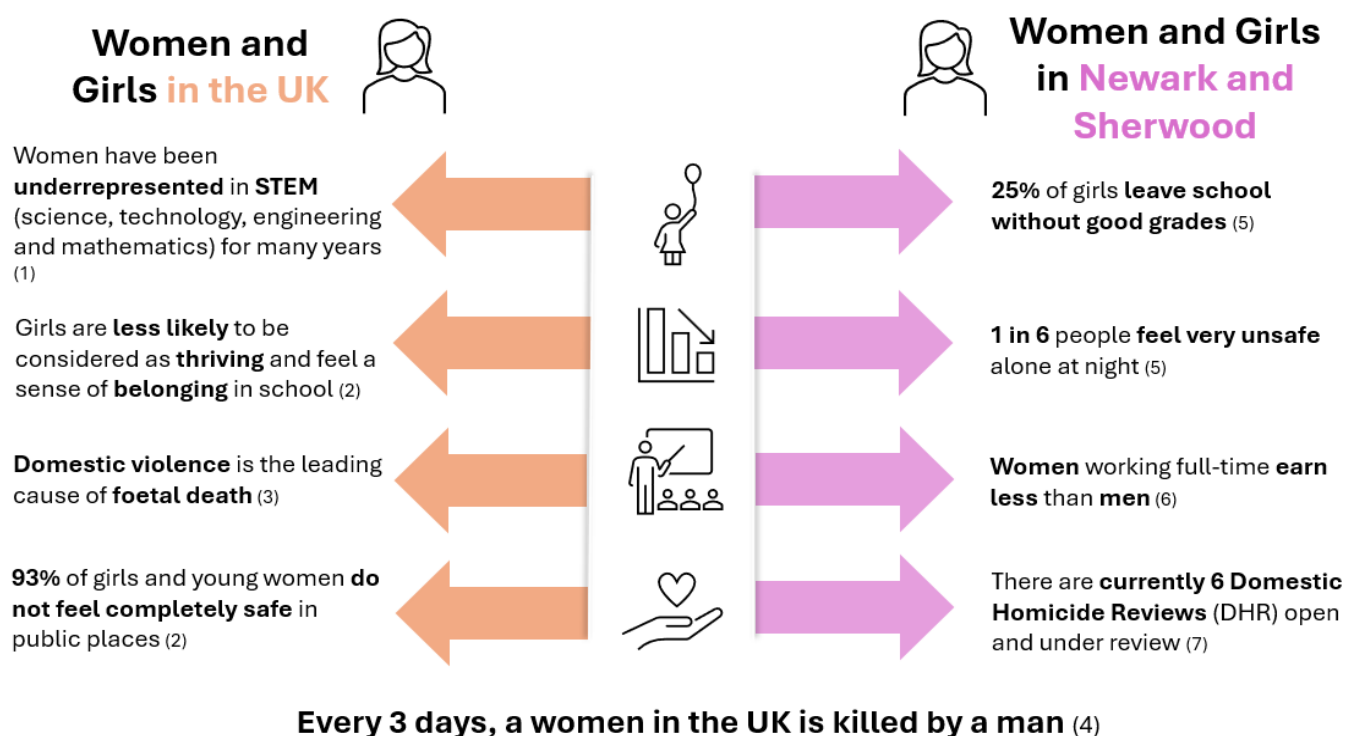


Report to: Policy & Performance Improvement Committee – 12 January 2026

Director Lead: Deborah Johnson, Director of Customer Services & Organisational Development

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| Report Summary | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Report Title | Life Chances for Girls |
| Purpose of Report | To provide an update and the findings from the work of the Life Chances for Girls working group. |
| Recommendations | That the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) note the findings and recommendations of the Working Group; and b) endorse the recommendations as outlined in Appendix 3 |
| Reason for Recommendation | To ensure that the findings of the Life Chances for Girls Working Group are formally acknowledged and acted upon. By noting the outcomes and endorsing the recommendations, the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee can support targeted actions that improve opportunities and outcomes for girls. This will be whilst working with our partners who can contribute to improving the life chances for girls. This approach demonstrates a commitment to addressing identified challenges and supports a number of ambitions in the Council's Community Plan. |



1.0 Background

In January 2025 a topic request form was proposed by Cllr Rowan Cozens (**Appendix 1**) and submitted to the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee. The proposed topic was supported and subsequently a cross-party working group was formed.

The Working Group

The working group met on five occasions between April 2025 and September 2025, with input from the following working group elected councillors: -

- Cllr Karen Roberts – Chair
- Cllr Alice Brazier
- Cllr Celia Brooks
- Cllr Andy Freeman
- Cllr Jean Hall
- Cllr David Moore
- Cllr Emma Oldham
- Cllr Irene Brown
- Cllr Linda Tift

Councillor Karen Roberts, Life Chances for Girls working group chair says:

“It has been a real privilege to chair the Working Group on Life Chances for Girls over the past several months. Working alongside fellow Councillors and hearing from a wide range of speakers, from colleagues at the District Council to partners across our wider network, has been insightful, humbling and inspiring. We left politics at the door, coming together with a shared commitment to prioritise the subject of life chances for girls. It has been a valuable opportunity to learn more about the excellent work and activities already being delivered by the District Council and our partners. As a result of our work, we can now add to that and take some more positive steps forward as a recommendation to the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee.”

Councillor Paul Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Community Relations says:

“As the Public Protection and Community Relations Portfolio Holder, I want to say how impressed I’ve been with the work of the life chances for girls working group. They have truly illuminated the challenges that girls and young women face today. It is particularly alarming to learn that domestic violence is a leading cause of foetal death. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for continued support and funding for programmes we already have in place, such as healthy relationships training in schools and the "Prison Me No Way" programmes. These programmes are crucial in helping young people feel more confident, informed, and supported, and they play a vital role in tackling behaviours that lead to violence against women and girls.”

Councillor Rowan Cozens, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture & the Arts says:

"I'm really pleased that the working group has taken the time to explore the important issue of life chances for girls. The recommendations coming forward are thoughtful and promising, and I look forward to seeing them put into action. It's encouraging to see such a focused effort on improving life chances for girls. I'm delighted with the recommendations and the positive direction they set for future work."

1.1 The working group identified three key aims based on the topic request form, which formed the basis of the review initiation document. The three stages of the working group were as follows:

1. Firstly, we reviewed the data set published by Plan International and considered its merits. We developed a fuller picture of the life chance for girls in Newark and Sherwood, by identifying and supplementing with more up to date and relevant data, that the Council holds and from partners or wider, national sources too.
2. We collated a summary of the activities, area of work and key achievements that the Council delivers or facilitates with partners to support this agenda around girls and young women.
3. Once the working group had reviewed all the relevant information and gained a better understanding of the landscape for girls and young women, the review began to explore whether changes could be made, or if work in this area could be approached differently. The aim was to identify ways in which the Council and its partners could intervene, improve, and advocate for better life chances for girls and young women across the district, and present this them to PPIC for consideration.

1.2 Plan International Report

The report and data tool, detailed further in Section 2, drew the interest of Cllr Freeman's daughter, Emily. With several councillors also taking notice, the initiative laid the foundation for a new working group. Emily was invited to the introductory session to share her reflections on the report and offer her perspective as a young woman.

The working group was supported by officers who gathered information and data from other sources to build a bigger picture for Newark and Sherwood and data to inform the sessions.

Key officers also contributed, helping to inform the working group, on specialist topics such as Public Safety, Domestic Abuse, Health and Wellbeing Homelessness and Communications and Marketing.

- Jenny Walker, Business Manager - Public Protection
- Christie Conroy, DAHA Accreditation Coordinator (Nottinghamshire Women's Aid)
- Hellen Ellison, Senior Health & Wellbeing Officer
- Cheska Asman, Homeless Strategy & Safeguarding Officer
- Sarah Lacey, Communications & Marketing Manager

External colleagues from partner organisations were also invited to attend to share their experiences and views on the topic.

- Inspector Charlotte Ellam, District commander for Newark & Sherwood,
- Penny Taylor, Head of Newark College and the Air & Space Institute
- Holly Youd, Youth Engagement Programme Manager (YMCA)
- Kelly Evans, Head of Partnerships & Community (Active4Today)
- Alexis Knock, Director of Business and Finance (Active4Today)

Each session proved to be valuable, with speakers and data collected offering the opportunity to valuable insights and some practical takeaways. A comprehensive summary of each session, including key discussion points is provided in **Appendix 2** for further reference.

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered

State of the Girls Rights Report

Plan International UK, a global children's charity committed to creating an equal world, published "The State of Girls' Rights in the UK" report in 2024. The report highlights significant challenges faced by girls, including safety concerns, educational inadequacies, and societal pressures, while calling for urgent action to achieve gender equality.

Between May and June 2023, they surveyed 2,963 UK girls and young women aged 12-21, which was the highest number in the report's eight-year history, to identify their most pressing concerns. The report acknowledges that, while efforts were made to ensure a representative sample, the views of 2,963 girls and young women cannot fully reflect the experiences of millions across the UK, some demographic groups and perspectives may not have been captured.

2.1 Data tool

Further to the report, Plan International developed an online tool. This tool is powered by a Local Authority index that Plan International have collated, based on indicators available nationally. Users can search by their postcode or council and learn about the reality of growing up as a girl in specific areas, and the injustices girls.

According to the data tool, girls and young women living in the Newark & Sherwood district, are living in the bottom 20% of places in the UK, whilst the rest of the county is rated as follows:

- Rushcliffe, Bassetlaw, Mansfield – falling short
- Gedling – bottom 50%
- Nottingham, Broxtowe – bottom 20%
- Ashfield - bottom 10%

2.2 Building a Bigger Picture for Newark & Sherwood

The group has used the Plan International Report and data tool as a springboard to gather local data and insights. The group have undertaken in depth exploration of key areas to better understand the scale of the issue affecting girls and women in Newark & Sherwood, as well as the work already underway by us and partners.

- 2.3 Identifying what can be done differently to intervene, improve and advocate the life chances for girls and young women in the district by the Council and by our partners
The working group recognises that girls and young women experience layered disadvantages stemming from concerns around public and online safety, health inequalities, educational barriers, and other systemic challenges. Such issues can be further compounded by entrenched societal norms and structural discrimination.

Where you live also plays a critical role in shaping life chances. It is therefore essential that local support, services, and initiatives are not only well-communicated but also purposefully designed and effective.

- 2.4 From understanding the initiatives and activities already being delivered, there is much to celebrate. The following are examples of the positive and partnership work that has been and continues to be undertaken by the Council and our Partners:

Feelings of Safety

- **Police Culture:** Inspector Charlotte Ellam - District Commander for Newark & Sherwood says:
"Policing culture has transformed significantly over the course of my career. In the early days, opportunities for women were often limited and lacked meaningful support. Today we see stronger mentorship frameworks that genuinely empower young women. From my initial role specialising in sexual offences to leading as Neighbourhood Inspector in Newark, I've always prioritised being a supportive leader and a positive role model. Mentoring others, especially women entering the service, remains one of the most fulfilling aspects of my journey."
- **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation (DAHA):** The Council is actively working towards achieving accreditation from the DAHA, a nationally recognised benchmark for housing providers committed to supporting survivors of domestic abuse. A key component of the accreditation is the delivery of comprehensive workforce training. All staff who come into contact with customers are required to complete an eLearning module, with additional in-person sessions for operational teams, which covers critical topics such as recognising different forms of abuse, responding appropriately to disclosures, avoiding victim-blaming, and referring survivors to specialist services. The accreditation process involves a rigorous audit of the Council's policies, procedures, and practices. The accreditation process is expected to drive meaningful change and to ensure that survivors receive the right response first time, every time. Crucially, staff will be empowered to signpost survivors to specialist support services, reinforcing the Council's ambition to be domestic abuse aware.
- **Violence Against Women and Girls:** VAWG remains a critical issue both nationally and locally. According to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), VAWG accounts for nearly 20% of all recorded crime in England and Wales. In response to this, in October 2024 the Council unanimously passed a motion committing to do all within its power to highlight the issue and improve the safety of women and girls across the district.

- **Walk in My Shoes:** a campaign by Nottinghamshire Police, attempting to encourage people to report instances of feeling unsafe to get a better understanding of feelings of safety in the city and county.
- **Community Safety Partnership (CSP):** a statutory body which the Council chairs, which is aimed at protecting the public and make you feel safe while living in and visiting our districts. The CSP are required to undertake Domestic Homicides Reviews (DHRs). In May 2025, there were 6 DHR running across our local CSP, which is the most we have ever had together at the same time. Alongside this there is wider case related, campaigns and strategic level working, district and countywide meetings related to Community Safety, Crime and Anti-social Behaviour.
- **Independent Domestic Violence Advocates:** organised by Nottinghamshire Women's Aid, provides support to pregnant women, such as to help to train midwives in issues such as:
 - why would being pregnant not be a protective factor to mum?
 - why do victims stay even when there might be harm to their baby?
 - encouraged to disclose in a safe and open environment, to ensure that victims and their children are safer, sooner.

The Council's Housing Options Team have an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) for three days a week, some of that time with the officers at Alexander Lodge and Castle House.

It was reported to the group that domestic violence has overtaken gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia as the leading cause of foetal death.

Around 30% of domestic abuse begins during pregnancy, while 40–60% of women experiencing domestic abuse are abused during pregnancy. 12% of the 378 women whose deaths were reported to the Confidential Enquiry on Maternal Deaths (2001) had voluntarily reported domestic violence to a healthcare professional during their pregnancy. None had routinely been asked about domestic violence, so this is almost certainly an under-estimate. (3)

- **CCTV Project:** As outlined in the Council's Community Plan, to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, improving community feelings of safety, significant progress is being made to bring the management of CCTV operations in-house. This strategic move is designed to improve responsiveness, accountability, and operational efficiency. One of the key outcomes of this transition is the ability to focus proactive surveillance and intervention efforts more effectively across Newark & Sherwood. By centralising control, the Council can better target areas of concern, respond swiftly to incidents, and support wider community safety initiatives. This approach also opens up opportunities for closer collaboration with local enforcement teams and community partners, ensuring that CCTV is used not only as a deterrent but as a tool for early intervention and evidence gathering.

- **Safer Gyms:** A survey conducted by the Office of the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner found that women are often made to feel uncomfortable in a gym or fitness setting, with experiences of being stared at while exercising, receiving unsolicited advice or overly flirtatious comments, being followed and even being photographed or recorded without consent. The scheme aims to increase feelings of safety for women and girls within fitness centres and gymnasiums.
- **Prison Me No Way:** Interactive and education programme to think carefully about the decisions they make throughout their lives, stay safe, positively manage the temptations of modern society, and increasing risks posed through social media, develop into law-abiding citizens, and achieve their full potential. Collectively helping young people and their communities to reduce crime, reoffending and anti-social behaviour and contribute towards creating safer communities for all.

Health and Wellbeing

- **Delivering food clubs:** A diversionary activity which provides opportunities for young people to learn how to cook nutritious, healthy meals. These sessions consistently attract high levels of interest and are frequently oversubscribed, highlighting their popularity and impact. In addition to their core purpose, these sessions present a valuable opportunity to apply the principles of 'Make Every Contact Count', enabling staff to engage with young people on broader wellbeing topics, signpost to additional support services, and reinforce positive lifestyle choices in a relaxed and informal setting.
- **National Women's Census Pilot:** is a pioneering initiative led by Solace Women's Aid and the Single Homeless Project, designed to uncover the hidden reality of women's homelessness in the UK. Traditional rough sleeper counts often miss women due to their tendency to avoid visible street homelessness, instead experiencing "hidden homelessness" such as sofa surfing or staying in unsafe accommodation. Nottinghamshire, including Newark & Sherwood, actively participated in the 2023 and 2024 pilots. The next pilot is taking place September 2025.
- **Women's Severe Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) Group:** Nottinghamshire took part in a pilot women's homelessness census in 2023 and 2024 which has led to the creation of a women's SMD group. This group is focused on building a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women experiencing multiple disadvantages. The collaboration involves gathering insights to create a whole-system picture. The Councils involved are actively working on women's focussed activities, with shared learning emerging across the partnership to inform future practice and support.
- **Leisure centres deliver activities:** Active4Today is making a meaningful impact on the lives of girls and young women by offering free school holiday activities, female-only swimming and self-defence sessions, and ensuring female instructors are available across all programmes. Through initiatives like VISPA (Volunteering in Sport and Physical Activity) and targeted bursaries for mental health, special educational needs, and unemployment, they are creating inclusive, supportive opportunities that empower girls to thrive physically, socially, and emotionally. Data from September 2025 comparing the number of

live memberships between males and females, across the four leisure centres, shows an 82% increase in women from April 2024 to August 2025. The data also highlights a higher and increasing number of women participating in group workouts in comparison to individual activities.

Empowerment and Future Prospects

- **College enrolment:** Enrolment data for Newark College and the Air & Space Institute (ASI) for the academic year 2024/2025 indicates that 393 women are currently enrolled, representing 42% of the total student population. While both institutions offer a broad range of courses including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), female participation in these subjects remains significantly lower than that of their male peers. This trend reflects ongoing gender-based course selection patterns, with many students continuing to follow traditionally gendered pathways.
- **Holistic support at college:** Beyond education and formal qualifications, colleagues at Newark College and the ASI are deeply committed to supporting students through this transition stage of life and preparing them for their future. These include initiatives aimed at empowering women, fostering self-worth and self-belief, and building confidence, particularly for those who may face barriers to participation or progression. In addition, colleges provide practical support such as employability skills training, pastoral care, access to a food bank, and counselling services. Students can also benefit from sexual health support and tailored careers advice, ensuring their wellbeing and future prospects are nurtured alongside academic achievement.
- **Mentoring and coaching project and local employers to empower the next generation:** The Council has supported the empowerment of female students through a coaching and mentorship programme organised by Newark College to pair experienced female business leaders with female students studying on an industry-based course. The initiative is designed to empower women across various sectors by offering structured mentorship and coaching. It focuses on building confidence, enhancing technical and leadership skills, and supporting career progression. The programme creates pathways into traditionally male-dominated industries, helping women overcome barriers and thrive professionally. A specialised strand of the wider project is the Women in Plumbing trail which encourages and supports women to enter and succeed in the plumbing trade. Through hands-on training, industry exposure, and one-to-one mentoring, participants gain practical experience and build the confidence needed to pursue careers in plumbing. There are several success stories as a result of some of these initiatives, such as:
 - 'Ellie' will begin her training as a fighter jet pilot with the RAF in November, showcasing the programme's impact beyond plumbing and into high-skilled, high-impact roles.
 - 'Grace' has started an engineering apprenticeship with Rolls Royce, demonstrating how mentoring and coaching can lead to prestigious technical career opportunities.
 - 'Cheryl' has successfully secured employment with a local plumbing company, a direct result of her participation in the Women in Plumbing trail and the support she received from mentors.

- **Changemakers:** is service that provides skills workshops, action projects and youth voice sessions at the YMCA. These activities empower young people and provide opportunities for further learning and development and employment. Participants were encouraged to explore causes that they care about. Some of the events that young people have chosen to take up include:
 - Afternoon tea event at Gladstone House to help combat loneliness
 - A litter pick event to help protect their environment
 - Teaming up with local vets, RSPCA rescue and stray dog services to promote helping animals.

Communication and Engagement

- **Communications and Social media strategy:** as part of our evolving communications strategy, we are placing a strong emphasis on engaging younger audiences through targeted and platform-specific social media initiatives. A standout example is the Recycling with NSDC campaign, which has been carefully crafted to reflect Gen Z's digital preferences and values. (Gen Z was born between 1997 and 2012.) Importantly, both the platform choice and the involvement of young people in content creation have been central to its success. This co-creation approach not only ensures the messaging feels genuine but also builds trust and increases the likelihood of engagement and behavioural change. The impact has been clear: the video generated 12,000 views, demonstrating strong resonance with the target audience and validating the strategy's effectiveness.
- Also, the Open Doors Creative Influencers programme, a successful community initiative focused on arts and culture, have been showcased in a 'takeover' video which aims to actively amplifying the voices of young people and improve access and opportunities for young people to engage in arts and culture in Newark. More broadly, our approach to communication should prioritise gender-inclusive language, such as using 'everyone' instead of gendered terms like 'ladies' or 'gents' to ensure that all individuals feel respected, included, and represented, regardless of their gender identity.
- **Internal communication campaigns:** The Council is currently running an internal campaign titled "It's Not Just Banter". Delivered through plain and simple communications, the campaign seeks to raise awareness about the impact of seemingly trivial comments and interactions, emphasising that what may be perceived as 'banter' can in fact contribute to a hostile or uncomfortable environment. This initiative is particularly important in addressing experiences of women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by casual sexism, public harassment, and gender-based microaggressions.
- **Resident Panel:** As of June 2025, the Resident Panel comprises 255 members who are invited to participate in consultations aligned with their interests. However, residents aged 16 to 25 remain the least represented demographic. To address this gap, efforts are underway to promote the panel as a meaningful opportunity for younger residents, including targeted outreach marketing and communications through Newark College and the ASI, with a focus on improved signposting and engagement.

2.5 Recommendations

Whilst there is much to celebrate, there are multiple areas the group have identified and have been cited in the recommendations. Several elements focus on enhancing existing initiatives. Notably, these include improvements in communication strategies aimed at better promotion and signposting. The full set of recommendations developed by the working groups is presented in **Appendix 3**. Some recommendations are already underway or being addressed through other workstreams, as clearly noted in the document where applicable.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

| Implications Considered | | | |
|--|----|----------------------|----|
| Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable | | | |
| Financial | Y | Equality & Diversity | NA |
| Human Resources | NA | Human Rights | NA |
| Legal | NA | Data Protection | NA |
| Digital & Cyber Security | NA | Safeguarding | NA |
| Sustainability | NA | Crime & Disorder | NA |
| LGR | NA | Tenant Consultation | NA |

3.1 Financial Implications (FIN25-26/800)

From the list of recommendations detailed in Appendix 3 – Life Chances for Girls, the following are highlighted for awareness:

| Recommendation No. | Financial Comment |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1, 2 & 3 | Any increase of resource or costs for Active 4 Today, could increase the costs to the Council through the management fee, however this along with all other costs are offset by income generated. |
| 16 & 17 | A sum of £50,000 has been included in the proposed 2026/27 as a requested change, intended to replace the financial support previously provided by the OPCC for localities, and to facilitate the continuation of related activities throughout the 2026/2027 and future financial years. |

All other recommendations listed are expected to be delivered within existing budgets, therefore no additional funding is required to implement these actions, and they fall within the scope of current operational budgets and staffing capacity.

4.0 References:

1. STEM Women, 2023. **Women In STEM Statistics: Progress and Challenges.** [online] Available via: [Women In STEM Statistics: Progress and Challenges - Stem Women](#)
2. Education Policy Institute, 2025. **No room for battle of the sexes: Why boys AND girls matter** [online] Available via: [No room for battle of the sexes: Why boys AND girls matter - Education Policy Institute](#)
3. SafeLives, no date. **Idvas in maternity units.** [online] Available via: [Idvas in maternity units - SafeLives](#)
4. NPCC, 2024. **Violence Against Women and Girls.** [online] Available via: [Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
5. Plan International UK, 2024. **The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024.** [online] Available via: <https://act.plan-uk.org/page/150206/data/1?locale=en-GB>
6. Office for National Statistics, 2024. **Labour Market Profile - Newark and Sherwood** [online] Available via: [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)
7. Newark and Sherwood District Council, 2025. **Domestic homicide reviews (DHR)** [online] Available via: [Domestic homicide reviews \(DHR\) | Newark & Sherwood District Council](#)

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None