

Annual Report 2023/24



Solihull

METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Purpose, audience and current context | 3 |
| Welcome and Introduction | 4 |
| Timeline 2023/24 | 6 |
| People & communities | 8 |
| Economy | 12 |
| Environment | 15 |
| Enablers | 19 |
| Financial outturn position | 24 |
| Outside the priorities | 26 |

Front cover images

Top left to right:

Horace the hedgehog

Council officer Adrian Butler (Planting our Future) and Cllr Ian Courts plant a tree at Dorridge Cricket Club

Bottom left to right:

Solihull Apprenticeship Show 2024

Mell Square redevelopment – artist’s impression

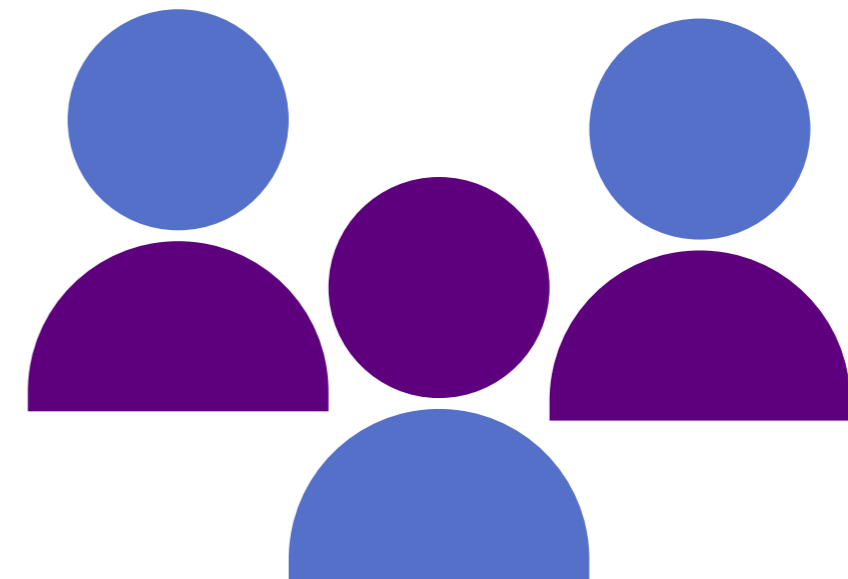
Purpose, audience and current context

The purpose of our Annual Report is to reflect on our achievements and highlights during the period from April 2023 to March 2024.

Our Council Plan sets the direction we want to go in as a Council and describes the major steps we need to take to achieve our ambitions for 2025 and beyond. It reflects our belief that economic development, environmental sustainability, and health and wellbeing go hand in hand.

This report showcases case studies from across the borough and key figures that demonstrate our progress in implementing our Council Plan priorities. It isn't a definitive list of everything we have done but is intended to give an insight into what we've been working on across the past year.

The audience for our Annual Report is our residents, employees, elected members, and all those who work with and alongside us.



Welcome and Introduction

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

In this Annual Report we set out our achievements in 2023/24 and how we are addressing key challenges facing us.

Children are central to all of our work as a Council and Children's Services continues to be our top priority for improvement. Over the past year, we have made improvements, including to our front door, assessments and planning. The quality of our social work practice has improved, although there is more to do to increase consistency. The progress we have made has been recognised by Ofsted inspectors in our recent monitoring visits. We are continuing our work to improve outcomes for children and young people in a way which focuses on early intervention and creating a sustainable system.

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

We are working with the NHS, local organisations, community groups and residents to take forward the ambitions in our health inequalities strategy. The Solihull Place Committee, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, is a key part of the Integrated Care System, taking responsibility for delegated functions and budgets, including commissioning of community health services and decision making around the Fairer Futures Fund.

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

Our borough is changing. The borough is increasingly ethnically diverse, with minority ethnic groups comprising 18% of the population in the 2021 Census, up from 11% in 2011. This trend is continuing and, since the 2021 Census, we have welcomed 4,200 adults and children to the borough through the Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Welcome Programme. In addition, those aged 65 and over were the fastest growing section of the Solihull population from 2011 to 2021, growing by 15% (+6,000 individuals) and this trend is set to continue. We need to take the changing nature of the borough into consideration when planning what we need and how we do it.

Like councils up and down the country, we are facing challenges in balancing the books for the next few years. As a result, we have to change how we operate in order to be financially sustainable and continue to provide quality services for residents. The Council's Budget Strategy Group will start work in early October 2024 to address the current financial challenges and prepare the Council for the longer-term challenges and opportunities ahead.

We are seeking to develop and promote the borough's economy, revitalise our town and local centres, and maximise the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. Our Economic Strategy for

the 10 years to 2032 seeks to deliver further and better economic growth, whilst ensuring that all our communities can participate and benefit. We continue to be a strong and active member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and have worked closely with them on the trailblazer devolution deal alongside Birmingham City Council to shape the East Birmingham and North Solihull (EBNS) levelling up zone.

We are committed to action to tackle climate change that benefits communities and businesses; implementing low carbon technologies will ultimately bring benefits to everyone, for example, through affordable energy, opportunities for clean growth and improvements to air quality and biodiversity. In late 2021 we published our Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP), a key element in planning the borough's response to the climate emergency, and our annual progress reports are published each Spring.

Our enablers are the foundations on which we build our services and which enable us to achieve our priorities. We have developed our People Strategy 2024-27 to engage and continue to develop a workforce with the resilience to drive us forward as an organisation and increase our ability to meet residents' needs. We have also developed an externally facing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy which sets out how we will integrate EDI practice into everything we do.

We pride ourselves on being a Council that is small enough to care, yet big enough to make a difference. By working together, we will continue to achieve our priorities and deliver for people who live, work, study in and visit Solihull.



*Leader of the Council
Cllr Ian Courts*



*Chief Executive
Paul Johnson*

Timeline 2023/24

Key events over the past year:

April 2023 - Nominations opened for Civic Honours Award



August 2023 - Solihull 2nd in the country for children's cycle training



December 2023 - Solihull launches Enterprise for Success, a new support programme for start-up businesses



June 2023 - Birmingham Children's Trust appointed as regional partner for our Children's Services Improvement journey



BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST

October 2023 - Solihull's first pilot Family Hub opens



February 2024 - The Solihull Apprenticeship Show took place



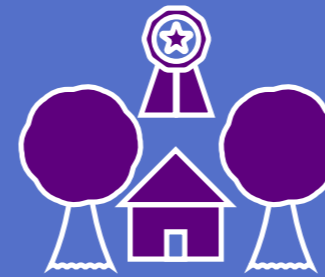
July 2023 - New Chief Executive of Solihull Council announced



May 2023 - Highway Infrastructure Team win Green World Awards 2023 for their carbon reduction work



November 2023 - Solihull holds its annual Greener Schools award



March 2024 - Solihull Council's Campaign (Planting our Future) to get local people involved in tree planting has won public sector prize at the Natural Environment Awards (NEA)



September 2023 - UK's largest electric vehicle charging hub opens in Solihull



January 2024 - St Basils Solihull Youth Hub launched



People & Communities

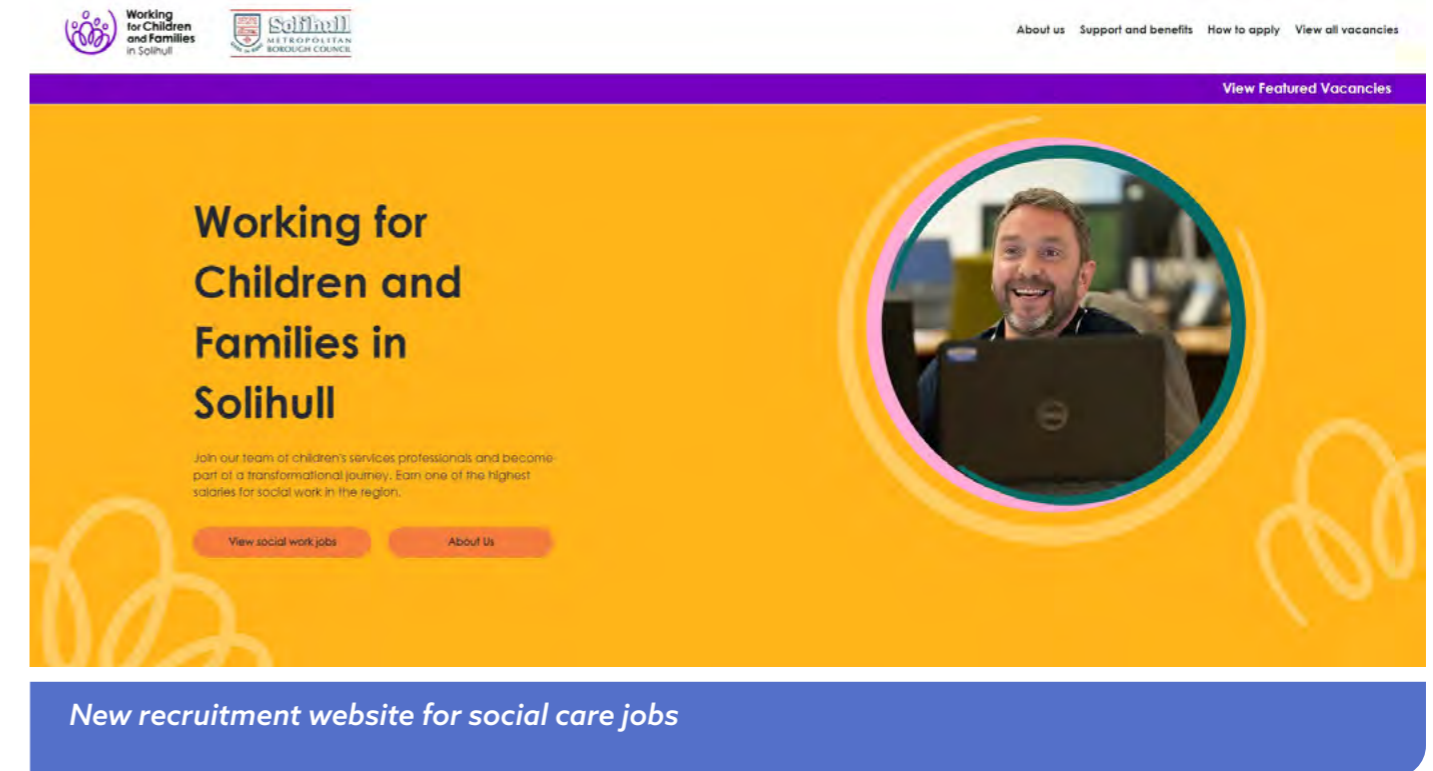
Some key figures:

- 5,212 children were supported by Children's Social Work teams during 2023/24.
- In 2023-24, 1,286 safeguarding concerns were responded to by Adult Social Care, with 228 incidents requiring a safeguarding enquiry.
- In 2023-24, Adult Social Care conducted 2,182 Care Act Assessments to understand people's needs and plan with them their support.
- The Employment and Skills team delivered employment support to 718 residents. Over the year, we helped 441 people move into education, employment, and training.
- Over 3,000 visitors attended our two apprenticeship shows.
- During 2023, we worked with 43 different providers across Solihull to deliver our Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF).
- Throughout 2023, the number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) attending HAF events accounted for 25% of the total attendees
- We had 37,089 attendances across our Solihull on the Move programme of activities
- 1,127 victims of domestic abuse were provided with specialist advice, information and support.

Case studies

To illustrate what we've achieved and what we're continuing to work on

Our Children's Services improvement journey



New recruitment website for social care jobs

Children's Services have been undergoing an improvement journey following an Ofsted inspection in November 2022 which concluded the service was 'Inadequate'. Children are central to our work as a Council and significant progress continues to be made as we work closely with the government appointed commissioner and key partner agencies. Ofsted monitoring visits in October 2023 and January 2024 saw inspectors recognising improvements across a range of areas as well as better co-ordination and consistency across teams, both within the Council and working with other organisations.

One of our key challenges is increasing the stability of our workforce and, in January 2024, we launched a new recruitment website for people looking for social care jobs working with children and families. 'www.solihullcarejobs.co.uk' showcases what it is like to work for Solihull Council, the wide range of benefits on offer, and the variety of areas to work in – all in one place. This recruitment drive forms part of our ambition to recruit and retain experienced people with a commitment to excellence to work within the service, in particular social care. The first phase of the recruitment campaign has been focused on recruiting social workers, however, other jobs working with children and families are also available on the website.

Holiday Activity and Food Programme



Children taking part in a HAF event

Utilising time-limited government funding, Solihull Council has been delivering the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme to eligible children and young people since 2021. This year there has been a substantial amount of work to ensure the voice of the child is feeding into HAF design and delivery.

The Communities team has worked closely with Solihull Parent Carer Voice and during winter we commissioned an artist to create four short films that directly captured the views of children engaging in holiday provision. This included a mix of provision with older young people and camps targeted at children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We have also built into the quality assurance visits an opportunity to collect children's feedback.

A key focus has been ensuring that all eligible children are represented. In Solihull, just under 29.5% of free school meal recipients have been identified as having SEND. Comparing this to actual attendance data, the attendance by children with SEND has steadily increased throughout the year from 22% at Easter, 26% during summer and 28% at Christmas, moving closer to our target. Furthermore, there is continued partnership working with the Council's New Communities and Resettlement Team to ensure that children, particularly Ukrainian children, were provided with places.

Carers' Strategy Delivery

In 2022, following feedback from carers, providers and wider partners, we agreed a 5-year Solihull Carers' Strategy in partnership with Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB). The strategy identifies key themes to improve the lives of carers in Solihull of all ages and the action plan shows how we will deliver the changes needed across those themes: identification of carers, providing information, respite and breaks for carers, wellbeing of carers and digital skills.



Promoting Carers Rights Day (l-r): Cllr Michael Gough, Cllr Tony Diccio, Brandon Scott-Omenka Chief Executive of Carers Trust Solihull

Positive progress has been made across the areas within the strategy throughout 2023-24.

- Young adult carers delivered awareness training to senior operational leads from 7 schools giving them an introduction to programmes to support young carers.
- Free access to the Holiday Activity and Food programme has been promoted to young carers since the summer holidays in 2023. 24 young carers are now accessing the scheme, and this will continue to be offered on an ongoing basis.
- Respite is a key priority of the strategy. In Children's social care a revised short breaks statement was co-produced with Solihull Parent Carer Voice and is available on the [Council website](#). In Adult Social Care in 2023-24 we have increased our [respite offer for Solihull residents](#), including committing long term to an additional respite provision in a supported living accommodation with onsite support and a new respite at home service which gives carers a regular planned break of a few hours at a time, while their loved one is looked after in their own home.

Economy

Some key figures:

- Solihull attracted more than 6 million visitors in 2023, an increase of over 200,000 visitors compared to 2022.
- Solihull's visitor economy was worth a record £1.27 billion in 2023, up 14.8% from the previous year.
- The numbers of full-time equivalent jobs supported by direct and indirect tourism activities rose by 9%.
- In Solihull, economic output per filled job is 17% higher than the West Midlands average .
- The Solihull economy, as measured by gross value added (GVA) per head, is the largest in the West Midlands and 31% bigger than the England average.

Case studies

To illustrate what we've achieved and what we're continuing to work on

Mell Square regeneration

In October 2023, Solihull Council selected Muse as its preferred development partner to bring forward ambitious regeneration plans for Mell Square. The redevelopment aims to revitalise Mell Square through the addition of new homes, public and leisure spaces, whilst enhancing Solihull's existing retail offer, visitor experience and diversifying the nighttime economy.

Mell Square has been identified by the Council as a key opportunity area within its Town Centre Masterplan. The Masterplan seeks to provide a framework to maximise opportunities, make best use of existing assets, and set out a clear vision for Solihull in 2036 while still retaining the character which makes the town centre so popular amongst residents and visitors.

In March 2024, Solihull Council, Muse and other partners undertook a 3-day in person engagement with the public, followed by an online questionnaire to shape the emerging masterplan by giving local residents the opportunity to have their say on the future of the town centre.



Mell Square redevelopment - artist impression

Training opportunities for local residents

In February 2024, over 1,000 young people attended the Solihull Apprenticeship Show at North Solihull Sports Centre. The free event was organised by Solihull Careers Hub, which is part of the Council's Employment and Skills Team, and allowed young people to connect with employers and training providers to learn about local opportunities.

Apprenticeships at all levels, as well as other entry level opportunities, were showcased at the event to highlight the variety of career pathways young people can explore. Employers and training providers worked within various sectors such as construction, digital, creative, engineering and business sectors. Exhibitors included Solihull College & University Centre, Jaguar Land Rover, Graham, Severn Trent, DHL, Deloitte and Creative Alliance.

As part of the Council's ongoing regeneration of Kingshurst Village Centre, the Kingshurst Training Hub is offering local residents the opportunity to benefit from onsite training with the aim of opening the door to future employment in the construction industry. This exciting initiative has been led by Solihull Council and funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority. It is delivered in partnership with Willmott Dixon, Solihull College & University Centre and RMF Group. Residents can sign up to a short training course focusing on either groundworks or brickwork which upon completion will provide them with a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card and a guaranteed interview to put their new skills into practice.



Young people attending the Solihull Apprenticeship show at North Solihull Sports Centre

Environment

Some key figures:

- We have planted 75,000 trees as part of Planting Our Future.
- There are 150 miles of public rights of way opening up woodland and open countryside within the borough and neighbouring Warwickshire.
- 63 volunteers spent a total of 85 hours planting trees and hedgerows to support Planting Our Future.
- 263 new registrations for Love Solihull Community Litter Picking initiative between April 2023 and March 2024.
- 16 Green Flag Parks within the borough (as of July 2023).
- The Council's carbon emissions have reduced by 75% in 2022/23, compared to 2009/10.



Alison White (Solihogs Hedgehog Rescue Centre) and Cllr Andy Mackiewicz release rescued hedgehogs.

Case studies

To illustrate what we've achieved and what we're continuing to work on

UK's largest EV charging hub



Solihull is leading the way on electric vehicle (EV) uptake and infrastructure in the West Midlands. In September 2023, then Chancellor Jeremy Hunt came to Solihull to open the UK's largest EV-charging hub. The new 'Gigahub' at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) includes more than 30 DC charging points that can fully charge a car in under 30 minutes, alongside a further 150 AC charging points. This leading project has been developed as part of a three-way collaboration between the NEC, EV Network and BP Pulse.

The NEC's Giga Hub the UK's largest EV-charging hub.

During his visit, the then Chancellor also announced additional funding for EV infrastructure will be made available to local authorities across England through the government's £343 million Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Capital Fund. The West Midlands Combined Authority has secured £14.5 million of this. Solihull Council plans to access this funding to partner with residential charging specialists to deliver 1,000 near-home charge points by the early 2030s. This will support drivers without access to suitable off-street parking and may not be able to benefit from low-cost EV charging at home.

This comes as the Council prepares to announce a contract for new destination charging which will see a minimum of 200 new EV charging spaces installed within Council car parks and local centres by 2026. These exciting projects are supporting the transition to cleaner and more efficient road transport will help ensure we remain on track as a borough to reach net zero emissions by 2041.

Energy saving home improvements

Energy saving measures have been successfully installed on more than 60 properties on Alston Road in Elmdon as part of a West Midlands-wide plan to help local people cut their energy bills and carbon emissions.

Privately owned homes and those managed by Solihull Community Housing (SCH) have benefitted from various upgrades, including external wall insulation and loft insulation. This transformation has been achieved as a result of government funding secured by Solihull Council, the WMCA and SCH, and was delivered by Sustainable Building Solutions.

This project was directed at homes with an energy performance rating of D or below, and the increased energy efficiency as a result of this work will support residents by alleviating cost of living pressures whilst also helping to tackle the climate emergency in the long-term.



(l-r) Shirley resident Kate, Act on Energy Chief Executive Rachel Jones, Solihull Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Planning, Cllr Andy Mackiewicz, Dodd Group Site Supervisor Max Jordan and Solihull Council Deputy Leader Cllr Karen Grinsell.

Model COP28 summit

In December 2023, students from secondary schools across the borough took part in a model COP28 summit as the Council hosted its annual Solihull Schools Climate Conference in partnership with InterClimate Network. The conference empowers young people to explore and engage with climate change on both a local and global scale, drawing influence from the COP28 discussions taking place in Dubai.

The event is an exciting opportunity to recognise and showcase schools' current climate actions and goals for the future, with pupils giving presentations about the environment-friendly initiatives they have been implementing at school. In particular, Alderbrook School was awarded a Level 1 Greener School Award by Prime Accountants following on from the Greener School Awards ceremony in November 2023.

Students also participated in a Q&A session with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Ian Courts, where he answered questions on the Council's plans to decarbonise transport, actions to combat littering and how the Council collaborates with regional partners to limit climate change.



Langley School students at Model COP28 summit

Enablers

Some key figures:

- The Council had 2,268 full time equivalent employees at 31st March 2024.
- The percentage of employees from minority ethnic groups continues to increase and was 18.47% at 29 February 2024 (15.47% as at 31 March 2022).
- To enable more efficient ways of working, 27 meeting rooms have had new hybrid equipment installed.
- To enable more collaboration while keeping information secure, 18.61 TB of council data has been moved to SharePoint (12.9 million files).

Case studies

To illustrate what we've achieved and what we're continuing to work on

Digital solutions in Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care have used digital solutions to help their staff when providing care for residents. Occupational Therapists (OTs) have been provided with alternative laptops to the standard offer. These included touch screens, a detachable and foldable pen to convert the laptop to tablet style, a digital pen for screen writing, and an additional rear facing camera.

The aim was to explore whether this could simplify and improve day-to-day visits for OTs, who were previously using a combination of three devices (laptop, iPad, phone). These devices weren't linked so it took time to transfer photos and documents once the staff had finished their visit, whereas the detachable laptops are an all in one device.

Work has been streamlined by more activity taking place on-site and time saved from uploading, downloading, copying and pasting, gaining signatures on paper copies. All reducing administrative time, duplication of paperwork, and printing.

Digital solutions have also been used to support people with additional needs to live independently. For example, a young adult experiencing seizures was provided with a watch with a built-in falls detector, SOS button and GPS. An initial assessment showed that the watch significantly reduces risks and enables him to live independently. The use of Technology Enabled Care meant he was no longer considering supported living for his accommodation. This demonstrates the strengths of Technology Enabled Care to mitigate risks and enhance individual's strengths.



Occupational Therapist using tablet-style laptop

Employee networks

Staff have developed and established three employee networks for disability, ethnicity and LGBTQ+ to provide opportunities for employees with similar identities or experiences to meet up and discuss particular issues that affect them in the workplace. Acknowledging and valuing the different skills and viewpoints that a diverse workforce can bring to the Council is vital for a happy workforce and good customer service as well as providing a workplace where we are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

We know that every voice counts, and we want to create greater opportunities for employees to feel that they are represented, seen and heard.

Employee support and wellbeing

Over the last year we have supported our employees through a range of activities aimed at helping people to keep workplace pressure positive and manage their wellbeing at work. This has included line manager training in mental health awareness, webinars and resources on a number of wellbeing issues such as behaviour change; managing energy and emotions at work; the science of stress and how to reduce it.

A key focus for the Council is facilitating greater support for women going through the menopause, which includes a Menopause Support Agreement designed to identify any reasonable workplace adjustments. Our aim is to embed support for colleagues going through the menopause into the culture of the Council. In 2023 we held drop-in information sessions at the Council House and Bluebell Centre, alongside employee and manager online briefings; over 50 managers attended our menopause manager briefings. Also, a Menopause Network was set up in January 2024 with employees meeting on a regular basis.

Financial outturn position

The breakdown below shows our financial outturn position for April 2023 to March 2024, by cabinet portfolio. (£)

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Adult Social Care and Health | 74,091,000 |
| Children and Education - excluding Non Delegated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) | 67,591,000 |
| Climate Change and Planning | 1,852,000 |
| Communities and Leisure | 3,701,000 |
| Environment and Infrastructure | 25,424,000 |
| Housing | 2,356,000 |
| Resources | 20,714,000 |
| Wellbeing, Skills and Inclusion | 1,378,000 |
| Sub Total | 197,107,000 |
| Levies | 8,933,000 |
| Working Balances and Contingencies | (6,790,000) |
| Total Core Council | 199,250,000 |

£

Total

199,250,000

Key Statistics


While we have priorities to deliver and outcomes to achieve, a huge amount of other work takes place across teams each and every day. Here are some highlights from the last year (up to March 2024) which all contribute to serving the needs of our Solihull residents, visitors, businesses and stakeholders.


We prevented or relieved homelessness for

81%

of young people (without dependants).



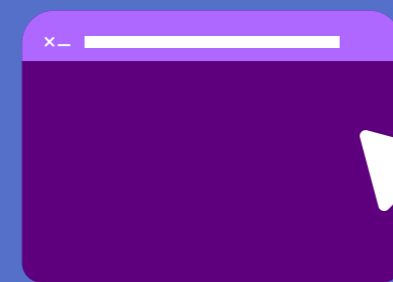
 **159,995**
calls answered by our contact centre

5,040
applications processed for secondary schools. 

During 2023-24, **5,129** adults received support from Solihull Adult Social Care.

 **97.3%**
Council Tax collected

 **96.8%**
Business Rates collected



We received

2,614,408

web visitors



10,716,380
waste and recycling collections

3,441 
applications processed for primary school places

Drug & Alcohol services supported

1,525
individuals in Solihull including adult, young person's treatment service and family & friends service.



1,078

Freedom of Information requests were received that collectively sought over 11,234 pieces of information.

560km

of roads were gritted **21 times** during winter 2022/23



