North Lanarkshire Council
Report

Policy and Strategy Committee

Does this report require to be approved? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Ref DM **Date** 04/12/25

Realising North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit

From Des Murray, Chief Executive

E-mail murraydes@northlan.gov.uk **Telephone** 01698 302350

Executive Summary

Since establishing The Plan for North Lanarkshire, regular reports to the Policy and Strategy Committee have highlighted the successful delivery of numerous programmes, projects, and activities that are central to transforming North Lanarkshire into a place people can connect with - a place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit.

While 57% of the council's health check indicators show improvement during the delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire, some results remain fragile, and significant challenges persist. As the council strives to resource major change aimed at transforming North Lanarkshire and addressing local economic, social, and health issues, it must do so within an operating environment that continues to face considerable pressure - including ongoing financial constraints, rising demand for services, and a complex national policy landscape.

Among the pressures faced is an ageing population - both within the community and the council's workforce - alongside a projected decline in the working-age demographic. In response, building capability and capacity, maintaining essential skills, and ensuring long-term workforce sustainability remain vital to delivering The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

The narrative of The Plan for North Lanarkshire is also vital. Clear messaging that informs people and communities, engages frontline staff, and strengthens the council's reputation is key to fostering the culture and conditions needed for successful transformation that improves lives. Targeted messaging is also key to supporting economic growth that is central to The Plan for North Lanarkshire and significant progress is already evident through large-scale regeneration, including new housing, integrated community hubs, and town centre renewal. Yet, there remains untapped potential to further elevate North Lanarkshire and extend promotion of its strategic central location, strong transport links, and available land to support inward investment and drive sustainable economic growth.

Since its inception in 2018, the council's service delivery model has established a strong, forward-thinking foundation for the *one place, one plan, one council* approach that underpins The Plan for North Lanarkshire. Building on this momentum, the vacancy for Chief Officer (Strategy and Engagement) presents an opportunity to further shape a resilient, future-ready workforce by fostering deeper alignment and synergies across vision, plan, governance, and delivery where communication is key to connecting people, purpose, action, and impact.

Recent changes at senior management level have opened up a valuable opportunity to

review and realign functions - strengthening the *one place, one plan, one council* approach that drives transformation across North Lanarkshire. This renewed focus - set out in this report - will accelerate the scale and pace of change, helping to position North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy and Strategy Committee:

(1) Approve the service reconfiguration that creates a single Communications function for the organisation and Senior Strategic Communications Manager therein, realising recurring annual savings of £47,386 from 2026/27 onwards (as noted in Appendix 1), and

(2) Note the subsequent realignment of functions within existing remits which are set out in the paragraphs in section 2.6.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	All priorities
Ambition statement	All ambition statements
Programme of Work	All Programmes of Work

1. Background

1.1 Prior to The Plan for North Lanarkshire being formally established in 2019, the shared ambition for *inclusive growth and prosperity for all* was set out in a report approved at the former Policy and Resources Committee in September 2018. This ambition set the future direction for North Lanarkshire to be a place where everyone is given equality of opportunity and where individuals are supported, encouraged, and cared for at each key stage of life.

1.2 At this time the council's service delivery model (outlined below) was firmly rooted in building strong relationships with communities and supporting individuals through each key stage of life. This approach directly aligned with the priorities of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and was underpinned by a place-based approach to transform North Lanarkshire's physical environment, recognising the intrinsic value and the economic, social, and health benefits that such transformation brings.

Service grouping	**Education, Children, and Families**	**Enterprise and Communities**	**Adult Health and Social Care**	**Chief Executive's Services**
Priorities in The Plan for North Lanarkshire	To support all children to realise their full potential.	To improve economic opportunities and outcomes.	To improve the health and care of communities.	To improve the council's resource base.
	To improve relationships with communities and the third sector.			

1.3 The clear direction set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, combined with the Policy and Strategy Committee's consistent commitment to maintaining the Programme of Work as the core delivery mechanism, and the longevity of the council's service delivery model have together established a solid foundation for the organisation. These

elements have enabled the council to drive meaningful change to improve the lives of people across North Lanarkshire and enhance the place in which they live.

1.4 Analysis of the council's transformation activities shows that 57% of health check indicators have improved during the delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire. However, some outcomes remain fragile and significant challenges persist. The environment in which the Programme of Work must be delivered continues to be complex, unpredictable, and, at times, uncertain. These conditions risk undermining the substantial progress made toward achieving *inclusive growth and prosperity for all* and threaten the creation and sustainability of a fairer North Lanarkshire where benefits are shared equally and wealth is more evenly distributed across communities.

1.5 While the council's service delivery model has provided a resilient foundation for the *one place, one plan, one council* approach that underpins The Plan for North Lanarkshire, it has also enabled the flexibility required to maintain alignment of vision, plan, and governance, while supporting ongoing refinement and efficiencies in operations. This adaptability has helped maximise operational efficiencies and synergies, while ensuring effective co-ordination of resources to strengthen organisational capabilities and capacity.

1.6 A consistent and compelling narrative in terms of what the council is working towards has also played a key role in reinforcing the resilient foundations of the *one place, one plan, one council* approach. This narrative is now firmly and consistently embedded across policy statements and is reflected throughout strategic management, financial management, strategy development, service delivery, and corporate governance practices. Clear and consistent messaging around The Plan for North Lanarkshire has also been a key factor in maintaining focus and momentum.

1.7 Operational leadership realignments and efficiencies over the years have been consistently guided by two core principles to (a) build organisational capacity by maximising already stretched resources through single council operations, single Chief Officer portfolios, and single service accountability, and (b) strengthen synergies and achieve economies of scale and purpose by streamlining back-office functions and practices in order to enhance the co-ordination and management of resources in support of, and to deliver, critical frontline care, support, and services.

1.8 The departure of the Chief Officer (Strategy and Engagement) offers an opportunity to deliver enhancements and efficiencies that will benefit the organisation. Section 2 of this report outlines a reconfiguration of service responsibilities and realignment of functions within the council's service delivery model which will generate recurring annual savings of £47,386 from 2026/27 onwards, alongside a range of specific operational benefits.

2. North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit

2.1 The Strategy and Engagement service (formerly Strategic Communication and Engagement) plays a strategically important role across the council, encompassing a broad portfolio of services. Its core functions include shaping and delivering messaging around The Plan for North Lanarkshire and the Programme of Work, engaging with local communities, and providing expert advice on all aspects of internal and external communications - including media and public engagement. In addition, the service oversees a wide range of corporate activities, including the management of events, the council's brand and identity, and its digital presence across web platforms and media channels.

2.2 Over time, the remit has expanded to include a range of additional functions, as listed below:

1. Leadership and operating model - to drive the transformation needed to establish a centralised approach for delivering integrated care, supports, and services through community based hubs at the heart of local areas.
2. Community planning - to support community capacity building, encourage participation in decision making, and foster the development of local solutions. This includes managing community grants, community asset transfers, and the local development programme to ensure community empowerment is embedded in service delivery.
3. Strategy and customer experience - to oversee the customer services hub and business change, co-ordinate strategic community planning for the North Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership (nurturing internal and external relationships), and support the council's strategic plan, programme of work, and associated performance and governance frameworks.

2.3 While the integration of the functions noted in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 above have supported greater operational synergies, the vacancy of Chief Officer (Strategy and Engagement) presents an opportunity to realign the additional functions within existing single council operations and Chief Officer portfolios. This would generate greater efficiencies through single service accountability. More importantly, it would create additional capacity within the communications function to proactively plan, design, and deliver messaging and campaigns in support of The Plan for North Lanarkshire (and in line with the council's Communications and Engagement Strategy, approved by the Policy and Strategy Committee in June 2024).

2.4 Elevating a single communications structure would create the space to deliver public-facing and internal communications that foster stronger connections across services, partners, and communities in delivering the Programme of Work. It would also support more proactive practices and a unified corporate-service approach that amplifies the reach and impact of messaging that promotes North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit.

2.5 To this end, Appendix 1 sets out proposals to reconfigure the Chief Officer (Strategy and Engagement) post to establish a dedicated Communications function led by a Senior Strategic Communications Manager. Reporting directly to the Chief Executive, and working with the Corporate Management Team, this role will lead the planning and delivery of all media and communications activity - ensuring the right messages reach the right audiences, at the right time, through the most effective channels - in support of The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

2.6 This structural refinement will affect the functions noted in paragraph 2.2 above, which will be realigned within existing remits as noted in the following three sections.

1. The leadership and operating model will be integrated within the portfolio of the Chief Officer (Assets and Procurement) to create additional capacity within the service to deliver the Town and Community Hubs programme in line with the Strategic Asset Review and Investment Strategy (SARIS), while ensuring earlier alignment of the operating model therein.

   Key organisational synergies and efficiencies include:

   - Ensuring the delivery and sustainability of an asset base that meets both current and future needs. This requires a strategic approach to long-term

investment in new facilities, while also maintaining short and medium-term investment to support the existing estate during the transition. Aligning investment priorities is essential to balance immediate requirements with future ambitions, support the net zero agenda, and focus resources on the development of each hub and implementation of its operating model across the wider estate.

- Improving integration with the asset rationalisation programme through greater alignment between hub design specifications and operating model requirements. This will strengthen early-stage planning and design, helping to deliver better outcomes for children, communities, and the wider North Lanarkshire economy in line with the hub principles.
- Ensuring decisions regarding rationalisation, investment, and dis-investment are enhanced through a fully joined up one council approach that better connects people and place in delivering essential care, support, and services that improve outcomes for North Lanarkshire's communities.
- Promoting stronger connections between physical assets, local communities, and the needs of the people within them. Each hub - whether newly constructed or adapted from an existing facility - should reflect the unique characteristics and requirements of the community it serves. By tailoring both strategic planning and operational delivery to local contexts, communities will gain more direct access to the specific care, support, and services they need. This would also enable staff resources to be deployed more effectively, working at the heart of communities and closer to the people they support.
- Providing strong and inclusive leadership for shared community hubs that are welcoming to all users. These hubs should foster a sense of collective responsibility across local communities, schools, partner organisations, and the council. This collaborative approach would also strengthen the role of Elected Members in leading North Lanarkshire's communities and representing the best interests of local residents.

2. Community planning will be incorporated into the portfolio of the Chief Officer (Housing) to strengthen place-based improvements and promote inclusive and accessible participation across local communities. Housing tenants, with their deep understanding of their homes and neighbourhoods, are well placed to contribute meaningfully to local development. Recognising this, the Chief Officer job title will be renamed (to Housing and Communities) to reflect its broader remit and enhanced focus on community engagement.

   Key organisational synergies and efficiencies include:

   - Leveraging legislative requirements related to housing and community empowerment to strengthen equality, communication, and participation. This includes ensuring that the delivery of services reflect the voices of tenants and that local communities are actively involved in shaping and delivering what matters to them.
   - Sharing learning from the Tenant Participation Strategy - a well-established, two-way engagement model that empowers residents through shared information, ideas, and responsibilities - to broader community planning and empowerment efforts. This approach can help improve services and assets beyond housing.
   - Expanding opportunities for tenant and resident involvement in the nine Community Boards, enabling them to contribute to longer-term, place-based decision-making across North Lanarkshire.
   - Co-ordinating engagement efforts and resources to ensure inclusive participation from tenants, residents, underrepresented groups, and seldom-

heard voices. This will help identify what matters most to people and build their capacity to help themselves and take an active role in shaping their communities.

- Creating an integrated approach to community building that fosters trust, strengthens local identity, and supports the development of sustainable communities and resilient individuals - better equipped to withstand broader economic and environmental challenges.
- Listening to communities through joined-up engagement will not only surface what matters most to people but also support their ability to act on it, contributing to the creation of resilient, empowered communities.
- Enhancing collaboration and partnership working with the Community Planning Partnership and third sector organisations to deliver integrated services that achieve shared outcomes - such as tackling poverty, growing the economy, improving safety, and fostering community cohesion - ultimately benefiting the people of North Lanarkshire.

3. Strategy and customer experience functions will be integrated within the portfolio of the Chief Officer (Legal and Democratic) to enhance alignment between the council's legal, democratic, and strategy functions. This integration will support a more cohesive and value-driven approach to governance, enabling legal and democratic services to contribute more directly to the growth and sustainability of North Lanarkshire and its communities through the delivery of the Programme of Work. Recognising this, the Chief Officer job title will be renamed (to Legal, Democratic, and Strategy) to reflect its wider strategic responsibilities.

   Key organisational synergies and efficiencies include:

   - Centralising responsibility for formal request functions under a single Chief Officer will raise the profile of the council's legislative obligations and promote greater transparency and personal accountability. This approach will enable the sharing of best practice across the organisation, streamline processes, and support more efficient, end-to-end handling of legally based requests, such as freedom of information requests, environmental information regulation requests, subject access requests, local authority complaints, and Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) stage three complaints.
   - Consolidating customer-facing enquiry functions - including the customer services hub, registration services, and licensing - under one Chief Officer will allow for better co-ordination, economies of scale, and the development of more automated engagement channels. This will help reduce inefficiencies and drive meaningful business change.
   - Integrating business support functions to achieve economies of scale and purpose in clerical and administrative support for senior officers and elected members, as well as civic duties. This will help establish a stable and efficient support model that contributes to organisational success and the delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
   - Bringing together support and oversight for the North Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership Strategic Leadership Board, alongside the council's committees, sub-committees, panels, working groups, and related bodies, under a single Chief Officer will enhance governance and co-ordination. This consolidation will also strengthen the council's ability to promote North Lanarkshire through strategic networks and relationships across economic, political, and social spheres.
   - Centralising responsibility for all non-financial governance arrangements under one Chief Officer will ensure a cohesive approach to democratic processes, committee operations, decision making governance, and statutory

obligations. This includes governance related to Best Value, performance standards, and the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework.

- Assigning responsibility for data governance to a single Chief Officer - who is also the council's Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) - will ensure robust arrangements for the safe collection, storage, and use of data. This will also support data quality and accuracy for evidence-based decision-making, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement, while also safeguarding appropriate data sharing.
- Designating the Chief Officer as the Senior Responsible Officer for the One Service Programme of Work will ensure strategic alignment across the council's democratic, decision-making, legal, and governance functions. This integrated leadership will provide a strong foundation for the council's transformation agenda, thus enabling innovative approaches to change that drive effective delivery of the Programme of Work.

Next steps

2.7 The structural realignments outlined out in this report will strengthen the council's ability to maintain a unified *one place, one plan, one council* approach. These changes will support more integrated ways of working by aligning solutions, resources, skills, and relationships across services, enabling greater efficiency. Future realignments below Chief Officer level will be undertaken within the newly aligned service areas in accordance with the council's approved Scheme of Delegation.

3. Measures of success

3.1 Measures of success include

- Sustaining organisational capability and capacity essential for delivering the priorities set out in the Programme of Work and achieving the shared ambition of *inclusive growth and prosperity for all*, as outlined in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
- Effectively marketing and promoting North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit - supporting enhanced economic opportunities, improved outcomes, and long-term population growth across its communities.

4. Supporting documentation

4.1 Appendix 1 - Workforce changes, with effect from 1st April 2026.
Appendix 2 - Senior management team structure, with effect from 1st April 2026.

Des Murray
Chief Executive

5. Impacts

5.1	**Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty** Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public

	Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments Yes ☐ No ☐
5.2	**Financial impact** Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? Workforce changes (detailed in Appendix 1) will realise recurring annual savings of £47,386.
5.3	**HR policy impact** Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? Workforce implications are being undertaken explicitly in line with the council's *Managing Workforce Change Policy.* Formal consultation with stakeholders, including Trade Unions, has commenced.
5.4	**Legal impact** Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.5	**Data protection impact** Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk Yes ☐ No ☐
5.6	**Technology / Digital impact** Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the

	Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)? Yes ☐ No ☐
5.7	**Environmental / Carbon impact** Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.8	**Communications impact** Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.9	**Risk impact** Is there a risk impact? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed? Creating organisational capacity - and ensuring ongoing alignment of vision, plan, governance, and operations - is critical to maintain (and sustain) the successful delivery of the Programme of Work and achievement of The Plan for North Lanarkshire. The information presented in this report therefore aims to contribute towards the mitigation of the risks on the Corporate Risk Register for *Governance, Leadership, and Decision Making* and *Delivering the Programme of Work*.
5.10	**Armed Forces Covenant Duty** Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.
5.11	**Children's rights and wellbeing impact** Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out? Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix 1

Table 1: Workforce changes (with effect from 1st April 2026)

Post	Current establishment FTE	Adjustment	Future establishment FTE	Salary £	On-cost £	Turnover £	Total budgeted salary £
Chief Officer (Strategy and Engagement)	1.0	Service reconfiguration that creates a single Communications function for the organisation and Senior Strategic Communications Manager.	0.0	125,223	36,948	(8,109)	154,063
Senior Strategic Communications Manager	0.0		1.0	(87,578)	(24,714)	5,615	(106,677)
Total	**1.0**		**1.0**	**37,645**	**12,234**	**(2,494)**	**47,386**

The workforce change in Table 1 will realise recurring annual savings of £47,386.

Table 2: Summary of workforce changes

Net change in employee costs	Net change in establishment (FTE)
Posts deleted:	
Vacancy	1.0
Posts created:	**1.0**
Net change:	**0.0**

Appendix 2

Senior management team structure (with effect from 1st April 2026)