

A photograph of a grassy field with several children playing. In the foreground, a child in a pink shirt and dark pants is running towards the left. In the center, a child in a red and white jacket is sitting on the grass, holding an orange ball. Another child in a dark blue jacket is running towards them. In the background, two more children are visible near some orange play equipment. The field is surrounded by a dense line of trees, and the sky is overcast.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

OUR BOROUGH STRATEGY 2021-2030



#STHELENSTOGETHER



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO OUR BOROUGH STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Our Borough Strategy 2021-30 shows how by working closely together to deliver our 6 priorities we will continue to create a better borough with people at the heart of everything we do.

In my first year as Leader, I am particularly proud to present this report in what is the 50th anniversary of St Helens becoming a Metropolitan Borough Council.

Looking back over the last 12 months, I have remained truly inspired by the strength of our borough and its people. The last few years have brought immense challenges to households, communities, businesses, and public services alike. However, in the 3 years since we published Our Borough Strategy what we have accomplished together has been nothing short of remarkable.

Our Children and Young People's services are now rated 'Good' with services for young people leaving care 'Outstanding'. We continue to lead the way on the integration of health and social care to improve community wellbeing and reduce inequality. Our ambitious plans to enable regeneration and growth within the borough are progressing at pace.

Our commitment to promoting the principles of sustainability, equality, inclusion and diversity is creating a positive future for all within St Helens, whilst our programme of council wide transformation is driving greater efficiency, value for money, and improvements to service delivery.

These remain testing times for local communities and some difficult challenges remain within local government. However, I am confident that together we will continue to make the most of the opportunities before us and successfully deliver our priorities.

I would like to thank all our council staff, members, partners, and the wider community for their dedication and hard work over the year, without which the many successes outlined in this report would not have been achieved.

I look forward to our ongoing future collaboration and I am excited about what more we can achieve together over the coming year to ensure our borough is a great place to live and one of which we can all be truly proud.



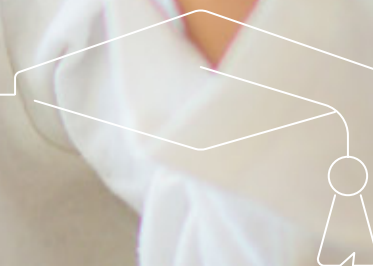
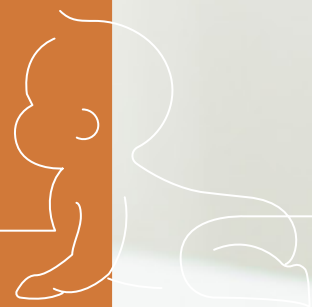
Councillor Anthony Burns
St Helens Borough Council Leader





PRIORITY ONE

ENSURE CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A
POSITIVE START IN LIFE



Giving our children and young people the best possible start in life, by ensuring that they are healthy, safe and secure, and supported to achieve their aspirations and potential has remained our number one priority. We are extremely proud of the commitment and investment we have maintained that is now delivering such strong outcomes and bringing positive change to the lives of children and young people and their families in our borough.

Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- Our improvement journey in Children's Social Care Services has been truly remarkable. In 2023 following a full Ofsted inspection our Children's Social Care Services provision was rated as 'Good' overall, with a judgement of 'Outstanding' for the support we give to young people leaving care. This fantastic turn-around from a judgement of 'Inadequate' in 2019 is thanks to the incredible dedication and hard work of both staff within Children's Services and everyone else across the council that provided support. The service continues to go from strength to strength and we have showcased our achievements nationally.



We are supporting
170 care leavers
(17-21) (March 2024)

- Over the last year we worked with many youth organisations and talked with thousands of young people across St Helens to understand what matters most to them at this moment in their lives. These thoughts have been brought

together in a draft youth declaration called 'It's Our Borough Too,' which sets out young people's concerns and hopes for the future. We will now consult further with young people, partners, businesses and residents, and publish the declaration to take a view on how we can all work together to play a role in better supporting and meeting young people's needs and build a borough fit for all those who are its future.



We support
70 schools
89% of which are rated 'Good' or 'Excellent'. (March 2024)

- We opened our first Family Hub in Sutton, followed shortly after by the opening of Central Link Family Hub and Newton-le-Willows Family Hub as part of a £3m Department for Education-funded programme to build on the range of other services for children and families already offered in the borough. The Hubs are open to families with children and young people from birth through to the age of 19, or up to the age of 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities. The focus is on supporting parents and carers to be the best they can possibly be and helping give children and young people the best start in life within a safe environment where they can thrive and reach their potential. The Hubs provide a wide range of services and free activities which are having a positive impact on the local community and feedback received from families and children has been fantastic. You can find further information [here](#).

- Our free **Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)** has continued to be a huge success since its launch in April 2021, reaching more and more children, young people and their families. HAF takes place during Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays and provides children and young people across the borough with a wide range of activities, opportunities and trips, along with a nutritious meal for everyone who attends. Since Easter 2021, 17,966 individual children and young people have attended 2,855 activities, with over 18,600 meals provided. You can watch the **video** to hear some of the great feedback we've received from those who have taken part.



We are supporting
1,652 children
in Need (March 2024)

- Our new plans to create 5 further residential children's homes in St Helens will make a huge difference to the lives of local children and young people in care, allowing them to remain within the borough and maintain their connections with friends and family. The new homes will support the huge demand on care placements and reduce the need for costly out of borough arrangements which can disrupt the lives of our children and young people. We are also successfully encouraging more people to come forward to work with us as foster carers and recently supported the set-up of the Foster4 Merseyside and Cheshire recruitment hub to increase numbers of foster carers across the region. In 2023-24 we successfully recruited 14 additional foster carers which is a fantastic achievement.



We are supporting
194 foster carers
across 124 households
(March 2024)

- We have continued to provide strong support to schools to improve the aspirations and attainment of our children and young people and a higher percentage of parents or carers are being offered their first choice of school for their child within the borough than regionally or nationally. We have continued to invest in rebuilding and improving schools and their facilities, with the completion and opening of two fantastic new schools at Ashurst Primary in Blackbrook and Willow Bank in Newton le Willows over the last year.



We are supporting
488 children and young people
in care (March 2024)

Our plans for the future include:

- Delivering further strong improvement across children and young people's services through the 'Children's Getting to Outstanding Board' and improving the quality and consistency of social work practice through our 'Brilliant at the Basics' programme.
- Improving and expanding our support for looked after children by increasing in house foster carer recruitment and delivering our plans for new local children's residential homes.
- Continuing to expand our Family Hubs and Early Help service development so all our children get the best possible start in life.
- Developing our new Youth Zone and Child Friendly St Helens programme to increase the aspirations and opportunities available for our children and young people.
- Improving the effectiveness of our schools and continuing to support all schools to be rated as at least 'Good', driving improvement in attendance, attainment and effectively meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families.





PRIORITY TWO

PROMOTE GOOD HEALTH
INDEPENDENCE AND CARE
ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES



Our award-winning, unique and integrated approach to working with our partners to provide effective health and social care across the borough has continued to develop effectively. Despite the challenges of increasing demand and cost of care services, and a population with comparatively poor health compared to many other areas, our innovative approach to modernisation and efficiency continues to deliver really strong outcomes, ensuring that people live well independently, that they have a positive experience of health and care services, and that their physical and mental wellbeing improves.

Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- Over the course of 2023-24 we developed a new vision and strategy for adult social care, **‘Enabling People to Live Healthier, Happier Lives’**, which was co-produced with input from more than 300 people across the borough, including service users, carers, staff and general members of the public. The strategy reflects what people told us is most important to them and clearly sets out, over the next 3-years, how our ambitious pledges and new ways of working will ensure we communicate, listen and interact effectively with people and their families to support and enable them to remain living as independently as possible within their own communities.



We supported

3,250 people

with community based long-term social care to live independently at home (2023-24)

- We have successfully continued to increase prevention and early support within our adult social care services, working closely with partners and voluntary and community groups to reduce the need for longer-term care.



Our Careline service supported

2,218 people

to remain safe within their home (2023-24)

Through Our Home First model we are jointly investing with partners in preventative services including occupational therapy, reablement and intermediate care, as well as specialist services for people with dementia and additional support for unpaid carers to enable people to live independently in the community or with minimal support. Improvements to our digital front door ‘Contact Cares’ and a new adult social care practice assessment model are also increasing our focus on prevention and supporting people at the earliest opportunity. We are also the North West pilot for SHREWD Resilience, which sees us providing daily data to the NHS on our social care capacity to enable timely hospital discharge. Through the success of all this work to date we have seen a 30% increase in the number of people being discharged home from hospital, now averaging around 55 people per week and have reduced hospital bed delays by a further 3 days.

- The improvements and innovations we are delivering across adults health and care services have seen our performance remain generally very strong.



Our support for people with learning disabilities is amongst the best in the country with high numbers of people in settled accommodation and paid employment. Overall levels of satisfaction for our services users and our carers are higher than both national and regional levels, as are numbers of service users and carers reporting that they find it easy to find information about care and support they need. We have low numbers of people accessing short-term care services that then go on to require long-term care, high numbers of people receiving domiciliary care and high numbers of carers we support with specific services.



We supported
890 people
in residential and nursing care
(2023-24)

- In collaboration with Citizens Advice St Helens, we developed and launched an online **‘Live Well Directory’**. The directory is a free and comprehensive resource that acts as a go-to platform for both local people and professionals across the city region to encourage the development of wellbeing within the community and promote preventative approaches. The site holds a host of information on wellbeing and health services, advice and guidance, events, activities and groups that people can access, whilst also giving the opportunity for providers and community organisations to promote their services to a wider audience to increase engagement and participation.



We supported
2,409 people
with home care (2023-24)

- Last year saw us proud to win the Municipal Journal award for our work in tackling inequalities and supporting the local community with the cost-of-living crisis. We established an inequalities commission in St Helens to better understand the barriers impacting residents reaching their potential, give local people a voice, and learn from expertise and best practices. This led to a number of projects including the set up a network of Welcome Spaces and community drop in events so that people feeling the pressure of increased energy costs and the rising cost of living could access a free warm space and receive advice and guidance. We worked together to increase the number of community food pantries and made sure they were available for everyone so there was no stigma in accessing them. We continued our Household support fund to assist residents in crisis with immediate help with food, fuel vouchers, white goods and furniture. We also re-energised the fuel poverty support, focusing on those vulnerable to respiratory illness and provided over 4,000 winter well packs. Our **Cost-of-living support pages** provide a summary of the financial assistance and other help & support available to residents.



87.5% of our care homes
are rated good or outstanding
the best in the region.

Our plans for the future include:

- Implementing our new vision and strategy for adult social care by continuing to listen to the voice of the service user and their lived experience to drive further improvement and effective service delivery.
- Further reducing the need for long-term care through our Home First model, including the way we use assistive technology, along with other preventative approaches to support individuals to remain living independently at home.
- Continuing our commitment to the safety of our service users by building on our strong safeguarding practice and ensuring high levels of satisfaction with safeguarding outcomes.
- Growing and developing our workforce to maintain effective social work practice and ensure high levels of satisfaction from people receiving care.
- Continuing to establish Care Communities at a locality level to facilitate improved multi-disciplinary working across health and social care.
- Delivering our Healthy Hub Town Deal Project and other key public health initiatives to improve people's physical and mental well-being.

WHAT MORE WE WILL DO





PRIORITY THREE

CREATE SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR ALL



Over the course of 2023-24 we have continued to work hand in hand with our local community and provide support for people across St Helens to come together to identify issues and deliver solutions to challenges to ensure our neighbourhoods and local areas are safe, strong, and caring places. Our approach to community support and development through initiatives such as our Family Hubs, our network of Welcome Spaces, our Holiday Activities and Food Programme are delivering really positive outcomes. Nearly 3 quarters of over 2,550 local people who were interviewed for our 2023 Residents Survey and expressed an opinion, agreed or strongly agreed that local people came together to improve quality of life in their local area. Nearly a quarter of people also said that they had volunteered within the last 12-months to promote community wellbeing.

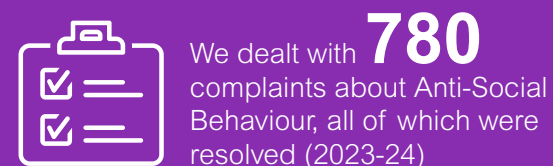
Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- Our Community Safety Partnership 'Safer St Helens' has continued to work effectively to promote community safety and reduce crime and disorder within our town centres and neighbourhoods. The year end saw some significant reductions in the number of reported crimes across the borough, including violent crime, hate crime, and domestic abuse compared to the number of incidents in the previous year. Our work continues to ensure that the vast majority of people feel safe within their communities. The results from our Residents Survey 2023 showed that 94% of the 2,500 people that expressed a definite opinion, reported feeling safe within their community during daytime.

The picture changed somewhat after dark with 62% of residents feeling safe and 38% feeling unsafe, and further work has been ongoing to promote feelings of safety after dark.



- The award of the Purple Flag status for St Helens town centre demonstrates the success of our partnership working to improve the nighttime offer within St Helens town centre and make sure it is a welcoming and safe place for all visitors. To further improve people's perceptions of safety within St Helens town centre, Safer St Helens successfully secured Home Office funding to deliver our Safer Streets 5 project. Safer Streets 5 was launched in December 2023 to deliver a programme of measures to prevent violence against women and girls, which included improvements to street lighting, training for employees working in town centre venues, a grant programme for installation of CCTV in taxis, and a 'safe home' initiative to ensure that vulnerable women can access a taxi home safely. We also worked with St Helens Youth Council on the 'Slow your drinking, start thinking' campaign to address excessive drinking, knife crime and street safety.



- Safer St Helens worked with Halton and St Helens VCA, to launch a Small Grants Programme in March to provide funding to local community groups and organisations to assist with addressing key issues relating to crime and disorder in the borough. The programme offered grants of up to £2,000 per community groups or organisation for projects that promoted crime prevention and tackled issues such as anti-social behaviour, violence, and domestic abuse.

- In March 2024 we also launched our 'CommUnity' Grants Scheme. The scheme provided grants of up to £10,000 to groups, charities and other organisations that can contribute to the integration of people and families who are refugees or asylum seekers, and others who have been displaced who are now rebuilding their lives in our borough. The scheme will support initiatives that help promote English language learning, improve health and wellbeing, and celebrate cultural diversity and cohesion in our communities, to build on the success of well-established successful projects such as 'Café Laziz' and 'Our Warm Welcome'. For further information please contact michaelmelia@sthelens.gov.uk.



- Delivery of our Housing Strategy has continued to ensure our neighbourhoods provide the right homes for all and we do all that we can to prevent homelessness. Over the course of



2023-24, 223 new homes were completed, with a further 176 completed between April and the end of June 2024. Approximately a quarter of new homes built were affordable.



We assisted **1,167** households to reduce fuel poverty (2023-24)

- Sadly, due to the national economic circumstances, we have seen a rise in the number of people rough sleeping in the borough. With hostels in the borough at capacity over the winter period, we worked with Teardrops to provide an emergency service offering a place of safety and warmth overnight within St Helens town centre. Our Outreach Service has continued to engage with people rough sleeping on a daily basis to offer support and emergency accommodation. We were proud that we were Highly Commended at the Municipal Journal awards for 'Best social housing initiative' for our work with Torus Housing and The Salvation Army, on the 'Everyone In' project, which focused on finding long term accommodation for homeless people and supporting them to tackle the underlying issues around rough sleeping.



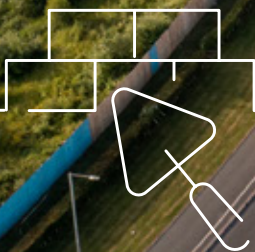
We assisted **816** households with benefits advice and secured over **£2.4m** worth of annual benefit gains for vulnerable residents (2023-24)

Our plans for the future include:

- Developing a new 3-year Community Safety Strategy and action plan that sets the vision and priorities for a safer St Helens for all our residents, communities and neighbourhoods.
- Continuing to effectively tackle anti-social behaviour and take action to support delivery of the Merseyside Serious Violence strategy.
- Upgrading our CCTV in town centres and wider neighbourhoods to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and improve people's feelings of safety.
- Delivering the first phase of our Localities Transformation Programme to develop 4 interlinked localities hubs that will deliver our services closer to communities.
- Establishing a Housing Partnership to promote further housing growth, improve housing quality and provide greater levels of affordable and social housing in the borough
- Continuing to prevent rough sleeping, homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation for families in the borough
- Continuing to promote community cohesion and provide our asylum seekers and refugees with training and education opportunities.

WHAT MORE WE WILL DO





PRIORITY FOUR

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



Working closely with partners across the Liverpool City Region and beyond we have continued to make the most of all opportunities to progress the delivery of our vision for the regeneration of St Helens and our ambitious plans for major investment, growth and job creation within the borough. Over the course of the year significant work behind the scenes on a range of key projects has been ongoing that will ensure that before long our plans are transformed into reality.

Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- In June 2023 following widespread consultation, we published **St Helens Inclusive Growth Strategy**. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that economic growth within the borough benefits the whole community, supporting local residents into the jobs created, giving local business more chances to grow and thrive, and providing our young people with work experience and support to realise their aspiration for the future. To drive our strategy in November 2023 we created St Helens Growth Board, which is bringing together local leaders from the public and private sector to identify, share and pursue opportunities for the prosperity of the borough.
- Working jointly with the English Cities Fund our multi-million-pound master plans to regenerate both St Helens and Earlestown town centres have moved on at pace. In Earlestown, a planning application for the Market Square was submitted to transform the area into a high-quality public space with family-friendly features, public art, planting and trees. An application was also submitted for the internal refurbishment of Earlestown's Grade II Listed Town Hall, which will feature community

meeting rooms, flexible workspaces, and a new courtyard garden and café. The main hall will be brought back to life as a performance and events space, helping to develop the evening economy in Earlestown.

- In St Helens town centre, a number of key regeneration milestones have been met. The franchise and management agreements with a global brand operator for the new town centre hotel were agreed. Negotiations have been completed with all occupiers of the Hardshaw Shopping Centre which has now closed, and demolition will commence shortly with new construction following. Joint working with the Liverpool City Region recently secured £33.7m of funding to create St Helens Multi-modal Interchange. The project will see the redevelopment of the existing bus station, due to be operational by September 2026, bringing a series of benefits which are key to wider regeneration ambitions in St Helens town centre.



£97.7m of funding secured for regeneration and transport projects across the borough through joint working with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2019 - 2024).

- A Town Board has also been created to progress the regeneration of Newton-le-Willows town centre to enable the draw down of £19.5m of approved government funding over the next 10 years. Consultation with local residents and businesses is underway to support the development of a long-term plan for the area.



- Strong progress continued on our Town Deal projects. Glass Futures, our global centre of excellence for research and innovation within the glass industry, opened its new £54m facility in June 2023. Government grant funding allowed us to acquire adjacent premises and to let them to Sina Medical Glass, which will deliver the UK's first facility of its kind to produce medical phials. Planning consent for the premises was agreed and work on the refurbishment of the new plant has begun.
- We successfully worked with Cannington Shaw who were awarded £249,000 of National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the development of a Heritage Skills Academy at their former site. A Planning Application was approved, and initial groundworks are underway. Our Heritage World project, the reinvention of the World of Glass visitor attraction, was successfully completed in August 2023, significantly increasing visitor numbers. Other Town Deal projects including the Youth Facility in the Gamble building, the Health Innovation Hub and Digital Infrastructure remain on track in line with delivery plans.
- We continued our strong support for the progression and development of key employment sites within the borough at Parkside and Omega, which will bring significant numbers of new jobs once completed. Parkside Link Road is now constructed and works to three road junctions in the area has been completed. Work is currently underway to connect the new road to the Motorway network and once complete the whole road will be opened to traffic. We were committed to ensure the right infrastructure was provided to facilitate the regionally significant Parkside Freeport site. Joint working with the Liverpool

City Region Combined Authority saw approval for the creation of St Helens Manufacturing and Innovation Campus. The £500m project will redevelop former industrial land to expand the area's manufacturing and innovation capabilities, with the potential to create more than 1,000 new jobs. the Site will be part of the Liverpool City Region Life Science Innovation Zone



Our Ways to Work service has supported over

1,100 people

into employment, education and training over the last 4 years.

- Our 'Ways to Work' service extended its employment services to economically inactive residents to support people who are furthest from the labour market. The team is now working closely with the local Jobcentre Plus to host surgeries and is providing outreach and engagement to community centres and libraries around the borough to support greater numbers of people into employment and training. Our Adult and Community Learning Service has continued to successfully promote skills development and was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in October 2023.



Our Adult and Community Learning service provides 27 classes per week to over

150 adult learners



We carried out **3,767** carriageway and pothole repairs, above the **2,299 potholes** reported by the public (2023-24)

- Major investments to ensure St Helens is well-connected with accessible transport and digital networks were delivered with more projects underway. A £15m upgrade of Lea Green railway station in St Helens is set to complete this year, thanks to funding from the Combined Authority. Extensive new and upgraded walking and cycling routes were also constructed including the first CYCLOPS junction (Cycle Optimised Protected Signals), designed to enable pedestrians, cyclists and motorists to safely use the junction at the same time. Significant funding was also acquired for the major housing project 'Cowley Hill Liveable Neighbourhood' to progress active travel links and improve connectivity within the area. We worked with partners from the City Region and private sector to complete the £30m full-fibre digital network that will provide some of the fastest internet speeds in the country to the benefit of businesses and communities alike.



96% of our inspections of roads and footpaths were completed in accordance with the Highway Code of Practice

Our plans for the future include:

- Delivering our Inclusive Growth Strategy by working with our partners to ensure that plans for investment and growth within the borough benefit the whole community.
- Supporting more people into jobs, training and apprenticeships through our Ways to Work scheme.
- Continuing to work with our partners from the City Region and private sector to implement and deliver our ambitious plans for the regeneration of our town centres and the delivery of our Town Deal projects., with works commencing on site in both town centres within the next 12-months.
- Continuing to deliver a sustainable and effective transport network and infrastructure that promotes economic growth and access to employment, including the development of a modern bus and rail network and new and improved local cycling and walking routes that meets the needs of our communities.



PRIORITY FIVE

CREATE GREEN AND VIBRANT
PLACES THAT REFLECT OUR
HERITAGE AND CULTURE



Strong support from colleagues within the Liverpool City Region and close working with our Climate Change Commission and Youth Council, saw us strengthen our commitment to reducing carbon emissions and striving to become a 'Net Zero' borough by 2040. While the impact of climate change is a very real concern, we have continued to look to the challenges it presents as opportunities to adopt new technologies, deliver our services differently and improve our communities by creating new jobs and skills that will support our wider priorities and plans for regeneration and growth. Maintaining this momentum is critical and although further work is required by us all, good progress is being made in laying the foundations to ensure our environment is protected for the future.

Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- In June 2023 we adopted our ambitious **Climate Change Action Plan** which set out an initial list of 134 activities that will help the borough to achieve its target of 'Net Zero' carbon by 2040. We made significant progress over the last 12-months resulting in our CO2 emissions falling by nearly 10% from 9,092 tonnes in 2022-23 to 8,196 tonnes in 2023-24. Investment in our growing fleet of electric and low emission vehicles, coupled with introducing low energy lighting and heating is saving money and cutting carbon emissions by hundreds of tonnes a year. We produced an Electric Vehicle charging and infrastructure strategy, the first in the Liverpool City Region, which played a key role in securing £10m of local electric vehicle infrastructure (LEVI funding from central government for the combined authority.

- We have invested heavily in improving cycling and walking routes and planted more trees. We are making homes greener across the borough with the significant funding we have secured to tackle low energy efficient housing. Carbon reduction strategies have been set out for our key regeneration projects including Parkside and our town centre masterplans. Work also continues through our Climate Change Commission to focus on decarbonising local industry and delivering ambitious green projects to the benefit of the wider community.
- We approved our £4.2m Resources and Waste Strategy with the aim of 'making waste a thing of the past' and introduced improvements to our curb-side waste and recycling service to ensure it offers value for money, encourages efficient waste reduction, greater recycling and supports our 'Net Zero' ambitions for the borough. Although we recognise that the new strategy is still in its relatively early stages and that more can be done to increase recycling rates, since the changes, participation in the recycling service has increased by 30% in some areas. Our service is successfully ensuring that we have one of the lowest levels of recycling contamination in the country. In 2022-23 around 21,380 tonnes of household waste was successfully recycled with just 35 tonnes rejected due to contamination. For more information on recycling within St Helens please visit: <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/recycling>.



We removed over **3,000** reported incidents of fly tipping (2023-24)



- We produced a draft 5-year plan to improve air quality within the borough and invited residents to share their views through a public consultation. The vast majority of our borough has generally good air quality and recent years have seen a steady reduction in levels of nitrogen oxide through our continual monitoring and the action we have already taken. The new plan sets out a range of additional projects and proposals that will further reduce pollutants and contribute to cleaner air in four key locations identified as Air Quality Management Areas for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing.
- We worked closely with our friends of parks and open spaces organisations and community groups over the year to maintain and care for our outstanding parks and green spaces to ensure that they are safe places for all visitors and residents to relax, exercise and improve their mental well-being. We were extremely proud that Victoria, Taylor and Mesnes parks, along with St Helens Cemetery, all achieved 'Green Flag' awards as a mark of their quality which is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our services and the many volunteers that care for these beautiful places.

We maintained over
 **1,100** green spaces covering
1,400 hectares

- We developed and approved our new 5-year Library Strategy. Although because of the need to make significant financial savings the new strategy meant we were sadly unable to maintain some libraries. A total of 7 libraries

remain open however, more than most of our neighbouring boroughs, and positive talks are ongoing with groups interested in bringing about a community managed approach to those facilities that had to be closed. Our new strategy is delivering a modern, efficient library service, that focuses on providing resources in areas of greatest need with outreach work such as pop-up libraries, home delivery, a click and collect service, and investment in digital services. All 7 remaining libraries have seen large increases in visitors and digital library loans grew by over 40% during the year.



We had over **47,500**
 attendances at our Library and
 Arts service events (2023-24)

- Over the course of the last 12 months, we successfully continued to bring our community together through arts, heritage and cultural projects to celebrate the spirit and identity of our great borough. Our hosting of the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture 2023, saw us working with a wide range of partners over the year to successfully deliver a packed programme of free family-friendly events that brought together over 200,000 people to celebrate the very best of the borough. New events included 'One Amazing Day' which brought a carnival-like atmosphere to St Helens Town Centre drawing in crowds of more than 5,000, while the breathtaking aerial show 'As The World Tipped' attracted more than 2,000 people. Events such as St Helens Pride and 'Communities Together' ensured celebrations of inclusion, diversity and culture across the

borough, whilst we also warmly welcomed 20 delegates from Stuttgart to mark the 75th anniversary of our twinning agreement. As part of the celebrations £80,000 in grant funded was provided to local arts, heritage and sports projects to organise their own events for residents to enjoy.

Our plans for the future include:

- Continuing to work with our partners and the community to deliver our Climate Change Action Plan to ensure sizable future reductions in carbon emissions and embedding actions to address climate change in all that we do.
- Developing and delivering an Open Spaces Strategy to further improve the quality of our parks and open spaces and increase our number of 'Green Flag' awards.



We planted
8,571 new trees
 (2023-24)

- Continuing to engage with our residents and effectively support them to reduce and recycle more of their waste.
- Developing a programme to transform our leisure services and continuing to deliver our Active Lives strategy to increase levels of physical activity and healthy eating.



We had over **1.4m** visits
 to our Leisure Centres (2023-24)



PRIORITY SIX

BE A

RESPONSIBLE COUNCIL



Over the course of the last 12-months we have continued to listen to and engage closely with our partners, residents and communities, whilst successfully embracing and progressing our programme of modernisation. During a time of real financial challenge, increasing costs and notable growth in the scale and complexity of demand for services, our strong leadership and sound financial management have allowed us to continue to invest in new technologies and improve the strengths and skills of our workforce. The success of our approach is enabling us to drive efficiency and productivity, help manage demand and introduce further innovative ways of working to improve our operations and service delivery. We remain proud of our journey of transformation and will seek to build on our successes and the many positive outcomes delivered to date for our residents and communities.

Highlights of our recent key achievements:

- Against the backdrop of a continually challenging funding position, we successfully delivered a balanced budget and continued to provide value for money. Our latest external **Annual Audit Report** again provided an unqualified opinion on our financial statements and confirmed that our financial sustainability, governance and value for money arrangements were strong with no significant weaknesses. We consulted widely with residents and businesses on our 2024-2027 budget and spending priorities, putting forward a series of savings options via a survey which prompted nearly 300 responses. Our Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027 and Revenue & Capital Budget 2024-25 was approved in March 2024 and provides the foundation to enable us to maintain

delivery of our statutory duties, continue to invest in the delivery of our strategic priorities and programme of transformation, whilst delivering a balanced budget.

 **£515.1m**
Revenue Budget 2024-25

- Whilst the future financial outlook remains very challenging, we took further steps to ensure our future financial sustainability. A rigorous internal savings development and monitoring process was strengthened by the introduction of a Budget and Performance Board to oversee the delivery of required savings alongside delivery of strategic performance outcomes. We introduced a new integrated financial management system to strengthen financial oversight across the organisation. We also joined 5 other councils in a shared service 'STAR' that will drive high quality procurement, ensure our contracts and commissioning provide strong value for money, whilst promoting further collaboration and best practice around transformation.

 **£124m** in organisational savings delivered since 2010

- We continued to collaborate effectively on our progressive programme of transformation. Our Transformation strategy is underway and consists of 12 ambitious programmes to improve our operational delivery, manage service demand and drive further efficiencies. We have invested in a Programme Management Office team to assist and support delivery



of the strategy and created a Change and Transformation Board led by our Chief Executive to ensure progress remains on track and the anticipated benefits of each programme are achieved.



Our workforce of
3,052 staff

has reduced by nearly a third since 2010

- Strong progress was made to improve ways of working and service delivery through the safe introduction and use of innovative new technology. Our Digital St Helens Strategy 2024-2027, and Data Strategy 2024-27 set out our plans to ensure investment in digital systems and infrastructure improves the quality and use of our data to drive performance improvement through informed decision making.

We have taken advantage of the latest technology to radically improve our relationships with our customers and meet their expectations. A new digital customer service platform now allows customers to have full view of their interactions with the council through a new Customer Portal. The groundwork was also laid to ensure the introduction in the very near future of Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Assistants and intelligent voice recognition across our website and contact centre that will bring enormous benefits to customers in terms of the speed and quality of the service they receive. We are creating a one digital front door for adult social care services that will allow people quicker access to care information and services, whilst allowing us to deliver more effective

interventions so that people get the right help at the right time. The work undertaken to date on the planned introduction of a Technology Enabled Care Model using devices and apps within care settings and individual's homes has the potential to transform health care and empower more and more people to stay safe and independent at home.

We also held our first SMART Borough board, which brought together partners from the City Region and the private sector to progress our digital infrastructure programme, improve digital connectivity across the borough and support further delivery of a number of our priorities including inclusive economic growth and better health and social care.



92,760 calls

answered by our Contact Centre (2023-24)

- We continued to listen carefully to our residents and communicate effectively with our communities. In addition to undertaking our second Residents Survey in 2023, we also successfully delivered a wide range of key consultations, community campaigns, event promotions and new service announcements. As a result, our social media reach through Facebook increased by 19% over the course of 2023-24. We also laid the groundwork for the development of a new weekly Residents Newsletter, which will be going out in the near future to promote family focussed events and services across the borough, and a new With You, For You campaign. This new video and social media-based campaign will seek

to increase understanding of the hundreds of essential services we provide, many of which ensure vital support to people at critical moments in their lives, along with the increasing cost and complexity of their delivery.

The campaign will also highlight how dedicated, professional, and caring our staff are and the great work that they are doing to benefit our residents, customers and communities.



Nearly **100,000**
social media engagements
with our Facebook (2023-24)

Our plans for the future include:

- Ensuring our financial sustainability and providing value for money through strong leadership, effective financial management, delivery of agreed savings, a balanced budget and a commercial strategy that generates new funding in responsible ways.
- Delivering strong governance and compliance arrangements to continue to be a responsible and effective council and undertake a Council Peer Review to learn from others and help us further improve.
- Continuing to deliver our programme of council-wide transformation to drive further efficiencies, manage service demand and improve our service delivery.
- Delivering our customer improvement project through the continued use of digital innovation to ensure accessible and responsive services.
- Continuing to invest in developing the strengths and skills of our workforce and Members by delivering our workforce development, management and leadership programmes.
- Continuing to effectively engage and support our community and deliver our With You, For You campaign to improve residents' perceptions of the council and the services it provides.



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