



Heritage Services

Annual Review 2024/25

Bath & North East
Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

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I am proud to see the impact that our cultural and historical venues have on residents, visitors, and the wider region. Our cultural institutions continue to be an engine for economic and social benefit, for our city and beyond.

This annual review highlights the exceptional work done to ensure maximum access to our buildings, exhibitions and collections, reinforcing our commitment to inclusivity and heritage preservation.

Our efforts to operate sustainably and responsibly are a testament to the values that are important to us. By prioritising environmental sustainability alongside financial resilience, we ensure that our treasured sites remain protected for future generations.

I commend the Heritage Services leadership team, staff and all those involved in making this year a success. Their passion and commitment ensure that our heritage assets remain places of culture, learning, and inspiration.

Cllr Kevin Guy
Leader, Bath & North East Somerset Council

Looking back on the 2024/25 financial year, I am immensely proud of the progress we have made in delivering on our strategic priorities. At the heart of our mission is the belief that heritage should be accessible to all.

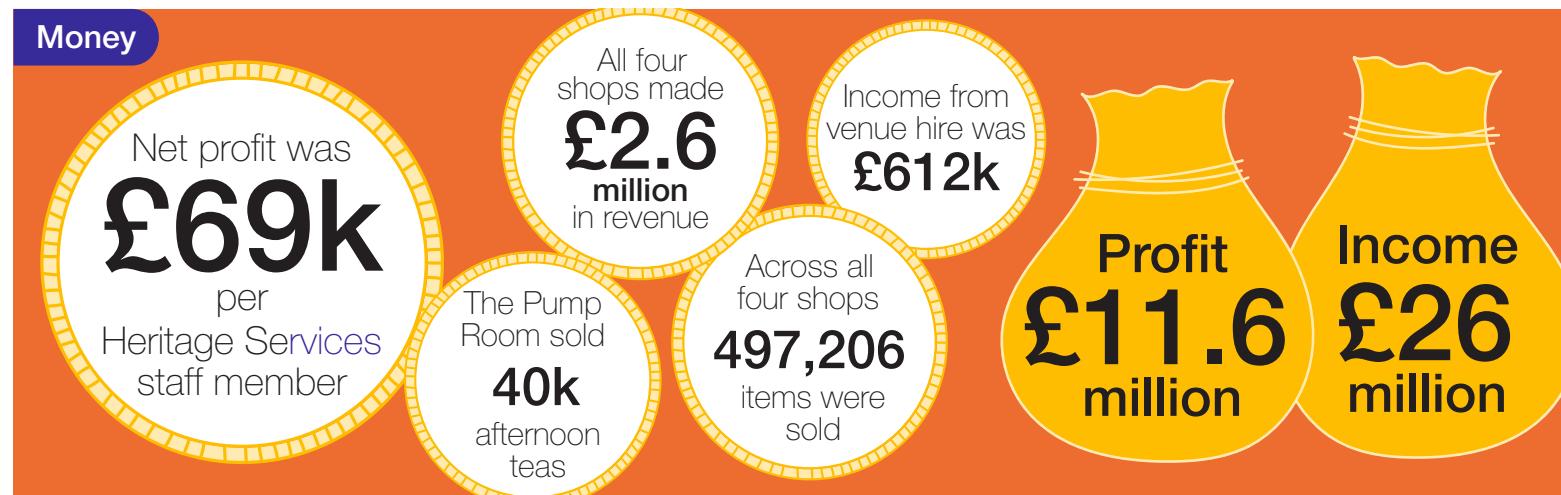
Through innovation and dedication, we have maintained high levels of visitor satisfaction, expanded engagement, and strengthened our commitment to sustainable practices.

Our efforts to maximise income and operate efficiently ensure that our museums and collections will continue to inspire future generations. But our achievements are not measured in numbers alone; they are measured in the experiences we create, the communities we serve, and the partnerships we build.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our incredible team, partners, and visitors. Together, we shape an organisation that not only preserves history but also enriches lives.

Robert Campbell
Managing Director, Culture and Heritage Services





Collections Access



Victoria Art Gallery



700 works of art were displayed in exhibitions

Almost **100** people participated in store tours

Assisted with **238** collection enquiries

Bath Record Office



Over **4,000** collection items consulted

Facilitated **1,070** research visits

Assisted with **1,700** collection enquiries

Fashion Museum Bath



Assisted with **1,032** collection enquiries

1,237,878 people saw Fashion Museum objects on loan

Community & Learning



13,985 school visits to The Roman Baths

188 refugees took part in activity sessions at The Roman Baths

234 children visited with uniformed groups such as Beavers and Brownies

2,124 people enjoyed free family activities at Victoria Art Gallery

650 people attended talks, tours and activities delivered by Bath Record Office

13,109 members of our community took part in activities including World Heritage Day, Science Busking and family activities at The Roman Baths

218 local residents took part in wellbeing activities at The Roman Baths

Volunteering



Our volunteers contributed

12,023 hours of their time



3,060 at Bath Record Office



5,995 at the Victoria Art Gallery



2,034 at the World Heritage Centre



108 at The Roman Baths



826 by placement students

Milestones



December 2024

- BBC Breakfast weather forecast broadcasts live from The Roman Baths
- Heritage Services venues scoop six awards at the Bristol, Bath & Somerset Tourism Awards

January 2025

Mirror of Mirth: Satire in Georgian Bath opens at Victoria Art Gallery

April 2024

Blockbuster exhibition *Toulouse-Lautrec and the Masters of Montmartre* (left) opens at Victoria Art Gallery

May 2024

The Roman Baths launches a brand-new audio tour reflecting the most up-to-date research available

August 2024

Free school visits scheme launches for schools across the UK where 30% or more of pupils receive free school meals. 20 schools booked through the scheme from November 2024 to March 2025, with 733 children benefiting.

September 2024

Fashion Museum Bath reveals *Dress of the Year* by Simone Rocha (right) and Bianca Saunders



October 2024

Bath Society of Artists 119th Annual Open Exhibition opens at Victoria Art Gallery

March 2025

- Fashion Museum Bath receives round 1 funding of £768k from the National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Bath Record Office launches its first dedicated online catalogue

February 2025

- Fashion Museum Bath announces appointment of new Foundation board
- Fashion Museum Bath awarded £20,000 Arts Council England National Lottery grant for its *Explore the Collection* project

Delivering our Service Strategic Priorities

What are our Service Strategic Priorities?

1. To provide maximum access to our buildings, monuments and collections to as wide an audience as possible to facilitate learning, understanding and emotional connection
2. To be a supporter focused organisation
3. To maximise income
4. To operate efficiently and effectively as an organisation
5. To bring benefit to Bath, the South West and the UK
6. To act as an environmentally sustainable and responsible organisation in everything we do

[Read here in full](#)

To provide maximum access to our buildings, monuments and collections

We welcomed over 1.1 million visitors to The Roman Baths, Victoria Art Gallery and World Heritage Centre, and introduced new multilingual audio guides and digital interpretation. Bath Record Office launched a new online catalogue with over 145,000 searchable records, and the Fashion Museum Bath's loan programme enabled over 1.2 million people to experience items from the collection. These innovations continue to break down barriers and invite wider, deeper engagement with our collections.

The Roman Baths

A Sound Map of The Roman Baths

A *Sound Map of The Roman Baths* was completed in 2024. This creative project was inspired by The Roman Baths' extraordinary history. Composer and musician Chris Cundy, along with poet Adam Horovitz and filmmaker Dominyka Vinčaitė, collaborated to create a series of short experimental films, poems, and soundscapes (below) that explored the historic site in a new way. The project was a partnership between Archaeology of the Ear, The Roman Baths, Resonance FM, the University of Gloucestershire, and the Sound/Image Research Centre at the University of Greenwich, with support from Help Musicians and Arts Council England. To discover the sounds, sights, and stories of The Roman Baths in a new way, visit [the project archive](#).

New Audio Tour

A brand-new audio tour was launched at The Roman Baths in May 2024. This tour is available in 14 different languages, with versions in British Sign Language and for visually impaired visitors. The tour offers a more immersive experience, allowing visitors to engage with the sensory aspects of what it was like to visit the baths in Roman times. It incorporates the latest academic insights about Roman Britain and the most up-to-date archaeological evidence available.

Displays

To celebrate the bicentenary of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution (BRLSI), a free display in the King's Lounge, *A Brilliant Bicentenary*, showcased Roman objects from the area on loan from BRLSI, including an amphora stopper, a fragment of mosaic flooring, brooches, and a range of coins.





Victoria Art Gallery

Toulouse-Lautrec and the Masters of Montmartre

Our blockbuster exhibition *Toulouse-Lautrec and the Masters of Montmartre* was hailed by *The Guardian* as one of the top 12 essential cultural experiences of 2024. It was one of our most successful exhibitions ever, with nearly 30,000 visitors.

Bath Society of Artists exhibition

Royal Academician Peter Randall-Page participated in this year's *Bath Society of Artists* exhibition (left). With almost 400 works of art on display, many by local artists, and record-breaking sales, we are proud to continue to partner on this important event in Bath's cultural calendar.

Bloomberg Connects app

This year we introduced content via the Bloomberg Connects app. The free app enables us to provide audio tours, virtual exhibitions and information in multiple languages, improving our interpretation and opening up access to our exhibitions for people anywhere around the world.

Bath Record Office

New Catalogue Launch

Bath Record Office can now boast its very own online catalogue (right) which incorporates both the archives and local studies collections for the first time. The team spent over 18 months on the project, which involved procuring a new collections management system, Collections Index +, and working with the supplier to migrate separate archives and library collections data into a single system – a huge task. There are over 145,000 collection records to search on the catalogue and work will continue to expand the catalogue so that more collections are discoverable and accessed.

Sounds of the South West Project

The development phase of this National Lottery Heritage Fund funded project, which aims to preserve and make accessible at-risk audio collections across the South West, has been running during 2024-25. So far, all of our priority audio collections have been digitised and we now begin the process of cataloguing and rights clearance before the material can be accessed.

Search the collections

[Show search options](#)



Fashion Museum Bath

A New Fashion Museum Bath

The new Fashion Museum Bath will be located in the 1927, Grade II listed, Old Post Office in Bath city centre. This major cultural project will create the UK's leading Fashion Museum for local and global audiences. An anchor project to Bath's Milsom Quarter regeneration scheme, the museum will be an exemplar of environmental sustainability, driving socio-economic change and placemaking, supporting disadvantaged communities across the region and providing a welcoming, accessible place for all.

Design

We appointed a design and consultancy team to work on the concept design for the new museum. The internationally renowned team includes 6a architects, who will lead the architectural design, and JA Projects, who will lead the exhibition design.

The team developed the architectural design, exhibition design, business plan, activity plan, interpretation plan, environmental and sustainability report, programme, cost report, and project governance. The work was led by Culture and Heritage Services, but is the result of an incredible cross-council effort, with many individuals and departments contributing to the project.

Staff Appointments

Fashion Museum Bath welcomed a new Senior Curator, Elisabeth Murray, and Learning and Engagement Lead, Jo Mawdsley.

MyWorld Fellow

Since February 2024, Fashion Museum Bath has been hosting a [MyWorld](#) fellow, in partnership with Bath Spa University. The goal of the fellowship is to explore best practices in fashion digitisation, using photography, scanning, 3D garment creation and 3D modelling, working with the museum's Dress of the Year collection.

Explore the Collections – Pilot

Explore the Collections is a pilot project and the first step in developing an online catalogue for the Fashion Museum Bath collection. It will be co-created by young people across Bath and North East Somerset and delivered in partnership with BANES Library Service. Fashion Museum Bath successfully secured funding from Arts Council England to deliver this project.



Fashion Museum Loans

1,237,878 visitors saw Fashion Museum objects on tour in 2024/25. This included loans to:

- *Fashion City: How Jewish Londoners Shaped Global Style* at Museum of London, London (above)
- *The Cult of Beauty*, Wellcome Collection, London
- *Sargeant and Fashion*, Tate Britain, London
- *Untold Lives*, Kensington Palace, London
- *Gardening Bohemia: Bloomsbury Women Outdoors*, Garden Museum, London
- *HerStory: Women of Goodwood*, Goodwood House, Sussex
- *Icons of British Fashion*, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire
- *Naomi: In Fashion*, V&A South Kensington, London

To be a supporter-focused organisation

We built strong connections with local partners – from carer and resettlement services to community groups and schools – and placed inclusion at the centre of our programming. Volunteers played an essential role across our sites, contributing thousands of hours and enriching the visitor experience. We developed new learning offers and increased accessibility through British Sign Language tours and toddler sessions. Meanwhile, community consultation helped to shape the future of the Fashion Museum Bath. Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to putting audiences first and creating welcoming, responsive cultural spaces.

Fundraising

Friends of the Victoria Art Gallery

We've continued to enjoy the vital support from the Friends of the Victoria Art Gallery. In addition to providing the majority of the funds for the development of our new learning space, The Modelling Room, they also bought equipment needed for us to make picture frames in-house, and helped fund conservation projects and acquisitions.



Community Engagement: Fashion Museum Bath

A programme of community consultation, engagement, and outreach continued with sessions held in Radstock and Midsomer Norton. This was an opportunity to hear how families engage with the topic of fashion, what their motivations and barriers to visiting the museum are, and how we can start to build longer-term relationships and nurture potential future audiences for the museum. This consultation will continue throughout the project and will help ensure the social impact of this major project is as significant as its economic outcomes will be.



Community Engagement: The Roman Baths & Victoria Art Gallery

Art Explorers area at Victoria Art Gallery

Museum Development South West funded a family friendly project at the Victoria Art Gallery. A new Art Explorers area in the Upper Gallery will provide families with a fantastic opportunity to engage with the collection through play and creativity.

Community Engagement Programme

We worked with local partners and council departments including Bath Carers' Centre, Headway – a charity improving life after brain injury, BANES Resettlement Team, local heritage sites and museums. We took part in February's ReBalance Bath festival.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme

62 children attended our Holiday Activities and Food programme at the Clore Learning Centre. Funded by the Department for Education, the programme provides healthy meals, enriching activities, and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning.



Family Trails

New trails were created for each special exhibition at the Victoria Art Gallery, and we ran a trail in conjunction with children's writer Marie Basting at The Roman Baths.

Teacher Engagement

In the autumn we contributed to two national conferences about our school programme, ran an activity for teachers on how to use objects for learning, and wrote a [blog for the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom](#).

New targeted programming at the Victoria Art Gallery

With our new Community Engagement Officer, Kersti Haabjoern, now in post, we've focused on getting the widest possible audience to enjoy the Gallery. A new programme of British Sign Language exhibition tours was introduced, complementing our existing provision for visitors with visual impairments. Alongside our formal learning offer and creative family activities, our new Toddler Thursdays sessions mean that we now cater for visitors of all ages.

To maximise income

Heritage Services delivered a record-breaking £11.6 million return to the council. Admissions at Victoria Art Gallery exceeded budget by 42%, and new retail product ranges helped offset trading impacts.

Pricing Review

In 2024 we undertook a review of our pricing strategy with a consultant, which influenced our prices for 2025. This has led to an increase in budgeted yield per visitor of almost £1.50.

Venue Hire

A new Corporate Sales Executive position was introduced to the venue hire team to work more closely with Bath universities and businesses and, while we did end the year 4% down on 2023/24, conference business grew by 40% in the Guildhall.

Marketing capacity grew when support for promoting the venues was included as a clause in the new Searcys contract, and we are already seeing the positive impact of this in the 2025/26 wedding bookings. We also saw great success with four sell-out Silent Discos at The Roman Baths.

Children's Activity Book

Working closely with the learning and curatorial teams, the retail team launched a new children's activity book, which sold 5,590 copies and generated an additional £28K in income.

Guidebook Upselling

In 2024 we introduced a prompt in the customer journey on the website to promote sales of the guidebook. This supported guidebook sales revenue growth of over 20%.

Performance Measurement at The Roman Baths – Visitor Enjoyment

The service measures the quality of its experience at The Roman Baths in a number of ways throughout the year:

VAQAS

Attractions are independently visited by Visit England quality assessors once a year. This year The Roman Baths scored its highest ever score of 93%. The Victoria Art Gallery had a score of 86% which was influenced by the ongoing closure of the Upper Gallery.

Voice of the Visitor

Our post visit survey. All visitors that we have an email address for are sent a survey to score a number of aspects of their visit. The Roman Baths' scores for 2024/25 are shown below. The service exceeded both prior year and target in the three key measures.

	2024	2023
Enjoyment	8.84	8.70
Value for money	8.05	7.98
Net Promoter Score	+64	+61

Mystery Visitor Programme

We receive four mystery visits a year and get a detailed report covering all aspects of the visitor's experience. Our average score for the four visits was 84%, with one visit receiving 96.5%, one of the highest scores in the UK during that quarter!

To operate efficiently and effectively as an organisation

The Roman Baths

Curating Curse Tablets

The Roman curse tablets (right) from the spring have been repackaged by conservators as part of an ongoing project to fully catalogue, conserve, record and photograph the tablets. This work identified longer term requirements in the preservation of the curses.



Acquisitions

Two Roman bracelets from Priston have been given to the museum, over 100 years after their discovery by the donor's grandfather, who uncovered a Roman coffin containing a skeleton wearing the bracelets in 1917. The bracelets and coffin were kept in the local area, and the coffin is visible today in Priston parish church. The gift of the bracelets means that they can be preserved and cared for as part of the museum's collection, to be enjoyed for hundreds of years to come.

A previously unrecorded fragment of the Roman mosaic from Durley Hill in Keynsham (left) has been gifted to The Roman Baths collection by the Marble Mosaic Company, to join the existing pieces cared for by the museum. Other fragments of this mosaic are currently on display in Keynsham Library, and this piece is a key fragment that connects one panel on display with another still in storage.

A Viking style belt buckle discovered in Saltford by a local metal detectorist has been gifted to The Roman Baths collection by the finder. The decorative style and Viking period is not currently well represented in the museum collection, and it is an exciting addition to our understanding of the 11th century in Bath and North East Somerset.



Victoria Art Gallery

Acquisitions

This year's most remarkable acquisition was a collection of printer's proofs of works by some of the most significant British artists of the 20th century, including Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff.

Conservation of Henry VIII

Our iconic portrait of Henry VIII (left), dating from the 1540s, underwent major conservation treatment this year, largely funded with grant-aid from Woodmansterne and the Friends of the Victoria Art Gallery.

Bath Record Office

Wessex Water Cataloguing Project

We were awarded £31,500 to catalogue records received from Wessex Water, which includes archives from the days when Bath City Council was responsible for water supply, as well as Wessex Water's own corporate archive. David Mulford, Project Archivist, joined the team in November for 12 months.

Research Highlight

Debora Sturzo, Erasmus+ training student and MA Candidate from the University of Turin, spent nearly 18 months on and off with us researching the pre-16th-century incunabula (early printed books) in the care of Bath Record Office. The information on the current incunabula holdings will be added to two internationally renowned databases: the MEI (Material Evidence in Incunabula) database and Heritage of the Printed Book database.

Conservation

Eleanor Towell, Bath Record Office conservator, has completed work on numerous archives and local studies collection items in need of treatment and repair, from maps and plans to deeds. Eleanor has also supported other museums and organisations with their conservation needs.

Notable Accessions

Our accessions included records of the Bath Choral Society, court registers for the Bath and Wansdyke courts, records of the Royal United Hospital NHS Trust, and records from the A Century's Memories WW1 oral history project.





Fashion Museum

Acquisitions

The Fashion Museum Bath collection continues to grow in response to generous donations and our strategic collecting policy. Highlights for 2024 include:

- Dress of the Year 2023 (left), chosen by Caroline Rush CBE. Dress, silk, tulle and sequined designed by Simone Rocha, Spring/Summer 2023; Ensemble, printed cotton, designed by Bianca Saunders for The Missing Thread: Untold Stories of Black British Fashion, Somerset House, 2023.
- Two ensembles designed by Phoebe English (Autumn/Winter 2019 and 2020).
- Garments by Zandra Rhodes and Bill Gibb, 1970s, gifted by Zandra Rhodes.
- Jon Moore Collection, including suits by Hardy Amies in the 1980s and 1990s as well as designs and garments from his student collections 1975-1979.
- A collection of clothing and textiles associated with the Zilkha family who lived in Baghdad, 1920s-1940.

To bring benefit to Bath, the South West and the UK

Our work brought cultural, social and economic value to local and national audiences.

The Roman Baths and Victoria Art Gallery contributed to civic pride, tourism, and public learning, while the Fashion Museum Bath is set to become a key part in the regeneration of Bath's Milsom Quarter. Our role as both a cultural anchor and economic contributor is more vital than ever.

Heritage Services Wide

Travelling Together Programme

The Roman Baths participated in the Travelling Together Programme, which was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England. This programme aimed to enhance the skills, confidence, and capabilities of the service, enabling us to engage with a broader audience. Over a year, the service embarked on a learning journey that supported them in making necessary changes to improve accessibility and relevance for our communities. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training was delivered by Heritage Services 'champions' to over 100 staff. As a result of this programme, the service has also developed an [EDI Strategy and Action Plan](#).

Sustainable Tourism Workshop

In January 2025, we held a sustainable tourism workshop in partnership with Visit West and Buro Happold. The aim of the workshop was to identify opportunities and barriers to BANES remaining a leading global destination whilst fostering sustainable economic growth, preserving the environment and enriching the lives of communities and visitors alike.

We had over 60 attendees from the public, private and community sectors in BANES. Discussions were focussed on the key topics of: governance, infrastructure, economy and business, tourist offering, sustainability and natural environment, and community and social value.

Using these lenses, attendees discussed how tourism can serve as a catalyst for conserving heritage, social cohesion and targeted climate action. We finished the workshop with clear actions to move forward which prioritise better data, stronger partnerships, and continued authenticity.

To act as an environmentally sustainable and responsible organisation in everything we do

During 2024/25 we appointed a Sustainability Manager, Amber Rochette, to better understand our environmental impacts and help us get to net zero emissions in alignment with the council's Net Zero Nature Positive 2030 commitment. Over the course of the year, we calculated our carbon footprint and put data monitoring processes in place, agreed a set of clear sustainability goals and targets to reach, and created a three-year action plan to decarbonise our operations across the service. Some actions that have already been achieved in 24/25 include:

- Changing waste supplier, meaning we now send zero waste to landfill
- The Victoria Art Gallery is now an "Active Member" of the Gallery Climate Coalition
- We hosted supplier sustainability drop-in sessions and engaged with 35 suppliers to better understand their environmental impacts
- Our catering partners, Searcys, have reduced food waste to 4% of total purchases
- In 24/25 all purchased grid electricity was 100% Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin (REGO) Certified. We are still conducting feasibility studies at suitable sites for on-site renewable energy generation to free up capacity and reduce our reliance on the National Grid.

As a service, we also started to map our climate-related risks based on the latest science and regional statistics on climate hazards in the BANES area. We identified 17 climate-related risks to the service, with most of them already being monitored and addressed through routine maintenance and conservation work. In 2025/26 we plan to publish our first action plan and start to deliver the decarbonisation projects included within it.



Financial & Business Review 2024/25

Financial Performance

	2024/25	+/-	2023/24		2024/25	2023/24
	£000	%	£000	Capital Expenditure	£000	£000
Admissions	21,127	6%	19,889	Energy capture scheme	39	(44)
Sales	2,746	1%	2,717	Heritage Services poster boxes	64	(85)
Room hire	628	-4%	656	VAG education & engagement space	(84)	(17)
Catering	397	-7%	427	Victoria Art Gallery BMS upgrade	(2)	(55)
Other income	1,110	16%	960	Roman Baths Shop refit	0	(54)
Total Income	26,008	6%	24,649	Fashion Museum	(59)	(236)
Employee costs	(6,885)		(6,243)	Total Capital Expenditure	(42)	(492)
Premises costs	(615)		(754)			
Transport costs	(36)		(41)			
Supplies & services	(1,546)		(1,367)			
Purchases for resale	(1,210)		(1,205)			
Voluntary sector	(10)		(8)			
Contracts	(778)		(734)	Roman Baths	992,538	-1%
Investment	(322)		(416)	Fashion Museum	0	0
Maintenance	(449)		(324)	Victoria Art Gallery	49,340	-18%
Total Variable Costs	(11,852)	-7%	(11,093)	Total	1,041,878	-2%
Rates	(1,004)		(963)			
Transfer to balances	0		(6)			
External insurers	(255)		(252)			
Corporate overheads	(536)		(534)			
Finance & debt charges	(713)		(689)			
Total Fixed Costs	(2,508)	-3%	(2,444)			
Total Surplus	11,648	5%	11,112			
Operating Margin	45%		45%			
Employee Costs %	26%		25%			

Financial Summary

Heritage Services returned their largest ever profit to the council in 2024/25 at £11.6 million.

Visitors to The Roman Baths were below budget by 10% for the year and by 1% against last year. Admissions income was 9% below budget but 6% up against 2023/24. The reduced visitor numbers drove a shortfall in retail sales, however the development of new product ranges limited this to 2% below budget and sales were up 1% compared to last year.

The lower than budgeted visitor numbers were influenced by challenges in the group market, who are visiting in smaller numbers, and the long-term closure of the A36 made the popular coach itinerary of Windsor, Stonehenge and Bath a challenge. The Pound strengthened against the Dollar and Euro, making it more expensive for international tourists to visit the UK and more affordable for UK residents to go abroad.

The service was successful in mitigating over 70% of the income shortfall.

The Victoria Art Gallery had a strong year: the *Wonderful World of the Ladybird Book Artists*, *Toulouse-Lautrec and the Masters of Montmartre* and *Bath Society of Artists* exhibitions all exceeded their budget and over the year exhibition visitors were up 42% on budget and 16% on last year.

Venue hire income for the year 2024/25 totalled £612k. Of this £333k was from hires at the Pump Room with £210k from the Guildhall. Parks generated £66.5k and £1.3k came from the Victoria Art Gallery. (The Upper Gallery was closed for almost the whole year due to repairs to the roof.)

2024/25 was a challenging year for events, particularly so at the Pump Room, due to a number of factors. The Pump Room was £62k down compared to the previous year and weddings showed a significant downturn. The Guildhall continued to perform well in all areas achieving growth of £18k+ against 2023/24.