



NEWCASTLE



**Corporate Strategy
2021 – 2026**

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Welcome from our Chair and CEO

Welcome to the first Corporate Strategy for Urban Green Newcastle.

Our vision is simple: to connect people to nature and improve the health and wellbeing of all families and communities in Newcastle by providing safe and well-maintained parks and allotments.

Although still a new charity, our role has never been more important. People have flocked to our parks and allotments throughout the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our green spaces provided everyone with a place where they could safely enjoy the outdoors and reap the benefits of reconnecting with nature. As a result, more than 70% of users ([Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Research](#)) reported improved physical and mental health during lockdown thanks to their local parks.

We want more people to understand the value of our parks, allotments, and green spaces: the impact they have on our wellbeing; the role they play in protecting the environment and nurturing wildlife; and why they make our city a better place to live, learn and work. They are spaces for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to enjoy, and it is our ambition – working in partnership with the people of Newcastle – to make sure they remain that way for generations to come.

We want to work closely with established groups, especially those who have volunteered so tirelessly to keep parks and allotments going over the past few years. But in addition, we want to create new partnerships and connections across the city. These relationships are especially important in enabling us to look after and improve the valuable green space we are lucky enough to have in our city.

We want to reverse the lack of investment that our parks and allotments have suffered from for many years by exploring opportunities to increase income generation and access funds and grants. Our ambition is for Urban Green Newcastle to become financially self-sustaining over the next five years. Although the need to increase income is clear, it is important to emphasise that parks will always remain free at the point of entry.

Over the next five years we will prioritise initiatives that respond to the global climate emergency; work to improve the health and wellbeing of people using our parks and allotments; and enhance the visitor experience across our estate.

We will only achieve our plan if we work successfully across all sectors, in collaboration and partnership. We know that we can achieve this and look forward to delivering our ambitions going forwards.



Jim Beirne
Chair
September 2020

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Beirne'.



James Cross
CEO
September 2020

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J Cross'.

Who We Are

Urban Green Newcastle is an independent charity responsible for the management, maintenance, restoration, development, and protection of 33 parks and over 60 allotment sites across Newcastle upon Tyne.

One of the first organisations of our kind in the country, we represent a novel approach to securing the future of green spaces previously managed by a local authority. We were set up in April 2019, following an extensive consultation exercise carried out by Newcastle City Council, in partnership with the National Trust and National Lottery Heritage Fund. We were officially launched as Urban Green Newcastle in October 2019. Our charitable objects are summarised in Appendix 1.

Urban Green Newcastle also has a trading company, Newcastle Parks Enterprises. This is owned by Urban Green Newcastle and exists to generate income for Urban Green Newcastle.

How We Are Governed

Strategic oversight for Urban Green Newcastle is provided by a board of 13 Trustees, who manage the business of the charity in accordance with the Articles of Association (see Appendix 1). The Trustees are the people responsible for controlling the work, management, and administration of the charity on behalf of its beneficiaries.

In addition, there is a panel of Members, appointed by the Trustees, which includes representatives from seven organisations. Company Members act as the gatekeepers and custodians of Urban Green Newcastle. Although Members have a limited role on a day-to-day basis, they are entirely separate from the Board and therefore can hold it to account for its actions. Their role is to appoint the first Auditors, approve any changes to the Articles of Association, and they can remove Trustees from the Board where necessary. The current list of Trustees and Members (as of February 2021) is provided in Appendix 2.

The Board of Trustees meets on a quarterly basis to take strategic decisions, with several areas of responsibility delegated to Committees. In addition, a panel (Urban Green Connect) has been established to provide advice on community engagement. The governance structure is set out in Appendix 3 and shows how the Board is supported by the Chief Executive and the staff.

There are three sub-committees of the Board:

- Finance, Audit and Risk – finance, external audit and strategic risks
- Compliance – statutory matters including safeguarding, health and safety, data protection and complaints.
- Nominations and Remuneration – general affairs of the Board and personnel matters.

Our Urban Green Newcastle staff are structured into three departments (Operations, Enterprise, and Parks and Allotments), and led by the Chief Executive. As a small organisation, there is close working across all teams, with the Senior Leadership Team supported by outputs from a number of cross-departmental Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups (see Appendix 3). The current staffing structure (as of February 2021) is shown in Appendix 4.

Our Vision and Ambitions

The value of public green space and allotments to both people and the environment is well-documented and irrefutable. Their contribution to public health, and their benefits for physical and mental well-being, have never been clearer. They play a key role in conserving the rich culture and heritage of our city. And at a time of climate crisis and major loss of wildlife, their importance in 'trapping' carbon and enhancing biodiversity has never been higher.

The parks and allotments of Newcastle are therefore an invaluable resource for the city, with the power to improve places and enrich people's lives in so many ways. These principles drive the vision and ambitions of Urban Green Newcastle. The vision for Urban Green Newcastle was established collaboratively in 2019.

Our Vision

...is for more people to enjoy and benefit from our beautiful, vibrant open spaces, which are safe, welcoming, and provide a great environment for wildlife and people which is valued by all.

Our ambitions reflect the consultations carried out with the people of Newcastle during the time of transition from Newcastle City Council into a new independent charity.

Our Ambitions



More people are enjoying beautiful and vibrant open-spaces, and feeling the benefits to their health and wellbeing and that of their families and communities. In the future we will see more people of all ages, and from a wide range of backgrounds enjoying the parks and allotments in the city. Our parks will always be free to access and to enjoy. There will be exciting large-scale events and venues, art and cultural activities and opportunities for sport and exercise. We will encourage children and young people to explore nature through educational activities in our parks.



Our parks and allotments are safe and welcoming for all. We will invest in them to create beautiful, clean, safe and well-maintained open spaces. Income from our facilities and activities will be reinvested so people from all our city's diverse communities can enjoy our parks and allotments. People notice the difference and public satisfaction is high.



Local people feel connected and committed to our parks and allotments. Our visitors and volunteers are passionate about all of the city's parks and allotments. We are giving people opportunities to come together, get involved and feel proud of their parks, allotments and green spaces. We offer opportunities for employment and volunteering.



Partner organisations value our parks and allotments and are committed to helping maintain and develop them. We will build close relationships with organisations and businesses in the city and involve as many partners as possible in using and investing in our parks and allotments.



Our parks and allotments will help conserve and improve our environment. We will help in the fight against climate change, and ensure that our parks and allotments are managed in a way which benefits wildlife, conserves our rich heritage, and reduces pollution.

Current Challenges and Opportunities

Urban Green Newcastle represents a radical change for managing parks and green space within the city. The intention is to find new ways of financing the improvements needed, and develop alternative management models, to provide exciting new opportunities and benefits for the people of the city.

However, achieving these ambitions is not without its challenges. The creation of the charity came as a direct result of the crisis in local government funding, when spending on parks, allotments and green space across the country had hit an all-time low. In Newcastle upon Tyne, council spending into the parks service had reduced by 90% over seven years, leading to job losses and a serious decline in management of the parks. Urban Green Newcastle has subsequently inherited a service with few effective systems in place, a backlog of maintenance requirements stretching back over more than 10 years, and a portfolio of assets which are in urgent need of investment.

Addressing these issues in the current economic climate will not be easy. Public finances continue to be under severe pressure, and the implications of the separation of the UK from the EU are unknown in terms of both longer-term funding and legislation. At the same time, the impacts of the global Covid-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on the economy nationally, as well as the ability of the charity to raise income from running events and activities throughout 2020 and into 2021.

Meanwhile, the combined crises of climate change and wildlife extinction mean that the need for rapid action to address carbon emissions and environmental degradation has never been higher.

While these are serious challenges, there are reasons to feel positive about the future. As an independent charity, focussed solely on the parks and allotments, we are able to take a holistic view of the estate. We can explore funding and establish new relationships and partnerships in a way which was not possible for the local authority. In addition, all funding generated from the parks and allotments will be reinvested back into them, with a focus on ensuring a more equitable share of investment and opportunity across all the estate.

At the same time, the series of lockdowns imposed by Covid-19 throughout 2020 demonstrated the value of local, publicly accessible green space, and raised its importance in the public and political consciousness in a way which has not been apparent for many years. It is unclear if and how this awareness might be translated into additional funding, but it should be possible to build upon the opportunities this might bring.

This is therefore an important time for Newcastle's parks and allotments. Public support and enthusiasm for our amazing green spaces have never been greater. While there will undoubtedly be considerable challenges over the next five years, there is huge opportunity, and great potential for the new charity. These have informed the priorities to be addressed through our aims and objectives between 2021 and 2026.

Our Strategic Aims and Objectives

This plan sets out the strategic aims and objectives for Urban Green Newcastle, for the five financial years between 2021 and 2026. These strategic aims reflect our charitable objects, and each of the departmental plans (see Appendices 5, 6 and 7) support the delivery of these aims.

AIM 1: Value, care for and improve our parks and allotments

Urban Green Newcastle has inherited an estate which has been in decline for many years. All our parks and allotments require significant investment to bring them to an acceptable standard, and to start to improve. We are committed to reversing this decline and creating beautiful spaces which will be valued and loved by the people of Newcastle. Our success will be measured by the number of parks achieving Green Flag status, with the aim of reaching 15 awards by 2026.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Address the backlog of maintenance to improve the safety and appearance of parks and allotments.
2. Establish management principles and plans for improving our parks, in partnership with key stakeholders and in consultation with local communities.
3. Improve the quality of our allotments, in consultation with key stakeholders, to ensure that these are safe, welcoming spaces which promote the benefits of local food.
4. Address the poor condition of buildings and structures across the estate and develop a programme of repair and investment.
5. Work with partners and key stakeholders to facilitate improved long-term and sustainable management and maintenance across our estate and ensure statutory compliance.



AIM 2: Develop a rich, diverse and exemplary visitor experience across our estate

We are committed to improving this experience and increasing visitor numbers from an estimated 6 million per year in 2020 to 7 million per year in 2026. But it is not just about numbers; it is about the diversity of people visiting and enjoying our parks and allotments, and the quality of their experiences.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Create vibrant and accessible parks, with improved facilities, a greater range of events and activities, and increased opportunities for recreation and play.
2. Improve understanding of the stories and significance of our heritage assets, and implement a programme to both conserve them, and bring them to life.
3. Build a creative arts and cultural offer across our estate which excites, stimulates, and provides an emotional connection for visitors.
4. Encourage meaningful and fulfilling community engagement in activities and events, including the planning of parks.
5. Raise understanding and awareness of our parks and allotments through improved communications, interpretation, and marketing.



AIM 3: Provide opportunities for enhancing health and wellbeing across our estate

Our parks and allotments offer huge potential for enhancing the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the people of Newcastle. It has been estimated that this is worth £128M in 2020 (Natural Capital Account for Urban Green Newcastle, Vivid Economics 2020). By 2026, we aim to improve this to a value of £165M.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Facilitate opportunities for local food production and raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of healthy eating.
2. Stimulate greater participation in physical activity and sports, including a wide range of opportunities to suit all abilities.
3. Explore partnerships to promote mental health and wellbeing across parks and allotments.
4. Increase opportunities for a rich and diverse volunteering offer.
5. Establish a programme for education, training, and skills across all parts of the organisation.



AIM 4: Seek opportunities to combat climate change and enhance the environment

We are facing unprecedented challenges regarding climate change and wildlife crisis. We have an opportunity to make a real difference across Newcastle within our parks and allotments. We can start by setting a target of reducing our emissions by 25% by 2026, with the aim of becoming carbon net negative as a charity by 2030, sequestering more climate change gases across our estate than generated by our activities.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Adopt and apply sustainability principles to all our activities and develop a carbon reduction plan.
2. Explore options for renewable energy regeneration across the estate.
3. Improve our woodland management, tackling the backlog of maintenance, creating plans, and embarking upon a tree planting strategy.
4. Support the development of city-wide green infrastructure plans, in conjunction with Newcastle City Council and partners.
5. Increase understanding of the biodiversity across our estate, improving habitat management and implementing strategies for vulnerable species.
6. Strengthen the systems for flood management and improve waterway management across the estate.



AIM 5: Develop the resources and organisational capability to deliver our vision

We are a new organisation taking over an estate in poor condition. To fulfil our ambitions over the next 5 years, there is a lot to be put in place. We need to build a strong team of expert and motivated staff and establish efficient internal systems. We need to become financially secure as an organisation by increasing commercial and philanthropic income to £2 million per year by 2026.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Establish robust policies, systems and processes for the charity and its commercial trading elements.
2. Create a positive, safe, and engaged culture in the workplace for staff, including proactive training and development.
3. Ensure financial resilience and sound stewardship of resources, including the development of investment plans for commerce, property, and new facilities.
4. Maximise fundraising by creating opportunities for sponsorship and philanthropic giving.
5. Work with key partners, including Newcastle City Council, to secure gains for green infrastructure through local and regional policy and development.
6. Establish effective systems for measuring and reporting performance across all aspects of the charity.



How we work collaboratively



At the heart of our ambitions and values is the desire for Urban Green Newcastle to build close relationships with organisations and businesses across the city and beyond, and to involve as many partners as possible in using, and investing in, our parks and allotments. Our departmental plans and staffing model reflect this ambition, with resources committed to engaging, raising awareness, building partnerships, and increasing volunteering.

The Council carried out extensive consultation throughout the transition process up to April 2019, to shape the new charity. Following the transfer, Urban Green Newcastle has co-created the Vision and Ambitions through a series of consultation events and workshops, and a number of the emerging systems and processes for the organisation were developed with the input of key stakeholders.

To inform our work going forwards, our Trustees are now supported by a community representation group, Urban Green Connect, which advises us on how to best to engage with the wider community and become more inclusive.

In recognition of the close working relationship with Newcastle City Council, we have established a regular Board meeting, to review strategic issues and opportunities. In 2020 the Chair of Trustees and Chief Executive offered meetings to all the ward councillors, to update them on the work of the charity, and provide reassurance on priorities and approach.

We continue to develop our marketing and brand, and stakeholders are kept informed through a newsletter, with regular posts on social media keeping the wider public updated. Through our developing relationships with councillors and local groups, including Friends of Groups, there is regular correspondence regarding major events and activities to ensure that interested parties are aware of what is being planned.

We are also committed to collaborating to co-create management plans for all our parks, as well as advising on strategic issues such as biodiversity, play and youth provision, and health and wellbeing. We are setting up Urban Green Park Action, a series of groups which will help provide ideas and advice, and help create the future vision for greenspaces across the city.



Measuring progress: what will success look like?

We have huge ambitions for our parks and allotments, and have set ourselves challenging targets to reach over the next 10 years. We are confident that we will reach them, but will be monitoring our progress and performance carefully to ensure that we remain on track and continue to deliver.

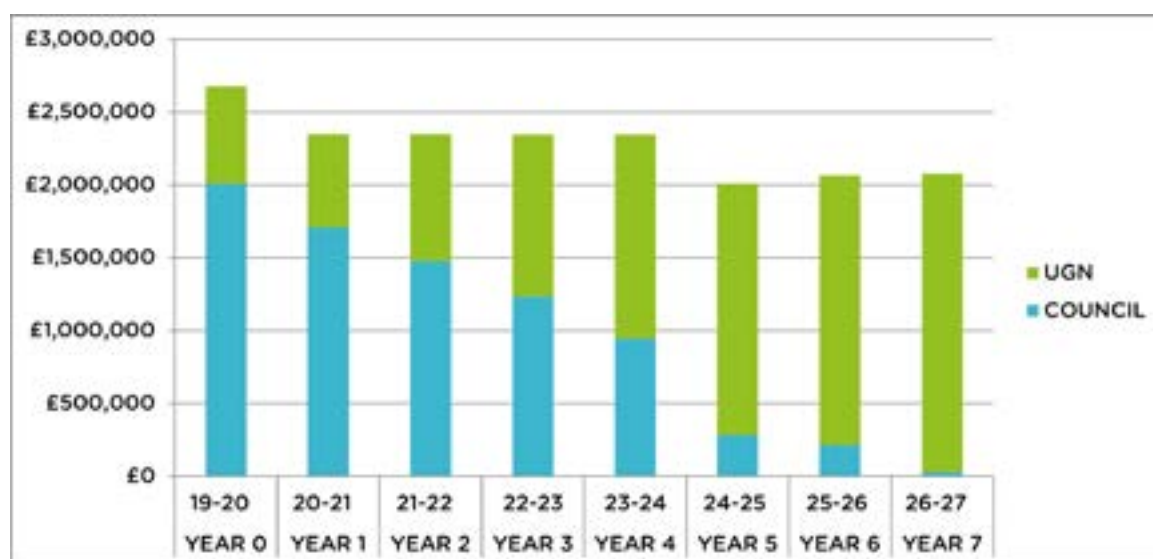
We have identified some initial Key Performance Indicators below for each of our Strategic Aims. However, one of our first pieces of work will be to set up an effective monitoring system, which will inform the KPIs going forwards. This table therefore sets out potential KPIs, and reflects data currently available. We will continue working on these and refining the measures over the next 12 months. Progress towards our KPIs will be reported on an annual basis, although not all datasets will be updated each year.

Strategic Aim	Key Performance Indicator
AIM 1: Value, care for and improve our parks and allotments	All parks to have Green Flag Awards by 2030, with 15 by 2026.
	Retain 98% occupancy of allotment plots by 2026.
AIM 2: Develop a rich, diverse, and exemplary visitor experience across our estate	Increase visitor numbers from an estimated 6 million per year in 2020 to 7 million per year in 2026.
AIM 3: Provide opportunities for enhancing health and wellbeing across our estate	Increase the value of parks to physical and mental wellbeing from £128M to a value of £165M by 2026.
AIM 4: Combat climate change and enhance the environment	Become carbon net-negative as a charity by 2030.
	Increase the number of trees by 5,000 by 2026.
AIM 5: Develop the resources and organisational capability to deliver our vision	Achieve a net income from our assets of £1.7M by 2026
	Increase number of UGN volunteer hours by 200%, to 66,000 by 2030, with an interim target of 33,000 by 2026. Note: This does not include external partners such as community groups. These will be recorded separately.
	Secure Investors in People Accreditation by 2026

Financing Our Plan

Urban Green Newcastle benefits from the support of a 10-year financial agreement with Newcastle City Council, providing up to £9.5 million. Our ambition is to replace this income with revenue generated by us from our assets and charitable giving and philanthropy. Whilst Covid-19 has had a short-term impact on our plans, in the medium term our financial strategy remains unchanged.

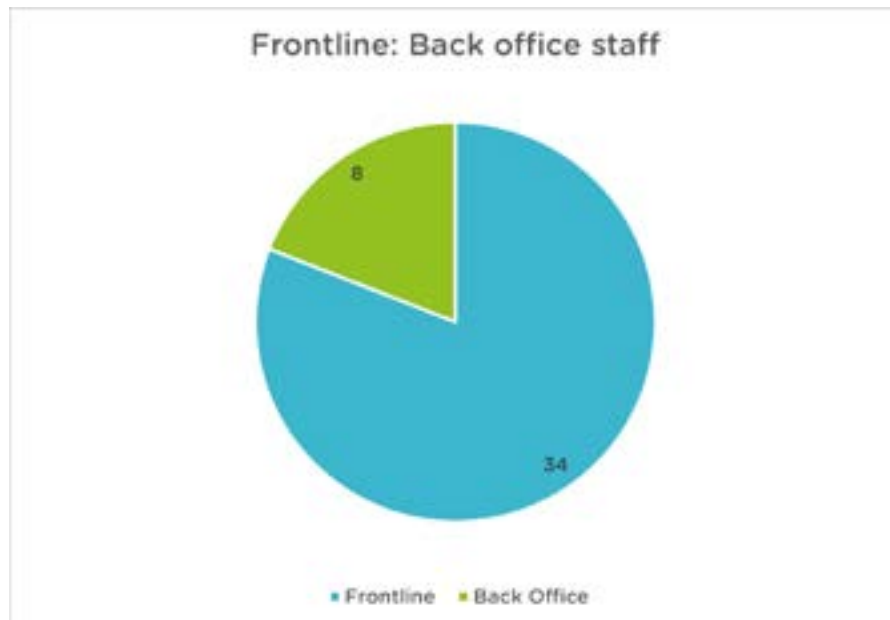
The shift from Council funding to earning our own income is described below.



For the first five years of this plan our annual expenditure is forecast to be approximately £2.3 million, with more than three-quarters of this spent on our estate or public activities. This includes over £500,000 invested in capital improvements to footpaths, fences, playgrounds, and buildings across our estate under a 'backlog maintenance' programme.

At the end of the backlog maintenance programme in year 5 our annual expenditure will decrease to approximately £2 million. The majority of this money will come from the net profits of our property and enterprise activities, together with grants and philanthropy.

Financial support from the Council will have ended in 2026-27.



We will have a relatively small staff team of about 42 FTE people, with the majority working across our estate and supporting events and other activities for the public.

Our Corporate Values

As a new charity, Urban Green Newcastle has a wonderful opportunity to create an organisation with a great reputation. An organisation which is known for being at the forefront of quality provision of green space, while being creative, innovative, a great partner, and an even better employer. Our company values reflect these ambitions.

In delivering all parts of our business, we wish to:



Be passionate We love our green spaces, and are constantly seeking ways to improve them and share their benefits with the people of Newcastle.



Be dynamic We are innovative and driven by results, and constantly deliver for the people of Newcastle.



Be skilful We take actions and decisions that are sound, just, and based on the best available evidence. We are trusted for our knowledge and expertise, and are authoritative and quality-orientated.



Be inclusive We believe that everyone should have access to high quality green space, and will aspire to make this possible across Newcastle.



Show integrity We strive to treat everyone fairly, and treat them with respect and honesty in all our communications.



Be collaborative We develop high-trust relationships with a wide range of partners, finding creative joint solutions to make things happen.



Invest in our staff We value our staff, the capabilities and contributions of each person, and trust each other as individuals. We invest in the support and development of our people, allowing each of us to grow and share knowledge and expertise.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Our Charitable Objectives

Urban Green Newcastle is constituted as a registered charity and company under guarantee in accordance with its Articles of Association dated 23 August 2018 and last amended 2 April 2019. The company gained registered charitable status with the Charity Commission on 19 March 2019.

The objects of the charity are:

The only Objects for which the Trust is established are for the public benefit, and in particular for the benefit of the inhabitants of and visitors to Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas to:

- *provide, maintain, protect, improve, and equip parks, gardens, landscaped areas, woodlands, open spaces, playing fields and recreational amenity spaces (the Parks);*
- *advance health by promoting participation in healthy outdoor recreation and amateur sport;*
- *provide or assist in the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation, including the provision of allotment facilities, in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants of Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas; and*
- *ancillary to the above objects, to advance education in particular in:*
 - (a) the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment including the flora and fauna, wildlife, biodiversity, and natural habitats of the parks;*
 - (b) the history, culture, heritage, and traditions of the North East; and*
 - (c) the promotion and encouragement of the arts, in particular within the Parks.*

Appendix 2: Who are our Members and Trustees

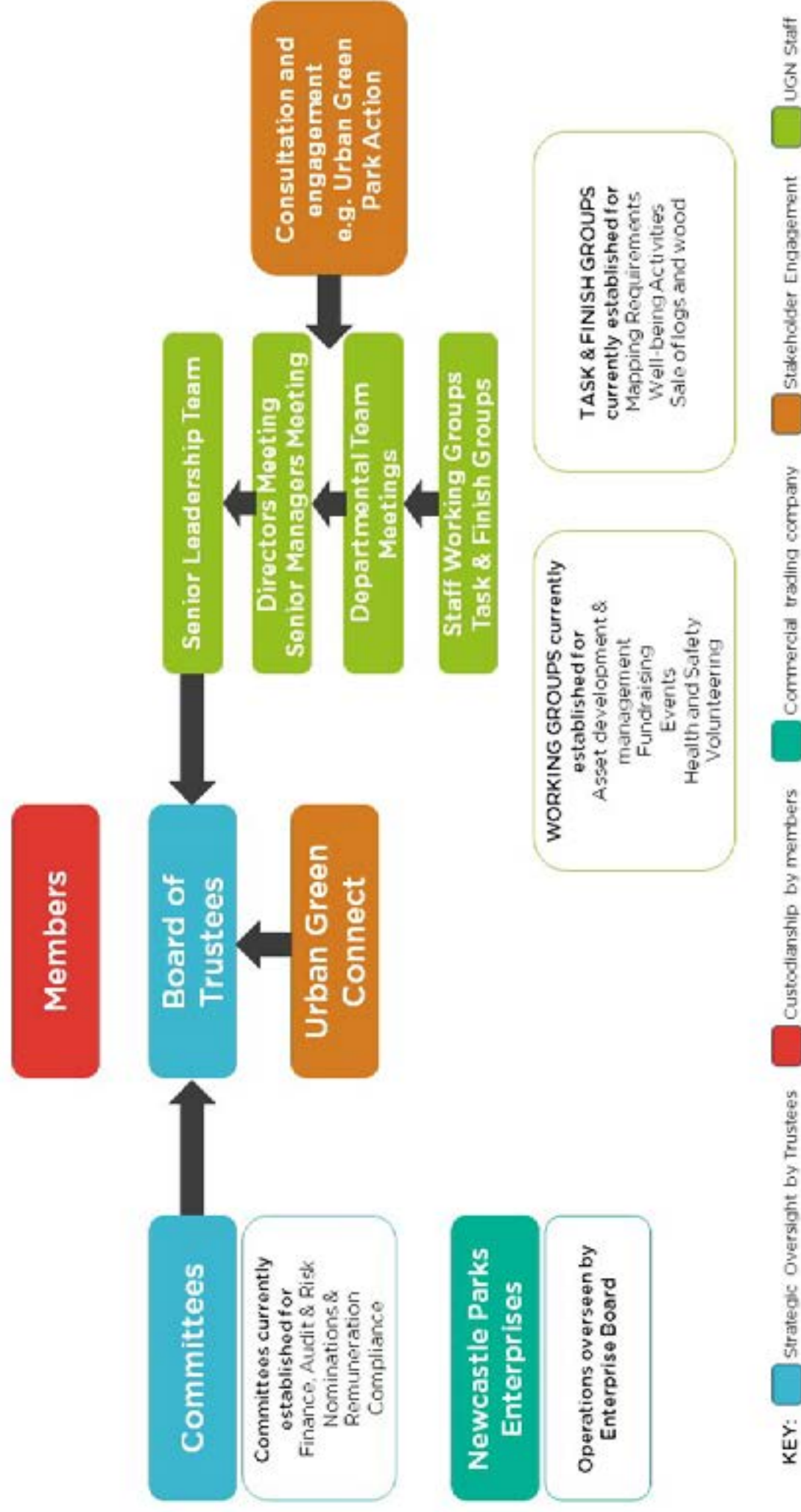
Our Members are made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- Connected Voice (previously Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service)
- National Trust
- Natural History Society of Northumbria
- Newcastle City Council
- Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Northumbria University
- University of Newcastle

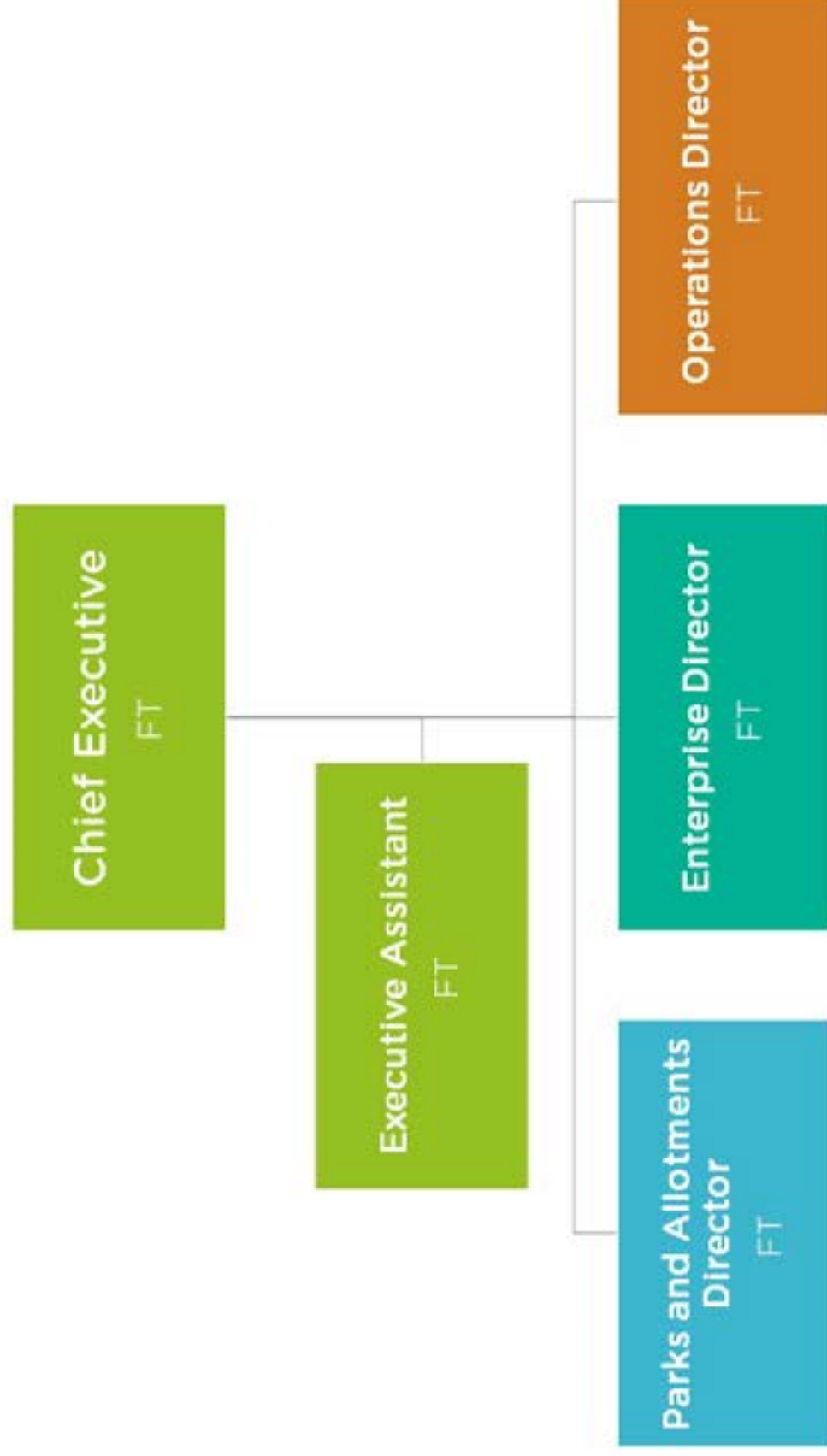
Our Trustees (as at February 2021) are:

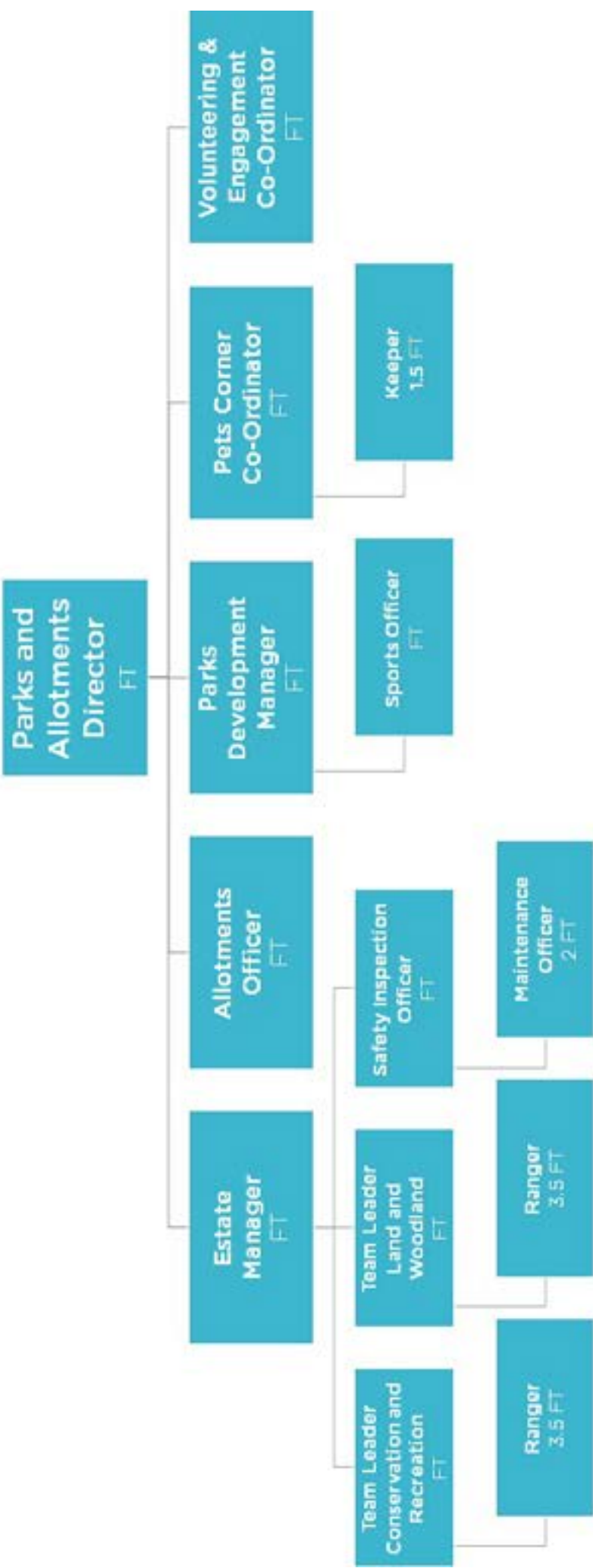
- Jim Beirne (Chair)
- Brian Aitken
- Cllr Irim Ali
- Robert Cameron
- Paul Collings
- Patricia Cresswell
- Kate Culverhouse
- Cllr Anya Durrant
- Nigel Emmerson
- Val Keen
- Professor Ella Ritchie
- Alan Schofield
- Gina Tiller

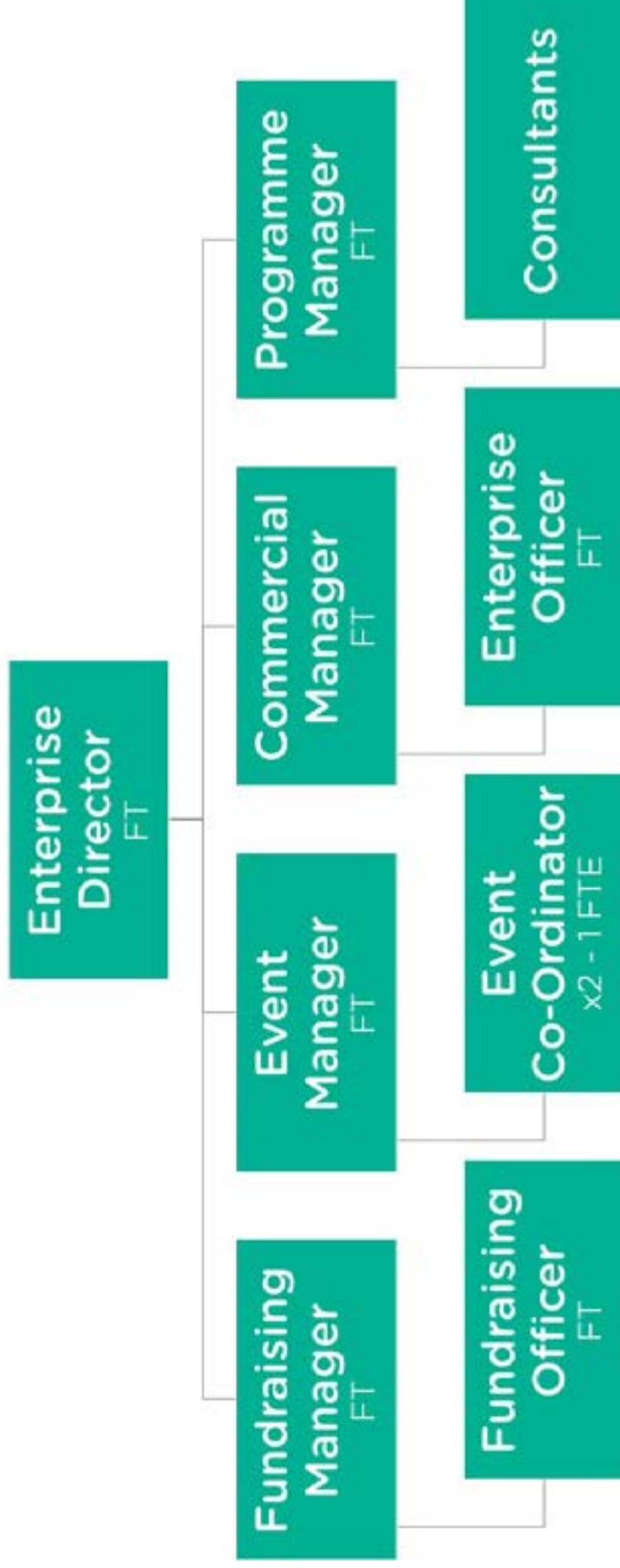
Appendix 3: Our governance

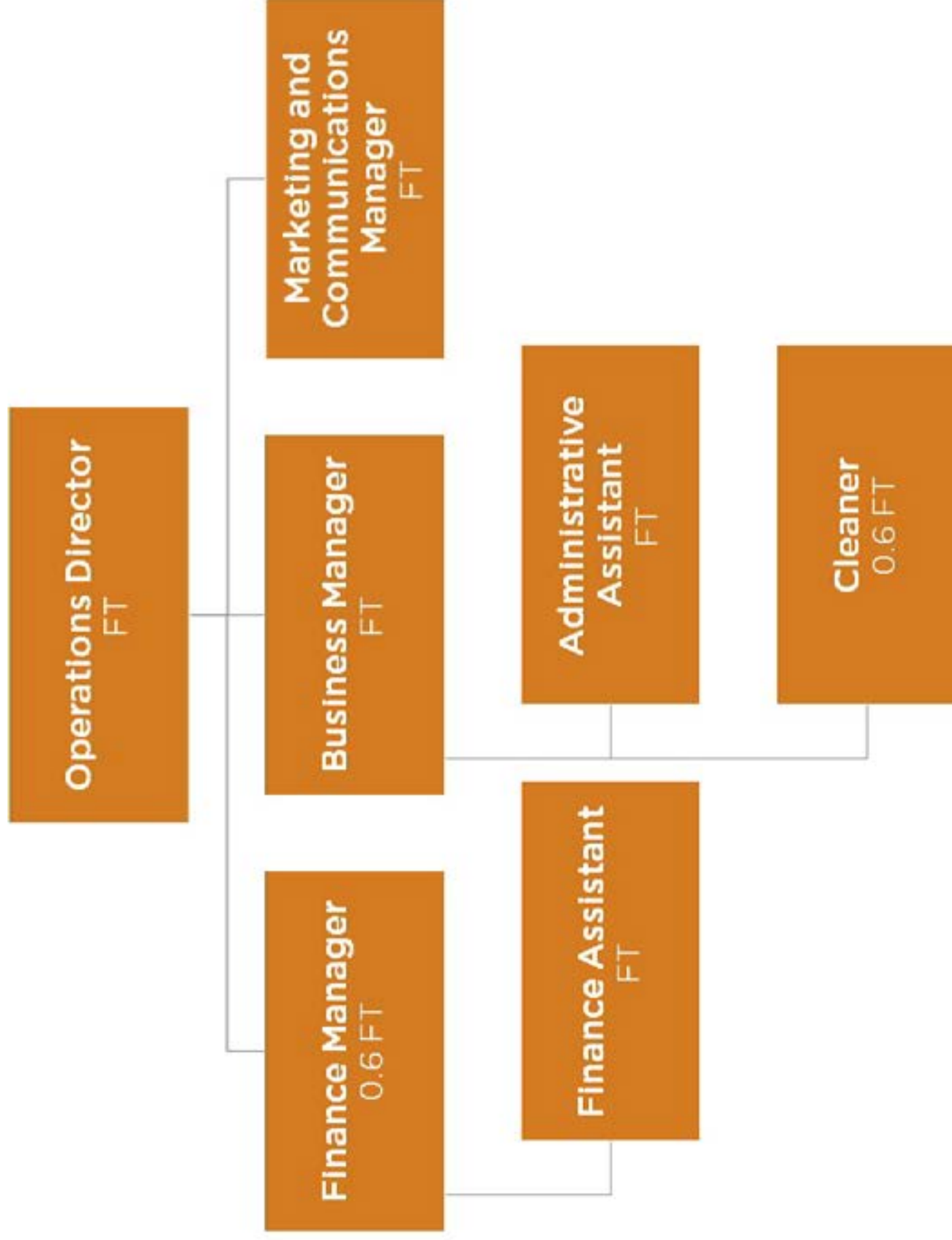


Appendix 4: Our people (as of February 2021)

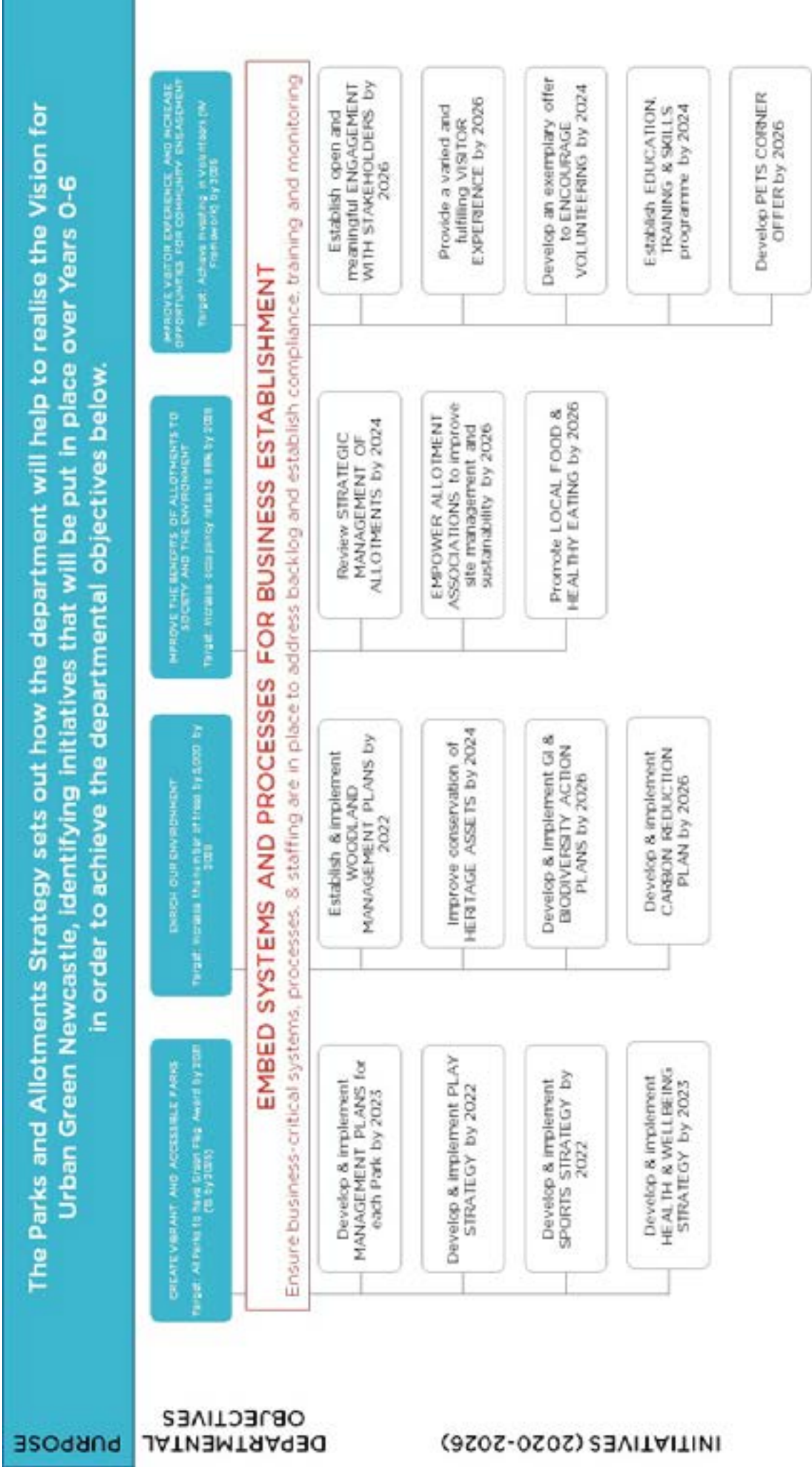




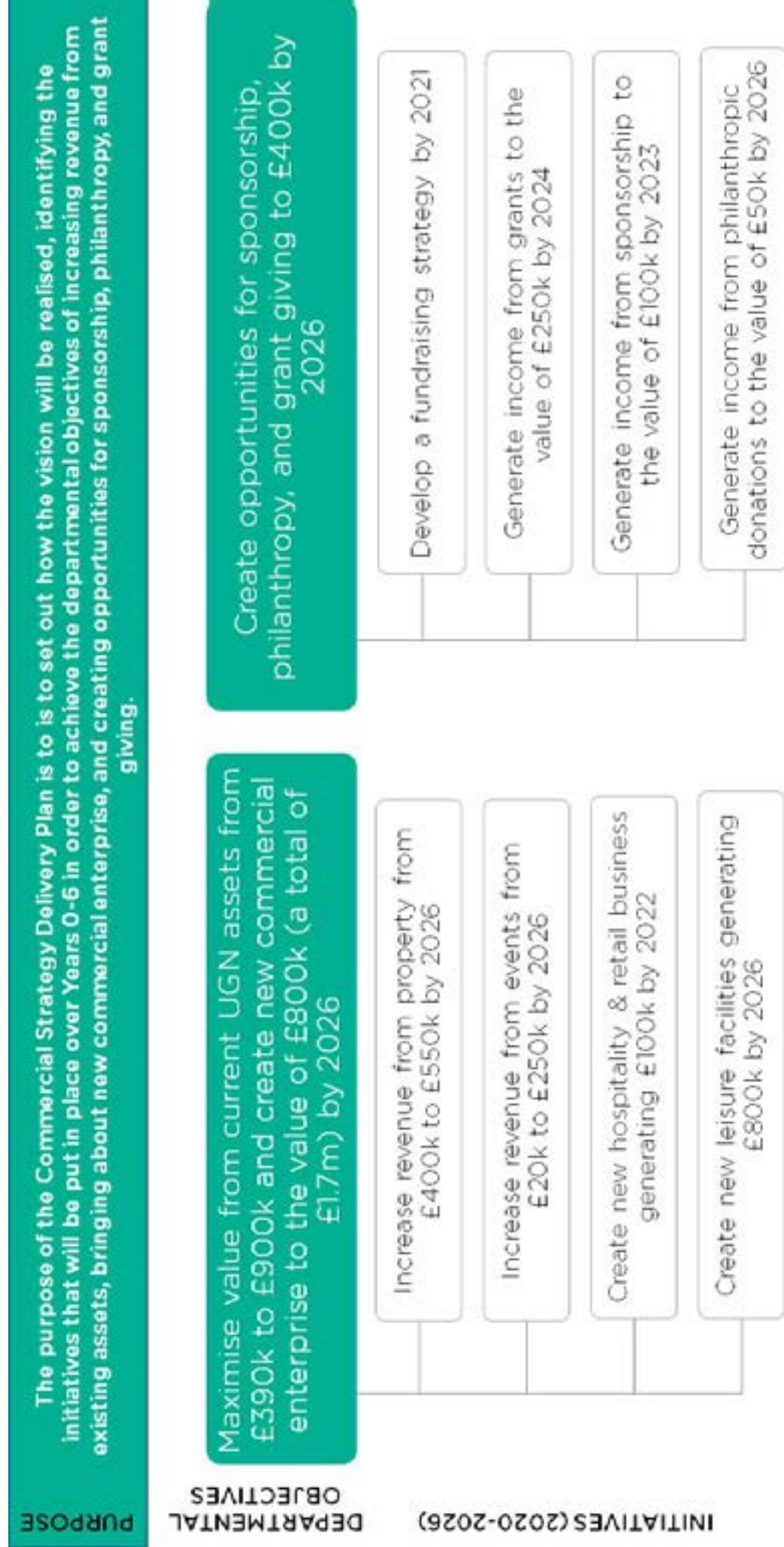




Appendix 5: Parks and Allotments Departmental Objectives 2021 - 2026



Appendix 6: Enterprise Departmental Objectives 2021 - 2026



Appendix 7: Operations Departmental Objectives 2021 - 2026

