



ST HELENS  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



#STHELENSTOGETHER

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

OUR BOROUGH STRATEGY 2021-2030

## MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER

### I AM PROUD TO PRESENT THIS UPDATE ON THE STRONG PROGRESS MADE AGAINST OUR BOROUGH STRATEGY 2021-30.

Our Borough Strategy 2021-30 was developed over the course of 2020 through our St Helens Together approach and published in February 2021.

The strategy is our blueprint for working together for a better borough. It shows our 6 strategic priorities and sets out how we can achieve better results for our communities by working together and supporting each other.

The strategy was developed during perhaps the most challenging times in recent history due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic has been far reaching and is likely yet to be fully realised as we now enter further uncertain and testing times with a Cost-of-Living Crisis that is bringing huge additional challenges to households, communities, businesses, and public services alike.

Over this period the strength and resilience shown by our communities has been remarkable and now more than ever we must continue to work effectively together with our partners and our residents if we are to realise the future potential of our proud borough.

Great challenges remain yet there are also substantial opportunities and the plans we are enacting are laying the foundations for the positive changes and achievements set out in this report. We recognise that there is more to be done and that change does not happen overnight. The report therefore also sets out what more we will do to build on the progress of the last 18 months and deliver a brighter future for everyone.

I would like to thank all our fantastic council staff, our partners, and the many people across our communities for your dedication and hard work since the launch of Our Borough Strategy. Without such great ambassadors for the borough, it would not have been possible to achieve the many successes outlined in this report and I look forward to our ongoing collaboration in the future.



David

**Councillor David Baines**  
St Helens Borough Council Leader





PRIORITY ONE

ENSURE CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A  
POSITIVE START IN LIFE



## ACHIEVEMENTS

Giving our children and young people a positive start in life is our number one priority. We have invested heavily in Children and Young People's Services to make sure our children are safe from harm and neglect and that the lives of children who are in care improve. Although there are still challenges within Children's Social care following the findings of the 2019 inspection, which said we had to do better in this area, our latest feedback from Ofsted is a positive step forward on our journey of improvement. Inspectors commented on a renewed energy and positivity within the service and said that social workers know our children well. However, there is still further work to be done and the pace of improvement needs to quicken.



Our Children's Social Services are currently supporting over

**1700 children and young people**

This is a very high number for a borough the size of St Helens. The majority of these children and young people need our support due to abuse and neglect stemming from family issues. We are working hard with our partners to safely reduce the very high demand placed on children's social care services. Our new Early Help service is now providing support to children and families experiencing difficulties to prevent more serious problems occurring in the future.



Our Early Help Service is working with over

**725 children**

and young people.

We also have very high numbers of children and young people in care. As well as the impact on the lives of these children and young people themselves, this also brings a significant financial cost to the council. In the last year we were responsible for supporting over 460 children and young people who were looked after at an annual cost of over £25M. The average annual cost of a residential placement for a child in care was £230,000. At the end of December 2021, we produced a new strategy to manage this high demand, safely reduce numbers of children in care and the cost this brings to us all. As a result, we have growing numbers of foster carers and our numbers of children in care are now stabilising and slowly beginning to reduce.

**AS A COUNCIL WE ARE 'CORPORATE PARENTS', THIS MEANS WE HAVE A DUTY TO DO OUR VERY BEST FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE IN CARE OR WHO HAVE LEFT CARE.**

We believe our Rewrite the Stars programme has made a real difference to the lives of these children and young people. The programme was designed by young people themselves and has helped raise their aspiration and ambition,

increase their confidence and self-esteem, improve their mental health and increasing their physical activity. Working with businesses and the community we have held an annual Christmas celebration event, supported career events, provided access to IT devices, and extended the Council Tax reduction scheme for all young care leavers in St Helens.



**170 care leavers**

are being supported by our 'Futures' care leavers service.

Compared to similar authorities we are doing well and although we want to do even more, our approach is working; we keep in touch with our care leavers, nearly all are in suitable accommodation and there are comparatively high numbers in employment, training, or education.

All throughout the period of the pandemic and beyond we have supported schools, nurseries, and colleges to achieve our goal of raising our children and young people's aspirations, attainment, and opportunities. We have promoted pupils' return to school and attendance through the 'All In' campaign, supported testing in schools, developed 'catch-up' programmes and enhanced educational support for vulnerable pupils, and promoted the wellbeing of our children and young people in schools. We worked closely with local businesses and others to offer laptops to pupils and schools to help with home learning during lockdowns.

**OUT OF OUR 70 STATE FUNDED SCHOOLS, 62, OR 89%, ARE NOW RATED AS 'GOOD' OR 'OUTSTANDING' BY OFSTED, WHICH IS JUST ABOVE THE ENGLAND AVERAGE.**

We also have a higher percentage of parents or carers being offered their first choice of school for their child than regionally or nationally.

We have increased the quality of support we give to pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs by investing in the multi-million pound rebuilds of Ashurst Primary School and Penkford and providing new provision at De La Salle for pupils with autism. We have also made it easier for families that have children with special educational needs and disabilities to get the information and advice they need through a dedicated Helpline and easy to read documents. Abbeyford, our children's home that offers respite breaks for children and young people with complex health, learning and social communication needs was recently awarded its fourth consecutive 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating.

We have successfully provided intense support to ensure the success of young people's learning after the age of 16. Ambitious targets for 16-17-year-olds to have a September Guarantee of a suitable place in learning were met, and the number of 16-17-year NEET (not in education, employment, or training), is now lower than national and North West averages. Additional investment into NEET prevention has led to more

intensive support being targeted at our most vulnerable young people through the Positive Inclusion Programme.

We have continued to support the health and wellbeing of our children and young people. We worked with St Helens Youth Council to create #GrowYourHappy, an online Mental Health toolkit aimed at educating young people about the importance of self-care. With the help of a wide range of partners we organised a packed programme of events and support for children and families in receipt of free school meals and those receiving support from children's social care as part of the Holiday Activities and Food scheme. Since March 2020, the programme has delivered over 940 sessions offered over 21,300 opportunities for children and young people to access activities including breakdancing, graffiti art, drama, sports, cookery, water sports, leadership courses and fishing to name but a few, and provided over 16,500 nutritious meals produced by our School Catering service.

#### WHAT MORE WE WILL DO

MAKING SURE WE DELIVER OUR IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REMAINS OUR MAIN PRIORITY.

To do so we will continue to invest in our social care workforce and develop and deliver an effective social work recruitment & retention strategy. We will continue to find ways of reducing the very high demand placed on children's social care services and ensure our Early Help services

are providing children and families with effective help and support at the earliest opportunity to prevent the escalation of concerns. We will increase the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.

We will put our children and young people's education first, by investing in schools so that children and communities have the high-quality facilities they deserve, whilst working with schools to drive up school standards. Our work with Secondary Schools and colleges will make sure our children and young people have access to all the work and training opportunities that will be created by new developments and growth in the years ahead.

WE WILL COMMIT TO MAKING ST HELENS A UNICEF CHILD FRIENDLY BOROUGH AND CREATE A NEW YOUTH ZONE IN ST HELENS, WHILST PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN OUR REGENERATION PLANS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO OUR UTMOST TO WORK WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND PARTNERS TO MAKE SURE THAT NO CHILD GOES HUNGRY DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS.



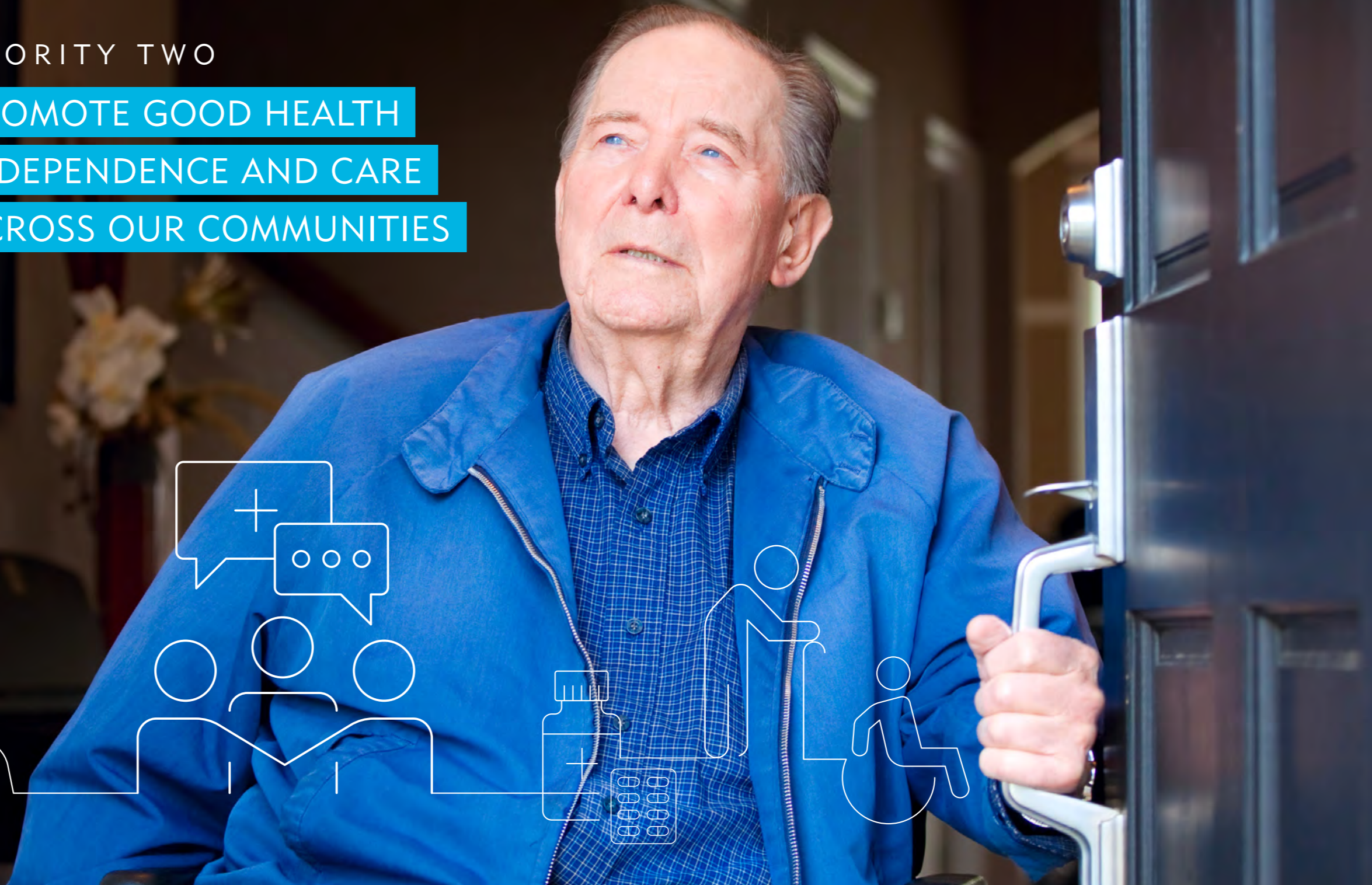


PRIORITY TWO

PROMOTE GOOD HEALTH

INDEPENDENCE AND CARE

ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES



## ACHIEVEMENTS

The challenges presented to our communities and the council itself over the last two and a half years by the COVID-19 pandemic have been enormous and our heart-felt thoughts remain with those whose lives have been affected. During this most difficult of times however the strength and resilience of our community has shone through. St Helens truly came together, and together we have been able to continue to effectively promote good health, independence, and care across our communities even under the most difficult of circumstances.

We have worked tirelessly with our local health partners and the community to respond to the pandemic, supporting our care homes, setting up community testing and providing Merseyside's first mass vaccination site at Saints. The launch of #StHelensTogether was a huge success in supporting those isolated or vulnerable due to COVID and to encouraged and coordinated volunteers to provide help during lockdown. We received 3 national awards for our work. During this period, we have provided significant extra funding to our voluntary and community organisations in helping support the most vulnerable members of our community.

With our partners across the NHS, we created St Helens Cares, an award-winning unique and integrated approach to health and social care across the borough.



Thanks to our integrated health and care system we have been able to

**introduce a shared care record** for each resident registered with a GP in St Helens, meaning that important information about all your health and care can be seen by professionals in one place and they can make better clinical decisions.

Our social prescribing scheme is supporting people to take greater control of their own health and wellbeing and reducing isolation and loneliness by referring individuals to a wide range of volunteering, arts, learning and physical activities and opportunities.

There are still many challenges to improving people's physical and mental wellbeing in St Helens. Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is comparatively low compared to many areas of the country and there are some wide health inequalities between different areas of our borough, many of which will have been made worse by the pandemic. Ill health also prevents many people from working and impacts negatively on the local economy and quality of life.

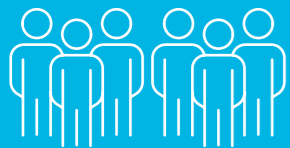




In response we have produced our new St Helens People's Plan which sets out the action we will take to **improve our 3 priority areas** of promoting people's mental wellbeing, tackling obesity, and helping our communities to be resilient.

Within the plan is an absolute commitment to tackling inequalities across our borough. We are seeing some successes such as the work coming from the launch of the OK2ASK Suicide Awareness campaign, which is offering training and support to prevent suicide. We also recently launched our new Active Lives Strategy to improve physical and mental wellbeing across our communities and our plans continue to develop to support improvement across our priority areas.

Despite the challenges of growing demand and the need for urgent Government reform of social care funding, the performance of our Adult Social Care services has remained amongst the best in the country, allowing us to continue to make sure people live well independently and have a positive experience of the health and care services we provide.



We support over **3,400** adults with long-term care.



We support over **2,900 people** to live independently in their own home.



We are also providing services to over **2,200 carers** to help them support the ones they love.

Our services for people with learning disabilities are strong with over 600 people supported to live in their own home or with their family and high numbers of people in supported paid employment compared to other councils. The effectiveness of our reablement and short-term care support is ensuring that over 85% of people who receive this service are not going on to require long-term care support.

### WHAT MORE WE WILL DO

We will continue to develop our approach to the integration of our health and care services to make sure our older people and vulnerable residents get the best care and support possible.

In doing so we will seek to develop the delivery of our services at a community level, whilst working with people within our localities to have their say on the design of these services.

Working with a wide range of partners from both the public and private sectors we will encourage and support people to improve their health and wellbeing in line with the priorities we have identified and tackle the health inequalities that exist in our borough through our new Inequalities

Commission. A key aspect of this will be the continuation of our work with partners to promote mental health awareness and improved mental health across the entire borough, including working towards our target of zero suicides.

To manage the ongoing challenges of high demand for Adult Social Care services and the cost, we will continue to ensure the development of more extra care housing across the borough so that people are supported to live independently and continue working with our health partners to promote self-care through the greater use of digital and assistive technology. We will also make sure that the services we commission are cost effective, offer value for money, and are of the highest quality affordable, whilst continuing to effectively meet the needs of all people who require them.







PRIORITY THREE

CREATE SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

FOR ALL



MOSS NOOK



## ACHIEVEMENTS

One of St Helens great strengths is our caring, close-knit community. In our recent resident survey nearly 80% of respondents agreed that their neighbourhood is a place where people get on well together to make the area a good place to live, less than 8% disagreed.

Over the last 12 months we have continued to build on the success of the St Helens Together campaign and increased our engagement and collaborative working with communities and partners to make sure our neighbourhoods and local areas are safe, strong, and caring places.

Our new Community Engagement Strategy sets out how we will work more closely with our residents, recognise the valuable skills and assets that exist within local areas, and support and enable communities to identify and deliver solutions to challenges across our neighbourhoods.

We all know from our experience of the incredible local response to the pandemic, the huge difference that all our voluntary and community groups are making to the quality of people's lives across the borough. Our new St Helens Together Strategy for the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector will ensure that all these groups are better supported to continue to make a difference and contribute to our new Locality Working Programme and approach to tackling the inequalities that exist in our borough.

Over the last 12 months we have developed the St Helens Together Directory, a community asset database, and work began on implementing a permanent Crowdfunding platform.

We have also continued to work with partners to promote our award-winning St Helens Volunteering Portal. During the year, an additional 800 active community volunteers registered on the portal.



St Helens has over  
**1,860**  
registered community  
volunteers

Our latest Community Safety survey told us that the overwhelming majority of people feel safe in their local areas during the daytime, however we know that people's feeling of safety decreases in the evening and are aware of the harm and distress that anti-social behaviour can cause in our communities. We have continued to work hard with our Community Safety Partnership through schemes such as 'Participate', campaigns such as #Ready2Respect campaign, and funding for local groups to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour. Our work has resulted in a notable reduction in reported incidents of anti-social behaviour over the last 12-months.

The high number of reported domestic abuse incidents within the Borough and the devastating impact this has on victims and families, particularly our children and young people remains a challenge.



There were over  
**4,800** incidents  
of domestic abuse in 2022.

OUR WORK AS A PARTNERSHIP IS ENCOURAGING PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE IN THE REPORTING OF THIS HARMFUL AND UNACCEPTABLE CRIME AND ALLOWING US TO PROVIDE GREATER HELP AND SUPPORT TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED.

Our new Domestic Abuse Partnership is leading the way to support victims of domestic abuse through the 'Safe2Speak' service and raising awareness within our communities through a number of high-profile campaigns. We have provided additional resources to resettle victims and families, have increased the counselling support available, and the monthly St Helens Survivor Forum is making sure that the voices of victims / survivors directly influence and shape future services.

Promoting equality and celebrating diversity within St Helens' communities is a hugely important part of our work as a Council and over the last year we have continued to deliver a number of high-profile events and campaigns. Our new St Helens Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was completed in early 2022.



In July, we again came together for the amazing St Helens Pride event to celebrate and embrace our LGBT+ community. There is 'No Place for Hate' within St Helens and this important campaign continues to increase people's confidence in reporting all types of hate crime. We also marked Refugee Week with events across the borough organised in partnership with local charity 'Our Warm Welcome', who have also supported our efforts to house Afghan refugees and most recently those fleeing Ukraine

To make sure our neighbourhoods provide the right homes for all, in June we launched our new Housing Strategy which sets out how we will meet the borough's future housing needs and commit to the building quality and accessible homes for everyone.



In the last 4 years we have worked with developers to deliver over

**2,500** new homes.

The majority of these new dwellings (x%) have been built on brownfield land within and on average within the last 2 years 40% of these homes have been affordable.

Despite continued high demand for support from residents, our Housing Services team continue to perform well. Our 'All In' scheme for St Helens, ensured every rough sleeper had accommodation and support provided during lockdown and we have reduced the number of rough sleepers from nine in 2019-2020 to two in the last year.



We assisted nearly **1,000** households in the last year with significant funding support to help tackle fuel poverty and improve household energy efficiency.

### WHAT MORE WE WILL DO

We will continue to better understand the needs of our communities and support our residents to make a difference to their neighbourhoods. Through our new Localities Model, we will make services more local and community-focused, targeting support where it is needed most.

We will continue to work closely with Merseyside Police and other partners to support efforts to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and continue discussions with Merseyside Police around the delivery of new police stations in St Helens and Earlestown. We will make sure our town centres and public spaces are welcoming and safe for families and visitors by designing out crime and anti-social behaviour in our regeneration plans, upgrading and investing in our CCTV systems and proactive enforcement action where necessary.

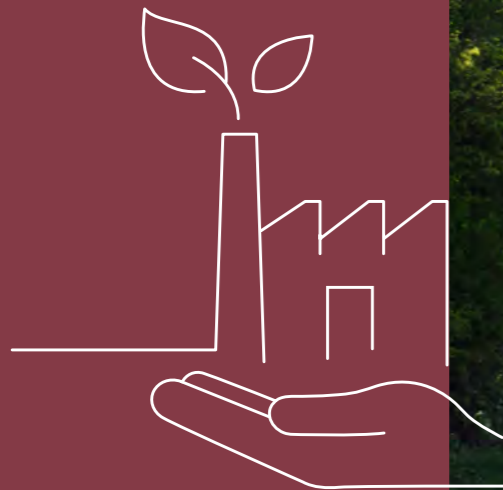
We will progress our new housing strategy for the borough to provide specialist housing for those who need it the most and good quality, affordable housing for all. In doing so we will continue to support the development of new homes on brownfield land sites and progress and work with developers to progress major housing sites including Cowley Hill and Moss Nook. We will increase our efforts to reduce fuel poverty and assist as many households as we can due to the energy crisis.





PRIORITY FOUR

SUPPORT A STRONG, THRIVING,  
INCLUSIVE AND WELL-CONNECTED  
LOCAL ECONOMY



## ACHIEVEMENTS

Although our borough, like many in the North, continues to face some long-standing economic challenges, which have been magnified by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, some strong opportunities exist, and we have put in place ambitious plans for growth. Whilst this regeneration will not be realised overnight, within a relatively short amount of time much has already been achieved to make sure our local economy recovers and grows and that people's skills and access to jobs improves.

Our vision for economic growth is one that will be to the benefit of everyone in St Helens, so that people and communities are no longer left behind. Increasing employment opportunities will raise aspirations and contribute to better community health and wellbeing. Growing investment within the borough is also essential to us as a council as it brings in the financial resources that are so desperately needed to compensate for years of government funding losses and allow us to be able to continue to effectively deliver the vital support services that thousands of our vulnerable residents rely on.

Our Local Plan 'Building a Better Future' was agreed in July to shape the development and growth of the Borough over the next 15 years. The plan is ambitious for new jobs, homes, and growth, whilst protecting the overwhelming majority of our local greenbelt and open spaces and will ensure that any new major developments take place unless new infrastructure roads, health services, schools and more is provided.

Over the last 12-months we have continued to work closely with developers to bring forward major employment sites. Our ambitious plans for Parkside and Omega West were approved by Government this year.

Parkside will bring almost 500 jobs during the construction of the first phase and the potential of more than 1,300 new jobs in the completed buildings, whilst the Home Bargains unit at Omega West will create a further 1,230 full time jobs with three further units bringing important additional employment opportunities to the borough.



### Construction of the **£54million**

Glass Futures project, our global centre of excellence for glass research and innovation has now begun.

Glass Future has already created 24 full time skilled jobs have already been created and it is expected a further 50 will be created between now and when the facility is fully operational in 2023. The project is expected to bring a major boost to attracting further inward investment to the region.





We have worked closely with our City Region partners to offer

**£48million** of support for businesses and workers impacted by the pandemic and lockdowns and offered a £500k grant scheme for town centre businesses to improve their premises.

Our vision for the transformation of our town and neighbourhood centres so that they are vibrant places that people visit, value, and enjoy took a major step forward through our partnership with English Cities Fund and the approval of multi-million-pound masterplans for St Helens and Earlestown town centres. The plans will see us bring the historic Gamble Building and Earlestown Town Hall back into use as community spaces as well as delivering new initiatives for town centre living, promoting our rich heritage, supporting healthy communities through a youth zone and health innovation hub, new walking and cycling routes and improving digital infrastructure to help businesses grow online.

The feedback on the plans received from businesses, residents, and visitors was highly positive.

Our work with local partners resulted in a



## £25m funding award

for St Helens town centre and 2 further bids to the Government's Levelling Up Fund were recently submitted to enhance both our Earlestown and St Helens town centre masterplans.

The regeneration of St Helens town centre is now underway. Chalon Way car park has been demolished to open up our historic canal area, and a £1m deal signed for a new temporary box park, a space for people to eat, drink and enjoy entertainment. Our work with partners to improve people's skill levels has shown strong improvement in the last 3 years.



The percentage of people with no qualifications is **6.4%** now equal to the national average and lower than that of the North West.

There is a greater percentage of people with higher-end skills at NVQ levels 3 and 4 now in St Helens than the North West average and we are now not far behind the England average.

**OUR WAYS TO WORK TEAM AND PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT PROJECT ARE MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE HAVING TO DATE ENGAGED WITH OVER 2,600 RESIDENTS, AND HELPED OVER 1,200 OF THESE INTO EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, OR TRAINING.**

The £2m we secured at the end of last year as part of the Government's Community Renewal Fund will allow us to continue to support even more people into employment and training.

### WHAT MORE WE WILL DO

We continue to work hard with our partners across the Liverpool City Region to make sure places are well-connected with accessible transport and digital networks. We have delivered a new train station at Newton-le-Willows, begun work on £15m investment to improve Lea Green station, including new and improved local cycling and walking routes and delivered major improvements to our road network including Windle Island, St Helens Linkway and Pewfall junctions. Work continues to deliver a £30m, 212km digital infrastructure project, which aims to make our City Region the UK's most digitally connected and inclusive.

We will continue to work with all our partners within the Liverpool City Region and across St Helens to progress and deliver our extensive plans for regeneration. This will include our plans for our town centres and our work with communities to bring the Gamble and Earlestown Town Hall back into use, as well as plans for our key employment sites including Parkside, Omega West, and Glass Futures. We will build on the

success of the Glass Futures project to attract other ground-breaking research and development facilities and seek further opportunities to bring more inward investment into our borough.

We will develop a new Inclusive Growth and Skills strategy which ensures that economic growth benefits the whole community; supports local residents into the jobs created; gives local firms more chances to win contracts; gives our young people work experience and supports their aspiration for the future. We will set up a business forum to give a greater voice to local businesses, ensure we hear their concerns and act on them, and keep them informed on our plans for regeneration. Before the end of 2023 we will support over 300 residents into a job, training or apprenticeships through our employment and training support and our Ways to Work Hubs in St Helens and Earlestown.

We will continue to invest heavily in our transport network and infrastructure. We will work with our partners within the Liverpool City Region to deliver a bus and rail network meeting the needs of our communities. We will further invest in our road network to improve conditions for all road users and promote sustainable transport by providing more than £1m in improvements to cycling and pedestrian routes across the borough.



PRIORITY FIVE

CREATE GREEN AND VIBRANT  
PLACES THAT REFLECT OUR  
HERITAGE AND CULTURE



## ACHIEVEMENTS

Climate Change is a huge global issue which will impact on everyone's lives, both now and well into the future. The scale of the challenge and the threat it poses are enormous. Our role as a council is to lead and coordinate St Helens' response by bringing our community voices together, so that we all play a part in tackling the climate emergency and protect our environment for the future. To do so we have set up a multi-agency Climate Change Commission, a Youth Climate Commission, and published our Climate Change Response Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help our borough achieve Net Zero carbon by 2040. Although we are still at the start of our journey and recognise that there is much to do with limited time to do it, a lot of innovation and creativity is already happening.



We have converted over **3,500** streetlights to low energy LED lanterns.

We have invested in new and more environmentally friendly vehicles including the first hydrogen-powered waste and recycling vehicles in the country. We introduced a recycling service for all plastics and remain the only council on Merseyside to offer weekly food waste recycling collections. We have brought in millions of pounds of external funding over the past 2 years to promote active travel transport links to encourage people to walk and cycle across the borough. Committing up to £1.2m of council funds to support local groups and business to

reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. We are making homes greener across the borough with the significant funding we have secured to tackle low energy efficient housing through a range of measures such as boiler replacement and external wall insulation. Our support for the ambitious Hynet project to allow the production and storage of hydrogen at an industrial scale, could reduce the regions carbon emissions by a quarter within 5 years. This is the equivalent of taking 4 million cars off the road.

ST HELENS IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE SOME OUTSTANDING GREEN SPACES AND PARKS. WE KNOW HOW MUCH THESE ARE VALUED AS SAFE PLACES TO RELAX, EXERCISE AND IMPROVE OUR WELLBEING AND WE HAVE CONTINUED TO WORK TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE ENJOYED AND LOOKED AFTER BY US ALL.





We have invested significant amounts in transforming and improving our open spaces such as Sankey Valley, Lyme and Wood Country Park, Bold Forest Park.



We have planted more than **50,000 trees** across the borough since 2010, creating around 30 hectares of new woodland.

We have begun to install accessible play equipment in our parks so that all children can enjoy outdoor fun with their friends and families. Victoria Park recently received an 8th consecutive Green Flag award as a mark of its quality, and we have continued to work with and support volunteers and community groups to maintain high standards across all our parks and open spaces. Our efforts to reduce fly-tipping through media campaigns and enforcement activity are having a positive impact.



We saw a **20% reduction** in fly-tipping over the course of 2021-22 compared to the previous year.

We continue to do much to ensure St Helens' spirit and identity are celebrated through our heritage, arts, and culture and the majority of our residents agree that St Helens offers strong opportunities for people to participate in these activities. We agreed a Heritage opportunities strategy to protect and promote our outstanding local heritage and this now lies at the heart of many of our plans for regeneration across the

borough. We also worked with the local arts sector to produce a new and comprehensive Arts Strategy and work together to build towards St Helens being City Region Borough of Culture in 2023. Our work with partner organisations and local businesses has allowed us to continue to organise events such as Summer Streets, the Westfield Street festival, Christmas light switch-on events across the borough and more.

During the pandemic, while our libraries were closed, we found new ways to provide services through home delivery and our extensive digital service 'BorrowBox' which provides access to thousands of books and magazines online at any time of the day or night, and then opened a brand-new library at the World of Glass while the restoration of the Gamble building is completed. In these challenging financial times with ever reducing central government grants it is essential that all council services are efficient and cost effective.

**OUR NEW LIBRARIES STRATEGY WILL ACHIEVE JUST THIS, WHILST MAKING SURE EVERY RESIDENT CONTINUES TO HAVE ACCESS TO AN OUTSTANDING LIBRARY SERVICE.**

The actions we take will deliver a modern state of the art library service that is relevant, accessible to all and continues to make a difference to people's lives, providing not only access to books and information but also supporting people's wellbeing and helping them realise their potential.

The overwhelming majority of our residents agree that St Helens strong opportunities for people to be physically active. Our leisure services have now recovered well from the pandemic in terms of attendances and membership, but even during the most challenging of times we continued to help people stay active during lockdown by moving leisure services online and providing virtual training sessions open to all residents. Our new Active Lives Strategy will go further to encourage even more people in the borough to be more physically active in the borough over the next five years, in particular providing opportunities for people in our more disadvantaged communities to participate in activities. There is much to look forward this year with the Rugby League World Cup coming to St Helens.

We successfully worked with the organisers and the local community to deliver nearly

**£1.5m funding**

to local clubs for new facilities and equipment to further encourage people to participate and be active.

#### **WHAT MORE WE WILL DO**

**WE WILL CONTINUE TO ACT AS A COMMUNITY LEADER TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND WORK WITH ALL OUR PARTNERS TO DELIVER OUR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN.**

We will develop clean, green transport and energy projects and bring forward a strategy to support the expansion of the use of electric vehicles within the community. We will produce a new Waste strategy and review the waste and recycling service to ensure it works for residents to increase our rates of recycling and reduce our amount of household waste.

**WE WILL PROTECT AND INVEST IN ALL OUR OUTSTANDING PARKS, BRINGING MORE UP TO GREEN FLAG STANDARD.**

We will also look at new ways to improve and enhance all our public open spaces working with residents and community groups through our localities model.

We will make sure every resident has access to an outstanding, modern library service.

We will continue to put our Arts and Heritage into action and work with partners and the community including our amazing local arts scene to produce a vibrant and successful programme of events for our Borough of Culture celebrations in 2023. We will fully support events to mark the 150th anniversary of St Helens RFC in 2023, making sure this plays a key part of our Borough of Culture activities.

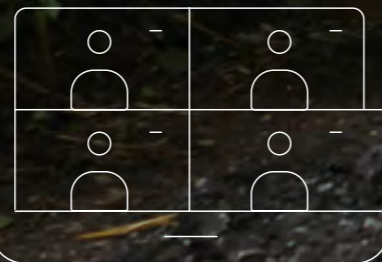
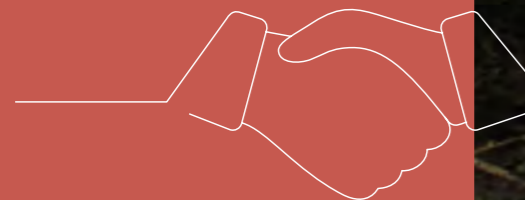
We will continue to invest in our leisure facilities across the borough including reopening the pool in Sutton and assessing the feasibility of new facilities in Parr and make sure our Active Lives Strategy reaches as many people as possible across all our communities.



PRIORITY FIVE

BE A

RESPONSIBLE COUNCIL



## ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past 3 years under the most challenging of circumstances we have come a long way as a council on our journey of improvement.

Last year the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge team said that the council had changed considerably for the better and was in a

**far stronger position**



than it was at the time of the last peer challenge visit in 2019.

They thought that the pace of change and improvement was impressive and a credit to the work of our elected Members, our staff and all our partners. They felt that our new Borough Strategy with its clear priorities and actions, linked to our new financial strategy and programme of modernisation provided a strong foundation for us to continue to deliver our ambition of creating a better borough for all.

The LGA also praised our response to the pandemic and our plans for recovery and we were pleased that our residents also felt the same.



**Over 80%** of people surveyed said they were satisfied with the council's response to COVID-19, and over 60% rated it as "good" or "excellent".

We are extremely proud of how we came together with our partners, local businesses, and the whole community to provide the vital support that we did to the most vulnerable during this difficult period

What was achieved in the first few months of the pandemic through #StHelensTogether was truly remarkable and a credit to the whole community.



A telephone helpline and community hub were set up to provide help and deliver over

**37,000 food parcels**

and essential items to the vulnerable, whilst over 1750 community volunteers offered their time to support over 32,000 people.

Our support to businesses saw us set up from scratch schemes that have distributed £48m in grant funding to businesses and workers across the borough who were severely impacted by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a renewed energy and purpose to the way in which we work with all our partners and how we engage with our communities. Our new Community Engagement Strategy sets out our commitment to make sure we communicate, listen, and engage effectively with residents, communities, and partners to recognise the particular strengths and skills that they bring. Residents' views have



recently helped to shape our Borough Strategy, our Local Plan, and our Libraries, Housing, and Financial Strategies. We are not complacent however and know that we can do more in this area. We recently commissioned a survey of over 2,000 local residents which gathered people's opinions on the council, its services and how we communicate. As a result, we will be to look again at how we can further improve the way in which we keep people informed of our duties, responsibilities, and the services we provide to increase trust in the council.

We have also made good progress in our commitment to improving people's access to services and delivering a quality customer experience for residents. Our new Localities Model will see us working even more closely with our partners to move services back into communities. Our new council website and innovative customer portal has been launched to improve residents access to information, make it easier for them to communicate and interact with us and our services, and ensure we respond effectively. We have also put in place new customer service standards. Again, we are realistic about the need to focus on continued improvement in this area and further work is underway to improve customer satisfaction.

The shape of the council and the way in which we now work together has changed greatly compared to how it was before the pandemic. We now have a new senior team of officers with the right experience and skills to improve the council and deliver for the borough and our investment to create a modern, innovative digital workplace is making us more efficient and improving service delivery.

The LGA noted that all of this work provides a strong base on which to build our ambitions for the future of St Helens.

However, our financial position is extremely challenging.



## A decade of austerity

has resulted in massively reduced budgets and the loss of millions of pounds of central government funding.

On top of this, our council like many others has suffered further large losses in income due to the pandemic, at a time when we have had to increase the amount we spend because of rising demand for the services we provide to support our most vulnerable. Despite the extraordinary circumstances facing local government, we have always set a balanced budget and delivered the savings that we have been required to make. Our budget gap for the next 2 years however stands at nearly £22m which has been exacerbated by inflation and the rising cost of providing services. In response we continued to promote investment within our borough and have also introduced a new Commercial Strategy to grow council business and help find ways of generating more income in new and responsible ways without hitting our local residents in the pocket.

## WHAT MORE WE WILL DO

We will continue to use our new Commercial Strategy and promote investment within the borough to generate funding in new and responsible ways to help fund our delivery of essential services. In doing so we will find the means to continue to look after the most vulnerable in our communities whilst bringing about the regeneration of our places.

We will continue to reshape and modernise our council using digital transformation to deliver a high-quality customer experience for our residents.

We will continue to improve the ways we communicate with our residents to keep them informed of our responsibilities and the benefits and services we provide.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO DEVELOP THE CAPACITY OF OUR COMMUNITIES TO BRING SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL AREA ISSUES AND CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR VOLUNTARY, FAITH, CHARITY AND THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.





**#STHELENSTOGETHER**



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL