



Council Annual Review

2022/23

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Introduction

A look back on 2022/23 shows another busy year with many achievements and high-profile events.

Highlights of the year include the opening of the Tawd Valley retail and leisure park, unveiling proposals for new leisure and wellbeing hubs, issuing over £9m in funds to help with the cost-of-living crisis through various government and local schemes, and delivering a further 37 new affordable homes through Tawd Valley Developments Ltd.

We were however extremely disappointed with the set back to long term plans for a Skelmersdale Rail Link, although there was confirmation that public transport connectivity in Skelmersdale needs investment. We will continue to work tirelessly to explore this so that residents get the significantly improved connectivity and sustainable transport solutions they deserve.

In our wider role for fostering a sense of place and community we have ensured that events of national and local importance were marked including the late HM Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee celebrations, King Charles III accession proclamation and the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Lancaster

Regiment marching through Ormskirk to exercise their Freedom of the Borough, as well as a programme of cultural and entertainment events in our town centres.

Whilst the Annual Review does of course have a focus on the new and the improved, this report also considers that much of our resource and effort is concentrated on achieving the high-performance standards we set ourselves in delivering day-to-day services.

We have a lot planned that will be delivered through our new Councillor and ward political structure and you can be assured that we will continue to work hard for everyone in the Borough.



Leader of the Council
Councillor Yvonne Gagen



In October 2020, the Council agreed a three-year Council Plan for 2020-2023. This came at the beginning of a period of recovery from the pandemic and set out bold ambitions and priorities to deliver benefits for the residents in the Borough. At every step of this journey, our residents have been at the heart of our decision making because, for investment to mean anything, local people and communities must feel its benefits.

In this annual review, you will see the continued progress and momentum built during the year. These achievements, include the completion of our Tawd Valley retail and leisure park, a significant investment bringing economic and social benefits and investment of £5m in improving our existing Council homes while also developing new affordable homes for local people.

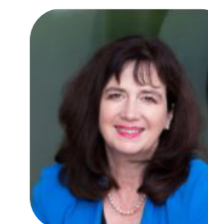
The launch of our Green Tourism accreditation scheme, our health & wellbeing programme, expanding opportunities for residents to build their skills and helping long-term unemployed people back into work, are all areas where we have made significant progress over the year.

In March 2022 we undertook a Peer Review as part of an industry-wide

commitment to improve our performance. In March 2023 our Peer review assessors returned and were impressed to see significant progress on our continued drive for improvement.

This annual review provides a snapshot of delivery across all our key priority areas to create 'a place of choice to live, work, visit and invest'. We remain optimistic for the future, but many challenges remain, not least of these being the national economic picture and the impact of the cost of living on the people we serve.

We are now looking to develop a new corporate strategy to reflect the future aspirations and intentions of the Council, building on our past success. I am convinced that keeping a longer-term focus whilst delivering effectively today will help us achieve our aim of inclusive economic development and prosperity. The Council will continue to strive to do the very best for this fabulous Borough.



Chief Operating Officer
Jacqui Sinnott-Lacey



Council Plan 2020-2023

West Lancashire Borough Council is focused on our ambitions for our people and communities rooted in a clear vision and purpose to deliver tangible outcomes.

Our Annual Review aims to highlight our achievements in our priority areas and how this work has made a difference to West Lancashire as a place of choice to live, work, visit and invest.

Vision

West Lancashire together; the place of choice to live, work, visit and invest

Our priorities

Create empowered, engaged and inclusive communities

Support businesses to adapt and prosper

Become a Greener West Lancashire

A clean, safe environment with affordable homes to buy or rent for everyone in West Lancashire

Everyone to be healthy, happy, safe and resilient

Be a financially sustainable Council by 2023

Everyone to be proud of their council



Create empowered, engaged and inclusive communities

We want:

- Healthy resilient and engaged communities that work together to improve the places they live and work
- Everyone to have the same opportunities
- Thriving voluntary and community groups that support innovation and collaboration
- To work with partners for the good of local people
- Our citizens to access the benefits of being digitally engaged
- Councillors that are active and knowledgeable and support change at a local level
- To improve customer satisfaction

Local assets, facilities, VCFSEs¹, educational settings and statutory and non-statutory organisations delivering services have been mapped in our three neighbourhoods. Data from this work was combined with results from the 'community conversations' to find out what matters most to people, led by our established team of Community Connectors who work with residents to strengthen our holistic approach to Health and Wellbeing. Once analysed, the information was shared with partners and action plans developed to deliver some meaningful change.

¹ Voluntary, Community, Faith, Social Enterprise



As part of the continued engagement with West Lancs' residents, the Environmental Enforcement Team hosted 5 Environmental Impact Days throughout the Borough. Our Partners such as trading standards, money advice, foodbanks and Lancashire Police attended the one stop advice shop in each location.



Helping overcome barriers to digital inclusion, residents were offered the opportunity to gain skills and confidence to get online through our partner provider We are Digital Training Ltd. A future face to face service is currently being sourced.

The funding for Community Voluntary Grants and Funding of Voluntary Bodies was administered via a three-year tiered funding approach 2020-2023. The total of £390,000 was awarded to three organisations, The Citizens Advice Bureau, West Lancashire Crisis Centre and West Lancashire CVS for the provision of:

- Information/Advice/Money/Debt services
- Services to improve independent living (elderly, young families, vulnerable, veterans, residents with disabilities) and their families
- Infrastructure support for voluntary, community and faith sector organisations (VCFS) within the Borough.



Regular volunteering across parks and countryside sites continues to grow with volunteers engaged in a wide variety of tasks including maintenance tasks such as vegetation management, upgrading and repairing paths, building bridges and steps. They have also been involved in wildlife surveying and assisting with events including the Dog Festival and Green Fayre.

Customers helped design our new Feedback Policy incorporating Housing Ombudsman requirements. This has given us a more effective tool for acting on feedback and where possible an opportunity to turn an initially negative experience into a positive one.

85% of complaints responded to within timescales

We listened to suggestions for improving our recycling calendars and changed the colour scheme to make the collection dates easier to understand.

Changes following the Electoral Review were in place ahead of the May 2023 elections which saw the number of Borough Councillors reduced from 54 to 45 and wards reduced from 25 to 15.



88,121 registered West Lancs voters (May 2023)

A new committee governance system has been adopted and we are preparing to replace the existing system for May 2024.

Working closely with Edge Hill University we play a key role in Welcome Week for around 13,000 students each year to help integration into our community and minimise potential issues.

A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group will expand community skip days and establish 'eco school' engagement.

Helping us shape our services we learned from responses to our Citizen and Stakeholder Survey. You told us the top three drivers for improving satisfaction with the Council are street cleaning, sports and leisure services and pavement maintenance – we are taking action in these areas with the support of partners.

1,104 responses to our Citizen and Stakeholder Survey

78% of residents are satisfied with the local area as a place to live in our most recent survey

We also used feedback on around 14 consultations in areas such as policy development and polling stations.

Support businesses to adapt and prosper

We want:

- West Lancashire to be the place of choice to locate your business
- Our three towns to be thriving hubs for their communities
- To support our businesses to succeed and grow
- A vibrant and modern Ormskirk market that attracts visitors to the town centre
- A strong rural business economy

To celebrate summer and support our local businesses we put on an August Bank Holiday Festival in Ormskirk with our partners. Visitors sampled a great mix of food, drink, entertainment, Lancashire Fire & Rescue demonstrations, rugby club 'give it a go' and swim and taster sessions at Park Pool.



5.7m footfall for Ormskirk town centre

2.4% increase in footfall in Ormskirk

The Tawd Valley shopping centre opened with three national retailers in Skelmersdale as part of our phased regeneration of the town centre bringing new local jobs and investment. Details of consultation on the future phases will be announced later in the year.



Christmas lights switch-on events were held in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk, with the community enjoying music, great food and family festive entertainment. We worked with partners to provide artisan-style markets and local businesses were involved to create a full community inspired event

“Just to say we really appreciate all the effort that you and West Lancs Council put into these events, working long hours, all the team get involved to be part of these fantastic events. So a big thank you to you all, great job.”

The Bagel Deli - Ormskirk

Our Community Wealth Building approach continued to progress. The aim of the strategy is to positively influence the growth and resilience of the local economy, create more opportunities and jobs, improve health and wellbeing outcomes and support the green agenda.

Plans to re-launch the Skelmersdale Ambassadors Board and Network are underway to help promote West Lancashire as a great place for business, attract inward investment, and encourage community wealth building to support our growing local economy.

230 businesses supported with finding property, skills and attracting employment

We have continued to drive social value through our contractors and partners giving us measurable improvements for the local economy, communities or society.

We’ve made it easier to keep purchasing power in our borough by launching the Enjoy West Lancs Gift Card. 36 businesses have now registered and are benefiting from the scheme.

“Give someone an Enjoy West Lancs Gift Card and they can spend it in our indie shops, cafés and restaurants, and get a totally unique experience. It’s free for us to be a part of the gift card and is a really welcome initiative.”

Ormskirk retailer



Work to further develop our digital offer to our customers, residents and businesses is underway. Transforming the look, feel and navigation of our website and customer account will increase and enhance our online services whilst improving the overall customer experience.

Visits to discoverormskirk.com were up by over 30% compared with last year and up by nearly 25% on letstalkskelmersdale.com

772k visits to westlancs.gov.uk

Become a Greener West Lancashire

We want:

- To become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030
- Local business and citizens to embrace the green agenda
- Council housing stock to meet high standards of efficiency - insulation, design, technology
- To minimise waste disposal and improve recycling services to meet national targets
- To embed green infrastructure into our thinking and planning for West Lancashire’s future development and regeneration
- To safeguard the natural landscape and maintain our green environment

We are working to identify and reduce CO₂e savings in the Council and borough, embedding carbon management, risk and adaptation into the Council.

Celebrating nature and community action on Climate Change we hosted a variety of events in our parks as part of Great Big Green Week including walks, clean-ups, and wetland habitat creation. Working with the Friends of Tawd Valley Park, a wetland scrape was created and leaky dams installed in Cobbs Clough to enhance biodiversity as well as to help slow-the-flow to alleviate potential flooding.

Green Tourism A Green Tourism accreditation scheme signed up 16 local businesses to help reduce their environmental impact and work towards the internationally recognised Green Tourism Award.

“I’m thoroughly enjoying my green tourism journey and have always strived to make my business more sustainable. By joining the Green Tourism programme, it has enabled me to look at where I can action small changes to make a bigger impact on the environment as well as save costs to my business, it’s a great initiative led by the Council!”

The Secret Garden Glamping (Skelmersdale) Green Tourism member

26 businesses also attended promotional Green Tourism webinars

Nearly £1.8m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, with the addition of nearly £5m from the Council, is enabling us to improve the energy efficiency of 250 houses in Skelmersdale which should save tenants money on bills as well.



Helping communities keep their beauty spots and streets litter free, we loaned out litter-picking kits to support Keep Britain Tidy’s Great British Spring Clean campaign for removing collected materials out of the environment.

We have engaged with residents and provided website information to explain how to make the most from installed solar panels.

Work to extend West Lancs' electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure funded by the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles is underway. 25 of the new EV charge points have been completed with a further 6 to be installed in 16 residential locations.

588 photovoltaic systems installed on council housing properties reducing carbon emissions and saving money

Proposals for what would be the first WLBC owned solar farm at Junction 4 / Whitemoss (Skelmersdale) remain under investigation. Discussions are taking place with Homes England to progress this scheme.

Engaging schools in our environmental work saw presentations about climate change and the actions students can take to reduce energy use. There were also 10 visits to primary schools delivering tailored assemblies to our future eco champions on topics ranging from dog ownership responsibilities, littering, recycling and pollution.



Community Action days provided a great opportunity to connect with residents and offer services and information including health and wellbeing, housing support and rent and money advice alongside the Police and Fire Service.



All aspects of the waste and recycling service, including route efficiencies helping drive down costs as well as emissions, are currently being scoped through a Waste Services Transformation programme.



Households continue to value our garden waste collections with 21,075 subscribers in 2022/23. 7,975 (38%) subscriptions were renewed through direct debit reducing seasonal impact on our customer services team and making it easier for households to retain the service.

86% of residents satisfied with our refuse and recycling service in our most recent survey

West Lancashire's biggest and best free countryside show returned to Beacon Country Park. This year all attending caterers and traders at the Green Fayre committed to no single-use plastics and recyclable packaging.



Access to green spaces were improved with a replacement bridge and upgraded paths at Abbey Lakes. Path improvements are underway at Burscough Brick Pits.

The community classroom at Tawd Valley Park is open for business, with a living roof, rain garden and rainwater harvesting system. The roof will aid biodiversity and the water system helps slow the flow of water to alleviate flooding.

The Community Classroom building is managed in partnership with the Friends of Tawd Valley Park, who regularly use the room for meetings and as base of operations for conservation sessions, including the recent Bioblitz. This event brought together ecologists, entomologists, and members of the public who carried out wildlife surveys of Tawd valley Park over a 48-hour period and identified 456 species of plant, fungus, and animals.

Policies requiring sustainable development will be embedded into the Local Plan development process currently underway.

Mini-meadows were created in areas of council-owned land in Skelmersdale. The areas will help with air quality, insect populations and carbon storage by reducing regular amenity mowing and replacing with annual hay cutting. Hay meadows capture 30% more carbon than amenity grassland. Despite having been amenity mown for 20+ years, with no additional planting, grassland species at Kiln Lane thrived on the revised regime, with Birdsfoot Trefoil, early Purple and Southern Marsh orchids, Red Clover, Cuckoo flower and Mouse Ear in abundance. The Rangers received significant amounts of positive feedback on the scheme via social media and care was taken to mow edges and grass paths to stop people thinking the area had been abandoned.

A clean, safe environment with affordable homes to buy or rent for everyone in West Lancashire

We want:

- To provide a cleaner physical environment to enhance the Borough
- West Lancashire to be safe for all citizens
- A Local Plan that supports quality growth and infrastructure in the Borough
- To provide quality and genuinely affordable homes

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) annual Bright Sparx campaign around Halloween and bonfire night once again successfully provided community reassurance and help for everyone to stay safe.

Skips for rubbish and combustibles removed 65 tonnes of waste during this period and 19 tonnes of bonfire ash was collected after the celebrations.



The Community Skip and Information Days hosted by Environmental Services were shortlisted for two awards, Keep Britain Tidy's Community Engagement Award and for the Environmental Services LGC Awards 2023.



A new monthly Environmental Services Update, based on the neighbourhood areas, was launched for Members.

Our Environmental Health teams responded to 737 complaints relating to noise and air pollution, we also carried out food hygiene interventions in 489 businesses.

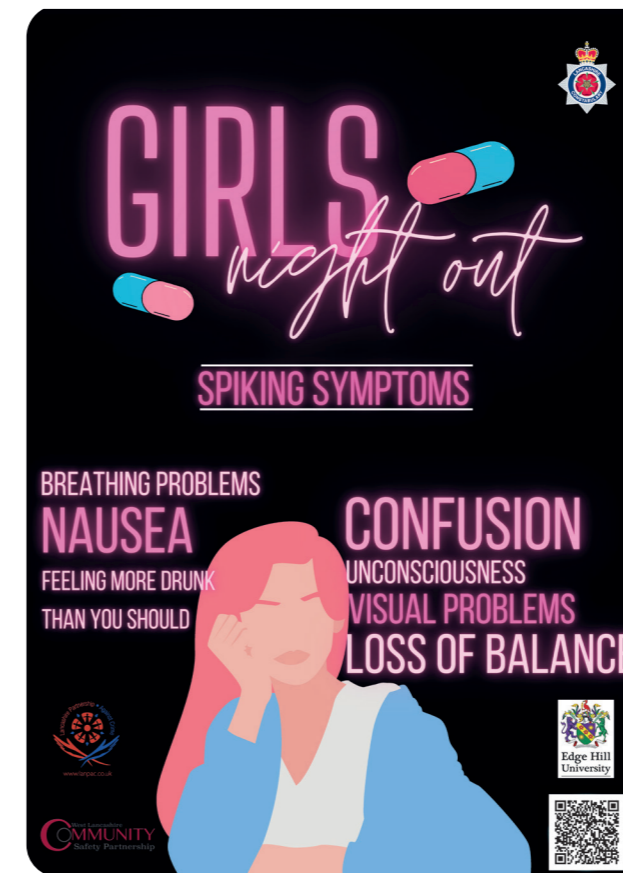


We were successful with our Re-certification Assessment of our CCTV scheme with no improvements suggested to the CCTV Surveillance Commissioner.

We completed a CCTV upgrade and published a three-year CSP Plan with priorities supported by all partners.

70% of residents felt West Lancs is a safe and secure place in our most recent survey

An award-winning joint initiative with CSP partners, licenced premises and Edge Hill University created a range of resources focused on keeping students safe. The West Lancs Spike Aware campaign was recognised through winning its category at the recent Lancashire Policing POP Awards.



Maintaining a safe built environment in the borough, the Building Control team made a total of 2,303 site inspections, visited 17 alleged dangerous buildings and processed 19 Demolition Notices.

Our very own house-building company Tawd Valley Developments Ltd (TVDL) completed 37 affordable new homes and started on the £8m development in Fairlie, Birch Green for 50 more new homes.



TVDL was shortlisted for Housing Small to Medium Enterprise of the Year at the Northern Housing Awards 2023.

A new Public Space Protection Order was introduced to deter organised car meets on Pimbo Industrial Estate in Up Holland following public consultation.

Our teams were part of Lancashire Resilience Forum's real-time simulated counter-terrorism exercise. Involvement alongside other emergency services and first line responders helps our preparedness in the event of a coordinated emergency response.

Work on the new Local Plan 2023-2040 is underway once more. Themes from the Scope, Issues and Options consultation responses have been collated for a Cabinet report in summer 2023 and preparation of the next consultation document is underway.

The Housing Strategy duration has been extended to March 2024 to enable a future strategy to use the same evidence base as the emerging Local Plan. A new strategy following stakeholder consultation will be agreed by March 2024.

With the Council and Birchwood Centre recognising the need for a Foyer in the Borough, this was reflected in the Councils Housing Strategy and in the Council making land available to support the project.

Working together to identify a suitable partner, the development of a new 24-bed facility for young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and/or who need accommodation with support was taken forward. The Birchwood Centre, a highly valued and respected local support provider, provides professional on-site support aiming to help residents gain independent living and life resilience skills to support them in their future lives. The Foyer was built by Calico Homes with £2.07m of their own investment and £0.7m from Homes England.



We have consulted tenants and updated the Allocations Policy to ensure that we make the best use of our housing stock and support those in most urgent need.

We have reviewed our approach to Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) recruiting specialist officers whose primary focus is on preventing and tackling ASB in our homes and estates.

£5m housing investment provided improvements to local council homes including communal refurbishment programmes to 44 blocks of flats, windows and doors in 40 homes and replacement roofs on 200 homes. In addition we spent a further £6.2m on maintenance, servicing, day to day repairs, and regulatory compliance. Over £6.3m is in place for Housing Improvement in 2023/24.

“I’ve never had any trouble contacting WLBC homes. They have always responded well and are polite and courteous.”

WLBC Housing Tenant

Rent to Buy and Shared Ownership Policies were approved for use to enable the Council to deliver new tenures as part of the development programme to help households with affordable housing needs. The first Rent to Buy homes are to be available autumn 2023.

To pro-actively tackle issues in local neighbourhoods the Council, along with partner agencies and local residents, engaged in an Estate Walkabout programme.

5,820 housing stock effectively managed

A new Damp and Mould Strategy was developed to tackle potential issues in our properties. A dedicated contact email and specialist team has now been established.

Everyone to be healthy, happy, safe and resilient

We want:

- To design services that help people stay healthy and independent
- An engaged and motivated Council workforce
- To invest in sports and leisure services and facilities
- To protect, invest and continue to develop our green leisure spaces
- To help businesses in West Lancashire to thrive, grow and connect

We have used part of our successful £4.2million bid for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for feasibility studies. These studies include looking at options for more leisure uses at Beacon Country Park and better community links between the Council’s Leisure and Wellbeing Hubs and West Lancs College. The former Beacon Golf Course is now part of Beacon Country Park offering more accessible green space and will be included in the feasibility study.



The former Beacon Golf Course site will be transformed to create a more engaging, accessible green space following consultations set to take place in the summer based on the options study funded through UKSPF.

Beacon Country Park and Coronation Park (Ormskirk) both retained the international Green Flag quality mark for parks and green spaces.



The cost-of-living crisis impacts hugely on our communities, so we were pleased to run the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) for children and young people in receipt of free school meals or living with food insecurity. This resulted in 650 food parcels distributed by WLBC and Shares Lancashire to families most in need.

“It’s been great to be part of something that is helping our community”

Nye Bevan Duty Manager on being part of the summer HAF Programme

As part of the Food Insecurity Forum we have promoted the NHS Healthy Start scheme for healthy food and milk for eligible parents or carers through our social media platforms and to other partners.

Our Financial Inclusion team have been working closely with people most in need. A new online Cost-of-Living Hub on our website drew together a range of local and national sources of support such as mental health and wellbeing, debt, energy payment schemes and food support to make accessing those services easier.

2,179 tenants supported with Money Advice

The Money Advice Team helped tenants secure a total of £354k by providing support and advice in relation to benefit applications and supporting tenants with benefit issues relating to paying their rent. The team also helped tenants to secure personal income totalling £524k through support which included benefits, budgeting and debt resolution.

627 families were helped to move onto Universal Credit and we supported 640 residents of the Borough providing vital support on many issues including poverty, mental health and debt.

Helping prevent homelessness in the borough support was provided to:

- 58 people threatened with homelessness were given targeted Money Advice
- 83 families were given homelessness help and advice. 61 of those families were prevented from becoming homeless with 34 families being housed by the Council.
- 156 families were given homeless relief duty. 89 families were helped into accommodation, with 76 of those being housed by the Council. Of the remaining families, 22 refused offers of accommodation.

- Of all the families that presented as homeless, 50 were provided with temporary accommodation.

Cost of Living Support for residents delivered through Revenues and Benefits 2022/23:

- £150 Energy Bills Rebate – 39,385 households, £5.9m
- Energy Rebate Discretionary funding – 8,601 households, £259k
- NNDR COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund – £1.8m
- Household Support Scheme 2 – £410k funding for 3,973 residents and 3 organisations
- Household Support Scheme 3 – £394k paid out to 2,511 residents and 13 organisations
- WLBC Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme – £260k funding; 284 households, £40k
- Council Tax Support Scheme – £229k funding; £145k, 5,802 households to date
- Ukrainian Sponsors – £132k, 53 sponsors
- Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding & Alternative Fuels – £82k, 221 customers.

A Business Health Matters Workplace Health Champion role was created for 12-months. The role delivers free, accredited training around the business benefits of staff wellbeing for the Council and within the wider local business community. In the first three months of the role to March, five Workplace Health Champion training courses were delivered to 22 participants.



286 business connections made through BHM via networking events and social media promotions

With a commitment to developing skills and bringing the long-term unemployed back into work, at the end of the Kickstart programme (September 2022) 65% of young people who completed placements continued to higher education or permanent roles. WLBC recruited 34 Kickstart participants during the scheme and from this nine took up roles within the Council.

Over 100 young people have accessed a discounted offer on Sunday evenings for 'gym and swim' sessions at the Nye Bevan leisure centre. The service is enabled by a grant accessed through More Positive Together, a Lancashire partnership project that helps people to improve their skills, wellbeing and employment prospects.

It has been an ambition of this council for many years to bring forward plans for the replacement of the ageing Park Pool and Nye Bevan leisure centres.

564k visits to WLBC Leisure Centres

Exciting plans for £50m new leisure facilities in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk were unveiled in March. Consultation on the proposed Hubs included online sources and in-person sessions allowing residents direct access to staff, consultants and architects. Plans for the substantial refurbishment of Burscough Racquet and Fitness Centre also progressed.



We successfully delivered the Public Health commissioned Adult Weight Management Contract delivering 36 courses to 244 residents. 219 people recorded a weight loss and the team have been awarded a new 12-month contract for 2023/24.

Twenty-eight volunteers from local Warm Spaces and community organisations attended workshops delivered by the Community Connector team. The event developed their valuable skills for sensitively signposting health and wellbeing messages during their everyday contacts.

We have taken on the lead role in the multi-agency West Lancashire PIVOT programme targeting those with complex vulnerabilities who may be high users of West Lancs services. With partnership funding, we are initially coordinating and chairing PIVOT for two years.

To ensure that the Council is positioned to meet the challenges ahead we have continued to complete our People Strategy which has brought significant improvements to the working environment and business model within the Council.

This has advanced a positive organisational culture with a strong emphasis on employee development and wellbeing.

It is essential that we listen to the views of our staff and 65% of our workforce told us what they think about working for us through our most recent staff survey.

- 82% understand how their role contributes to the Council's vision and priorities

A new e-learning system, Our Learning, with over 1,500 courses, bitesize learning and professional development courses has been commissioned for roll out in May 2023. This will help with our staff training, development and mandatory requirements such as Health and Safety.



Be a financially sustainable Council by 2023

We want:

- To be confident, capable and financially sustainable
- To continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service provision
- To be able to invest in high priority service areas
- To maximise available government funding and generate income to reinvest in West Lancashire
- To provide value for money services

The latest Tawd Valley Developments Ltd business plan was approved with a development pipeline focusing on local need.

Our follow-up report from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge showed that we had made substantial progress on recommendations including adopting recommendations around our financial structure and processes.

We increased the number of standards we meet in the NHS Data, Security and Protection toolkit demonstrating compliance to give assurance around personal data management.

The transformational Our Future programme ensured that key projects were prioritised and links between budget setting and service development plans were further strengthened.



Helping transform how we work across the Council, MS 365 tools and products are being deployed to replace legacy applications and infrastructure. This will provide a set of tools to collaborate in real-time, securely store and share information, easily communicate with customers and colleagues, reduce duplication and improve business processes.

A marketing strategy for our estates has been reviewed and several initiatives put into action. Within its commercial portfolio, the Council aims to support existing and attract new tenants maintaining vitality of high street and district centre locations and sustain levels of rental income. To achieve this, we seek to minimise the length of time properties stand empty through prompt and diligent progression of enquiries, advertising, network and current customer testimonial. We aim for a 90% occupation rate. We also seek to ensure that rents are promptly increased when opportunity allows through keeping up to date with rent reviews and lease renewals. Due to Covid, a backlog has built up but actions are now underway to bring rents payable up to date and reflective of the current market conditions.

92% occupancy rates for our commercial estate

To support our Housing Revenue account, last year we collected 100.47% of rent due.

What else is in place to help with financial sustainability and good governance?

Set a balanced budget for 2023/24 during a challenging economic climate. Through a combination of transforming the way we do things to bring about efficiencies, making savings on non-essential areas of spend and reviewing our income generation activities we have set a balanced budget for 2023/24.

Reviewed the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS has been reviewed and updated to account for the latest economic forecasts. This Strategy places less reliance on the use of Council Reserves over the next 3 years.

Established the foundations to manage procurement centrally. In order to bring consistency of approach, strong compliance with procedure and to ensure that we obtain value for money in all our procurement activity, a central Procurement Team was created with the necessary expertise to provide strong governance to this key area of Council activity.

Planned centralisation of computing, printing and stationery budgets. Through centralising a number of our “corporate budgets” we will achieve greater value for money through our contract negotiation and co-ordinated procurement approach. The use of single suppliers will enable efficiencies to be obtained across these areas of Council spending.

External assessment of Internal Audit Service Achieved an overall risk maturity level of 3 (managed) following an external risk review. This was the highest level of award we could receive and demonstrates our ongoing commitment to improving our governance and control arrangements surrounding the systems we operate.

Continued successful bids for external local and national grants to help our plans. For example £4.2m UK Shared Prosperity Fund, £1.8m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This funding has greatly assisted us in the delivery of our corporate priorities and has allowed exciting new opportunities to support local communities and businesses to prosper.

Finance at a glance

Our Funding

Our revenue budget represents what we spend each year to run the Council and provide day-to-day services. This Council is required to set a balanced budget each year as a legal requirement. This budget does not include capital spending.

2022/23 CORPORATE FUNDING FIGURES (MILLIONS)

(£14.961M)

COUNCIL TAX

£8.226M

RETAINED BUSINESS RATES

£2.793M

BUSINESS RATES RELIEFS GRANTS

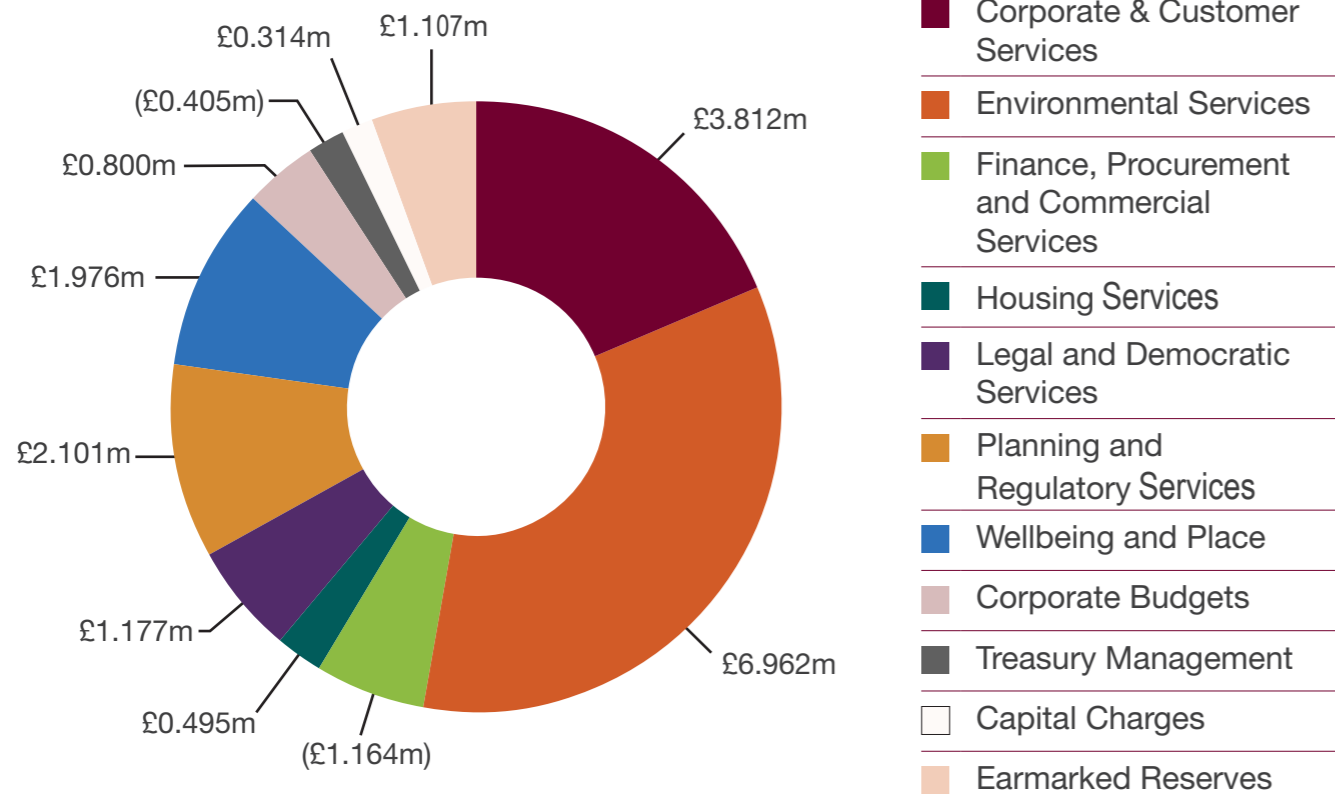
£2.850M

OTHER GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

£1.092M

Our Spending

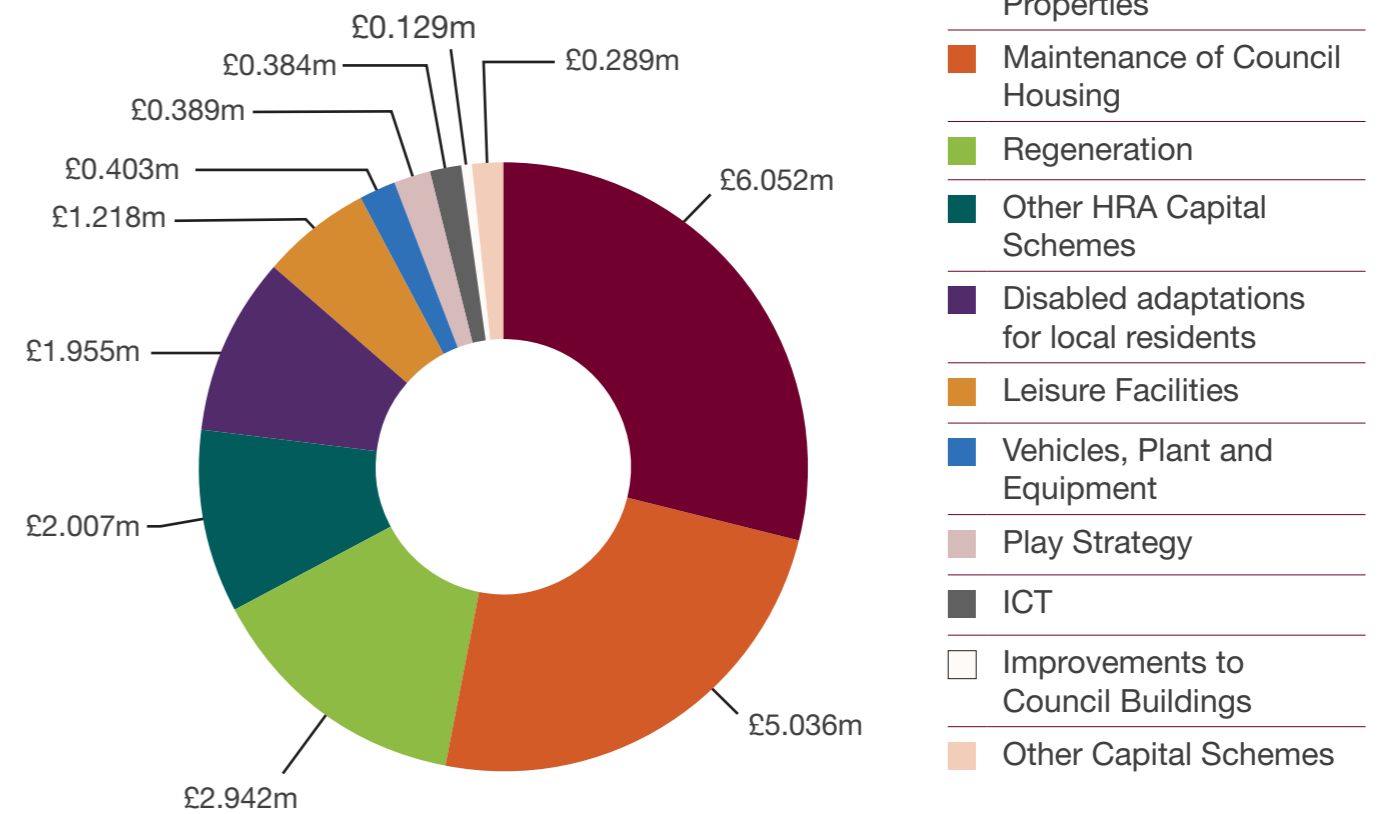
Net expenditure 2022/23 (£14.961m)



Capital Spending

Alongside our day-to-day costs, we spend money on Capital Assets such as buildings, vehicles, equipment and ICT. Some capital money is 'ring fenced' e.g. if we have received a grant for a certain project, then it can only be spent on that project. During 2022/23 we spent £20.804m on capital schemes. Regeneration schemes and maintenance of Council Housing were our top areas of spend and included Skelmersdale Town Centre.

Major Areas of Capital Spend in 2022/23 (£20.804m)





The Council would like to thank all staff, residents and stakeholders for the use of their images in this annual review.

We can provide this information on audiotape, CD, large print, Braille and in other languages upon request.

Please email businesstransformationandchange@westlancs.gov.uk or telephone **01695 577177** to request this.

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