



Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

Annual Achievements Report 2023-24

Report of Councillor(s) Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

Responsible Officer(s): Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

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

This report sets out the achievements against all three priorities of the Corporate Plan.

2. **Purpose of report**

To highlight key achievements of the Council in the year 2023-24

3. **Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that Council note the achievements of the Council in year 2023-24

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

Not applicable

5. **Background**

The County Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its AGM on 17th 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.

The Council's Corporate Plan sets the overall strategic direction for the Council, setting the context for service planning, appraisal, and capital investment. Therefore, it's important for Members and Officers to understand Council delivery and performance in the context of the three Corporate Plan priorities. This helps Members to track progress against the Council's priorities and informs debate on resources, action-planning and policy development.

Appendix 1 of this Report outlines the key achievements. These are set out against the Council's three priorities of Tackling Inequalities; Delivering Economic Growth; and Achieving Value for Money. The document is set out framed around the four objectives under each priority.

6. Summary of Achievements 2023-24

Since the approval of our Corporate Plan in May 2023, the teams at Northumberland County Council have a strong sense of focus on delivering the Council's vision and priorities, and we've delivered a lot. We've enjoyed a huge amount of staff celebrations from our youth justice service being recognised as good by Ofsted, social workers being recognised for their commitments, the team behind the Union Chain Bridge being celebrated for the investment and dedication to our very own BEST staff awards in November. This year has cemented the pride and passion all our staff have for Northumberland and that culture is setting us up strong for the future.

A key enabler for the organisation was the launch of BEST to support with some of that work – ensuring that we would, and could be, a fit-for-purpose, modern organisation, meeting the needs of our residents.

More recently we welcomed the LGA as part of our own Peer Review – something that was important to do following the last year to ensure we are heading in the right direction – and the good news is we are, so we should be proud of that. In its report the Review Team states: ***“Northumberland has made improvements it can be proud of and should focus on further embedding these...it should celebrate and be proud of the significant progress made.***

Some key achievements under each of our three priorities:

Value for Money

- We set a balanced budget for 2023-24 that sustains good-quality day-to services whilst continuing to invest in new or refurbished schools, leisure centres, regeneration and infrastructure. All this at a time when, sadly, neighbouring councils are having to close key facilities.
- Procurement savings of £1.63m have been achieved in Q1/Q2 of 2023-24 and it is anticipated that final savings will exceed £2m by the end of 31 March 2024. These comprise recurrent and non-recurrent efficiencies arising from a range of initiatives.
- We know residents value being able to contact the Council quickly and conveniently to pay bills, ask questions, access services and resolve issues. Our Customer Services are continuing an overall trend of improvement.
- We implemented Fix My Street, a platform that allows residents to report public realm issues and get updates on progress. This system has improved the online offer for customers and has allowed better understanding and visibility of issues leading to more efficient service delivery.

Tackling Inequalities

- We are proud to have led the way in convening a countywide and partnership approach to tackling entrenched social, economic and health inequalities. Following adoption of the Tackling Inequalities Plan by County Council in September 2022, the Inequalities Plan has now been signed by key partners across the County and beyond, demonstrating the commitment by all partners. Our Plan outlines key goals that can be delivered at scale over the coming years to level off and start to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy.
- We have continued to ensure our young people have access across the County to the best education facilities and are educated in high-performing schools. Following completion of new schools in Hexham and Ponteland, the Council has approved a multi-million investment in the Coquet Partnership of schools and, following extensive consultation, a £50.427m project will see Astley Community High School and Whytrig Middle School rebuilt on a new, shared campus to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for over 1,000 students. The Council has also pledged substantial investment for schools in Berwick.
- We are delighted to see more children and young people attending good or outstanding primary schools. This continues the improving trend over the last 2 years. The figure of 95.5% is 5.5% better than the national average. For 'pupils in good / outstanding secondary schools' - we have seen very impressive performance over the last 2 years and at early March 2024, the figure is 83.6%. Inspection outcomes are approximately 2% above the national average.

Delivering Economic Growth

- In November 2023 the County Council welcomed millions in extra funding to improve the condition of the county's road network. An extra £2.768m is confirmed for the county for 2024-25 and it is expected this will continue thereafter, with a total uplift of over £184.836m over the next ten years. The Council's main funding for highway maintenance comes from Department for Transport and is around £21.780m per year. In addition to this since 2020-21 the Council has put in a further £17.225m in its own capital to improve road maintenance over the last three years.
- We have maximised the benefits from devolution and powered regional growth. The County Council has been a constituent authority of the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA), alongside Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council, since its inception in 2018. The County has seen significant investment, supporting its priorities as a result of the devolution deal, including infrastructure investment, for example in Northumberland line stations and the road bridge, investment in key sectors such as digital, green and clean manufacturing and health.
- We have continued to invest in 'flagship' infrastructure. Construction is now well underway on the Northumberland Line, with six new stations granted planning approval. Bringing passenger services back between the Southeast of the county and central Newcastle has made significant progress this year and will be open from Summer 2024.

The appendix details all our achievements for each of our priorities and it demonstrates the scale of delivery from right across the council, all for the benefit of our residents.

7. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

7.1 The recommendation to Council is to note the Annual Achievements Report 2023-24.

8. Implications

Policy	This report supports delivery of all three priorities of 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 Corporate Plan may have financial implications which would form separate reports as these arise
Legal	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the individual actions may have legal implications, which would form separate reports as these arise.
Procurement	N/A
Human resources	N/A
Property	N/A
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No No equalities issues
Risk assessment	N/A
Crime and disorder	N/A
Customer considerations	Progress and achievements against the Corporate Plan benefit the residents of Northumberland by working towards positive outcomes.
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and wellbeing	n/A
Wards	(All Wards);

9. Background papers

Appendix 1 – Annual Achievements Report 2023-24

10. Links to other key reports already published

Corporate Plan 2023-26

11. Author and Contact Details

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