



# Corporate Peer Challenge

## Position Statement

February 2023



**St Albans**  
City & District Council

# Contents

<b>Introduction: St Albans District</b>	<b>4</b>
Welcome to St Albans District	4
St Albans District at a Glance	5
Geographical and Historical Context	7
About St Albans City and District Council	8
Public Sector Landscape	9
<b>Local Priorities and Outcomes</b>	<b>10</b>
The Council's Priorities	10
Understanding Our Communities	10
Case Study – Community Engagement – Cottonmill Community and Cycling Centre	12
Case Study – Community Engagement – Quaker Garden	14
Managing Performance	16
<b>Organisational and Place Leadership</b>	<b>18</b>
Place Leadership	18
Key Partnerships	18
Supporting Sustainable Growth and Shared Place Ambitions	20
Joint Infrastructure Collaboration	20
Political Leadership	20
Organisational Leadership	21
Officer Strategic Leadership Team	22
Wider Leadership Team	23

<b>Governance and Culture</b>	<b>24</b>
The Political Context	24
Background To Our Current Governance Arrangements	25
The Council's Governance Arrangements	26
Arrangements Supporting Good Councillor-Officer Relationships	27
Arrangements Supporting a Culture of Respect, Transparency and Challenge	28
Strategic Risk Management Arrangements	28
Staff Culture and Engagement	29
<b>Financial Planning and Management</b>	<b>30</b>
Current Financial Health	30
Key Financial Risks	34
Budget Monitoring	36
Capital Programme	36
Financial Decision Making	37
<b>Capacity for Improvement</b>	<b>38</b>
Adapting, Learning and Improving	38
The Council's Approach in Key Capacity Areas	38
Key Plans and Data	42

# Introduction: St Albans District

## Welcome to St Albans District

Like other Councils we have experienced significant change over the last three years, both as a result of the pandemic and subsequent changing ways of working, and the increasingly challenging financial landscape.

St Albans District was identified in early 2023 as one of the top ten areas in the country with high levels of social trust. This shone through during the pandemic, and we are proud of the way our community came together to support each other, and that we were able to play our full part in delivering vital public services.

Severely challenging as it was, the pandemic was an opportunity to rethink the way we work and to make changes for the future. In 2022 we reshaped our operating model so that we are in a better position to adapt and respond to the financial pressures we face, shifting demand and expectations, and the pace of change. A major programme of organisational change is underway to put the necessary foundations in place for our future development.

Two years ago our Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency. Our climate change strategy sets out how we will tackle this. Among a wide range of initiatives, our housing stock will have the infrastructure in place by 2030 to be carbon net neutral; sustainability is firmly at the heart of our emerging Local Plan; and we are determined to retain our strong position as one of the top performing local authority areas for recycling in England.

Our Council Plan sets out our priorities for the next five years. The climate emergency; more social housing; supporting the local economy; enhancing the District's cultural offer; and promoting equality, inclusion, and fairness are our top priorities. These will be our areas of focus over the next five years.



Chris White,  
Leader



Amanda Foley,  
Chief Executive

“  
We are proud of what we are achieving, but we know there is a lot more to do. We are inviting this peer challenge to help us ensure that the Council is best placed to deliver in the short and medium term and is a high-performing organisation fit and able to respond to the challenges of the future.”

## St Albans District at a Glance

Since 2011 the District's population has increased from **140,700 to 148,200** (2021), an increase of **5.4%**. The East of England population increase is **8.3%**.



The composition of our population (2021) is **83.6%** White; **8.2%** Asian/Asian British; **2.1%** Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; **4.3%** mixed/multiple ethnic groups; **1.8%** other ethnic group.



The District covers **161** square kilometres.



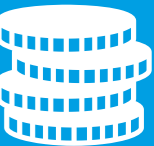
We have **8,675** business enterprises (2022), the highest number in Hertfordshire.



**91.3%** of businesses are micro (0-9 staff), **7.1%** small (10-49), **1.2%** medium (50-249), and **0.4%** large (250+).



Gross value added (GVA), the measure of the value of goods and services produced in the area, has continued to increase (from **£2,976m** (2011) to **£4,436m** (2020), though it has not been keeping pace with that of some neighbouring areas. This is no doubt linked to our local business mix.



The gross weekly pay for full time employees *living* in the District (2021) was **£933.6** (male); **£738.1** (female) - (national comparison: **£642.20** (male); **£584.50** (female)).



The gross weekly pay for employees *working* in the District (2021) was **£653.30** (male); **£567.70** (female) - (national comparison: **£642.20** (male); **£584.50** (female)).



The number of people employed as Managers, Directors, and Professionals has increased from **60.7%** (2011) to **67.1%** (2021).



## St Albans District at a Glance

St Albans District has **53.0%** of residents working from home, the highest across Hertfordshire (2021).



The Number of people claiming Out-of-Work Benefits in January 2023 was **1,805** (2%). This is the joint second lowest rate in Hertfordshire and the joint 45<sup>th</sup> lowest in England (out of 309 local authorities).



Education levels (Level 4 and above) have increased from **46.3%** (2011) to **53.0%** (2021). Educational attainment is the highest in Hertfordshire, and the 9<sup>th</sup> highest across the 331 Local Authorities in England and Wales.



Numbers of self-employed people have dropped from **12.6%** (2011) to **10.9%** (2022) – nevertheless, St Albans District has the highest number of self-employed people in Hertfordshire.



St Albans District has the highest number of people (by far) who are accommodating Ukrainian guests in Hertfordshire.



Two Members of Parliament cover our District; Daisy Cooper MP is the Liberal Democrat MP for St Albans; Bim Alobami is the Conservative MP for Hitchin and Harpenden.



St Albans is the birthplace of the famous golfer Sam Ryder, and the home of the Campaign for Real Ale. Our Roman remains and mosaics are world renowned, as is the International Organ Festival.



We have a vibrant pub and restaurant culture locally which, alongside our many independent retailers, and our ancient Charter Market, underpin city centre vitality.



Despite our relative economic prosperity, St Albans District has pockets of deprivation. Seven neighbourhoods are amongst the highest areas of socio-economic deprivation in the country and there is a significant inequality within wards. The 7 neighbourhoods are identified as Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the 50% most deprived category in 2019, rising from 5 in 2015 (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019).



## Geographical and Historical Context

The District of St Albans has a rich Roman and medieval history and is a blend of historic city, vibrant towns, pretty villages, and beautiful countryside.

The District is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt (82%), 32km north of London.

Hertfordshire's towns are influenced by their proximity to the capital. Many local people work in London, and the District benefits from excellent train links into the capital, and further afield through easy access to the motorway network. This contributes greatly to local economic prosperity. It also impacts on our ability to compete in the employment market, especially for certain professional groups.

St Albans is the largest settlement in the District. The town of Harpenden lies to the north; the villages of Wheathampstead, Redbourn, Park Street, Bricket Wood, London Colney, and Colney Heath, among others, are the other main areas of population outside the city.

The District has many firms in the legal, accountancy and financial services sectors. Some of these have come together under the “[City of Expertise](#)” banner, an initiative started by the Council and now business led.

The area is also home to a sizeable cluster of agri-tech and green technology businesses and organisations. This is discussed further, below. Other notable employers include AECOM, Premier Foods, and Burtons Foods.

St Albans District continues to have a much lower retail vacancy rate than both the national and regional average, showing the relative resilience of the retail sector locally, when compared with other areas.

St Albans and Harpenden have a mixture of attractive independent shops, restaurants and cafes, and high street brands.

St Albans District's population is culturally diverse. A majority of the population voted Remain in the 2016 Brexit referendum (62.7%), illustrating the population's underlying metropolitan outlook. Equalities and climate change are key concerns, reflected in the Council's priorities.

## About St Albans City and District Council

The Council of the City & District of St Albans was established in 1974. We employ around 400 full time equivalent staff, and work with a number of commercial contractors on key services, including Veolia for waste and recycling; John O’Conner for parks and green spaces; Morgan Sindall Property Services for housing stock repairs and maintenance; and SLM Everyone Active for leisure services.

We own our housing stock and also work with a number of partner housing associations to provide homes for local people. Providing more homes for social rent is a priority area for the Council.

The Council works with a range of Local Authorities and external partners to deliver for our community. The most recent examples of our shared service arrangements are below:

**Building Control –**  
Watford BC - Lead Authority

**Planning Enforcement –**  
Watford BC - Lead Authority

**Legal Services –**  
St Albans DC - Lead Authority

**Internal Audit –**  
Broxbourne Borough Council -  
Lead Authority

A major focus, reflected in our priorities, is our work to address climate change. The developing Local Plan will be an important enabler providing a framework for future sustainability. We are working to decarbonise our housing stock and reduce carbon emissions across the District. Strategically, with our partners across the county, we are working together to ensure growth is managed sustainably.

The Council runs two museums. Verulamium Museum displays Roman artifacts including important mosaics, and has a strong schools programme. St Albans Museum and Gallery, located in a landmark building in the city centre, is a key focus of cultural life locally and is rapidly attracting interest as a venue with potential to move from regional to national significance. In 2022, the Arts Council recognised this with a development grant of over £1m. St Albans Museum and Gallery attracts thousands of visitors. In 2022, its economic impact on the area was estimated at £3 million a year. Our market also helps to attract footfall into the City Centre.

In recent years, all our Council-owned sports and leisure centres have been redeveloped. Westminster Lodge is our flagship leisure centre in Verulamium Park with Roman-influenced spa and three swimming pools. Batchwood Sports Centre is an important centre for tennis and golf. Our newest developments are Cotlandswick Sports Centre in London Colney, and Harpenden Leisure Centre.

The Council has also recently built a new theatre in Harpenden – the Eric Morecambe Centre. Plans to redevelop our other theatre - the Alban Arena in St Albans - have been paused for the time being due to the economic downturn.

The Council’s events programme, including the Alban Festival in June, the St Albans Food and Drink Festival in September, and the St Albans Christmas Cracker in December, is well supported by our local community and attracts thousands of visitors helping to support the local economy.



## Public Sector Landscape

St Albans City and District Council operates in a three-tier area, one of ten district and borough councils within Hertfordshire, with a County Council, and 9 Town and Parish Councils in the District.

The District underwent a Boundary Commission Review in 2021/22. A [Community Governance Review](#) followed, setting out revised arrangements for Town and Parish Councils in December 2022.

Through the [Hertfordshire Growth Board](#), the Council works with county partners to identify opportunities for, and to manage, growth.

The county-wide Local Enterprise Partnership operates across Hertfordshire and is an important partner for collaboration on infrastructure and economic development opportunities. Other strategically-significant partnerships are discussed below, including our work with other local authorities to develop a South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan.

Hertfordshire forms part of the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board. There are two major community provider NHS trusts operating across the County. One of these, West Herts Hospital Trust, covers St Albans District.

Oaklands College has a campus in St Albans and West Herts College operates from Watford and Hemel Hempstead to the south and west. The University of Hertfordshire is located in nearby Hatfield just over our District border to the east.

# Local Priorities and Outcomes

## The Council's Priorities

The Council Plan sets out our priorities for the next five years. The Council Plan for 2023/24 will be considered by Council at its meeting on 22 February. The draft is available on the Council's [website](#).

The Council's key priorities are to continue our work to combat the climate emergency, to deliver more social housing, to support the local economy, to enhance the District's cultural offer, and to promote equality, inclusion, and fairness. These are our areas of focus over the next five years.

## Understanding Our Communities

### Community survey

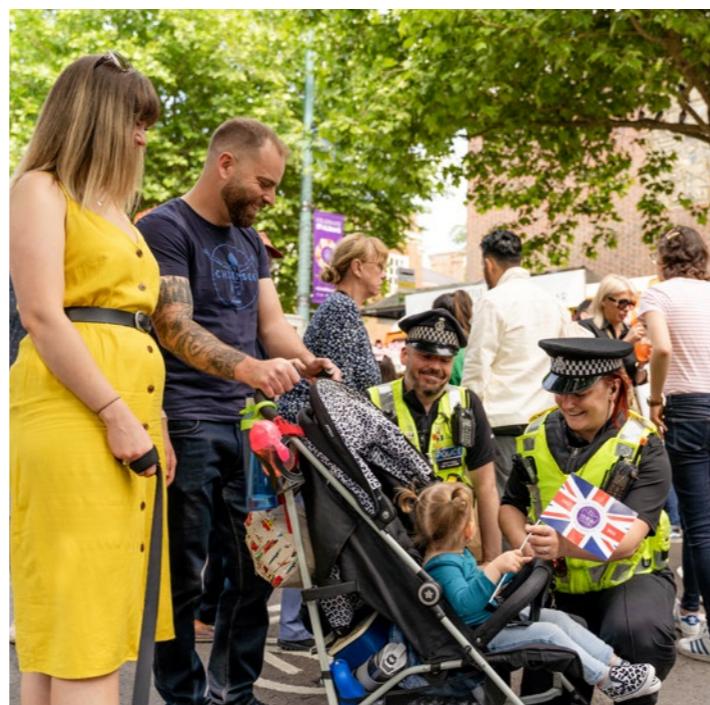
We undertake three- or four-yearly research studies through our Community Surveys. These independently conducted studies allow us to gain insight and trend data from a representative sample of our residents on their experiences of Council services and their perceptions of the District.

Full results can be found on our [website](#). Our next Community Survey in 2023 will be the first since the pandemic and will provide useful data to show the extent to which the views of our community have changed and how they feel about their local public services and the District as a place to live and work in a post-Covid world.

We also use census data to understand the composition of our communities, for example in the compilation of our Local Plan, and in service planning and financial forecasting.

### Consultations and Community Viewpoint panel

We conduct consultations on a range of activities. Our current consultations can be seen on our [website](#). Residents can sign up to be alerted to our consultations and to act as a sounding board on other matters, through their MyStAlbans online account.



St Albans City and District Council

### Public questions and petitions

Residents are invited to ask questions at all Service Committee Meetings, and we encourage use of [petitions](#).

### Housing repairs satisfaction model

The Council, with our contractor, has recently implemented a housing repairs satisfaction model. Council tenants are asked to provide real time feedback which is available instantly to managers. Issues and problems can be identified and addressed swiftly, helping maintain good relationships with tenants and informing service improvements.

### External communications

Our [press notices](#), social media activity, monthly residents' e-newsletters and twice yearly printed [Community News](#) publications are our core external channels.

### Community engagement

We engage local residents actively, including on capital projects, through open communication and consultation.

The case studies on the following pages illustrate aspects of our approach to listening and empowering our community and involving them in decision making.



Corporate Peer Challenge Position Statement

## Case Study

# Community Engagement – Cottonmill Community and Cycling Centre

**Cottonmill Community and Cycle Centre in St Albans opened in 2022 on the site of an underused Council-owned pavilion located in Sopwell, one of the District's more deprived neighbourhoods, where much of the housing is local authority owned with few community facilities. The new £2.7m centre provides a high-quality community hub and cycling centre of regional importance.**

### The challenge

This was a challenging and complex project.

A community campaign sought improvements to community facilities for the residents of Sopwell. Other groups, including the local cycling community, and third sector organisations had long campaigned for better facilities too, and all wanted to see the site used for different purposes.

The Council could not fund the new centre alone and needed external funding to bring it to fruition. We worked with multiple stakeholders and funding bodies each with differing expectations and requirements.

### The solution

From savings on maintaining and running the former pavilion, and future income projections, the Council identified part of the necessary funding pot. We set out to find the additional sums necessary from external sources. This ultimately shaped the final centre created.

The local community backed the project from the start and took an active role in its concept and delivery through bodies including Cottonmill and Sopwell Hub (CaSH), Sopwell Residents Association, the Sopwell Community Trust and the Verulam Cycling Club.

British Cycling's Places to Ride Fund and Sport England gave £350,000 and CaSH gave £79,000 from fundraising events and donations. The Health Protection Board provided £78,000 towards the building and additional funding for health interventions.

### The impact

Along with a BMX pump-track and cyclo-cross track, the centre boasts an impressive cycle hub offering bike maintenance and repairs workshops, function room and café. The centre is also a training facility for local cycling and triathlon clubs. The pump track can also be used by skateboarders. The main building also provides full disabled access, a kitchen suitable for event catering and a Changing Places facility.

It is now used by Sopwell community groups for different activities such as yoga and dance classes, play groups and lunch clubs as well as one-off events.

The centre is accessible to all, with wudu wash facilities for members of the Muslim community to carry out ablutions before prayer. There is also a dementia-friendly Quiet Room for anyone to use for peaceful escape, study, personal reflection or prayer.



The centre is accessible to all, with wudu wash facilities for members of the Muslim community to carry out ablutions before prayer.

### Future sustainability

The centre is being run by SLM/Everyone Active as part of its leisure contract with the Council. Health Protection Board funding provided additional resources including £150,000 to enable outreach work to be carried out through the centre by Citizens Advice St Albans, Mind in Mid Herts and Communities 1<sup>st</sup> to improve the wellbeing and mental health of residents in Sopwell impacted by COVID.

### Lessons learned

The involvement of the local community from the start meant that the facilities were closely shaped to meet their needs and desires. They requested additional aspects that could not be funded in the early stages, and they rallied to raise the additional monies needed.

Harnessing the power of local community groups coming together to collectively raise additional funds for new facilities has become an important enabler locally. For example, by working collectively with local resident groups, the District now has much improved playground facilities at Victoria Playing Fields, Verulamium Park and Clarence Park, all co-designed, and co-funded with local residents.

### Further information

<https://www.everyoneactive.com/centre/cottonmill-community-cycling-centre/>

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/news/cycling-tracks-opened-revamped-community-centre>

## Case Study

### Community Engagement – Quaker Garden

City Centre Opportunity Site South – Quaker Garden Regeneration – Consultation with Luton and Leighton Area Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

There have been various attempts to develop the site of the former police station and other dilapidated buildings in St Albans city centre adjacent to the Quaker Garden (shown in yellow in the image below).

The Council approached the Quakers to see if they would like to be included in the regeneration of this important city centre area.

The Council and the Quakers negotiated openly and in good faith. The two parties worked collaboratively to include the aspirations of the Quakers within the development plans.

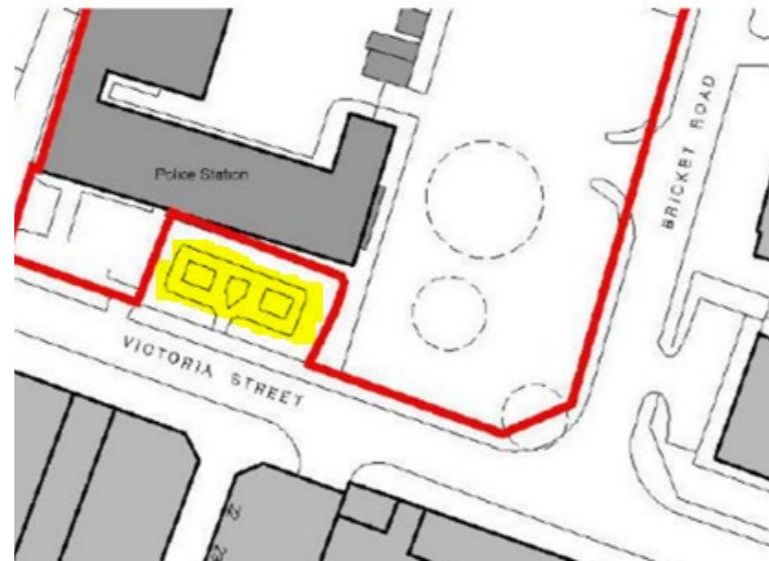
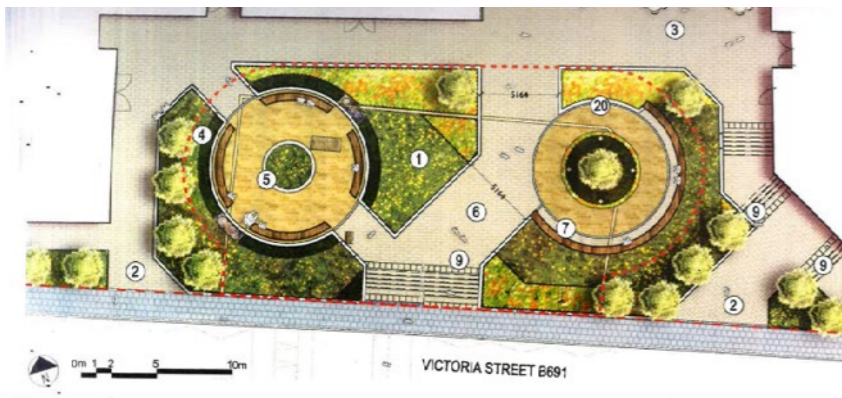
#### The challenge

The Quaker Garden was used as a burial ground for some 200 years. An old plan shows 72 burial plots, but it is not known how many interments took place there, nor the levels of the burials.

The Council, as the developer, does not own the Quaker land, but felt that the two sites were integral and that including the gardens would be for the benefit of the community.

#### The solution

In depth communications were held with members of the Quakers to understand what their wishes were for the design of the area. A proposal design was produced by architects, which has formed part of the lease agreement between the Council and the Quakers.



Two circular spaces are central to the design, reflecting a shape that is symbolic and significant to the Quakers. The existing gravestone locations and the alignment of the existing Burial Ground will be highlighted in the paving and planting.

Due to the sensitivity of the ground conditions, the landscape design does not include features requiring excavation, for example tree pits, or concrete haunching.

A consultant was appointed with a watching brief for the entire site. A further consultant was appointed to carry out archaeological monitoring and recording for the ground works. A detailed scan was undertaken to understand areas of particular sensitivity, and where potential graves could be.

Human remains were encountered during the watching brief. All findings were recorded and reburied in a location agreed by the Quakers.

#### The impact

A newly regenerated area of an underused part of the City Centre will be created, with a sensitively designed, regenerated Quaker Garden. The development is due for completion in Spring 2023.

#### How the new approach is being sustained

The Quakers were consulted on works and designs throughout. They are able to visit the site at any time. An annual rent is to be paid to the Quakers.

#### Lessons learned

Continual communication is key. Good record keeping is required so that if there is a change in personnel no information is lost. It also allows for strong relationships and trust to be built with stakeholders.



“

Two circular spaces are central to the design, reflecting a shape that is symbolic and significant to the Quakers.





## Managing Performance

### Performance data and business insight

The Council has identified that our performance data and business insight is an area for improvement. This applies to individual service areas, our overall corporate perspective, and the monitoring of outcomes.

Our current model has been developed over many years and is based on trend data, inputs and outputs. Our quarterly reports, considered by each of our Service Committees, are published on our [website](#).

Recognising the limitations of this approach, the Council is moving towards a new performance framework which we will be implementing in the new municipal year. This will be more outcome and impact focused making best use of comparative data from other councils.

The Council is also aware of the need to prepare for possible additional reporting requirements from the new Office for Local Government.

In the interim we are gradually introducing new elements to our performance reporting, as we develop our approach. For example, for many years we have been reporting on the number of vacant retail units, based on business rates data, to show trends in the retail sector. Introducing regional and national figures to our reporting has provided a further dimension which allows us to understand the local situation in a broader context. Such simple changes are having a big impact on improving our understanding of our economy.

Alongside formal reporting we are moving towards better use of live data to identify and pre-empt performance issues rather than rely on historical performance measures. This approach is central to our new customer delivery model. Our plan is to introduce dashboards to help managers of our key services to identify areas in need of investigation and improvement.

### Staff performance

Our employee performance management is based on the setting of clear objectives linked to our organisational objectives and Council priorities. Staff and managers have regular one-to-one check-ins and performance conversations, and annual performance reviews. This provides the framework for regular, continuous, two-way communication. As well as progress against targets, our [values and behaviours](#) are a key focus of these conversations.



“ Staff and managers have regular one-to-one check-ins and performance conversations, and annual performance reviews.



# Organisational and Place Leadership

## Place Leadership

We recognise that we can achieve far more by working together with our partners than we can alone to achieve good outcomes for our communities.

## Key Partnerships

Some of our key cross-Hertfordshire partnerships are outlined above. Other key partnerships are discussed below.

Collaboration with other Hertfordshire councils is undertaken through the Hertfordshire Leaders' Group (which includes all Hertfordshire Council Leaders and the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner). Through formal and informal meetings its members meet at least twice a month to discuss matters of strategic importance such as migration, resilience, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Hertfordshire councils' chief executives meet regularly at the Chief Executive Coordinating Group (CECG) to discuss matters of common interest. St Albans Council's Chief Executive is the Chair of the CECG.

A further key strategic group is the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan (SWHLSP) Strategic Planning Group. This is chaired by our Council Leader. The SWHJSP is discussed below.

The Council's Leader chairs the St Albans District Strategic Partnership which meets every 6-8 weeks. Our Strategic Partners include Hertfordshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire County Council, and St Albans Cathedral among a wide range of others (see: [www.stalbans.gov.uk/partnership-and-community-projects](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/partnership-and-community-projects)). Together they agree annual themes on which to focus. In the past these have included diverse subjects ranging from knife crime to sustainability. The current theme is working together to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

The Council works on community protection and resilience matters through [St Albans City and District Community Safety Partnership](#), and [Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum](#).

Joint working through the pandemic crisis, and in welcoming Afghan and Ukrainian families, has strengthened many of our district and county relationships.



Other key partnerships include the Hertfordshire Health Protection Board, and the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership.

The Council's Chief Executive meets individually with a number of our key strategic third sector partners including Communities 1<sup>st</sup> and CASTAD (Citizens Advice St Albans District). Both these organisations, plus NHS partners, and the St Albans Police Station, are co-located with the Council at the Civic Centre in St Albans.

[St Albans District Healthy Hub](#) is also located at the Civic Centre. Hub partners are from a wide cross section of community organisations, making cross-referral easier. We meet regularly with Hub Partners to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Engagement with town and parish councils is conducted through regular roundtable meetings and our annual Parish Conference organised by the District Council. The Chief Executive and Strategic Directors hold regular meetings with the Town Clerk for Harpenden, the largest settlement outside of the city area.

The St Albans Business Improvement District, now in its second term, brings additional funding and focus to St Albans city centre. The BID has taken on the role of Destination Management Organisation, coordinates the St Albans District Visitor Partnership, and administers [www.enjoystalbans.com](http://www.enjoystalbans.com).

The Council has recently drafted a new three-year Economic Development Strategy which will be considered by Councillors in the coming municipal year.

## Supporting Sustainable Growth and Shared Place Ambitions

The Council is using its strategic planning role to underpin sustainable development in the District. Our developing Local Plan is being prepared; the Regulation 18 public consultation is due to begin in July 2023.

Rothamsted Research, a major centre for agricultural research in Harpenden, and the Building Research Establishment in Bricket Wood, are both located within the District. These two local organisations are part of the Enviro-Tech Enterprise Zone known as Herts IQ ([www.herts-iq.co.uk](http://www.herts-iq.co.uk)), located to the east of Hemel Hempstead. This is a development of approximately 280,000 sq metres of new commercial space which will become available over the next 20 years aimed at environmental technologies, low carbon environmental goods and services, life sciences and sustainable construction.

We are working to ensure that the Local Plan supports the necessary transport infrastructure for the Herts IQ. A key aim is to prioritise accessibility for public transport links to rail stations and active travel.

## Joint Infrastructure Collaboration

St Albans City and District Council is one of 5 councils jointly developing the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan. This, together with the Hertfordshire Growth Board, provides the frameworks through which we work to collaborate on planning and infrastructure matters to support a thriving economy with affordable housing, a sustainable transport network, superfast broadband coverage, as well as excellent educational and healthcare facilities.

With other Hertfordshire councils we are using part of our Shared Prosperity Fund allocation to support the creation of a Film Office for Hertfordshire, to be developed through the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

We are also working jointly with partners, including Dacorum Borough Council, local landowners, and Hertfordshire County Council, on the future development of [Hemel Garden Communities](#). This development programme, partly located on land in St Albans District, will transform Hemel Hempstead and create attractive and sustainable new neighbourhoods and communities to the north and east of Hemel Hempstead, including 10,000 new jobs by 2050.

## Political Leadership

The Council is led politically by a Liberal Democrat administration.

Councillor Chris White, is the Council Leader, and Cllr Helen Campbell, our Deputy Leader. Six other Lead Councillors each have a Chair or Vice-Chair role on our service committees and have a range of **service area responsibilities**. The political context in which we work is discussed below.



Cllr  
Chris White,  
Leader



Cllr  
Helen Campbell,  
Deputy Leader

## Service Committees

### Policy Committee

Chair – Councillor Chris White

Vice Chair – Councillor Paul de Kort

### Housing and Inclusion Committee

Chair – Councillor Jacqui Taylor

Vice Chair – Councillor Sarwar Shamsher

### Public Realm Committee

Chair – Councillor Helen Campbell

Vice Chair – Councillor Allison Wren

### Regeneration and Business Committee

Chair – Councillor Robert Donald

Vic Chair – Councillor Danny Clare

## Organisational Leadership

The Council has experienced significant political and organisational change over the last four years.

In 2022, the Council implemented a new operating model, moving from seven departments, led by Heads of Service, to three Strategic Directorates.

The three Strategic Directors, who report to the Chief Executive, have a range of public sector backgrounds as well as consultancy experience within Local Authorities.

The leadership redesign is a key element of our current Building our Future Transformation Programme. This move is designed to provide more strategic capacity across the organisation.

The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) meets weekly to consider both strategic matters and operational issues involved in the day to day running of the Council.

The SLT is tasked with leading and managing the work of our staff, ensuring all aspects of service delivery, and managing key contracts and the shared services.



## Officer Strategic Leadership Team



**Amanda Foley**  
Chief Executive

**Responsibilities:**

- To manage the Council's political arrangements.
- To lead the Council's workforce to deliver the Council's statutory duties and corporate priorities.



**Dale Phillipson**  
Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Strategy, Policy and Transformation

**Responsibilities:**

- To understand the future vision and aspirations of the Council, converting these into strategies and policies to enable delivery
- To design and deliver external and internal economic and commercial opportunities
- To procure and manage all major contracts
- To build and enhance strategic partnerships
- To translate the Council's aspiration and priorities into corporate and related plans, coordinating the delivery of these
- To design and deliver all corporate external / internal communications and marketing
- To lead and co-ordinate transformation of services (including different delivery models e.g., shared services)
- To manage, monitor and challenge corporate performance
- Acting as Deputy Chief Executive for key strategic delivery groups

**Suzanne Jones**  
Strategic Director for Customer, Business and Corporate Support



**Responsibilities:**

- To deliver a service for all initial customer contact, transactions, case work, compliments and complaints for every Council team and service
- To deliver all business support services, including finance, IT, HR, procurement, and governance
- To ensure Councillors are provided with the appropriate support and services to carry out their duties
- To manage the delivery of all income and debt across the Council
- To ensure all Council business is completed within required governance and audit requirements
- To support all Council teams to deliver their customer interactions in the most efficient way
- To create and monitor the Medium Term Financial Plan

**Christine Tall**  
Strategic Director for Community and Place Delivery

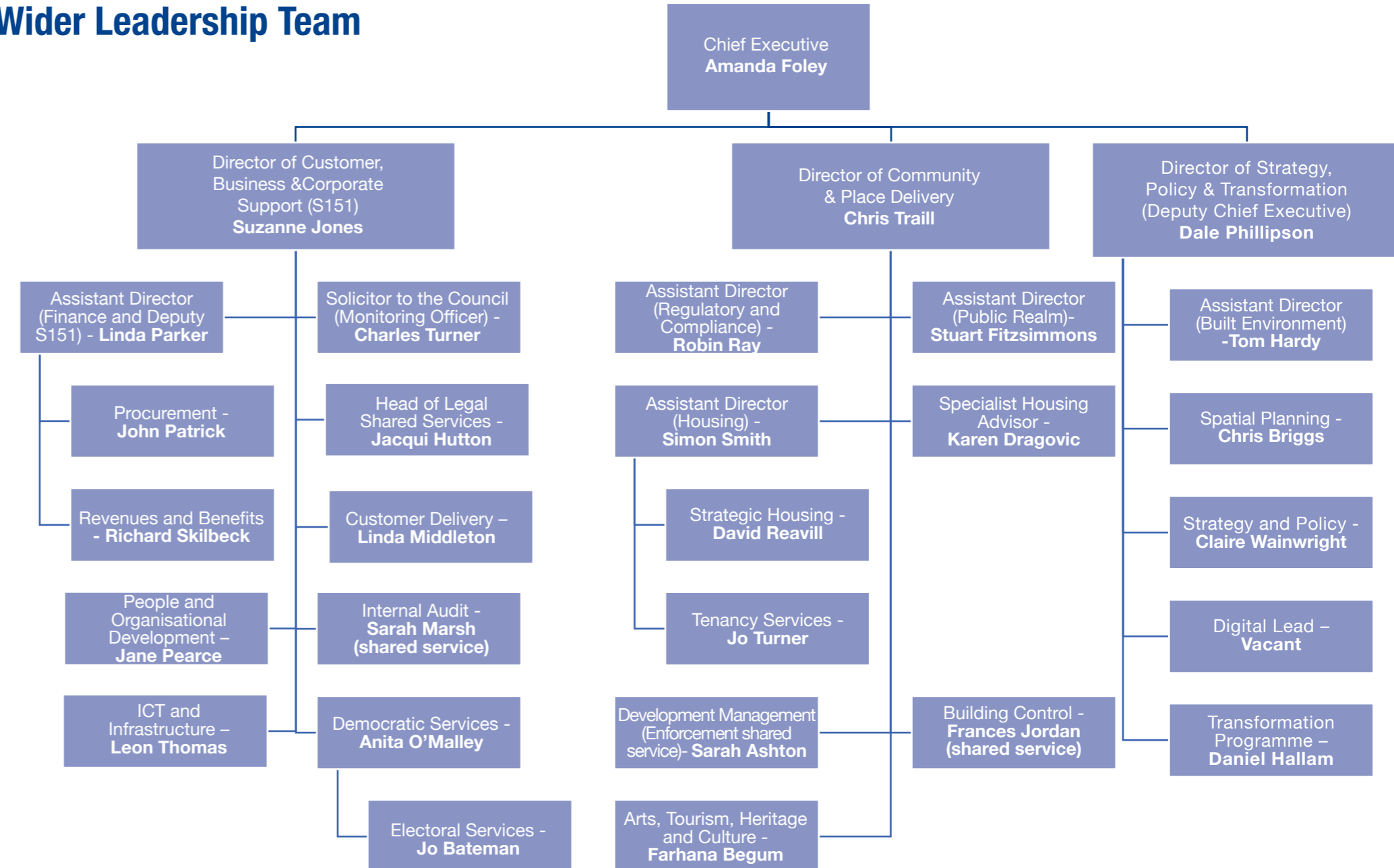


**Responsibilities:**

- To deliver management of all place related functions including planning, development management and building control
- To deliver the management of all community related functions, tourism, events and related Council community assets and open spaces
- To deliver all Housing related activities, ensuring strategic aims are met, housing stock managed, landlord services delivered, homeless support provided, and technical queries resolved
- To ensure community safety targets and requirements are met
- To ensure we meet our corporate Health & Safety, Safeguarding and Emergency Planning responsibilities
- To ensure all environmental and regulatory needs are managed and delivered

Alongside our Strategic Leadership Team, Tiers 3 and 4 of our management structure were redesigned in the autumn of 2022. The wider Leadership Team also includes our Assistant Directors and Service Managers.

## Wider Leadership Team



# Governance and Culture

## The Political Context

The political landscape has pivoted over the years from a Conservative-led administration, to one of No Overall Control, and to Liberal Democrat led with varying sizes of majority, as illustrated below:

1999-2006	No overall control
2006-2007	Liberal Democrats
2007-2008	No overall control
2008-2011	Liberal Democrats
2011-2015	No overall control
2015-2019	Conservative
2019-2021	No overall control
2021-Present	Liberal Democrats

As a result of the recent Boundary Commission Review, the number of seats at the Council was reduced from 58 to 56 seats. There was an all-out Council election in May 2022 following the implementation of the new boundaries.

18 seats will be up for election at the polls scheduled for 4 May 2023, when the Council will return to elections in thirds.

The current political composition of the Council is set out in the table below and shows the large Liberal Democrat majority. Of the 56 Councillors elected at the May 2022 polls, 30 of those Councillors were newly elected.



Group	Group Leader	Seats
Liberal Democrats	Cllr Chris White	50
Conservatives	Cllr Brian Ellis	4
Independent/Green	Cllr Simon Grover	2

The political climate of the Council was very different during the municipal year 2021-22. Relationships between some political groups at the time (Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, Green and Independent, and Labour, who returned no Councillors at the last election) were challenging.

Additionally, some Councillors when surveyed independently by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny indicated a lack of trust between some Councillors and Officers.

This lack of trust from some Councillors was indicated when in 2021 the Conservative Group undertook to resign from the Audit Committee. In response to concerns raised by the Conservative Group, the Chief Executive appointed CIPFA to carry out an independent review of the operation of the Audit Committee.

The review looked at ways to improve the operation of the Committee in line with the Independent Review into the Oversight of Local Audit and the Transparency of Local Authority Financial Reporting.

## Background To Our Current Governance Arrangements

The Council currently operates under a Committee System of Governance, which was adopted in May 2021. Before this, the Council operated under a Cabinet system. In 2020, a Committee Restructure Working Group was established to consider the Council's options for governance change.

External technical support was provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The new committee system of governance was adopted by Council at its annual meeting in May 2021.

Following the implementation of the new system, and in line with best practice, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny was subsequently commissioned to conduct a review of the new constitutional arrangements. The final recommendations from this work are expected to be reported to the Committee Restructure Working Group at its next meeting on 1 March 2023.

It is anticipated that this group will decommission itself and formally recommend the establishment of a Constitution Committee in line with the practice of most Local Authorities.

Such a committee would have the opportunity to consider and implement the recommendations arising from the report by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.



# The Council's Governance Arrangements

## The Constitution

The [Constitution](#) sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable.

## Full Council

[Full Council](#) is made up of all 56 Councillors. It has the role of setting the annual budget and overall policy framework for the Council, and adoption of changes to the Council's Constitution.

## Service Committees

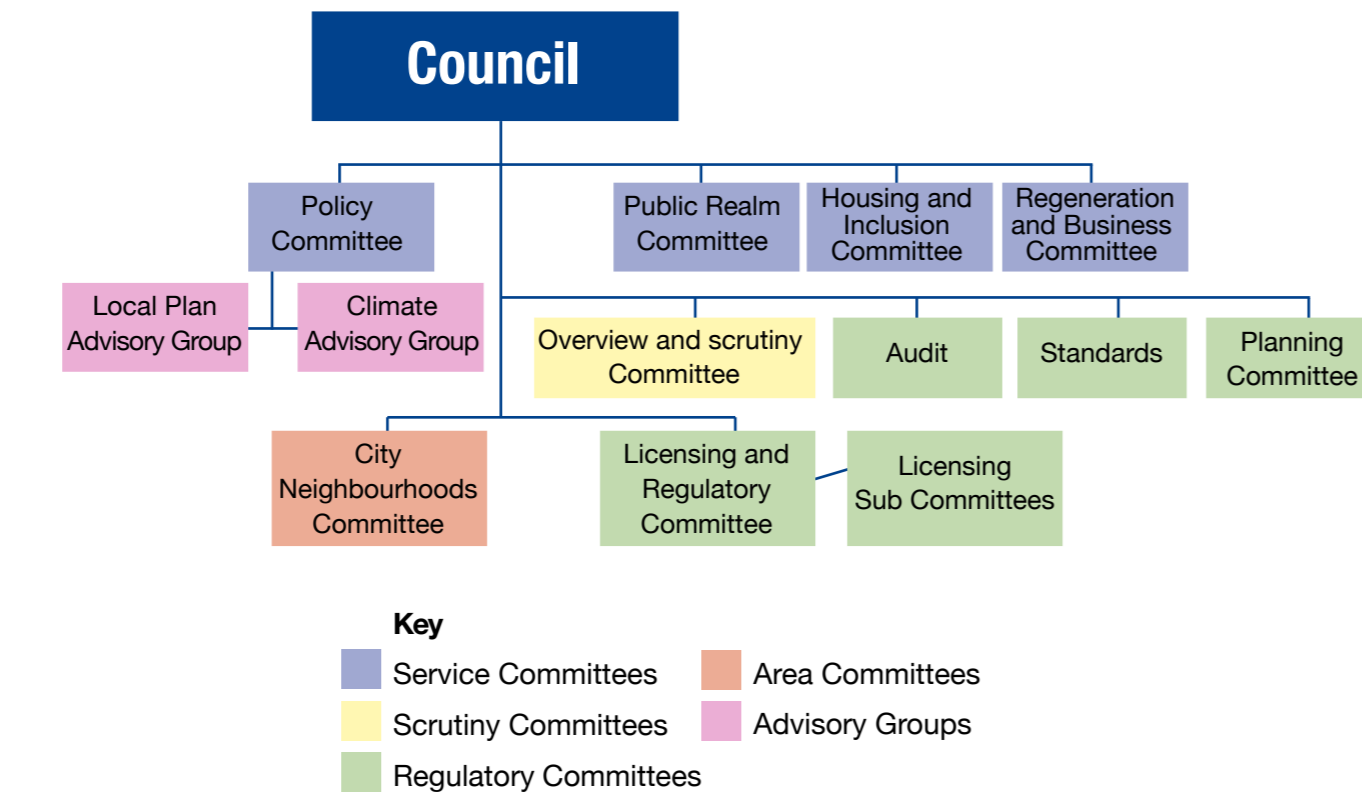
At the inception of the Committee System in May 2021, four Service Committees were established.

These are the:

- Policy Committee
- Housing and Inclusion Committee
- Public Realm Committee; and
- Regeneration and Business Committee.

[Responsibilities for all Council Functions](#) are split between these four Service Committees, with the Policy Committee being the more senior body due to its role in the budget-setting process.

Two important advisory groups inform the work of the Policy Committee; the Climate Advisory Group, and the Local Plan Advisory Group.



## Other Committees

Alongside the service committees we have Audit, Standards, and Licensing committees.

Unlike many councils operating a Committee System, St Albans has retained its [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#). This supports the work of the Service Committees and the Council. It takes an overview of all the activities that the Council is involved in and can decide to examine in depth particular issues.

Annual Reports of the Council's Scrutiny Committee can be [viewed here](#). Reports of Scrutiny Reviews undertaken can be [viewed here](#)

The Council has an unparished area, which covers the City Centre neighbourhoods. Under the Localism Act, the City Neighbourhoods Committee (CNC) has responsibility for implementing localism within the unparished area (including reviewing policy and budget decision making for non-strategic city centre assets) and makes recommendations on those issues to the relevant Service Committee. The CNC is comprised of ward councillors and several Residents Association representatives.

Development Management Planning committee arrangements and the call-in process changed in Autumn 2022 after consultation including with councillors and partners. The result is a move to a single Planning Committee (from three). A 6-month review of the changes is underway.

## Arrangements Supporting Good Councillor-Officer Relationships

Regular internal meetings between elected councillors and officers underpin our strategic decision making and policy formulation process and help to nurture strong relationships.

The Council Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive meet fortnightly. The Chief Executive also meets regularly with the main opposition Group Leader. Committee briefings are held for all service committees, including for opposition councillors.



## Arrangements Supporting a Culture of Respect, Transparency and Challenge

Expectations of Councillors and Officers, and their respective roles, are set out to all as part of our induction process. The Council's Audit Committee is chaired independently to increase the objectivity of oversight and deliberations.

The Council's Standards Committee is tasked with maintaining high standards and can consider matters should they fall short of the Council's expectations.

At the start of each Committee meeting, those participating are reminded of the seven Nolan principles of public life.

Challenge is welcomed and public questions are encouraged at the start of all formal meetings. Council considers petitions that meet agreed thresholds of participation.

The Council has well developed Freedom of Information processes. Complaints are recognised as opportunities to put things right for our residents if an issue arises.

## Strategic Risk Management Arrangements

The Council has a strong Risk Management Framework which was reviewed by external Auditors in January 2021 when an 'acceptable' level of assurance was determined. Before this the Council participated in the Association of Local Authority Risk Managers' annual benchmarking exercise and the improvements identified in both reviews have been acted upon.

The Council's risk management is overseen by the Senior Leadership Team, with Internal Audit having administrative responsibility. Risk informs the Council's Internal Audit Plan.

Risk is considered at weekly department management team meetings, and Service Managers and members of the Senior Leadership Team consider and update risk registers regularly.

There was a review of the Strategic Risk Register at the end of 2022 following the move to the directorate structure and work continues on implementing a number of changes.

The Audit Committee monitors the effective development and operation of risk management in the Council. The Committee reviews the Strategic Risk Register once a quarter, along with one of the three Directorate Registers on rotation.

Following an external review by CIPFA, the Audit Committee has, since September 2022, had an independent Chair, Mr Jonathan Flowers, who is an experienced Non-Executive Director, chair, board level advisor, and former Chief Executive of a County Council.

The Internal Audit team is part of a shared service led by Broxbourne Borough Council. This came into effect in November 2022.



## Staff Culture and Engagement

We are committed to working with our staff to keep them informed, engaged and motivated. This was severely tested during the pandemic. Most colleagues worked from home during this period, and many front-line colleagues worked with evolving safety regimes.

Having transitioned to remote working during the pandemic most staff have adjusted to more agile ways of working and hybrid work arrangements are the preferred option for many office-based colleagues if their roles allow it. Work is not always where people do it, but what they do, and what outcomes are achieved. Many staff work at, or from, home much of the time, with typically 1 or 2 days spent in the office each week for collaboration, though some roles clearly require a full-time presence on the ground.

Helping staff to look after their health and wellbeing has also been a priority. We offer extensive guidance and support through our Employee Assistance Programme. We have trained Mental Health First Aiders who are on hand to support anyone who needs help. We are also signposting colleagues to sources of information and help to navigate the rise in the cost of living. Through the Vivup benefits platform, staff can access discounts and tips for saving money.

We undertake regular 'pulse' surveys to assess the health and attitudes of our workforce. These were key throughout the pandemic to check how people were feeling and to understand their ability to work effectively from home and still collaborate with their teams. These frequent check-ins enable us to adjust and adapt our support to staff on a timely basis.

The Senior Leadership Team produces a weekly Team Brief which sets out the latest news, updates and items of interest for our staff.

Our Building our Future e-newsletter provides updates on our transformation programme.

Staff Briefings, which all colleagues are invited to attend either in person or through Microsoft Teams, are held quarterly, led by the Chief Executive and the rest of Strategic Leadership Team. These are live streamed events held in the Council's Chamber. Typically, between 200 and 300 of our four hundred staff attend.

Political awareness sessions for officers, are led by the Chief Executive and the Council's Leader.

We hold 'Welcome' sessions throughout the year and invite all new employees to join a small group discussion with the Chief Executive. This enables them to understand her expectations and the way we work, including the values and behaviours which underpin how we deliver.

# Financial Planning and Management

## Current Financial Health

The Council takes a proactive approach to its financial planning and management, and is delivering significant savings including through our current Building Our Future programme.

However, like other councils, cost pressures are immense, and without extra government funding, cuts to services have been required.

Inflationary and other cost pressures have formed part of the Council's budget process for 2023/24.

The budget gap for 2023/24 was estimated to be £3.5m based on assumptions about government funding. The provisional Local Government settlement was better than expected with a Guaranteed Funding Grant of £1.3m, therefore reducing the budget gap from £3.5m to £2.4m. However, the position remains very challenging. Full Council meets on Wednesday 22 February 2023, where it will be asked to agree the budget and council tax. The budget gap for 2024/25 is projected to be £6.68m.



## Background to the 2022/23 budget

In setting its budget in February 2022 the Council agreed £0.7m of savings to be made in the financial year 2022/23. The Council was also able to use £1.2m of its New Homes Bonus that was rolled forward by the Government when the Local Government Financial Settlement was agreed in February 2022, to balance its budget for 2022/23.

At that time, it was identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that there would be a need to close a gap of £2.9m for 2023/24 in order to arrive at a balanced budget for that financial year.

The Council agreed that it would increase its council tax by £5 (2.63%) at Band D for 2022/23, the maximum allowed without a referendum.

The Council confirmed (at that time), that it needed to rebuild its financial reserves that had been adversely impacted by the pandemic principally as a result of the loss of income from fees and charges, particularly in respect of parking and leisure income.

## 2023/24 Budget

Since then, inflation (CPI) has reached over 10%, the national living wage has increased, and the cost of energy has been affected by the economic climate and other world events.

The cost-of-living pressures are affecting the income the Council received from fees and charges and, while these are broadly in line with the forecasted budget, they remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

## General Fund Revenue Budget

As at the end of September 2022 (mid-year point), the forecast outturn was £1.18m (7.3%) more than the budget. Inflationary pressures are driving the situation.



The Council takes a proactive approach to its financial planning and management, and is delivering significant savings including through our current Building Our Future programme.







### General Fund Capital Budget

As at the end of September 2022, the forecast outturn for the capital programme was that it will be £29.1m against a budget of £52.6m, which is £23.5m less than budget.

Officers subsequently carried out a strategic review of the Council's major development projects in light of the difficult economic conditions including inflation above 10%, supply chain issues, the huge rise in the cost of building materials, and volatility in the construction sector.

As result, a number of projects are being paused and some stopped. Further details are provided below.

### Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The HRA is being affected by the same inflationary pressures as the General Fund, with a forecast of £1.233m (57%) more net expenditure than budget driven by reduced income and significantly higher utility costs.

### Housing Investment Programme (HIP)

The forecast spend for the HIP is £16.7m against a budget of £26.9m which is an expected underspend of £10.3m principally resulting from slippage into 2023/24 of a number of developments.

### Impact of national issues

As a result of the changes that have been occurring in national government and government departments, we have made significant bids for funding:

- a. Shared Prosperity Fund - £1.6M - 3-year revenue and capital funding requested for business support and programme of skills development to be delivered by the LEP and for SADC projects
- b. Arts Council – Museums and Galleries - £1.2m (2 bids)
  - i. £1.1m the development and delivery of a programme of arts and museum activities including education programmes, research, exhibitions, and events – there has been recent notice that this has been secured however there are conditions to be met as with most grant awards;
  - ii. £0.1m repairs and maintenance work for various water ingress issues at the St Albans Museum + Gallery.

### Principles and assumptions

As part of the financial planning for the setting of the 2023/24 budget and revision of the MTFs, some planning assumptions were made:

- considering if any of the additional grant given last financial year may be allocated again for the forthcoming year
- increasing council tax by £5 at Band D
- increasing fees and charges by the rate of inflation or to the maximum allowed where regulations restrict increases or set the charges
- charging for services where there is the ability to do so – even if not charged for currently
- ensuring that only district council functions are being delivered and paid for by the district
- focussing on delivering essential services at a level that meets the statutory requirement
- pausing non-essential expenditure
- pausing elements of the capital programme, where possible, except for items that either generate immediate income or are required for legislative compliance
- increasing fees and charges without delay - where permitted - to meet some of the in-year pressures

Our latest projections are summarised below:

### Overall General Budget

	1	2	3	4	5
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
<b>Budget gap (+ve) / (-ve) (£000)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,326</b>	<b>6,680</b>	<b>4,878</b>	<b>5,262</b>
Policy Committee Proposed Savings (net of one-off revenue investments) (£000)		-2,236			
<b>Budget Gap / Excess after Council Approved Savings</b>		<b>0</b>			



## Key Financial Risks

### Contract inflation

There are several contracts that the Council has in place to deliver its services that contain inflationary increases.

A provision for inflation is included in base budgets however as a number of these increases are based on the prevailing rate of inflation in December for the next financial year, there is a risk that this will be at a much higher level than the 2% that was included in the revision of the Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by Council in February 2022 for 2022/23.

Furthermore, some contracts have elements of fuel related price increases which are significantly more than the current Consumer Price Index (10.1%).

### Pay award

The Council is part of the National Joint Council for pay negotiations. In line with normal practice, trades unions submitted an annual pay claim, in response to which the National Employers Panel offered an increase of £1,925 for all employees. The total cost pressure for this Council of this award is £0.866m on the General Fund and £0.16m for the HRA in 2022/23. £0.572m and £0.1m respectively was already in the budget; this leaves a pressure of £0.294m on the General Fund and £0.06m on the HRA which will need to be met for this year by savings or reliance on reserves.

The recent reversal of the increase in Employer's National Insurance contributions with effect from November 2022, has marginally offset this by £0.08m (£0.07m for General Fund and £0.01m for the HRA).

The increase will form part of the base budget for future years.

### Energy costs

Inflation has caused energy costs to rise, and these are expected to exceed the budget by £0.4m in the General Fund. This will continue into future years unless there is a significant reduction in the unit price of energy.

Energy costs also have the potential to create pressure for some of our contractors, which will in turn cause budget pressure for the Council.

### Cost of borrowing

With the rise in inflation rates, there is a risk that the cost of refinancing the Council's existing borrowing will be significantly more than the rates that it currently enjoys. Borrowing is taken in a timely manner according to the expected spend in the capital programme (General Fund and HIP). This means that there is a need to refinance some borrowing on the horizon for 2023/24 which is forecast to be at higher interest rates than we currently pay.

### Local Government Financial Settlement

The Final Local Government Settlement was in line with the provisional settlement announced in December. Compared to 2022/23, there was a significant reduction in New Homes Bonus Grant offset by the Funding Guarantee Grant. There is, however, no guarantee that the Funding Guarantee Grant will continue after 2023/24. The figures for 2022/23 and 2023/24 are detailed below.

### Overall General Fund Budget

	2022-23 £'000	2023-24 £'000
<b>Grants</b>		
Government grants (service lines)	1,526	1,409
Lower Tier Services Grant	116	0
Revenues Support Grant		117
Services Grant	174	98
New Homes Bonus	1,225	195
Funding Guarantee Grant		1,346
Compensation for under-indexing the BR multiplier		446
Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus	174	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3,215</b>	<b>3,611</b>

## Budget Monitoring

Each month, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) receives a summary of the budget position. The work done to monitor budgets involves a review between individual budget holders and their Finance Business Partner.

In addition to reporting the outcome of that monitoring, SLT also receives and maintains a risks and opportunities log in relation to financial impacts. This allows for early remedial action to be taken where necessary and a collective understanding of the overall situation.

The Council's Corporate Property Board considers matters concerning current Capital Budgets for both HRA and General Fund projects.

During 2022/23, a series of briefings to the wider leadership team were undertaken to extend collective understanding. Staff briefings were held to promote a fuller understanding, and collective ownership, of the Council budget position, to seek further savings suggestions, to encourage the right behaviours - for example those connected with energy use in the offices - and to provide information so staff are well informed.

## Capital Programme

As a result of the strategic review of the General Fund Capital Budget mentioned above, a number of projects are being paused, and some stopped, including:

- The development of two projects in St Albans. A review is to be conducted of options for both.
- Work to rebuild a community centre in St Albans. Officers will investigate alternative construction methods, new enabling development options, and different sources of capital and future maintenance funding.
- The redevelopment of a large scheme in Harpenden and former public toilets in St Albans. Officers will look at options for the disposal of both sites while seeking to achieve best value and consulting with relevant interested parties.

The sale of new homes at our new scheme at Jubilee Square to a Housing Trust has been agreed subject to further negotiation.

Concept design work on an ambitious project to potentially redevelop the area in and around the Alban Arena theatre in St Albans, has been paused.

Development of a new cultural strategy will continue, and will inform the future of the site, pending the recovery of the economy.

Among the projects due to complete in April 2023 are:

- Jubilee Square, formerly known as CCOS South: the regeneration project is on the site of the City's former police station and an NHS clinic. This complex will provide 93 new homes with 33 social housing flats and 60 for market sale and 6,000m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space for businesses and other organisations.
- Leyland Avenue, St Albans: seven houses for sale at market rate.
- Noke Shot, Harpenden: four properties for social rent to people from the Council's housing register with seven homes for market sale.
- Ridgeview, London Colney: 10 flats for rent at market rate and 10 temporary housing apartments.

Our new Property Board has been put in place to provide more commercial focus for the Council's land and property portfolio.

## Financial Decision Making

Full Council ultimately sets the Council's Budget at its annual budget setting meeting in February each year. Recommendations from the Service Committees are made to Policy Committee, which then recommends a budget to Council.

Star Chamber sessions in the late summer and autumn consider budget proposals put forward by officers through the Strategic Leadership Team in consultation with Lead Councillors, following a process of deliberations over the spring and summer. Those accepted form the basis of the recommendations to Service Committees.

The Section 151 officer is responsible for the monitoring the Council's financial position, which she does with her team. As a member of the Strategic Leadership Team, the Section 151 Officer reports regularly at SLT meetings on the Council's financial position so that appropriate decisions can be made and action taken where necessary. The Section 151 officer meets regularly with the Lead Councillor for Resources who is the Vice-Chair of the Policy Committee.



# Capacity for Improvement

## Adapting, Learning and Improving

From our learning in the early part of the Pandemic, we conducted a strategic review of our operating model in late 2020. As a result the Council started to work towards becoming an Adaptive Council, to increase our flexibility to deploy skills and resources as needed depending on the operational situation.

As part of the review we identified a number of objectives for the way we operate, including the following:

- Increase strategic capacity and optimise spans of control
- Build strong transformational capability
- Make evidence-based decisions, using data and insight
- Implement an 'agile' approach with increased flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances
- Be a learning organisation - led by reflection, action inquiry and flexible governance

Our objectives underpin our Building our Future transformation programme (see below).

## The Council's Approach in Key Capacity Areas

### Organisational development

The Council's new operating model has been designed to streamline and modernise the Council's operations, so they are more efficient and cost effective, and to provide the right environment to improve the customer experience for residents, businesses and visitors.



Alongside the new operating model we have been developing new ways of working that:

- Build on the agile working practices that emerged under pandemic conditions
- Recognise that 'work is what you do not where you do it' and that employees value flexibility
- Are supported by a modern employment offer and enabled by modern work spaces / technology solutions
- Demonstrate our culture, values and behaviours
- Are supported by a skills development programme focused on working/managing in an adaptive council

In 2021/22 we worked with 'Ways of Working' Champions from across the Council to develop and implement our new agile working approach including hybrid arrangements where appropriate for service delivery. We reduced and reconfigured our existing open plan office space to support more modern ways of working and encourage collaboration. This has also allowed us to release additional office space to our NHS partners. We have also started to modernise our employment offer to facilitate work focused on outcomes rather than attendance.

We delivered extensive learning and development throughout the pandemic to help managers and teams to make the transition to working in more agile ways. This has included implementing digital tools to support regular check ins and our performance conversation approach.

### Digital, data and transformation

78% of households have a MyStAlbans online account through which residents can make service requests, see documents like their Council Tax bill and manage much of their Council business online. This follows improvements made to our website and digital services before the pandemic.

In June 2020, the Chief Executive commissioned a strategic review of the organisation that, among other things, would build on the agile work practices adopted during the pandemic, maximise the use of existing and new technologies, enable efficiencies and deliver substantial savings.

The organisation came to the view that learning over the previous 6 months and best practice indicated that an 'adaptive council' model should be developed to enable increased strategic capacity and capability for organisational learning and transformation.

The result of this was our Building our Future transformation programme redesigning the way we work and creating a structure to facilitate the changes required to implement an 'adaptive council' operating model.

The Council is making a significant investment and expects to make continuing savings of £600k a year.



Our Strategic Director for Strategy, Policy and Transformation chairs our monthly programme board. The key workstreams are depicted below:

## New Operating Model – an Adaptive Council

### Building our Future (Transformation Programme)

Strategic  
Capacity

Ways of  
Working

Service  
Reviews

Investment  
and Income

### Channel Shift and Digital Transformation

### Performance and Data Insight

#### Progress so far:

Strategic capacity: New strategic leadership, and service management teams in place.

Channel shift and digital transformation: In the year to May 2022, 25 percent of our contacts were online, compared to 16 percent the previous year.

Ways of working: A new Customer Delivery Team has been created bringing together all customer service and case management staff. (Our [Customer Engagement Strategy](#) sets out other changes to our approach).

Service reviews: Our current focus is on seven business areas including strategic housing, waste and recycling, and customer complaints. Five shared services, designed to improve resilience, have been implemented in the last six months.

#### Equality, diversity, and inequalities

Promoting equality, inclusion, and fairness is one of the Council's five priorities.

The Council plays a key role in community leadership and place-shaping, and we believe equality, diversity and inclusion should be central to local service delivery. Our new [equality, diversity and inclusion strategy](#) sets out how we will make sure these are central to our approach.



Our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Partnership is helping us to put in place the building blocks to achieve our action plan.

Equality Impact Assessments are a key part of decision making. Alongside this, we have redesigned our Committee reporting processes to make the community impact of decisions clearer so that mitigating actions can be challenged in a transparent manner.

Our grants funding is specifically focused in the current period on the cost-of-living crisis. Our grants and community engagement team is also involved in considering the distribution of covid inequalities funding as part of their work supporting our Health Hub.

#### Climate change

The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and combatting that is one of our five priority areas for the next five years.

The Council's [Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy](#), developed with Sustainable St Albans, St Albans Friends of the Earth, and other environmental and community groups, sets out the actions we are taking locally to achieve our net zero carbon emissions target by 2030.

Our developing Local Plan presents an opportunity to make sustainability a key focus to help local efforts to counter the effects of climate change.

The Council owns its own housing stock, some 5,000 homes. We have put in place a new Energy Strategy so that by 2030, all Council-owned homes will be carbon net zero ready for when the grid becomes fully carbon neutral.

We are working closely with Hertfordshire County Council on transport infrastructure improvements, including those to make walking and cycling safer and more attractive transport options, to help ease congestion, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

We are modernising our [parking services](#), both to encourage responsible car use and make improvements for residents, including upgrading our digital services and reducing our use of paper and energy.

As one of the best performing local authority areas for recycling in England, we are working to ensure we build on our strong position for the future.

## Key Plans and Data

### Performance management data, and key strategies and plan

Our performance management data, and key strategies and plans can be found on our website:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/performance-vision-policies-strategies-and-plans>

### Workforce information

The Council employs approximately 400 full time equivalent employees. 43% of our workforce live within the District; 62% are female, and the average age is 45 years (6% are under the 25 years).

Our gender pay gap data has shown a relatively small gap of below 3% for the last 5 years, compared to the public sector pay gap of over 15%.

The buoyant employment market and our close proximity to London is having a significant impact on our ability to attract and retain staff. Our voluntary turnover level for 2021/22 was 13.96% and this has been a persistent issue in several specialist skills areas over the last 5 years.

Particular skills shortage areas and hard to fill posts are in teams such as Planning, Legal and Finance. Recruitment and retention strategies include market forces payments, career pathways and apprenticeships.

Temporary workers make up approximately 8 – 9% of the workforce at any time. This provides flexibility to adapt to changing resource needs but also costs more.

Sickness absence levels have historically been low, typically 5 – 6 days lost per employee compared to 8 days for the public sector in general. Rates did increase during 2021/22 as a result of coronavirus which made up 14% of all absences. The main reasons for absence recorded in 2021/22 were stress, anxiety and mental health issues making up 20% of all absences.

Throughout the pandemic and during recovery there has been significant focus on the health and wellbeing of our workforce. Regular pulse surveys have checked in on the mood of employees several times each year.

67% of employees have worked in a hybrid way over the last 2 years, typically coming into the office 1- 2 days per week. 83% have reported good levels of motivation and challenge during that time and 84% are confident that they have clear work objectives. These figures compare favourably with 2017 figures of 78% and 83% respectively.

We have continued to focus on effective line management and developing employees and teams. 81% reported receiving regular and constructive feedback from their manager, with 68% reporting easy access to learning and development opportunities. Again, this compares favourably with the 2017 survey figures of 67% and 61% respectively.

Staying connected has also been a focus over the last 2 years. Employee reporting on this indicator peaked at 92% in November 2020. The beginning and end of the pandemic period saw results of 89% and 81% respectively.



“

Throughout the pandemic and during recovery there has been significant focus on the health and wellbeing of our workforce. Regular pulse surveys have checked in on the mood of employees several times each year.

To find our more please visit  
[www.stalbans.gov.uk](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk)



**St Albans**  
City & District Council

Photo credits: Stephanie Belcher Photography (events and staff); Cecelina Photography (museums).  
With thanks to our partners for providing other photographic content.