



MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER: WLDC Position Statement

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2025



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our latest Position Statement, produced in support of West Lindsey District Council undergoing a Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2025. This is the story of West Lindsey as told by us, the collective voices of members and staff, and we are proud to share it with you.

We look forward to the Peer Challenge as an opportunity to celebrate what we do well; and to learn and grow in those areas where we can improve.

In particular, we see the Peer Challenge as a way to help us sense check our vision for 'Our People' and 'Our Place', supporting our understanding of whether we have the right capacity in the right places to deliver our vision. We welcome the learning opportunities that will flow from this Challenge, and we are committed to building them into our strategic business planning over the coming months to help us move forward with delivering our strategic priorities.

Like all local authorities, West Lindsey is operating in increasingly challenging and uncertain times. Regionally, a Greater Lincolnshire County Combined Authority has been established, based on a [Vision for Greater Lincolnshire 2050](#), which Lincolnshire districts were involved in shaping. Locally, the previous government's decision to mobilise the former RAF Scampton site, located in West Lindsey, as an asylum processing centre placed prolonged and unprecedented pressure on the Council over a two-year period as we sought to appeal the decision, support the local community, and protect the planned investment and regeneration of the site.

Continued uncertainty around local government finance has redoubled our efforts to balance the financial sustainability of the Council with ongoing service delivery and digital transformation. Our efforts are recognised through external audit reports, and we are also taking on board the recommendations. For example, our most recent external audit Value for Money Risk Assessment indicates a need for a more formal Savings Plan given the level of financial challenge over the next two years. This has resulted in the creation of a Financial Sustainability Working Group, which will be known as the Savings Board.

A change of political administration in 2023 for the first time in 15 years marked a new era and a change in focus requiring a period of readjustment for officers and members as we sought to establish new relationships and ways of working that will deliver on the Council's shared priorities. Now almost half-way through the administrative cycle, we continue to work together to strengthen member / officer relationships, and we strive towards delivering the administration's new priorities.

We know that our circumstances are not unique; they are undoubtedly experienced in councils up and down the country. What is special about West Lindsey is how we continue to adapt and respond. That we have navigated challenge and change whilst continuing to deliver our [Corporate Plan](#) alongside our high performing, award winning services is testament to the tenacity, resilience, dedication and passion that runs right to the heart of our organisation.

#TeamWestLindsey is more than just a hashtag, it is an ethos. We are proud of our successes. We are honest about our challenges. We pull together. We support each other. We roll up our sleeves and we deliver.



Ian Knowles
Chief Executive
of the Council



Cllr Trevor Young
Leader of the Council

OUR DISTRICT

West Lindsey covers 1,156 sq km. This is equivalent in size to Greater Manchester.

1156 sq km

Second least densely populated area in the East Midlands. Each resident has the equivalent of two football pitches of space.



West Lindsey is made up of 97 parishes.

97

The Lincolnshire Wolds runs through the district and contains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Total population is 97,880 people.

97,880



One of the most rural districts in England.



Three market towns: Gainsborough, Market Rasen and Caistor.

Gainsborough is the administrative centre.



The district is home to 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and two nature reserves.

15



There are 46,007 households in the district.

46,007

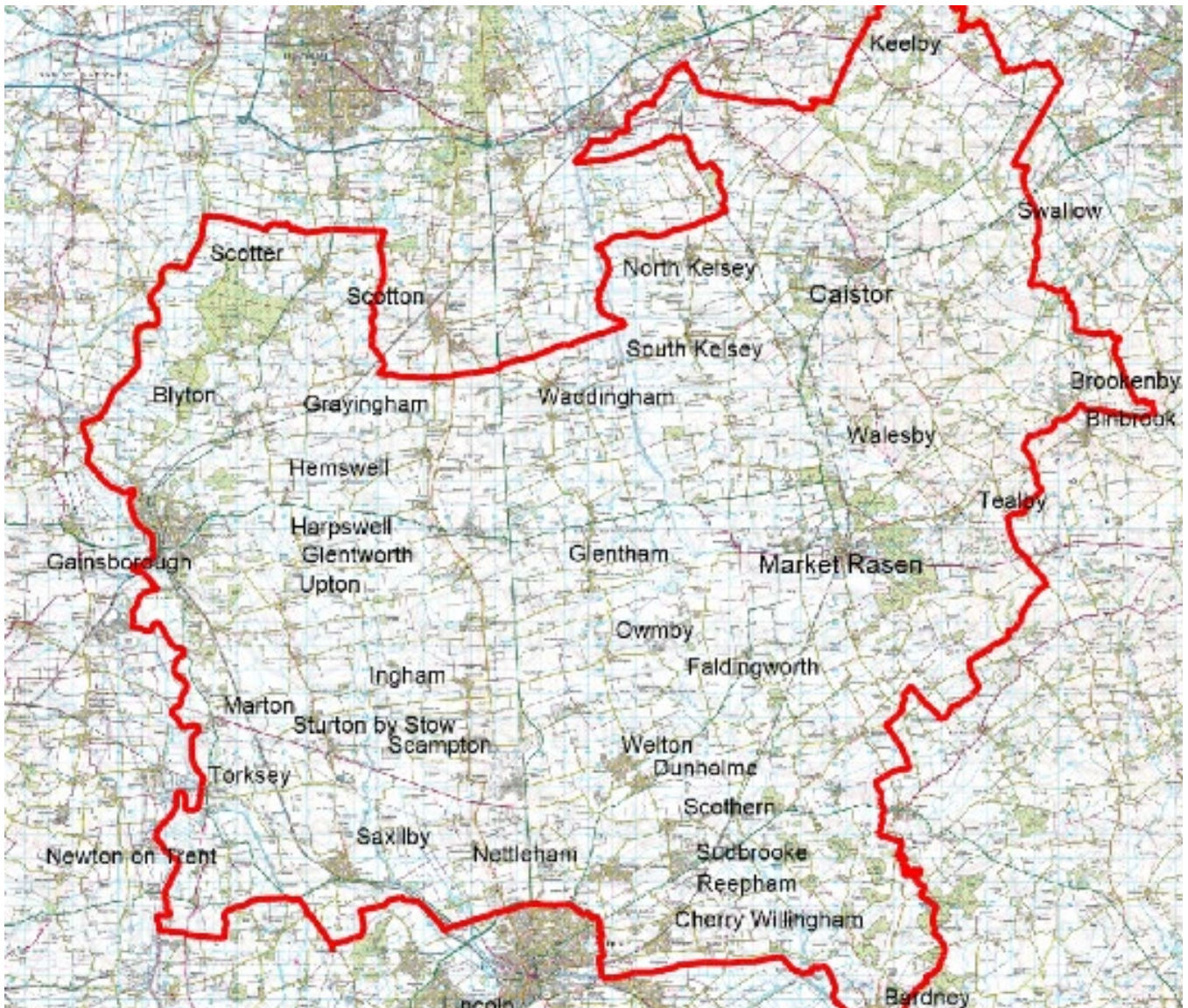


WEST LINDSEY: THE CONTEXT

To help grow our understanding of the district, each year we produce a [State of the District Report](#) which acts as our strategic evidence base, telling the story of 'Our People' and 'Our Place' through statistical analysis of key themes such as demography, health and wellbeing, the local economy, employment and skills, and housing. Evidence-based decision making is integral to our approach to policy development, business planning and project scoping. The State of the District Report supports our decision-making by aiding our detailed understanding of the issues, challenges and opportunities in the district both now and in the future.

Our ambition is to modernise our strategic evidence base, thus enhancing our overall business intelligence and insight and embedding a 'whole systems' approach both internally across service areas, and externally with key partners.

An ongoing challenge is having the capacity and resources available to progress this ambition at pace and scale. Whilst "the ability to understand and meet current and future need and demand based on evidence and insight" is a stated objective in our Corporate Plan, we do not have a dedicated corporate data, insight and intelligence officer, or an off the shelf software solution to progress this work as quickly as we would like. A decision is needed to enable us to understand where this work fits in the scale of strategic priorities.



Our People:

Our demographic make-up has remained relatively static over time. Our population is increasingly ageing with a current average age of 48.5, eight years above the national average. Our working age population remains static and our birth rates are low, which is an issue in relation to increasing employment levels and growing the local economy in the short and long-term.

The diversity of need across the district is evident when looking at factors such as deprivation, poverty, health and wellbeing. An ongoing challenge is enabling the conditions to support our most deprived neighbourhoods in Gainsborough to thrive and grow whilst at the same time, supporting our rural communities who face unique challenges of their own, including hidden deprivation, fuel poverty and isolation.

Health and Wellbeing:

Taken on average, physical and mental health outcomes are good. Life expectancy is better than average at 83.6 years for women and 79.1 years for men. There is, however, some disparity depending on where you live. Those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the district have, on average, a life expectancy nine years lower than those living in the least deprived neighbourhoods. An ongoing priority is to work with local communities in the most deprived areas to unlock growth, drive aspiration and improve health outcomes, particularly in relation to the wider determinants of health.

Levels of physical activity are higher than average and improving. 65% of adults participate in moderate physical activity for at least 150 minutes per week, whilst 50% of children take part in moderate activity for at least 60 minutes per day. Levels of active travel have also seen an increase over the past year. In 2023, we adopted a [Lincolnshire Districts Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#), including five key levers for improving health and wellbeing outcomes within our sphere of influence as a District Council. This Strategy was adopted in partnership with the six other Lincolnshire Districts, bringing together colleagues from across the County as part of a whole systems approach to support delivery of the overarching county-wide [Lincolnshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#).

We are currently developing a [Sport and Active Leisure Strategy](#), the aim of which is to embed a place-based approach to health and wellbeing and drive higher rates of physical activity. We have recently appointed a Sport and Physical Activity Community Officer, who will work with key partners and local communities to embed our new Strategy and support a comprehensive programme of sport and physical activity across the district.

Poverty and Deprivation:

The picture across the district remains mixed. In 2019 (the last time the dataset was updated), West Lindsey was ranked the 123rd most income deprived out of 316 local authority areas on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Of the 52 neighbourhoods in the district, eight are among the 20% most income deprived neighbourhoods in England, with one neighbourhood in the 0.1% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Conversely, six neighbourhoods are in the 20% least income deprived neighbourhoods, thus highlighting the level of variation across the district, despite a relatively low level of deprivation when looking at the district as a whole.

In the most deprived neighbourhood, 45.3% of people are income deprived.

45.3% 

In the least deprived neighbourhood, just 2% of people are income deprived.

2% 

Since 2015, child poverty in the district has risen 7.1 percentage points. 30.9%, or 5,831 children in West Lindsey are currently living in poverty.

Fuel poverty is also an issue in an area that has a high number of households without a mains gas supply. The latest data shows that 16% of the district's households are in fuel poverty, compared to 13% nationally.

We have a package of measures in place to support our residents with the ongoing challenges of the increased cost of living. In 2022, we held a Cost of Living Summit, bringing together over 30 key stakeholders to identify local challenges and priorities for tackling the cost of living through a partnership approach. Since then, we have led a Cost of Living Officer Working Group, bringing together key colleagues to share intelligence and deliver holistic solutions to support our residents. We have also acted as the lead on the county wide Cost of Living Group.

An ongoing member priority is to ensure our residents are supported with the cost of living through the Household Support Fund. We are proud of our roll-out of these schemes, led by our Benefits Team in collaboration with the Communities Team and in partnership with local food support provision organisations. During this period our high standard in administering our HB processing, VEP, HBAA and Overpayment recovery was recognised by the Department of Work and Pensions, who wrote to commend our Benefits Team for their high standards of performance and good practice.

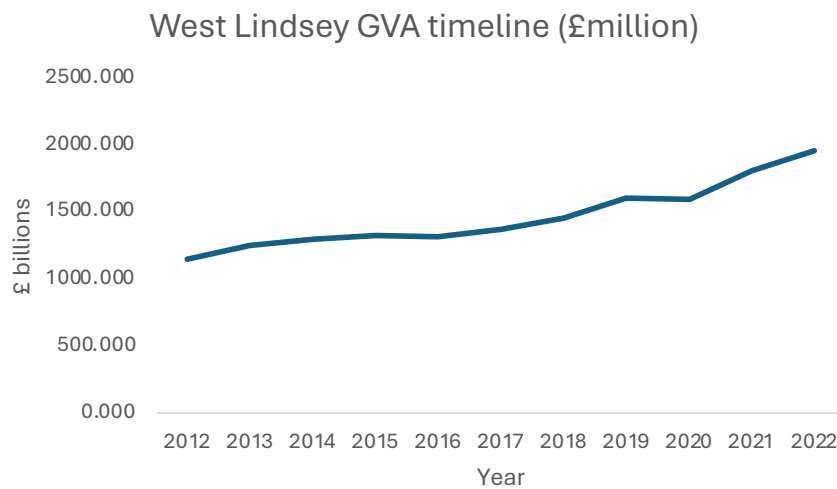
Since the pandemic, there has been an unprecedented increase in demand for support with the cost of living, as well as a substantial increase in the number of people contacting the Council in distress. This has had a notable impact on staff, particularly those working in Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, and our homelessness service, all of whom have continued to deliver these services to a high standard, and with a customer centric approach. With the cost of living pressures showing little sign of easing, an ongoing priority is to ensure that our residents continue to feel supported, and that we continue to ensure the wellbeing of our staff in the face of continued high demand and stretched capacity.

Help for Households



The Local Economy:

As a rural district, agriculture and farming is key to the local economy. Additionally, the local economy relies more heavily on the manufacturing and construction sectors compared to England as a whole, while the information and communication, and financial and insurance sectors are underrepresented compared to the national picture. The presence of the RAF has left a lasting legacy with economic potential for the growth of a cluster exploiting strengths in defence, air and space. In terms of economic output, Gross Value Added (GVA) is rising following a period of stagnation during the pandemic.



Economic Activity:

Economic activity is lower in West Lindsey compared to the national average. 58.2% of the working age population is currently in employment compared to 75.5% for Great Britain as a whole. Conversely, 4.8% of people are currently unemployed compared to 3.9% nationally. Economic inactivity remains an ongoing challenge which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. A total of 27.3% of 16-64 years olds describe themselves as economically inactive, higher than the national average of 21.4%. This equates to 14,800 people, of which 14,000 state that they do not want paid employment.

We are in the final stages of developing a new Economic Growth Strategy, a medium-term approach to unlocking the district's economic potential, prioritising future growth opportunities arising from the new Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined County Authority, and the wider regional opportunities created by initiatives such as the STEP Fusion site across the border in Bassetlaw. Development of our Economic Growth Strategy, which is due to be adopted in 2025, has been overseen by a Member Working Group and facilitated by our Economic Growth Team.

Educational Attainment:

Lincolnshire operates a selective education system. Additionally, there is no post 16 provision for further education in West Lindsey. Educational attainment remains an ongoing challenge. Across all qualification levels, attainment levels are lower than the national average. 81% of the district's population holds at least an RQF2 qualification, equivalent to GCSE level. This compares to 86.5% nationally. The picture worsens at RQF3 level (equivalent to A Level) with 47.8% of people holding this level of qualification compared to 67.8% nationally. At the undergraduate level, 24.7% of people hold this level of qualification compared to 47.3% nationally.

Employment and Skills:

In 2022, we commissioned a [West Lindsey Employment and Skills Study](#) in partnership with Lincolnshire-based skills consultancy, Skills Reach. The purpose of the study was to enhance our understanding of the local skills landscape, particularly focusing on the balance between skills demand, supply and the local skills provision available in the district.

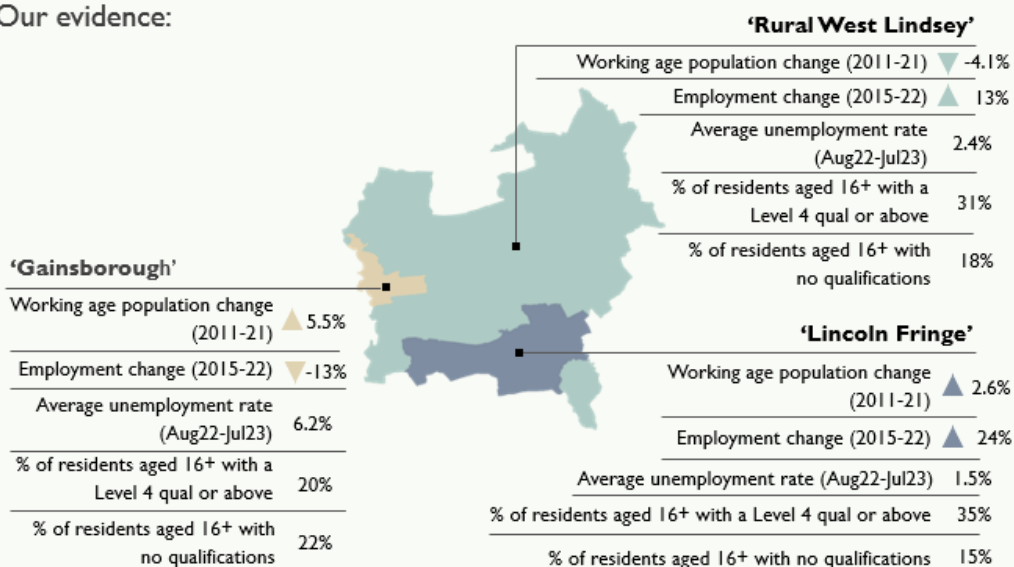
The study found that West Lindsey is a high performing council for employment and skills indicators, highlighting a growing, diverse rural economy with growing potential in locally important employment sectors.

Growth and career opportunities exist within the local economy. Agri-Food remains the largest employment sector. High demand also exists for roles in Health, Care and Wellbeing, Manufacturing and Engineering, and the Visitor Economy. Replacement demand from people leaving the workforce, e.g. through retirement, is a major issue across each sector. The level of vocational education and skills initiatives in the district has reduced over time, which was highlighted as a shared concern amongst employers.

Three distinct employment and skills geographies within West Lindsey with different dynamics and needs

High overall performance particularly from the Lincoln Fringe risks the challenges faced by Gainsborough and Rural West Lindsey being 'under the radar'. Skills planning needs to reflect those differences at a local level.

Our evidence:



Housing:

West Lindsey is a non-stock holding authority. We are committed to housing growth, which is one of the key priorities of our administration. As part of Central Lincolnshire, we continue to plan positively for growth, exceeding expectations for housing allocations. Through our Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, we continue to maintain a healthy housing land supply. There are market challenges due to land values and development viability, and also due to demand impacting on the pace of sales. This has resulted in some national housebuilders not consistently developing in the area. We continue to engage with housebuilders to overcome this challenge and work closely with our SMEs to deliver housing growth within the District .

We have a good track record in the delivery of fully affordable housing schemes across the district, including schemes to meet specific needs such as extra care and over 55 development and work collaboratively with Registered Providers to ensure what is delivered meets identified housing needs. The delivery of Section 106 affordable housing remains a challenge which mirrors challenges across the country, with very few Registered Providers actively seeking S106 opportunities in West Lindsey. First Homes has performed well, providing a first step into home ownership, particularly in the Lincoln Fringe villages. Whilst this does meet a specific need for low-cost home ownership, it does not meet the needs of those on the Housing Register and we are cognisant of ensuring a central government priority for home ownership doesn't hinder our ability to meet the needs of people who are not in a position to own their own home.

Planning and Development :

The planning policy function for the Council is provided as part of a shared service with City of Lincoln and North Kesteven District Council under the banner of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. The partnership has been established since 2009 and has successfully delivered two Local Plans in that time, most recently adopting a new Local Plan in April 2023. The Plan is positive about sustainable growth, supporting jobs and improved infrastructure. There are more than 34,000 homes being planned to meet housing need (significantly above the nationally derived local housing need figure of 24,244 dwellings).

Our Local Plan also includes ambitious policies that address energy efficiency and adaptation to climate change. The suite of policies are not only some of the farthest-reaching, climate change-related in England, they are also proven to be deliverable.

It is our belief that the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan is an excellent example of what plans can achieve through a positive partnership with ambition and shared vision from members and officers. Having an up-to-date Local Plan, with a healthy 5-year land supply (currently 7.8years) reduces the impact of speculative development on our communities and supports positive decision making by our members and our Development Management Team. A recent study conducted by the industry in August 2024 (<https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1881874/seven-secrets-councils-best-decision-making-records>) ranked West Lindsey in the top 40 Local Planning Authorities for performance in the country. This included analysis of government data on speed and quality of decision-making, including the number of decisions overturned at appeal. We are always striving to improve the service, particularly for our customers and we have recently implemented a new Development Management system designed to deliver efficiencies in the whole planning process and improve the customer experience.

THEME ONE: LOCAL PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

The Strategic Framework:

To address the issues and challenges within the district, and to enable us to take advantage of key opportunities, the Council has in place a [Vision for West Lindsey](#) which is our Corporate Plan covering the period 2023-2027.

Adopted in June 2023 following a light-touch refresh of the previous version, the Corporate Plan is our key strategic document that drives everything we do under the three key themes of 'Our People', 'Our Place' and 'Our Council'. Our overarching strategic vision is that:

“West Lindsey is a great place to be where people, business and communities can thrive and reach their potential.”

Our vision is bold in its recognition of the many advantages to living in, working in, or visiting West Lindsey; whilst also recognising the Council has a central enabling and supporting role to play in helping the district to reach its full potential.



Importantly, our Vision is centred around the delivery of a clear set of outcomes, which can be mapped to each strategic aim and objective. Monitoring the delivery of these outcomes is vital to our understanding of how well we are delivering our strategic priorities. We do this through our Executive Business Plan, our Progress and Delivery framework, project and programme management, and our approach to continuous learning and improvement. We have made strides in recent years to mature our approach across all these areas, but we recognise there is more to do, as explained under the following headings.

Strategic Business Planning and the Executive Business Plan:

To ensure strategic alignment across the organisation, Corporate Plan delivery is central to our strategic business planning framework, an established and embedded practice across the Council. Our approach to strategic planning has been matured further via the introduction of a Corporate Policy and Strategy team in 2021, which, as well as oversight of the Corporate Plan and strategic business planning, also has responsibility for the [Central Lincolnshire Local Plan](#) and the [Environment and Sustainability Strategy](#). Establishing this core corporate function has ensured that staff across the organisation are working to deliver a shared vision with clear objectives, as well as supporting members and Management Team with strategic decision-making.

One of the key areas that we are keen to progress is communicating delivery against our Corporate Plan's aims and objectives. Our main vehicle for this currently is our annual Executive Business Plan; a rolling three-year delivery programme which sets the context for the [Medium-Term Financial Plan \(MTFP\)](#). The Executive Business Plan provides members, officers and other key stakeholders with details of what we expect to deliver, which informs decisions on spending levels within the MTFP. Whilst the primary drivers for the Executive Business Plan are growth, efficiencies and financial sustainability, great effort has been made in recent years to ensure that every team can see their work represented in strategic delivery, after this was identified as an area of weakness in our 'Golden Thread' in a 2020 audit of the Corporate Plan. Whether it be collecting refuse, keeping our streets clean, supporting our vulnerable residents, providing a regulatory service, delivering large-scale projects, or keeping the corporate wheels of the organisation turning, we want every member of staff to see and value their role in contributing to the delivery of our Vision for West Lindsey. To that end, the Executive Business Plan, like the Corporate Plan, has been designed to be inclusive of all service areas, recognising that everyone has a vital role to play in delivering our shared vision. Our efforts in this regard resulted in an improved finding of high assurance in a follow-up audit of the Corporate Plan in 2022.

There is a need to take this further and fully develop and embed a clear approach to Corporate Plan monitoring. The Executive Business Plan is a high-level summary and can only provide strategic assurance. For a more holistic understanding of strategic delivery across the Council it is necessary to triangulate the Executive Business Plan with financial and performance reporting, programme and project delivery, and monitoring of risk.

We recognise the need to ensure that members, especially those who are new to the Council, fully understand the Executive Business Plan and its role in shaping the MTFP and strategic delivery in the context of performance, programme delivery and risk. Plans are being developed to introduce a rolling cycle of Portfolio Reviews from May 2025. This will see Directors present the work of their portfolio, based on business plans, to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Engagement with members and Team Managers will begin in the New Year, ensuring that the final recommendations from our latest Peer Challenge are incorporated into this process.

The Progress and Delivery Framework:

In managing performance, the Council relies on a clearly defined and well-embedded Progress and Delivery (P&D) framework. In recent years, we have invested in a performance management software solution, part of the OneCouncil ERP system. The aim of this system was to modernise and automate our performance reporting function; freeing up capacity within the Change Team to support the organisation with continuous learning and improvement. Progress in rolling out this system to its full functionality has been slower than anticipated and as such, the system has not released the levels of capacity at the rate expected. In spite of this, the Change Team have made much progress in continuing to mature our performance management framework.

We report progress against our P&D measures to members and Management Team on a rolling quarterly basis, with formal scrutiny applied twice a year by both main Policy Committees, and our Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These reports are by exception, focusing on those measures that are either above or below target, based on a 'RAG' rating. To aid understanding of whole-year performance, we also produce an annual performance report, summarising annual performance for each of our P&D measures.

More recently, P&D reports have included Performance Improvement Plans, applied to those performance measures falling below target for two consecutive periods or more. These explain the actions being taken to bring performance back on target. The introduction of these Improvement Plans has been welcomed by members, who have praised officers for the additional level of assurance they bring to our P&D reports. We recognise that there is still progress to be made. A small number of our P&D measures have performed consistently below target for a considerable period of time. Members are keen to ensure that our Improvement Plans are SMART, with a clear set of targeted, specific and time-bound actions. There is also a desire to slim down our P&D reports, making greater use of visual performance reporting and reducing the amount of written commentary.

Work is underway to ensure our P&D measures are mapped to our Corporate Plan objectives so that members can regularly track Corporate Plan delivery at the operational level. This is the first step in transitioning to a set of P&D measures that are outcome focused and strategically aligned to the Corporate Plan. To achieve buy-in, and to ensure our performance measures are SMART with stretching targets, an annual review of our measures and targets is undertaken with our Team Managers, facilitated by the Change Team and overseen by a member Task and Finish Group. The final set of measures and targets is approved in January each year by our Corporate Policy & Resources committee. The ongoing focus is to ensure we have in place a set of performance measures that allows us to consistently track our performance in priority areas and fully embed a cycle of continuous learning and improvement.

Personal Development and Appraisals:

To fully mature our approach to continuous learning and improvement, we recognise the need to embed our performance management framework at the individual level. An ongoing challenge until recently has been reduced capacity in our People Services function to support this aim, which means progress has been limited until recent months. The appointment of a People Services Manager in November 2023 has resulted in a fully staffed service and created capacity in the team to focus on strategic workforce development. One priority is to refresh our appraisal process for 2025, to create linkages between individual performance and delivery of strategic objectives. This refresh will also take on board the recommendations of a recent audit of our appraisal process.

We are proud to retain a corporate training budget at West Lindsey. Personal development is a key benefit to working for the Council, which helps us to attract, develop and retain high quality staff. Maintaining a training budget ensures staff have access to up-to-date learning, particularly important in regulatory service areas where colleagues are responsible for implementing legislation and compliance. More widely, our training budget has been used to support a range of personal development programmes, from enhancing specific technical skills to broader Senior Leadership Apprenticeships for those looking to progress into senior management and to support succession planning.

We are also committed to a wider Apprenticeship Programme; and we are proud to have supported a number of school leavers through Apprenticeships, many of which have resulted in offers of permanent employment at the Council. Since our last Peer Challenge in 2020, we have funded 25 apprenticeships through the Apprenticeship Levy, including some for existing Council employees. In recent times, three of our Apprentices have been finalists in the Lincolnshire Apprentice of the Year Awards, with one going on to win Apprentice Champion of the Year Award 2023 in the Government and Public Services category.



Complementary to our own staff training and development, West Lindsey actively participates in sector wide training and development programmes. For staff, this includes the District Councils Network Staff Development Programme, and New Local's Next Generation Programme. The latter Programme has led to the creation internally of a Staff Mentoring Scheme, championed by a member of staff who was keen to share the benefits of their own experience of the New Local Programme. This has recently been rolled out, with a view to expanding the scheme further.

To ensure learning is brought back into the organisation and retained longer-term is one of the key challenges for us as an employer. Promoting a culture of personal development is key to meeting this challenge and linking this to career progression within the Council's structure remains a priority. As such creating a balanced and progressive senior structure, with a robust Workforce Development Strategy will go some way to achieving this. For details of our Member Training and Development Programme, please refer to page 30.



Theme One Priorities:

- Develop and embed our approach to Corporate Plan monitoring
- Strengthen our Performance Improvement Plans
- Standardise our appraisal process and include clear linkages to our Values and Behaviours framework and the Corporate Plan
- Develop a rolling cycle of portfolio reviews for O&S Committee to highlight ongoing work and priorities within each portfolio

THEME TWO: ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Political Leadership:

The Council consists of 36 District Councillors representing 20 wards. The local elections in 2023 saw a change in political administration for the first time since 2008, with the Liberal Democrats forming an Administration Group with an independent member, giving them a majority of one.

Changes since the May 2023 elections have seen both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives each lose a member of their group, with both of these members joining together in November 2024 to form a new, Consensus Independent group of two, which is due to be ratified at Full Council in January 2025.

The Council continues to be governed under no overall control, albeit still led by the Administration Group under the leadership of Councillor Trevor Young. The Conservative Party forms the Opposition Group supported by one independent member and led by Councillor Ian Fleetwood. The Lincolnshire Independents form the third political group on the Council, consisting of two members led by Councillor Paul Key. The newest and final group on the Council, the Consensus Independent Group, consists of two members, led by Councillor Trevor Bridgwood. The most recent changes mean that all our elected members are now part of a group. The chairmanship of committees, as agreed at Full Council, means that the Administration Group have the deciding vote on all politically balanced committees.

The political structure of the council, since the local elections in 2019, is set out below:

	Political Party	May 2019	Nov 2019	May 2023	Dec 2024
	Liberal Democrat	12	12	18	17
	Conservative	19	18	14	13
	Independents	1	2	2	2
	Lincolnshire Independents	2	2	2	2
	Consensus Independents	-	-	-	2
	Gainsborough Independents	2	2	-	-

The Council operates a fourth option model, based on a committee structure. Chairmanship of each committee is appointed by Full Council. All committees are chaired by the Administration Group, with the exception of Joint Staff Consultative Committee, which is chaired by a member of the Opposition Group. Councillor Trevor Young is Leader of the Council, supported by Councillor Lesley Rollings as Deputy Leader. Councillor Stephen Bunney is currently serving his second consecutive year as Chairman of the Council, supported by Councillor Matt Boles as Vice-Chairman.

The Council operates two main policy committees, Corporate Policy & Resources Committee, which is chaired by the Leader of the Council, and Prosperous Communities Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Leader.

Although not mandatory within a committee structure, the Council operates an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which is predominantly focused on scrutinising the decisions of the Policy committees in relation to performance management and outside bodies. Following the recommendations of our last Corporate Peer Challenge in 2020, a number of changes were made to how Overview and Scrutiny operates, which were felt to have improved the overall effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny function. A recent external health check of our Constitution recommended that we further review our Overview and Scrutiny Committee and give consideration to its function, remit and workplan moving forward.

Committee	Chair	Vice-Chair	Chief Officer
Corporate Policy & Resources	Cllr Trevor Young (Leader of the Council)	Cllr Lesley Rollings (Deputy Leader of the Council) Cllr Paul Swift	Chief Executive (HoPS) Director, Corporate Services (S151)
Prosperous Communities	Cllr Lesley Rollings (Deputy Leader of the Council)	Cllr Trevor Young (Leader of the Council) Cllr Emma Bailey	Director, Planning, Regeneration & Communities Director, Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Planning	Cllr Matthew Boles (Vice-Chairman, Council)	Cllr Jim Snee	Director, Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Governance & Audit	Cllr Stephen Bunney (Chairman, Council)	Cllr Baptiste Velan Cllr David Dobbie	Director, Corporate Services (S151) Assistant Director, People & Democratic Services (MO)
Overview & Scrutiny	Cllr Paul Howitt-Cowan	Cllr Jacob Flear Cllr Moira Westley	Director, Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Joint Staff Consultative Committee	Cllr Jackie Brockway	James Deacon (Officer)	Assistant Director, People & Democratic services (MO)
Chief Officer Employment Committee	Cllr Moira Westley	Cllr Mandy Snee	Chief Executive (HoPS)
Licensing	Cllr Jim Snee	Cllr Mandy Snee	Director, Change Management, ICT & Housing and Environmental Enforcement Manager.
Regulatory	Cllr Jim Snee	Cllr Mandy Snee	Director, Change Management, ICT & Housing and Environmental Enforcement Manager.
Standards	Cllr Moira Westley	No vice-chair appointed to this committee.	Assistant Director, People & Democratic Services (MO)

Alongside formal committees, the Council also operates a number of formal working groups. Some of these are long-term in nature, designed to support the strategic aims of the Council, such as the Environment and Sustainability Working Group, or the Leisure, Culture, Economy and Tourism Group (LCET). Others, such as the Progress and Delivery Working Group, or the Economic Growth Strategy Development Group, are time-limited, task and finish groups created to deliver specific pieces of work. Many of our current working groups are new and the number of them has increased significantly since the 2023 elections as officers seek to support members in delivering their priorities.

There is a need to review the number, membership, frequency, and Terms of Reference of our Working Groups to ensure the Council's workplan is manageable, that the groups are operating in line with our governance framework, and that they are focused on delivery. One example of this is the Markets Working Group, established in 2023 under the parentage of Prosperous Communities Committee to oversee delivery of the Markets Action Plan following ongoing member concerns about the performance of our town centre markets. The departure of the Director of Operational and Commercial Services, whose portfolio included markets, means that we do not currently have officer capacity to deliver this Working Group, despite an improved market offering remaining a key member priority. The further development of the market is now integral to the ongoing Levelling Up Programme to create a thriving town centre for Gainsborough. A decision is needed on the priority for Working Groups in line with our strategic objectives so that capacity can be concentrated in these areas and so that members have a balanced and manageable workload.

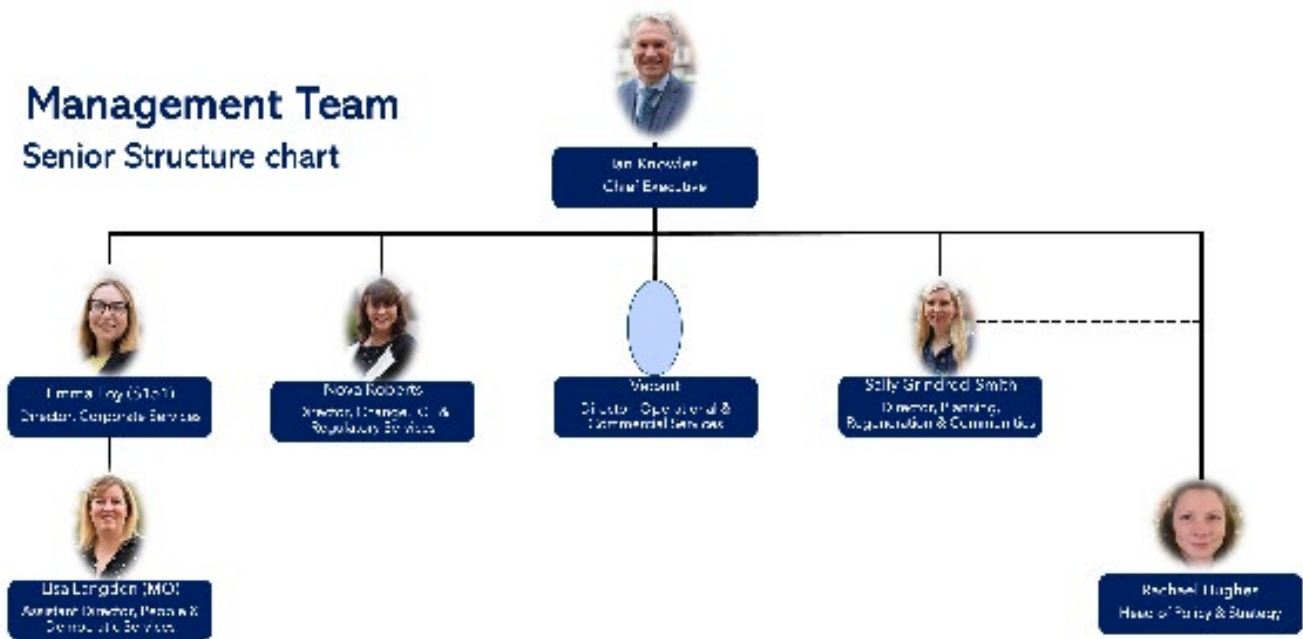
Officer Leadership:

In December 2019, the Council moved from an Executive Director model, with no Chief Executive, to a Chief Executive model. This remains in place today and has provided clarity of direction and purpose over the past five years in respect of strategic leadership. This was particularly important as we navigated through the challenges of the pandemic. Staff surveys were conducted regularly during this period and consistently found that staff felt supported and valued by the Management Team, and that top-down communication was highly effective. Externally, a Chief Executive model has strengthened our regional position and provided clear leadership in shaping and influencing the Greater Lincolnshire devolution deal.

Currently, the Management Team structure is comprised of the Chief Executive, four Directors and one Assistant Director. Management Team holds formally governed meetings once every two weeks to consider strategic issues, governance matters, performance, and finance reports. The Head of Policy and Strategy, and the Corporate Policy and Strategy Officer both attend Management Team in an advisory capacity, providing strategic advice and support, and acting as a strategic link between Management Team, Wider Management Team, elected members, and the wider organisation.

The position of Assistant Director of Homes and Communities has been vacant since 2022, and was deleted from the Establishment List in May 2023. The responsibilities held by this post have since been shared amongst Team Managers within the Planning, Regeneration & Communities portfolio. The Director of Operational and Commercial Services post has been vacant since November 2024. The Director of Corporate Services (and S151 Officer) will also be leaving the authority in February 2025 to take up a new role elsewhere, with interim arrangements to be made in respect of the statutory S151 element of this role. Interim senior management arrangements have been put in place with the senior structure currently set up as follows:

Management Team Senior Structure chart



There has been a high turnover on Management Team in recent years, with seven members of senior management leaving the authority since our last Peer Challenge in 2020 through a mixture of retirement, taking new roles elsewhere, or career progression. Despite this, officer leadership has remained focused on delivery and effectively navigating the authority through constant pressures and change. Management Team are accessible and have an 'open door policy', encouraging colleagues from across the organisation to engage with them on all aspects of working at West Lindsey such that staff generally feel valued and that their opinions are listened to, which has been consistently reflected in the results of staff surveys over the past few years.

The recent departure of the Director for Operational and Commercial Services, a long-serving, experienced and popular colleague, highly valued by staff and members has had a significant impact on the morale and dynamic of Management Team and Wider Management Team. The leadership, perspective and experience that he brought to the team is much missed. Management Team and Team Managers have rallied round to ensure the continued management and service delivery for the teams within this portfolio which includes many of our customer facing, operational and commercial services, and our emergency planning and business continuity function. However, with capacity already stretched, this can only be a temporary arrangement, and it is an organisational priority to address the senior structure to promote stability and to add capacity.

These most recent, and impending, departures at Management Team present an opportunity to reflect on what the senior structure should look like going forward, taking into account the findings of this latest Peer Challenge. There is a need to engage with Chief Officer Employment Committee (COEC) to create a permanent senior structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. A structure that is aligned to delivering our Corporate Plan, outwardly focused on leadership of place, and dedicated to delivery of high performing, value for money, modern services with the right capacity in the right places to deliver our shared vision. The Chief Executive has initiated discussions with the Leader and Deputy Leader and will look to establish a meeting of COEC for discussion in due course.

Member and Officer Arrangements:

The tables below sets out our governance arrangements for formal member meetings, key internal officer groups, and internal delivery arrangements for both officers and members.

FORMAL MEMBER ARRANGEMENTS	
Full Council	Group Meetings
Policy Committees	Regulatory Committees

INTERNAL DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS - MEMBERS	
Meeting	Attendees
Committee Chair's Briefings	Chair and Vice-Chair, Lead Officer, and report authors
Leader's Panel	Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairman of Council, Vice-Chair of Council, Administration Group Chief Whip, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of key committees, Management Team, Head of Policy and Strategy, Corporate Policy and Strategy Officer.
Member Working Groups	Various
Ad-hoc Member Briefings	All members, Management Team, other key officers as appropriate

INTERNAL DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS - OFFICERS	
Meeting	Attendees
Management Team (Fortnightly)	Chief Executive, Directors, Assistant Directors, Head of Policy and Strategy*, Corporate Policy and Strategy Officer (Corporate Strategy & Business Planning)* * Advisory capacity only
Management Team 'Big Conversation' (Monthly)	As above
Wider Management Team (Quarterly)	Management Team, Team Managers, Corporate Policy and Strategy Officer (Corporate Strategy & Business Planning), Corporate Policy and Strategy Officer (Environment and Sustainability)
Portfolio Board (bi-monthly)	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services (Chair), senior finance representative, Programme Sponsors, members of the Change Team, and other key officers as required
Together 24 Programme Board ICT Programme Board Commercial Programme Board Housing & Wellbeing Programme board LUF Programme Board UKSPF Programme Board Land, Property & Growth Board	Our Programme Boards meet monthly and include Project Sponsor, Project Manager, finance representative, comms representative, subject matter experts

Governance related to programmes and projects has grown significantly in recent years to reflect the high number of projects that the organisation has initiated simultaneously. Whilst necessary to ensure good governance and consistent project management, this has created a heavy administrative burden, stretching the capacity of those responsible for project and programme delivery. This is compounded by the continued scale and pace of delivery, and the high expectations we place upon ourselves as an ambitious organisation.

Whilst our high level of ambition is a positive aspect of the culture at West Lindsey, our capacity and resources are finite. As a small organisation, project sponsors and project managers are usually comprised of members of Management Team and the Wider Management Team. For Management Team, this limits capacity for strategic and place leadership at an important time for the organisation in respect of devolution and other place-based opportunities. For Wider Management Team, acting as both Project Manager and Team Manager adds an extra burden on delivery of services.

That we continue to deliver is testament to the resilience and ethos of our organisation, to our organisational leadership; and to the success of the Change Team. Ask any officer or member within West Lindsey and you will find a strong desire to deliver, grounded in a commitment to public service. There is a high-level of corporate buy-in to our project management framework, but there is a growing recognition of the need for change to ensure workloads are sustainable and focused on delivery.

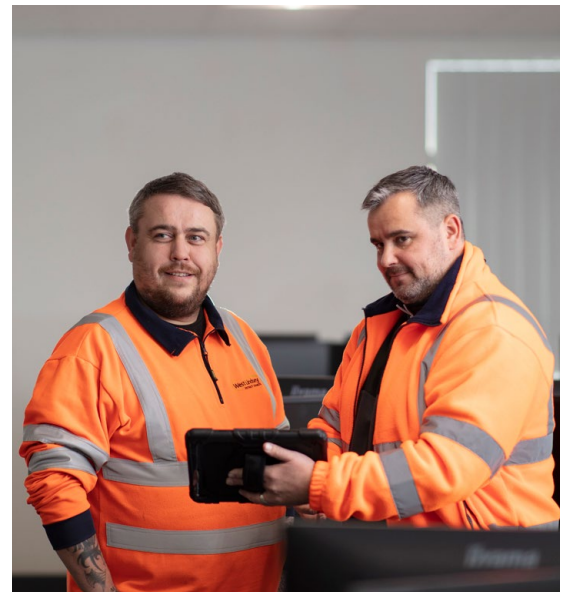
With our Together 24 transformation programme due to end in December 2024, and with new emerging priorities for the Council in respect of financial sustainability, and our role as place leaders, now is an appropriate time to recalibrate our approach to project and programme management. There is a need to explore how we ensure the role and remit of our Programme Boards aligns to our place-based aspirations; our newly agreed Savings Board which is in the process of being established; and our Digital ICT Vision and continued modernisation of services. The Portfolio Board should continue to provide strategic oversight, but there is a need to ensure this is focused on delivering our Executive Business Plan so that our key projects and programmes are closely aligned to delivering strategic priorities.

There is also a need to ensure our members have appropriate strategic oversight of programme delivery. Whilst the strategic priorities of our key programmes is led by members through the Executive Business Plan, and through committee decisions, currently members are not represented on our Programme Boards and such a requirement is not referenced in our Constitution. Members receive annual progress updates for programmes of work, such as UKSPF, and make key decisions on spend and strategic direction at committee, such as decisions related to our LUF Programme, approval of new system purchases, and any expenditure not already in delegated budgets. However, in reviewing our Programme Boards, it is important to consider options for a member presence on these Boards and how this would allow more regular oversight, enhancing strategic understanding across all aspects of delivery.

In summary, exploring options to streamline our Programme Boards, and the wraparound governance arrangements could ensure that members have greater assurance and oversight of Programme delivery, that the Change Team can focus on project delivery and change management; and that senior and managerial capacity is released to focus on strategic and operational delivery.

Organisational Leadership Priorities:

- Review the senior management structure
- Continue to develop our Overview and Scrutiny function
- Ensure the Council's workplan is manageable and review the number, frequency and effectiveness of member working groups
- Simplify our Project and Programme governance arrangements so that capacity is focused on delivery
- Ensure greater alignment between Programme Boards and the strategic priorities of the Council



PLACE LEADERSHIP

Over the last five years our focus has been on delivery of the Council's largest ever capital programme, totalling almost £20 million, funded through a combination of the Levelling Up fund, National Lottery Townscape Heritage grant, private investment and the Council's own investment. Midway through this programme, the adoption by our members of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan added a further £2.7m to our investment programme.

By the summer of 2025 the Levelling Up programme of work will have delivered:

- Four screen, state of the art 'Savoy Cinema' and car parking on a redeveloped brownfield town centre site
- New pedestrian connection to the historic heart of the town
- New retail and hospitality space
- Over 2,000m² of improved public realm
- 4,000m² of new and improved green space
- Upgraded bus station and town centre wide CCTV improvements
- 31 new residential units in vacant spaces above shops
- Refurbishment of 40 listed buildings including historic shop fronts

This programme of work has been delivered in house, with external expertise as required, touching almost every team in the organisation and involving constant engagement with members at every stage of the Programme's development. We have seen this as a huge opportunity to develop our skills, and the reporting of two audits with the highest level of assurance for the LUF Programme is testament to the Team West Lindsey ethos required for a programme of this scale.

During this period of intense programme delivery, we have used our place leadership role to ensure that our communities and businesses are engaged in regeneration activity. Our communication strategy has been key, supplemented by our teams regularly engaging with businesses through business breakfasts and our e-brief, with traders on our twice weekly markets and with our communities through regular 'walkabouts' in partnership with other community leaders. Capturing the development of the cinema on a time-lapse has been a particular 'talking point'.

As we work through our growth programme, we continue to integrate and evolve our Consultation and Engagement Strategy. The next phase of this evolution is the development of a Communities Strategy, detail of which is included under theme five (Capacity for Improvement).

Whilst capacity has necessarily been focused on delivery, going hand in hand with our capital regeneration works, we have focused on developing our network of relationships and partnerships across our key growth sectors within the public and private sector. This includes the University of Lincoln, specifically the Lincoln Institute of Agri-tech based at the Riseholme Campus in our district. Our key partnerships also include the Greater Lincolnshire Defence and Security Network, comprised of partners in the RAF and private sector and the Council, and the STEP Strategic Collaboration Group which is leading and shaping the programme with the UK Atomic Energy Authority to deliver the STEP Fusion programme at West Burton.

In developing these key networks, we have also ensured we have the best possible understanding of the economic opportunities, any barriers, and the action required to move forwards.

Work is underway across all three sectors, including an Economic Impact Assessment of the Agricultural Growth Zone (a concept developed by the LEP, University of Lincoln, WLDC and Lincolnshire County Council). This can be recognised within a masterplan and investment proposition for Scampton with a focus on defence, space, education and heritage. We have procured a Development Partner to lead this work.

We are heavily involved in the STEP Fusion work programme, including jointly commissioning and funding the Economic Impact Assessment, being a key partner in the Trent Clean Energy Supercluster Vision and leading work on the development of a 'Skills Collaborative'. We were proud to host the launch of the STEP programme at our very own Trinity Arts Centre in Gainsborough in July of this year ([Gainsborough STEPs forward to fusion energy - GOV.UK](#))

Building on the sector work outlined above, which will drive our growth strategy and future Local Plan development, we recognise that a key component of securing inclusive growth, particularly in Gainsborough, is to develop our response to the STEP Economic Impact Assessment and Trent Valley Clean Energy Super Cluster vision.

The STEP Fusion programme is an incredibly unique opportunity on an unprecedented scale. This is a priority for our administration who have been clear that we should seek to maximise the opportunities for skills development and learning as a direct result of the STEP programme.

STEP Fusion also offers many wider opportunities for Gainsborough and West Lindsey in terms of supply chain, employment opportunities, residential growth, investment in infrastructure, and town centre regeneration. During 2025 it will be necessary for the Council to develop a masterplan for Gainsborough and the wider area to respond to the opportunities of the STEP programme, guided by the priorities of the Council and in collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure that the full growth potential is harnessed, for the benefit of the district and that it is well planned, sustainable and inclusive.

We recognise that as we move into a new era of regional working, the articulation of our priorities for growth, as well as ensuring that we have the tools for delivery will be at the heart of our success. In readiness, we continue to explore our ambitions for place-based delivery, working with members to understand their strategic priorities for growth; and bringing together officers from across the Council to drive these priorities forward through partnership working at a place-based level.

Preparations are underway to implement a new Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA), bringing together the county of Lincolnshire, and the unitary authorities of North and North-East Lincolnshire into a devolved agreement worth £720m over the next 30 years. As a non-constituent member of the CCA and MCCA, we are determined that the interests of Our People and Our Place are represented in all aspects of devolved decision-making, so that we are able to take advantage of the opportunities a new devolution deal brings. Having a clear and deliverable strategic vision for West Lindsey grounded in emerging economic growth opportunities and supported by robust data will allow the Council to lead this agenda, and is key to our district's success in this new era for Greater Lincolnshire.

To support our ambitions, we recognise the need for a wholesale review of our next Corporate Plan, with our role as place leaders at the heart of this. Our approach going forward will include a clear emphasis on partnership working and public and stakeholder engagement, which was not in the remit for the most recent Corporate Plan refresh. In line with member priorities, and in keeping with the principles set out in our recently adopted [Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy](#), we are committed to co-designing our next Corporate Plan with residents, communities, businesses, partner organisations and the voluntary sector so that it more closely reflects shared priorities and ambitions.

Recognising the changing local government landscape, we will continue to develop our place-based approach, strengthening and embedding it further to ensure the interests of Our People and Our Place are strongly represented in devolved decision-making. To ensure the success of this approach, we recognise the need to equip members and officers with the right knowledge and skills to act as 'Place Champions' for the district. How successful we are in this endeavour will depend on key factors including collective buy-in to a shared vision; political and managerial leadership; our approach to change management, project management and continuous improvement; our plans for workforce development; our financial resilience; and our approach to risk management. At this early stage in developing a long-term, place-based vision, we are keen for this Peer Challenge to explore: a) our effectiveness as a place leader; and b) our readiness and capacity as an organisation to deliver such a vision through the evolution of our Corporate Plan.

Communicating our Challenges and Ambitions:

Our Communications Team is highly valued by officers and members alike. The strategic importance of this function has grown significantly in the last two years both internally and externally as we have navigated our way through the complex legal proceedings relating to RAF Scampton, responded to repeated flooding emergencies, and found new and innovative ways to manage multiple layers of demand created by different social media channels. The need for clear, consistent and engaging comms has never been greater.

Externally, we have a presence on Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn. News stories are pushed from our own website onto these channels to ensure one line of consistent messaging. Comments and private messages through social media channels are monitored daily to ensure our customers receive a timely response, and that casework is passed to the appropriate team or ward member. Members of the public are encouraged to sign up to our digital Council newsletter. In addition, we produce a monthly parish newsletter, and a regular business e-brief to ensure our Parish Councils and local businesses are kept informed of key developments and future plans.

We operate a communications strategy that is based on our strategic priorities, supported by a communications grid which is updated on a weekly basis and accessible by the Leader of the Council to support his role as a place leader and figurehead for the Council and district.

We have a strong and positive influence within our Local Resilience Forum (LRF), with our Communications Manager chairing the LRF's Warn and Inform Cell in 2022-2023. Through our experience with RAF Scampton, we have nurtured positive relationships with communications counterparts in the Home Office, and have established a national news presence, firmly placing West Lindsey on the map and creating avenues for West Lindsey news stories in respect of other priority areas for the Council, such as STEP Fusion, or areas of challenge, such as solar farm development.

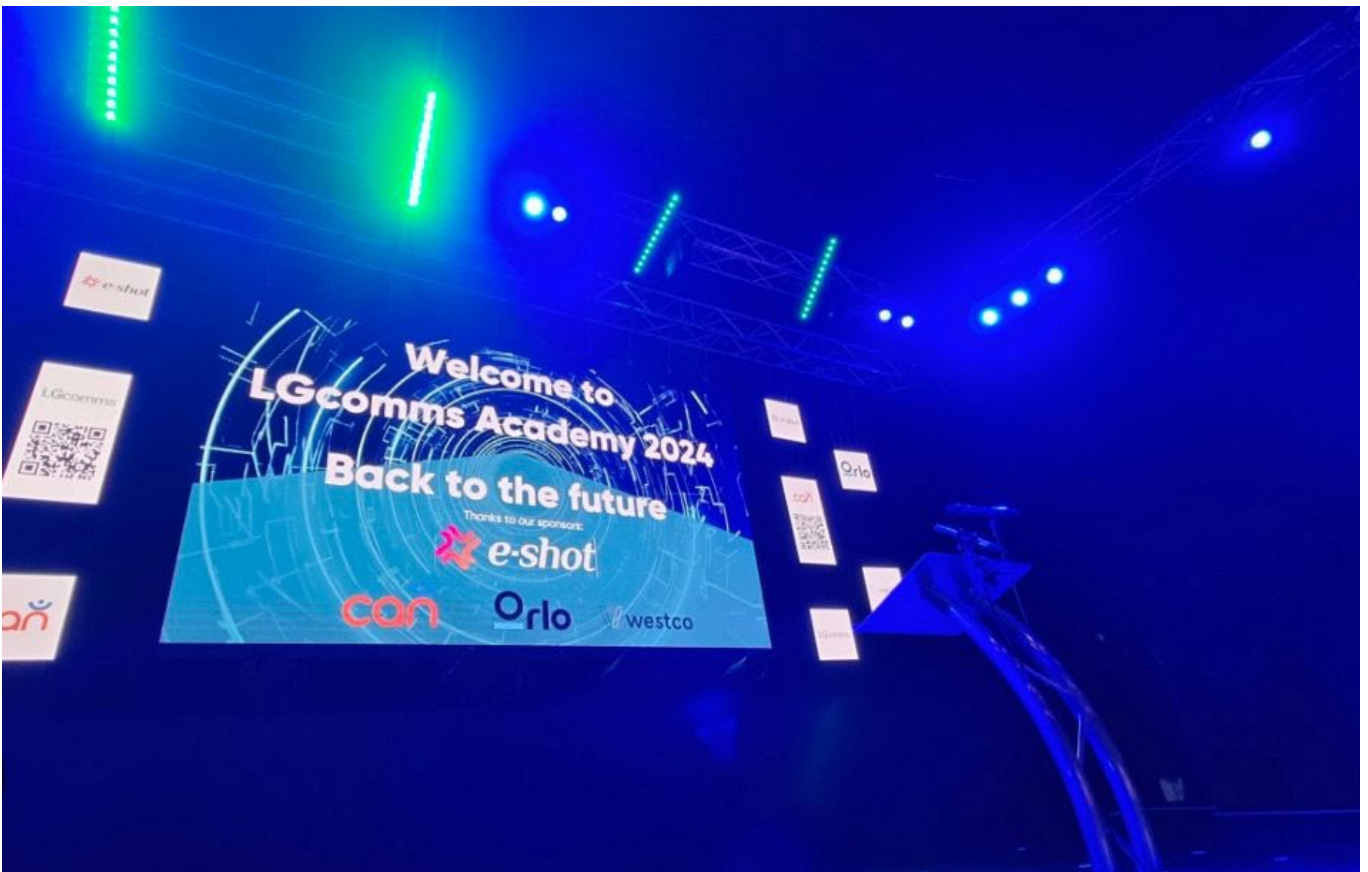
Importantly, our Consultation function forms part of our Communications Team, further establishing our connections with local communities. We have recently adopted a new and ambitious [Consultation and Engagement Strategy](#), which was developed based on the member priorities expressed at our annual Strategic Away Day. This event included industry experts from New Local, the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) and Local Trust and allowed members to explore their priorities in relation to consultation and community engagement. The resulting strategy is closely linked to our communications strategy and ensures a feedback loop between consultation exercises and how the results of these are communicated. A recent example of this is our garden waste consultation exercise, which received over 9,000 responses and informed our Garden Waste Service Business Plan going forward.

Our approach to communication was recently recognised nationally by the sector. In October 2024, we were invited, along with our counterparts from Braintree and Dorset Councils, to run a workshop at the LGComms Academy's 'Back to the Future' Conference, sharing our insight with other comms professionals on navigating the emotive and complex issues of immigration, community cohesion and the power of partnership in communication. Our strength in our communications function lies in collaborative working across teams, bringing together key officers to promote and support community cohesion and working effectively with members to support them in their role as place leaders.

Internally, we engage and communicate regularly with staff. What started out as a daily all-staff email to disseminate key messages during the emergency phase of the pandemic has evolved into a weekly all-staff message that is used to share important information, updates, events and key decisions. These have been positively received by staff who broadly welcome the regular connection with Management Team. Now that we have settled into an established, post-pandemic way of working, making use of MS Teams to connect and seeing more staff return to the office, there is a need to review whether or not we continue with a weekly message, depending on the wishes of staff who will be consulted on this decision.

In addition to the weekly message, we hold quarterly Corporate Updates to which all staff, including our depot staff, are invited to learn more about key developments and future plan based on the themes of 'Our Council', 'Our People' and 'Our Place'. We also make use of Minerva, our staff intranet where we have a rolling news carousel on a variety of topics, as well as a staff messaging channel. While the quantity of internal communication is high, there is a need to ensure how we engage with colleagues in and across the organisation is effective, and that messages from senior management are consistent, considered and timely.

More formal staff engagement takes place through our Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC), comprised of members and staff representatives. This committee meets regularly to consider and monitor internal employee related policies and issues, before they proceed to Corporate Policy and Resources as the parent committee. Recently, JSCC considered the Agile Working Policy which sets out expectations for staff on ways of working. The committee will also soon consider the results of our most recent annual Staff Satisfaction Survey, exploring any issues of note and examples of good practice.



Place Leadership Priorities:

- Consider how we shape our next Corporate Plan through our role as place leaders
- Ensure members are appropriately supported in their decision-making role as place leaders, particularly in the context of the new Greater Lincolnshire MCCA
- Ensure we have the right skills, capacity, resources and governance frameworks in place to deliver a longer-term place-based vision.
- Ensure our programmes of work are aligned with the emerging regional agenda
- Ensure the authority maximises the benefits to communities, residents and businesses of the development of STEP Fusion and ex-RAF Scampton

THEME THREE: GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

Each year, we internally review and update our [Constitution](#), paying particular attention to instances where our constitutional arrangements have been tested or flexed during the year, either by Council activities, or by responding to legislative or internal procedural or structural change. Similarly, the Council's Contract Procedure Rules are reviewed annually. Both reviews are overseen by the Monitoring Officer and referred to the Governance and Audit Committee prior to the Council AGM each May. For our most recent review, we commissioned an external health check of our Constitution, recognising the length of time that has passed since this was last carried out. The findings of this review have recently been submitted for consideration. Taking this work forward through to the Council AGM in May 2025 will involve two key stages. Firstly collating, for approval, the required changes that must be made to ensure our Constitution is fully compliant with legislation. Secondly, an all-member briefing is planned for early January 2025 to explore the discretionary elements of the Constitutional Review and the member appetite for taking each of these elements forward. A future decision will be needed on whether the external health check is sufficient, or whether a full and formal Constitution Review is required.

Our most recent [Annual Governance Statement \(AGS\)](#) was considered by the Governance and Audit Committee in September 2024 and approved for inclusion in our 2023-2024 Financial Statements. Our AGS is prepared by the Monitoring Officer (our Assistant Director for People and Democratic Services) and collates sources of information including the Combined Assurance Report, the Internal Audit Annual Report, internal Audit reports, the External Audit Annual Audit Letter, consultation results, any Ombudsman investigations, a review of whistleblowing activity, and an annual review of fraud. The AGS includes a review of the performance and effectiveness of our governance arrangements during the year, including a summary of any planned changes for the coming year following assessment by external bodies.

Corporate Risk Management:

Our approach to risk management is defined in our [Risk Management Strategy 2019-2023](#), which was developed around our previous Corporate Plan. Work has commenced to update this key strategy, with the most recent activity being a risk appetite survey of officers and members, which will inform the level of risk that is considered acceptable to the Council.

In the meantime, our Strategic Risk Register, which is owned by the Management Team, has been updated to reflect the aims and objectives of our new Corporate Plan. Recognising the increasing number of challenges, pressures and risks faced by the Council, in 2023 we increased the frequency of strategic risk reporting. Management Team considers the Strategic Risk Register on a monthly basis, receiving formal reports once a quarter. For members, the frequency of reporting to Governance and Audit Committee has increased from twice yearly, to quarterly. Increased monitoring and management of risk allows early identification of any emerging risks, ensuring timely action can be taken to mitigate the impact of these.

At the operational level, our Service Risk Register is updated annually with Team Managers. These are related to the delivery of day-to-day business activity and kept on our Minerva intranet site as well as being recorded in business plans. A separate register of Project and Programme risks is maintained by the Change Team and monitored at the appropriate Programme Board.

As a priority, there is a need to progress the development, adoption and implementation of a new Risk Management Strategy, including engagement with key officers and members, to ensure that our corporate approach to risk management is understood across the different strands of risk. It is also important that our approach to risk is understood in the context of the new Savings Board, commercial investment, performance and programme management, and strategic delivery. This new Risk Management Strategy will need to be supported with a comprehensive comms roll-out and training so that officers and members have the right skills and tools to embed our corporate approach and effectively manage risk.

Closely aligned to our approach to risk is our Commercial Investment Strategy. Reviewing our approach to commercial investment is a key priority of the administration and we have committed to updating our Strategy which is a key element of our Medium-Term Financial Plan. It has been essential to understand commercial investment in the context of external financial regulations. Work to develop a new Commercial Investment Strategy commenced in 2023, with feedback sought from members on risk appetite and priorities. A new Commercial Investment Strategy is not yet in place but remains a priority. There is a need for the new Strategy to be adopted so that our approaches to commercial investment, and risk management are understood by the Savings Board, and so that members of the Board have the right toolkit in place to support their work to identify savings, efficiencies and new income generating opportunities.

Member / Officer Relationships:

The local elections in 2023 heralded an era of change under a new Administration who have been keen to implement the manifesto on which they were elected. All of our elected members are ambitious for our place, with the administration having a particular focus on job creation, skills, growth, culture, sport and leisure, and reducing antisocial behaviour and fly tipping. The new Corporate Plan, adopted immediately post elections, presented an opportunity for the Administration Group to shape how we will deliver this based on their priorities over the next four years. Collectively, our members and officers are passionate advocates for West Lindsey with strong ambitions for future growth and high standards of service delivery.

The new administration took political control at a mid-point in the development and implementation of a number of key strategies and programmes, such as our [Cultural Strategy](#), our Levelling Up Programme, and our work to support improving conditions in the private housing market. This created some tensions in member / officer relationships as we sought to understand and respect each other's perspectives. Members of the Administration Group were keen to see that their priorities were reflected in driving these strategies and programmes forward. With significant complex programmes of work already in delivery for some three years or more, officers were keen to integrate the new administration's priorities into those programmes.

Great effort has been made to overcome these barriers and ensure that members and officers find common goals and a shared understanding anchored in delivery. We continue to work together, building our relationships to ensure issues are addressed and resolved such that opportunities can be explored together. A good example of this is our work relating to RAF Scampton which saw officers and members from across the Council work in partnership to challenge the Home Office and progress our redevelopment plans for the site.

Most recently, we have worked with members to establish a new Savings Board with a focus on the financial sustainability of the Council based on the steer of Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. It is an ongoing priority for members and officers to continue to build on these relationships as we move towards the half-way point in our administrative cycle.

To continue the development of member / officer relationships, we have increased the frequency of Leader's Panel, which now meets monthly. The Leader's Panel consists of the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader, Chairman of Council, Vice-Chair of Council, and chairs and vice-chairs of key committees. It is an informal forum with no decision-making powers; the purpose of which is to bring together senior members and officers to discuss matters of policy, finance, the strategic direction of the Council, and any other matters relating to Council business. Ideas are often explored and tested at an early stage in this forum before proceeding through formal governance. Holding more frequent meetings of Leader's Panel over the past 19 months has helped to build regular dialogue between senior officers and members. With the Administration Group now into their second year, and with regular channels of communication happening naturally in other ways, now is an appropriate time to review the format and frequency going forward to ensure the Panel remains an effective forum focused on strategic matters.

For our 19 new members, just over half of the Council, significant time has been invested to support them in their new role and help them navigate the complex world of governance and decision-making that comes with being a councillor. We have in place a robust, four-year Member Training and Development Programme, overseen by a member working group to ensure it meets the needs of new and returning Councillors. This includes a mixture of internal and external training, support and development and is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the ongoing needs of members.

We produce a monthly Members Newsletter, which is used to share key information and updates outside formal committee meetings with all members. Plans are in place to refresh this in the New Year so that it remains an effective source of information for members.

Roll-out of the induction and training programme began immediately after the elections in line with previous practice. For the first time, we held a Members Fayre, which was a positive experience both for our members who were able to meet staff from across the Council, and for staff who were pleased to showcase their services and meet with Councillors. The substantive induction programme began the week after the elections with a full programme of induction and training sessions. Members expressed the challenges in managing a full programme so soon after the election period, and alongside their work and caring commitments. We have taken this feedback on board, noting the significant increase in Councillors with additional responsibilities outside the Council, and we have committed to work with the Member Training and Development Group to design an induction programme for 2027 onwards that better accounts for members broader schedules and responsibilities.

Theme Three Priorities:

- Continue to develop and strengthen our member / officer relations
- Consider a review of Leader's Panel to ensure it remains an effective forum
- Ensure our Member Training and Development offer remains purposeful, accessible and is well-attended
- Adopt and implement a new Commercial Investment Strategy
- Adopt and implement a new Risk Management Strategy
- Ensure members of the Savings Board understand the approaches set out in these key strategies, and those already adopted, to ensure that their work to identify savings, efficiencies and new income generating opportunities is aligned with the priorities of the Council.
- Consider the recommendations of the recent constitution health check



THEME FOUR: FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

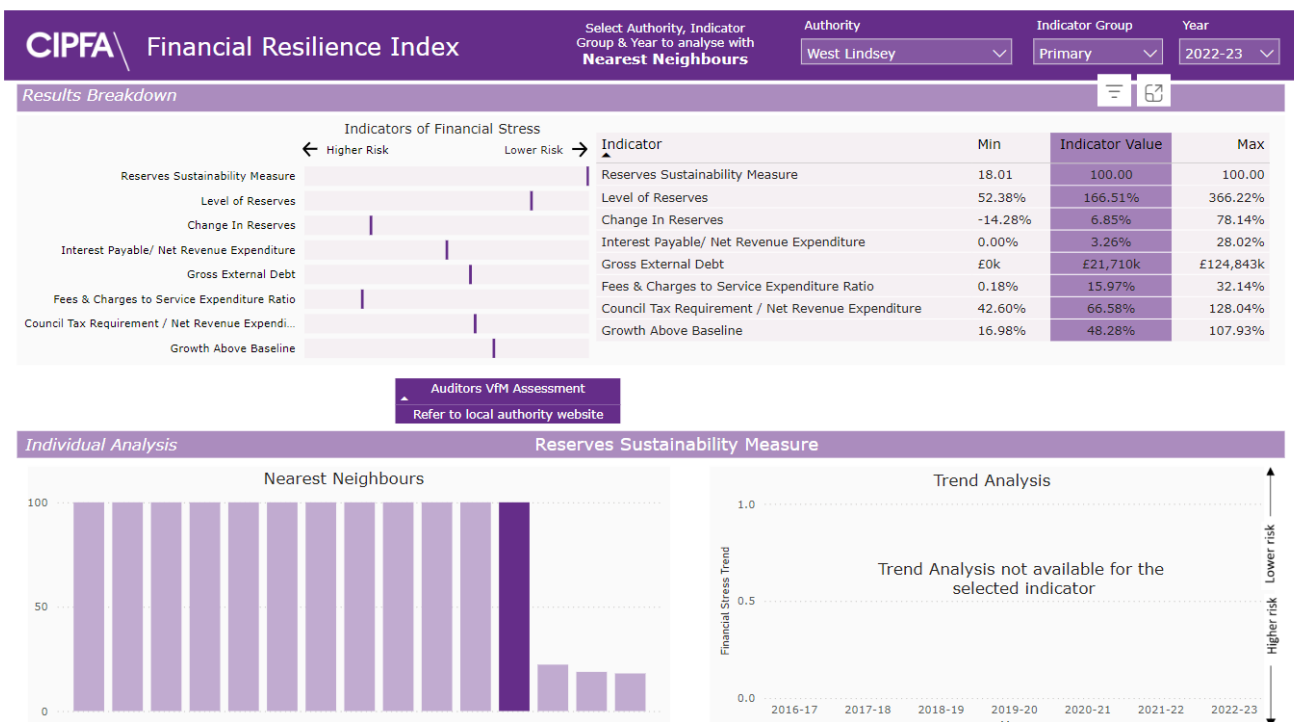
At the time of our last Position Statement in 2020, we considered ourselves to be in a good position in relation to our financial standing, resilience and future sustainability. Whilst Central Government funding has fallen since, we have continued to be able to set a balanced budget each year, without reductions to services or staff.

We use fixed term resources to support grant funded projects and programme delivery to minimise future funding pressures and through improved budget monitoring and reporting, we have reduced the risk of unnecessary spend.

Successful grant applications have enabled us to decarbonise assets and regenerate our towns. A new leisure facility has been provided in Market Rasen and a new depot delivered for our refuse and street cleansing service. Members continue to have small grants available to them which they can spend in their wards as they choose. We have maintained a training budget for staff to utilise, funded new IT for Members, and in the last 12 months, two significant new software systems have been funded.

The new Government's publication of the Local Government Finance Policy Statement in November 2024, which headlined with a 3.2% increase in local government core spending power, presents additional challenges for district councils such as West Lindsey, as the settlement is expected to be weighted towards social care and education. On receipt of the settlement on the 18th December 2024, we received a 0% increase in core spending power. We remain committed to working with staff and members to balance future budgets. Our budget volatility reserve for both revenue and business rate purposes in addition to our General Fund Reserve is sufficient to provide for a thoughtful and thorough implementation of efficiencies and income regeneration.

The Council has set the following resilience indicators, as presented in our MTFP:



Our Current Financial Position:

The Council has delivered reducing underspends in the period since the last peer challenge. Where possible these underspends are utilised to top up earmarked reserves which face continued demand.

RESERVE	ESTIMATED YEAR END 2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
General Fund Working Balance	2,525,079	2,231,879	2,111,179	2,111,179	2,111,179	2,111,179
Earmarked Reserves	11,437,511	10,311,282	10,787,382	10,858,582	10,748,282	11,261,082
Capital Receipts	5,617,736	5,728,264	5,854,967	5,883,687	5,913,061	5,923,061
TOTAL						

The General Fund balance sits at between 10-15% of annual net revenue expenditure as recommended. The Council also holds specific reserves for budget volatility, Business Rates volatility, and volatility of Commercial Asset valuations. Annual contingencies are also in place to protect against any changes in property asset rental income.

Our earmarked reserves are categorised as follows as at 3rd of December 2024:

EARMARKED RESERVE	ESTIMATED YEAR END 2024/25	MTFP				
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Service Investment / Renewals	3,070,390	2,683,625	3,464,525	3,560,225	3,449,925	3,962,725
Contingency / Risk	5,750,634	5,322,734	5,107,234	5,082,734	5,082,734	5,082,734
Investment for Priorities	2,616,487	2,304,923	2,215,623	2,215,623	2,215,623	2,215,623
TOTAL	11,437,511	10,311,282	10,787,382	10,858,582	10,748,282	11,261,082

The above table assumes that £4.75m will be invested from the Growth and Investment Reserve to purchase RAF Scampton. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of New Homes Bonus will be available to top up the Growth and Investment Reserve further for 2025-26 although this is subject to the outcome of the Local Government Financial Settlement.

The focus of the Council in recent years has not been to deliver savings, a detailed review of all budgets takes place each August and salaries are zero based with an adjustment for salary drift. This exercise has previously enabled the Council to deliver balanced budgets without any formal savings plans.

However, it is recognised that post 2026 this will not be possible and medium to long term financial sustainability is a key risk on our Strategic Risk Register. This point is explored in more detail in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy section below.

The Council has six Commercial properties funded from a combination of PWLB and internal borrowing, four of which are outside the district's boundaries. All properties have credible tenants and rent payments are up to date. The Council also holds properties for regeneration purposes which include commercial and regeneration properties that are let within the Council's boundaries.

The Council continues to explore opportunities for alternative delivery models and shared services and is currently reviewing the option for a shared building control service.

In-Year Budget Monitoring and Financial Management Processes:

We have invested significantly in building our Finance and Business Support function in recent years, implementing a financial system and wherever possible ensuring a fully staffed and appropriately structured team that includes dedicated Finance Business Partners for each budget holder. The recruitment and retention of technical financial accountants is a challenge for the Council as it is for many Councils but through the use of limited agency staffing, we have also met the publication deadlines for draft financial statements. Our auditors KPMG have completed their audit of the 2023-24 financial statements and value for money narrative, and we look forward to an unqualified opinion in January 2025.

In 2022 we implemented a new One Council Finance system to modernise our service and replace our legacy system. Both the restructure of the team, and the implementation of the new system have contributed to improved financial insight, decision-making and performance; one of the key outcomes in our Corporate Plan. Finance Business Partners hold monthly meetings with their budget holders and monthly revenue budget summaries are provided to the Chief Executive and S.151 Officer. Quarterly budget monitoring reports are provided to Management Team and Corporate Policy and Resources Committee which contained detailed reporting on Capital Programme and Treasury Management performance. The next stage is for our Finance team to fully implement interactive dashboards for all budget holders which will be delivered by March 2025. The Council implemented a no-PO no-Pay policy in October 2024 and despite this has maintained invoice payment performance of 99.73% within terms. The Council continues to derive value from the Finance system and has made further changes in the last 12 months, fully utilising the fixed assets functionality and planning to implement the cash receipting module.

The Council projects an underspend of £118k for 2024-25 after requested carry forwards.

Each corporate update and quarterly Wider Management Team meeting contain a dedicated update on both in year financial performance and the Medium-Term Financial position. Wider Management Teams are used to introduce new functionality within the system or new controls such as no PO no Pay,

With many new members on the Council, we are mindful of the need to provide comprehensive training and support to ensure members are supported in their understanding of complex financial reports and can carry out their decision-making role effectively. This is especially important in a committee structure where all members are responsible for agreeing the budget. In addition to the member induction programme, we provide monthly budget updates to the Leader's Panel so that senior members receive regular financial updates to support them in their role as committee chairs and vice-chairs. More recently, we have run a series of all member briefings dedicated to our budget position in readiness for the next MTFP. There is also a dedicated all-Member briefing on the budget consultation process and Members are encouraged to attend budget consultation events which are held in Gainsborough, Nettleham, Market Rasen and Caistor. We use the Members newsletter to provide draft papers and policies in advance of Committee seeing them and recently have used this to carry out an All-Member Risk questionnaire to assess risk appetite in advance of Members approving a new Commercial Strategy and Risk Management strategy.

2025-26 Budget and beyond (Medium Term Financial Plan):

In December 2023, as part of the Annual Review of reserves, we established a Budget Volatility Reserve to provide us with time to identify and deliver the cashable savings required to balance future budgets. As of December 2024, the Budget Volatility Reserve sits at £1.951 million.

Further anticipated cuts to funding bring additional challenges for us. Whilst we have not absorbed all of the New Homes Bonus into the Revenue Budget, and have used it to fund Growth and Investment projects, there are concerns regarding our ability to deliver these projects in future. The Reset of Business rates will cause an estimated £1m gap to our annual revenue budget. We do not receive revenue protection for the Internal Drainage Board Levies we are required to pay out and the reallocation of rural support grant may have a further adverse effect, depending on the financial settlement. Council Tax Collection targets remain challenging but increased residential development has assisted in providing a buffer which has protected our Collection Fund balance. As such any surpluses from the collection fund have been removed. Domestic food waste will be implemented in 2026 and there remains uncertainty about new burdens funding, therefore the pressures are fully recorded in our MTFP. We understand, and have accepted our responsibilities for medium term financial sustainability, having successfully accommodated Local Government funding cuts in 2010.

An updated Medium-Term Financial Plan was presented to Members in March 2024 and is detailed below:

	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	2028/29 £
MTFP FUNDING GAP B/FWD	326,000	1,584,900	1,567,900	1,552,100	1,572,700
Establishment	795,900	1,016,000	1,155,500	1,248,300	1,356,700
Pressures	101,100	129,100	161,400	203,900	195,900
Income Loss	76,700	78,700	80,700	40,200	32,400
Savings	(444,100)	(531,400)	(564,500)	(511,600)	(511,600)
Income Gain	(411,300)	(373,200)	(338,700)	(367,500)	(461,100)
Inflation	60,400	64,500	72,400	97,900	180,200
Contribution to Reserves	180,000	115,000	115,000	115,000	115,000
Increase MRP	46,000	71,600	71,600	71,600	68,300
Contribution to Revenue Contingency Budgets	254,200	251,700	260,800	267,100	273,600
In Year Surplus - transfer to budget stability reserve	157,400	(157,400)	0	0	0
Movement in Funding:					
Council Tax Surplus	(290,000)	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Yield	18,900	19,500	20,300	20,900	21,700
Other Government Grants	(441,100)	(103,700)	(103,700)	(103,700)	(103,700)
Business Rates	(430,100)	(1,446,100)	(1,400,000)	(1,375,500)	(1,434,000)
MTFP FUNDING GAP	0	719,200	1,098,700	1,258,700	1,306,100

At the September meeting of CP&R Committee, in considering a High-Level MTFP and Budget Consultation paper, members tasked officers with bringing back options for the creation of a member/officer working group for the purpose of identifying further income generating opportunities, efficiencies and savings in pursuit of a balanced budget. At the October meeting, CP&R Committee subsequently approved the establishment of a Savings Board comprised of six cross-party members, Management Team, and other officers to provide technical advice as required. The remit of the Board is to provide oversight of MTFP delivery, provide input into identification of cashable savings and income generation, and to prepare responses to government consultations on funding reform. More generally, the Board is an opportunity to develop members understanding of the budget and financial decision-making processes.

We are already working on some key themes of savings which are centred around:

- Management Team structure
- HR System
- Single Land Based service
- Street Cleansing

With the Board due to begin meeting in January, it is important that members are supported to embark on this programme of work with a full, clear and accurate understanding of the current financial position, and considering the content of the draft settlement. Members will also receive updates on the internal work that has already been undertaken to identify efficiencies, savings and income generating opportunities.

In our 2023/24 Value for Money Risk Assessment provided by KPMG to Governance and Audit Committee, it was noted that the Council did not have a formal process regarding identification and development of savings plans. To address future savings requirements, and whilst the Budget Volatility reserve would provide short-term protection, further work should be done to ensure longer-term sustainability. This Savings Board will help to address the improvement observation noted by our External Auditors.

Financial Decision-Making:

The governance requirements for financial decision-making are set out the constitution, with finance regulations and embedded within our Finance and HR systems. Our updated Financial Regulations will be drafted and presented to Management Team in February 2025 and are due to be presented to Full Council in May 2025 with the updated constitution.

In 2023-24 we received an assurance rating of satisfactory within our Internal Audit opinion with no specific areas of weakness noted. We are up to date with unqualified external audit opinions on our Statement of Accounts, with an unqualified opinion on the 2023-24 accounts due to be issued to Governance and Audit Committee in January 2025. We have always received unqualified value for money opinions and our Housing Benefits audit opinions are up to date.

Our Governance and Audit Committee includes independent members and meets regularly. In the last twelve months members of the committee have received training on risk management, Statement of Accounts and Treasury Management and Members cannot vote on the final approval of the Statement of Accounts if they have not received the most recent training. Internal Audit services are provided by RSM and in 2024/25 an independent fraud risk assessment was carried out providing a Fraud Risk improvement plan which is being implemented. Progress against this plan is monitored by the Governance and Audit Committee.

We have recently undertaken a consultation exercise with members and officers on risk appetite. The results of this will be used to inform our new Risk Management Strategy, which will be drafted and brought to Governance and Audit Committee for adoption. Funding will be drawn down from the training budget to provide further risk management training to Wider Management Team and Members.

Equality Impact Assessments are carried out for all significant financial decisions as needed and a nine-week budget consultation process takes place each year. In addition, consultation takes place on any potential decisions to the local Council Tax scheme.

Capital Programme and Investment Plans:

Since the previous peer challenge we have delivered a crematorium, a new leisure centre at Market Rasen, and a new refuse and street cleansing depot at Caenby Corner. In recent years our capital investment plans have been largely focussed on grant funded projects which have included £10.2 million of LUF expenditure, and £1.2 million of funding for Townscape Heritage Schemes which have improved 32 shop fronts and created a number of dwellings above existing shops. Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund, we have supported our communities and parish councils in delivering £3.5 million in further capital improvements. Since 2023, we have been successful in capital grant applications consisting of £400K for Solar panels through the Swimming Pool Support Scheme, £1.3 million from the Local Authority Housing Scheme and £800k for Home Energy Improvement across the district. CP&R Committee agreed to acquire the remaining share in a retail and residential private sector joint venture providing continuity of landlord for three retail units and four residential units in Gainsborough Town Centre.

Financial support has also been provided to the decision making and procurement of a development partner for RAF Scampton. External consultants 31ten were engaged to ensure robust due diligence was carried out on prospective development partners and continues to take place.

The Capital Strategy, Treasury Management policy and MRP policy are presented annually to full Council for approval. We have not breached any prudential indicators in the period since the last peer challenge and annual Treasury Management training is provided to Members of Governance and Audit Committee in advance of them approving the Annual Treasury Management strategy and recommending this to Full Council. We have a prudent MRP policy, and all borrowing is fully provided for over asset life.

- Ensure Members are supported in their understanding of the financial position
- Adopt a new Commercial Investment Strategy
- Ensure the role of the Savings Board is clear and well-defined, and that its aims and objectives are clearly communicated and understood by both staff and members

THEME FIVE: CAPACITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

Like all Councils, we are used to the need to adapt and learn, and we are always striving to improve how we deliver our services. We approach this in a number of ways as outlined below:

Corporate Capacity to Deliver:

As a small organisation in a rural district, attracting new staff with the skills, professional qualifications and experience necessary to deliver high quality services is a challenge. We currently have a vacancy factor of 8%. Our current workforce profile is summarised thus:

289 employees which equates to 268.06 FTEs. 26 of these are on fixed-term contracts. We also employ 13 casual workers.

268.06 FTEs

43.9% of staff define themselves as male and 56.1% define themselves as female.

43.9%



56.1%

At 3.5%, staff turnover is low. 189 employees are paid at the top of their band and the average length of service is 9 years

3.5%



At an average of 2 days per FTE, sickness absence is increasing which can be explained by a rise in long-term absence

2 days per FTE

Each year, we carry out a staff survey, the findings of which are reported to Management Team and JSCC Committee, as well as being shared with Wider Management Team, and staff at our Corporate Updates. The findings over recent years have been positive. This broadly remains the case in 2024, with staff reporting a majority positive response across all categories. Staff reported particular satisfaction in relation to knowing what is expected of them at work, working arrangements, and levels of motivation to do well in their jobs. Staff also remain able to cope with the demands of the job at similar levels to last year. There have, however, been some notable changes, which are summarised below:

While staff are satisfied overall with their jobs, the level has fallen from 88% in 2023 to 64% in 2024. 12% remain dissatisfied with their job, the same as in 2023. The remaining 24% reported being neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

At 80%, levels of motivation remain high, but they have fallen 10% on the previous year.

In considering the statement "I feel valued and recognised for the work I do," 58% of staff gave a positive response compared to 81% last year. 21% do not feel valued and recognised, while the remaining 21% neither agreed, nor disagreed with the statement.

63% of staff feel that the Council communicates well with them compared to 86% last year. 17% responded that the Council does not communicate well, broadly similar to last year, while 21% neither agreed or disagreed with the question.

In considering the question "my opinion at work seems to count," 59% responded positively to this question compared to 89% last year. 15% disagreed or disagreed strongly with this statement compared to 11% in the previous year, whilst the remaining 25% neither agreed or disagreed.

N.B. For the 2024 survey, we reintroduced a "neither agree nor disagree" option for each question at the request of staff.

75% of staff would recommend West Lindsey as a good place to work.

75%



What these results show is that, overall, staff have a positive view of working at West Lindsey, consistent with previous surveys, which is encouraging. However, the results also tell us that there has been a shift in how staff feel since the last survey was carried out in 2023. Some of this can be explained by changes in the methodology of the survey. At the request of staff, we reinstated “neither agree nor disagree” as a response option to each of the questions, after this option was omitted from our 2023 survey. The proportion of people responding ‘disagree’ or ‘disagree strongly’ remains low and broadly unchanged since last year, but many of the positive responses from 2023 have shifted to the more neutral response of “neither / nor.” There is a need to dive deeper into these results to understand the reasons behind this shift, paying particular attention to those areas where positive responses have slipped the most. This is particularly important as we embark on a senior management restructure and prepare ourselves for a new wave of change that devolution will bring to the organisation.

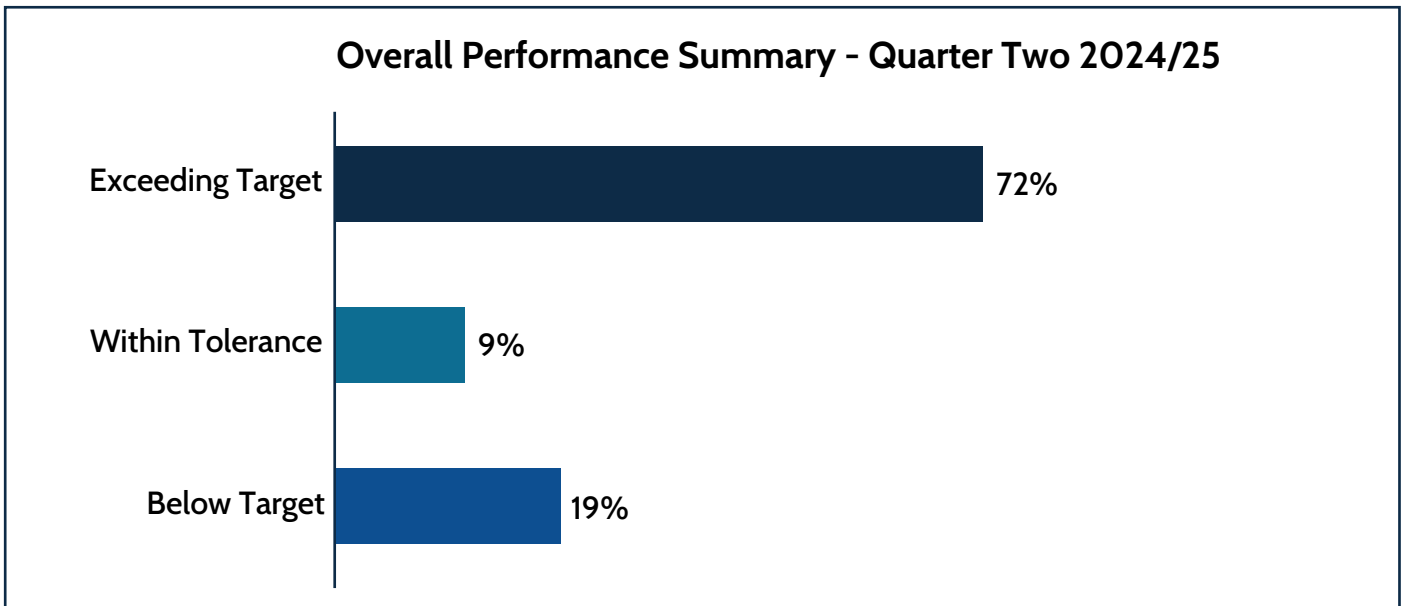
Organisational Development:

In November 2022, we appointed a People Services Manager to oversee HR, payroll, corporate Health and Safety, and organisational and workforce development. This brought much needed capacity to the team following a longstanding vacancy in this role, during which time the team’s senior officer picked up the team management responsibilities in addition to carrying out their existing role.



A fully-staffed People Services team has provided capacity to think about the more strategic aspects of organisational and workforce development. This is taking a phased approach. Firstly, we have recently introduced an Agile Working Policy, developed with staff and members to set out our expectations in respect of working arrangements. To understand our baseline position, People Services have also audited the workforce data we hold, updating this where necessary. Some of this data is now reported to Management Team on a quarterly basis so that senior management has a regular strategic oversight of the ‘health’ of the organisation. The next phase will be to produce a new Workforce Development Strategy which will identify the skills and capabilities needed to deliver our strategic priorities now and in the future. Our last Corporate Peer Challenge identified single points of failure within the Council, meaning that knowledge and skills for some roles often sat with one single person, which were then lost to the organisation if that person left or was absent. Whilst the number of these single points of failure have reduced, it does remain a concern given we have a low-turnover rate and an ageing workforce. The new Workforce Development Strategy must tackle this issue if we are to strengthen our capacity, skills and succession planning. The current government have announced a series of employment legislation changes as part of its ‘Plan to Make Work Pay.’ We will work to update our employment policies and procedures to reflect these changes and communicate them with staff and members as appropriate.

A Summary of Current Performance:

We currently report performance against 54 key performance indicators (KPIs) corporately to Management Team, both Policy Committees and our Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Our latest Progress and Delivery Report, published at the end of quarter two, shows that 72% of our key performance indicators are performing better than target. 19% are currently below target, while the remaining 9% are within agreed tolerance levels.



Our P&D reports include a basket of measures designed to monitor the overall corporate health of the organisation. Our latest position is as follows:

<p>Our overall budget forecast outturn is -0.87%, which is better than target</p> <p>-0.87%</p>	<p>99% of our invoices are paid on time</p> <p>99% </p>	<p>At 85%, our customer satisfaction rating is better than target</p> <p>85%</p>
<p>We take on average 7 days to resolve complaints, better than target</p> <p>7 days</p> 	<p>The Council was determined to be at fault for 17% of overall complaints, better than target</p> <p>17%</p>	<p>There have been 0 data breaches requiring action from the ICO</p>
<p>91% of Freedom of Information requests were completed within 20 working days, which is below target</p>	<p>Staff sickness averaged 0.82 days per FTE, which is worse than target</p>	<p>Our ICT system and server availability is 100%, better than target</p>
<p>£370,750 of savings have been identified through Together 24, which is higher than target</p>	<p>£94,600 of savings have been delivered to date through Together 24, which is below target</p> <p>£94,600</p>	

Our Approach to Transformation and Service Design:

Whilst our approach to performance management and programme management has been outlined in earlier sections, it is important to acknowledge more specifically our Together 24 Transformation Programme and its impact on the organisation. T24 replaced our previous Customer First Programme, and was launched in August 2020 with five key objectives:

1 All Council services have been reviewed redesigned with approved recommendations implemented by Dec-24

2 Customer requirements are identified and factored into service redesigns

3 Maintain and or improve levels of customer and officer satisfaction

4 Ensure that officers have the right levels of skills, behaviours and have the right tools to do their job

5 Efficiencies totalling a minimum of £300k are realised by December 2024



Together 24

The Programme's central vision is that "together, through our staff and technology, we will excel in meeting the needs of our customers through service delivery." Recognising the challenges of Customer First, people-led change has been at the core of Together 24's ethos from the start. We put in place a number of Change Support Officers, part of the Change, Performance and Programmes Team to ensure service re-designs were done with, not to, the teams involved. Change Support Officers released the subject matter experts to be part of programme implementation and thus retained the development knowledge within the organisation. In this regard, the Programme has been successful, with the teams who have been through the Programme broadly positive about their experience and the outcomes for service delivery with very little impact on business as usual.

The overarching objective of the Programme was for all Council services to have been re-designed by December 2024. This was an ambitious target that will not be met. A total of 15 service reviews have been completed through the Programme. No further reviews are planned whilst the Council's Project Management Office works to deliver the identified recommendations and savings. Looking ahead, it is important that a plan is in place to ensure our remaining services yet to go through a service review are supported with modernisation following the same people-led change approach that has been characteristic of Together 24.

Whilst Together 24 was not designed to be a savings programme, one of the five key objectives was to deliver cashable savings of £300k by December 2024. This objective became more of a priority mid-way through the Programme as the need for Together 24 to deliver savings and contribute to reducing the Council's budget gap became more of a priority. To date, £370,750 worth of savings have been identified, however, only £94,600k have materialised, meaning that the financial objectives will not be achieved by the end of the Programme. Additional savings separate to these figures have been identified that have been re-invested in the services. In recognising the need for financial sustainability, it is important the evolution of Together 24 places a stronger emphasis on savings and efficiencies, to align with the aims and objectives of our new Savings Board. As a result of our Transformation Programme, we are now looking at further savings that may be achieved through efficiencies within our land-based administrative support function.

Looking immediately ahead, the challenge for the Council is balancing the need for financial savings against the need to modernise, and to deliver our strategic objectives. It is important that key officers work together to evolve Together 24 into a new programme of work that can successfully achieve these objectives.

Our Digital ICT Vision:

Closely aligned to the Together 24 Programme is our [Digital ICT Vision](#), adopted in 2023. This sets the focus, framework and plan to deliver the required digital and ICT service improvements identified through Together 24 and through our annual business planning exercise. The Vision is aligned to our Corporate Plan and focuses on improving the customer experience through modernising our service delivery, underpinned by six guiding principles. Since 2020, we have implemented five new software systems, including a finance system, a CRM system, and most recently a Development Management System. The successful implementation of these systems has been achieved through our change management approach, and by staff working collaboratively across teams to ensure no loss of service to our customers.

As with our Together 24 Programme, the challenge for the Council is to modernise our service delivery in a financially sustainable way, ensuring efficient, value for money services in line with the principles of our new Savings Board.

Procurement:

Our Procurement function is delivered as part of a county wide framework known as Procurement Lincs. Internally, this is supported by our Contracts and Procurement Business Development Officer. To support our staff with implementing the new requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, we have recently rolled-out a training package, as well as briefing members on the key changes. This training is ongoing to ensure the new procurement rules are correctly adhered to. Our approach to procurement is currently under review as we recognise a need to improve the knowledge and understanding of all those involved in the procurement process.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

Responsibility for our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) umbrella of work sits within our Communications and Corporate Governance Team. Positive steps have been made in this regard over the past 12 months, but we recognise the need to do more. In 2023, following a suggestion from a member of staff, we established an EDI staff forum which meets monthly and to which all staff are encouraged to join if they wish to. We regularly promote EDI news stories on our staff intranet, and staff are encouraged to include their pronouns on email signatures, although this has not yet been widely adopted. [Our Equalities Strategy](#) is due to be refreshed in 2024/25.

All staff are required to complete an annual EDI staff training module on our Learning Platform. To ensure EDI is considered in our decision-making, our covering reports include a requirement to demonstrate that an Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for all new strategies, projects, and other key decisions. This is not always applied consistently across the organisation and there is a need to provide refresher training for Wider Management Team and other key officers.

Our Approach to tackling Climate Change:

In 2024, we refreshed our [Environment and Sustainability Strategy](#), which was first adopted in June 2021. This sets out our core commitment to West Lindsey becoming a carbon net zero Council and district by 2050. Strategic oversight of this work area sits within the Corporate Policy and Strategy team to ensure alignment with our Corporate Plan and the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.

Internally, our focus is on “getting our house in order” by delivering a green thread of activity across all aspects of the Council’s operations to ensure we are playing our part. Officers are supported to identify new projects or different ways of working that will reduce our carbon footprint. Our committee reports include a Climate, Environment and Sustainability Impact Assessment (CESIA) so that members are supported in considering the impact key decisions will have on the environment. Our Corporate Plan embeds the concept of the ‘green thread’ by containing a number of climate related objectives across each of the three main themes. In 2024, members adopted a new Fleet Decarbonisation Strategy which sets out a framework for the decarbonisation of our fleet vehicles. We continue to apply for funding opportunities that will support our aims, such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund. One of our challenges is the often tight deadlines for submitting a funding application, which does not always align with our governance cycles. We have put mitigations in place to address this, with support from the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. Member oversight of our Strategy and associated Action Plan sits with the Environment and Sustainability Member Working Group which meets monthly. We are conscious that carbon reducing projects are not progressing as quickly as we would like. We will seek to improve the speed of carbon reduction as we move forward.

Externally our focus is on supporting communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change and enabling our communities and businesses to take steps to reduce their own carbon footprints. Our Home Energy Efficiency Team has a highly visible presence across the District, supporting residents with home energy advice. Our Growth Team supports businesses to nurture a circular local economy. Our supporting communications campaign “Small Steps, Big Impact” is rolled out across all our social media channels to highlight the steps our residents can take to reduce carbon emissions.

To become net zero by 2050 is ambitious and can only be achieved by working together as a Council and as a district. We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge, particularly for a district vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events on sustainable food production and flooding.

Community Capacity:

Our Communities Team is integral to the delivery of the 'Our People' aims and objectives of our Corporate Plan, supporting some of our most vulnerable communities and playing a key role in improving outcomes related to health and wellbeing, employment and skills, community cohesion, and rural issues. Following the recent adoption of our Consultation and Engagement Strategy, which included a focus on 'empowering community voices,' the Communities team are taking this principle and applying it to a new Communities Strategy, which will set out how we will deliver this aim over the short, medium and long-term. This Strategy will be developed with member engagement, based on their priorities, in 2025.

Theme Five Priorities:

- Identify a methodology for supporting modernisation of those services who did not go through a Together 24 service review.
- Identify and agree an approach to continuous learning and improvement in place of the Together 24 Programme
- Ensure the principles and priorities of our Digital ICT Vision, our approach to continuous learning and improvement, and our Savings Board are not competing with each other, and are all aligned towards delivering the shared vision of our Corporate Plan
- Update our Equalities Strategy, and ensure the principles are communicated to staff and members to promote our commitment to EDI.
- Continue to promote our climate change and sustainability objectives so that these become embedded across all areas of Council activity.
- Update and modernise our HR policies.
- Review and improve our procurement processes in light of the recent changes to Procurement legislation.
- Embed the principles of our Consultation and Engagement Strategy within all service areas

SUMMARY

In sharing our Position Statement, we set out to demonstrate what we think we do well, and where we think we could improve. Reflecting on our progress since our last Corporate Peer Challenge in 2020, we are proud of the progress we have made and of how far we have come. But we are not complacent. We know that there is always more to do, and we look forward to the learning opportunities the Peer Challenge presents. How we progress from here will be shaped by our priorities, our capacity to deliver, and through collaborative working so that we are in the strongest position possible to move forward together.

