

Council Plan 2024-28



Foreword

County Durham, the jewel in the North East's crown, the historical land of the Prince Bishops, of industrial and technological innovation, economic reinvention, renowned cultural offer and world class education. A place with a strong cultural identity and pride in place built over the generations. A place like no other.

This plan sets out our bold ambitions to build upon the considerable strengths of our people and communities, our culture and our economy, to make County Durham an even better place to live, work and visit. It outlines how we will achieve our vision of more and better jobs, people living long and independent lives within safe, vibrant communities, a county that is carbon neutral, and a council which is both efficient and effective.

As we celebrate ten years of Public Health being part of the local government family, we proudly put health and wellbeing at the centre of our plans for the future. This is important, because for all of the county's great attributes, we are still blighted by the legacy of the post-industrial decline in areas previously dominated by mining and heavy industry. Issues of inequality and deprivation are a very real challenge in many of our communities.

So, our plan seeks to build on our strengths, but also tackle our challenges. Focussed on five key themes, structured around the economy, environment, people, communities, and the council - interlinking to make County Durham thriving, safe, caring, and green. It sets out how we will tackle inequality and discrimination, provide opportunity, and ensure no one is left behind.

Despite the history, natural beauty and strength of place, we are aware that the county, our partners and this council face many challenges. This includes responding to unexpected events such as the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of climate change, as well as planning for known changes driven by an ageing population, and growing demand and expectation for public services. We also recognise economic opportunities such as greater use of digitisation, artificial intelligence and automation alongside the move toward a low carbon economy. We cannot meet all these challenges or leverage these opportunities alone.

We are blessed with strong and progressive partnerships, forged on the strength of pride in this unique county. This plan builds on the work of the council, our partners and our communities over recent years. It underpins the County Durham Vision 2035 and sets out our contribution to the collective drive to achieve long-term change across the county.

Our plan shows we are looking to the future, working hard to achieve our ambitions and creating a resident-focused culture that actively listens to the needs and feedback of our communities.

Welcome to our plan.



Amanda Hopgood

Councillor Amanda Hopgood
Leader of the Council



John Hewitt

John Hewitt
Chief Executive

**Each year
we engage with hundreds
of partners, voluntary
and community groups
to help shape our service
provision so it meets the
needs and expectations
of our communities**



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Durham County Council Plan

2024
2028



**The council
plays a key role in
improving the lives of
everyone who visits,
lives or works in the
county, and we take this
role very seriously**

Achievements

The last few years are amongst the most challenging we have ever experienced. The Covid-19 pandemic, severe storms hitting the county, and the more recent cost-of-living crisis, have all driven demand for our services. In addition, inflationary pressures are reducing the council's spending power.

However, we have never wavered from our ambitions and, through it all, have continued to strive to improve the lives of our residents.

About County Durham

Durham is a forward-thinking county with a strong sense of community. It sits at the heart of the North East, with the biggest population and the strongest economic connectivity from the Tyne to the Tees. It is a great place to live, learn, visit and do business. The county has fast and reliable transport links: A1(M), A19(T), A66(T), East Coast mainline, and two international airports nearby. There is also a local port at Seaham Harbour, major ports on the Tyne and Wear, and a freeport at Teesside.

Having transformed its economy over the past 30 years, from mining and heavy industry to a focus on green technology, innovative business and manufacturing, high tech opportunities such as NETPark, and our heritage, culture, and visitor economy, the county is moving forward. Although Durham City and our large towns act as major centres, the county is largely rural. The Durham Dales covers around one third of the county and is part of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is one of the most remote and unspoilt places in England. As well as a stunning landscape of open heather moors, dramatic dales, tumbling upland rivers, wonderful woods, glorious waterfalls, fantastic birds, colourful hay meadows, stone-built villages, and intriguing imprints of a mining and industrial past, the area is also a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its outstanding geology.

County Durham is largely rural, 222,606 hectares with a population of about 522,100. The eighth largest county in the country by population



57% Rural area
7% Population
0.3 per hectare

7% Rural town and fringe area
37% Population
2.7 per hectare

11% Urban area
56% Population
12.1 per hectare

County Durham's major cultural attractions



We believe our fascinating history, local attractions, beautiful countryside, and coastal landscapes, will help us become a major tourist destination



1 Killhope Lead Mining Museum



7 Beamish Museum



12 Gala Theatre



2 High Force Waterfall



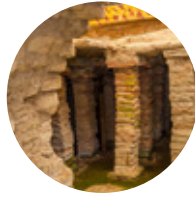
8 East Durham Heritage and Lifeboat Centre



12 Durham Town Hall



3 Durham Dales Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



9 Binchester Roman Fort



12 Durham Light Infantry Memorial



4 Barnard Castle



10 Bishop Auckland Town Hall



13 International Cricket Ground



5 Raby Castle



11 Locomotion



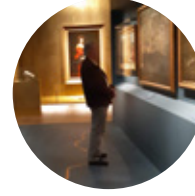
14 Sedgefield Racecourse



6 Empire Theatre



12 Durham Cathedral



15 Auckland Castle, Spanish Gallery, Kynren

County Durham has unique characteristics

Heritage Coast



High Force



Tommy



Durham Dales



We have:

- A large and diverse county with some of the sparsest population densities in the country: of 300 recognised settlements, only 23 have a population of 5,000 or more
- Some of the most remote and unspoilt countryside in England, with nationally recognised dark skies ideal for stargazing. The Durham Dales, part of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its outstanding geology, is an area of great ecological significance
- Dramatic landscape along the Heritage Coast with beaches, rugged cliffs and imposing headlands, internationally recognised for its rare plants and wildlife
- Durham Castle and Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Durham University, a globally outstanding centre of teaching and research

About the council: service delivery

We have a budget of around £1.3 billion which helps us provide more than 800 services to more than 522,100 people.



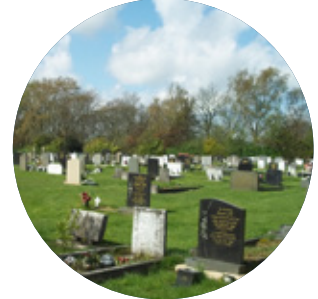
19,000 adults supported by social care



148 allotment sites



Nearly 10,000 engagements with our archives



46 cemeteries
96 closed church yards



2 crematorium joint committees



Corporate parent to over 1,000 children



3m visits annually to our 15 leisure centres



5,000 people learning to swim in our 10 pools



266 schools



11,274 children with special educational needs



3,800 children supported by social care



809,000 sq ft business space managed



5,000 food businesses inspected



15 sq mi of litter picking per week



8 major events organised



2,363 miles of highways and 500 road bridges

About the council: service delivery



12,500 contacts to Housing Solutions per annum



57,000 Council Tax Reduction claimants



39 libraries with over 200,000 members



9 parks and 12 Green Flag Awards



82,422 street lights



£4.2m subsidy provided to bus operators to run non-profitable routes



Over 100 Welcome Spaces supported for people to find company and stay warm



2,191 miles of public rights of way



1 million bins emptied each month



18,000 new benefit claims processed each year



15 family hubs



Almost 600,000 calls answered by customer services each year



More than 80,000 visits to our eight Customer Access Points each year



290 EV charge points (more to follow)



45 hectares of woodland planted since 2020



More than 2,500 births and 5,000 deaths registered each year

Our vision

A place where there are more and better jobs, people live long, and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.

Developed with partners and residents, this vision sets out our shared long-term ambitions for the county. To help us manage our contribution to this partnership vision, we have developed a strategic planning framework.

The framework helps the council set ambitions and objectives from the highest corporate level to the bottom functional level. It consists of a series of plans which are aligned throughout the organisation (golden thread). At the top of the framework is the Council Plan (underpinning the County Durham Vision).

The Council Plan

The council plan describes how we will achieve this vision. Written in line with the council's financial strategy (the MTFP), it also sets out how we will become more efficient and remain fit for the future.

Supporting strategies

These are key to achieving our ambitions across specific key areas. Examples include Inclusive Economic Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, Joint Health and Well-being Plan, Housing Strategy, Workforce Development Strategy.

Service and improvement plans

Service plans describe the role of each service in delivering the vision, alongside any plans to improve our existing high quality services.

Project plans

Project plans contain more detail of a specific programme. Every employee is given tasks as part of the supervision process.

Teams and individuals

The annual Performance Development Review (PDR) process sets out an individual's contribution to achieving our corporate objectives.



To support the framework, we have developed a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor progress to achieving our vision. These indicators are included at the end of relevant sections of this plan. Performance is monitored regularly at service level in addition to being formally reported four times a year to Cabinet and the council's scrutiny committees.

Our ambitions

Our economy

- A range of employment sites
- A strong, competitive economy
- A broader experience for residents and visitors
- Young people accessing good quality education, training and employment
- Helping all people into rewarding work
- Fewer people affected by poverty and deprivation

Our environment

- A physical environment contributing to good health
- A carbon neutral county
- Reduced impact of waste and pollution on our environment
- A protected, restored and sustainable natural environment

Our people

- Children and young people enjoying the best start in life, good health and emotional wellbeing, and a safe childhood
- Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will achieve the best possible outcomes
- Promotion of positive behaviours
- Better integration of health and social care services
- Tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities
- Supporting people to live independently for as long as possible - more homes for older and disabled people
- Supporting people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protect adults with care and support needs from harm
- Protect and improve the health of the local population, tackling leading causes of illness and death

Our communities

- Improve standards across housing stock
- Towns and villages which are vibrant, well-used, clean, attractive and safe
- Good access to workplaces, services, retail and leisure opportunities
- Communities able to come together and support each other
- More high-quality housing which is accessible and meets the needs of our residents
- Rural communities which are sustainable whilst retaining their distinctiveness
- Narrowed inequality gap between our communities

Our council

- Effectively managed resources
- A workforce for the future
- Services designed with service users
- Use data and technology more effectively

Our approach to wellbeing

Well-being includes everything that is important to people and their lives. Put simply, it is 'how we are doing' and 'how satisfied we are with our lives'.

It affects, and is affected by, our relationships; health (mental and physical); what we do; where we live; personal finance; economy; education and skills; governance and environment. These factors change over time for all of us, and sometimes we need help.

Alongside services offered by organisations like the council and the NHS, we can often find help within our communities; provided by local people, charities, and voluntary groups.

The [County Durham Approach to Wellbeing](#) is based on the best public health evidence for improving people's wellbeing through implementing community centred approaches. The Approach to Wellbeing is about putting people at the heart of everything we do and underpins our work to achieve the [County Durham Vision](#).

The approach to wellbeing is structured around the following seven principles.

1 Empowering communities

Working with communities to support their development and empowerment.

2 Being asset focused

Acknowledging the different needs of communities and the potential of their assets.

3 Building resilience

Helping the most disadvantaged and vulnerable and building up their future resilience.

4 Working better together

Working together across sectors to reduce duplication and ensure greater impact.

5 Sharing decision making

Designing and developing services and initiatives with the people who need them.

6 Doing 'with', not 'to'

Making our interventions empowering and centred around you as an individual.

7 A strong evidence base

Everything we do is supported by evidence informed by local conversations.

Our economy



We want to create a thriving local economy that helps people achieve their ambitions, with large employment sites offering more better-paid jobs, thriving local businesses and young people with the right skills to find a job and realise their potential

Our focus is 'inclusive growth'. We intend to grow our local economy fairly across the entire county and in doing so, create opportunity for all.

Workforce health and connectivity are key challenges, so we will work with partners to attract a wider range of jobs, support enterprising people, improve education and training levels, improve wages, tackle digital exclusion, and support people furthest from the labour market.

We will create the conditions for more businesses to start, move, and grow in all parts of the county, providing advice and guidance, access to finance, unlocking employment land, and investing in digital and physical infrastructure so that people can work closer to where they live.

We will continue to support people who want to access new opportunities and are joining forces with local schools and businesses to develop occupation-led training, aligned to local job opportunities.

Our aim is to retain local talent and attract more highly skilled workers.

We have strong economic foundations; we are developing specialisms in emerging sectors including fintech, space technologies, and advanced materials, our global university is expanding, and our visitor economy is growing.

We believe our fascinating history, local attractions, beautiful countryside, and coastal landscapes, will help us become a major tourist destination, so we are focused on developing a year round visitor economy. We are enhancing our cultural and creative infrastructure and are continuing to invest in and grow our events programme to attract more visitors.

The 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway will give us the opportunity to celebrate our railway heritage.

Our priorities

- Widen our business base to increase employment opportunities and help people earn better salaries
- Support new business to 'start up' within County Durham
- Promote fair trading and better regulation
- Delivering strategic employment sites including Durham City Innovation District, Forrest Park, Jade Business Park, Integra 61, and NETPark
- Give people the skills they need to work in existing and emerging industries
- Make County Durham a year-round visitor destination and a leading centre for culture and the arts
- Re-open the DLI Museum and Art Gallery, and complete The Story
- Increase visitors to culture, heritage, arts, theatres, museums, and galleries
- Support people into education, training, jobs and to excel in their careers
- Invest in opportunities to regenerate and improve the vibrancy of towns and villages
- Develop opportunity sectors and support enterprise, innovation, and productivity



Our measures of success

- More private sector business / employments per 10,000 head of population
- New businesses and registered / licensed activities
- More inward investment
- More employment land (hectares)
- More office and industrial floorspace occupied
- Increased value of the visitor economy
- More jobs supported by the visitor economy
- More residents with higher level skills
- More 16-17 year olds in education, employment and training
- Fewer council owned heritage assets 'at risk' and fewer categorised as 'Priority A' and/or in 'very bad condition'



Relevant documents

Inclusive Economic Strategy
Local Transport Plan
Housing Strategy
Towns and Village Plan
County Durham Plan

Our environment



We want to protect our natural environment for future generations, create a built environment that supports good health, make the county carbon neutral by 2045 and stop the decline of our local wildlife and habitats

We live in a beautiful county. It has large areas of attractive countryside, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a UNESCO designated Geopark), a heritage coast and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Although our landscapes are of great ecological significance, they are under threat from climate change impacts, such as sea-level rises, coastal erosion, and flooding.

The climate crisis is a global issue, but we can act locally. The council has declared both a climate emergency and an ecological emergency - pledging to become carbon neutral by 2045 and do more to stop the decline of wildlife and habitats.

We are reducing the carbon emissions from our operations and have changed land practices such as peat restoration and tree planting.

We are also working across our services to deliver actions that will both safeguard and improve the health and vitality of biodiversity on council owned green space and land, and are implementing a countywide Local Nature Recovery Strategy to improve habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.



Our priorities

- Move toward a carbon neutral County Durham
- Continue to work with and encourage all residents and businesses to reuse, recycle, and adopt sustainable practices
- Reduce spikes in pollution experienced by certain areas at certain times
- Develop infrastructure to make cycling and walking viable modes of transportation and encourage residents to embrace it
- Improve the air quality in Durham City Centre
- Decarbonisation of council buildings



Our measures of success

- Reduce the council's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030
- Help make County Durham net zero by 2045
- More waste diverted from landfill
- More household waste that is re-used, recycled or composted
- Reduce the percentage of non-recyclable materials in household recycling collections
- Increase levels of cycling and walking
- Increase satisfaction with cycle routes and facilities
- Improve air quality (reduce air pollutants)
- More trees planted



Relevant documents

Air Quality Action Plan

Climate Change Strategy

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Climate Emergency Response Plan

Local Nature and Landscape Partnership programmes

Our people



We want our residents to be healthy and to live independently for as long as possible. We want to reduce health inequality, improve mental health and create a sustainable high-quality care market

Good health is important. But in some parts of County Durham, people spend less time in good health and die younger than in other parts of the country. Also, more people have long-term health issues. Much of this ill-health is due to the county's industrial past.

Ill-health increases demand for our services. We are joining-up our health and social care services and helping our older and disabled residents live independently in their own homes for longer. We are also encouraging healthy choices and want to create a county which is smoke-free, has low levels of addiction, and high levels of good mental health.

The welfare of children is a top priority for us and we work to ensure their safety and protection. Our commitment extends beyond providing support to children in crisis; we strive to create a nurturing environment where children can grow, develop, and thrive. Through the promotion of family-based care settings and delivering tailored support services, we aim to provide every child with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We will make it clear what help and support is available to our residents and how to get it.

Our priorities

- Ensure a joined-up service for health and social care
- Help more people adopting positive behaviours
- Increase health and well-being, with reduced health inequality
- Support vulnerable individuals and victims of crime and disorder
- Increase benefit take-up to support people whose circumstances make them vulnerable



Our measures of success

- Increase in healthy life expectancy
- More children who are a healthy weight
- Fewer residents who smoke
- More people are able to live independently in their own home for longer
- More people with aids and assistive technologies in their homes (aged 65+)
- More older people still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement / rehabilitation services
- Fewer adults admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care
- More children in care living in a family setting
- Fewer children's social care re-referrals
- Making every adult (and child) matter
- Increase benefit take-up



Relevant documents

Healthy Weight Plan

Joint Health and Well-being Plan

Mental Health Strategy

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy

County Durham Place Based Commissioning and Delivery Plan

Children and Young People Strategy

Our communities



We want to develop our towns and villages to be places people want to be. With housing that meets need, high streets that are vibrant, safe, and attractive social hubs, and with direct links between population centres and employment and leisure

Our communities, with their distinct identity and heritage, are where people live, work, and raise families. And we want to make them better. The county is growing, and it is important that that growth is sustainable and of benefit to both urban and rural areas of the county.

We are continuing to invest in our town and village centres and place-based regeneration while respecting the landscape and natural assets, ensuring they remain quality environments for people to live and visit. As more people move into the county, we need more homes. We also want private rental houses to be of a higher standard and more homes suitable for people who are older or disabled.

We are working to transform derelict and abandoned spaces into assets that enhance the overall attractiveness and liveability of our communities, bringing more vacant properties back into use and are regulating private landlords to improve housing conditions.

We will encourage people back into our town centres through events, leisure, and culture.

Through our Leisure Transformation Programme, we are delivering a mix of new building projects and refurbishments to existing buildings to improve our leisure facilities.

Our plans will also introduce new activities which reflect changing trends and support the economic recovery of the county.

We will also ensure all our communities have access to fast and reliable broadband. By improving digital connectivity, we will open up access to more and better paid jobs across the county, particularly in areas difficult to reach by public transport.

To achieve our ambitions, we will maintain our strong relationships with our communities and residents, with transparent and responsive approaches to the issues that matter the most of them.

Our priorities

- Better transport links in rural areas
- More digital connectivity
- Community engagement and co production
- Establishing Local Network panels to further engage and empower local communities
- Making safer places
- Improving library services and transforming leisure facilities
- Building more council homes
- Delivering the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone, Future High Street Fund and Stronger Towns Fund
- Supply Seaham Garden Village development with geothermal heat from mine water treatment scheme

Our measures of success

- More properties improved or brought back into use
- Reduced levels of anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder
- More effective community projects and other funded initiatives
- Successful implementation of government Partnership for People and Place pilot
- More people who think the police and local authorities are dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the local area
- Greater access to employment sites and key service locations by public transport
- Reduced vacancy rates in town centres
- More new housing and affordable homes
- High levels of cleanliness in relation to litter and dog fouling
- More properties with access to gigabit-capable broadband
- A well maintained road network with a greater proportion of structurally sound 'footways'
- Less fly-tipping



Relevant documents

Digital Strategy
Housing Strategy
Local Transport Plan
North East Bus Service Improvement Plan
Towns and Villages Strategy

Our council



We want a council which is efficient and effective, financially sound and forward looking. A council which is delivering high value local services which meet the wants and needs of our residents in a sustainable manner by a motivated workforce trained for the future

Our council is resident focused. We actively listen to their views and place their interests at the heart of everything we do. Our place based working models help us build joined up service provision, where the basics are done well and efficiently.

Our staff are our most important asset and we want to be an employer of choice attracting highly skilled motivated people who want to work with us. After the NHS, we are the largest employer in the county and one of the largest providers of training and apprentice opportunities in the county. We plan to attract and keep our staff through a range of staff benefits, modern-day working practices, training opportunities and career pathways which give everybody the chance to progress.

With increasing trends for remote working and automation, and more residents expecting digital services available 24/7, we have needed to rethink the way in which many of our services are delivered, the culture of our organisation and the skills we need for the future.

Improving the digital accessibility of our services is crucial in building a highly regarded council. Through continuous improvement and responsive service delivery we aim to exceed customer expectations and guarantee a service that is of the highest quality.

Fiscal responsibility and caution are our top priorities. Our dedicated focus on effective resource allocation, financial sustainability, and delivering value to our community sets us apart.

We closely monitor performance and value for money, and achieve the targets outlined in our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), demonstrating our commitment to responsible financial management.

Through efficient revenue management, we can maximize financial resources, maintain fiscal stability, and deliver the services and infrastructure our community relies on.



Our approach to sustainability and business improvement

- Partnership working
- Locality based models and prevention
- Organisation capabilities and culture
- Customer access and property assets
- Technology, data and research

Our measures of success

- Achieve our savings target
- County Durham Partnership deliverables
- Achieve an unqualified audit opinion
- Fewer data breaches
- High collection rates (council tax and business rates)
- More benefits processed within target time
- Lower sickness absence rate
- Lower employee turnover
- Greater proportion of digital contact
- Greater satisfaction with service delivery



Relevant documents

Workforce Development Strategy
Apprenticeship Strategy
Digital Strategy

Council finances

Finances

The council has been required to achieve significant savings over the last 16 years due to government funding reductions and budget pressures. The need for savings will continue in future years as inflationary and demand pressures outstrip our ability to raise council tax and due to expected restrictions in government funding uplifts.

For a number of years local government has received one year financial settlements which complicates effective long term financial planning and there remains uncertainty around a likely implementation date of the Fair Funding Review.

Council tax

Council Tax is based upon historic property values. All properties are placed in one of eight valuation bands, determined by market value as at 1 April 1991. The proportion of properties in each band varies significantly across the country, impacting upon the tax raising capacity of individual local authorities. Across England, 65% of properties fall within bands A to C, but across County Durham it is around 83%.

This means County Durham has a much lower tax base than the national average and is therefore unable to generate as much council tax as those local authorities. This means a 1% increase in council tax would raise an additional £2.65 million across County Durham but a 1% increase in more affluent areas with high tax bases would raise in excess of £10 million.

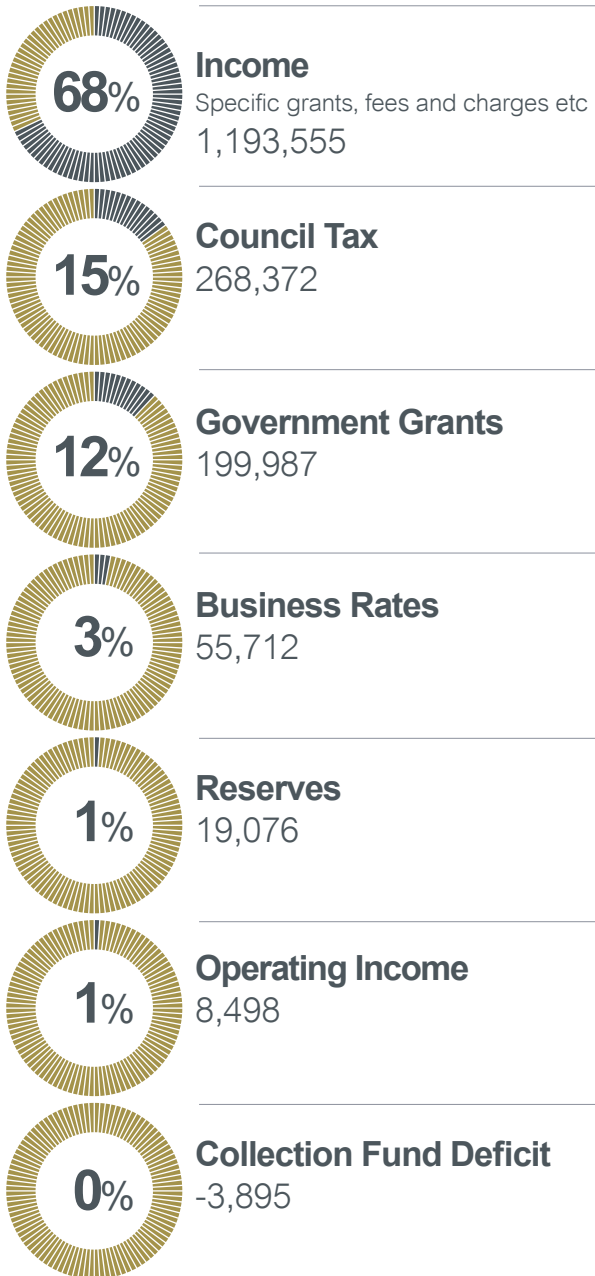
Government funding

The council is facing increasing demand and significant cost pressures and will continue to face difficult decisions on spending and service provision.

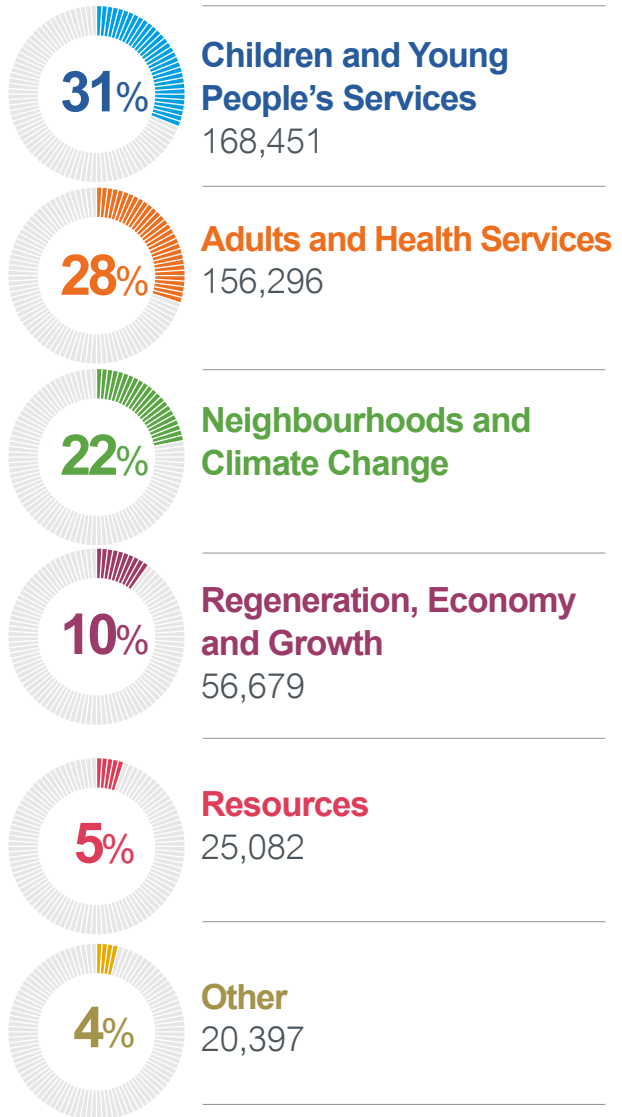
The current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) includes agreed savings of £5.9 million. However, we anticipate that further savings of £50.2 million will be required by 2027/28 to balance the books.

Finances

Revenue spending 2023/24 by service area



Net cost of services 2023/24

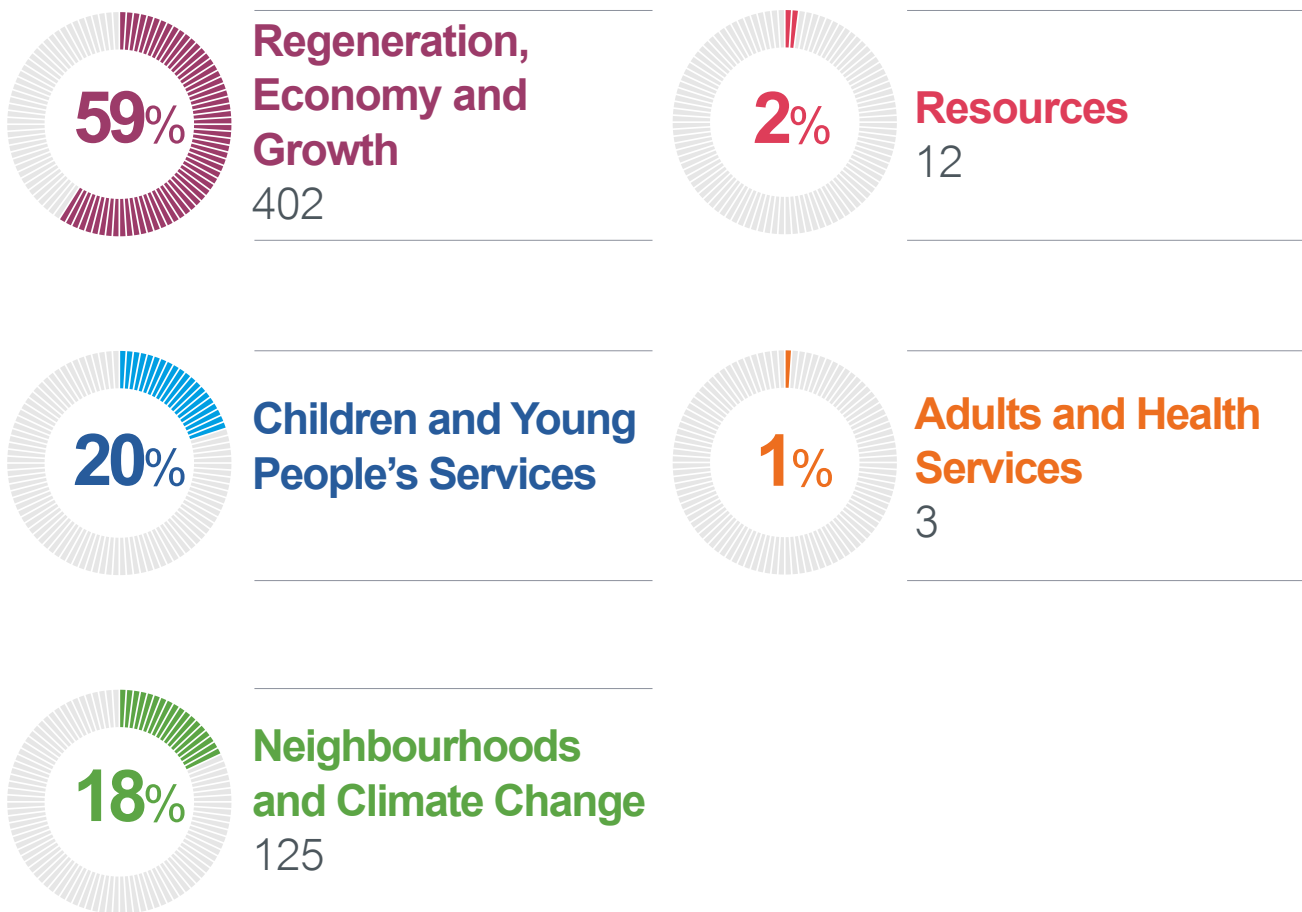


The council spends the majority of the budget in caring for vulnerable adults and children. Revenue expenditure covers all the day to day expenses incurred by the council to provide services.

Capital spending

The council has a significant capital budget of £681 million for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27.

This budget is utilised in invest in long term assets which includes highways, schools, leisure centres, libraries etc. The investment normally covers purchase, improvement and repair in areas such as property, buildings or equipment.



Equality and inclusion are at the heart of our vision and core values and we are committed to promoting equality and diversity, as an employer, in the services we deliver, in partnership and in the decisions we make



Equality and inclusion



We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people

As a Disability Confident Leader, we will improve recruitment and retention rates of disabled people within the council. We will also work with local businesses to improve disability employment rates countywide and through our approach to procurement.



We will build inclusive communities

We will work with our communities to support their development and give them more control over the factors and decisions which affect their lives. As our communities have differing needs, strengths and potential, and we recognise one size does not fit all, we will target support towards those most in need and help to build capacity and resilience.

By working more effectively with other organisations and interested parties such as parents / carers and service users, to collectively shape services and initiatives that matter, means we are doing things with communities rather than to them.

This is known as our Approach to Wellbeing.



We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture

We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supporting working environment for our employees and tackling inequalities, prejudice and discrimination. We aim to be an inclusive organisation, with improved staff engagement and effective staff networks.