

The independent Local Government Association (LGA) carried out an inspection of our council in September, reviewing our progress since their last visit in January 2019 before I became Leader. Last week their final report was presented to our council's Cabinet.

The inspection team met with a wide variety of people including myself and other senior leaders, Cabinet members, opposition councillors, council partners, managers and frontline workers to discuss the way the council works and I'm delighted to say that their findings are extremely positive.

They conclude that we have made 'significant improvements' since 2019 under new leadership and note that this achievement has also taken place whilst the organisation dealt with the huge impact and demands of a global pandemic. They added that the scale, pace and extent of improvement they've witnessed is a credit to the council.

Credit goes to my Labour colleagues, senior officers, and all our council keyworkers for their tireless hard work.

And that work continues – we still have a lot to do, from managing and improving 700+ essential services, delivering large projects and big priorities like town centre regeneration, and continuing to respond to and deal with the ongoing risk to public health of Covid.

There is growing concern about the new Omicron variant and this week I chaired a meeting of our Outbreak Management Board to discuss the latest situation across St Helens.

We don't yet have all the information we need about this new variant, and until more is known, please don't panic. The best thing we can all do is continue taking simple precautions to keep ourselves and each other safe, like the vast majority of us have since this started back in March 2020: wearing a mask in shops or on public transport, washing hands more regularly, keeping indoor spaces well ventilated, and testing ourselves regularly. Importantly, if you haven't yet done so please do book in for your booster vaccination.

We'll have to wait to see the impact of the new variant and for any decisions made as a result by government. As we have done throughout, St Helens Borough Council will do our best to keep residents updated with all the latest information and advice at [sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus), and if you need any help or support please call St Helens Together on 01744 676767.

Best wishes to all Star readers.