

Foreword

Welcome to Bolton Council's plan for the next three years.

Our focus is clear, addressing inequality and poverty across the borough, supporting our residents by caring for, empowering and listening to them and achieving a prosperous Bolton. These are not just goals; they are the pillars upon which we will build a strong council and strong communities. We believe in a Bolton where every individual has the opportunity to thrive. Through our plans, we are dedicated to reducing barriers and creating a fairer Bolton for all.

As service demand grows, we are having to adapt how we deliver, moving away from a paternalistic role as that approach is no longer economically viable nor does it serve the best interests of the community. Instead, we want to empower residents to actively contribute to their communities while fostering collaboration across the diverse neighbourhoods within our borough. Prevention is at the heart of this approach. By anticipating challenges, acting decisively and working with our residents, we aim to improve well-being for all. From enhancing public health to growing and investing in our local economy, we are proactive in our strategies to ensure that no one is left behind.

Our shared goal is to see Bolton thrive, enhancing our cultural, social, and environmental landscapes. We are fostering innovation, supporting local businesses, and investing in our town's unique assets to ignite a renaissance of opportunity and economic growth, benefiting our communities and the town as a whole.

This Council Plan is a blueprint and a call for collective action. It is with a spirit of collaboration and determination that we journey towards a brighter future. Let us embrace these challenges with courage and transform our ambitions into reality.

Cllr Nick Peel

Leader of the Council, Bolton Council

About the Council Plan

The Council Plan sets out the strategic priorities that we aim to deliver over the next three years. It is an umbrella document bringing together our various plans and strategies into one cohesive and comprehensive document. Building on and responding to our July 2024 LGA Corporate Peer challenge, this plan embodies Bolton Council's ambition to continuously evolve as an organisation as well as support us in shaping and influencing the borough to achieve our borough plan and wider Greater Manchester ambitions.

Our plan is high-level, clear, and simple, underpinned by data and evidence to demonstrate our impact across all areas and people in Bolton.

It is built around outcomes, ensuring visible changes that demonstrates what the council is doing and how we are playing our part in progressing towards achieving our vision for the borough.

As a member of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, we will play our part in delivery of The Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS). The GMS focus on growth and prevention fits well with our ambitions. We welcome the challenge of sustainable inclusive growth and a preventative live well focus to benefit all.

We have tested the financial viability and risk factors of our priorities. In doing so, this will enable us to navigate challenges more effectively and ensure our efforts are directed where they are most needed.

For each priority described in this plan, we have identified a list of outcomes. These outcomes align with our borough plan and make it clear what it is as an organisation we are aiming to influence and change. Whilst the actions to achieve these outcomes are not directly indicated in this plan, we will draw out priority actions which will progress out delivery as defined in the council's golden thread.

Our principles

Principle 1: Being stable, responsible and purposeful

We will manage our resource effectively and deliver our service as best we can.

It is widely acknowledged that public services and councils are facing financial challenges.

Despite this, the council has successfully secured government and other funds to enhance our capital investment programme, promoting local growth and economic resilience.

Moving forward, we need to carefully manage our resources and deliver our services to the best of our abilities while maintaining our reputation for fiscal responsibility.

Principle 2: Getting the basics right

We will continue to meet and deliver our statutory responsibilities.

Proper governance arrangements, transparent financial management, and efficient service delivery builds trust with our residents.

By prioritising the essentials, we can achieve value for money, align strategic objectives, and learn from past mistakes.

Ultimately, getting the basics right is not just about administrative efficiency; it's a cornerstone for effective governance, financial responsibility, and community trust in local government.

Principle 3: Empowering our residents

We will work alongside Bolton's residents to support and enable them to help themselves.

By empowering residents and fostering cooperation across our diverse communities, we create a stronger, more responsive locality, built on trust, informed decision-making, enhanced community cohesion, and resource allocation that builds on community strengths as well as needs.

Principle 4: Working together

We will work as one team across the council and with partners to achieve our goals.

The council has a longstanding commitment to working together for the good of Bolton residents and businesses. No longer can we assume that the council should provide a universal service for all circumstances.

Instead, we must embrace a "place leadership" role, enabling partners to work in the best interests of our residents whilst maximising resource in order to achieve our outcomes.

Principle 5: Delivering more modern services

We will work to make our ways of working, infrastructure and services fit for the future.

Bolton Council is committed to ensuring that our methods of working and infrastructure are future-ready. We recognise the importance of meeting residents' expectations in an ever-evolving landscape. As a proactive council, we actively champion innovative approaches that enhance efficiency and embrace modern practices

A confident and achieving council

Maintain financial stability to support our residents

Budget cuts have resulted in year-on-year reductions in the council's budget with an increased level of scrutiny on how local government is spending public funds all whilst demand for services has increased. The council therefore needs to ensure the services it delivers are meaningful, within budget and delivering best value.

Our four year medium-term financial plan (2024-2028) sets out the resource we have to deliver the priorities and outcomes described in this plan, whilst also detailing the requirements for further cuts required to achieve a balanced budget. As such, it's vital we maximise the resources available to us, harnessing social value from our contracts and attracting investment into the borough.

The current capital programme totals £200m. Almost half of this covers regeneration activities across the borough, and one quarter schools' expansion schemes, both predominantly funded by government grants.

There are opportunities the council can explore to bring in additional fundings including regional and national funding mechanisms such as the integrated settlement and government bids. Equally, controls will be put in place to better monitor our resources against delivery of plans and strategies.

Linked Strategies:

- Medium-Term Financial Plan

What we aim to achieve:

Service delivery: Optimise financial resources to support delivery of essential services for our residents

Modernise and improve council services to better serve our residents

The past few years have paved the way for new ways of working and challenged the council to test its effectiveness of its services and consider how we get maximum impact from our developing approach to transformation.

The transformation programme will support the council to deliver complex, strategic and system-level change across the organisation. The priorities and outcomes described in this plan will be used to shape our transformation programme, ensuring it's aligned to the areas which will allow us to deliver the ambitions of the council.

As part of this programme, our digital strategy aims to streamline council operations whilst enhancing digital literacy across the council. The digital strategy matched with our emerging intelligence strategy, presents an opportunity to bolster data capability and realise financial gains, leveraging advanced digital tools and data analytics to enable more informed decisionmaking and improved service delivery.

To monitor our effectiveness, the council will implement a refreshed performance framework as part of our Golden Thread. As part of this framework, performance boards will be established which will highlight achievements, identify issues early and also enable directorates to target the right support at the right time, by considering performance, risk, and finance together.

Linked strategies:

- Digital Strategy
- Corporate Strategic Intelligence Strategy
- Corporate Change Programme
- Risk Management Framework

What we aim to achieve:

Enhanced data management: Improved utilisation and accessibility of data.

Streamlined systems: Increased efficiency and reduced operational costs.

Risk management and assurance: Increased organisational resilience and better protection from risks.

Maximising workforce stability, wellbeing, and engagement across the employee lifecycle

At the council, we employ over 6,000 staff across 500+ roles and value the work our dedicated teams put in to enhance lives, whether through providing waste management services, accessible housing, supporting children and families, enabling social care services, driving an ambitious regeneration programme or running a world-class events programme and it is staff that are pivotal to achieving this plan.

It's critical we create an environment to promote sharing of knowledge and experience across all staff and services whilst recognising the good work of council employees in order to attract and retain our current and future workforce. To address some of these issues, we are exploring ways of modernising our recruitment processes, extending workforce representation and supporting digital inclusion through collaborations with local organisations. We have recently set up our young employee network to further support us in developing our talent.

We must also continue to invest in our staff; by delivering a modern, best-practice approach to staff development and wellbeing whilst promoting our Values and Behaviours framework. Our organisational development programme has delivered over 600 courses to upwards of 7,100 trainees over the last 12 months. Staff are able to access internal opportunities such as career pathways and apprenticeships and we must continue to engage our workforce with development opportunities.

In recent times the council's staff development and leadership can be seen in our achievement of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, our Armed Forces Charter Silver award and intention to go for gold, and our developing staff volunteering programme.

Linked strategies:

- Corporate Workforce Strategy
- Marketing and Communication Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Improved workforce capacity: Increased recruitment and retention rates.

Addressing the skills gap: Reduction in any mismatch between the skills possessed by the current workforce and the skills required for the future of the organisation.

Strengthen staff communication: Improve employee engagement by informing, engaging and inspiring our workforce.

A council committed to building together with its residents

Improve community voice, health and wellbeing

The council recognises the challenges faced by our residents, including cost-of-living pressures, growing health inequalities, and increasing demand for social care. The council needs to review what it can do to harness resident voice and create the conditions for our residents to better help themselves which is why it is essential to adopt a strength-based approach, focusing on the inherent capabilities and potential within our communities.

By empowering individuals and leveraging their strengths, we can build more resilient and self-sufficient communities. Health is influenced by many factors, and healthcare alone accounts for only about 20% of what keeps us healthy. To best support Bolton residents, we must provide effective health and social care while also focusing on strong economic development and growth, connected communities, and green spaces. The council is committed to implementing plans and strategies that lay the groundwork for good health and wellbeing for all. This includes GM Live Well, which will provide a framework to enhance existing neighbourhood and prevention approaches across Greater Manchester.

Another one of our key initiatives is our Tackling Poverty Strategy. Addressing poverty requires a whole-system, action-focused approach and we have been collaborating with our partners to develop a strategy for Bolton. With coproduction at its heart (poverty is everybody's business) and a firm commitment to drawing on local people's lived experience, we are taking a strengths-based approach to ensure that the focus is on what individuals and communities can bring to the table and how we can all work together to deliver actions to address poverty. Aligned with this approach, our commissioning, quality assurance, and improvement strategy underscores the importance of prevention. We are seeing increases in requests for social care services and support in times of continuing financial challenges for the council. Our goal through this strategy is to cultivate a robust and varied range of social care services, supporting children, young people, and adults to live as full and safe a life as possible with more choice and independence over their lives.

Our resident voice and experience play a key role in unlocking some of these answers within the community. Community Alliances and Community Champions have already played a pivotal role in creating the conditions that enables the council to engage its residents on the decisions it makes, whilst our Family Hubs and Neighbourhood model has enabled us to begin applying lived experiences and insight to tailor services which will deliver the greatest impact. Despite this, we recognise there is still more that can be done and want to create a more consistent approach for our engagement.

Linked strategies:

- Tackling Poverty Strategy
- Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Community Cohesion Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Support residents out of poverty: Maximise resident income and reduce debt.

Healthy and Well: Improve conditions for good health through a comprehensive council-wide approach.

Live Well at home: More residents able to live well at home with independence, choice and control over their lives.

Engage residents' voice: Work with our residents to foster and improve community engagement and cohesion

Enhance employment and skills opportunities with our residents

Vital to the success of our borough is a skilled workforce that has access to job opportunities, living wage and good jobs. Yet, it is recognised that many people across the borough are not able to fulfil their potential, with some facing multiple barriers to accessing training and employment and improving their quality of life, which applies to all ages.

Within our Economic Growth and Resilience Plan we have made it an ambition to raise the wage floor whilst supporting residents into sustainable employment. We will focus on employability, and in-work support, to ensure people are able to access and remain in employment. Major investments and job growth are mostly in the West and South of the borough; it is important to connect all residents to these opportunities. As one of the town's largest employers Bolton Council is committed to raising awareness of its many career opportunities for residents, reducing any barriers residents face applying for roles and striving for a workforce which reflects the community we serve.

The development of an all-age skills strategy will also support in equipping residents with essential skills, to create a more resilient and adaptable community. This strategy will be shaped by real-world experiences to ensure it is inclusive and practical. We envisage a future where education is linked to the labour market, young people are equipped with essential skills and digital literacy and an integrated system captures the evolving skills of our communities.

Linked strategies:

- Economic Growth and Resilience Plan
- All-age Skills Strategy
- Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Supporting residents into sustainable employment: Higher number of residents in sustainable employment.

Skills development and access to employment: An increase in the number of residents with skills for sustainable employment.

Empower our children and families to thrive

One of our primary focuses is on early intervention and prevention. By developing a robust Family Help approach, we aim to provide timely support to families, reducing the need for more intensive services. This proactive strategy helps keep families together and minimises the number of children entering the care system. By addressing issues early, we can prevent them from escalating, ensuring that children grow up in a stable and supportive environment.

By expanding our Family Hub network, we aim to bring services closer to where families live, making it easier for them to access the help they need. From early childhood education to parenting support, the Family Hubs offer a range of resources to assist families at every stage. These hubs are designed to be a one-stop-shop for families, taking a strength based approach and providing them with the necessary tools and support to navigate the challenges they may face.

Our commissioning strategy is designed to ensure that the services we provide are effective and meet the needs of children and families. By working with external partners and stakeholders, we aim to develop innovative solutions that lead to better outcomes. This includes reducing external placement costs by ensuring that more children can stay within their communities. Keeping children close to their families and support networks not only reduces costs but also promotes better emotional and social development.

Reducing school absences is another critical area of focus. We understand the importance of regular school attendance in a child's academic and social development. By addressing the underlying issues that contribute to absenteeism, such as health problems, family issues, or lack of engagement, we aim to improve attendance rates. Ensuring that children attend school regularly helps them achieve better educational outcomes and prepares them for future success.

Finally, we are focused on keeping children within their communities whenever possible. By developing a sufficiency strategy, we aim to reduce the need for out-of-area placements and ensure that children can stay close to their families and support networks. This approach not only reduces costs but also ensures that children maintain their connections to their community, which is vital for their overall wellbeing

Linked strategies:

- Early Help Strategy
- Belonging in Bolton Strategy
- Sufficiency Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Children and families will receive help, as soon as needs arise

Children and young people are happy, healthy and safe.

Children achieve their potential and feel they belong in Bolton.

A council which enables growth and investment

A growing economy

Bolton, like other UK towns, has faced significant external challenges recently. The pandemic altered how people connect, shop, study, and work, compounded by the cost-of-living crisis and public sector financial challenges. These issues have been acutely felt by Bolton's residents, businesses, and investors.

The council is one of the leads for the growth and investment agenda for the borough. Over recent years, we have successfully bid for capital funding from the Government's Levelling Up Fund, Future High Streets Fund, and Towns Fund for Bolton's economic regeneration. We recently launched our new plan for regeneration – The Bolton Blueprint: A Vision for 2040 and Beyond.

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

This means ensuring having quality housing available as well as integrated, well-connected transport network for Bolton. Quality housing is essential to accommodate the needs of our growing population and attracting new residents whilst a robust transport network enables better access employment, education, health, culture and leisure services and opportunities.

Bolton Council is also committed to helping businesses create new jobs and training opportunities for residents. Our strategy supports investment and development across Bolton. The Economic Growth and Resilience Plan will focus on inward investment, manufacturing, town centre diversification, and becoming a real living wage town. Expanding the visitor and night-time economies and implementing the Bolton Cultural Strategy and Visitor Economy Strategy are key to enhancing the Borough's perceptions and attracting new businesses and residents.

Linked strategies:

- The Economic Growth and Resilience Plan
- Places for Everyone
- Local Plans
- Bolton Transport Strategy
- Visitor Economy Strategy
- Brand Bolton Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Attract investment into the borough: To maintain and increase Bolton's business base.

Build more homes: Deliver government targets for house building.

Well-connected transport network: Deliver Bolton Transport Strategy's three year action plan.

An attractive visitor destination: Enhanced and diversified offer making Bolton a destination of choice

A safe and protected borough

Our dedication to a sustainable future is evident in our response to the Climate Emergency declared in 2019, which led to the creation of the Bolton Climate Change Strategy. This strategy aims for net zero carbon emissions by 2030 for Bolton. As we look ahead, we must focus our efforts on our own operations and take tangible actions to lower our carbon footprint.

In line with our commitment to safety, the community safety partnership recently launched the Violence Prevention Strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence in Bolton. We will continue to work with residents, partners, and public services to make the borough a safer place. The council has also recently received funding to implement cohesion related activity over the short term, culminating in the development of a longer-term strategy and action plan. The funding presents Bolton with a unique opportunity to reset cohesion in the borough engaging wider stakeholders and communities in the process.

We also recognise the need to work to support people facing or at risk of homelessness. In 2025 we anticipate 4,000 people will need our help to prevent homelessness, 1,500 people will need assistance with serious concerns about their property, and 700 people with complex needs will require our support to avoid rough sleeping. By setting the standard for supporting vulnerable people, helping residents find and retain homes, and promoting quality landlords, we can help the most vulnerable weather the storm. One key area of focus for the council will be increasing housing supply to reduce the number of residents in temporary accommodation.

Linked Strategies:

- Bolton Violence Prevention Strategy
- Bolton Climate Change Strategy
- Community Housing Plan
- Community Cohesion Plan

What we aim to achieve:

Reduce crime in Bolton: Safer communities with lower crime rates.

Reduce our carbon footprint: Reduce CO2 emissions from council operations.

Support residents with access to housing: Increased housing supply with fewer families in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Culture and leisure for all

Our location offers fantastic opportunities for cultural and physical activities. Our Cultural Strategy aims to make the most of this, to boost the local economy and increase visitor footfall. That means ensuring residents and visitors always have the space to experience culture and leisure to express themselves. We want culture to be the heartbeat of Bolton and to cut through everything that we do because we believe that culture characterises us as people, links us to a place, and connects us in a community. This can already be seen in the £12m refurbishment of the Octagon Theatre, in the £3.8m improvements to Bolton Museum including a leading Egyptology exhibition, in the newly renovated Bolton Central Library, in the growing status and reputation of the Bolton Film Festival, in the many creative courses on offer at the University of Bolton, and in a dedicated performance space at the new Elizabeth Park in the heart of the town centre.

Bolton was selected as the Greater Manchester Town of Culture in 2024, launching a cultural renaissance across the borough. The council will work through our programme of cultural events celebrating Bolton's heritage, supported by UK Shared Prosperity Funding for new and improved cultural venues and programmes that continue to deliver far beyond 2024.

As part of our Active Lives strategy, we want our residents to access parks, greenspace and leisure activities with their communities. This will enhance physical and emotional well-being, improve life opportunities, boost employability, reduce reliance on health and social care services, and promote better opportunities for our residents. By implementing various initiatives and forming partnerships, we aim to improve the overall well-being and health of our residents, making Bolton a healthier place to live

Linked Strategies:

- Culture Strategy
- Active Lives Strategy
- Visitor Economy Strategy

What we aim to achieve:

Culture offer: An improved culture offer for Bolton residents and visitors.

Physical activity and healthy living: More residents moving, and more often

Monitoring and delivering this plan

The success of this plan will be monitored through target setting and progress made against this plan will be made transparent and shared through updates with our elected members and residents.

The council's performance framework outlines the role that everyone in the council has in the delivery of this Council Plan. It sits alongside our Golden Thread and will monitor progress and delivery against the priorities for the council. It does this by setting out our approach to business planning and performance, and how we use these processes to inform decision making.

Supporting the delivery of priorities, our council dashboard highlights a handful of high level (headline) and internal (supporting) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which show a clear link between performance of the KPI and delivery of the priorities and is reported to cabinet on a quarterly cycle.

- **Headline Indicators:** These are broader borough wide measures that we wish to influence with recognition they may not all be within our control.
- **Supporting Indicators:** A mixture of both internal and external measures (which we have direct control over or for what we carry lead responsibility) that plays a substantial role in delivering the headline indicators.

The council's services often have a cross-cutting impact, yet we acknowledge our capacity is limited and we can only play our part in delivery. By monitoring this plan, we aim to demonstrate our impact on achieving the broader outcomes for the borough, as well as measuring our internal efforts to influence these outcomes.

Furthermore, we recognise that as resources dwindle and demand increases, it would be unrealistic to assume we can excel in all areas. Through this Council Plan, we intend to acknowledge what we consider to be good and what is good enough.

Monitoring these KPIs is done through our Performance Boards which are subsets of Directorate Leadership Teams and adopt a high challenge, high support ethos, where performance is reported, monitored, assessed, challenged and celebrated.

These performance boards will be underpinned by our performance framework which sets the direction for strong performance management across the council.

We expect that they will allow us to better highlight impressive performance, identify and investigate potential issues sooner and enable directorates to target the right support at the right time for services that need it, supported by strong evidence.

We aim during the next three years to better connect our dashboards to our Plans and priorities to inform and develop the conversations. As the Directorate Boards further mature into their role, we expect that these reviews will allow us to draw on strengths, and to identify potential issues early in order to initiate deepdives and support to services