



**St Helens Borough Labour Group
SUMMER REPORT 2023**



CONTENTS

3 *Welcome from Cllr David Baines, Labour Leader of St Helens Borough Council*

4 Working for our communities all year round

5 Supporting communities with the cost of living

 *Funding for essential services – Cllr Martin Bond*

7 Investing in children and young people

 *Fostering – Cllr Nova Charlton*

9 Fighting for healthier, safer communities

10 Delivering regeneration, growth and jobs

 *Inclusive growth – Cllr Kate Groucutt*

12 Working for a cleaner, greener borough

13 Celebrating our local heritage and culture

14 Get in touch





Welcome to our St Helens Borough Labour Group Summer Report.

2023 has so far continued to be a difficult time financially for many of our residents and the services that support them, including our council. But – as hard as it's been – we've all continued to show tremendous strength, kindness and solidarity, working hard and together with partners to provide support and advice.

In spite of the challenges with the cost of living crisis, we are delivering what we promised in our manifesto last year.

We agreed the Local Plan to deliver the jobs, the homes and the infrastructure our borough needs. And those of us who supported it make no apologies for our ambition.

We're investing in our children, from continued investment in children's services and support for vulnerable children during school holidays to brand new school buildings at Willow Bank and Ashurst Primary, and Longton Lane Primary to come.

We've worked with partners to support refugees and asylum seekers, from Ukraine and elsewhere, making them welcome and supporting integration.

We've delivered regeneration plans for both town centres, with outline planning agreed and detailed plans for phase one coming forward.

We've worked with local and regional health and care providers on the new integrated care system changes, putting residents and patients first, and we're continuing to work together to tackle inequalities. We're also supporting care workers – agreeing to pay them all the foundation living wage.

We've delivered the external repairs on the Gamble and Earlestown town hall, with internal works next, and we're delivering Glass Futures, Parkside, Omega West, Moss Nook, Cowley Hill, Lea Green and more major investment projects.

We're making sure local people and businesses are at the front of the queue for all the opportunities we're creating by delivering a new social value policy and an inclusive growth strategy.

We're tackling the climate emergency, with major investment in cycling and walking infrastructure, the UK's first hydrogen powered waste collection vehicle, a new fleet of hydrogen powered buses, a new waste strategy to promote recycling, and a new climate action plan.

And we're delivering a borough of culture programme that promotes local organisations and people, celebrating our past, present and future, with the recent One Amazing Day, Armed Forces, Heritage Festival and Pride events just some of the highlights and plenty more to come.

There's a lot more still to do, and to all those working constructively for a better borough – thank you. Here's to more progress.

Best wishes to all residents,

David

Working for our communities all year round



Our Labour council works hard to deliver essential services right across the whole borough, and Labour councillors work for their wards all year round. Here's just some of the highlights from the year so far:

Town centre ward councillors have organised action with the ASB team and Your Housing to address antisocial behaviour in the Providence Courts housing area;

Our Labour Council is contributing towards rebuilding Longton Lane Primary and we've invested in accessible play equipment in **Rainhill**;

In **Billinge and Seneley Green** Labour have supported numerous community events including food and toy collections for local children, and are fighting for investment at Garswood station;

In **Blackbrook**, Labour councillors have worked to deliver the rebuild for Ashurst Primary School;

Moss Bank Labour councillors have worked with Torus and the council to deliver the rebuild of the shops on Wythburn Crescent and Bassenthwaite Avenue;

In **Newton-le-Willows** Labour have secured new bus services to Newton station and hospital, improvements to the Vulcan Village Conservation Area, and are driving delivery of major regeneration in Earlestown – including the restoration of the historic Town Hall;

Our Labour Council is committing to investment in SEND facilities at **Haydock** Library and has delivered investment at KGV Park;

In **Peasley Cross and Fingerpost** Labour have worked with Torus and Merseytravel to install new bus stops to help residents access the network;

In **Windle**, Labour councillors supported the campaign to save Stan Pennington Allotments, successfully fought to retain the 37 and 38 bus services, and are supporting the Friends of Victoria Park to install a defibrillator;

In **Parr**, Labour have worked with the police and other partners to tackle ASB on the Duckeries, set up a new community forum for local groups, and are fighting for new leisure facilities to replace the old swimming pool;

West Park Labour councillors have fought to make the junction at Leslie Road safer, and have worked with residents to begin developing a community allotment at the top of Lonie Grove;

At train stations across the borough including in **Thatto Heath, Sutton, Newton, Garswood, Rainhill** and **St Helens Junction** Labour councillors and members have campaigned against ticket office closures.

And much, much more...





Supporting communities with the cost of living

Our Labour Council is committed to doing everything possible to help residents and support essential services through the cost of living crisis.

The latest available figures state that in 2021 – before the cost of living crisis – more than a third of St Helens residents suffered food insecurity.

Hunger is a political choice. Central government have chosen to make people hungry. In contrast, our council has chosen to help.

We've supported the **Right to Food** campaign; we committed to **feeding every child** during school holidays and did it; we're working to tackle health inequalities with our award winning **Inequalities Commission**; we agreed a Local Plan that was ambitious for **new homes, new jobs and new opportunities** – and we've just agreed an **Inclusive Growth Strategy** that puts local people at the front of the queue for those opportunities.

We have always worked closely together with partner agencies from the local public, private, faith and voluntary sectors, and we are working together more than ever right now to target support and offer help where it's needed most. Our **St Helens Mobile Food Pantry** is the latest example and it's in high demand, helping more and more people access affordable food and essential items. The pantry is now operating regularly across the borough and is helping hundreds of residents get food and essential items at affordable prices. They've even held collections at Saints and St Helens Town FC games.

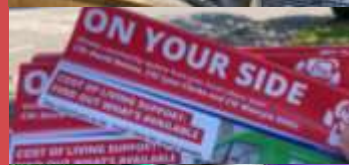
Labour councillors have been sharing information on their **community newsletters** about the support that's available, and wherever possible helping to share help and advice.

Our Labour Council coordinated **Warm Spaces** over the winter, and we've held special cost of living support events right across St Helens with dozens of partner agencies present to offer advice and support to residents.

And the work continues. Making sure every child has the best possible start in life is our Labour Council's top priority, and over the summer holidays we are doing all we can to make sure no child goes hungry with **more than 13,000 opportunities being provided for children** to attend events and get a healthy meal.

We would like to thank all the Council's partners, staff and volunteers for their amazing efforts.

The Council has put together a directory of all the support and advice that's available. Visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether to find out more.



FUNDING FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES



Cllr Martin Bond

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services



“As we all know, inflation is affecting most households in St Helens. From the massively increased cost of the weekly shop to energy bills being exorbitant and mortgage/rental costs on a constant upward tilt, it feels as though our incomes are being engulfed from all sides...”

As well as trying to cushion some of that impact, St Helens Labour must judge how to handle the effect it has on the Council Budget. It’s not just the cost increases that inflation brings directly to the Council. The cost-of-living crisis sees more and more residents needing the Council’s help as well.

Energy prices, borrowing for much needed and ambitious capital projects, materials cost increases for rebuilding schools, funding pay increases for its fantastic and deserving staff added to increasing demand places huge stress on the Council’s scarce resources. We need to remember that the budget forecasts are set in the Autumn and take effect in the

Spring. Much can and has changed since those forecasts were made.

When considering how we allocate resources, our Labour principles sit at the heart of our decision making. Any party in political power must make decisions based on its priorities. Nye Bevan said, “the language of priorities is the religion of socialism.” Our priorities, unlike our opponents, are always to protect the most vulnerable, raise opportunity, prosperity and give the best start in life to our children.

Our massively ambitious regeneration projects are designed to do precisely that. We do this despite 13 years of

Tory devastation and the huge challenge that inflation presents.

We don’t have a significant council tax and business rate base. We can’t therefore rock back on an ample collection fund. That is the same in many post mining areas. We won’t though borrow recklessly and overstretch ourselves. We will stick to our principles and invest sagely.

We need to continue at the same time to fight this iniquitous Government and build a better future for us all.”



Investing in children and young people

There was great news recently with planning permission granted for the full rebuild of **Longton Lane Primary School in Rainhill**. The Council is contributing over £150k towards the project, which follows on from recent rebuilds at **Ashurst in Blackbrook** and **Willow Bank in Newton**.

Cllr Nova Charlton – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – and councillors are fully committed to improving children’s services and supporting council staff in doing what needs to be done.

For example, we’re continuing to **invest record amounts in children’s services**, increasing spending from £43m in 2019 to £64m this year; we’re supporting new ways of attracting permanent staff and **investing in the workforce**; modernising and improving our **Early Help** offer; investing £2.5m in our own **new children’s homes**; working with partners including Saints to **promote fostering**, and much more.

Our children’s social care services are of course focused on supporting the most vulnerable – and as a Labour council we can say hand on heart we are fully committed to that fight.

We are determined to do all we can to make sure no child goes hungry

during school holidays and this summer we’ll be providing more than 13,000 opportunities for children to take part in activities and have a healthy meal – find out more at www.sthelens.gov.uk/holidayfun.

And all the work we’re doing to attract jobs, investment and growth, raise aspiration and increase opportunity – it’s work that we hope will reap benefits for future generations as well as the here and now.

In the past year nearly 30 schools and hundreds of primary school pupils have received special talks and information about scientific and technical careers supported through our Parkside Joint Venture and partners. Local apprentices have also been recruited on major projects such as the Gamble restoration and school rebuilding projects, and we want to do more.

From the new **Inclusive Growth Strategy** recently agreed at Cabinet to building much-needed new homes and new infrastructure, not to mention doing as much of this as possible in sustainable and innovative ways to help us tackle climate change and leave a planet children can enjoy – **it’s all for children and young people**.



FOSTERING



Cllr Nova Charlton

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



"Giving every child in St Helens Borough the best possible start in life is our Labour Council's number one priority."

Foster carers play a key role in this, and we're lucky to have lots of amazing people who are able to provide safe, loving homes for children and young people – but we need more. We're working with partners including Saints and local businesses to promote fostering, and I thank them all for their support.

For those who foster, in addition to a competitive financial allowance, the council provides a huge amount of help to foster carers including a wide range of quality training courses. Our social workers also have first-hand knowledge of the children, their families and their needs, allowing us to accurately match children to carers who are most suited to them, and we have strong links with local schools, healthcare providers and children's centres, to help provide support and make your experiences as a foster carer as easy as possible.

I encourage anyone interested to get in touch to find out more. You really can change a child's life."

Putting children and young people first is a responsibility our whole Labour Council takes seriously. Cllr Trisha Long, Chair of the council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, says: *"I'm proud to be Chair of the Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny panel and a member of the Council's Fostering Panel. All councillors take our responsibilities as corporate parents extremely seriously, and we're determined to do all we can to improve outcomes for children. Key to that is finding more foster carers who can help to give children and young people a safe, loving home. It's a hugely rewarding thing to do and I strongly encourage people to find out more and give it a go if they can."*

If you would like to find out more about fostering, please contact our fostering team on 01744 671146 or visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/fostering.

Be the foster carer They need...

01744 671146 * sthelens.gov.uk/fostering





Fighting for healthier, safer communities

Promoting good health, independence and care across our communities, and creating safe, strong neighbourhoods are key priorities for the Council.

The pandemic shone a light on existing inequalities in our borough, with deprivation and other social and economic factors clearly affecting health and wellbeing.

That's why we set up our **Inequalities Commission**, which brings together representatives from the public, private and third sectors to coordinate work to address these issues.

In June, our People's Board received the draft Inequalities Commission Annual Report for 2022/23. The report sets out the work of the Commission, and in the forward the Chair Justin Hill from the YMCA explains its role: *"The inequalities that the Commission focuses on are the unjust and preventable differences in health and wellbeing across our population and between different groups in our society, caused by the wider social conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. We're bringing together insights from experts and local people with lived experience, in order to influence positive change."*

The council and partners have received national recognition for this work, winning a prestigious Municipal Journal Award for 'Best Whole Council Approach to Tackling Health Inequalities'.

One of the impacts of deprivation is on suicide – it is undeniable that it has an impact on mental health and, without adequate support and intervention, can lead to people taking their own life. This is of course just one potential factor, but it's spelled out clearly in our **Suicide Prevention Strategy** which was agreed in July, along with a clear set of actions to help tackle the issue and provide the support people need.

We're continuing to work closely with partners from the health sector, leading the way on the **integrated care** agenda. In April we also announced we would be **committing to pay all care workers the Real Living Wage**, giving thousands of essential keyworkers a much needed pay rise.

We also want everyone to feel safe and welcome in our borough, and we are proud to support events such as **Refugee Week** in June and **Pride** in July to demonstrate this commitment and stand shoulder to shoulder with all our residents.

Refugee Week events included a community football match featuring Labour councillors, residents and refugees, organised in partnership with St Helens Town FC, and on Pride it was fantastic to see St Helens town centre filled with laughter, colour and positivity.





Delivering regeneration, growth and jobs

We know how important regeneration is to residents – we all want town centres we can be proud of, and our Labour Council is also working hard to deliver new jobs, new homes and new opportunities for local people and businesses.

In January we got confirmation that we were successful in our bid for £20m **Levelling Up funding for Earlestown**. This will help to deliver the major regeneration plans we have for the town, and will unlock the full restoration of the Town Hall – on which we have now completed external repair work.

We've also been successful in winning £25m **Town Deal funding for St Helens town centre** which will support our wider plans with ECF, which are on track and coming forward for detailed planning approval shortly.

Work on other specific projects included in the bid is at various stages of delivery. At **Cannington Shaw** (pictured above), the work to restore the historic site took a step forward with the Preservation Trust taking ownership of the site in June, and work on reimagining the **World of Glass** is underway with an official reopening scheduled for August.

In March we had the official handover of the **Glass Futures** building, and work is now ongoing to complete the internal work.

Delivering this project in just a few years – through a pandemic and a cost of living crisis – hasn't been easy, and it's testament to a lot of hard work and great partnerships.

Work is well underway on the rebuilding of **Lea Green** station to provide more parking, more capacity and easier access for passengers.

We're also rebuilding schools, with **Ashurst Primary** in Blackbrook and **Willow Bank** in Newton now complete, and planning just agreed for **Longton Lane** in Rainhill.

At **Omega West** work is moving fast on the new base for Home Bargains and Iceland, and the new **Parkside Link Road** is nearing completion at the former colliery site in Newton-le-Willows.

We've said all along that regeneration isn't about shiny new buildings – it's about people. It's about new jobs, new skills, and raising aspiration. Local businesses and supply chains are already benefiting from projects like Glass Futures too, with more to come. You can read more about this over the page.

Find out more about job and training opportunities available through our Ways to Work scheme at www.sthelens.gov.uk/waystowork.



INCLUSIVE GROWTH



Cllr Kate Groucutt

Cabinet Member for Economy, Business and Skills

“We want local people and businesses to be at the front of the queue for all the opportunities we’re creating through our ambitious growth plans.”

It’s great to see the Omega West development progressing so quickly, and the new buildings will soon be occupied by Home Bargains and Iceland. These businesses will generate thousands of new jobs for our borough, with recruitment starting soon including for highly-skilled engineering roles.

We are committed to supporting local residents to access these roles, and ensured that developers contributed towards public transport improvements as part of the granting of planning permission. We also gave them tough targets for local recruitment and using local businesses during the construction phase, and there has already been £14m worth of orders placed with local businesses.

Our Ways to Work team worked closely with all the contractors, holding recruitment fairs and helping local residents to access job and apprenticeship opportunities. On a recent visit to Omega West we met a young women who secured a job with McLaren after attending one of these jobs fairs, and she said it had completely changed her life.

We’ve done the same with the Parkside Link Road contract, recent school rebuilding

projects at Willow Bank and Ashurst and other major infrastructure projects. We will ensure that when the contracts are drawn up for our town centre regeneration in St Helens and Earlestown, and the redevelopment of Parkside colliery, ‘social value’ is built into those contracts to ensure measurable educational, environmental and economic benefits.

This is all part of our Inclusive Growth Strategy which was recently passed by Cabinet, which includes a detailed action plan for improving access to training and opportunities for our residents, along with our support for businesses who choose to invest in our Borough.

We are already working to do this, and through our Ways to Work programme we’ve helped local people find new opportunities – including 19 year old Kyle, who found work at Stone Tyres (pictured).

As we work with partners to invest around £500m in major projects, we want to make sure that it changes lives in the towns and villages across St Helens Borough.



Working for a cleaner, greener borough

In July we marked **Net Zero Week**, and it was the perfect time to remind ourselves of the importance of this issue: it had just been confirmed that we'd just had the hottest June in the UK ever, with the average mean temperature the highest since 1884.

The environmental and health impacts of climate change are potentially drastic and that's why our Labour Council is trying so hard to take action to stop it. Achieving net zero carbon emissions is key, and we'll all need to work collectively and quickly.

As a Council and as a member of the City Region we've declared a **Climate Emergency**, and like many other socially-responsible organisations and businesses we are taking targeted, local action on hundreds of different aspects of the climate challenge.

Cllr Andy Bowden has led work on our **Climate Action Plan** which was agreed in May, and in July the City Region agreed its overarching Five Year Climate Action Plan.

In March we had the official handover of the **Glass Futures** building here in St Helens, with work now well underway on the internal fit out, and we agreed our new **Waste and Recycling strategy** which aims to make waste a thing of the past.

In May the first of our City Region's

publicly-owned **hydrogen-powered buses** took to the road on the 10A route between St Helens and Liverpool (pictured above), and shortly after in June we launched a consultation on our draft **Electric Vehicle charging strategy**,

While others increasingly look to St Helens for examples of good practice we're always keen to look around for new ideas and investment. As City Region Deputy Metro Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Net Zero and Air Quality, Council Leader David Baines welcomed a senior delegation from South Korea to Glass Futures in June for **discussions about hydrogen power and innovation**, and Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram signed an agreement with them to work together on new technologies.

The fight against climate change is of course a huge threat, but in choosing to act we can also seize new opportunities. By investing in clean energy and transport we can not only address the climate emergency but create thousands of new jobs, grow our local economy, and protect our energy security and affordability too.

In St Helens and our City Region we have all the ingredients to lead the way in the UK's journey to net zero, and along the way we can build the sustainable and fair future that our communities deserve.





Celebrating our local heritage and culture

We are proud to be Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture in 2023, and so far there have been lots of terrific events attended by more than 10,000 people. We've also given out more than £80,000 in grant funding to community groups to help celebrate our culture and heritage.

The Borough of Culture initiative was started by Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram and the City Region in 2018 as part of a commitment to invest in culture, and we will be using the opportunity to promote and support as many of our amazing local people, groups and events as possible.

The year was launched at a special event at the World of Glass attended by more than 3000 people, with dozens of local performers and organisations showcasing just some of what makes St Helens great.

Since then, we've held the One Amazing Day event, the Heritage Festival, Armed Forces Day, Pride and much more.

We welcomed our World Champions St Helens RFC and Michael Smith to the town hall and we've commemorated their achievements with new 'Welcome to the Borough' signs on major routes.

And this year we're also celebrating the 75th anniversary of our twinning with the German city of Stuttgart. We've named the path around Taylor Park lake 'Stuttgart Walk' and will be installing information boards around the route, and St Helens Town FC have also visited the city to play a special game against TSV Uhlbach – winning 2-1!

Find out more and stay up to date on social media and online at culturesthelens.co.uk.





GET IN TOUCH

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