



LGO Awards
2023
WINNER

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2023
MJB

Describing the characteristics of a great local authority

2024



2030

Barnsley – the place of possibilities.



BARNLSLEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

Foreword



Local authorities play a vital role in delivering public services and improving the quality of life for their residents. They can also be place-shapers, working with residents and partners to improve the economy and the areas where people live and enabling communities to do more for themselves.

Here in Barnsley, we are passionate about local government and the positive impact it can have. However, we are also aware of the challenges the sector faces and the increasing scrutiny it is now under.

As the first council ever to win both the LGC Council of the Year and the MJ Local Authority of the Year awards in the same year, many people have asked us for the secret of our success and what the learning is for the sector. We have produced this guide to set out what we believe are the characteristics of a great local authority but also the environment local government needs to succeed.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stephen Houghton'.

Cllr Sir Stephen Houghton CBE
(Leader, Barnsley Council)



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sarah Norman'.

Sarah Norman
(Chief Executive, Barnsley Council)



Place leadership and community engagement

A great local authority:

- Has a clear vision, developed with and owned with partners from the statutory, community and business sectors.
- Works tirelessly with partners to invest in the future of its 'Place'.
- Finds innovative ways to engage with and listen to its residents.
- Has a published up-to-date Local Plan which makes the brave decisions that are required to release land for necessary housing and economic developments.
- Has an economic strategy, which is bought into and developed with partners.
- Is 'open for business'. This means having a strong planning service, alongside strong economic development teams, and being engaged with business partners – both within the private and public sectors.
- Has a joint Health and Care Plan, which demonstrates a distributed leadership approach.
- Works in partnership with communities and levers their contributions.
- Has developed a strong place narrative and related communications and marketing strategy aligned to its ambitions and priorities.



Case study

The Glass Works

Town centre regeneration

THE
GLASS
WORKS

The Glass Works is an example of successful town centre regeneration and proper use of borrowing. It is Barnsley Council's £220m game-changing project, which has transformed the heart of Barnsley town centre with new retail, leisure and public realm facilities.

A new chapter in Barnsley's already famous history, the project was delivered over two phases, and substantively completed in 2022. The Glass Works includes: 25 shops, a 13-screen Cineworld with 4DX technology, Superbowl UK with bowling alley, laser quest and soft play, seven family-friendly restaurants, public square, multi-storey car park and Market Gate Bridge.

The completed first phase included the new Library, Barnsley Markets and Market Kitchen. Town centre footfall is on a significant upward trajectory, with a 34% improvement year-on-year (more than 460,000 extra visitors), and an annual total which surpasses figures seen pre-pandemic, bucking the national trend.



[Find out more about the Glass Works](#)

[Dolly's Desserts - Make it yours](#)

[Keith's Quality Meats - Make it yours](#)

[Library @ the Lightbox](#)



A great local authority:

- Benefits from political stability, and long-term decision-making.
- Shows a willingness to make necessary and difficult decisions despite opposition, political and financial cost.
- Prioritises evidenced-based decision making.
- Invites peer review/challenge from the sector and feedback from the public it serves.
- Invests in elected member development.
- Has a transparent and robust performance management framework.
- Employs a distributed leadership approach to governance. For example, through close collaboration with its place-based partners.
- Enjoys good cross-party collaboration over important issues with regular briefings.
- Has a comprehensive staff induction and member support programme in place.



Case study

Barnsley Council's Local Plan



Our Local Plan provides an example of a plan underpinned by brave, and sometimes unpopular decisions to successfully transform the local economy. As a former mining economy, all of Barnsley's jobs were underground and it has been necessary to release greenfield sites for development.

The adopted plan sets out how the council manages physical development of the borough on behalf of residents and businesses. The aim of this is to create more and better jobs to improve earnings and increase opportunities for local residents. It also aims to provide improved housing to meet existing need and the needs of future generations whilst at the same time protecting what is special about the borough.

Following public consultation and examination by an independent planning inspector, Barnsley's Local Plan was adopted by Full Council in January 2019.

 [Take a look at our Local Plan](#)





Financial Management

A great local authority:

- Sees managing the budget as a whole council responsibility, between elected members and officers, and across all departments and partners.
- Plans for multi-year balanced budgets that ensure organisational stability and sustainability and is prepared to make difficult decisions to achieve this.
- Incorporates continuous improvement, modernisation, and transformation in all that it does.
- Provides up to date and transparent financial and management information to understand how well money is being spent.
- Ensures that discharging its legal best value duty is at the heart of everything it does.
- Only uses reserves in emergencies and to smooth budget transitions, not to avoid or put off the decisions that need to be made.
- Isn't afraid to use debt finance in the right way to achieve its objectives.
- Manages debt with eyes wide open, and de-risks the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) in relation to borrowing costs and commercial income so that core and statutory local authority services are never compromised.



Case study

Financial Management

This is best illustrated in Barnsley Council's multi-year revenue and capital budget planning that aligns resources to priorities over the medium-term. Such an approach allows the focus to be on the delivery of outcomes rather than on the annual scramble to deliver savings and balance the books.

For example, a decision to undertake an ambitious project to re-imagine a declining (dying) town centre, largely funded through the council's own resources, was not viewed in isolation. There was a shared ambition and understanding of the impact on the wider organisation that would need to be addressed to deliver it.

Substantial borrowing costs were factored into the MTFs and funded over the longer-term through the delivery of savings and the realignment of resources to priorities. The MTFs was 'de-risked' by eliminating any reliance on volatile commercial income streams that may or may not crystallise in future.

Such an approach is in keeping with the very heart of the Prudential Framework and, if that document included a definition of what good debt looks like, then surely the council's approach to funding the Glass Works would feature somewhere in it.

Together with the broader approach to longer-term service and financial planning, these were the foundations that enabled, not just the delivery of an award-winning re-imagined town centre offer, but more importantly the continued delivery of excellent services that residents rely upon the most.





Serving vulnerable people - adults and children

A great local authority:

- Makes prioritising the vulnerable everybody's business.
- Embraces strong service-user engagement and voice mechanisms.
- Understands how to spot signs of service stress and failure, is open about them and responds to them quickly.
- Develops a relationship with partners that encourages mutual constructive challenge and collective action to find solutions to meet the needs of the vulnerable.



Case study

Children's Services Development Board

In the spring of 2022, we realised that the impact of covid and pressure on families had taken their toll on children's services with higher caseloads and difficulty retaining social workers both impacting on the quality of social work.

We immediately recognised the need to react quickly to this, injecting the additional financial resources required and establishing a Development Board with partners to oversee improvement. The result was that we able to rapidly arrest and reverse the decline, stabilising our workforce, reducing caseloads and with a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children.

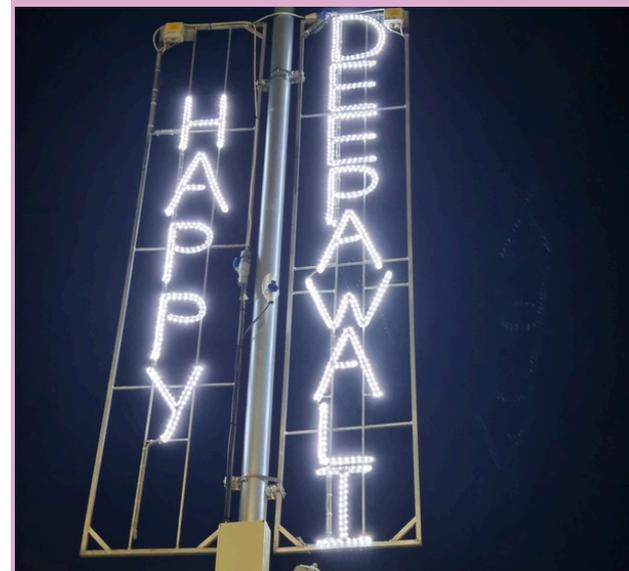
This was recognised by Ofsted in September 2023 with a 'Good' judgement and our children's services are now thriving with a stable workforce and budget.



Organisational culture and overall leadership

A great local authority:

- Is able to successfully prioritise – from the highest level.
- Is open and transparent, and thereby encouraging openness and transparency throughout its staff.
- Develops a culture where officers can exchange views with a focus on problem-solving.
- Has a willingness to make brave decisions and doesn't put difficult decisions off.
- Has staff who are engaged in the corporate vision, values and priorities.
- Has a clear behaviour framework which can be seen and felt across the organisation, developed by staff and refreshed in a timely manner.
- Fosters robust and respectful officer and member relationships, with collaboration on decision making and implementation of policies.
- Promotes inclusivity and encourages equality and diversity.
- Encourages learning, development and sharing of ideas across the organisation, supporting and encouraging innovation.
- Demonstrates pride in place and the council's ability to promote positive change across the borough.



Case study

No Place for Hate

Making Barnsley a welcoming place for all



We launched the 'No Place For Hate' project in July 2020 to address rising online abuse, hate speech, and disinformation affecting staff, elected members, and communities. The campaign aims to change online behaviour and support those targeted by hate, reinforcing that such behaviour is unacceptable in Barnsley.

We recognise online abuse as a growing problem impacting wellbeing and community cohesion. Our No Place for Hate campaign aims to make positive online communities. Our zero-tolerance approach online delivers 11 serious interventions a month. We are transparent in our policies and actions against online abuse, communicating effectively through various channels. It has also welcomed feedback and engagement from the community.

We have fostered a problem-solving culture, collaborating with internal teams and external partners to address online abuse's root causes and share best practices. The campaign demonstrates our courage in enforcing a zero-tolerance policy on online abuse and handling opposition with resilience. We've engaged our staff in the campaign, providing support and celebrating their contributions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. The campaign reflects a clear behaviour framework within the council, with updated policies and training to handle online abuse.

We have involved elected members in the campaign's development and protect them from online abuse. The campaign promotes inclusivity and diversity, partnering with various community organisations and highlighting their stories. It showcases Barnsley's strengths and challenges negative perceptions, promoting our vision, values and ambitions for the borough.

We're a team

We all work together towards shared goals to make Barnsley the place of possibilities.

We're excellent

We provide the best quality services and value for money for the people of Barnsley. Only our best is good enough.

We're proud

We take pride in our work, and we're dedicated to making Barnsley the place of possibilities.

We're honest

We're clear, fair and reliable, helping people to understand what we are doing and why.



What Local Government needs to succeed

Our suggested **6** Point Plan

- 1** Fair funding which distributes funding based on need taking account of the variations in what councils can raise from council tax and business rates.
- 2** A proper analysis of what funding local government needs and discussion about its role – there is currently too much of a mismatch between the funding available to local government and what we are expected to deliver.
- 3** Long-term funding settlements that allow councils to plan ahead, including taking the politics out of funding allocations with an independent expert body to determine the formula.
- 4** A proportionate joined up approach to assurance, audit and inspection.
- 5** Collaboration with the sector to progress the key policy areas and markets requiring radical reform – adult social care, children's social care, SEND, asylum, economic inactivity and temporary accommodation.
- 6** Developing a constructive, trusting and mature relationship between national and local government with new powers and funding coming where appropriate including covering skills and economic development.

Case study

Health on the High Street

Health on the High Street is a trailblazing initiative in Barnsley that is bringing access to a range of health and wellbeing activities into the heart of Barnsley town centre, improving access to health and bringing increased footfall on the high street, a health and wellbeing hub will be at the heart of this approach.

Phase one of this initiative was the creation of the Community Diagnostic Centre which already offers a range of diagnostic services, such as ultrasound, x-ray, breast screening, and phlebotomy, in a convenient location. This facility has reduced waiting times, increased uptake rates, for example we have seen a 22% increase in attendance for mammograms and a 24% reductions in Do Not Attends (DNAs), improved patient satisfaction, and contributed to early prevention and integration of care.

From an economic growth perspective, the CDC has increased footfall into the town centre (55,000 extra visits) which directly impacts our ability to attract other end users into the town centre, whether they be retail, leisure or food and beverage end users.

Phase two will be the development of a health and wellbeing hub in the Alhambra Centre in the town centre, working with key partners such as Barnsley Hospital, Barnsley Premier Leisure and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SWYFT).



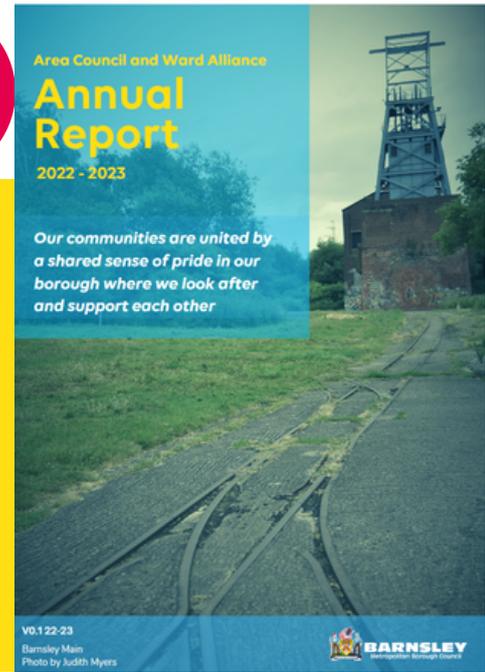
Case study

Community Enablement

Here in Barnsley, our Area Councils and Ward Alliances model is an example of engaging with communities and enabling them to do things for themselves.



[Here's our latest annual report](#)



Case study

Pathways to Work Commission

An example of collaboration and innovation

The Pathways to Work Commission is an independent Commission for Barnsley with one key line of enquiry: How does Barnsley enable all of our working age population, particularly those currently outside the labour market, achieve pathways to employment?

Chaired by the Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn and with support from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, we have convened a group of twelve national experts from a range of fields from adult education to business to health. This includes the three directors of the Resolution Foundation, Health Foundation and Work Foundation, along with the Mayor of South Yorkshire.

Meeting for several evidence sessions over the course of a year (July 2023 – July 2024), the Commission is uniquely focussed on developing a deep, place-based understanding of economic inactivity and barriers to work. Our expectation is that the findings will lead to recommendations for local, regional and indeed national actors.

Currently on plan, the Commission will be launching its final report together with a proof of concept to take its recommendations forward in July 2024.



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