

SOLIHULL COUNCIL PLAN

2024-25 Update



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Our vision: Where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all

Our values: Ambitious, open, honest and keeping our promises

Purpose and audience

The Council Plan sets out the direction for the Council and the major steps that we need to take to achieve our vision for a borough where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all. In addition to the priorities set out in this plan, the Council also undertakes activities and provides services to meet its duties and responsibilities set out in law.

Our plan continues to be flexible and we will respond as the context that we operate in changes.

This plan sits alongside our Medium Term Financial Strategy which aligns the Council's financial resources to our priorities.

Our latest progress in implementing our Council Plan for 2020-25 will be set out in our annual report for 2023/24.

The main audience for our plan is employees, elected members, partners and all those who work with and alongside us. It is also used as a basis for engagement with Solihull residents and businesses. We'd love to hear your views on our plans and any suggestions for the future, please email these to:
hannah.morris@solihull.gov.uk

Introduction

From Councillor Ian Courts, Leader of the Council and Paul Johnson, Chief Executive

We have updated the Council Plan for 2024/25 to reflect key developments over the last year, including the progress in our Children's Services improvement journey and the financial challenges facing us as a local authority. There have also been updates to reflect the context that we are working in, including the health of the UK economy and changes in the partnership environment that we work in.

People and communities, economy and environment are the key themes at the heart of this Council Plan, reflecting our belief that health and wellbeing, economic development and environmental sustainability go hand in hand. We also set out the foundations or enablers that underpin how we work.

Like councils up and down the country, we are facing challenges in balancing the books for the next few years. As a result, we have to change how we operate in order to be financially sustainable and continue to provide quality services for residents. A Financial Sustainability Board has been established to address the current financial challenge and prepare the Council for the longer-term challenges and opportunities ahead.

Children are central to all of our work as a Council and children's services continues to be our top priority for improvement. Children are key to the future of our borough and we want Solihull to be a place where every child can thrive and reach their potential to become an independent, healthy and happy adult.

We are bringing forward a number of innovative schemes to support our children, young people and families to achieve their potential and achieve the best possible life outcomes.

We are also committed to being good parents to children in care and care experienced young people and we are embedding this into everything we do as a Council. We are developing new strategies in this area and have launched a Community Parenting Board to involve local organisations in supporting our care experienced young people.

We are continuing to develop our approach to prevention. We have developed a new prevention strategy 'Living Well in Solihull' to support this. It sets our approach and opportunities to help local people to live well. We want to maximise opportunities for people to live well and independently, with a clear 'offer' when support is needed.

Solihull is one of the strongest performing economies in the UK and offers a world class, well-connected location to live, work and invest. We support the development of local business and have a strong reputation for sustainable economic growth and investment. This is illustrated by our ambitious masterplan for Solihull town centre, creating exciting opportunities for new housing, leisure, business, and culture.

We continue to seek to create opportunities for all and to drive inclusive growth through our roles as employer, procurer, service provider and system influencer.

We are proud of the high-quality environment in our borough. The natural environment plays a key part in climate action, and we are progressing with our Planting Our Future programme to plant 250,000 trees over 10 years across the borough.

We acknowledge our role in facilitating climate action across the borough and we are developing a climate action engagement and behaviour change plan to target our efforts in the most effective way.

We pride ourselves on being a Council that is small enough to care, yet big enough to make a difference. We look forward to working with you to achieve our vision of a Solihull with opportunity for all.



Councillor Ian Courts
Leader of the Council



Paul Johnson
Chief Executive

The strategic context

Our Council Plan needs to take account of changes in the broader context in which we work and live, which are set out in this section.

The national and international context

International conflict continues to cause instability which has national and local implications.

Inflation has decreased from 11.1% in October 2022 to 3.2% in March 2024 with the downward trend expected to continue throughout 2024. The Office for Budget Responsibility also expects real household disposable income will recover to its pre-pandemic peak in 2025-26. This is attributed to a fall in energy and food prices, combined with policies announced in the 2024 Spring Budget, such as the reduction in national insurance contributions.

Despite this, the national economic environment remains characterised by low levels of productivity and small increases in real wages. High levels of economic inactivity are a particular challenge within the economic context, with the number of working age people who are long term sick remaining at historically high levels.

We are still seeing impacts of the Covid pandemic on children and young people, including lower school attendance and behavioural, social and developmental impacts on particular age groups.

Addressing climate change is a global and local priority. Extreme weather events have severe impacts on our communities and ecosystems. As the climate changes they pose an increasing threat

and we are now seeing more frequent extreme weather events, such as flooding and high temperatures.

National policy

Some key features of national policy affecting local government over the last two years are summarised below.

The Growth Plan 2022, makes growth the government's main economic priority. It has set a goal of reaching a 2.5% trend rate. The Growth Plan aims to create higher wages, greater opportunities, and sustainable funding for public services. The plan also sets out steps to reduce energy costs in the short and long terms.

The 2023 Autumn Statement accelerated devolution in England, with new deals announced for four areas. It also outlined how the new 'trailblazer deals' for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands will operate, with a single settlement for these areas giving enhanced flexibility in the use of transport, housing, skills, net-zero and local growth budgets. A place based strategy is being developed which will set out how Solihull wants to utilise single settlement funding to achieve Council Plan outcomes.

In December 2023, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated. The NPPF sets out the Government's economic, environmental, and social planning policies for England that local authorities must adhere to. The new NPPF gives greater flexibility for local authorities in relation to local housing need, clarifying that the outcome of the standard method of calculating housing is an advisory starting point, allowing councils to plan for a higher or lower number of homes than the method indicates.

Other changes emphasised the importance of beauty and placemaking in strategic policies and setting out that there is no requirement on a local authority to review or change its green belt boundaries unless it chooses to do so. We are currently examining how the NPPF can be used to support the long-term interests of the borough in the most effective and meaningful way, particularly in relation to the protection of the green belt.

This Council Plan update was written during the 2024 UK General Election campaign. We will adjust our plans where needed in the light of changes in the national policy context post-election.

Regulatory responsibilities

As a Council we have hundreds of statutory duties to fulfil. Some of the areas where we have regulatory responsibilities include: social care, education, public health, homelessness, housing, waste and recycling, maintaining highways and the public realm, environmental health and trading standards. Our regulatory responsibilities continue to evolve, reflecting national policy.

There is an increased focus on, and scrutiny of, local authority performance, including:

- A series of monitoring visits from Ofsted following an inadequate rating for Children's Services in January 2023
- The Special Education Needs and Disabilities inspection framework
- CQC assurance of the Council adult social care functions.
- A new regulatory framework for social housing which came into effect on 1st April 2024.

This increased scrutiny is also evident through the Office for Local Government (Oflog) Through its analysis and publication of data relating to local authority performance, it aims to increase transparency, foster accountability, and improve the overall performance of local government.

Oflog is also working towards establishing a new early warning system aimed at identifying which local authorities might be at risk of serious failure of leadership. They will then engage in early warning conversations with the councils identified as being at risk and offer recommendations for improvement.



Cllr Mark Parker, Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Housing, with members of Solihull Council's Rough Sleeper Outreach Team and supporters of Change into Action Solihull promoting a campaign to combat homelessness

Fit for the future

Like councils up and down the country, we are facing challenges in balancing the books for the next few years. There are a number of reasons for this, including the increasing demand for all of our services, particularly for adult social care and children's services, the after-effects of the pandemic, plus an increase in costs due to inflation.

The budget approved by councillors in February 2024 showed that we need to deliver significant savings by 2025/26 in order to balance our budget. Savings will be achieved through a combination of reducing what we spend and considering where we are able to generate income.

We need to adapt so we can continue to provide quality services for residents. To be sustainable we have to do things differently. Identifying solutions to the financial challenge is likely to dominate a significant amount of capacity in this coming year. We will also begin to make changes in how we work in order to put us in a better place to meet the future financial challenges.

We will be publishing a Productivity Plan in July 2024. This will include service transformation to make better use of resources, opportunities to take advantage of technological advances and better use of data to inform decision making and service design.

This plan will be publicly available on the Council's website.

About Solihull

This section describes some of the key features of Solihull's population and place that influence our future plans. Subsequent sections will describe how we are adapting our plans and services in response to the changing needs of people in our borough.

A robust economy

Solihull has a strongly performing economy and offers a world class, well-connected location to live, work and invest.

On a per capita basis, Solihull has the third largest economy in the UK outside of London and the South East. In 2021 it was 44% larger than the England average. Locally, output from the Solihull economy is 77% higher per head than neighbouring Birmingham and 37% higher than Warwickshire.

Nationally, growth has been highly volatile in recent years and economic output in Solihull contracted significantly at the height of the pandemic (-7.5% in 2020) before rebounding as the country emerged from lockdown (+7.3% in 2021). Over the five years 2016 to 2021 economic growth in Solihull has been relatively constrained but still slightly above average (+15% Solihull, +14% England, +12% West Midlands).

The United Kingdom's GDP grew by just 0.1% in 2023, reflecting high levels of inflation, low levels of business investment and below average levels of participation in the labour market. We have seen that the number of economically inactive adults is at its highest level in a decade with one third of those citing long-term sickness as their primary reason for not working.

National economic growth is expected to increase from 2025 onwards but remain relatively anaemic. Solihull is not immune but has a number of fundamental economic advantages to offset this low-growth environment. These include:

- Economic assets of regional importance including Birmingham Airport, the NEC and Birmingham Business Park.
- The development of HS2, adding to Solihull's extensive national and international infrastructure links.
- A thriving business environment with high levels of job density.

In 2022, there were 148,000 jobs located in Solihull equating to 680 jobs per 1,000 resident. Solihull has the 11th highest number of jobs per 1,000 in the country and the 3rd highest outside of London and the Southeast.

Financial and business services are by far the largest sector in Solihull, accounting for 41% of all employee jobs compared to just 24% across England. The manufacturing sector in Solihull is also above the England average.

The number of jobs in Solihull increased by 24% between 2017 and 2022 compared to just 5% for England. Job growth in Solihull for this period was the 3rd highest in England.

However, the youth claimant unemployment rate in Solihull is 5.0%, compared to 4.7% for England and 6.1% for the West Midlands. The average rate in the three North Solihull regeneration wards of Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Smith's Wood is 10.8% compared with 3.4% across the rest of the borough.

Increasingly diverse communities

Solihull is increasingly ethnically and religiously diverse, with ethnic minorities now accounting for 18% of the population (similar to the national average of 19% but less than the West Midlands average of 23%). Diversity is highest among young people; 26% of the Solihull population is from an ethnic minority group.

82% of respondents to the 2022 Place Survey indicated that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

Since the 2021 Census, a number of national policy initiatives have impacted on UK immigration. In particular, since 2021, we have welcomed 4,200 adults and children to the Borough through the Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Welcome Programme. To April 2024, 1,610 school age Hong Kong British Nationals have been educated in Solihull schools.

We have developed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy which sets out how we will integrate EDI practice into everything we do. This is currently in consultation phase to ensure we are addressing the key issues for residents.

Inequality

Solihull is one of the least deprived local authorities in the West Midlands but incomes are unequal across the borough as is poverty, unemployment and life expectancy. 16 out of 134 neighbourhoods in Solihull are in the most deprived 10% in England, of which 6 are in

the bottom 5%. All of these are in North Solihull (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019).

Women living in the least deprived areas of Solihull can expect to live 10 years longer than those living in the most deprived areas, with the life expectancy gap 11.5 years for men. This life expectancy gap is due to higher mortality rates from circulatory disease, cancer, COVID-19 and respiratory diseases in the most deprived areas, particularly in men aged 40-79 years.

An ageing population

The 2021 Census shows that 45,600 Solihull residents are aged 65+ (21% of the population vs 18% England), including 6,700 people aged 85+ (3.1% vs 2.4% England).

Those aged 65 and over were the fastest growing section of the Solihull population from 2011 to 2021 (+15%, +6,000 individuals) and this is set to continue. The Solihull population aged 65 and over is expected to increase by 10,600 people (+23%) between 2021 and 2041. In-particular, those aged 85+ will increase by 3,500 (+50%) and those aged 75-84 by 4,900 (+30%).

A relatively older and ageing population has demand implications for social care services. For instance: 14,500 Solihull residents aged 65+ have a disability that limits their daily activity; 18,200 are in poor health while 4,600 provide unpaid care to others. This also has implications for unpaid carers. Solihull currently has around 21,000 unpaid carers in the borough. An ageing population is likely to mean increasing numbers of unpaid carers, which would have implications for policy and support that we provide.

Rising demand for children's services

Solihull's population of children and young people is growing. The number of Solihull residents aged 16 and under increased by over 2,300 (+6%) between 2011 and 2021.

This is only part of the story of rising demand for children services. For instance:

- The number of Solihull children aged 15 and under living in a low-income household increased by over 1,400 (+28%) in the 5-years to 2022/23.
- The number of children in need in Solihull is 32% higher than England in March 2023 increasing by 46% (+663 children) between 2019 and 2023.
- The number of children looked after in Solihull in March 2023 was among the 20 highest in the country, increasing by 34% between 2019 and 2023 (+145 children).
- 17% of pupils attending a Solihull school have a special educational need, between 2018/19 and 2022/23 this increased by 13% (830 pupils).

People and communities

This section sets out our understanding of the needs of people and communities in Solihull and describes how we are working together to give everyone an equal chance to be healthier, happier and safer. At the end, we summarise what we aim to deliver in 2024/25.

Improving outcomes for children and young people

Children are key to the future of our borough and we want Solihull to be a place where every child can thrive and reach their potential to become an independent, healthy and happy adult.

We have strengths to build upon. For example, Solihull has excellent schools, with 81% of our primary schools and 87% of our secondary schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

There are also challenges and the number of children and families needing social work, mental health and education support continues to increase.

During 2022, there was considerable internal and external scrutiny of children's services, with an Ofsted inspection in November judging them to be 'inadequate'. The service is now in a period of monitoring by Ofsted, including regular visits from inspectors.

Our children's services are the Council's top priority for improvement and a comprehensive improvement plan is being delivered alongside a multi-agency plan to address those issues that need a multi-agency response. Police and health services are partners in this plan and together we are fully committed to making the necessary improvements. We also have a governance structure designed to ensure that the improvements required are made.

Sir Alan Wood, a Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State, has worked closely with the Council and partners since November 2022 to assess and analyse the challenges, help steer improvement and strengthen services. Visible progress is being made and is being supported by our regional improvement partner, Birmingham Children's Trust.

Over the past year, we have made improvements including to our front door, assessments and planning, and to strengthen management oversight and auditing. The quality of our social work practice has improved, although there is more to do to increase consistency. The significant progress we have made and the culture changes have been recognised by inspectors in our most recent monitoring visits.

Our most recent monitoring visit found that social workers know their children very well and children's views are consistently sought and acted on. Our social workers are highly committed to their children and are making an impact in the outcomes they are achieving for children.

We are ambitious for all our children and young people in Solihull and we are bringing forward a number of innovative schemes to support our children, young people and families to achieve their potential and achieve the best possible life outcomes. These include expanding our Family Group Conference team and developing our approach to participation.

We are committed to being good parents to children in care and care experienced young people and we are embedding this into everything we do as a Council. This has included redesigning our Corporate Parenting Board, preparing key new strategies for this area, and launching a new Community Parenting Board to involve local organisations in supporting our care experienced young people.

We are also focusing on a shift towards prevention so that high quality support is available for children and families from the earliest point of need. This includes through our new Family Hubs, our developing early help system, and our new Families Together service to support young people on the edge of care.

We are continuing our work to improve outcomes for children and young people in a way which focuses on early intervention and creating a sustainable system. Our Additional Needs Strategy was written with children and young people, their parents, carers and those who work with them. As this represents what they want and need, this will continue to direct the work across the borough.

Through the strategy, our aim is to work towards a future where our children and young people can say:

- I can see that everyone is working together to help me make my life better
- I can see that Solihull has the services and support I need
- My voice is heard and it makes a difference
- I feel welcome, understood, valued, appreciated and included wherever I go
- In planning for my future, I know what will happen, when it will happen and who I can communicate with about this
- I can get the right support I need at the right time for me



Cllr Karen Grinsell, Deputy Leader with representatives of Paragon Bank, Solihull which kindly donated laptops to our children in care

Adult social care

Adult social care services support and enable people to stay as independent and well as possible for as long as possible, working closely with partners including the NHS, voluntary organisations, care providers, community groups and local businesses. We recognise, value and support the vital role of unpaid carers and the huge difference they make to lives and communities.

Our **Adult Social Care 5 Year Plan** was published after seeking extensive feedback through public sessions, pop-up sessions in retail areas, engagement with community and faith organisations, sessions with our employees and managers, social media, communications to individuals and carers currently in receipt of support and involvement of key partners such as care providers and NHS organisations. Survey results came in from the public, with over 2420 visits to the engagement webpage. This extensive feedback helped us to create our Plan which underpins all of our work. To deliver effective adult social care and support services, we will continue to listen to people with care needs, carers, providers, our staff, and other professionals. We encourage people, groups, and communities to get involved and play an active role in helping shape the future of adult social care in Solihull through our adult social care **'Get Involved'** approach.

We support people to make use of personal strengths and abilities, support networks and resources in the local community, providing the right information and support to enable people to understand what choices are available. This is so that people can make informed decisions about what support options are best for them.

When people do need long term support, we work to make sure that this is timely, proportionate, responsive, and good quality and enables people to continue to live their lives the way they want to.

This includes monitoring and reviewing the quality and safety of services that we commission and acting promptly if there are concerns.

We are also preparing for the **new assurance regime by the national regulator called the Care Quality Commission (CQC)**. This assurance process will cover all adult social care functions of councils and following inspections, CQC will award ratings to the local authority (e.g., 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') in a similar way to other social care providers.



Adult social care officer supporting a service user to travel independently during a travel training session

Tackling inequalities

In September 2022, the Council published a three-year strategy to tackle health inequalities. The aim of the strategy is to improve the lives of those with the worst health outcomes the fastest, to help them live healthier, happier, longer lives.

The strategy is a call to action to residents, community groups and local organisations to partner with the Council and NHS to tackle health inequalities. Closing the gap in life expectancy requires concerted, system-wide efforts across the life course and targeted work for those population groups at greater risk of poor health outcomes.

The priorities have been amended to take account of the BSol ICS Health Inequalities strategy and are:

- Maternity and early years
- Adulthood and work
- Supporting higher-risk groups
- Healthy places (addressing health inequalities caused by housing, transport and the environment)

Two important strategies have been developed since the health inequalities strategy was developed. The first is the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing strategy (JLHWS), which will be finalised in Autumn 2024.

The second is the Living Well in Solihull Prevention Strategy, which launched in 2023 (see page 20).

By being more effective at preventative measures, and by taking systematic action to address inequalities, we will want to see

improvements in the health and wellbeing for the whole population. Recent examples of progress include the opening of the Family Hubs across Solihull and the implementation of a targeted cardiovascular (CVD) prevention programme in the north of the borough.

An action plan is in place to take forward the priorities in the strategy and progress will be measured by an inequalities dashboard which will measure in-borough variation. The health inequalities oversight board will monitor progress in this work.

Here2Help

The Solihull population, like other local authority areas, has experienced the effects of high inflation and the consequent squeeze on household incomes. These pressures are especially damaging to lower income households. Here2Help is the council's brand which encompasses helping residents with these pressures.

The Council is working in collaboration with other public and voluntary organisations to support residents to manage income, reduce costs and access financial support. The [Here2Help pages](#) of the Council website provide information and contact details for getting help with food, fuel and financial advice.

The Household Support Fund (HSF), which was due to end in March 2024, has been extended until September 2024. The HSF provides councils with funding to help low-income residents who are struggling to pay for their energy bills and funds emergency food support services. Preparing for further changes in this area continues to be a key focus in Solihull.

Stronger communities

Strong and vibrant communities that support each other and have the capacity to generate solutions to local problems are vital to achieving our vision of a borough where everyone has an equal

chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous. Strong communities are critical in supporting people not to need council services and, where council services are needed, including adults and children's social care and public health, to enabling them to support people well.

The relationships between voluntary organisations and the Council were strengthened by working together to support people and solve problems during the Covid Pandemic and we continue to work together to build on this legacy.

Safer communities

Most residents (59% in the 2022 Place Survey) feel safe after dark; however, the majority of residents remain concerned about levels of anti-social behaviours (ASB). The 2022 Place Survey identified the most commonly cited ASB problems as being litter (34%), vehicle nuisance (32%), and people using/dealing drugs (28%).

Multi-agency activity in response to these issues, and other associated crime and ASB are coordinated through the Safer Solihull Partnership, with specific arrangements in place for ASB and drugs.

Diverse and inclusive communities

We want the borough to be a place which is welcoming and inclusive, where people respect and celebrate the increasingly diverse communities we serve. The borough is generally a place where people get on well together, with 82% of respondents to the Solihull Place Survey 2022 agreeing that people from different backgrounds get on well together.

Working directly with people from refugee and migrant communities, faith communities and other communities of identity

is an important part of our approach to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. We provide a range of information, advice and help to those that are new to the area.

The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement sets out how we will work to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.

We continuously review, examine and plan our services and policies to ensure they are fair and accessible. We work with partners in the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System and the West Midlands Combined Authority to bring together a stronger focus and resources on actions to remove or reduce inequalities that exist for people from different groups in the borough.



Tai Shing Lee, Founder of West Midland Hong Konger Support CIC, co-hosted Solihull cultural market to celebrate Refugee Week and help new communities feel welcome in the borough

Priorities and deliverables

Our priorities for the people and communities theme in 2024/25 and the things that we aim to deliver are set out below.

Priorities	Deliverables
<p>Priority: Achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people in Solihull</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure we have a relentless focus on our continuous improvement of children’s services to maximise positive outcomes for children and families, by improving quality and consistency of social work practice for all children, young people & families • Build and sustain a high-quality children’s workforce, through recruitment, retention, and practice development initiatives • Work together effectively across the council and with our partners to maximise our positive impact on children and families, with a particular focus on our enhancing our corporate parenting approach and building our community parenting approach • Extend the current Joint Additional Needs Strategy to continue the focus on improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families so that they can enjoy and have an equal chance in life
<p>Priority: Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for adults in Solihull when they need it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the way we provide services to help people repair, improve, maintain or adapt their home, with the aim to bring services together into a single, streamlined model that enables people with care needs to have safer, more accessible home environments suited to independent living • Improving support for unpaid carers by making residential short breaks more accessible, improving information and advice, and ensuring that the new sitting service and more flexible carers direct payments approach launched in 23-24 are well used • Achieve a positive outcome in the CQC inspection, using the evidence of our performance to date, the experiences of people we support and our plans for further development
<p>Priority: Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen our multi-agency work to close the health and wellbeing gap and embed our approach to prevention through the implementation of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy • Implementation of year 1 of our Living Well in Solihull (our all age prevention strategy) action plan • Implementation of Smokefree 2030 national objective to reduce the modifiable health inequalities

A strong economy

Health and wellbeing, economic development and environmental sustainability go hand in hand and this section describes how we continue to seek to grow that creates opportunities for all.

Solihull's economic strategy

We have developed a new Economic Strategy for the 10 years to 2032. The success of the strategy will be measured not only on economic growth but also on the achievement of inclusive growth and carbon reduction.

The strategy responds to economic, environmental and social challenges in Solihull and seeks to maximise future opportunities. It looks to deliver further and better economic growth, whilst ensuring that all our communities can participate and benefit.

It also supports our net zero aspirations for the borough and seeks to create thriving places which become centres of our communities and support local people. With its delivery plan, it sits alongside the Solihull Connected Transport Strategy, the Health Inequalities Strategy, the emerging Solihull Local Plan, the Housing Strategy and our Net Zero Action Plan.

The strategy is split into four priorities, these are:

- Taking steps to support business investment, innovation and growth
- Create access to good work and training opportunities
- Support business to accelerate a collective transition to net zero
- (Re)generate distinctive and economically vibrant places

Sustainable inclusive growth

Inclusive Growth is about judging an economy by what its activity does to deliver what people need to thrive: good health, purpose, power, connectivity, creativity, and a resilient, regenerative environment. Inclusive growth describes how we make sure that everyone in the borough has a fair and equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from economic growth.



Cllr Ian Courts, Leader of Solihull Council and Fiona Hughes, Chief Executive of Solihull Community Housing at a regeneration site in Kingshurst which will deliver 25 new net zero carbon social rented homes

We will drive inclusive growth as:

- › Employer - taking an inclusive approach to recruitment and development
- › Procurer - building social value into our activities to drive greater benefits for the community
- › Service provider - delivering services that directly support inclusive growth
- › System influencer - working with key stakeholders to influence the development and delivery of services to our communities and businesses to support inclusive growth

In order to deliver inclusive growth, we will adopt a multi-level approach, pitching national and international benefits to secure investment while delivering local benefits through our place-based leadership.



Artist impression of Drury Gardens – part of the regeneration of Mell Square in Solihull town centre

We will:

- Develop a pipeline of investment propositions to deliver on the economic strategy and target outcomes for inclusive growth, tackling health inequalities and transition to net zero
- Continue to advocate for Arden Cross as a catalyst site for Levelling Up nationally and regionally
- Continue to provide strong place leadership bringing together the public, private and voluntary sectors to address key issues such as access to transport, financial and digital inclusion and social connectedness

East Birmingham and North Solihull (EBNS) is a major opportunity for the UK and West Midlands, for housing, employment growth and innovation in low carbon energy. Enabling this growth, and ensuring that communities benefit, requires an integrated approach to infrastructure investment, housing and local public services.

As part of the Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal for the West Midlands, Solihull and Birmingham Councils, working alongside the Combined Authority, have identified an opportunity to work together to take an ambitious, long-term and multi-faceted approach to regeneration in East Birmingham and North Solihull (EBNS).

We now have the ability to retain the business rate income generated within specific 'Growth Zones' above an agreed baseline for a period of 25 years. The funds will be available for reinvestment in development, infrastructure and services.

A key pillar of the approach to regeneration in EBNS is a focus on prevention, public service reform and a 'whole place' approach to service delivery. An integrated approach that works with people to promote their wellbeing is needed, building on their aspirations, strengths and assets.

Priorities and deliverables

Our priorities for the strong economy theme in 2024/25 and the things that we aim to deliver are set out below.

Priorities	Deliverables
Priority: Develop and promote the borough's economy, revitalise our town and local centres and maximise the opportunities of UK Central and HS2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver phase 1 of the Kingshurst development and mobilise for delivery of the community, health and retail hub (phase 2)• Take the next steps in developing and implementing our plans for towns and local centres, including Mell Square and Chelmsley Wood• Unlock the development opportunity at Arden Cross by securing agreement to the Council's proposals for the site, and support the University of Warwick and local partners to plan for a Health Tech campus• Progress development and delivery of the Council's multi-modal transport investment programme, improving connectivity between key borough locations, and progressing development of the Balsall Common relief Road and active travel proposals• Bring forward plans to maximise opportunities arising from the Growth Zone status secured for the borough• Attract and deliver external funding to develop the culture and arts sector in Solihull
Priority: Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress the draft Solihull Local Plan, taking account of changes to the national planning framework and guidance• Work with promoters to ensure there are opportunities for both first-time buyers and those looking to downsize on Local Plan sites• Deliver the Solihull Housing Strategy, including the implementation of a new homelessness strategy; ensuring readiness for new social housing reforms; maximising opportunities to deliver cross-tenure sustainable retrofit programmes; and implementation of new policies to develop the private rented sector

Actioning our climate change declaration

We are committed to action to tackle climate change that benefits communities and businesses and this section sets out how we are doing this.

People value the quality of the environment in Solihull with 84% of respondents to the Solihull Place Survey 2022 satisfied with their local neighbourhood as a place to live, compared to the England average of 79%. Two thirds of the borough is green belt and there are 16 green flag parks.

The Council acknowledges its role in facilitating and encouraging climate action across the borough. We are aiming for Solihull to be a net zero borough by 2041 and want to ensure we maximise the benefits of this to Solihull's residents and organisations.

Over the coming months we will be developing our climate action engagement and behaviour change plan to help target our efforts in the most effective way.

For businesses we have seen the Birmingham and Solihull Business Growth Hub starting to roll out new support for small to medium size enterprises (SME's) to save energy and reduce their carbon emissions.

SME's can receive tailored advice and one-to-one sustainability support as well as access to programmes and grants.

The Council is continuing to promote energy efficiency and cost savings for residents in Solihull.

We are working with available funding to deliver energy efficiency measures to residents, cutting energy costs, creating warmer healthier homes, and reducing carbon emissions.

Another key area for climate action is transport with around 40% of the borough's greenhouse gas emissions coming from road transport.

The Council is continuing to make progress in this area recently announcing a contract with Qwello to install up to 500 public EV charge points across the borough.

The natural environment plays a key part in climate action, the Council is progressing with its planting our future programme, planting 250,000 trees over 10 years across the borough.

The Council also consulted on Solihull's Natural Capital Investment Strategy which is a key element in our response to the biodiversity crisis and sets out how we will protect restore and enhance nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing.

The Council has recently consulted on our draft Air Quality Strategy which details steps we plan to take between 2024 and 2028 to further improve air quality across the borough.



Public realm team planting trees as part of the Planting Our Future campaign

The Council acknowledges its leadership role to reduce its own emissions with an ambition to be net zero in our own operations by 2030. Our Carbon Budget is considered by the Budget Strategy Group annually to ensure progress against our target. This year we presented our Climate Investment Plan that considers the costs and benefits of climate action.



Council officer and representatives from schools in the borough join forces at an event to explore how they can reduce their carbon emissions and play their part in tackling climate change

Priorities and deliverables

Our priorities for the actioning our climate change declaration theme in 2024/25 and the things that we aim to deliver are set out below.

Priorities	Deliverables
Priority: Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refresh and take the next steps to deliver the Solihull Climate Change Prospectus, including adoption and delivery of the Natural Capital Investment Strategy, the planting of at least 25,000 additional trees by 31/03/25, and a further 125,000 trees by 31/03/2030, delivering the Council commitment to plant 250,000 trees in ten years from 2020• Implement key actions in the air quality strategy including improving our air quality monitoring capabilities and communication with the public and businesses• Commence delivery of the Solihull Town Centre Energy Network• Implement energy saving programme for street lighting (whilst maintaining safe neighbourhoods)• Develop proposals for the new household waste collection regime, in response to new requirements for weekly food waste collection

Prevention and early help

Supporting people to live well in Solihull is facilitated by the Council's **'Here2Help'** range of information and services and is underpinned by a 'think prevention and early help' approach.

'Prevention' is about taking action to stop issues arising in the first place. 'Early help' is about providing support to 'nip things in the bud', providing help when an issue first emerges, to stop it getting worse and causing major problems later. Having the right support in place to prevent problems and crises escalating, is a far more positive experience for people who need help and support. The Prevention Strategy and delivery plan, **'Living Well in Solihull'**, focuses on ensuring both new developments and existing services maximise their impact. This reflects the Council's responsibilities to support people to grow up well, live well and age well, recognising the added benefit that this approach reduces the need for statutory interventions and higher cost services.

Key points from our 'Living Well in Solihull' approach:

- › The Council is Here2Help you grow up well, live well and age well.
- › Most people live well and independently and our approach is to maximise opportunities for this, whilst having a clear 'offer' when support is needed.
- › The Council has plans to further improve its prevention and early help offer, including the roll-out of new facilities such as Family Hubs as part of its approach to both improving the opportunities for everyone to live well in Solihull, as well as maintaining an affordable long-term model for service delivery.



Cllr Tony Diccio, Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Adult Social Care & Health, with colleagues at the opening of Evergreen Family Hub

The Prevention Strategy sets out the approach and opportunities relating to helping local people to live well. Following this, our 'Living Well in Solihull Delivery Group' has been established. It is co-ordinating the key developments and projects across the council which contribute to this area of work.

The work is grouped into four themes - 'growing up well', 'living well', 'ageing well' and 'facilitating activities'. As part of the 'growing up well' theme, the children's Early Help Board will be responsible for 'early help' service developments focused on improving lives and outcomes for children and young people. Examples of developments overseen through this board include delivery of the Children's Early Help Strategy and establishment of Family Hubs.

Our public service design

We provide a variety of services spanning those offered to all residents through to those supporting individuals who need specialist support. We focus on supporting people to live well and independently, whilst having a clear 'offer' when support is needed. To do this, our Council operating model is underpinned by a 'think prevention' approach and broadly divides our services into three categories: Universal, Targeted and Specialist.

Universal services are those offered to all of our residents and provide the foundation upon which successful, sustainable communities are built.

Targeted services are there to help these residents to get things back on track and try to ensure temporary difficulties do not escalate to become long term issues.

Specialist services are received by residents who need specialised support, such as adults with long term health issues and children with special educational needs and disabilities or those needing longer-term support and intervention from social workers.

Throughout this plan are examples of how we continue to develop our universal, targeted and specialist services to better meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Enablers

This section sets out some of the foundations on which we build our services and which enable us to achieve our priorities.

Some of the key enablers of good quality services and positive outcomes for our residents are described below.

Our people

Our aim is to provide an engaging and inclusive work environment where valuing employee wellbeing, equality, diversity, and inclusion is part of who we are and how we do things every day.

We are developing the People Strategy 2024-27 to engage and continue to develop a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward as an organisation and increase our ability to meet our resident's needs. We are focused on building a culture and working practices where employees are valued and supported to perform at their best.

The themes of the strategy are:

- Culture
- Workforce now and in the future
- Leadership
- Wellbeing
- Develop, engage and empower

The strategy will also set out our commitment and approach to developing a diverse, inclusive and stable workforce where difference is valued and no one group feels left out or behind.

Recruitment, retention and development of our workforce

We have a skilled, dedicated and experienced workforce. This is our most important asset and the foundation of many good services for residents.

Like many local authorities, we face a number of challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce, including:

- Areas where there are recognised national occupational shortages e.g. social workers, town planners etc.
- Difficulties in recruiting where there is also a private sector market e.g. in ICT, finance, procurement etc.
- A buoyant market for agency staff.

We continue to respond positively to these challenges. We are developing our workforce to fill future vacancies and address skill shortages, for example, through apprenticeships and newly qualified social worker programmes. Currently, we employ in the region of 150 apprentices across a variety of roles and professions. This includes existing staff who are using their apprenticeship to improve their skills in their current role.

We are exploring alternative ways to find suitable candidates for roles within the Council, including careers fairs, through our social media activity and talent pools.

Both adult social care and children's services face significant workforce challenges. To address these, bespoke workforce strategies have been developed. The Solihull Social Care Academy has also been launched to promote and maintain excellent practice.

Digital transformation

The Council's Digital Programme has progressed steadily during 2023/4. The implementation of the Oracle Cloud system has been a key success along with the roll out of SharePoint.

We have created a digital roadmap which provides clear direction for the next 18 months, focusing on operational efficiency and increasing our workforce's digital skills and competence.

Analysis and insight

We aim to ensure that all of our decisions are intelligent, based on the latest analysis and insight. We have made some progress with this over the last few years, but we still have further to go.

We have redesigned our approach to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to provide an accessible and up to date evidence base about the health and wellbeing of the Solihull population on the Council's website. The high-level evidence summary, the Story of Solihull, will be updated annually. Topic based needs assessments, population profiles and Director of Public Health annual reports are also available, offering more detailed information.

The upgrading of some of our major IT systems over the last five years has improved our ability to extract and report on data to generate insight. We have invested in a secure organisation wide data platform and are currently working with a partner to ingest data into this platform and to connect data from multiple data sources to generate insight about how the Council can best meet citizen needs.

Engaging our citizens

Residents and communities are central to the Council's thinking and planning.

A Community Development team works across the borough's neighbourhoods to encourage and enable and support communities to develop local assets and solutions to local problems. This model is evolving to work alongside children's services, adult social care, schools and local health services to better connect services with local communities and promote community participation as a key form of prevention and early intervention.

Our adult social care 'Get Involved' approach is one way that local residents can get involved and help shape our future services. We will continue to strengthen co-production arrangements.

We carry out a Place Survey every other year to find out what residents think of their local place and track how this is changing over time. We also carry out regular surveys to find out what those who use them think of key services and consult on proposed service changes, plans and projects. One of the ways in which we will do this going forward is through our digital engagement platform, Your Voice Solihull.

We will continue to build on existing strong relationships with community groups and organisations, engage more people to understand the Council's ambitions for the borough and enable them to shape the future of their local places.

Deliverables

Key enablers that we need to deliver on in 2024/25 are set out below.

Deliverables

- Achieve a sustainable financial position for 2024/25 to 2026/27 by:
 - › Ensuring the delivery of the existing Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - › Identifying further options for delivery of the savings required against the gap for 2025/26 and 2026/27
 - › Containing the financial position on children's services within budget
 - › Reviewing areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant high needs budget to improve the financial sustainability of providing specialist support to children and young people who require it
- Deliver the Solihull Council People Strategy 2024-2027 by taking the agreed actions for year one
- Develop a plan for the digital customer transformation programme and commence delivery
- Develop and agree an asset masterplan to provide efficient and sufficient accommodation for effective delivery of services
- Implement the delivery plan for the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Partnership working

The Council plays a key role in promoting partnership working across public, private, voluntary, and community sectors in Solihull.

The Council's relationship with voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations was especially important throughout the Covid pandemic and continues to be so to support residents with cost-of-living pressures. Local groups are essential to ensuring there are help points for different communities and needs.

We have worked with our partners across the VCSE to support key projects, such as the Warm Welcome network. We have also used our relationships with key partners to support foodbanks and Holiday Activity and Food Programme activity.

The Council's role has evolved during this time with recognition for when it needs to convene and facilitate opportunities for local groups and organisations, as well as when it needs to "get out of the way". It is now a more equal relationship, with recognition of each other's strengths and skills and how to best utilise these.

Our Council housing stock is managed by Solihull Community Housing (SCH) who work in partnership with us across a range of priorities including housing delivery, decent and safe homes and supporting those affected by homelessness.

Significant progress has continued over the last year to reduce the risk of exploitation of children and adults, via partners working closely together through the Exploitation Reduction Delivery Group.

This has included refreshing the All-Age Exploitation Reduction Strategy and Delivery Plan, undertaking a governance re-structure

and developing the services for children and adults at risk of or being exploited. The work will continue in 2024/25 with a focus on disruption.

The annual Community Safety Partnership (Safer Solihull) strategic assessment helps to inform its priorities alongside statutory duties and emerging intelligence and trends. The priorities for the partnership currently include exploitation, domestic abuse, serious violence, drugs and alcohol, reoffending, ASB, gangs and organised crime. There is also supporting work to develop the partnership's capability concerning data and intelligence, communication, and stakeholder engagement.



Cllr Ken Hawkins, Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Environment and Infrastructure, with representatives from local businesses, pupils and staff from Monkspath School at the school's new eco garden which was created with the help of local businesses

Health and care partnerships

The Health and Wellbeing Board sets the strategic direction for place and contributes to Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS) priorities, alongside developing Solihull's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A refresh of the joint local Health and Wellbeing Strategy has taken place in 2024 and takes a life course approach along with improving mental health across all ages.

Solihull Council has close and effective working relationships with health partners and is a key partner in the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS). For 2024/25, we are increasing our combined efforts to enable people to be cared for at home whenever possible, avoiding unnecessary hospital or care home admissions by providing the right support in the community.

This includes fast responses from NHS teams and social care and support. After essential hospital care, people should return home promptly, with more integrated health and care available to support them in their recovery and return to independence.

Through the community care collaborative, we are working to improve Community Services. We are working with our partners to provide improved community services in Solihull, to support people to live as independently as possible, to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, and to ensure timely discharge from hospitals for individuals with care and support needs.

The Solihull Place Committee, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, is the key multi-agency forum and the local delivery vehicle for the ICS. It has approved the development of a Solihull Place Commissioning Group to oversee collaborative strategic planning and commissioning arrangements between the Integrated Care Board and the Council.

Regional partnership working:

We work in partnership with colleagues from across the region to identify where joint commissioning approaches can add value and improve outcomes for children and young people. For example, we are part of regional frameworks for children's residential, fostering, and supported accommodation placements.

Solihull has continued to be a strong and active member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), committing political and officer leadership, expertise, and resources.

In-order to secure the benefits of levelling up and deliver inclusive growth, we will continue to work regionally and to advocate for devolution to regional and local levels.

How we will assess delivery of our plan

At the end of the sections on people and communities, strong economy, actioning our climate change declaration and enablers, we have listed our priorities and key deliverables for 2024/25.

For each deliverable, we set a number of milestones – dates by which we expect to achieve key actions. Every quarter, the Council's Corporate Leadership Team reviews progress in achieving these milestones.

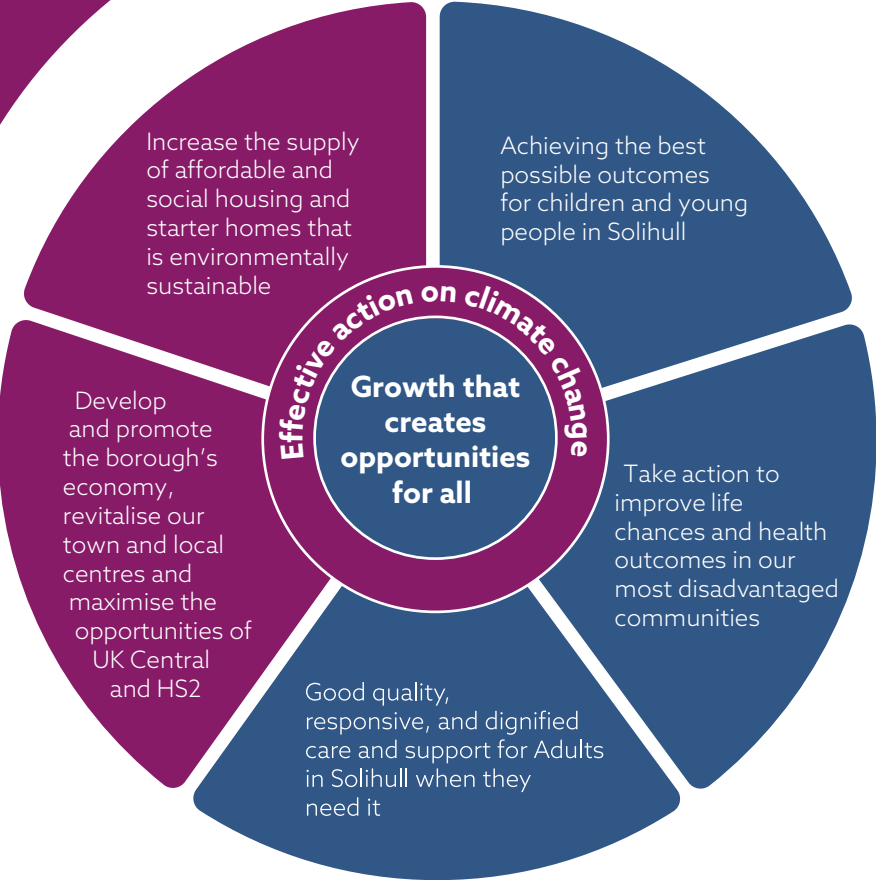
Other arrangements to monitor progress and hold us to account in delivering the plan are:

- The work programme for the Council's scrutiny boards is based on the Council Plan. This is a key mechanism for Councillors to scrutinise the delivery of the plan and hold Cabinet members to account for delivery of the plan.
- A report to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board each spring summarising delivery over the previous year.
- An Annual Report setting out progress and challenges in delivering our Council Plan.

The key elements of our plan are summarised in the plan on a page on page 27.

Solihull Council Plan 2020-25

Updated June 2024



Children are central to our work as a Council

People and Communities

- Improvements in early childhood development and school readiness, particularly in disadvantaged communities
- Effective early help prevents issues from escalating
- Children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded
- The Council is a good corporate parent to children in care and care experienced young people
- Improvements in skills and access to good work
- Connected, resourceful communities where people find solutions to local issues

A Strong Economy

- People, business and the environment benefit from UKC and HS2, including increased access to good work
- More environmentally sustainable affordable and social housing is built
- Safe, welcoming town and local centres where businesses can thrive
- More visitors to the borough
- The local economy is more resilient to economic shocks
- Improve transport across the borough

Actioning our Climate Change Declaration

- Community, environment and business benefiting from actions on climate change and more resilient to its impacts
- The council is net zero carbon by 2030
- The borough is net zero carbon by 2041
- An enhanced, well connected natural environment
- More people using public transport, walking and cycling
- Air quality has improved

Here2Help: Coordinates information, advice and help for all residents

Strong Foundations:
 Developing a New Operating Model (Fit for the future) | Our People | Digital and Customer Services Transformation |
 Achieve a Sustainable Financial Position | Asset Masterplan | Analysis and Insight | Engaging Our Citizens

Produced by the Business Intelligence and Improvement Team.

Designed by the Communications Team.

This document can be produced in other formats, please email businessintelligence@solihull.gov.uk

Cover captions:

Top right: Pupils enjoy school lunch provided by Solihull Catering Services which deliver award-winning school meals to pupils in primary schools across Solihull and surrounding areas.

Bottom right: Artist impression of the Solihull town centre masterplan – a blueprint for future investment and development in the town centre over the next fifteen years.

Top left: Tree wardens at work in one of our parks.

Bottom left: Cllr Courts, Leader of the Council and Cllr Karen Grinsell, Deputy Leader at the opening of one of our children's homes.