

Position Statement - Strategic Alliance

Corporate Peer Challenge - February 2024



Photo: Visit Peak District and Derbyshire

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We're very pleased to welcome the LGA Peer Challenge Team to High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

As a previous CPC was delivered in January 2022 it has been agreed that this review will be proportionate to this. As the context has changed, it will consider the implementation of the recommendations from the [2022 review](#) in addition to reviewing the current position.

The [2022 CPC position statement](#) provided a significant amount of detailed background in the context of the CPC components, this background is still relevant, and this updated position statement will not repeat all this information, it focuses on an update on the progress that the Councils have made in the form of a 'health check'. This includes details of the [progress with the implementation](#)

[of the recommendations](#) from the 2022 CPC review as set out in the [Councils' CPC Joint Action Plan](#) which was agreed in June 2022.

The Statement does however include an in-depth look at the Governance and Culture component given the recent political changes at the Councils following the May 2023 local election.

Established in 2008, the Councils' strategic alliance (the Alliance) is one of the earliest and most successful within local government and has achieved significant budget savings whilst allowing the Councils to continue to deliver high performing, low-cost services.



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The two Councils have a single 'Alliance' workforce that serves the separate but similar needs of two distinct geographic and political areas. The partnership has withstood a number of changes in political control during the last 16 years and continues to remain strong: built upon foundations of collaboration, leadership of place, and value for money services.

As in 2022, we are proud to show the Peer Team how our partnership works and the ongoing plans we have for our areas. This will include a full [timetable](#) of meetings scheduled where the Peer Team will meet councillors, staff and partners. This interactive position statement also provides useful links to a [library](#) of supporting documents which help to set out the significant progress that we have made but

also identifies the challenges that we face. We are keen to receive the Peer Team's input into our ongoing journey and are looking forward to receiving your feedback at the end of a productive, collaborative few days.



Our ambitions for High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands are set out in our strategic plans. These are fundamentally reviewed every four years following the local elections.

Consequently, the [High Peak Borough Plan \(2023-27\)](#) and the [Staffordshire Moorlands Corporate Plan \(2023-27\)](#) were agreed by the two Councils in October 2023

As with previous plans, the new plans have been developed after considering the following framework of understanding:

- **The views and aspirations of residents** - as established by the consultation activity undertaken on a regular basis. This is now steered by new [Consultation And Engagement Policies](#) that were agreed by the two Councils in December 2022 which include the commitment to a regular [Residents Survey](#) for each



Council with the latest undertaken in September / October 2023.

- **A clear understanding of empirical evidence** - such as demographic information and quality of life indicators that identify the local issues that need to be tackled. This has recently been enhanced with the production of a [locality analysis](#) for each of the Council areas which recognise the relevance of the key issues to different localities within each district area. In this exercise, area wards have been grouped into larger localities that share certain characteristics. The aim of this analysis is to provide an initial starting point for discussions about the needs of different places in the two districts and how services can best be levered to shape the places

in an equitable way. This has, in the first instance, begun to identify additional research needs.

- **Recognition of the national and regional policy framework** – taking into account central government requirements and the requirements of regional agencies where appropriate.
- **Learning from the progress made by the Councils and understanding the improvements that need to be made** – as provided by the ongoing assessments of the Councils’ performance including the outcomes from the January 2022 CPC.

The two new plans build on the previous plans and priorities, and, importantly have been steered by the new political administrations with the mandate provided in the recent local

elections. However, the plans need to be owned by all of the councillors and Member Priority Setting Workshops were held at each Council to allow all councillors to feed into the process.

The workshops were prefaced by contextual presentations from members of the Alliance Management Team (AMT) to enable councillors to understand the local and national backdrop against which the priorities needed to be set. This included an understanding of the Councils’ positions in terms of prospects for growth; the financial challenges; and the wider opportunities for partnership working at all levels. [The outcomes from these workshops](#) were fed into the development of the final plans.

Although separate, the two Plans follow a similar format – built around

strategic aims: one inward looking, and other aims (4 in High Peak and 3 in Staffordshire Moorlands) focused on the environmental, social and economic wellbeing roles – and many of the supporting objectives are shared in common whilst still reflecting local priorities. The additional outwardly facing aim at High Peak has been newly introduced into this plan to reflect the significance of the Council’s responsibilities as a social landlord with its own HRA stock.

Both Councils recognise that the delivery of public services is undertaken by a variety of partners. The Councils are committed to play the lead role in championing the local area. Fulfilling this role effectively will mean influencing partners in several key areas in order to ensure that services are shaped and delivered around the

needs and aspirations of residents and businesses. The plans set out the priorities selected by councillors for this influencing role.

A key contribution to the achievements of the Councils in past years has been well-established priorities. The plans detail each of the Councils' priority outcomes. These outcomes will be given the highest priority, and a significant proportion of resources will be directed towards the achievement of them.

The achievement of the aims and supporting objectives will be driven by a number of priority actions which are identified in the plans to ensure step improvements and maximum impact upon the priority outcomes. These will be implemented over the life of the plans.



Photo: Lee Blanchflower

A programme of stakeholder communication and engagement has followed the approval of the plans to gain wide support and understanding amongst employees, local residents,

partners and businesses of the Councils' priorities. [A short summary of the vision, aims, objectives, priority outcomes, influencing objectives and priority actions](#) has been used to facilitate this engagement.

Each plan informs, and has been integrated into, the Councils' [Performance Frameworks](#), ensuring delivery of the priorities through operational Service Plans and individual appraisal objectives for every member of staff. The new priority actions contained within the plans have been fed through to the Councils' [Transformation Programme](#). These actions ensure the 'golden thread' throughout the Alliance.

Our 2022 Position Statement sets out several of the priority actions that have been recently implemented or are still in progress. The key new areas of focus up until 2027 as set out in the new strategic plans include:

Both Councils:

Develop and implement plans to enhance regional and local strategic partnerships.

Implement [Cost of Living response plans](#)

Review Debt Recovery Policies to ensure recognition of vulnerable people

Develop and implement an enhanced community leadership scheme.

Develop and implement Cultural Strategies

Progress the reviews of the Local Plans

Develop plans to ensure the effective use of Biodiversity Net Gain

Review the Councils' Growth Strategies

Implement the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund Local Investment Plans](#)

Staffordshire Moorlands:

Develop enhanced partnerships with town and parish councils.

Develop a Parks & Open Spaces Strategy

Deliver the [Leek Levelling Up Fund Programme](#) following the award of £17.1m of Round 2 funding

High Peak:

Complete a fundamental review of the HRA Business Plan including developing a High Peak Decent Homes Standard, developing and implementing a plan to increase the HPBC housing stock, reviewing sheltered / supported housing provision, and improving estate management arrangements)

Implement a plan to ensure compliance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

Develop a new Parking Strategy to ensure that car parks meet the needs of residents and visitors

Explore options to refresh and enhance our CCTV system

Implement the [Revitalising Buxton \(Future High Street Fund\) Programme](#) following the purchase of The Springs Shopping Centre in December 2022

Following the election, the new administrations at the two Councils have expressed the commitment to further develop the Strategic Alliance. Consequently, the Executive / Cabinet members have held a series of meetings to identify areas where the Councils can work more closely together. The initial priorities for this programme of work include:

- Climate Change Action Plans
- Growth Strategies
- Leisure Transformation

The performance framework is reconsidered on an annual basis to establish targets for each individual financial year. This, along with an annual report for [High Peak](#) and

[Staffordshire Moorlands](#) on progress, provides a regular opportunity for members to keep the plan and its direction under review and to make any required adjustments.



Organisational Leadership

[The organisational management arrangements](#) that were fully established in 2021 are now fully embedded. The Alliance Leadership Team (ALT) and Alliance Management Team (AMT) share the responsibility for the delivery of the councils' priorities and the management of services and the workforce. The changes introduced in 2021 were built on the principles of:

- Increased collaboration
- Strengthened communication
- Improved planning
- Better member relationships.

ALT, which is made up of the Chief Executive and Executive Directors, meets monthly and is supported in

discharging its strategic functions by a number of corporate assurance groups:

- Risk Management Group
- Transformation Programme Board
- Health & Safety & Compliance Group
- Emergency Planning Group
- Growth Board
- Management / Trade Union Liaison
- Information Governance Group
- Safeguarding Board
- Corporate Governance Group

[AMT](#) is made up of ALT plus the councils' 14 Heads of Service; it also meets monthly and focuses on tactical issues.

Since the organisational management arrangements were established, a Leadership Development Programme has been put in place. The outcomes of this development work have been:

- More inclusive decision-making processes and greater collaboration between services
- Effective delegation of service decision making within a clear framework and a clear understanding of the process
- Good levels of assurance

The links between ALT / AMT and the wider workforce and the Executive / Cabinet are maintained in a structured monthly rhythm as follows:

Meeting	Timing
ALT	First week of the month (Wednesday)
AMT	Second week of the month (Wednesday)
Team meetings	Third week of the month
SM Cabinet / ALT	Fourth week of the month (Tuesday)
HP Executive / ALT	Fourth week of the month (Thursday)

- The new Council Administrations and Corporate Plans

- Outcomes from the Annual Staff Survey

- Launch of the Alliance: Our Future Programme – Alliance wide service review and design programme

- The new Staff Appraisal Scheme

Internal communication across the Alliance is lateral and vertical with key corporate messages flowing from AMT through Team Talk and with joint member-officer ebulletins via [Keeping You Informed](#) where colleagues from across the organisation can contribute news and other information.

These arrangements have facilitated the move towards flexible working through the new [Agile Working Policy](#) which is bringing mutual benefits for the Councils, the employees and the environment.

The strengths of the arrangements for communication across the Alliance workforce and in particular the focus on the delivery of the Councils’ priorities are evidenced by the outcomes of the recent [Staff Survey](#) which included the following four

A monthly core brief [Team Talk](#) is produced by AMT for discussion with staff at the monthly team meetings. The Chief Executive also attends all the team meetings on an annual basis. The last series of meetings was in October / November 2023 when the focus of the discussions was:

Team



statements which were amongst those receiving the most positive responses from employees:

I am trusted to do my job.

I understand how my work contributes to the priorities of the Councils.

I always know what my work responsibilities are.

My team makes a difference to the residents of High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands

The interface between ALT / AMT and the Councils' Executive and Cabinet members is also well structured. The arrangements are set out below:

Forum	Participants	Frequency
High Peak Executive/ALT <hr/> Staffordshire Moorlands Cabinet/ALT	Executive/Cabinet Chief Executive & Executive Directors	Monthly
Executive/Cabinet Member Briefings	Executive Councillor/Portfolio Holder Executive Directors/Heads of Service	Dependent on individual agreements between Directors/Heads of Service and councillors
Updates to individual Executive/Portfolio Holder	Heads of Service	At least Monthly

These arrangements have ensured a more strategic / forward looking focus for the Cabinet / Executive with clear attention paid to the delivery of the Councils' priorities. The monthly Cabinet / ALT and Executive / ALT meetings also provide for effective agenda planning with 'no surprises'.

There are also formal links to overview and scrutiny processes. A nominated Executive Director provides direct support to each of the Select Committee / Overview & Scrutiny Panel Scrutiny / supporting committee chairs.

There are also regular political group leader meetings at each Council which are led by the Chief Executive and Leader.

The Councils have put in place two Council Controlled Companies to deliver several of its key services. These are joint ventures which involve partnerships with similar controlled companies operated by other local authorities:

Council Controlled Company	Services Operated	Joint Venture Partner (Local Authority Owner)
Alliance Environmental Services (AES)	Waste Collection Street Cleansing Grounds Maintenance Fleet Management	Ansa (Cheshire East)
Alliance Norse	Facilities Management Repairs & Maintenance of Public Buildings Capital Programme Implementation Housing Repairs (High Peak) Disabled Facilities Grants	Norse (Norfolk County Council)

The delivery of priorities through these controlled companies are achieved through:

- The Chief Executive and Executive Director (Governance and Commissioning) are directors of both companies

- The operational delivery is ensured by client input from the Head of Service Commissioning (AES) and the Head of Assets (Alliance Norse)

- The strategic focus is provided by Commissioning Boards which include the relevant Executive Councillors / Cabinet Portfolio Holders

- There are annual reports to the Select Committees / Overview & Scrutiny Panels at the two Councils

The Performance Frameworks ensure that the Councils' corporate priorities are fully aligned and integrated into Service Plans across the Alliance, which in turn inform individual objectives that are fed through to employees through the staff appraisal process. Progress against performance targets is reported monthly to Alliance Management Team and is reported to select committees / overview & scrutiny panels and the Executive / Cabinet quarterly, as part of a combined report alongside financial and procurement monitoring. These arrangements provide a clear understanding of priorities, and the performance framework targets provide a focus on delivery by Heads of Service.

The Transformation Board oversees all projects across the Alliance through the [Transformation Programme](#), which is fully aligned to corporate objectives and uses a [project management methodology](#) based on Prince-2. The programme has a direct link to priority actions established in the strategic plans and maintains regular feedback of progress to councillors.

Place Leadership

Both Councils operate within a three-tier structure (County, District /Borough and Town/Parish) and relationships with our place partners across these tiers and with other public sector agencies are constructive, productive and well established.

Working with Upper Tier and Neighbouring Authorities

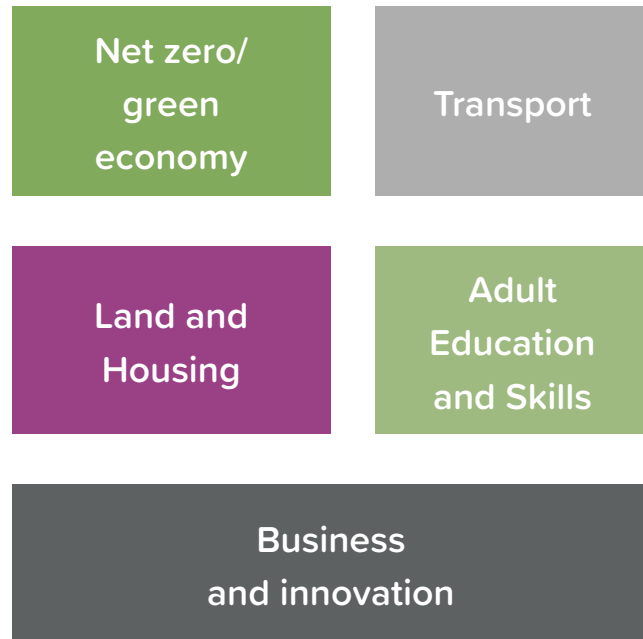
As outlined in the previous position statement, Derbyshire County Council submitted a formal expression of interest requesting that Derbyshire be considered as a potential County Deal pilot area prior to the publication of the of the Levelling Up White Paper. In anticipation of this Derbyshire councils created new formal governance

arrangements, in the shape of a Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee.

Following the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper in February 2022, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Nottingham (who were identified as pathfinders) agreed to cooperate at pace on the creation of a new devolution deal. This will include the areas covered by Derbyshire County Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Derby City Council and Nottingham City Council (the ‘Constituent Councils’) and be delivered through the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (the East Midlands Combined County Authority, EMCCA).

A devolution deal was agreed between the four Constituent Councils and the Government on 30th August 2022. Statutory consultation was conducted in December 2022 and, following consideration of the consultation responses, the Constituent Councils approved a final version of the Proposal which was then submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2023 following the coming into force of the relevant provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The draft of the ‘East Midlands Combined County Authority Regulations 2023’ that will establish the EMCCA were considered and approved by the four constituent councils in December 2023.

The investment package for the deal is worth more than £4 billion, including the £1.14 billion investment fund and a new City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement of £1.5 billion. The initial priorities for the EMCCA are:



Following the approval by the constituent authorities, a Shadow Authority has been mobilised to support a smooth transition to the fully established EMCCA (which will come into existence the day after the coming into force of the Regulations, which is likely to be in March 2024). The Shadow Authority is overseeing the planning and implementation of establishing the EMCCA.

District and borough councils remain critical partners and continue to be actively engaged in the programme. Under the proposed governance arrangement for the combined authority there is to be district / borough representation through four non-constituent seats (two from Derbyshire and two from Nottinghamshire). The High Peak leader has been fulfilling the role of

one of the Derbyshire district / borough representatives and consequently, supported by the Chief Executive, has been involved in the shadow governance arrangements.

In order to dovetail with the new regional County Combined Authority, Derbyshire councils have taken the opportunity to reconsider the partnership approaches embodied by the Derbyshire Economic Prosperity and Vision Derbyshire joint committees. These are currently being reconstituted into a single Derbyshire Leadership Board that will work collectively to tackle the county's challenges and speaking with a collective voice. This board will:

- Collectively discuss, agree and align Derby and Derbyshire councils' positions on EMCCA business

- Agree and then feed in Derbyshire's perspective and collective priorities via its representatives on the CCA Board

- Exercise all functions that the EMCCA is granting.

Staffordshire did not seek to become a pathfinder for a County Deal, however, as outlined in the previous position statement, began laying the foundations for the development of a potential County Deal with the formation of the Staffordshire Leaders Board (constituted as a Joint Committee) in 2022 to strengthen the previous governance arrangements.

The Staffordshire Leaders Board established a clear set of priorities for collaboration and began work on these through a variety of structured partnership arrangements.

The May 2023 local elections saw changes in political control in a number of the district and borough councils. Since these changes, the Board, with its new membership, has undertaken a refocus including:

- Welcoming Stoke-on-Trent City Council (who previously were not involved in the Board) as part of the Board Membership.

- Working together to restate the clear ambition to collaborate on opportunities to help unlock some of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's most important challenges.

- Reflecting on existing priorities with a forward look and developed a refreshed set of priorities.

- Supporting a strengthened approach for Leader and CEO 'Sponsors' against each priority (cross-boundary combinations suggested to work best).

The refreshed set of priorities (formal ratification will be at the next Leaders Board in March 2024) are:

- Economic Development (incorporating Green Growth)

- Transport infrastructure

- Climate Change including a joint approach to Waste and Sustainability

- Health inequalities

- Social inequalities

- Strategic Migration Partnership / Asylum Dispersal
-

- Devolution and a future County Deal

The Staffordshire Moorlands Chief Executive is the nominated chief executive lead for the Waste and Sustainability work and support lead (to share his experience from the East Midlands County Combined Authority involvement) for the development of the approach to Devolution and a future County Deal. The Staffordshire Moorlands Leader will be allocated as member lead for one of the priorities prior to the formal adoption of the new priorities in March.

Working with Town & Parish Councils

The regular liaison meetings with parish / town councils (Parish Assemblies) have continued at High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands. More recent topics have included:

Partner Updates including Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, Staffordshire Moorlands Local Policing Team, Staffordshire County Council Highways, West Midlands Ambulance Service, Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Leek Moorlands Hospital (Staffordshire Moorlands)

- Events Arrangements
 - Planning Enforcement (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme
-

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
 - Defibrillator use in the district (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Empowering parishes to meet the Climate Emergency (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Development of the Social Economy (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Regeneration and Planning Update (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Leisure and Tourism Update (Staffordshire Moorlands)
 - Local Plan Review (High Peak)
-

Staffordshire Moorlands has committed in the new Corporate Plan to a fundamental review of how they work with town and parish councils. The terms of reference and the

process for this review are currently being developed.

Working with Business

Government took the decision to end the national funding of Local Enterprise Partnerships from April 2024 with the functions being transferred to the upper tier authorities in Staffordshire and to the emerging EMCCA in Derbyshire. It is recognised that there are benefits of having local, business-oriented institutions that support local economic decision-making and that these relationships need to continue. The arrangements for the governance for the ‘future voice of business’ in both areas is currently being considered and developed in Derbyshire by the emerging EMCCA and in Staffordshire by the Leaders Board. Our two

Councils are playing a pro-active role in these developments.

Locally, both Councils produce a monthly Business Newsletter, which goes out to over 2,000 local businesses each month: providing information on funding streams, tender opportunities, business events and relevant news. There are also close working relationships with the local Chambers of Commerce.

High Peak’s own plans for economic prosperity are set out in the [High Peak Growth Strategy](#), which sits alongside the [2016 Local Plan](#) (the first to be adopted in Derbyshire) and is underpinned by locational masterplans. Staffordshire Moorlands’ are set out in [Joint Growth Strategy](#) with the County Council. The [Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan](#) was adopted in September

2020 and is also underpinned by locational masterplans.

The two Councils have recently committed to a refresh of their growth strategies and this work has recently commenced. The review of the High Peak Local Plan is currently in progress and the process for the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan is under consideration. All these reviews will be undertaken with collaborative consultation with local businesses.

Working with Health Partners

Both Councils recognise the importance of working with strategic health partners to influence positive outcomes around the provision of accessible health and social care, particularly for the elderly given our aging populations.

The Councils have worked proactively with partners following the creation of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). This required close scrutiny and involvement in High Peak where the health services in Glossopdale were transferred from the Tameside and Glossop CCG, which had many additional benefits that came from the Greater Manchester devolution arrangements, to the Derbyshire ICB. This was a particular focus for High Peak's Community Select Committee. The Councils also provide key input into the Place Alliances that support the work the work of the ICBs. The High Peak Leader is a member of the Derbyshire Health & Wellbeing Board and the Staffordshire Leader has recently been asked to provide a nomination for one of the two



A dance class at South Moorlands Leisure Centre

district council representatives on the Staffordshire Health & Wellbeing Board.

The Councils have worked closely with Sport England and other local and regional partners to influence and improve how physical activity is built into our daily lives. This includes helping to design opportunities for activity in new housing developments, securing investment into new leisure and recreational facilities and finding creative ways to activate our parks and greenspaces. The Councils' Leisure Transformation Plans set out the improvements that are required to ensure that the leisure offer is developed with longer term health benefits in mind. The Councils have worked with health providers to include wellbeing facilities in the improvement plans for leisure centres.

In 2023 both Councils adopted strategies ([Move More High Peak](#) and [Move More Staffordshire Moorlands](#)) that are focused on the aim of facilitating everyone across both areas to be moving more every day – including providing greater support to individuals where required. The strategies are a product of collective development work that included integrated health and care, voluntary and community organisations, young peoples’ services and education, wellbeing, sport, leisure, transport, housing, environment, community safety and planning and others.

The overview and scrutiny functions at the two Councils have continued the pro-active engagement with health partners.

Working with Community Safety Partners

The Community Safety Partnerships in both High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands have continued to operate effectively. The Council also participates in a number of countywide initiatives which have been initiated by the police force or the Police and Crime Commissioner. The initiatives supported recently have included:

- Project Unity – a Clear, Hold, Build initiative focussed on tackling county lines and associated exploitation issues in the Fairfield Road area of Buxton in High Peak
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Community Safety Forum

- Supporting the delivery of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire CONTEST & PREVENT Strategies intends to safeguard people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism

Supporting Community Place Making

The Councils have continued to support and promote Neighbourhood Planning, which helps people to influence planning and place making in the areas in which they live and work.

In High Peak, the first Neighbourhood Plan for Chapel-en-le-Frith was adopted by the Borough Council in 2015 - a similar plan for Whaley Bridge was adopted in December 2023.

In Staffordshire Moorlands, the Leekfrith Neighbourhood Plan was the

first in the District to be made in June 2021 – this has now been followed by the adoption of a plan for Biddulph in December 2023 with a further plan for Checkley expected to be adopted in May 2024

The adoption of these Neighbourhood plans has followed independent examinations and referendums.

Councillors' Community Leadership Schemes

The Community Leadership Schemes support councillors across the two Councils to identify community issues or concerns and to help them address those concerns through influencing service delivery and / or facilitating community self-help. The current Schemes were approved following the publication of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee

report “Councillors on the Front-line” and enhancement of them is a committed priority action in the Councils’ new strategic plans. The process for development of the new scheme has commenced through engagement with the relevant select committee / overview & scrutiny panel.

The Schemes include:

- Providing ward specific data to identify characteristics of each member ward
- [Locality analysis](#) in this exercise area wards have been grouped into larger localities that share certain characteristics. The aim of this analysis is to provide an initial starting point for discussions about the needs of different places in the two districts

- Officer support to review data to address issues identified and generally in elected roles
- Liaison with parish councils where appropriate
- Co-ordination of any multi-agency responses
- Use of Member Initiative Scheme – which provides every councillor with access to an annual fund of £500 to £1,000 each, which can be used to tackle local problems and support activity by local people that will improve the wellbeing of their communities
- Providing IT resources – to ensure that councillors have the tools to fulfil their role
- A case management system - currently being rolled out to provide

a facility to allow members to track local case work responses

Working with Communities and the Voluntary Sector

Both Councils continue to participate in and support a large number of place-based partnerships focused on living and working conditions, as well as social, cultural and environmental improvements in each area.

The Councils' partnership arrangements came to the forefront during the Covid pandemic with Council officers meeting representatives from public health, the Voluntary Sector and others on a regular basis to co-ordinate local action.

At High Peak, councillors considered and adopted a set of principles for



Volunteers improving areas

partnership working and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting, and collaborating with, the voluntary sector. The outcomes of this work are now embedded.

At Staffordshire Moorlands, the Council is currently reviewing its partnership working arrangements. This has included a new theme-based focus for its Moorlands Together Partnership which in December 2022 undertook a partnership based review of the support given to communities in the Cost of Living crisis. The outcomes of this work were captured in the Council's Cost of Living Response Plan.

The Councils' approach to partnership arrangements is continuing to be developed with external training on stakeholder engagement and management provided to staff during

2022 and councillors as part of the post-election induction programme.

Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Councils adopted their [Equality and Diversity Policies](#) in 2018 and in line with the policies [reviewed the Equality Objectives](#) in March 2022. The implementation of the policy in 2018 included the following actions:

- Updating the Council's Community Profile (a resource which describes the makeup of our communities by protected characteristics) and promoting its use to services for the purposes of policy development and service delivery.
 - Incorporating consideration of equality impacts as part of the introduction of the report
-

management element of the Council's committee management system.

- Improving the information held with regards to the profile of the Council's workforce (collecting information in relation to protected characteristics).
-

In reviewing the objectives, the Councils have used the Local Government Association's (LGA) Equality Framework which was itself reviewed in November 2021. This framework sets out four modules for improvement, underpinned by a range of criteria and practical guidance that has helped the Councils plan, implement, and deliver real equality outcomes for employees and the community. Key service areas including Democratic Services, OD and Transformation, Communities

and Climate Change, Service Commissioning and Customer Services completed a self-assessment against the above modules to establish the Councils' current performance against the LGA Framework and this review was used to identify new equality objectives. An annual report is produced to review progress.

High Peak Borough Council is [represented by 43 elected councillors across 28 wards](#): with overall control switching from a Labour minority control to a Labour majority administration at the May 2023 local elections. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

Group	No.	No. New
Conservative	10	5
Labour	29	16
Liberal Democrat	1	0
Independent	1	1
Green	2	0
	43	22

The [Executive](#) is the main decision-making group at High Peak and is made up of six portfolios, including that of the Council Leader. The Executive also has two Assistant Executive Councillors.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is [represented by 56 elected councillors across 27 wards](#): with overall control switching from Conservative control to a Labour minority administration at the May 2023 local elections. The Independent Group (including the Liberal Democrat) support the Labour administration and fulfil most of the overview and scrutiny and supporting committee chair roles. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

Group	No.	No. New
Conservative	22	7
Labour	24	13
Independent	7	1
Independent/ Unaligned	1	0
Green	1	1
Liberal Democrat	1	1
	56	23

The [Cabinet](#) is the main decision-making group at Staffordshire Moorlands and is made up of seven portfolios, including that of the Council Leader. There is also a Cabinet Support Member.

A comprehensive [Member Induction Programme](#) has been completed since the May 2023 local elections, with a variety of training sessions including the input of external facilitators. Ongoing training and development will continue to be based on identified needs analysis as highlighted by the Member Development Groups at each council. Each of these are led by a Member Development Champion.

The Councils' decision-making frameworks are set out in each authority's Constitution which

sets out the arrangements for decision making by:

- Council and Council Assembly

- Executive / Cabinet

- Other Committees – Planning, Licensing and Regulatory, Audit and Standards

- Officer through delegations

The Councils' [governance and decision-making processes](#) are summarised in the attached document.

The overview and scrutiny functions are provided by Select Committees in High Peak and Overview and Scrutiny Panels in Staffordshire Moorlands.

There are three Select Committees at High Peak with 12 members on each:

- Corporate
- Community
- Economy and Growth

There are three Overview and Scrutiny Panels at Staffordshire Moorlands with 14 Members on each:

- Resources
- Community
- Service Delivery

Each of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels has a supporting committee comprising 10 Members, providing the opportunity for more detailed scrutiny of specific issues by a smaller number of members with particular interest in the subject matter:

- Finance & Performance (Resources)

- Growth & Economy (Service Delivery)

- Health & Wellbeing (Community)

Both Councils commissioned the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) (December 2020 in [High Peak](#) and December 2021 in [Staffordshire Moorlands](#)) to review their scrutiny arrangements. The purpose of the reviews was to give each Council an external perspective on how well the current models are functioning and fulfilling their essential role of

policy shaping, holding the Executive / Cabinet to account, and reviewing issues of importance to local communities.

The High Peak review concluded that:

- Scrutiny's role as part of the democratic decision-making process at High Peak is respected and valued in the Council, with supportive political leaders and Executive Members; and
- The scrutiny function at HPBC is held in a relatively high regard by the Council overall, further evidenced by Director level support for each Select Committee.

Staffordshire Moorlands review concluded that:

- Scrutiny has the conditions for success; and

- There are no critical issues for scrutiny at SMDC and the contributions that scrutiny makes are seen as mostly positive.

In both reviews, the CfGS made a series of similar recommendations which were reviewed and supported in the 2022 Corporate Peer Challenge. In response to the recommendations from the CPC, the Councils also gave a commitment to take forward the findings from the CfGS reviews. These commitments included:

- Greater focus on strategy and policy.
- Earlier access to, and involvement with, core policy and decision-making activities.
- Increased work programming across scrutiny and on a basis that is more elected member led.

The recommendations for each Council included the establishment of a Select Committee Programming Group at High Peak and an Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group at Staffordshire Moorlands. The initial task for these groups was making recommendations to take forward the outcomes from the CfGS review to further improve and strengthen the Councils' arrangements for scrutiny. The Groups met on several occasions and developed recommendations for each Council. These recommendations were considered and agreed by each Council, and included the fundamental review of the number and membership of Scrutiny Panels at Staffordshire Moorlands, which has reduced the number of members serving on the Panels and created supporting committees to facilitate more in-depth

scrutiny on specific items, creating capacity in the Panels' agendas for the scrutiny of matters of priority importance to the Council.

In order to ensure that there is effective work programme prioritisation the following process is in place at each Council:

- An all-member workshop to agree topics for scrutiny work programmes is organised to take place each year following Annual Council;
- Selection criteria for items to be prioritised is based on the [“PAPER Analysis” model](#). The tool is to be used to prioritise topics for consideration at the select committee / overview & scrutiny panel (and supporting committee) meetings; and

- The Programming Group monitors activity against the work programme and considers the appropriateness of changes as necessary.

Due to the fact that the Councils are newly elected, the most recent annual all-member workshop took place in January / February 2024 in order to consider the Councils' new strategic plans in the development of the work programmes.

The Programming Groups are embedded and have focussed on the processes and arrangements to ensure the ongoing development of work programmes for the select committees / overview and scrutiny panels (and supporting committees). The PAPER analysis model has been used to ensure that the items suggested are in line with the priorities for each Council.

The new programmes reflect the role of the scrutiny and comprise four elements, which are categorised in line with the functions of overview and scrutiny i.e., scrutiny and policy development:

Scrutiny

- The ongoing scrutiny of the Councils', their Controlled Companies', and their Strategic Partners' performance
- The scrutiny of the effectiveness of existing Council policy
- The scrutiny of, and ongoing going input into, major project implementation

Policy Development

- The development of new strategy and policy

Following initial discussions between the High Peak Executive and the Staffordshire Moorlands Cabinet, it has been agreed that it would make sense to work collaboratively on a number of issues including:

Climate Change

Planning Policy

Leisure Transformation Operating Model

Growth Strategy/ Business Enterprise

Although the Programming Groups have responsibility for the oversight of the work programmes, the responsibility for the ongoing development of them lies with the Select committee / overview & scrutiny panel (and supporting committee) chairs.

The select committees / overview & scrutiny panels also have the facility to establish “task and finish” groups which have been successful in the past. The chairs are supported by a nominated Executive Director to assist with work programme development, agenda planning and setting.

The ongoing development of councillors is critical in ensuring an effective scrutiny function. Consequently, several development sessions have taken place as part of the Councillor Induction Programme.

The relationships between members and officers continue to be positive and are based upon mutual respect. Regular joint meetings take place between ALT and the Executive/ Cabinet as well as with the Political Group Leaders at each Council. The Chief Executive has regular meetings with each Council Leader/Deputy Leader. Senior officers regularly brief portfolio holders and scrutiny chairs on the business of the councils.

In line with best practice and the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, each council has adopted an Ethical Framework to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for its members. The principal constituent parts of the Frameworks include each Council's constitution, code of conduct for members and register of interests together with other supporting codes and protocols. The framework is endorsed by all political groups within each Council and is published on the website with its Constitution, to provide a route map for all members, officers and the public to identify and consider the policies and procedures which the Councils have in place.

The Councils' Community Leadership Schemes were approved following the publication of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee report "Councillors on the Front-line". This recognised the changing role of elected members, becoming increasingly community-based with councillors spending more time out and about supporting their constituents and working with external organisations. The package of measures in the schemes are established to deliver improved support for councillors in their wards.

The Councils have also both reviewed their member allowances schemes for the first time for a significant number of years. The reviews were conducted by Independent Remuneration Panels (IRP). The Terms of Reference of the

IRP were to make recommendations to the Council on:

- The amount of basic allowance that should be payable to its elected members and the expenses that it is deemed to include.

- The responsibilities or duties which should lead to the payment of a special responsibility allowance and as to the amount of such an allowance.

- The duties for which a travelling and subsistence allowance can be paid and as to the amount of this allowance.

- The amount of any Coopted member allowances payable.

- Whether the authority's allowances scheme should include an allowance in respect of the expenses of

arranging for the care of children and dependants and if it does make such a recommendation, the amount of this allowance and the means by which it is determined.

- Whether annual adjustments of allowance levels may be made by reference to an index, and, if so, for how long such a measure should run.
- Any other issues brought to the attention of the IRP.

The reviews included the consideration of a wide range of evidence including questionnaires completed by serving councillors, several factual briefings held between a range of members and the Chair of the IRP and key benchmarking data including a summary of allowances paid in other similar councils.

The recommendations made by the IRP were fully adopted by [High Peak Borough Council in October 2023](#) and [Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in December 2023](#).

When developing the High Peak Borough Plan and Staffordshire Moorlands Corporate Plan the councillors were keen to enhance the Councils' reputation as "can do / will do Councils"

In order to do this, the Councils committed in the plans to:

- Continue to develop an Inclusive culture that values participation and ideas
- Ensure that everybody is valued and treated with respect (staff, public, members)
- Adopt a professional approach

including turnaround of performance challenges

- Have an effective Communications Strategy
- Be outward looking and Open for Business
- Be proactive and responsive

The following operating principles were adopted in the plans and are to be embedded in the work of the Councils:

Ambitious

The Councils will show ambition and determination to improve the quality of its services.

We will expect our Councillors and Officers to look for ways to make their work better.

We will gather the views of the public and partners on the quality of we do and use that feedback to shape future decisions about our services.

We will encourage Councillors and Officers to be aware of best practice and to apply that knowledge to their own and the Council's development.

Dynamic

The Councils must be dynamic and change in response to new challenges and opportunities.

We will invest in our workforce to develop the skills that are needed to respond quickly and effectively to a rapidly changing external environment.

We will ensure that we provide the good governance and leadership that will be critical in inspiring positive change and growing officers and teams that are happy, inclusive, and able to draw on the widest possible range of ideas and experiences to deliver quality, appropriate and effective services over the next decade.

We will look for opportunities to introduce new models of service delivery including new partnerships.

We will be innovative and responsive in our approaches.

We will adopt appropriate new technologies as they emerge to improve the services that we offer and the ways in which Councillors and Officers work.

Environmentally Responsible

We will lead the way locally in our approach to responding to the climate change and nature emergencies.

We are committed to reducing the Councils' emissions to achieve Net Zero by 2030.

The Councils acknowledge that the 'Bigger, Better, More and Joined-up' principles of the 2010 Lawton Report should be followed.



We will act as a leader within our borough / district and encourage our communities and partners to lower carbon emissions, encourage nature recovery, increasing levels of recycling, cut the use of single use plastics and reduce water consumption. Keep it Local (Pride).

- We will support local jobs and apprenticeship opportunities.

- We will seek to buy local where we can and encourage others to do so as well.

- We want to support our communities to deliver and improve those things that are important to them.

The Councils' per capita unit costs are very low placing each Council amongst the lowest 20% of councils nationally. With a strong value for money focus in everything that the Councils do, the financial plans have had the protection of frontline services at their heart.

Financial Planning and Management Arrangements

Robust financial planning and management is a key strength across the Alliance, with a history of delivering balanced budgets despite the financial implications of austerity.

The Councils' Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFPs) set out the financial challenges and opportunities facing each council and cover a four-year period with mid-year and annual reviews. The MTFPs provide the

funding framework for the Councils' 4-year strategic plans. They have been successfully underpinned by Efficiency Strategies that have to date helped to achieve significant budget savings across the Alliance.

The MTFP and Annual Budget setting process is subject to member scrutiny prior to adoption. Taking on board the recommendations of the CfGS scrutiny reviews there has been earlier engagement through the Select Committee / Overview and Scrutiny Panels in the development of the next year's budget.

Following budget approval, Heads of Service in conjunction with the Council's Head of Finance monitor detailed budgets throughout the year. This enables any service pressures to be identified on an on-going basis.

Reports are presented on a quarterly basis to member scrutiny panels which highlight variances between spending and budgets.

The Councils' business partnering approach sees finance officers linked to specific service areas to provide support, guidance, and regular liaison.

Previous MTFPs and Efficiency Plans

From April 2017 up until March 2022, the Councils' MTFPs were underpinned by an Efficiency and Rationalisation Strategy which was approved by members at each Council in February 2017. This Strategy identified a programme of £5.2 million (Staffordshire Moorlands -£3.1 million and High Peak £2.1m) in savings to be made over the period

2017/18 – 2020/21 (later extended to 2021/22) to balance the MTFP and build the financial resilience of both Councils. The significant programme of efficiencies was established on the back of the requirement for the Councils to move towards being self-financing and no longer being reliant on direct government funding). The strategy was developed with the underlying principles of protecting frontline service delivery and ensuring that it is a tool to help ensure that service spending is determined by the established priorities set out in the 4-year strategic plans.

By March 2022, the Councils had delivered the required financial savings with a number of major contributors:

- Newly procured Leisure Centre operational contracts

- The establishment of Alliance Environment Services (AES) – the joint venture company for the delivery of waste collection, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and fleet management

- Retendering the insurance contract

- Workforce planning

- General procurement activity

- Asset rationalisation

- Income generation (primarily fees and charges).

February 2023 MTFPs

The [February 2023 updates of the MTFPs](#) were approved alongside the 2023/24 budget being set for both Councils in February 2022. The plans incorporated the commitments

required for the Councils to deliver the local strategic plans with strong links to the corporate priorities. They also took account of latest economic forecasts, and assumptions around the timing and level of capital and revenue expenditure and income.

The 2023/24 local government finance settlement had some positive news, with additional one-off grant funding, but again it was a one-year settlement, which maintains a level of uncertainty in the MTFPs and makes medium term financial planning more difficult.

In terms of costs, the plans recognised that the Councils would incur costs higher than originally anticipated due to the increasing impact of inflation.

The plans provided for a balanced budget across the 2023/24 to 2026/27 financial years but with greater

uncertainty and risk in the MTFP for future years. Particularly so, as the outcomes from Government’s business rates review, fair funding review, or new homes bonus review were all unknown. No efficiency requirements are required in the 2023/24 financial year but plans identified that achieving a balanced budget at each Council in 2024/25 to 2026/27 requires the delivery of a new Efficiency Strategy.

The following 2023/24 Budgets were agreed by the Councils:

	High Peak	Staffordshire Moorlands
	£	£
General Fund Net Budget 2023/24	12,492,970	11,694,640
General Fund Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2026/27	39,984,160	23,721,000
Housing Revenue Account Net Budget 2023/24	15,961,750	-
Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2026/27	28,824,600	-

Development of a New Efficiency Programme

The efficiency requirements for the two Councils set out in the February 2023 MTFPs were as follows:

Year	High Peak	Staffordshire Moorlands	Alliance Total
	£	£	£
2024/25	150,000	200,000	350,000
2025/26	200,000	240,000	440,000
2026/27	200,000	250,000	450,000
Total Requirement	550,000	690,000	1,240,000

Recognising the future requirement to realise efficiency savings each of the Councils, an 'Ideas Lab' exercise was held with Heads of Services and, subsequently, with opportunities for all councillors to engage in the process during the Autumn of 2022. This exercise identified potential efficiency savings that could be developed into a new Efficiency Strategy which will be implemented alongside the requirements of MTFPs from 2024/25.

Two key criteria were established from the very outset:

The programme should not be significantly detrimental to the delivery of frontline services; and

Any reduction in staffing should be minimised; the programme includes no expected staffing reductions.

Following this exercise, the potential programme of potential efficiency opportunities was assessed on the following criteria:

- Viability: how deliverable the scheme would be;
- Cost of input: an assessment of any costs of delivering the scheme;
- Difficulty of input (time): the likelihood of the opportunity being delivered within the period of the MTFP;
- Economy: whether the scheme would deliver a reduction in inputs;
- Efficiency: whether the scheme would deliver an improvement in outputs;

- Effectiveness: whether the scheme would deliver an improvement in outcomes;
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); whether the scheme would have a positive, negative, or neutral impact in respect of EDI; and
- Environmental assessment: whether the scheme would have a positive, negative, or neutral impact in respect of the environment.

This assessment was then further refined with the development of five themes, each led by a senior officer. These themes are:

Asset Management Plan –
Head of Assets

Income and charges –
Head of Democratic Services

Recruitment and retention –
Head of OD & Transformation

Project management –
Executive Director (Finance &
Customer Services)

Council controlled companies –
Head of Service Commissioning
- (AES) and Head of Assets
(Alliance Norse)

Following this exercise, Draft Efficiency Strategies were then presented to the Corporate Select Committee and Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel for consideration and recommendations to the High Peak Executive and the Staffordshire Moorlands Cabinet.

The reports set out requirement to deliver efficiencies from the February 2023 MTFPs and informed councillors that it is expected that the February 2024 updates of the MTFPs, which will include the 2027/28 financial year, are likely to identify the need to add to this which, along with delivery and risks means that it was considered prudent to include a 50% contingency to this requirement.

The draft Efficiency Strategy that was recommended to the Executive and Cabinet included financial savings as follows:

Theme	2024/25		2025/26		2026/27		Total	
	High Peak	Staffs. Moorlands	High Peak	Staffs. Moorlands	High Peak	Staffs. Moorlands	High Peak	Staffs. Moorlands
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Management	24	6	79	11	165	219	268	236
Income & Charges	40	60	40	60	40	60	120	180
Recruitment & Retention	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Project Management	15	15	15	15	15	15	45	45
Council Controlled Companies	28	303	86	88	211	213	325	604
Total	107	384	220	174	431	507	758	1,065

The next steps for the finalisation of the programme were set out as:

- Integrate the values in the development of the February 2024 MTFP updates – including any necessary adjustments.
- Incorporate the Efficiency Programme into the Alliance Transformation Board's portfolio to commence delivery from April 2024.

February 2024 MTFP Updates

At the time of the issue of this position statement, the February 2024 update of the Councils' MTFPs were still being finalised. The updated plans will be made available to the Peer Team before you commence work on site.

Early draft versions of the MTFPs were presented to councillors in

November 2023 which set out initial projections of the Councils' finances over the four-year period (2024/25 to 2027/28). At this stage, the plans were considered as draft with the knowledge that the forecasts would be subject to change as more information becomes available. Councillors were advised that the plans were being developed in the most challenging of circumstances for some years. The current challenges include:

The current period of high inflationary pressures and the uncertainty about future inflation levels

High inflation rates and uncertainty about future reductions in base rate

Capital cost inflation and its impact on the levels of required

borrowing – increased by the impact on additional borrowing required to support major projects that have fixed levels of government grants e.g. Leek LUF project

The ongoing uncertainty over longer term government financial settlements

The November update set the context for the preparation of the 2024/25 budgets and updated MPFPs which will need to be approved by the Councils in February 2024. The draft Plans provided:

- Details of current budgetary provision and Strategic Priorities.
- A focus on the transformation programme and the consequential financial implications, including the capital programme and efficiency

plans.

-
- Updated inflation and interest assumptions using the latest forecasts and the impact of changes in budgetary demand and funding.
-
- Details of areas of changed budgetary demand and risks that will impact on the Councils' financial positions.
-

As is typical at this stage of its production, the draft MTFPs remained unbalanced and were awaiting the development and refinement of many current assumptions including the outcome of the Local Government Financial Settlement which was not announced until late December 2023. The draft plans identified additional budget deficits over and above those identified in the February 2023 MTFPs.

The draft version of the MTFPs did however set the context for the ongoing development of the final plans. This included the actions that will be completed to ensure that the final proposals are robust:

- Continued development of a new Efficiency Programme reflecting the need to address the financial pressures being experienced
-
- Revision of the Council's Capital Strategy including new capital demands emerging from the Councils' new strategic plans and further update of the Asset Management Strategy building on the outcome of the Condition Surveys

- Determination of the level of Council Tax over the life of the plan reflecting Government capping/ referendum levels
-
- Determination of the level of HRA rent increase to be applied over the life of the High Peak plan
-
- Development of detailed proposals for fees and charges increases
-
- Complete review of reserves and balances
-
- Continuing to monitor the ongoing issues arising from the high levels of inflation, utility market volatility and Government spending pressures on funding levels
-
- Understanding and refining the cost pressures emerging from the Council Controlled Company operations and forecasts

Financial Risks & Resilience

The MTFPs for both Councils are currently (as at February 2023) in a balanced position and are expected to be in a similar position in February 2024. However, there are several risks to this position that will need to be monitored and mitigated. The key risks include:

- The assumed income generation from housing and economic growth, particularly to underpin the capital programme.
- The additional financial risk (but also potential rewards) associated from developing High Peak's successful Future High Street Fund Project and Staffordshire Moorlands successful Levelling Project.
- The ability to fund emerging major

capital investment ambitions in particular the Leisure Transformation Programme including significant investment required to transform facilities in Glossop and Cheadle.

- The uncertainty around the outcomes of national reforms including changes to the NHB scheme which may impact on estimated income forecasts.
- The national economic situation is currently volatile and unpredictable. There is a risk that several local and national economic drivers such as inflation, interest rates, the valuation of assets and liabilities and the demand for and funding of services may be affected.

In order to account for these risks and uncertainties, the Councils ensure that there are adequate reserves to draw on if budgets turn out to be insufficient. Both Councils carry general fund contingency balances in excess of minimum requirements to help manage this uncertainty. Both MTFPs include a 'Chief Finance Officer (CFO) Section 25 Review' which considers the robustness of budget estimates and adequacy of reserves. As part of that review, CIPFA's Financial Resilience Index data is taken into consideration.

There has been a focus in recent years to ensure that the Councils and their workforce have the capacity to ensure the delivery of the corporate priorities. This has been done with the objective of creating a culture of innovation across the Alliance to ensure that there is continuous improvement within the constraints of limited financial resources.

Delivery of Corporate Priorities

The recent refresh of the Councils' strategic plans commenced with an assessment of progress with delivery of the priorities in the previous Corporate Plans (2019-2023). This review shows that there was good progress with the delivery of the priorities contained within the plans. Regarding the priority actions, the vast majority were either complete or significant progress has been made:

Authority	Priority Actions in Corporate Plans 2019- 2023	Complete	Substantially Complete
High Peak	47	28	17
Staffordshire Moorlands	44	25	17

The significant recent successes include:

- Successful leverage of significant grant funding has included - Leek Levelling Up - £17.1m; Buxton FHSF - £6.6m; Buxton HIF - £3.9m. Delivery of the associated projects will be transformational, with a significant impact on economic benefits for residents and businesses.
- The creation of two Council Controlled Companies - AES and Alliance Norse – leveraging additional capacity for the Councils to enable the effective delivery of services.
- Development and implementation of the Leisure Transformation Plans and Move More Strategies – has yielded the improvement in the Councils' leisure offer and its impact on health outcomes.

- New [Asset Management Frameworks and Plans](#) – have established a clear route map to ensuring that the Councils utilise their physical assets to support the delivery of corporate priorities.
- Development and implementation of a [Parking Strategy for the Staffordshire Moorlands](#) – ensuring that the Council's offer supports local residents and businesses and helps support the visitor economy.
- The development and implementation of new Environmental Enforcement Policies to ensure the protection of the local environment.
- Development of [Climate Change Part 1 and 2 Action Plans](#) for both Councils which set out a clear set of actions in response to the climate

emergency to ensure that the Net Zero ambitions are met.

- Development and implementation of plans to improve the Councils' green spaces: including new arrangements for the management of the Country Parks in the Staffordshire Moorlands, Parks Development Plans in High Peak, and a number of improvements in green spaces and play facilities across the two areas.

Despite the success in the ongoing delivery of the Councils' corporate priorities, there is an ongoing need for continuous improvement to ensure the delivery of the new ambitious strategic plans. The Councils are therefore constantly looking at ways to improve service delivery at the same time as creating capacity to do more.

Access to Services, Organisation Development and Digital Strategies

Local authorities are experiencing a time of unprecedented change. We now live in a fast paced, digitally reliant, 24/7 society which has changed the way in which our residents live and work and how and when they want and need to access our services and support. The experience of the pandemic also has changed the way people work, accelerating moves towards flexibility, responsiveness, and agile / remote working. Whilst these changes present challenges for the Councils, there are clear opportunities for efficiency. The demand for online services, if met successfully by the Councils, will significantly reduce the cost-of-service provision.

With these challenges and opportunities in mind, in February 2022, the Councils approved three new strategies designed to respond to these new challenges as the Councils need to continue their transformation, developing new ways to improve and make services more intelligent and more relevant to the lives of the people who rely on them. The strategies and their visions are as follows:

Strategy	Vision
<u>Access to Services Strategy</u>	‘Ensure our services are readily available to residents in the appropriate channels and provided ‘right first time’
<u>Organisational Development Strategy</u>	‘Ensure that the Councils’ aims, objectives and priorities are met through the recruitment, development of a well led highly skilled and motivated workforce, and effective service commissioning arrangements, that reflect local context and provide excellent services to customers in a responsive way’
<u>Digital Strategy</u>	‘We will authentically deliver services that improve the lives of all our residents and businesses; through better design, use of data and innovation, and community collaboration’

Each of the strategies contains an outline action plan which sets out the initiatives that will be undertaken over a three-year period to implement the strategies. Several of the actions overlap and, following their approval, a combined action plan was developed which establishes timescales and milestones for the delivery of the individual projects.

The actions that are being delivered are focused around improvements in the following areas:

Focus	Themes	Outcomes
Customers	Customer Insight	Clear understanding of resident needs and service access preferences
	Digital Inclusion	Services are available to all in required access channels Improved customer focus
Partners	Effective Collaboration	Appropriate technology infrastructure is available across the districts Effective sharing of data
Technology	ICT Application Review	Up to date integrated system applications infrastructure
	Effective Data Management	Effective data management arrangements
Service Delivery	Service Reviews	Service processes designed around the customer
		Increased productivity Improved value for money
Organisation	Leadership & Management	Strong leadership and management
	Skills Assessment	Skilled, flexible and motivated workforce
	Workforce Development	

These actions provide significant opportunities for the improvement in the capacity of the Councils to deliver services more effectively.

Alliance: Our Future – Service Review Programme

Emerging from the combined action plan is the implementation of an Alliance wide service review programme. This has recently been mobilised and is branded as ‘Alliance: Our Future’. The vision for the programme is ‘to reflect the needs and experiences of colleagues, customers and connections to create accessible, intelligent and relevant services that are valued by those who rely on them’.

This vision recognises the links between digital transformation and cultural transformation; the success of a change programme of this scale, and adoption of new technology that enables greater connectivity between colleagues, other services and our

users, relies on change-ready leaders and an agile and engaged workforce.

Service delivery can be vastly improved with the use of modern technology, improving the ability to create powerful integrations between various internal systems, and help to increase the self-serve opportunities with a smoother experience for customers. Automation of processes in the background not only allows the Councils to design more intelligent services but removes manual and repetitive tasks from processes.

In order to enable accurate prioritisation of the areas of focus, each service area has been assessed and scored through an agreed prioritisation model. By measuring satisfaction of customers’ experience,

it has been possible to accurately forecast the impact of change, reach of improvements and scale of work required for any proposed service redesign. Other factors were taken into consideration such as contract risks, legacy system risks, opportunities to impact on the Councils’ future infrastructure plans to move to the cloud where possible, and affordability.

The service review programme commenced with a pilot review of the Communities & Climate Change Service. The service reviews for the identified priority areas of Housing and Planning have now commenced.

The programme also includes a strategic technology review which has assessed the overall IT application infrastructure. The purpose of this

strategic overview is to focus on an organisation-wide approach that ensures that applications are up to date and integrated. This exercise has also identified opportunities for system consolidation through the identification of duplicate functionality in different applications.

Development of the Alliance Workforce

The Councils recognise the importance of workforce progression and are committed to supporting and improving the progression and upskilling of the workforce. Workforce development is significantly important in the success of the Councils and is essential in sustaining and improving the capacity to deliver corporate priorities.



The Organisational Development Strategy sets out a series of actions which are being implemented to ensure the continuation of the effective development of the workforce. The strategy also included a commitment to review and refresh the apprenticeship and graduate recruitment arrangements across the Alliance.

Workforce development and progression have a significant impact on all functions within the Councils. Prioritisation of development and strategies around progression are important for the Alliance to be a dynamic organisation that meets the needs of its consumers.

In November 2023, councillors considered the [Alliance Workforce Report](#) which summarises the current achievements and the progress of staff

throughout the Alliance, focusing on the progression made by senior management, trainees and apprentices. It also sets out details of training spending.

A summary of statistics within the report are set out below:

39% of all currently employed Alliance staff have progressed through the organisation with the remaining 61% employed based on relevant qualifications.

16% of the 39% have joined as an apprentice or trainee.

Of those 16% joining at trainee or apprentice level, 53% currently hold either a senior management, middle management, or professional officer role.

70% of all senior management have progressed within the Alliance before taking on their current senior role.

Alliance workforce training spending compares favourably with other local authorities for the 2022/23 period – gross training spend per employee is £266 compared with the mean for all district councils which is £235.

Whilst the progress set out above is good, there is a need to continue to develop the current workforce and create a talent pipeline within the Alliance. The Organisational Development Strategy is being implemented to support with this progress.

In addition, there have been a number of other actions that have contributed to the development of the workforce including:

- The development of a new appraisal framework.
- The implementation of the agile working policy.
- A clear approach to pay, progression and benefits including the resolution of the long standing pay progression issue.
- Participation in the LGA 's National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) with the recruitment of two graduates that commenced in September 2023.
- Publication of the overall staff benefits package – to support recruitment and retention.

Staff Appraisal

The Councils have recently refreshed their Staff Appraisal system. Historically, managers have conducted multiple standalone one-on-one conversations, set against challenging review cycles. The Alliance wants to consolidate all key aspects of line management discussions into a unified framework, saving valuable time and energy for both the manager and the employee.

This new model will enable managers and direct reports to focus on the aspect that is the

most important to their area of work at a particular moment in time. The goal is to maximise everyone's time and ensure that conversations deliver value, rather than focus upon form filling.

This new model will replace the old appraisal system and will be underpinned by four specific pillars serving as guiding frameworks for conducting meaningful conversations.

Appraisal at the Alliance is now structured around the following four pillars:



By having these focused conversations, line managers are better informed about what is happening within their teams at specific moments in time. They can understand whether individual and team performance is on track and respond with timely support and interventions. Regular 1:1s and check-ins are still required but an appraisal conversation should allow for more agile discussions which support the individual's and organisation's needs.












Every employee should have an appraisal conversation four times within a rolling twelve-month period. The scheduling of these can be agreed between the line manager and the employee, for example around project deadlines or the start of the financial year.

Alliance: Our Network

In order to further improve employee engagement with the ongoing transformation and development of the Alliance, an additional network is currently being created. The purpose Alliance: Our Network is to give employees a voice in co-designing, reviewing, and supporting the implementation of key changes.

The purpose, objectives and roles of the network are set out below:

Purpose	 <p>A group of influential advocates, keen listeners, and constructive thinkers, who will: foster a positive attitude towards the Alliance: Our Future programme; share their insights and expertise; and gain support for change from their peers.</p>			
Objectives	 <p>Shape and road test new ideas and ways of working, sharing insights, expertise, and an employee perspective.</p>	 <p>Act as role models and support peers to understand the benefits of proposed change, addressing or escalating any concerns.</p>	 <p>Be the heartbeat of change effort within your team, developing skills for change and reinforcing key messages.</p>	 <p>Strengthen two-way communication between ‘the business’ and project teams acting as the ‘go to’ for both parties.</p>
Roles	 <p>Co-design & collaboration Participate in focus groups and design workshops, helping to tackle business problems and provide valuable insights and feedback.</p>	 <p>Change readiness Help programme and projects to assess if teams are ready to implement new changes, e.g. through completion of surveys or meetings.</p>	 <p>Communications Road-testing comms, and reinforcing message within teams, and providing feedback on queries.</p>	 <p>Learn Be the first to learn and test new systems or processes, acting then as ‘super users’ to help colleagues to adopt new ways of working.</p>

Alliance: Our Network will:

- Have representatives from different parts of the organisation, who can be approached by and effectively reach their colleagues.
- Meet regularly (monthly) to discuss the impact of change on their service areas and provide this feedback to leadership.
- Meet as required to handle ad-hoc challenges, as defined by the Chief Executive (as the Network's sponsor).
- Work with internal communications / employee engagement to establish and facilitate cross-organisation engagement channels (e.g. Viva Engage groups, in-person sessions).
- Meet with the CEO and other members of the leadership team every quarter to raise and discuss these topics and agree appropriate follow-up and feedback
- Be sponsored by the Chief Executive
- Have an internally-appointed facilitator / chair

The key aim of the network is to support / enhance the capacity for improvement across the Alliance.

Creation of Council Controlled Companies

The successful development and implementation of the Councils' Controlled Companies, AES and Alliance Norse, has had a positive impact on the delivery of services but has also generated significant additional capacity in the form of:

- The economies of scale have generated financial savings which have been able to be reinvested in other priorities.
- The professional input from the joint venture partners, Ansa and Norse, has facilitated a step change in improvements in service delivery e.g., fleet management (AES) and Disabled Facilities Grants (Alliance Norse).
- The ability to trade beyond the services provided to the Councils, provides an opportunity for significant cross subsidy again allowing reinvestment in other Council services.
- The expertise provided by the joint venture partners has facilitated improvements in the levels of assurance in respect of statutory compliance in respect of High Peak's housing stock.

- The joint ventures provide the opportunities to work with a broader range of partners.
- A wider range of knowledge to facilitate strategy development e.g., the impact of the current planned waste strategy reforms.

Building on the successful experience of the creation of the existing Council Controlled Companies, the Councils are developing plans to create a further controlled company to operate and manage the Councils' leisure facilities, as part of their Leisure Transformation Plans. This will increase the capacity to develop and deliver the Councils' leisure and wellbeing strategies.

Priority Service Reviews

Following the implementation of the management structure in 2021, it was recognised that there are several changes in staffing structures that are required below Head of Service level to ensure that there is the necessary capacity to deliver the ambitions set out in the Corporate Plans. There were significant financial savings from the management review which provided an opportunity for reinvestment in this additional capacity.

Clearly, there are continuing challenges for all services that will impact on capacity but there is a process for dealing with these challenges for individual services as they emerge with ongoing 'tweaks' to staffing structures – this is very much a 'business as usual' approach.

There were however a number of services where there were fundamental issues / challenges that needed to be addressed as a priority and required

more wide-ranging changes to staffing structures. These were identified at that time and timescales for completion to be agreed.

The service areas where there was a clear case for fundamental review of the staffing structures were as follows:

Service	Issues required to be considered
Communities & Climate Change	Climate Change Action Plan implementation and co-ordination resource Voluntary / Community sector relationship Strategic partnership arrangements Cultural / Arts Strategy development
Democratic Services	Implementation of scrutiny reviews Consultation co-ordination Community leadership schemes Governance
OD & Transformation	OD Strategy implementation Policy development Communication Strategy implementation Programme / project management development ICT Digital Strategy implementation

Service	Issues required to be considered
Revenues & Benefits	Additional demands following COVID-19 Process / System review required from channel shift Universal credit / housing benefit changes Supervisory structure
Environmental Health	New COVID-19 functions Adaptations service Private sector housing strategy Supervisory structure
Assets	Commercial skills and expertise Effective commissioning Strategic asset management planning

These staffing reviews have now been completed and have resulted in 15 new staffing posts created across the Alliance.

Levering External Capacity

The Councils have a track record of harnessing external capacity which has included:

- Private sector investment and expertise in respect of regeneration and growth
- Effective partnerships with public sector bodies around health and wellbeing
- Engaging with local communities with the delivery of community initiatives such as litter picking and community clean up events
- Securing the services of volunteers to support the management and development of green spaces.



Improvements at Glossop Halls

Securing External Funding

The Councils have been successful in securing significant external funding to support the delivery of local priorities. This has included large scale projects such as the significant investment in the Buxton Crescent Projects by Heritage England. The Councils have built up a track record of successful delivery of both small- and large-scale projects.

More recently the Councils have secured major investment in Revitalising Buxton (Future High Streets Fund), Fairfield Roundabout (Housing Infrastructure Fund), Glossop Halls (D2N2), and Leek Town Centre Regeneration (Levelling Up Fund). These projects are on track for successful delivery of the required outcomes.

Through these successes the Councils have built up strong relationships with funders and intends to continue to use these to help secure more funding to facilitate the delivery of priorities. The Councils are continuing to develop these relationships with funders and are currently in active discussions with a number, including Sport England, Homes England, the Arts Council, and the National Heritage Lottery discussing potential future investment opportunities.

Benchmarking

The Councils strongly support shared learning across the wider local government family and have long histories of playing their part in local government improvement programmes including beacon councils, peer reviews and best practice groups.

Benchmarking is carried out systematically across services and underpins corporate and service planning. The Council utilises the LG Inform benchmarking club, East Midlands Performance Network, near neighbour groups, uses data from CFOinsights and Place Analytics, and regularly accesses the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Bulletin to assess the level of performance and inform future improvements.

The Councils are active members of Knowledge Hub and have shared good practice with other councils and public sector bodies around employee appraisals, risk and performance management.