools based in Ashington. In 2022-23 the portfolio of organisations engaged with 398,032 people as audience members and people who have taken part in cultural activity. These cultural organisations are charities and invest funding they lever back into their organisations to provide public benefit. In 2022/23 they achieved £2,557,285 of further funding into Northumberland which is an exceptionally good return on investment and value for money building on Council investment of circa £1m per annum.
- There are 8 National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) (Arts Council funded) in Northumberland in this round of Arts Council funding. Two new organisations have been added to the portfolio and two received uplifts in funding. The Arts Council has extended this round of NPO funding by a year to provide cultural organisations with more time to deliver their programme after the effects of the pandemic. The round now covers 2023 – 2027 and is a total investment of £1,290,452 into Northumberland. For the scale and population of the County, achieving this amount of Arts Council funding is impressive. Northumberland has a highly regarded reputation in the sector for the quality of the organisations that are based here and the work they deliver for local people and visitors.

Implementation of the Council's Cultural Review

- The Council commissioned an independent review of its cultural investment portfolio which concluded in late 2022. In February 2023 Cabinet agreed a series of actions and recommendations in response to the review, these are:
 - **Action 1:** Develop a strategy that protects Northumberland's cultural properties for the future
 - **Action 2:** Transform the partnership agreement with Museums Northumberland (Woodhorn Charitable Trust)

- **Action 3:** Optimise the engagement of people in museums, heritage, and culture through place-based approaches
- **Action 4:** Prioritise inclusive approaches to cultural activity that reach people and communities who face barriers to engagement
- Work against all four actions is ongoing through a coordinated programme approach.

Create Berwick, Northumberland's Culture and Creative Zone

- With the support of the North of Tyne Combined Authority, Northumberland, North Tyneside, and Newcastle have received in the region of £1.5m each until 26/27 to support pilot Culture and Creative Zones (CCZ). Northumberland's Zone, called Create Berwick focuses on the town centre of Berwick upon Tweed and is investing in creative led regeneration of Berwick, helping creative, cultural and community led organisations to innovate and strengthen the local economy. Taking inspiration from Berwick's rich coastal and borderlands heritage, traditions, and landscapes the CCZ will help create new contemporary cultural experiences and support thriving creative businesses. It provides business support and skills development, working with the National Art Fundraising School, analysis of spaces for production and growth, bringing together the sector to raise its profile and be attractive to visitors. Launched in October it announced the Creative Action Fund before Christmas 2023 to support artists with studio time, project delivery and R&D. The project continues until 2027 providing a positive amount of time to ensure culture and creativity is embedded in the town to benefit local people in projects such as a youth training community radio and every wider town project includes opportunities to commission artists, e.g., Bridge 400 (400th anniversary of Berwick Old Bridge) Create Berwick is providing support to commission an artist with the Bridge 400 town partners.
- Create Berwick is bookended by two strategic capital projects, The new Maltings supported through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal to transform the existing theatre and cinema into an expanded arts and entertainment centre of national significance. The Berwick Maltings is also a key partner in the Living Barracks partnership with the Council and the lead organisation, English Heritage. The project sets out to provide a high quality and cohesive visitor experience showcasing a number of collections. In May 2023 Cabinet took a decision that the Berwick collections should be retained within the Barracks complex as part of the Living Barracks initiative. Plans for the Living Barracks also include a series of artist studios and temporary public art interventions.

A new Cultural Venue for Blyth

- Energising Blyth is a Town Investment Plan to grow, renew and connect the town agreed locally by partners with the UK Government. Following the recent Levelling Up Deep Dive funding announcement the Programme is now expanded to be the £110m Regeneration Programme to transform Blyth, funded by UK Government through Future High Streets Fund (FHSF), Town Deal and Levelling Up Deep Dive, the Council, North of Tyne Combined Authority and other partners alongside a wider programme of investment including the Northumberland Line, Blyth Relief Road, Northumberland Energy Park and Heart of Blyth.
- The Council undertook an in-depth consultation with local people and businesses in Blyth and local people identified a desire for a cinema and cultural facility in the

town centre as a catalyst to draw in desperately needed footfall and spend. Feasibility and business planning work was commissioned by independent cultural consultants, David Clarke Associates, which included a mapping of the creative and cultural sector in Blyth, to identify gaps and opportunities.

- A new Cultural Venue built on a newly designed Market Place, in Blyth's town centre is being delivered as part of the £90m Energising Blyth Programme to grow, renew and connect the town and is funded by the UK Government, Northumberland County Council, and North of Tyne Combined Authority and is due to open in summer 2025. The new cultural hub will:
 - provide a major accessible attractor that will increase vibrancy and footfall, bring visitors and spending to the town, boost pride of place amongst residents, encourage more a night-time economy, and stimulate the wider regeneration and renewal of the town centre.
 - Reinvent the Market Place to compliment the cultural facility and provide a more intimate, safe, and attractive space for residents and visitors to meet, sit and play encouraging people to dwell and utilise local facilities including the local Market;
 - Complement and enhance the historic character and identity of the town and other planned projects close by including a hotel/restaurant and Energy Central Campus Institute;
 - Provide a hub for the ongoing and planned improvements to the walking and cycling infrastructure around the town, improving legibility, access to facilities and ease of movement;
 - meet demand and need from the community demonstrated in previous consultations and;
 - deliver against Business Case/Grant Funding conditions of the Future High Streets Fund capital funding awarded which is to directly improve the core town centre around market place for the benefit of the whole community.
- Jam Jar Cinema have been announced as the new venue's operator after a full procurement process. The enabling works have started on site and within the erection of the building's steel frame in early spring, the Council will be announcing the new brand and name of the venue which will include 3 cinemas, a studio theatre, a creativity space, and cafe/bar offer.
- A Culture Placemaking Programme (CPP) includes artist's commissions in and outside the new building and public realm. Neon Studio an artist and architect duo, Poet, John Challis and Candle & Bell award winning filmmakers have all been appointed. All are working with local people and communities in the development of their commissions. The CPP also includes an exciting and diverse events programme, and lighting and signage strategy to bring vibrancy and colour to the town centre and Market Place.

5.2 Portfolio Key Areas of Focus

a) Library Service

- In line with the recent Policy Paper 'An independent review of English public libraries' produced by Baroness Sanderson and published January 2024, the opportunity will be taken to consider the recommendations of the review which considers matters such as brand and identity, volunteer networks, workforce skills

and knowledge and the connection to hubs and communities and understand how this can shape our library service, ensuring it continues to meet present and future needs.

- The Library Service conference programme will continue, with arrangements in place for a Schools Library Service conference in February 2024 which will see education leaders from around the county and beyond come together to discuss the theme 'Focus on Non-Fiction' in the school curriculum. Guest speakers include Dr Kirstin Mullholland, Assistant Professor in Education from Northumbria University, and Kate Pankhurst, children's non-fiction writer and illustrator.
- The Northern Poetry Library of which an edit of the collection is available for access at The Chantry in Morpeth, will be brought together as a complete collection in the new library located in Morpeth Leisure Centre. This collection is much valued and highlights the largest collection of post WW2 poetry in England outside of London along with first editions and signed copies. The reunification of our poetry collection will align to a series of events to recognise and support the local poetry community in Northumberland.
- The Prison Library SLA with HMP Northumberland will be reviewed for the period 2024 to 2027, ensuring that the changing needs of the increasing prison population are met, and that the service remains fully resourced to meet this.

b) Archive Service

- Further funding will be sought to support Archive activities and programmes across the county. The Northumberland Archive Charitable Trust will apply for funding to the Ray Wind Farm Trust for grant funding which will support the cataloguing of the papers of Philip Cheswright and culminate in an exhibition at Wallington and County Hall.
- Work will continue on the Atkinson Marshall papers, which are an essential reference to the involvement of Northumberland farmers in the Highland clearances. The Archive Service are working with colleagues from academia in this work.
- The service will host a Community Action Northumberland Village Halls event in County Hall on 18 March 2024. This all day event will bring together representatives from many village halls across the county and focus on sustainables and the National Lottery funded Village Hall heritage project that the Archive Service have delivered.
- In partnership with council colleagues, Archives are supporting International Women's Day on 8 March and will deliver talks and an exhibition celebrating exceptional Northumberland women. Mona Taylor who was a pioneer in maternity care will feature, along with Mrs B.F.C. Adams who was the first female Mayor of Berwick.
- Funding streams will be explored with the National Lottery Heritage Fund about possible funding to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2 in 2025.

- Berwick Record Office will work with The Maltings on an education programme for the forthcoming Lowry Exhibition scheduled for May to October 2024.
- The service will also provide support to Bridge 400 which is a community project to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the opening to traffic of Berwick Old Bridge.
- Berwick colleagues will run a Pilot Volunteering Repackaging project for The Living Barracks.
- The Archive Service will curate a series of exhibitions for County Hall. This will include a range of areas of interest such as Everyday Life in a Northumbrian Manor,

c) Leisure

Mobilisation of the New Leisure and Wellbeing Contract – Places Leisure

- The Council has assembled a cross organisation team to support the mobilisation of the new contract arrangements with Places Leisure to ensure a smooth transition with minimum disruption to customers, and staff. The Council are also supporting the orderly closure of Active Northumberland.
- Places Leisure will create opportunities for activity across the county, taking activities to residents within settings where they are comfortable, ranging from bootcamp style circuits to family fun in local parks, to children’s activities in local schools or youth clubs. The Active Communities Programme will be co-designed with NCC Public Health and Sports Development teams. In addition, outreach vans will be used to offer NHS health checks within community settings to advise residents on the best way to monitor and improve their health. A health MOT will be on offer incorporating blood pressure, cholesterol, waist to hip ratio and a wellbeing review.
- The Activity Communities initiative will also ensure that residents in rural areas in the county are afforded the opportunity to engage with such community events and facilities, contributing towards tackling rural isolation. The Places Leisure Community Class Programme will offer outreach across our community settings such as care homes, village halls, and day centres where focus will be places on initiatives such as seated aerobics and falls prevention in care homes.
- A robust set of performance management and reporting standards have been set by NCC to Places Leisure that will see the provider produce an Annual Service Plan, developed in tandem with NCC, that will set out how the service will be developed and delivered over the coming year to meet NCC’s strategic objectives. Continuous improvement will be at the heart of this. Performance standards clearly set by NCC together with reporting requirements will ensure close monitoring of the contract to ensure targets are met, and excellence is delivered.
- The new Leisure and Wellbeing contract, in partnership with Places Leisure enables NCC to redefine the leisure service for the county, strengthening reach and impact, creating new opportunities across our communities, and stretching our ambitions in tackling health inequalities and ensuring Northumberland residents thrive and be the best they can.

- In addition to the routine performance and contract monitoring meetings, a Strategic Partnership Board chaired by NCC and attended by key Officers, senior Places Leisure representatives and the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Lives will be formed to oversee the delivery of the new health and wellbeing focussed Leisure Service. The first meeting being planned four weeks post contract commencement.

Prudhoe Waterworld Improvements

- Following the delivery of new build Leisure projects in Berwick, Morpeth, Ponteland, and the upgrade of both Blyth Sports Centre and Newbiggin Sports Centre, a requirement to improve the customer experience at the ageing Prudhoe site was identified. The project has been awarded a budget of £1.5m for the refurbishment work of the wet-side leisure facilities, together with provision of a new wheelchair accessible ramp from the main road.
- The brief comprises of:
 - Improved layout for toilets, shower and back of house areas.
 - New pool tiling to swimming pool tank.
 - New cubicles, locker, shower, and vanity units to suit new layout.
 - New lighting, ceiling tiles, wall and floor finishes to changing village area.
 - Improved flume exit provision, along with review of sauna and steam room.
 - Conversion of redundant climbing room into pool side store.
 - Provision of accessible changing area.
 - New glazing to south elevation of the pool.
 - Removal of existing spa pool and associated plant.
 - Review of soft play.

The project will be completed by April 2025.

Sports Development – Playzones

- Ahead of the programme opening nationally, NCC was invited to apply for Sport England and Football Foundation funding to develop Playzones in the county.
- This project aims to provide quality facilities to increase physical activity in areas of high deprivation aligning to the NCC Inequalities Plan. Sixteen communities have been identified and approved for inclusion across Northumberland and have been divided into two portfolios.
- Portfolio One contains six sites (Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Newbiggin, West Bedlington, West Wylam) which have all received formal funding offer letters, with an anticipated build of summer 2024. The remaining ten sites (Berwick, Blyth, Choppington, Cramlington, East Bedlington, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Lynemouth, Seaton Valley, Wooler) which make up Portfolio Two are being progressed to final application with an expected build time of late 2024 (subject to Football Foundation timescales).
- The total value of the Northumberland Playzone development is estimated at approximately £5 million of which 75% match funding will come through the Football Foundation. The remaining 25% match funding will be sourced from various external sources in addition to S106 funding and SCG allocation.

- Via the Sports Development service, the objective for 2024/25 is to progress the delivery of the whole Portfolio and embed sustainable Playzones into each community.

Visitor Economy

- The focus will be to continue to deliver against the priorities of the Destination Management Plan and undertake a review of actions to ensure the plan's 10-year vision remains relevant and aligned to strategic developments within the sector.
- This next year will also be a critical year for engagement with the regional Destination Development Partnership and the development of a regional 10-year strategy for the visitor economy aligned with regional devolution.

Culture

- The focus will be on continuing the implementation of the Cultural Review through a programme based approach. A programme board and two workstreams have been established focusing on:

- Museums, Collections and Place-Based Approach and
- Cultural Estate

Through this overarching programme approach, Northumberland County Council will oversee activity relating to the four actions agreed by Cabinet:

- Action 1 – Develop a strategy that protects Northumberland's cultural properties for the future
 - Action 2 – Transform the partnership agreement with Museums Northumberland (Woodhorn Charitable Trust)
 - Action 3 – Optimise the engagement of people in museums and heritage through place-based approaches in culture
 - Action 4 – Prioritise inclusive approaches to cultural activity that reach people and communities who face barriers to engagement
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- In relation to the Berwick Culture and Creative Zone – Create Berwick, activity over this next year will be focused on delivering against the 4 workstreams which are
 - Skills and Enterprise – this includes training and skills development workshops, National Arts Fundraising School, a cultural leadership programme, a peer to peer support programme, the Creative Action Fund, a community radio and a youth training programme.
 - Raising the profile of the Zone through the website, community marketing and delivering artist commissions
 - Engaging Communities which includes support for community led festivals
 - Places and spaces which includes support to bring forward spaces for creatives in Berwick.
 - Mobilising the Culture Placemaking programme will be a priority in order to engage local people and communities in the lead up to the new Culture venue in Blyth town centre

Continued support will be provided to the Living Barracks Project which is a partnership project involving English Heritage, The Maltings, Kings Own Scottish Borders Museum and Northumberland County Council as the project progresses through the different funding rounds and implementation.

6. Implications

Policy	This report highlights the policy work being undertaken and aligns to the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Value for money is a priority for the Council. This Report contains no direct financial implications. The ongoing delivery of the individual actions within the Portfolio may have financial implications which would form separate reports as they arise.
Legal	No implications to note.
Procurement	None identified.
Human resources	None identified.
Property	None identified.
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No N/A
Risk assessment	All risks are managed as part of service level risk registers.
Crime and disorder	No implications.
Customer considerations	All services are designed to best meet the needs of residents and seeks feedback from residents where applicable.
Carbon reduction	None identified.
Health and wellbeing	Leisure, libraries, and archives along with the Council's and county's cultural assets play a significant part in the wellbeing, development, and healthy living outcomes for residents.
Wards	(All Wards);

7. Background papers

N/A

8. Links to other key reports already published

Corporate Plan 2023-26

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