

# Bolton

CORPORATE PEER  
CHALLENGE 2024

Position Statement



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## FOREWORD

It is with immense pride and enthusiasm that we welcome you to Bolton, a town with a proud history and bright future. With a population of nearly 300,000, Bolton stands as a beacon of cultural richness, historical significance and vibrant community spirit.

As Leader and Chief Executive of Bolton Council, we are committed to ensuring that our community thrives, and are honoured to lead an organisation that plays an essential role in shaping the future of our borough. Boltonians are the heartbeat of our town. Their resilience, compassion and unwavering commitment to one another form the very fabric of our community.

Our dedicated teams work tirelessly to enhance lives, whether through providing waste management services, accessible housing, supporting children, young people and their families, enabling social care services, driving an ambitious regeneration programme or running an events programme that is the envy of others and ignites the imagination of many. Bolton has been selected as the Greater Manchester Town of Culture for 2024 which will be a launchpad for a cultural renaissance across the borough.

Nonetheless, we have moved beyond a clear pivot point for what we as a local authority can and should do for our communities. We know that we must engage better at this level across the council and the wider system to enable better connected routes to shift power and resources into the community. We welcome the peer team's views on how we can do better in this element of our place shaping role.

Underpinning what we do is Bolton 2030 - our vision for the borough to be Active, Connected and Prosperous. Our developing Corporate Plan highlights how the council's priorities contribute to the delivery of this vision.

As we are a long way down the path to 2030, the council has begun the engagement with our key partners to update and reconsider our vision into the longer term to develop our Bolton 2040 Vision, with prevention at the forefront of this and following this Corporate Peer Challenge, we will use your recommendations to strengthen this work.

We have reflected hard in the preparation of this peer statement and like many places, Bolton is not without challenges, year-on-year budget cuts



**Cllr Nick Peel**  
Leader of the Council,  
Bolton Council



**Sue Johnson**  
Chief Executive,  
Bolton Council

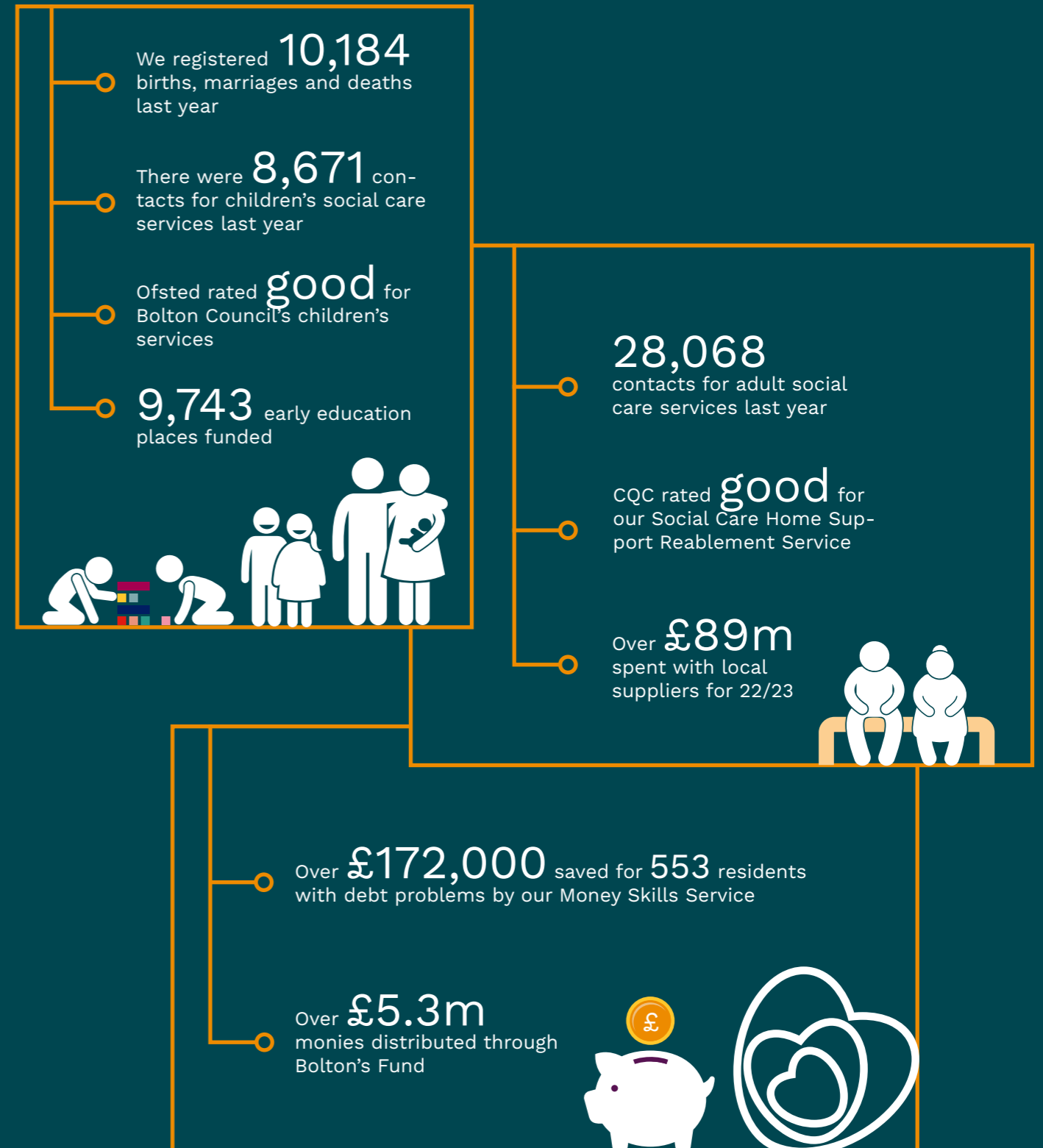
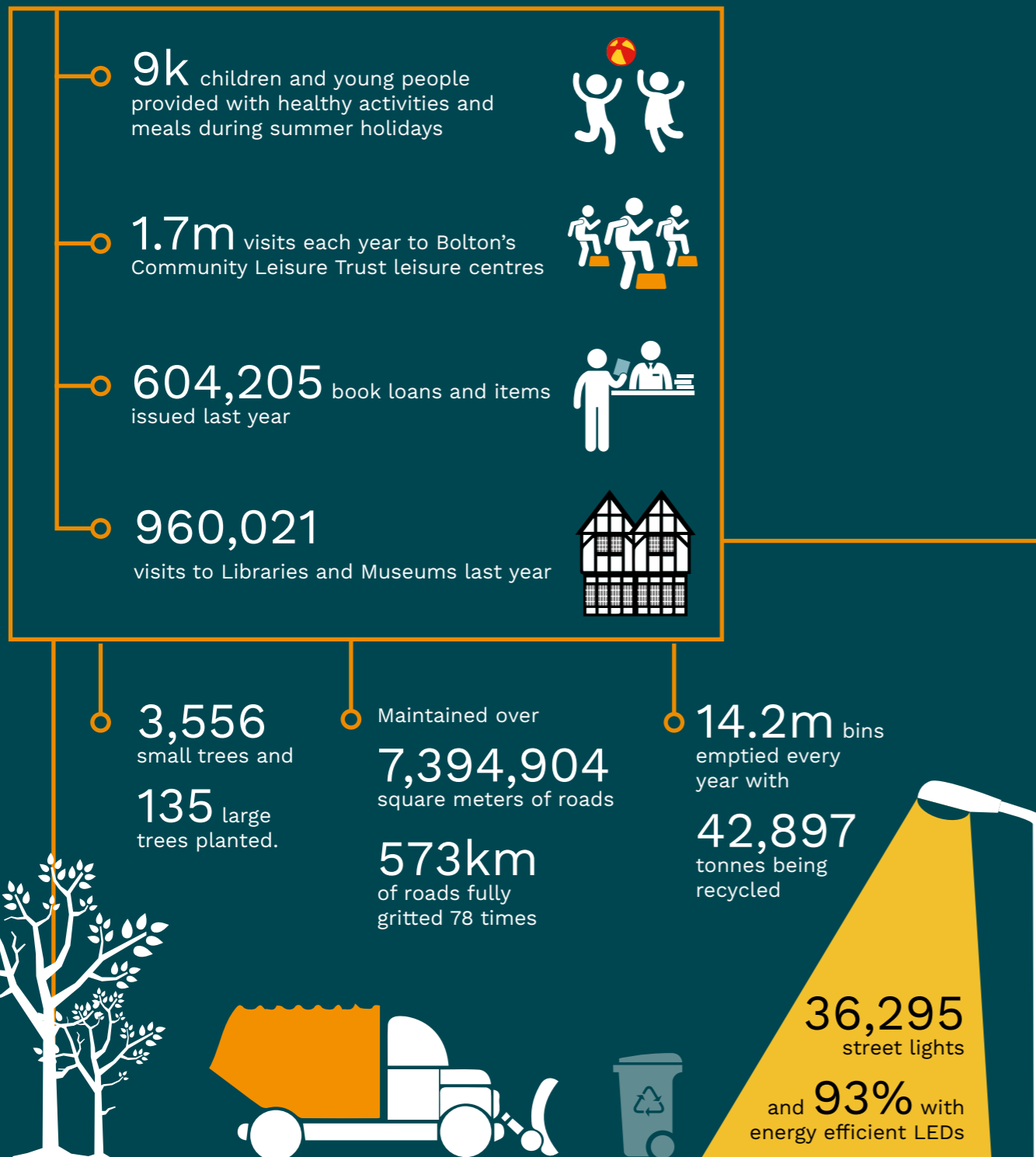
matched with rising demand have tested the council's financial resilience, requiring tough decisions whilst paving the way for new ways of working.

We want to work with the peer team to consider how we get the maximum impact from our developing approach to transformation, our work to address the demand pressures most acutely seen within our Children Services Directorate, how we maintain financial stability whilst delivering an ambitious regeneration programme and how we might modernise our governance model to assist and ensure that this council takes well connected decisions that support our ambitions for the borough and our residents for many years to come.

As we embark on this peer review journey, we invite our peers to witness the spirit of Bolton—the resilience that carried us through the pandemic, the unity that binds us and the vision that propels us forward. Together, we shape not only the council but also the broader landscape of Bolton.

# OUR BOLTON

## Our council



# Our residents

## Bolton's population



298,903



72,458  
aged 0-17



175,030  
aged 18-64



51,415  
aged 65+



14,930 stay at home to look after family/home.



3,453 births in 2021



2,132 children with special educational needs



63.9% of pupils achieving a good level of development at EYFS (aged 0-5yrs)



0.14% children and young people were permanently excluded



322 of our 544 Looked After Children are in in-house foster placements



15% of Looked After Children adopted



190 Care leavers



4,331 of adults are accessing long-term support



1,469 residents have a different sex from the one registered at birth



2 year lower life expectancy than England average



26% live in an area that is among the 10% most deprived nationally



65% of 40-74 year olds receive an NHS Healthcheck



18% (16+) have a disability



25,980 unpaid carers



31.24% ethnic minority



7,345 Armed forces veterans



5,695 LGBT+ community



Within Bolton, life expectancy varies by 14.9 years (male) and 9.9 years (female)



Children and young people make up 19% of all offenders in Bolton

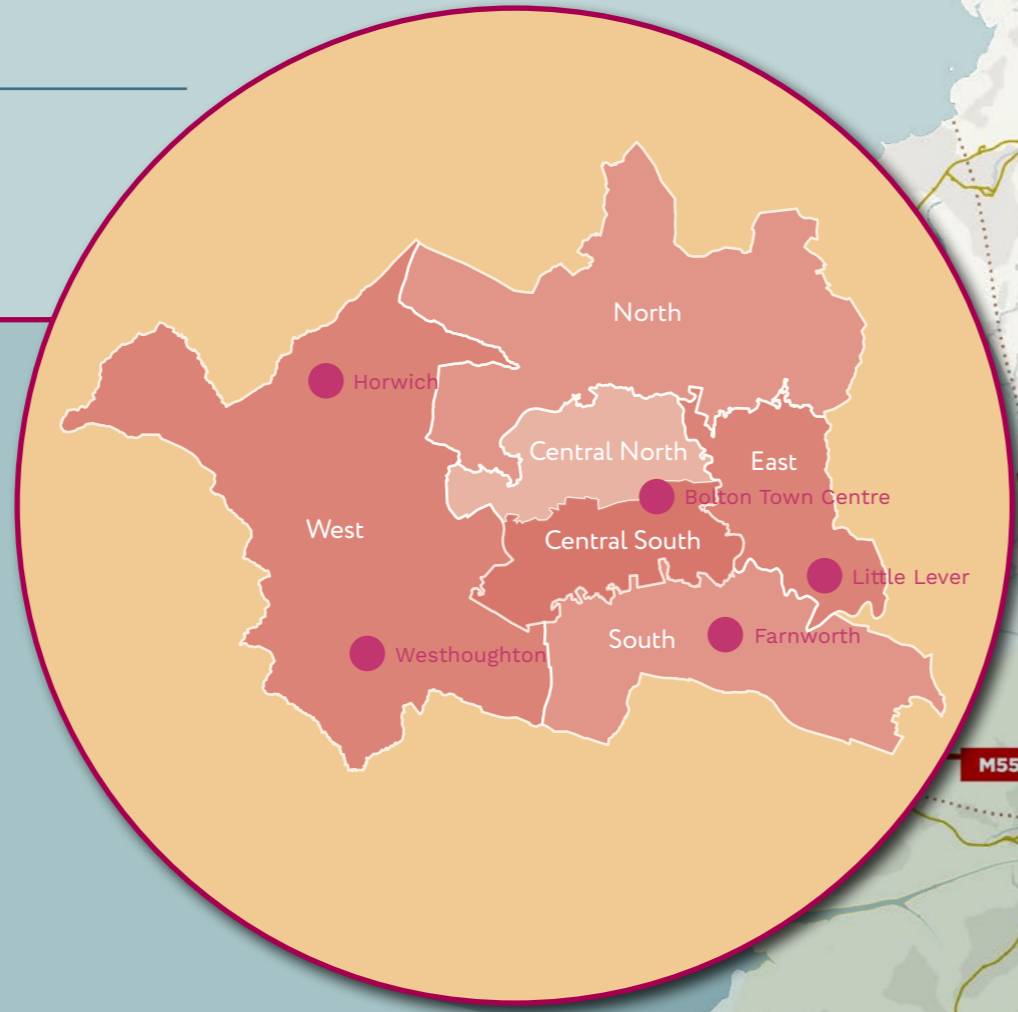


93% of babies visited by public health nurses within 14 days of birth



89.7% of adults with a learning disability live in their own home or with their family


# Our borough



 **£3.8m**  
refurbishment  
of Museum

 **£12m**  
refurbishment of  
Octagon Theatre

 **3.4m** visitors  
to Bolton (2021)

 Award winning food  
and drink festival

 **£1bn**  
regeneration  
programme

 **£13.3m**  
Future High Street  
funding awarded

 **1,100**  
businesses

 **£83m** GVA

 Awarded  
**£11m** to  
develop and deliver  
a heat network



**12 miles**  
from Manchester  
City Centre



**1 million**  
people live within  
45 minutes of Bolton



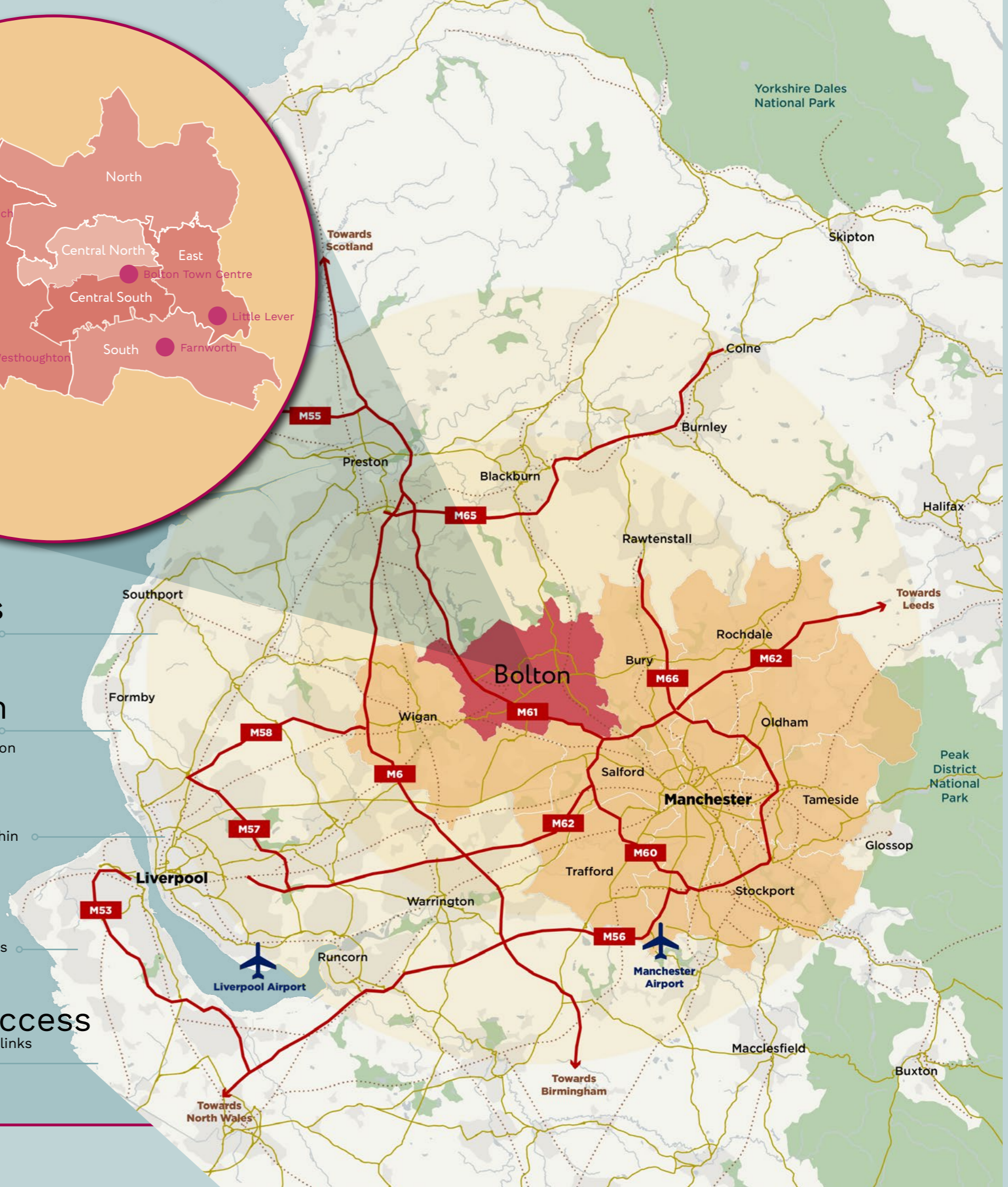
**60%** of UK  
businesses are within  
a 2-hour drive



**10,000** jobs



**Direct access**  
to major transport links





# 01

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## Local priorities and outcomes

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## Bolton Vision

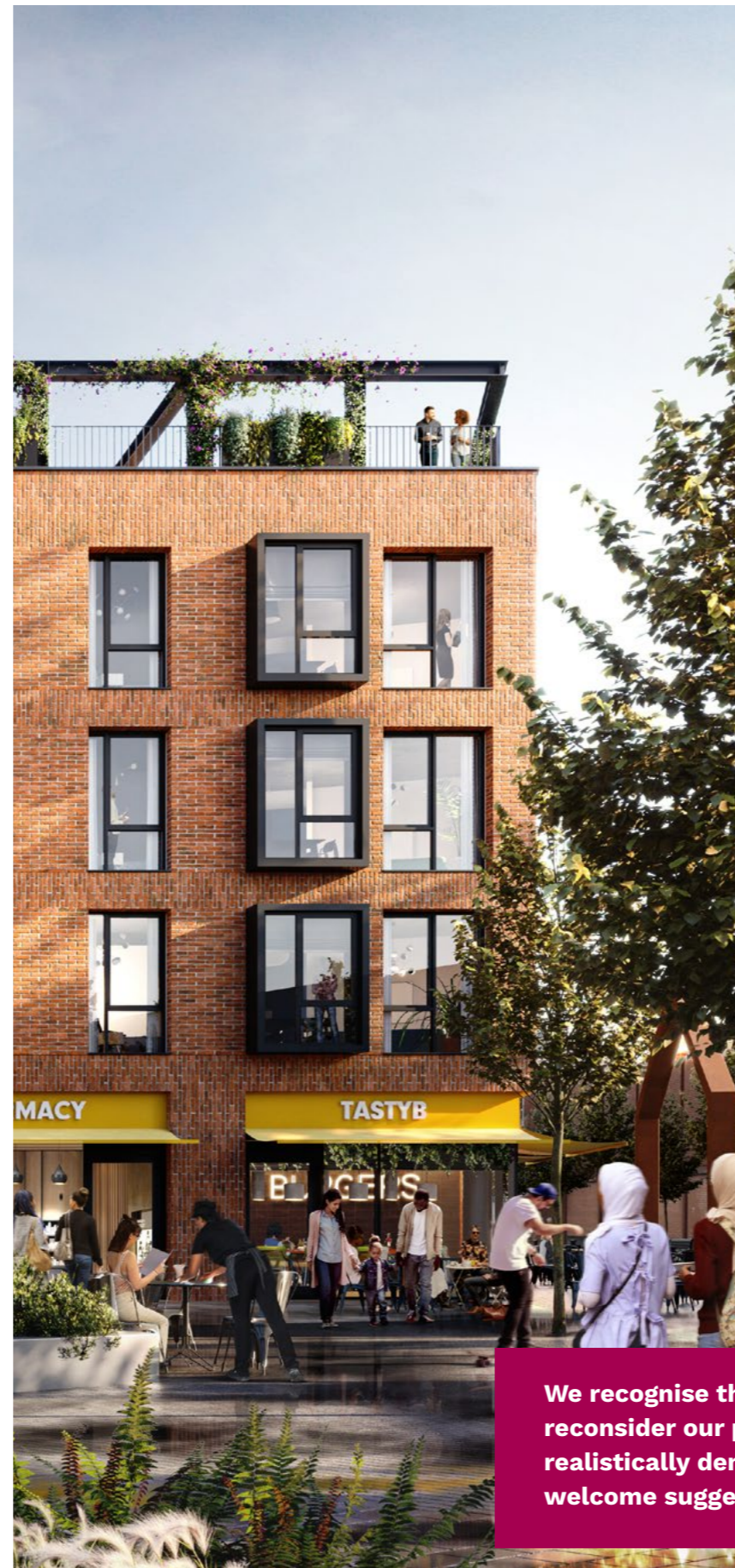
Bolton 2030 was introduced prior to our last Corporate Peer Challenge and our focus to support an Active, Connected and Prosperous Borough remains the vision that we share with our partners.

Much has changed in the system since then with significant structural reform in our local health system, the response and aftermath of the pandemic, increasing demand for services, cost of living pressures for residents and business, continuing financial pressures across the system and opportunities arising from devolution. Nonetheless, the council and our partners have remained steadfastly committed to our six key outcomes of start well, live well, age well, prosperous, clean and green and safe, strong and distinctive.

By way of context, prior to the pandemic and after developmental sessions with the Kings Fund and LGA, an amalgamation of the Vision Steering Group (the place leadership partnership at that time) and the Health and Wellbeing Board was undertaken to form the Active, Connected and Prosperous Board (ACP). This was in its infancy when the global pandemic hit and did not manage to get well established. Once we were on recovery from the pandemic, with some LGA support, we reset and reactivated our ACP and constituent partnerships.

Consequently, the ACP Board acts as a place leadership advisory board as well as discharging the statutory Health and Wellbeing Board duties. This enables it to support our overall partnership agenda, whilst giving agency to the underpinning partnerships, to deliver and hold themselves to account for delivery.

This strong and sustained culture of working collaboratively across sectors in Bolton has enabled the ACP family of partnerships to positively impact the lives of Bolton residents. Whether it is revitalising local neighbourhoods through our regeneration programme, improving access to quality education and skills development within Team Bolton, supporting small businesses, or



enhancing community safety and well-being with our community safety partnership, these partnerships have been instrumental in driving positive outcomes and creating a vibrant and thriving Bolton for all.

Whilst this longstanding commitment to working together is a real strength, the council and key partners recognise that we must take stock and reflect on our current position and how we embrace the opportunities and challenges in an ever changing and volatile future. Given the increasing complexity in the system, we have more work to do to ensure we have a truly connected and purposeful system of partnerships and would welcome peer views on this.

Bolton Council remains committed to fostering strong partnerships and collaboration as integral components of our operating model, as well as reconsidering our vision for the longer term. Consequently, we have started the conversation on our next long-term plan for the borough, to develop a system wide view of what our focus to Bolton 2040 should be.

We want to take this opportunity to lean in collectively as a system, work more collaboratively, prepare better for digital transformation and actively embrace opportunities to grow community power. We know that we may have to revisit our governance and decision-making structures across the partnership landscape to ensure that we collectively deliver value and impact.

In our preliminary conversations around reviewing our vision, all age prevention is strongly emerging as a priority across a number of partnerships and we are expecting to drive this work via a prevention framework that our Public Health Directorate are developing to enable a more structured, connected and coherent approach across the council and with system partners.

**We recognise that shifting our system focus to prevention will need us to reconsider our performance management frameworks to highlight how we realistically demonstrate short term progress alongside long term impact. We welcome suggestions from the peer team on how we may address this.**



## Bolton Corporate Plan

At the time of writing, the Council's Corporate Plan for 2024-2027 is in an advanced draft state, with formal sign-off planned shortly. The previous Corporate Plan (2022-2024) primarily focused on organisational principles, serving as an enabling document that provided the groundwork for organisational change and delivery.

As we started the consultation process for our new Corporate Plan, it became evident that the previous plan was not always fully understood. Feedback from staff engagement sessions and our recent staff survey indicated that it was often perceived as too strategic, and staff were not always able to see their role within delivery. We improved engagement on the plan and reflected hard on how we ensure that all our staff can see where they fit in the delivery of the council's priorities. We recognised that we needed to do more work to make our 'golden thread' more relevant and understandable.

In the first half of 2024, the Cabinet and Corporate Leadership team undertook a series of top leadership sessions with the LGA specifically trained on assisting the development of a strong Corporate Plan, to ensure we were focussing on the right things and leadership understood their role in delivery. These sessions have enabled us to refine focus within our Corporate Plan and create a shared understanding between our senior officers and cabinet of what our strategic priorities need to be for the next three years.

**This has led to our Corporate Plan being split across three pillars, with various strategies and projects being identified to support them in delivery.**

## A council which delivers its duties effectively

**As a local authority, it is crucial that we operate effectively by getting the basics right, delivering our statutory responsibilities and maintaining financial stability. The ongoing financial challenges facing the council means we must adopt an ever more strategic approach to our operations, ensuring optimal efficiency and value for our residents.**

Whilst we have had a robust financial management system in Bolton for many years, more recently, financial uncertainty has increased, as have the risks of overspend in challenging areas such as children's and adults social care and regeneration schemes. We recognise the need to maintain a clear focus on our Medium-Term Financial Plan, given these risks. We welcome the peer team's overview on our management and deployment of resources and any recommendations that assist us to manage the most challenging demand issues.

Bolton Council has invested over £100m for borough-wide regeneration, and it is vital that this is supported by strong governance and integrated approaches to reflect the community's needs. Collaborative partnerships are key, building on a history of joint successes like pandemic response, Family Hubs and our co-designed VCSE strategy.

Increasingly, there is an expectation that councils play their role in adapting to climate change. In Bolton, following the council's motion to declare a climate emergency, the council has supported a partnership approach to the development of a local strategy. The Bolton Climate Change Strategy aims for net-zero carbon council operations by 2030 and collaborating with partners across the system to make as much of an impact that we can.

Empowering staff is central to achieving our ambitions, fostering a culture of support and challenge, with training initiatives and recognition programmes like Bolton's Best, underscoring the council's commitment to excellence and shared community goals. In recent times the council's staff development and leadership can be seen in our achievement of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, our Armed Forces Charter Silver award and intention to go for gold, as well as our developing staff volunteering programme.

## A council that cares for, listens to and empowers its residents

Bolton Council is dedicated to delivering essential services that evolve with the community's strengths and needs to address inequalities faced within the borough, such as cost-of-living pressures and the wider impacts of poverty.



This shift towards a wider family and person-centred preventative support offer is designed to offer timely assistance, reducing the need for specialist interventions and fostering a supportive community environment.

The council recognises the barriers many face in accessing training and employment, which hinders their potential. An emerging skills strategy aims to ensure all residents achieve essential skills levels and access higher-level skills for better opportunities.



We also need to ensure that our health services are reflective of the unique Bolton demographic, with a prevention framework in development to enhance service delivery and align with partner organisations. As part of the Greater Manchester Integrated Care System, Bolton Council can leverage regional collaboration to introduce efficiencies while catering to local needs through place-based arrangements.

## A council which contributes to a vibrant borough

Bolton Council plays a significant role in delivering a growth and investment agenda for the borough and we have a track record of securing capital funds for economic regeneration across Bolton.

The launch of the 10-year Economic Growth and Resilience Plan marks a commitment to amplify these efforts, focusing on job creation, skills enhancement, supporting residents into sustainable employment and housing improvements. The plan also aims to overcome economic challenges faced by residents, attract and retain businesses and stimulate new investments. Our refreshed Bolton Brand demonstrates that Bolton means business.

The development of the visitor economy strategy, in tandem with our cultural strategy, will play a crucial role in enhancing the borough's profile. As the GM town of culture, Bolton is poised to deliver a culture and leisure renaissance that reflects one of our greatest strengths.

Bolton Council's position as an anchor within the borough presents us with an opportunity to maximise the town's social value outcomes. Within the council we are undertaking a strategic overhaul of our procurement methods to maximise the benefits derived from our suppliers' social value intentions.

In collaboration with the Bolton Family, a collective of businesses, and others dedicated to social value in Bolton, we seek to unify the understanding of social value across key anchor institutions, VCSE partners, and businesses, expanding the reach of these initiatives and really making a difference.



# Performance Management

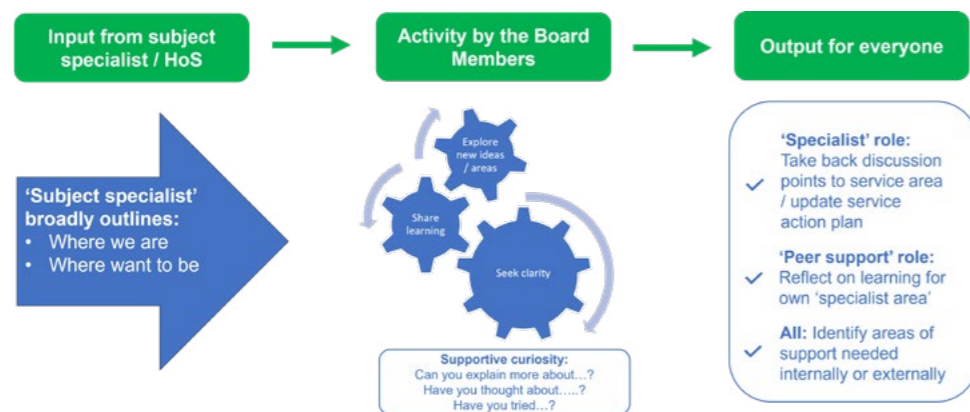
We are evolving our performance management framework and have made positive changes to our practice in recent times. We recognise that we have more to do to embed this focus on performance to ensure that performance runs through the work we do, giving greater clarity on not just what we are delivering but how we are measuring our progress and impact over time.

This work is an essential part of our Golden Thread, and how we judge the effectiveness of the Corporate Plan, associated Directorate Plans, Service Plans as well as provide clarity to staff on the role they play in delivering our objectives, through their professional development reviews. In the past year we have worked hard to better connect priorities to available performance information, be that qualitative, narrative, quantitative data and Key Performance Indicators.

To assist with this, all directorates have started to phase in Performance Boards where Directorate Leadership Teams adopt a high challenge, high support ethos to challenge managers against expected performance, as well as celebrating successes, providing a dedicated space to discuss priorities and performance.

As we embed the Performance Boards practice, we expect them to play a key role in driving a stronger performance imperative across the council. We anticipate that they will allow us to better highlight impressive performance, identify and investigate potential issues sooner and enable directorates to target the right support at the right time for services that need it.

Additionally, we expect Performance Board outcomes to improve our formal reporting to elected members.



We intend to use the deeper analysis provided through Performance Board discussions to improve the quality of information provided and for remedial and mitigating actions and solutions to feature more within the quarterly updates to Cabinet.

We recognise that we capture organisational risks in a separate process; and we want to make sure we are considering risk in conjunction with our performance management processes. Work has started to explore how we either integrate the two processes, or how we better link processes and this will be fully developed during the life cycle of the 2024-27 Corporate Plan. We would welcome views from the Peer Team on our plans to improve performance management.

As we continue on this developmental journey to improve the robustness of our performance management, we need to do so in conjunction with having good data management



principles. As part of our Digital Strategy programme, we are looking at developing an overarching data strategy for the organisation, we know that good performance management depends on data quality and consistency and we are using our Performance Boards to test robustness of our outputs and KPIs, including making sure we have robust baselines, directions of travel and targets, so that we can develop and fully evidence impact and outcomes. We will be better utilising our Bolton Research and Intelligence Network (BRAIN) to develop this work (see page 95 for more detail).

With an increasing focus from government on local authority performance, we also want to make sure we better utilise benchmarking, building on what we already have in place, so that we compare and contrast our performance against our statistical peers. Our view is that our work here has been patchy, and we are looking to have a more consistent approach to this going forward.



# 02

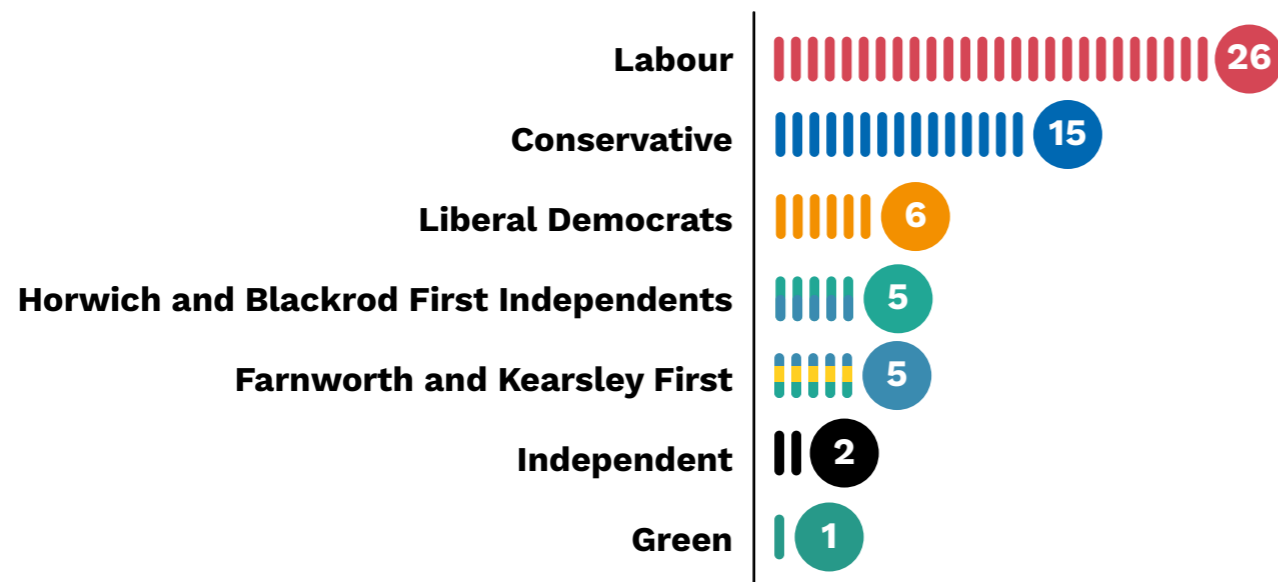
## Organisational leadership

## Local leadership

Since 2019, Bolton Council has been in no overall control. Over this period the council has been led by minority Conservative and minority Labour administrations. The council is currently led by a minority Labour Administration.

Additionally, we have also witnessed a growth in hyper-local political groups who have added a new dimension to the political make up in the borough.

**Following the local elections in May 2024, the political make up is as follows:**



Political leadership through a period of no overall control does require a deeper commitment to collaboration. The Leader of the Council has regular Group Leaders' sessions where he engages with all group leaders on significant issues and priorities as part of the administration's commitment to openness, transparency and collaboration beyond the politicking of the council chamber.

Our Elected Members demonstrate a genuine passion for the local areas they represent, leveraging their deep local knowledge to harness community strengths and work toward achieving positive outcomes for all. Following our previous peer review, we recognised the need to modernise our Area Working model. Utilising support from the LGA and Nurture Develop, the Community Alliance model strengths-based approach was developed, bringing together elected members and communities to empower our residents to meet local needs and play a significant role in addressing

inequalities in the borough. We are currently in a test and learn phase across seven wards and expect to roll out the model across all of the Borough later in the year.

In this test and learn phase, evidence is emerging of how community alliances are beginning to provide a platform for elected members to engage with community groups, build trust, relationships and confidence to address local issues in a way that is different and breaks the paternalistic feel of the traditional councillor casework approach.



## Relationship with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

As the Greater Manchester agenda has grown, Bolton Council has been required to navigate a shifting landscape of governance and decision-making. It is clear there are opportunities for Bolton, although it is equally important to recognise the added complexity that arises, particularly where regional and local priorities do not fully align.

In the past few years, the relationship between the council and GMCA has matured, and there have been good examples of where the council and GMCA have been required to work collaboratively to deliver joint outcomes. The Leader is the portfolio lead for the digital-city region which has already delivered significant milestones particularly in raising awareness and mitigating action to support the digital switchover. Bolton is fully engaged in the roll-out and delivery of the Bee Network and our Chief Executive is the chair of the Green City Region Board.

As part of the refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy, the Wigan and Bolton Growth Corridor will mature, connecting residents to employment opportunity, employment growth driven by logistics, manufacturing and distribution and health innovation opportunities.

Ahead of each GMCA meeting a Leader's briefing paper is developed. Directors and Assistant Directors contribute their understanding against

agenda items and provide the Leader with expert opinion and advice on the impact for Bolton, allowing the Leader to be fully informed and ready to respond where relevant, which has improved our strategic connection to the GM agenda.

The impending seventh devolution deal will bring a single longer term funding settlement, and it is important the council has a significant voice in shaping how these monies deliver outcomes for Bolton.

Across the five pillars in the single settlement, Bolton recognises that there will not be automatic allocations and we need to ensure that we have the strongest connection to ensure our priorities are aligned well to the single settlement and the Greater Manchester Strategy. Even where we are not part of specific GM initiatives such as the recently agreed growth and investment zones, we need to ensure connection to benefit from the supply chain and broader market opportunities that are arising from these.

Maintaining the GM relationship does require significant officer resource to ensure the Bolton voice and influence shapes the agenda and our priorities are well represented. We carefully consider the value of our representation, so we connect on the right agenda at the right time to ensure the best impact for Bolton residents from the opportunities that devolution brings.



## Bolton: Born to perform

Bolton has a rich topography of countryside, moorland, parks, commercial centres, town centres and neighbourhoods. Our location and our place-based assets have put us on a global stage as an excellent film location. We facilitated 141 filming days in 2023, hosting productions shown on major broadcasters and motion pictures, such as A Gentleman in Moscow, Passenger, Fool Me Once, The Power of Parker, Sleepover, Cobra and Coronation Street.

Being home to a university, theatres, museum and Bolton Wanderers Football Club, alongside our various events, provides a strong infrastructure to bring communities, families and visitors together. Bolton's Food and Drink Festival is the UK's biggest food festival attracting some 500,000 people whilst the Octagon Theatre has recently been awarded the leading arts and culture venue at the 'This Is MCR Awards'. The football club has recovered from near insolvency and with two trips to Wembley within a 12-month period, has started to bring back a feel-good factor to the Borough whilst our library and museum has benefited from a £6.8m refurbishment that makes it one of the best in the country.

The Bolton community came together for a historic celebration in 2023, as King Charles III and the Queen visited to mark 150 years since Bolton Town Hall was officially opened by The King's great-great-grandfather, the future King Edward VII. The visit was all about celebrating the friendly, diverse and vibrant town of Bolton, and inviting The King and the Queen to meet local residents, uniformed organisations, charities, community groups, sports teams and volunteers who help make Bolton such a great place to live.

**Bolton has been named Greater Manchester's town of culture for 2024 and is set to develop a programme of cultural events and activities celebrating Bolton's heritage over 12 months.**

We have also received UK Shared Prosperity Funding to deliver new and improved cultural venues and programmes. Our celebrating Bolton ethos and activity, including actions for the future, are well represented in our recently published Visitor Economy Strategy 2024-2030 and Culture Strategy.

In 2023, a review of the 'Bolton Brand' was commissioned by the Strategic Economic Partnership to provide a single, coherent message about what Bolton has to offer.

**This work found 'Family' is an important concept for Bolton - a sense of strong roots, strength and dependability.**

Local celebrities including Peter Kay, Paddy McGuinness, Sara Cox, Vernon Kay, Jason Kenny, Amir Khan and Clive Myrie are all proud of their Bolton roots and are vocal supporters of the town. Using the Bolton Brand is an important part of communicating what Bolton plans to do for the future; and telling our Bolton story.



## Keeping the £ in Bolton

Over the past year, and at the behest of the administration, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen the power of the 'Bolton pound' through our strategic procurement and wider social value practices.

In 22/23 19% of our purchases were made with local suppliers (BL post-code) to an approximate value of £89m. As part of renewed efforts, we want to see a greater emphasis on social value which can be drawn from our contracts and benefit the local economy through development of a new social value strategy, focused on procurement, people and partnerships.

Bolton Council evaluates contract applicants on price, quality, and social value, with a notable 20% weighting on social value that exceeds government standards, encouraging more substantial social contributions. Recognising the need for a more streamlined approach, the council is in the process of testing a new Social Value Framework. This framework aims to facilitate specific, measurable, and impactful social value propositions from contractors and suppliers, aligning with Bolton's own ambitions. The framework includes 25 social value commitments, derived from the LGA National TOMS Framework, focusing on community and business engagement, environmental sustainability, and employment opportunities for marginalised groups with the intention to keep more of our spend within the Bolton local economy.

The Procurement Act 2023 and new regulations will provide us with more scope to drive our local social value strategy, particularly the shift towards most advantageous tender as opposed to most economic advantageous tender.



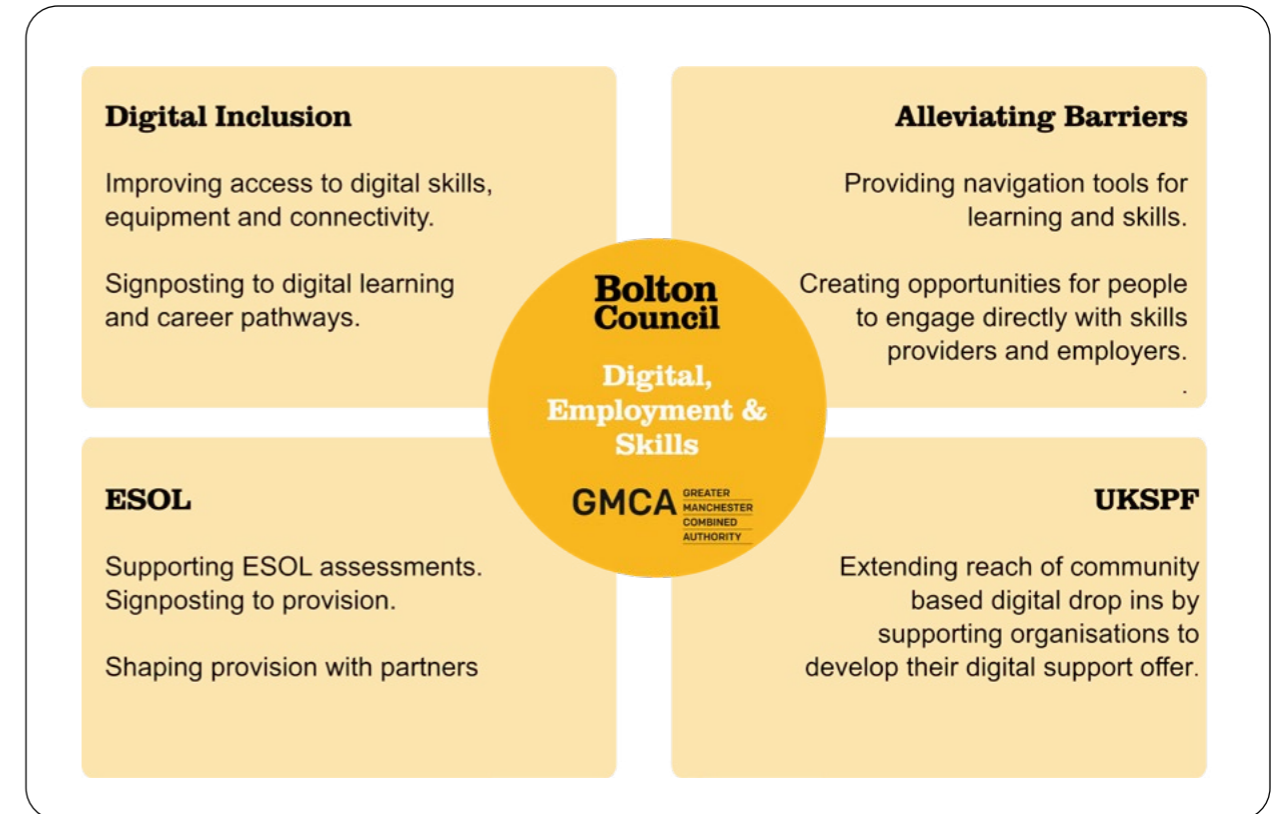
In terms of people, Bolton Council is a significant employer, and the council encourages its employees to engage with the community, offering up to three paid days for volunteering, with uptake of this staff benefit on an upward trajectory. For partnerships, the council promotes collaborative efforts through 'The Bolton Family', outlined earlier in this statement. As part of Bolton's Family remit, they are promoting responsible business practices, integrating social value with VCSE expertise, supporting social enterprises, promoting contributions to the Bolton's Fund, and working towards a standard language around Social Value in Bolton.



## Digital Inclusion

In Greater Manchester, more than 1.2 million residents are digitally excluded to some extent. To address this challenge locally we have launched the Digital, Employment, and Skills (DES) service. The service, based within Bolton Library and Museum Services aims to increase access to digital inclusion activity, improve the navigation of learning and skills opportunities and develop support and learning for people with English as a second language (ESOL). Access to digital inclusion underpins all of the support the service provides and plays a key role in improving the health, wellbeing and economic prosperity of our residents.

Over the last three years the impact of the service has been significant, reaching beyond council led delivery of digital inclusion activity with strong partnerships developed across the borough through the Bolton Digital Inclusion Partnership. The partnership, led by the DES team, provides a forum for sharing of good practice, support to set up and establish digital inclusion activity and access to key local and national updates and funding. As a result of the partnership, the DES service has collaborated with Bolton NHS FT to promote use of the NHS app and online health services.



The service has distributed over 600 free SIM cards to adults on a low income from three community libraries via the National Databank. All Bolton libraries will be equipped to distribute free data from Summer 2024. A Digital Lending Library provides access to laptops and tablets within over 300 people supported to date.

**Device loans have so far enabled people to access online learning, set up businesses and search and apply for jobs.**

The service coordinates basic digital skills learning across the borough and has supported over 1300 people via one to ones and drop ins to date. Over 40 care leavers have been supported with free data, donated devices and signposting to career opportunities and money advice. Additionally, we have compiled a comprehensive printed guide to digital support available in Bolton.

## Protecting our residents

It is important we have effective safeguarding practice in place to keep our vulnerable residents safe and protected. The Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) and Bolton Safeguarding Adult Board (BSAB) are made up of partner agencies who co-operate to protect residents at risk, prevent neglect and abuse and promote wellbeing. To ensure consistent understanding across safeguarding, both boards share the same experienced chair.

Through BSAB, we have developed a domestic abuse strategy in Bolton. The board was also able to convene a development day tasked at better understanding self-neglect and hoarding. Drawing on the learning from the development day, the group have developed a draft self-neglect and hoarding policy, which will be finalised this year.

A key ambition for the BSAB is to ensure the voice of the adult at risk is actively listened to and shapes every element of their work. Each BSAB meeting and all sub-group meetings comprise of reflective practice questions to challenge and ensure that the voice of the adult at risk and their carers are ever present in all that

the BSAB do. To ensure this remains prevalent, a review of the governance is scheduled to test how effective this is.

A recent example of the impact of this reflective practice stems from a consultation exercise where it was revealed that older members of the Bolton community felt that they were unaware of the role and function of the BSAB and would not know how to identify some forms of abuse such as financial abuse or where to report a safeguarding concern other than via the police. In response to this, an awareness raising campaign with posters, a pocket-sized z-card with key safeguarding messages was developed and launched. Alongside this an overarching communication and engagement strategy is currently in development to further improve this.

In the BSCP the partnership has collaborated with the Cost-of-Living group to establish warm spaces, offering free access to warmth, refreshments, and advice, along with a safeguarding checklist to protect children's welfare. The partnership is also developing a neglect pathway with the largest local social landlord to empower practitioners to recognise and act against neglect.

The training programmes provided to staff have been broadened, developing and delivering awareness and knowledge in relation to the partnership's priority areas of Neglect, Complex Safeguarding, and Domestic Abuse, among other priority areas. The BSCP is also refining its approach to contacts and referrals, enhancing monitoring systems in schools, and planning a Neglect Summit for strategic focus on this pressing issue.

### **Moving forward, we recognise there is further challenge to all.**

The statutory safeguarding partners recognise through their work on reviews, audits and stakeholder engagement that the safeguarding landscape is as complex as ever and we must continue to revise our priorities to deliver outcomes which focus on our most vulnerable.



## Supporting the housing needs of Bolton residents

In recent times our housing service have been managing an unprecedented amount of people who need our assistance, a position unlikely to change in the near future. From next year, we expect 4,000 people to need our help to prevent homelessness, 1500 people to need our help with serious concerns on the condition of their property, and 700 people with really complex needs, needing our help to avoid the risk of rough sleeping. This is considerably higher than the past – and a significant rise since the pandemic.

In setting the standard for supporting vulnerable people, helping residents to find and retain places they can call home, and in promoting quality and good landlords we can help the most vulnerable weather the storm.

Consequently, we have recently launched a new community housing service plan which is built on three areas, intervention, protection and prevention. We have observed a discrepancy between what our customers expect and what we can feasibly deliver and there is a growing notion we are firefighting demand, and our staff are often carrying too many cases, which presents a clear and obvious case for change and transformation. To tackle these challenges, we have devised a series of actions aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction, streamlining strategic coordination, and investing in our workforce.



### GM Mayor's Housing First Pledge

Bolton will enable our share as outlined in Places for Everyone

[www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4682/places-for-everyone-compressed.pdf](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4682/places-for-everyone-compressed.pdf)

**10,000**  
NEW SOCIAL  
RENT HOMES  
BY 2028

**30,000**  
NEW SOCIAL  
RENT HOMES  
BY 2037

These actions include demystifying our processes for customers, ensuring clarity and ease of understanding, while jointly developing policies that are attuned to their needs. It is essential that we use our resources judiciously, engage in effective commissioning, and strengthen our bonds with both internal and external partners. This will support sound governance and strategic alignment at all levels. Moreover, we are committed to fostering an environment that values positivity, progress, and continuous learning, all the while assessing and integrating technological advancements to bolster our capabilities. As part of our work on housing, a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is due to be considered by the Executive Cabinet Member.

**To bolster this approach, we have introduced our Strategic Housing Board which will determine the overall direction and strategy for all housing related matters operated through the council. The board will oversee the production of a housing strategic needs assessment, will monitor service effectiveness and manage housing related risk and assurance.**

Crucially, the board will provide oversight and leadership in embedding prevention as an approach to managing demand across the Housing Sector, ensuring the best use of resources available to the council to deliver on the core requirements of our housing strategies and supporting plans.

## Helping people to help themselves

The council recognises the pressures being faced by our residents, with cost-of-living pressures, decreasing life expectancy and demand for social care increasing. The council needs to review what it can do to create the conditions for our residents to better help themselves. As described earlier in this document, we have begun a review of our current Bolton 2030 vision, with an emerging all-age prevention framework to wrap around a number of strategies and projects the council and partners are developing and delivering to enable this.

Bolton has a long and effective history of working in partnership to address financial inclusion issues. We have had partnership arrangements in place for more than 20 years and this has enabled a strong focal point for mitigating the impact of the unprecedented demands that the most recent cost of living pressures have had on many of our residents.



**The Bolton system quickly stood up its support to ensure better outcomes for our residents. We have successfully delivered a Household Support Fund (HSF) programme since 2021, distributing approximately £13.9m to date, through:**

- ↑ **Vouchers for children in receipt of/eligible for free school meals (FSM)– including all pre-school age children who meet the qualifying criteria for FSM.**
- ↑ **Investment in our grassroots voluntary and community sector via our flagship Bolton’s Fund programme.**
- ↑ **Targeted support for residents such as pensioners, care leavers and those in receipt of disability related benefits**
- ↑ **Investment in our Local Welfare Provision to support residents with emergency energy top ups, food and essential household items.**
- ↑ **Debt and money advice via our MoneySkills Service**



Although welcome, the HSF programme has been a short term and uncertain programme of support, which has led us to develop a longer term, sustainable approach to poverty in the borough.

Addressing the challenges of poverty requires a whole-system, action focused approach, and we have been collaborating with our partners to develop an anti-poverty strategy for Bolton which will launch in 2024. With co-production at its heart (poverty is everybody’s business) alongside a firm commitment to draw in local people’s lived experience - we are taking a strengths-based approach to ensure that the focus is on what individuals and communities can bring to the table and how we can all work together to deliver actions to address poverty.

## Strengthening our approach to prevention and inequalities

In addition to commissioning or purchasing direct care and support for children, families and adults with support needs, Bolton Council also invests in and supports a range of preventative services with the voluntary and community sector to support the wider duties outlined in legislation. This includes services which are connected to or support homelessness, carers, domestic violence, dementia support, information, advice and guidance and technology and independent living services, including home adaptation.

Investing in these services is critical in the delivery of our key strategic priorities. In 2024 we will continue our work with our voluntary community and faith partners to co-design a new preventative contract, which will focus on achieving the best outcomes for the people of Bolton as well as offering sustainability to the sector (something which we have specifically been asked to support).

Our Commissioning and Improvement strategy underscores the importance of prevention, which is integral to our three core life outcomes: Start Well, Live Well, and Age Well. Our goal is to cultivate a robust and varied range

of services that foster a sense of community and ensure easy access to both universal and specialised support networks. This approach is dedicated to nurturing positive outcomes. We are committed to enabling individuals to reside in their own homes for as long as they safely and appropriately can. Additionally, we aim to nurture a well-integrated Home Care and Residential Care market that is deeply connected to the local community, providing options that are innovative and empower individuals with choice and autonomy.

Alongside our commissioning strategy, Bolton Council's Public Health Directorate continues to prioritise promotion of wellbeing, self-care, prevention of ill health and reducing inequalities and appropriately commissioned services that enable delivery of mandated and statutory public health services.

We have secured additional conditional grant funding to further enhance areas of work around Drugs and Alcohol, Tobacco, Active Lives (including Sport England), and Workplace wellbeing. Work alongside local residents and communities has been completed to

identify and promote opportunities for good health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. We also have a programme of work on trauma informed approaches and adverse childhood experiences and have won National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funding for research to evaluate schools intervention.

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**We anticipate the emerging prevention and inequalities framework will help shape a system wide and community orientated approach to prevention and we are committed to ongoing strategy development and delivery to protect and improve Bolton population's health, with emerging priorities for the next year of commercial determinants of health, smoking, diet and good nutrition, and health and work amongst others.**

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The Public Health Annual Report (PHAR) and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) support the work of the Public Health Directorate and system partners, with the 2022 PHAR focus on inequalities and mental health, and 2023/24 focus on asset-based community development.



# 03

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Place  
leadership  
– Shared  
ambitions

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## Children and Young People’s Board

In the past 18 months, our Children and Young People’s Board (CYPB) was re-established, recognising that there was more we could do to harness the shared understanding of Bolton and its children and young people, to achieve our Bolton 2030 outcome, that our children get the best possible start in life, and have every chance to succeed and be happy.

The CYPB is chaired by the Director of Children’s Services and brings together partners from across Education, Health, Social Care, the VCSE Sector providing collaborative system wide leadership to improve outcomes for the children, young people and their families in our Borough. Board members are expected to provide a system wide and joined up response to national, regional, and local policy as it relates to children, young people, and their families.



This has been evidenced in the work the board has done to co-produce of the plan on a page which underpins the CYPB and sets out Bolton’s approach to ensure our children:

- **Are safe and protected from harm**
- **Are healthy in their physical and mental wellbeing**
- **Achieve their potential**
- **Feel they belong in Bolton**



The board have also assisted the council to launch our network of Family Hubs and support Children’s Services to achieve a ‘Good’ rating in its 2023 Ofsted inspection.

The board has benefited from its development sessions with one of the country’s foremost restorative practice experts who has steered the board towards relational practice based on a high challenge, high support ethos.

The financial challenges confronting Children’s Services through demand management requires a collaborative partnership strategy, devising solutions requires our effective cooperation with partners. As part of this response, we can harness this collegiate approach to support in delivery of the demand management work programme and use expertise and knowledge of partners highlighted in the capacity for improvement section of this document.

## Team Bolton

Bolton Council is an integral member of Team Bolton, a collaborative partnership dedicated to enhancing the lives of Bolton residents through training, skills, and employment opportunities with priority workstream leads focused on ESOL, digital inclusion, employment support, adult education and preparing for adulthood.

Last year, the partnership commissioned a scoping exercise to inform development of a skills strategy, aimed at fostering development and providing support to bolster outcomes for the people of Bolton. This strategy will be shaped by real-world experiences to ensure it is inclusive and practical, concentrating collective efforts and resources. Team Bolton envisions a future where education is linked to the labour market, young people are equipped with essential skills and digital literacy, and an integrated system captures the evolving skills needs of the community.

Bolton's commitment to skills and employment is further demonstrated through events like the Bolton Job Fair which connects employers with potential employees. Additionally, the Learning and Skills Fair, held annually in Victoria Square, brings together providers and organisations to present career opportunities. The Bolton Digital Inclusion Activity Network, meeting quarterly, ensures that digital support remains a priority by staying abreast of national and regional initiatives.





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## Supporting Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector

Bolton's VCSE sector is diverse with over 1,600 groups, an estimated 58,259 volunteers giving over 211,000 hours each week, with an impact value of some £106m per annum. The sector makes significant contributions to health and wellbeing and community strength, and all aspects of life in this Borough (State of the Sector, 2021).

Bolton Council is acutely aware of the value of the sector and are invested in Bolton CVS as our VCSE infrastructure partner. Through Bolton CVS, this investment has enabled us to enhance the capabilities of VCSE groups leveraging Bolton CVS's expertise to provide the sector with developmental aid and training in areas like governance, financial management, safeguarding, and encouraging the growth of social enterprises and service providers.

In a bid to enhance the council's connection and relationships across the sector, in the past year, the council's wider leadership team has commenced quarterly meetings with the VCSE Leaders' Forum.

These sessions aim to foster better collaboration, discuss mutual goals, and enhance relationships.

Alongside this, the council has also invested into Bolton's Fund, a grants programme initiated in 2019 and managed by Bolton CVS which has been instrumental in nurturing innovation and community projects within Bolton and has distributed over £5 million to grassroots organisations, with grant applications evaluated by an independent team of community assessors. This initiative reflects the commitment to Bolton's people, ensuring that local groups receive the support they need to thrive and make a tangible difference in the community.

The fund's flexibility was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis, where it swiftly redirected resources to support those most impacted. By providing essentials like food, clothing, and digital support, Bolton's Fund has been an effective mechanism for supporting many, especially those disconnected from public sector services.



In the past year, Bolton's Fund has been reviewed to improve the fund's accessibility. Bolton Council and Bolton CVS have revamped the funding model, transitioning to a rolling programme that strengthens support pathways and encourages sustainable funding applications. This strategic move, coupled with contributions from local organisations and ongoing efforts to diversify investment, is part of a broader VCSE Strategy aimed at empowering the sector to face new challenges and maximise its impact on Bolton life.

The VCSE Co-Design group, comprising of organisations invested in the sector's success, are leading the development of this strategy, with a focus on sustainability and impact. The strategy aims to deepen the understanding of sustainability in the form of funding and commissioning. Funding efforts are geared towards seizing opportunities, broadening the sources of income, and fostering income-generating activities. With regards to commissioning, this



developing strategy will be focusing on what can be done practically to enable VCSE organisations to be 'commission ready', ensuring they are well-prepared for development and contract opportunities.

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**For impact, this strategy aims to enhance the visibility of the VCSE sector's contributions to the prosperity of Bolton.**

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This includes storytelling to showcase social value, supporting organisations to develop their storytelling, and celebrating milestones like Bolton's Fund 5th Birthday. We are using the GM VCSE Accord to support and guide our action and will be aligning with new developments such as GMCA Fair Funding protocol to strengthen local practice and outcomes where we can.

## Locality Board and connecting with the NHS systems locally

In Bolton, a significant portion of the population (26%) resides in areas that fall within the top 10% of the most deprived nationally, in stark contrast to 12% living in areas among the least deprived 20%. This inequality poses complex challenges for the council and partners, necessitating a strong commitment to delivering services that cater to the entire community, while prioritising the support and protection of our most vulnerable residents.

We know that the determinants of health are complex.

### Healthcare only accounts for around 20% of what makes us healthy.

To do the best we can for Bolton residents we need to deliver both optimum health and social care provision, as well as ensure Bolton has strong economic development, connected communities and developed green spaces.

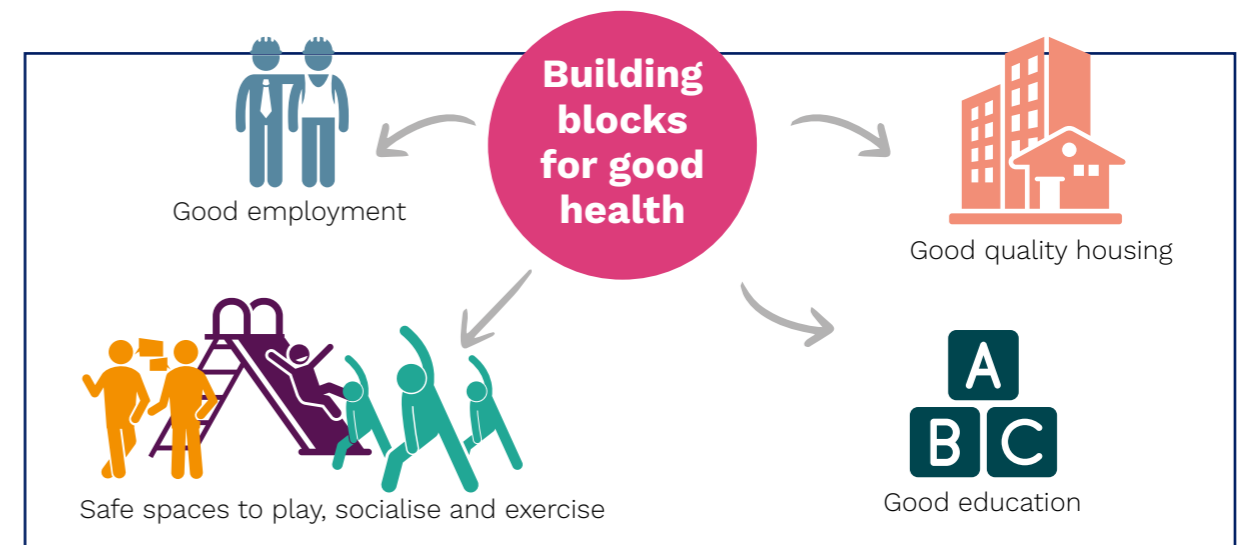
In order for us to do this effectively in Bolton we have two strategic boards working together. The Active,

Connected and Prosperous Board (ACP) focuses on achieving the Bolton 2030 outcomes and the Locality Board leads on addressing health inequalities and securing the best outcomes across health and social care.

Bolton is one of ten localities within the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, forming a collaborative network of health planners, providers, local authorities, and community members. This alliance aims to optimise public resources and improve local health and well-being. Supporting the Locality Board, various groups and committees with diverse representation from Bolton are dedicated to delivering the recently launched Locality Plan (2024 – 2029).

The locality plan has identified six strategic areas for delivery which aim to tackle healthcare inequalities, enhance community services, promote healthy living, support children's development, optimise resource use, and invest in staff development. It focuses on addressing health inequalities, simplifying access to services, prioritising preventative care, ensuring children's well-being, managing financial challenges efficiently, and fostering a skilled workforce.

Underpinning these will be an overarching five-year outcomes framework which will demonstrate progress against the annual delivery plans created to highlight achievement against the six strategic aims. The Locality Board will oversee these delivery plans.



## Ageing Well Partnership

**In 2018 the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised Greater Manchester as the first age-friendly city region.**

That same year, we launched an Age friendly Strategy Development Steering Group, with cross sector - multi agency leadership with a vision to commit to develop an Age-friendly strategy, to deliver the Age Well theme of Bolton Vision 2030 and contribute to GM's Age-friendly ambitions underpinned by the WHO Age-friendly domains.

Prior to the pandemic, a framework was developed for consultation which had over 800 responses to support the co-production and shaping the emerging strategy. Recognising the substantial changes brought by the pandemic and cost of living crisis, we revalidated the existing information alongside the use of more recent findings, to develop a strategy built around four themes: health and wellbeing, economic challenges, social implications and transport.

Our emerging Age-friendly strategy (2024-2027) is dedicated to ensuring that Bolton's older residents lead lives that are not only healthier and more independent, but also more fulfilling and interconnected. We are committed to fostering their wellbeing and dignity, improving access to preventive healthcare, and mental health resources, all while integrating the principles of the Falls Prevention Report. It is essential to cultivate an environment that supports the financial health of our older population. Our goal is to enhance understanding of benefits available to them, and provide opportunities for retraining, employment assistance, and connections with age-friendly businesses.

The evolving Age Well section of our JSNA has been essential to informing the development of Bolton's Age Friendly Strategy. The Age Well section has also allowed us, as a system, to have a more focussed approach, working collaboratively on specific work areas, identified by the data and intelligence from across the system and equally importantly by insights from older people themselves.



**We strive to address the social obstacles they face, fostering a community that is both welcoming and connected, and we are exploring innovative ways to support their desire to age happily and healthily in place. Lastly, in collaboration with our transport colleagues, we are working towards a transport system that is accessible and considerate of the needs of older people, promoting their independence and overall wellbeing.**

# Climate

## In 2019, Bolton Council declared a Climate Emergency, sparking a series of actions to address climate concerns.

The following year, Bolton Vision promoted a big climate conversation to collect residents' views, which informed the development of the Bolton Climate Change Strategy. By 2021, the strategy was endorsed by the council and the ACP Board, setting an ambitious goal to achieve net zero carbon emissions for council operations by 2030 and to collaborate with others to aim for a net zero carbon Bolton by the same year. The Bolton Climate Change strategy is not just for the council but is an integrated strategy for Bolton.

The strategy is bolstered by a cross-organisational Climate Change Delivery Team which promotes a connected approach across the Borough. It works towards 32 key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress across various climate-related activities. Some of these KPIs are outside the partnership's control, such as upcoming changes to national policy. Recognising this, as part of an update provided to the ACP Board there was an agreement to refine focus and concentrate on delivering the most impactful activity which has now begun to shape priorities.

Collaboration on climate work extends to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and other local authorities, aligning with the Greater Manchester Five-Year Environment

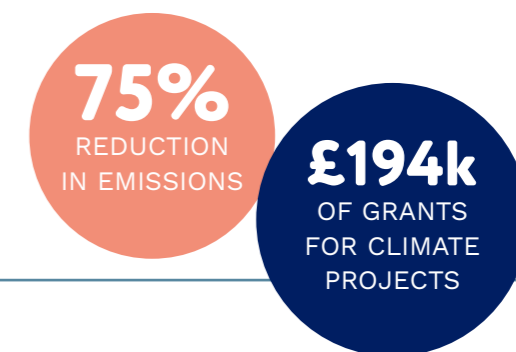


Plan and leveraging opportunities from the GM devolution deal to further refine the strategy.

Bolton Council supports climate action through its operations and has an internal group comprised of officers from across the council's functions to ensure climate change priorities are embedded throughout the council such as implementing a Carbon Management Plan (CMP) that has already achieved a 21.6% reduction in CO2 emissions since 2019.

## The council also facilitates broader initiatives, like the Bolton town centre heat network, funded by an £11m grant, which is projected to save 123,000 tonnes of carbon emissions over 40 years, a 75% reduction in emissions.

Additionally, the council has distributed over £194,000 of grants for climate projects, planted thousands of trees, improved recycling rates, and engaged the youth in environmental discussions. Despite these efforts, the council remains pragmatic, acknowledging that achieving its climate targets will be continually shaped by regional and national policies.



## Community Safety Partnership

Bolton's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has a statutory duty to bring together local partners to formulate and deliver strategies to reduce crime, tackle antisocial behaviour and make the borough a safer place. Our collaborative efforts extend throughout Greater Manchester, ensuring robust partnership connection. We have a strong working relationship with the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner, and we support the delivery of the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Plan.

Recently the CSP launched their Violence Prevention Strategy which is aimed at preventing and reducing serious violence in Bolton. This strategy draws on the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Needs Assessment 2023 which is an evidence-based analysis of information relating to the violent crime types, the drivers of crime within the partnership area and the cohorts who are most vulnerable.

**The three main priorities included within the Community Safety Delivery Plan 2023 – 2026 that are aligned with the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Plan are:**



To support this strategy, a comprehensive 7-week public consultation was conducted, gathering insights from 130 survey respondents on their perception and experiences with serious violence in Bolton. Additionally, a focused consultation involving 767 youths aged 10-18 years solicited their individual experiences related to serious violence. The feedback obtained has been instrumental in shaping a strategy that clearly delineates the issues and outlines targeted actions to mitigate serious violence.

Since February 2022, the Prevention, Intervention, Education, Diversion project (PIED) has been active, engaging 788 at-risk youths in proactive measures to avert their involvement in antisocial behaviour and crime.

Of these, 338 individuals (43%) have been directed to specific interventions or activities. Moreover, the Summer Violence Prevention Programme delivers, a 6-week initiative spanning five key areas in Bolton, with 295 youths participating in cost-free sports and activities.

Bolton proudly hosted the national Knife Angel monument standing some 27-foot tall and forged from over 100,000 confiscated blades, symbolising the perils of violence and the call for societal transformation. In conjunction with this initiative, the Council was able to distribute close to £11,000, which was distributed among 22 community groups to further their impactful work in reducing knife violence.

Active Lives Strategy is overseen by a Strategic Leadership Group.

The group will take the opportunity to connect better with current and future leisure offers, enabling appropriate fit with our Pivot to Active Wellbeing Programme.

## Active Lives Strategy

Our location provides fantastic opportunities for people to take part in physical activities. We want large numbers of people to be able to walk or cycle to work and around their communities; and we want our parks and green spaces to be hubs for all kinds of leisure activities, supporting people to stay active, make connections and be a part of local life. The local ambition is to create an environment where people are more active in their daily lives, which in turn will improve health and resilience across communities. This will increase physical and emotional wellbeing, improve life chances, employability, decrease dependence on health and social care services and support prosperity.

To support these ambitions, we have collaborated with our partners to formulate the Active Lives strategy. This five-year initiative, guided by our partners, is organised into seven distinct workstreams, each tailored to support and promote active lifestyles within our community.

Following the strategy's launch, considerable progress has been made across various initiatives. The Walk Once a Week project (WOW), a pupil-led initiative, has been successfully piloted in twelve schools, where students use the WOW Travel Tracker to log their sustainable travel to school, earning badges for their efforts.

In addition, the Type 2 diabetes pathway to remission programme has partnered with local venues in Bolton, such as Farnworth Leisure Centre, to deliver a national diabetes remission programme. Farnworth was selected due to its high number of referrals and patient preference for the location. As the programme grows, it



is anticipated that more centres across Bolton will be utilised based on referral patterns and area needs. The Community Stroke pilot project, funded by the national Stroke Quality Improvement in Rehabilitation (SQuiRE), is now operational and accepting referrals from the Community Stroke Team. This project aims to integrate stroke survivors in Bolton into community-based physical activities and wellbeing services, enhancing NHS community rehabilitation with the support of a dedicated Health Improvement Practitioner (HIP).

Moreover, the active travel network has been expanded with the completion of over 1.5km of new segregated cycleways, including three Cyclops junctions and upgrades to three crossings/junctions, promoting safer and more accessible routes for cyclists and pedestrians whilst six Bolton businesses have been successful with the active travel grants from TfGM.

Looking ahead, Bolton is making significant strides in community health initiatives. The development of a Community MECC (Making Every Contact Count) course is underway, empowering individuals working within communities. The Health Referral Pathway, co-designed with partners, aims to transition patients from clinical settings to community leisure activities. Health walks are being piloted around three GP practices in Horwich, linked to the new health centre currently under construction. Additionally, the Bolton NHS Neuro team and HIPs are pioneering a project that prescribes physical activity to enhance patient well-being. Furthermore, Bolton Council has secured additional Bikeability funds to support active travel, extending the Bikeability coordinator role for another year.



# 04

## Governance and culture

## Political makeup / Cabinet



**Cllr Nick Peel**  
Leader of the Council  
and lead member for  
Corporate



**Cllr Akhtar Zaman**  
Deputy Leader and  
lead member for  
Regeneration



**Cllr Sue Howarth**  
Lead member for  
Regulatory Services  
and Property



**Cllr Sean Fielding**  
Lead member for  
Adults, Health and  
Wellbeing



**Cllr Martin Donaghy**  
Lead member for  
Children's Services



**Cllr Richard Silvester**  
Lead member for  
Climate Change and  
Environment



**Cllr Rabiya Jiva**  
Lead member for  
Stronger Communities



**Cllr Hamid Khurram**  
Lead member for  
Transport, Housing and  
Highways



**Cllr Nadeem Ayub**  
Lead member for  
Culture

## Elected member support

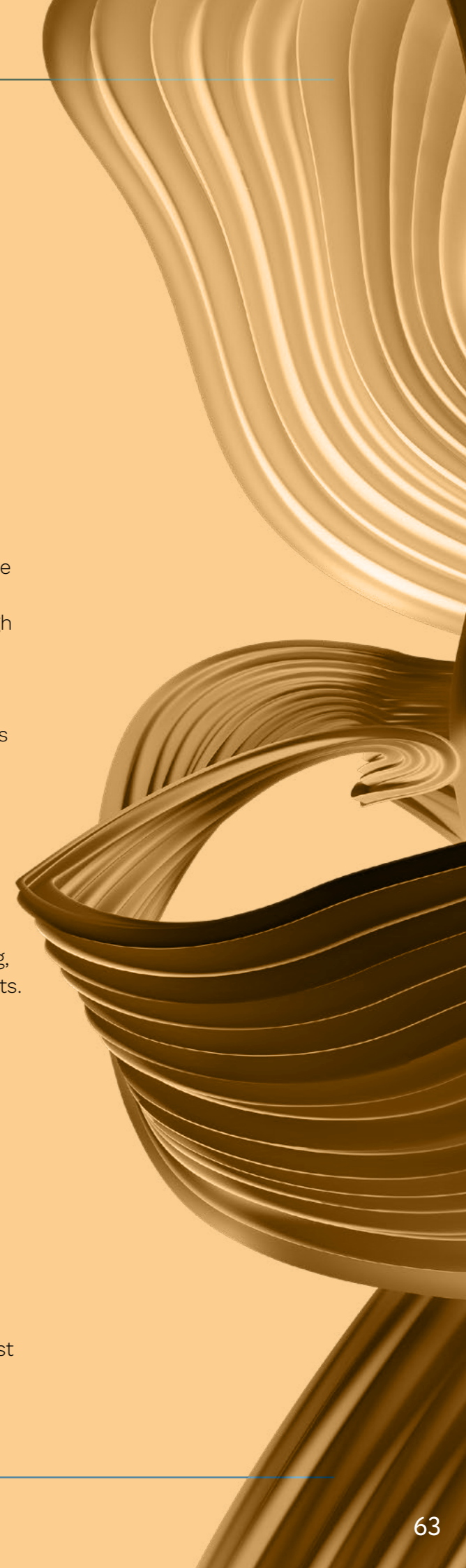
**At the spring local elections 2024, we welcomed nine new members to the authority.**

These members receive a broad training and welcome pack that acquaints them with the council's roles, services, and decision-making processes. The Borough Solicitor provides additional specific training on the code of conduct, governance, and decision-making.

Members serving on planning or licensing committees also receive specialised training, and all our elected members are trained on child sexual exploitation prevention. Alongside this, members are also introduced to the Corporate Leadership Team to discuss their service areas and priorities.

The council also employs the LGA Councillor Hub, offering elected members resources, support, training, and the opportunity to attend and participate in events. Our e-learning system features modules on a variety of topics, including data protection, constitutional support, financial management, scrutiny, and other pertinent subjects, to further enhance elected members understanding.

Elected members are also encouraged to draw on the resources, especially specialist briefings that are provided through our subscription to the Local Government Information Unit. Finally, we have introduced our elected members to the 'Life as a Councillor' programme which provides elected members with an insight to what it means to be a 21st century councillor in local government.





## Constitution and decision making

The council's constitution outlines how we will operate and the procedures that are followed to ensure that decision making is sound, efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. Some of the processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the council to choose. The council's rules of procedure contains the procedural rules for Cabinet, Scrutiny and formal council meetings which are contained in part 4 of the Constitution.

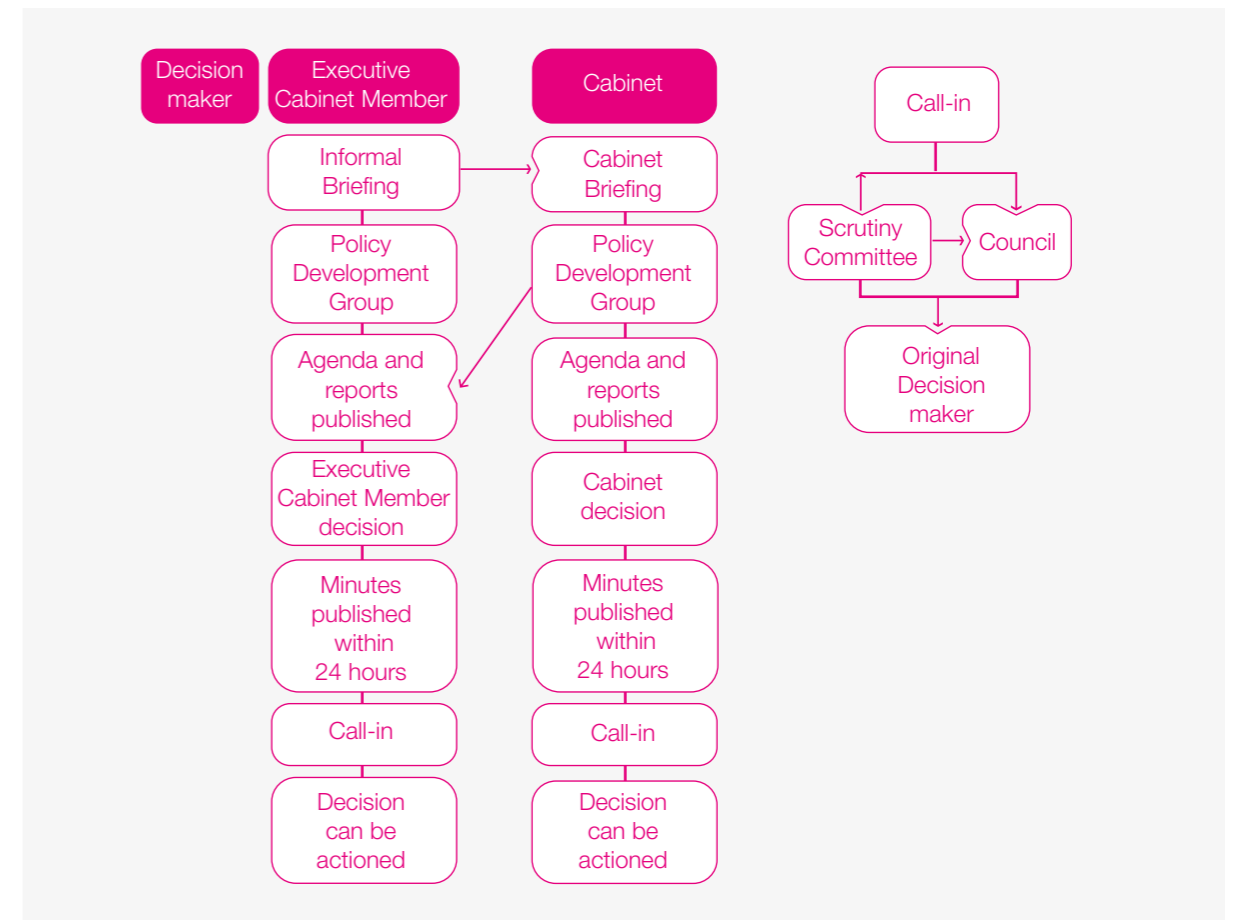
Decision making meetings for Executive Cabinet Members (ECMs) and Cabinet are scheduled every four weeks. Decisions may be taken by individual leads or where relevant taken to Cabinet for decision. As part of the forward planning process, if a report is going to Executive Cabinet Members the report must go the respective Directorate Leadership Team for sign-off and approval and Corporate Leadership Team when being shared with Cabinet. Cabinet has a weekly briefing session to discuss upcoming items.

Each ECM is also given an informal briefing which consists of the ECM lead, responsible senior officer and report author. This provides an opportunity for the lead to ask any questions which may need to be considered prior to the formal meeting.

Following this, the formal meeting takes place, with a formal agenda and is available for viewing online either during or post-meeting. As part of these meetings, spokespersons for opposition groups are invited to attend and following each decision a period is made available for the report to be called-in to scrutiny.

Decisions may be called-in and referred to scrutiny by any member who is present when the decision is made, at which point the committee can note the decision, refer the decision back to the original decision maker, with or without comment, or refer the decision to council.

The council's scrutiny committees are:  
**Health Overview and Adults Social Care, Place, Childrens and Corporate and External issues.**



Alongside these there are also several committees to conduct non-executive functions. These include:

- Planning Committee
- Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee and its sub-committees
- Standards Committee
- Audit Committee
- Active Connected and Prosperous Board when conducting statutory Health and Wellbeing business

In some instances, we have also used cross-party Policy Development Groups which are used to progress sensitive subjects. More recently the Leader has established a Chairs' meeting of cross-party leads to enable more transparency and collaboration on matters affecting the Council.

As part of our approach to modernising, we have recently introduced ModernGov and also plan to conduct a review of our governance.

Whilst we have robust governance processes in place, we welcome, any feedback our peers might have that help us to further improve and modernise the governance function within the council.

## The Corporate Leadership Team



**Sue Johnson**  
Chief Executive



**Lee Fallows**  
Director of Corporate Resources



**Rachel Tanner**  
Director of Adults, Communities and Integration



**Jon Dyson**  
Director of Place



**Sandra Bruce**  
Interim Director of Children's Services



**Lynn Donkin**  
Director of Public Health



**Tony Glennon**  
Borough Treasurer / S151 Officer



**Helen Gorman**  
Borough Solicitor

## Senior management makeup

The Corporate Leadership Team is made up of the Chief Executive and respective directors across the five directorates, the council's S151 officer and the Borough Solicitor. CLT meet on a weekly basis, and this is a key part of the council's governance structure with respect to strategic and operational decisions.

Since our previous peer challenge, our forward planning process has been significantly improved to improve efficiency and clarity around decision making. In this process, CLT provide the key link from officer to Executive Cabinet Member with respect to the decisions that lead members will make. CLT provide an additional test of the efficacy of decisions before being taken through for elected member decision and sign off. Bi-monthly, the Corporate Leadership Team meet with Assistant Directors to form our Wider Leadership Team which is used to collaborate on cross-cutting projects and share essential updates. Examples of this include development of our new Corporate Plan and inviting in VCSE Leaders on a quarterly basis as highlighted previously.

CLT have recently participated in a top-team session alongside our Cabinet and the LGA to further strengthen and promote a high-support, high-challenge ethos which has helped us to refine our priorities in the new Corporate Plan.

**Finally, the recommendations that emerge from this Corporate Peer Challenge will form the basis of a workplan for CLT which will serve as our required delivery plan, subject to review by the LGA next year.**

## Risk management and audit

The Council's Risk Management strategy was fully refreshed in 2024 and a new approach is in the process of being rolled out. It outlines the Council's strategic approach to how we detect and respond to our risks whilst providing clarity on the duties and responsibilities associated with this. It describes risk appetite and the approach to risk management.

Each directorate owns its respective risk register and is responsible for managing these with support from the Assurance and Risk Management Team. It is our longer term ambition to integrate risk management alongside our performance boards to provide services with greater awareness and alignment between their risks and their performance and delivery.

In conjunction with our risk management strategy, we are currently reviewing our Annual Governance Statement (AGS) process. Our goal is to refresh our approach, with the prospect of broadening this approach to facilitate continuous annual assurance planning and collection. This will lay the groundwork for the AGS in subsequent years. The revised strategy includes the formation of a

corporate governance group, which will collaborate with directorates to evaluate their governance assurance levels. The insights gained from this evaluation will guide the enhancement of governance actions, address challenges, and provide support for the 2024/2025 period. Additionally, this new approach will involve the creation of director assurance statements to support our overall governance approach.

The Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Audit Plan undergo an annual evaluation, with prioritisation given to areas identified by internal audit as carrying known risks and agreed with CLT and Audit Committee. This approach is also used to guide the Internal Audit element of the Council's counter fraud approach which is described in the Annual Anti-Fraud Strategy and Report. This includes having a fraud risk assessment in place and these are being further developed at directorate and service level in 2024. Risk, Audit and Counter fraud services are delivered through a collaboration with Manchester City Council and this approach is being developed to strengthen the current services and release further benefits and resilience that derive from a shared service.



**Looking ahead, we aim to further evolve and align our risk and assurance approach with wider services such as governance, performance, safety and finance. This proactive and collegiate approach is crucial for integrating risk considerations efficiently into our broader corporate planning and reporting processes.**

## Supporting our current and future workforce

Bolton Council currently employs over 6,000 staff, 3,324 in the council and 2,700 in community and voluntary controlled schools, in over 500 different roles. Over the last 12 years the overall council workforce has reduced by 25%.

Services provided by the HR and OD team focus on supporting complex cases, change and transformation initiatives, collaboration on cross-

council programmes and working to address the challenges facing local government including recruitment, retention and an ageing workforce. We aim to deliver a modern, best-practice approach to staff development and wellbeing, proactive and statutory compliant health and safety advice alongside a values-based approach to people management and development, supported by the council's HR People Plan which set outs five key priorities:

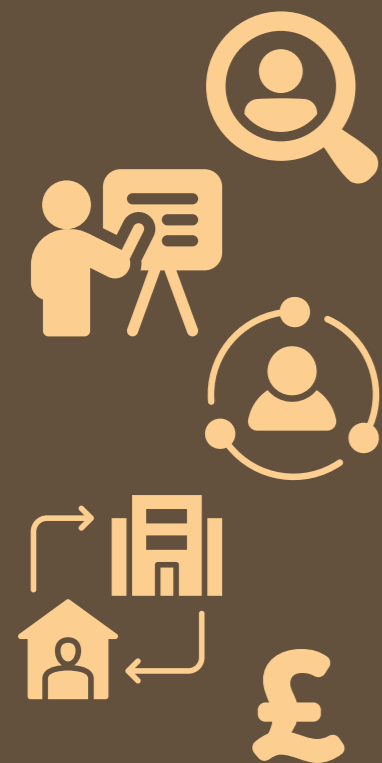
Bolton Council is actively addressing recruitment and retention challenges in local government by modernising recruitment processes, extending workforce representation, and supporting digital inclusion through collaborations with local organisations.

Efforts include creating informative 'Top Tips', utilising social media, producing British Sign Language videos, and promoting the 'Make a Difference - Join the Bolton Family!' brand. We have been working with our schools and education providers as part of the LGA 'Love local government' campaign to create a pathway for our future workforce, as well as attending various school jobs and skills fairs and offering work experience placements to encourage new and emerging talent into local government.

To enhance retention, initiatives like welcome cards, improved staff benefits, and a Young Employees Network has been introduced. Additionally, a new E-Recruitment system is being implemented to streamline applications and data

management, while flexible and hybrid working practices are being realigned to adapt to post-pandemic needs. Our organisational development programme has delivered over 600 courses to upwards of 7100 trainees over the last 12 months. Staff are able to access internal opportunities such as career pathways and apprenticeships and for 23/24 we have had 42 employees on apprenticeship schemes, committing over £376,000 of the apprenticeship levy. In 2024, a new cohort of apprentice and graduate opportunities has been designed, to create new entry level posts. The council also runs various leadership development, coaching and mentoring schemes conducive to succession planning.

**We are also committed to supporting staff through cost-of-living challenges with a comprehensive suite of initiatives. During Talk Money Week, staff had access to a variety of events and webinars covering financial topics from pensions to energy efficiency.**



- 1. Improve our recruitment approach**
- 2. Enhance our learning and development offer for all staff**
- 3. Maximise the use of HR data and system capabilities**
- 4. Realign our flexible and hybrid working practices**
- 5. Support staff with the cost-of-living challenges**

The council pays the Foundation Living Wage rate to all our employed staff and have also recently been awarded the Good Employment Charter. Beyond this, we promote the local credit union, Hoot, and have introduced Vivup (a one stop shop app) as a provider of staff benefits and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), offering discounts and lifestyle support as well as a car lease scheme for staff.

In terms of our overall wellbeing offer, Bolton Council ensures staff feel valued and equipped to manage life's challenges and supports staff at all ages and life stages, offering initiatives such as flexible working, job sharing and hybrid working. Dedicated intranet pages offer guidance on topics like menopause and stress awareness, mental health first aid, enabling support via physiotherapy, counselling, and occupational health services. The council also provides up to three days of paid volunteering leave and has achieved a Silver Status in the Armed Forces Covenant, Public Health events, wellbeing activities, and training courses are regularly promoted, alongside inclusivity efforts through the EDI – LGBTQ+ network and Race Allies Network. A variety of training programmes are available, both corporate-wide and sector-specific,

such as for Adult Social Care and Social Workers. The Me-Learning platform offers a wide range of mandatory and professional development courses accessible to all council staff.

Our sickness absence rate for 2023/24 was 6.8%, with stress/depression/mental health and musculoskeletal forming the two main categories for absence whilst our turnover rate was 9.79%, with the highest turnover being in our Children's Services and Place Directorates. We have a comprehensive mental health and wellbeing suite of training which is offered to all staff ranging from short 1-hour workshops to multiple session courses. These include the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, Connect 5, Mental Health First Aid and Live Life to the Full.

The council maintains a strong collaborative relationship with Trade Unions, regularly working together with them to deliver changes and initiatives. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Assistant Director of HR engage in bi-weekly dialogues with Unison and GMB to address corporate and policy matters. The council has a well-defined structure with member-led joint committees, while chief officers and HR meet with trade union representatives to discuss and resolve directorate issues.



In parallel, we foster partnerships with other local authorities in Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, exemplified by collaborative work to deliver regional contracts such as our recruitment website, the GM social work pledge and various other contracts in relation to occupational health, DBS and e-learning.

These collaborations ensure uniform practices across the region, contributing to making Greater Manchester an attractive place for employment. Moreover, we work in tandem with voluntary sector organisations including Citizens Advice Bureau and Bolton CVS, offering mutual support, guidance, and services such as DBS checks for their personnel.

# Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

As a major public sector organisation, Bolton Council strives to achieve equity and inclusion for the borough. This means ensuring that our residents, workforce and our partner organisations are treated fairly.

In 2021 we launched our new Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Reflecting upon the challenges faced by the town during the Covid-19 pandemic and the widespread inequalities experienced by our residents, it showed us that to deliver our Bolton 2030 vision, we must put equality, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of everything we do. To underpin our aspirations for Bolton, we recognised the need to support, strengthen and develop our workforce and infrastructure, enabling our staff to be more informed and better able to represent the communities they serve.

Through a process of engagement, consultation, investigation and self-assessment, we identified three equality objectives aimed at strengthening internal processes and procedures.

**These objectives are now equipping our workforce with the skills and tools required to support our diverse population and programmes of work:**

**Embed equalities training and awareness at all levels of the organisation.**

**Review and improve our processes around equalities and diversity demonstrating due regard to the Public Sector Equalities Duty and transparency in our decision making.**

**Ensure that our collection of equalities data is robust and sufficient to provide the required information for our decision-making processes.**

To ensure the EDI agenda is firmly rooted in the organisation's ethos and delivery plans, Bolton Council has appointed the Director of Corporate Resources as strategic lead for this programme area. Furthermore, an operational EDI Improvement Group meet monthly to support the organisation with its commitment to integrate equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its services and to help secure its ambition to ensure that equalities and diversity is embedded at all levels of the organisation. Staff networks have been established to support employees with protected characteristics, and our political member portfolio now includes EDI.

To build knowledge, understanding and resilience of our workforce and address some of the challenges around inequalities raised during the pandemic, mandatory EDI training has taken place. We also offer a range of other development opportunities to deepen understanding, including training for our newly appointed elected members. In addition, each year we support a range of EDI campaigns, enabling us to support our workforce, raise awareness and celebrate our diverse communities.

**To ensure that EDI permeates throughout all our strategies, policies, service delivery and decision making, understanding our data and intelligence has become intrinsic to our processes.**

We use the Bolton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment platform as a tool to enable our officers and wider partners to access key statistical and analytic evidence, supporting them to be better informed when undertaking initiatives that impact our residents, businesses and visitors. Recently, the EDI service has been placed within the Strategy, Policy and Area Working function to further embed its strategic importance within the council.



## Staff culture and engagement

Bolton Council's Values and Behaviours Framework is designed to support the Bolton 2030 Vision by guiding staff behaviour and decision-making processes. The framework was developed with input from council staff and outlines five core values:

**Accountability**  
take responsibility for actions, stand by decisions...

**Making a difference**  
work to a high standard, provide a quality service, keep it simple...

**Honesty and respect**  
be truthful, open, fair, treat others how you want to be treated...

**Determination**  
don't give up, remain positive and open to new ideas...

**Working together**  
share knowledge, support, collaborate for better outcomes...

These values are intended to foster a culture of responsibility, quality service, transparency, perseverance, and collaboration. They are practical expectations that shape the daily work life and interactions within the council, aiming to build a cohesive team that is equipped to meet the challenges of the future and achieve our Vision.

The Values and Behaviours form an integral part of how we conduct business, be it inclusion in our interview process, a key feature of the PDR or setting the standards for staff conduct. Our most recent staff survey has checked in on how these values and behaviours drive our workforce and we have used the findings to inform the next version of our Corporate Plan.

Employees are at the forefront of the Bolton Brand, sharing our values and key messages, not only at work but also out in the community and with family and friends. Regular and effective communication helps inform, educate and develop two-way engagement with staff at all levels, providing a unified sense of purpose and belonging that reflects positively on our corporate vision and goals.



To achieve this, we use a variety of communication channels to unite our staff. The new MS Viva Engage platform fosters community and engagement. These include CEO briefings, both live and recorded, comprehensive staff satisfaction surveys, and updates cascaded through senior management. Our communication efforts are bolstered by weekly online news, important updates via the Chief Executive's emails, and targeted service level announcements. Through staff engagement tools, we have been able to adopt a 'you said, we did' approach, more recently with updates to our hybrid working policy and staff benefits offer.

The intranet serves as a hub for detailed information, complimented by visual displays throughout the workplace that reinforce our values and behaviours. Virtual meetings via MS Teams, hybrid meeting rooms, and Viva Engage communities ensure continuous connection, while initiatives like Bolton's Best staff awards and Digital Aiders support our commitment to excellence and peer collaboration and offer us an opportunity to celebrate the successes of our staff.



# 05

## Financial planning and management



The council has continued to face significant financial challenges since 2010. Originally this was in the form of grant cuts, and we had to make cuts to our services accordingly. However, in the latter few years the greater concern has been one of rising demand particularly in Children’s and Adults’ Services. This together with high inflation has seen the council put additional funds into these areas only then to have to make cuts to balance its budget. We have now made in excess of £200m of cuts since 2010.

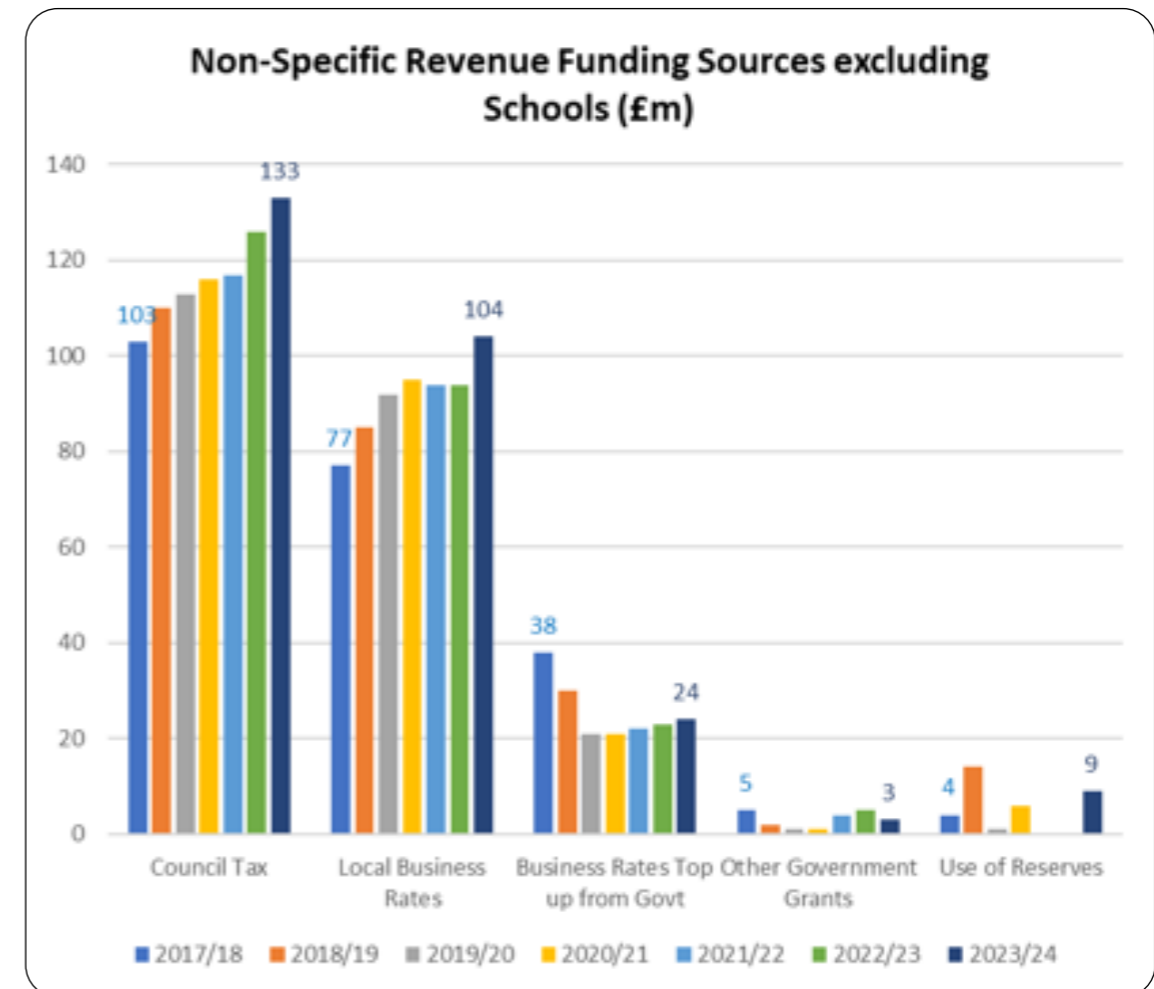
Each budget year we have introduced a cuts programme agreed firstly by officers then elected members. This has been managed and monitored throughout the year to ensure successful delivery. Local Government Finance Settlements have been one-year settlements, sometimes with additional funding for Social Care. Whilst the additional funding has been essential, nevertheless this approach to funding makes financial planning beyond the following financial year extremely difficult.

## Expectations with regard to local government funding

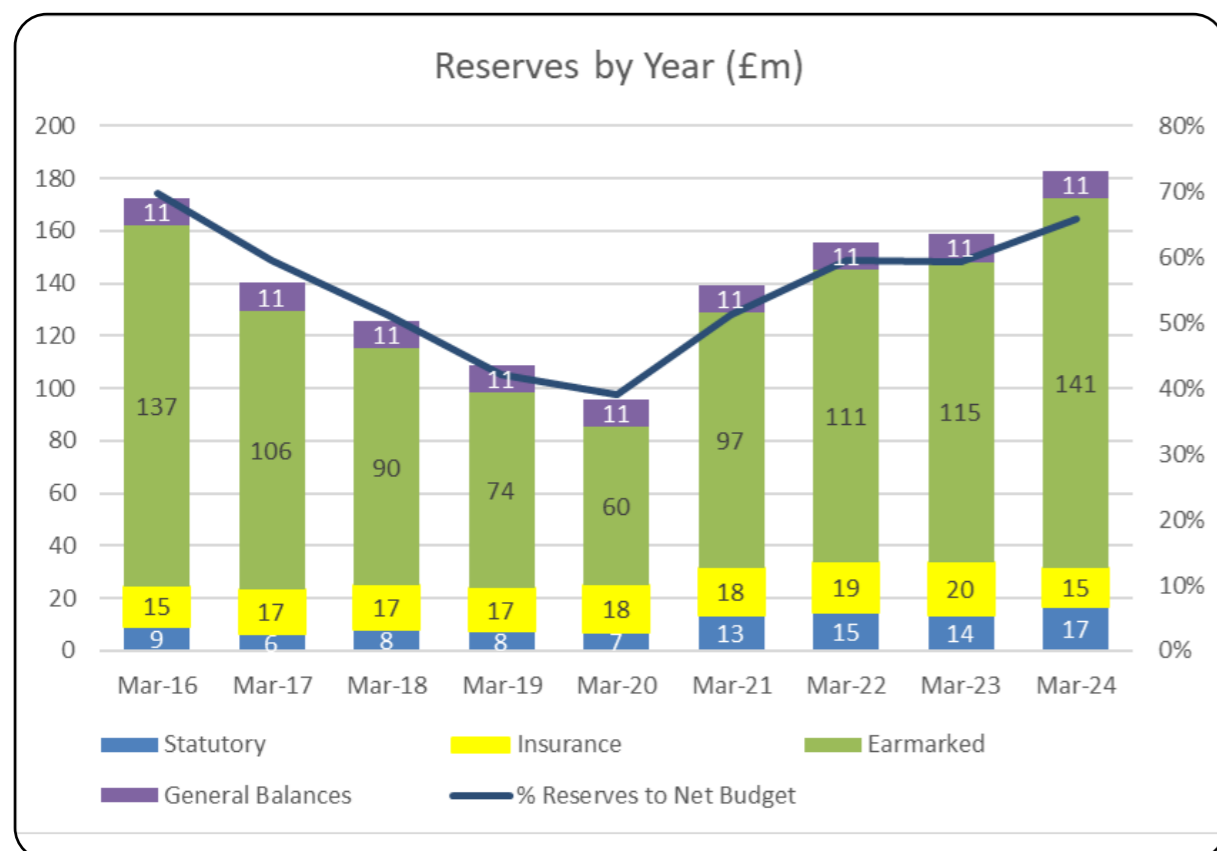
The government has confirmed the assumption for the future path of departmental spending. This will follow the profile set at Spring Budget 2023. After this Spending Review period, planned departmental resource spending will continue to grow at 1% a year on average in real terms, which implies real-terms cuts for unprotected local government services over the lifetime of the next parliament under current plans.

## Summary financial position

As the graph highlights below, locally generated Council tax and Business Rates are the major sources of general income to fund our services. Our Core Spending Power (i.e. the sum of all resources available to us) only increases because we pass on to local residents the council tax increase the government assumes.



The chart below shows the percentage of reserves held compared to our net budget (at the end of Mar-24 we held £184m equating to circa 66% of our net budget).



Within the Earmarked Reserve figures above are two specific reserves (1) the Corporate Budget Reserve (balance £35m) and (2) the Financial Resilience Reserve (£20m). In addition, the council's General Fund Balance stands at £11m. Overall these non-departmental reserves account for almost 40% of the total reserves.

The council now subscribes to LG Improve who undertake balance sheet health check comparisons against other local authorities.

**The Medium-Term Financial Plan covering the next three years assumes a further £18m cuts will be required to balance the budget.**

	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>580.77</b>	<b>589.37</b>	<b>601.55</b>
<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>573.35</b>	<b>584.01</b>	<b>596.60</b>
<b>Surplus / (Deficit/Cuts Requirement)</b>	<b>(7.42)</b>	<b>(5.36)</b>	<b>(4.95)</b>

**The council's external debt stands at £158m, a reduction of £20m from the position at Mar-22.**

The council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with regards to the Council's risk appetite. The council generated circa £7m in income in 2023/24 from investments in banks and other local authorities.

Politically since 2019 the council has not had a Party in overall control. The requirement to set a legal budget annually has involved the major party being reliant at best on smaller party support or at worst abstentions.

## Budget Planning Process

The council has a strongly embedded budget process. In early Summer initial forecasts are provided to the Corporate Leadership Team about the likely pressures and financial impact for the following financial year. During Summer, these pressures are refined and fed into the Medium-Term Financial Plan. In early Autumn this is presented to Cabinet members before a report is made public in early November on the expected financial challenge for the following year. In December, the cuts options are made public, and consultation commences, all in advance of receiving the Finance Settlement in mid to late December. Consultation is concluded in mid-January and a Budget Report is taken to Cabinet in February followed by Budget Council later that month.

## Savings and Efficiencies Programme

Robust programme management is in place to manage the cuts targets, overseen by the Corporate Savings and Change Delivery Board and chaired by the Director of Corporate Resources, which meets quarterly. This brings together representatives from each directorate, finance, HR and the Programme Management Office to monitor performance and risk, share information, and join up activity with the Digital and Corporate Change Programmes where relevant.

## Financial Monitoring

Reports are taken to individual Executive Cabinet Members on a quarterly basis. The overall aggregate monitor is also taken to the Leader's Executive Cabinet Member portfolio quarterly. In addition, finance colleagues work closely with service managers throughout the year to identify and react to any upcoming financial pressures.

## Capital

The current capital programme totals £200m. Almost half of this covers regeneration activities across the borough, and one quarter schools' expansion schemes, both predominantly funded by government grants. In the current climate there is a risk that capital projects go over budget and there is an additional requirement for council funds. There is a capital reserve held corporately to mitigate against this.

Greater Manchester Devolution Deal  
The Deal confirms Government's intentions to negotiate and implement a Single Settlement (capital and revenue) with GMCA at the next Spending Review.

The deal sets out some key principles, agreeing the Settlement will:

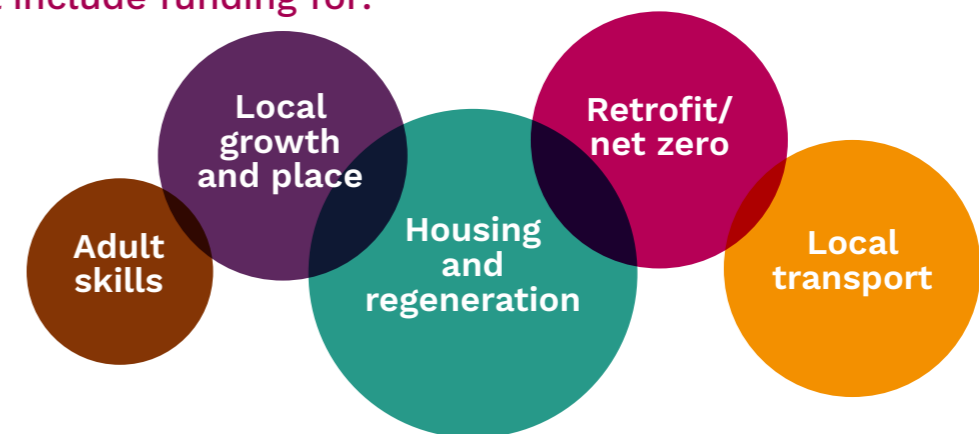
Cover an entire Spending Review period.

Replace individual grant funding streams.

Be the default mechanism for receiving funding in areas covered by the settlement.

Be subject to a single, streamlined accountability framework.

It will include funding for:



Secondly 100% Business Rates Retention will continue for a further 10 years. GMCA will retain 100% of their business rates for 10 years (25% retained by GMCA and 75% retained by LA).

This retention pilot aims to stimulate economic growth and empower GM.

- Three growth zones across GM with 600 hectares combined.
- Two investment zones across GM with 600 hectares combined.

Subject to National System Reset (2025/26 at earliest)



# 06

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## Capacity for improvement

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## Demand management in adults and children's social care

Our vision for social care in Bolton is to continue to make a positive difference every day, supporting children, young people, and adults to live as full and safe a life as possible and make informed choices, alongside the complex challenge of managing demand for adults and children's social care and SEND services.

As a local authority, we must strike a delicate balance between providing essential support to vulnerable individuals and ensuring fiscal sustainability. The challenges are not new, but are a product of longstanding deprivation, which means we are seeing increases in need and complexity across social care and SEND services in times of continuing financial challenges for the council.

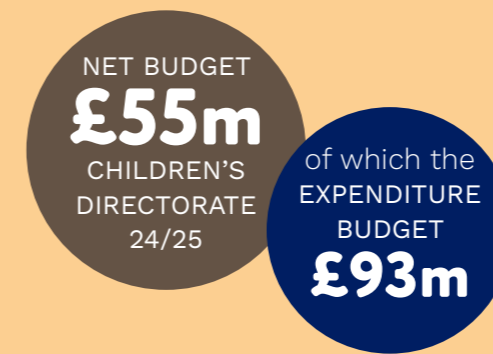
In Bolton, there are upwards of 10,000 adults receiving care and support from the local authority, over 580 looked after children and an 11-year difference in average life expectancy between our communities. We expect the volume of children, young people and adults requiring support in Bolton to continue to rise significantly and needs of these people to be increasingly complex. Despite this, our recent Ofsted inspection resulted in Bolton Council

Children's Services rated 'Good' when it comes to looking after youngsters in care and those at risk whilst our Adult Social Care Home Support Reablement Service was rated 'Good' by the CQC, reflecting our ongoing commitment to keeping residents at the heart of what we do.

For 24/25 the Children's directorate has a net budget of £55m of which the expenditure budget is £93m whilst in the Adults directorate there is a net budget of £84m of which the expenditure budget is £179m. In 22/23 and 23/24 the expenditure has outweighed the Children's budget. The majority of the overspend was on the placements budgets and Bolton has been experiencing between 7% and 10% inflationary increases in this area. The has necessitated additional corporate support.

In Adults, 77.2% of the expenditure budget is allocated to contracts and commissioned services and there is a heavy reliance on the contribution of grants.

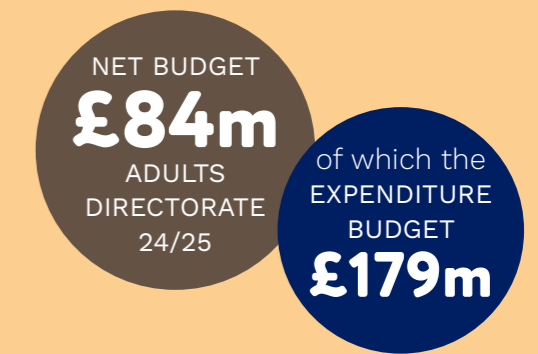
Within Adult Social Care there has been a strategic focus since September 2021 to refocus strategic direction on Living Well at home and creating an approach to managing increasing demand emerging from the pandemic



and the data trends that showed increasing older population, service and dementia demand trends. The initial two years strategy endorsed by Cabinet has now been consumed into the Vision and priorities for Adult Social Care and woven into the Transformation and innovation plan that is overseen by the DASS through the Quality, Performance and Finance Board governance structure within the directorate. There is a key focus on improving strengths based practice and neighbourhood partnership working, redesigning models of care for short term care and discharge from hospital, tech enabled care and developing a prevention approach all of which are underpinned by key enablers and best in class commissioning.

The performance governance has a dedicated subgroup chaired by AD for Social Care operations overseeing key actions delivering financial efficiency programs and embedding learning from a focussed independent review of Home care demand by Glenesk.

Given continued demand pressures in future years, partnership working is one of the keys to us relieving some of this demand. Children's and Adult Social Care cannot operate alone,



especially given the national and regionally led changes underway with the development of the Integrated Care Systems (ICS) alongside our already well-developed local relationships and plans. In Bolton we already have strong, robust relationships with our system partners, voluntary, community and faith sector and our key stakeholders in the Borough. As one of the 10 placed-based partnerships we can also collaborate to address specific Bolton based challenges and deliver within Bolton the component parts of the Greater Manchester ICS.

Beyond this, in Bolton we have a vibrant voluntary, community, and faith sector. With the right support and conditions there is immense scope for the sector to continue to play an integral role in both the development and the delivery of services. This has been clearly demonstrated in the development and delivery of the highly successful Bolton's Fund to support grant giving locally and we see Bolton's Fund as an avenue to complement our recently developed commissioned strategy. As such, we are initiating a review of our existing prevention-focused grants to explore opportunities for converting them into contractual agreements, to guarantee longer and more secure funding periods.

Our joint commissioning strategy identifies the commissioning principles and priorities for Adult and Children's Social Care and how we underpin our commissioning approach through our Quality Assurance and Improvement offer. As part of this strategy, aligning closely with the emerging Bolton2040, we are putting a greater emphasis on prevention. We believe prevention is about people in Bolton living well, for longer, in a place that they call home.

We believe that prevention has a vital role to play in reducing, or delaying the escalation of problems and issues, to the point where access to more formal or long-term services or support is reduced or is no longer needed. In the coming year, we will work with our Public Health colleagues to develop a prevention and inequalities framework which will articulate Bolton's vision for prevention, ensuring that we retain a strong focus on achieving better outcomes for individuals, families and communities as well as meeting the financial challenges.

To support our demand management, demand boards have been established across the two directorates with respective demand management programmes being worked through to identify improvement areas for directorates.

Our Children's Demand Management Programme encompasses 13 distinct projects, each aimed at areas such as prevention, demand management, commissioning, capacity building, and enabling factors. The primary goal of these projects is to achieve cost savings and tangible financial benefits. Given the scale and complexity of this transformative agenda, a step-by-step implementation is necessary, taking into account our current resources and capabilities. As we move forward, we will further refine our strategies to support and enhance a comprehensive preventative family support system. The programme's direction is steered by the Demand Management Programme Board, ensuring alignment with the overarching objectives of the Children's Directorate Plan.

**We acknowledge the intricate web of interdependencies that exist among numerous services and partnerships, including our anti-poverty strategy, adult services, and healthcare provisions and acknowledge the importance of effective processes and planning to address this demand pressure.**



## Corporate Change Programme

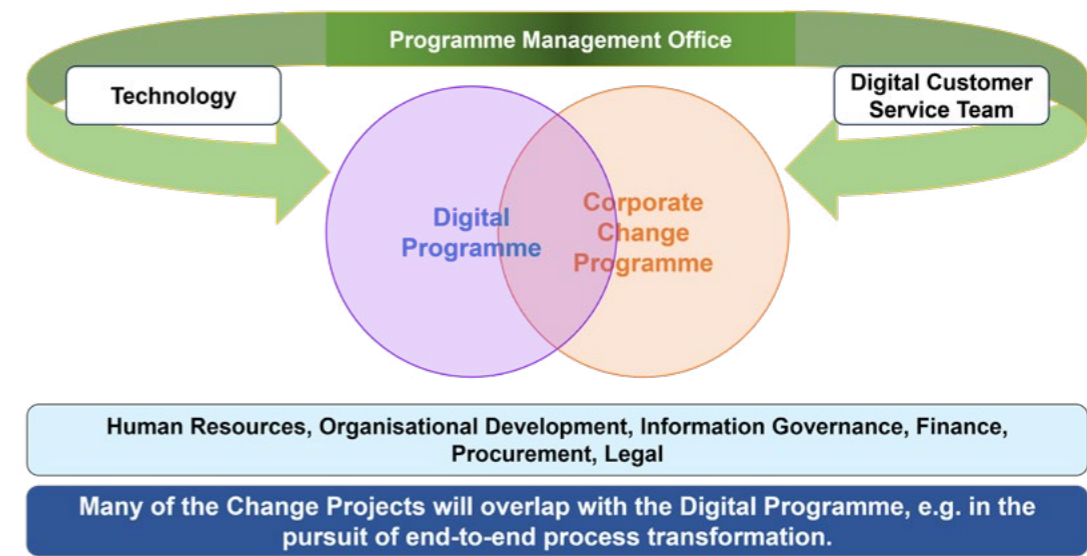
In 2022, recognising the need to better assess our approach to transformation, our corporate change programme was launched with the recruitment of change managers. Change managers support the council to deliver complex, strategic and system-level change across the organisation, providing capacity for Process Transformation projects in the Digital Strategy. Their role is to look holistically at the service or problem, and collaboratively identify solutions that are evidence-led, customer-centred and sustainable. This is done by working with services to map out the current service processes and identify the issues, and co-design the future service with the team.

Priority is given to One-Council projects which support the Corporate Plan priorities and those that contribute to a balanced budget by identifying cashable savings or reducing demand and associated costs. At present there are 6 live projects all at various stages and 4 projects have been completed since launch of the programme in January 2023.

The programme management office is the responsibility of the Deputy Director, Corporate Resources. In 2023 the Corporate Property Service was

transferred into the transformation service and this shift has redirected a substantial portion of focus to this service area, subsequently affecting the change management programme. Simultaneously, the team's resources have been reduced due to staff vacancies, which has had an impact on the delivery of projects.

To ease these pressures, we have received approval to appoint an Assistant Director to manage the corporate property service and are currently recruiting for the vacant change management posts. Once back to full capacity we acknowledge the importance of collaborating with DLTs to pinpoint areas where we can achieve the most significant cost savings and generate positive outcomes for our residents. In line with this, we understand the necessity to enhance cooperation and ensure that transformation efforts and service delivery are synchronised rather than operating in silos. The change management programme offers a valuable opportunity to make these improvements, but it requires a supportive organisational culture to thrive, and we recognise we still have work to achieve this.



At present, we are using the LG Inform Transformation and Innovation Exchange self-assessment tool and LGA Transformation Capability tools, to better understand where we are on our improvement journey and use these findings to inform our practice over the next year. Once back to full capacity, we can reassess our projects and map out how we best realise these. One of these projects will be the implementation of self-service which will have the potential to give staff everything they need to manage their time as an employee outside of day-to-day job tasks and everything a manager needs to manage staff effectively. This involves streamlining processes and reducing paperwork to realise multiple benefits including increased efficiency, cost savings, improved staff satisfaction, and a smaller environmental footprint.

As we concentrate on addressing demand, we will advance related projects however, it is crucial that these initiatives are conducted in a collaborative manner to ensure demand boards are integrated with the change management programme. The introduction of the new planning time agreement extension was, for example one element of a comprehensive review of our planning processes to enhance efficiency, whilst our highways change management project is dedicated to streamlining our systems, aiming to cut costs and bolster consistency across the board.

As we look to instate a more consistent approach to project management, we will continue to roll out The Bolton Way, a project management toolkit and training for all staff to use who are involved in project management. We welcome the peer team's views on ways in which we can further strengthen the delivery of our overall approach to transformation.

## Transforming services through our Digital Strategy

In 2021, Bolton Council initiated a digital programme, marking a major advancement in the council's adoption of technology to deliver services. We focused on facilitating digital access for residents and businesses, streamlining council operations, and equipping staff and elected members with the necessary tools and expertise.

### The programme is structured around six key themes:

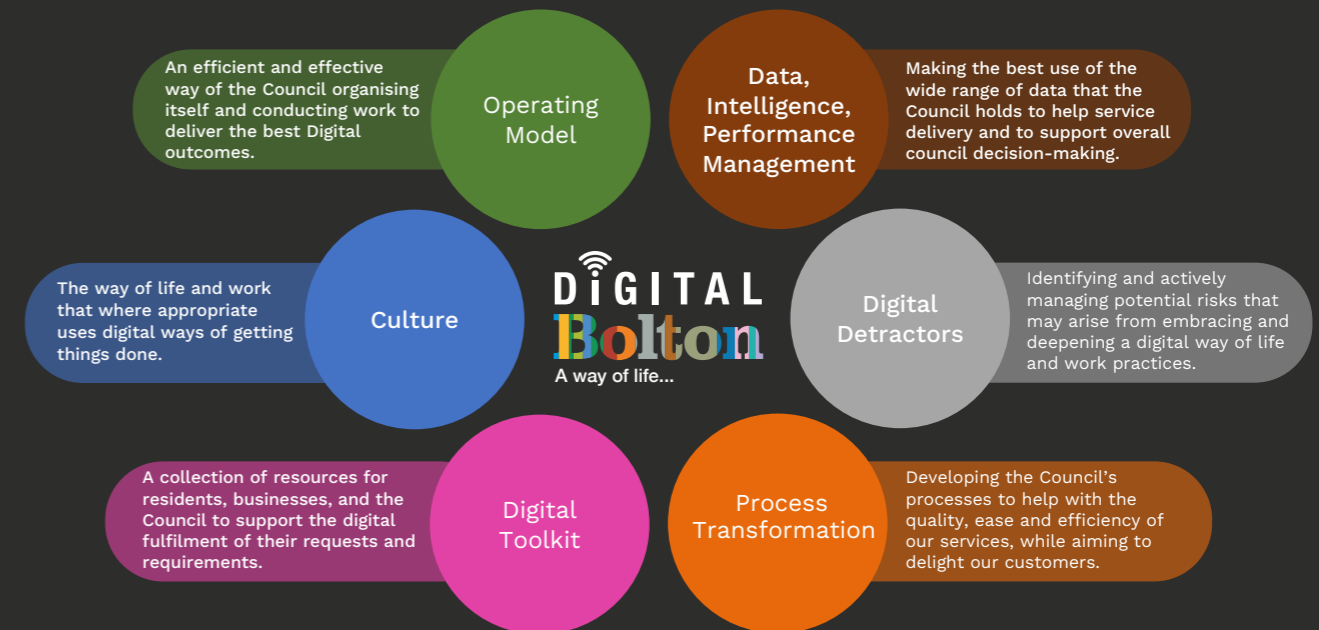
- Culture
- Process Transformation
- Digital Toolkit
- Data, Intelligence and Performance Management
- Operating Model
- Digital Detractors

Each theme is championed by a dedicated sponsor and lead, tasked with pinpointing critical work areas for delivery. The programme's complexity is evident, with numerous projects intersecting multiple themes and of considerable magnitude, such as the ICT contract retender.

Since its launch, the programme has seen significant progress with several pivotal projects. The deployment of digital aiders has unified tech-savvy individuals within the organisation to bolster the digital proficiency of staff. Additionally, there have been over 1000 enrolments in Microsoft learning programmes. The transition to online payslips has substantially cut down paper usage: over 150,000 sheets annually, aiding our environmental objectives and contributing towards Digital Programme financial benefits of £0.9 million per annum.

The digital programme presents a chance to bolster our data capabilities and realise financial gains through new tools for data visualisation and infrastructure. As part of this approach, we recognise the value of deploying data effectively within the organisation.

Currently, the council holds fragmented information across various systems and directorates, limiting data sharing potential. To foster a more integrated approach, we are currently migrating our applications to the cloud. This move toward improved accessibility serves as a stepping stone for an emerging data strategy, underpinned by strong data principles.



In 2023, Bolton's Research and Intelligence Network (BRAIN) was established to facilitate collaboration among analysts and relevant stakeholders from the Council and partners. The goal is to create a more cohesive approach to data sharing and joint analytical work. Whilst there have been some joint-working examples, we aim to refine BRAIN's focus in the coming year, ensuring alignment with organisational priorities. In addition, we must provide our analysts with the essential tools to carry out their work. Recently, we have implemented business intelligence tools throughout the organisation to enhance performance management and decision-making. However, we acknowledge that these tools are only effective if supported by quality data. Consequently, we are collaborating with our IT provider and Microsoft to create a business case which will review the implementation of a data infrastructure for the organisation, to add greater capability for analysts and allow us to effectively pull everything into one place.

**As we progress, it is important to distinguish between feasible objectives and unrealistic ambitions which is why we have recently engaged with the LGA to participate in a data maturity exercise and performance workshop and use these to help us improve our approach.**

This groundwork will set a standard for our organisation. The rising significance of AI also offers an opportunity to incorporate it into our council's operations, enhancing routine tasks or aiding in decision-making processes. We also acknowledge that achieving the digital programme's goals may entail initial expense and therefore we must thoroughly understand the benefits to be gained before allocating funds to any project. For this reason, the requirement for business cases to be approved by the Digital Steering Committee (subset of the Corporate Leadership Team) is embedded into the programme.



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## Community Engagement

### **Our residents are at the heart of the services we deliver.**

The makeup of the borough means we have a diverse community, and these services must reflect the needs of the people they aim to serve. To enable this, we need to create the conditions for resident voice to feed into the decisions we make, and not overcomplicate this by having various functions operating in a contested space. We acknowledge the success of community engagement is dependent heavily on community confidence and must make sure we are undertaking the necessary actions to attain this, particularly as we recognise the potential community engagement has in delivering a preventative approach, as showcased through our Family Hubs.

In 2023, Bolton welcomed the opening of its first five Family Hubs, with three more set to open in the next twelve months. These hubs emerged from the collaborative efforts of the Children and Young People's Board with the aspiration is that the family hub network will reset and redefine how all organisations work with children and families in Bolton. They will be places for people

to connect, feel supported and recharge, being community designed and connect to what already exists in neighbourhoods, providing the infrastructure to deliver a family help offer in Bolton connecting services in neighbourhoods so families can access a comprehensive offer of support before problems escalate and thereby prevent escalation to children's social care. The family hub network is a key component to developing an all-age approach to prevention and as part of our wider engagement models there is an opportunity to integrate these to deliver a more effective approach.

Currently, the council employs many ways of engaging our communities. Our community alliances are currently in their test and learn phase and have been rolled out to seven wards. The aim of these is to bring community assets together as a network, communicating, collaborating and staging local activities with the aim of collectively enhancing community wellbeing and supporting community contribution through social action, a key driver for preventive work. As part of this, elected members play an enabling, facilitating role at the heart of strong community networks.



Alongside this, we also have our Community Champions initiative, born out of the pandemic response, the initiative has evolved from fostering COVID-19 compliance and vaccine uptake to a dynamic phase 2, emphasising sustained progress and two-way communication between the system and communities. The Community Champions seek to empower communities, to voice their priorities and challenges, ensuring they receive support where needed.

As the local population ages and health complexities rise, the neighbourhood model serves as a proactive solution, catering to 30,000-55,000 residents per area with integrated health and care teams. Central to this model are community-centred teams and newly appointed neighbourhood leads who are dedicated to understanding local needs and optimizing resources for better health outcomes. Bolstered by Bolton's Locality Plan and its strategic aims, a comprehensive change programme is in motion to streamline services across six neighbourhoods, simplifying access to health and care while leveraging existing community assets.

We now need to work across these various models of engagement to create a more consistent approach to community engagement. We are mindful we might often be engaging the same residents on a number of different things, with potential to create duplication and engagement fatigue.

### **We need to take a step away from competing engagement models and find a way to operate in a more collaborative way, recognising the ways in which we work might be different, but that we share same common goals.**

Work through the ACP Board has acknowledged variations in our approach with an acceptance that we need to better 'pull together'. As we work up our emerging preventative framework, we see this as the ideal opportunity to align these models of engagement more closely, particularly as communities will play a vital role in the success of this. We would therefore really welcome the peer team's insight and thoughts on how we can have a more connected approach to community engagement that values all parts and ensures that we work more effectively.

## Economic Growth and Resilience

Bolton, like all towns in the UK has felt the impact of external circumstances in recent times. The pandemic changed the way people connected and socialised, shopped, studied and worked. This impacted across the borough, further compounded by the cost-of-living crisis and financial challenges in the public sector. All of this felt acutely in Bolton by our residents, businesses and investors.

We have recently launched our new plan for regeneration – The Bolton Blueprint: A Bolton Vision for 2040 and beyond. Bolton Council will lead on the realisation of the plan in collaboration with partners, and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Implementation will have strong links and co-ordination across and between Directorate Plans and other commissioned work.

It is vital that our regeneration programme is connected to wider services and our partners, particularly where there is opportunity to benefit from this programme. We are aware that there are tensions with investment and regeneration when we are still addressing cost of living pressures, and a challenging economic outlook. The challenge is to make sure our plans help us to reduce inequalities across the borough as a whole and we need to make sure our plans fit with the social infrastructure necessary for physical regeneration; and where necessary

strengthen those processes to ensure they are aligned with other relevant strategies.

We and our partners are committed to securing benefits of over £136m for Bolton through various regional and national initiatives, such as the Levelling Up agenda, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Greater Manchester Trailblazer Devolution Deal. It is essential to recognise Bolton's unique demographic to ensure these efforts are well-suited to the community's needs.

Moreover, the successful implementation of this plan hinges on robust governance and meticulous risk management. Efforts have been made to improve our decision-making processes in regeneration projects however we believe that there is room for further improvement in this.

Bolton offers quality open space, a university, a developing visitor economy, transport links to Manchester City Centre, to neighbouring boroughs; and to Lancashire; making our location a great place to live, study, work, visit and invest and we must harness this opportunity.

We are looking to re-imagine the Bolton town centre offer following the pandemic. This involves looking at transport; business support and development; the retail offer; the housing offer; the student offer; the



night-time economy; and, addressing negative town centre perceptions by making sure we focus on cleanliness and safety; incorporating all these elements, making best use of the Bolton Brand. Our flagship redevelopment of Crompton Place Shopping Centre is moving forward giving us more opportunity to deliver this modern vibrant town centre.

In Bolton town centre we have secured funding to create a Wellsprings Innovation Hub supporting Digital and Creative Start-Ups. We are well underway with our town centre living programme with the Moor Lane, Deansgate Gardens and St George's Road developments advancing and creating vibrant urban neighbourhoods. We expect around 5,000 new residents comprised of older people, young people and their families. This will be a catalyst for a modern town centre economy that has a vibrant mix of retail, creative and commercial industry, leisure and hospitality as part of the offer.

Deloitte have estimated that these opportunities and others across the town centre represent a regeneration pipeline that has the potential to deliver around 4,300 new jobs, 5,000 new town centre residents and £565m in Gross Development Value. In addition we have very recently commenced a review of our Town Centre Master Plan (2018) with place making experts to ensure we develop a compelling and realisable

Master Plan or Regeneration Framework to take us through to 2040.

Across the borough we have exciting opportunities coming to fruition or in development. We are set to open Bolton University's new Institute of Medical Sciences, which will transform healthcare teaching from Summer 2024. Linked to the NHS Trust, this innovative new institute will support and attract 3,000 students on a range of medical courses, from Bolton and across the region providing specialist skills pathways with the aim of growing and retaining a talent pipeline within Bolton.

Farnworth has been identified as part of the Government's Long Term Plan for Towns Programme. This will provide £20 million over the ten years to 2034. The Long Term Plan is to be submitted by 31st July 2024. It is expected to provide detailed costed proposals for the first three years with a broad outline of objectives and approaches to cover the remaining seven years. These will be developed into projects over time.

The Wigan Bolton Growth Corridor is one of the six growth locations in Greater Manchester, with a focus on innovation as a driver of growth focussed primarily on logistics, manufacturing and health innovation. We expect this to drive further significant growth in Wingates building on the success we have already seen in the well established Logistics North.

**Welcome to Bolton  
and thank you for  
taking the time to  
read our position  
statement.**

