

# **Darlington Borough Council**

## **Council Size Submission**

**December 2012**

## Contents

### **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION (Page 3)**

Welcome to Darlington

Darlington's Strategic Priorities

The Darlington Local Strategic Partnership

Darlington Together

### **PART TWO: GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING (Page 10)**

Executive Arrangements

Regulatory

Demands on time

### **PART THREE: SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS (Page 19)**

### **PART FOUR: REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE OF COUNCILLORS (Page 22)**

### **PART FIVE: THE FUTURE (Page 24)**

Localism and policy development

Service Delivery

Financial Situation

### **PART SIX: THE SUBMISSION (Page 31)**

Preparation of the Submission

Summary

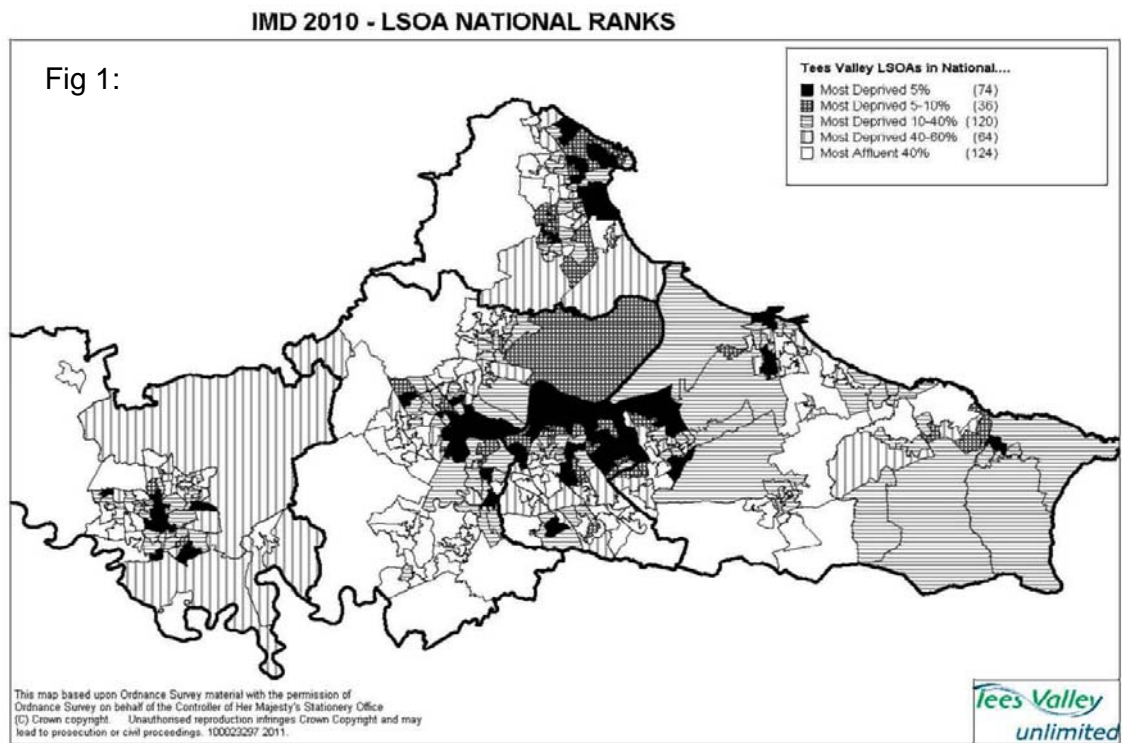
- (i) Governance Arrangements
- (ii) Scrutiny
- (iii) Representational Role
- (iv) The Future

Council Size Rationale

## PART ONE - INTRODUCTION:

### Welcome to Darlington

1. Darlington Borough comprises a traditional market town with several rural centres. Its rich industrial heritage includes the initiation of the first public passenger railway in the world. More recently service industries have become predominant. Darlington is one of five unitary authorities in the Tees Valley, North East England, prior to 1997 being administratively part of County Durham. It covers an area of 197 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 105,600 (ONS mid-2011 estimate) with 85% living in the compact urban core. The population has increased by nearly 7,700 (97,900, ONS mid-2001 estimate) since mid-2001. As at mid-2011 Darlington's population represents 15.9% of the Tees Valley total of 663,100 and 17.1% of the historic County of Durham population of 618,600.
2. The number of households has increased from 42,000 in 2001 to 46,700 in the 2011 Census, an increase of 4,700 or 11.1%. The average household size over this period has declined slightly from 2.33 to 2.26.



3. Darlington is ranked 75th out of 326 areas on the Indices of Deprivation 2010 (ID2010) where a lower number is more deprived. Darlington's relative deprivation has increased since ID2007 when Darlington was ranked 87th. The Indices of Deprivation uses the national statistical geography and there are 63

Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) covering Darlington. The Tees Valley LSOA distribution is shown in the map [Fig 1] above. Local authorities are delineated by the thickest line and Darlington is the farthest west. In ID2010 Darlington had 10 (16%) LSOAs in the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England, 18 (29%) in the most deprived 20% and 28 (44%) in the worst 30%. Thirty-nine (64%) LSOAs are below the median with 24 (36%) above.

4. The statistical geography does not give primacy to wards, although it is possible to calculate the Indices of Deprivation for wards. This has been done by Tees Valley Unlimited and is shown in the table below, ranked by ID2010, with the most deprived ward at the top. The ranking is out of 7,934 wards in England. It should be noted that small changes in rank are unlikely to be significant.

<b>ID2010 compared to ID2007 for wards in Darlington (7,934 wards in England)</b>					
<b>Ward</b>	<b>Direction 2007 to 2010</b>	<b>% change in ward rank 2007 to 2010</b>	<b>Change in ward rank 2007 to 2010</b>	<b>Overall ID2010 Rank</b>	<b>Overall ID2007 Rank</b>
Central	Worse	-1%	108	156	264
Northgate	Worse	-2%	188	328	516
Cockerton West	Worse	-2%	140	349	489
Bank Top	Worse	-2%	140	391	531
Lascelles	Worse	-2%	145	434	579
Park East	Worse	-2%	152	507	659
North Road	Worse	-5%	409	664	1073
Eastbourne	Better	1%	-109	862	753
Haughton East	Better	1%	-113	922	809
Lingfield	Worse	0%	9	1437	1446
Pierremont	Worse	-5%	390	2101	2491
Haughton West	Worse	-1%	97	2577	2674
Haughton North	Worse	-2%	123	3072	3195
Cockerton East	Worse	-4%	316	3326	3642
Harrowgate Hill	Worse	-1%	75	4158	4233
Sadberge and Whessoe	Worse	-2%	125	4244	4369
Hurworth	Worse	-6%	441	4637	5078
Middleton St George	Better	1%	-65	4757	4692
Faverdale	Better	5%	-413	6083	5670
Heighington and Coniscliffe	Better	5%	-399	6132	5733

ID2010 compared to ID2007 for wards in Darlington (7,934 wards in England)					
Ward	Direction 2007 to 2010	% change in ward rank 2007 to 2010	Change in ward rank 2007 to 2010	Overall ID2010 Rank	Overall ID2007 Rank
Park West	Better	3%	-242	6362	6120
College	Better	2%	-178	6497	6319
Mowden	Worse	-3%	240	7153	7393
Hummersknott	Better	1%	-57	7407	7350

5. Further statistical data, local authority and ward profiles are available on the local information system DarlingtonLIS (<http://lis.darlington.gov.uk/>).
6. As noted, Darlington is a relatively deprived area although less so than the rest of the Tees Valley. This deprivation brings with it a series of challenges such as a relatively high level of alcohol misuse, smoking, obesity, teenage conception and crime. Although compared to nationally, the area has a low level BME population of 4.4% in 2009 (ONS) however, there is a higher than average Gypsy/Roma/Traveller population.
7. Darlington has a number of key strategic facilities within its boundaries which provide services to surrounding rural areas or the Tees Valley. For example Darlington Memorial Hospital serves an area far larger than the Borough of Darlington, as a result the Council's registration service provides a greater number of birth registrations and death certifications than demanded by the population of the Borough. The area also has the regions Airport at Middleton St George but titled the Durham Tees Valley Airport. The mainline train station at Darlington provides a commuter service for a population from the surrounding rural areas and across the Tees Valley.

### Darlington's Strategic Priorities

8. The Council's priorities are driven by the community strategy, *One Darlington; Perfectly Placed*, agreed through the local strategic partnership after extensive consultation and consideration in 2008. The two priorities are:
  - (a) **One Darlington** which describes our approach to people and specifically to make sure that they are not disadvantaged by lack of income, where they live or any other circumstance that might constrain their potential to achieve good outcomes.
  - (b) **Perfectly Placed** which describes our approach to Darlington as a place, helping to shape our infrastructure, economy, neighbourhoods

and care for the environment.

9. These priorities are put into action by the Council through its corporate plan (2012-2015) which identifies desired outcomes for communities across the borough.

### **One Darlington**

- People are healthy and supported
- People are educated and skilled
- People are financially secure
- People live in cohesive communities

### **Perfectly Placed**

- People live in sustainable neighbourhoods
- People are safe and free from crime
- People are ambitious and entrepreneurial

10. In addition the corporate plan identifies four core functions for the Council to:
  - Champion the interests of citizens and businesses
  - Support strong partnerships to set a vision and direction for the Borough
  - Promote the Borough to secure investment and support
  - Ensure the provision of good quality services
11. The Community Strategy sets out the vision to 2021 and was recently revisited as a result of the significant changes following the election of the coalition government in 2010. The result of this review was to confirm the continuing relevance of the strategy, although the detailed action plans are evolving to reflect the changed circumstances.
12. Darlington retains its market town character, with a wide catchment area, and functions as a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping and culture in South Durham and the Tees Valley. Darlington however presents an area of contrasts. Many residents and visitors enjoy a high quality of life that is valued. The challenge is to retain and improve on this whilst addressing the very real inequalities in health, wealth and educational achievement that exist within the Borough and when compared with other areas of the country.
13. Over the next three years the Council will continue to focus our collective efforts on key actions which will make the biggest impact in support of delivering One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. For example, one agreed priority action is to create jobs in Darlington. We have identified key locations for regeneration and this will result in a supply of land being made available to support a wide range of employment opportunities and for our housing needs. There is a particular focus on supporting young people to remain in education, employment and

training in preparation for adult life.

14. There is clear strategic direction to prioritise delivering and supporting cohesive and sustainable communities, including those which meet the needs of disabled citizens. To deliver this we have agreed to improve the conditions for private sector housing tenants; Council will tackle anti-social behaviour and Council have identified a small number of families with multiple problems that we will collectively work with to improve the life chances for the family members, and particularly the children.
15. Darlington recognises that many of Council residents have been affected by the austerity measures and that there are further changes ahead. Council have prioritised giving high quality advice and guidance to support financial inclusion and we are collectively working to prevent crises and breakdowns which can lead to increased social difficulties for citizens. Council are also improving the way we target our resources to try to prevent families getting into difficulty.
16. Council will continue to prioritise tackling health inequalities and our commitment to narrow the gap in life expectancy between different communities. Council will continue to target work to reduce the harmful effects of drug and alcohol misuse. Council will work to reduce offending and re-offending and Council will provide effective support for all vulnerable groups. Within our community, Council have highlighted some needs specifically relating to looked-after children, Gypsy/Roma/Travellers and disabled people which Council will address.
17. In the final round of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) managed by the Audit Commission that rated all English local authorities, Darlington Borough Council was rated *Four Stars* with a direction of travel of *Improving Strongly*. This is the highest rating possible which confirmed the improvements in corporate management and services that had been made in the preceding years. As one of the smallest unitary councils Darlington has been said to consistently 'punch above its weight'.
18. Examples of notable achievements include:
  - (a) Beacon Council status awarded for a number of services.
  - (b) Darlington was the first council in the North East to receive Investors in People accreditation for the whole organisation.
  - (c) Receiving consistently high ratings throughout the life of the CPA for its corporate assessment and many services.
  - (d) Receiving consistently high ratings for the use of resources and value for money.
  - (e) Evidencing sound corporate governance through several inspections.
  - (f) Consistently improving educational attainment and achieving the best GCSE results in the country in 2011.
  - (g) Redeveloping the Town Centre with new landscaping through the Pedestrian Heart Scheme.



- (h) Achieving status as a local sustainable transport town by the Government through the competitive LocalMotion initiative.
- (i) Foundation for Jobs an initiative through the Strategic Partnership which has been successful in creating jobs and was recently awarded the LGC Award for ...

### **Darlington Partnership**

19. Darlington has a long and proud tradition of partnership working, which has been an effective model for securing improved outcomes for citizens and industry during periods of both economic growth and periods of slow down. The Darlington Partnership has successfully harnessed the commitment of all sectors to become champions for the whole community. The partnership is now facing its greatest challenge because the broader national and local economic climates have changed adversely and markedly.
20. The Darlington Partnership Board has been given the authority by agencies to 'own' on their behalf the process for delivering One Darlington; Perfectly Placed. It joins together the Partnership with the statutory/democratic accountabilities of the different partners. It brings together a vast knowledge and experience from all partners and a commitment to deliver the priorities for the borough through a defined partnership framework.
21. The partnership has specific objectives and last year had a specific objective to improve the vocational opportunities for young people with the creation of Darlington Foundation for Jobs. The project created 110 extra apprenticeships, 125 internships and a range of other outcomes. The project was successful in winning the Local Economic Partnership Award at the 2013 LGC awards. This year the partnership has set up a project designed to expand the network and remit of the current Neighbourhood Watch Scheme with a view to providing a good neighbour scheme. Enabling people to look out for their local neighbours and supplement the statutory services provided to the vulnerable within the community.
22. Council Members are actively involved in the Partnership at all levels including delivery. The Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Opposition, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Member for Health and Partnerships are all members of the Partnership Board. The Leader acts as Vice Chair. There is also involvement from ward Members in their roles as representatives of the voluntary and community sector. Members are actively involved in the Board's sub-groups as well, with the Lead Member for Children and Young People chairing the Children and Young People's Collective, the Cabinet Member for Health and Partnerships leading a Community workstream,

and active involvement in the Local Economy, Creative Darlington, Community Safety strands. All of Cabinet, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, were members of the Shadow Health and Well Being Board during its development. The new Board has four Members of Cabinet and is chaired by the Leader of the Council. Regular briefings for Members are held throughout the year, and Scrutiny Committees receive regular updates too. There are a number of statutory duties to co-operate for example in the area of the Children and Young People's Collective and a duty under the Academies legislation for new Academies in Darlington to be accountable to the Community. One of the ways in which they have chosen to do this is to appoint elected Councillors as Members of the Academy Boards.

## **PART TWO: Governance and Decision Making**

### **About the Council**

23. Darlington Borough Council has 53 Councillors representing 24 wards with three political groups. The Council has majority Labour control with 33 Labour members, 15 Conservative and five Liberal Democrats.
24. Most wards have two Councillors, but larger wards have three and smaller wards have one. The Council holds 'all out' elections once every four years. The last elections in Darlington were held in 2011 and the next election in 2015 will implement any changes arising from the Further Electoral Review.
25. The Leader of the majority party, the Labour party in Darlington, is the Leader of the Council. He is elected by the Members of the Council every four years, but there is a provision within the constitution to allow removal during the term of office by a vote of the majority of Council Members.

### Executive Arrangements:

26. Darlington has a Leader and Cabinet form of Executive arrangements. The Cabinet has eight members including the Leader. Each Cabinet Member has a portfolio for which they are responsible. The current Cabinet Portfolios are as follows:

The Leader

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources

Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Cabinet Member for Transport

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Housing

Cabinet Member for Health and Partnerships

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Local Environment

Full Details of the Cabinet Portfolios are attached at **Annex 1**

27. The majority of executive decisions are made in full Cabinet meetings held in public. This provides transparency and the opportunity for public attendance and questions at meetings of Cabinet.

### **Cabinet Meetings**

28. The Executive arrangements are within the gift of the Leader to change, however Darlington has always operated a system where the Cabinet meeting is the main decision making forum and is actively attended by other members of Council with the Leaders of opposition groups on the Council invited to sit at the table alongside Cabinet members to hold them to account as decisions are considered. The Chair of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group (the group for co-ordinating the Council's Scrutiny function) and also key partners like the Chair of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group are also invited to attend and sit alongside Cabinet members during decision making. Other members of Council also regularly attend Cabinet meetings and ask questions of Cabinet members as decisions are discussed.
29. Cabinet meetings are held monthly. Cabinet members also attend a range of other meetings.

### **Labour Group and Chief Officer Meetings**

30. These are meetings of the Labour Group of the Council at which briefing papers from officers are presented by Chief Officers at the request of the Labour Group. These meetings are chaired by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members will take the lead on reports presented within their portfolio. These meetings are held regularly through the cycle and usually about monthly.

### **Cabinet/COE Meetings**

31. These are joint meetings of the Council's Management Team and Cabinet which are used to discuss emerging issues and to prepare the annual budget and to develop high level Council policy and strategy. These meetings take place regularly and are scheduled monthly although additional meetings will be held during key periods such as during the budget preparation. There are also a number of development days throughout the year for Cabinet on its own or in conjunction with the Chief Officer's Executive.

## **Portfolio Meetings**

32. Portfolio holders meet regularly with senior officers who operate within their area of responsibility. These meetings are scheduled regularly and take place with varying regularity from weekly to monthly.

**Cabinet Members also sit on other Committees in the Council as follows:**

Planning Applications Committee	1
General Licensing Committee	1
Licensing Act 2003 Committee	1
Standards Committee	0
Human Resources Committee	5
Human Resources Chief Officers Appointments Panel	2
Human Resources Panel	3

**Individual Cabinet Member Delegations**

- 33. Cabinet Member with the Health and Partnerships Portfolio has delegated powers in relation to Community Grants and Discretionary Rate Relief.
- 34. The Leader also has powers to make decisions individually for example as part of the Tees Valley key economic partnership Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU).

**Appointments to Outside Bodies (Executive)**

**A key area of the role of portfolios is attendance at meetings outside the Council which are relevant to the portfolio area. Examples of these include:**

<b>Leader</b>	Darlington Partnership Board Durham Tees Valley Airport Vice Chair of Tees Valley Unlimited (Leadership Board) Association of North East Councils Local Government Association Leaders Group, East Coast Main Line Working Party
<b>Efficiency and Resources</b>	Durham County Pension Fund Committee North East Regional Employers Organisation North Eastern Purchasing Organisation Joint Committee Local Government Association

<b>Economy and Regeneration</b>	Business Improvement District (BID) Board Tees Valley Unlimited (Planning and Economic Strategy Board).
<b>Health and Partnerships</b>	Darlington Partnership Board North East Strategic Migration Partnership (NESMP)
<b>Leisure and Local Environment</b>	County Durham Waste Management Partnership Groundwork North East Tees Valley Environmental Protection Group Arts Council England North East
<b>Children and Young People</b>	North Council of Education Authorities Local Safeguarding Children's Board Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) Darlington Partnership Board Schools Forum
<b>Adult Social Care and Housing</b>	Northern Housing Consortium County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust Tees Valley Unlimited Housing Board Strategic Transport for Health Management Group
<b>Transport</b>	North East Highways Training Centre – Management Committee Shop mobility Steering Group Strategic Transport for Health Management Group Tees Valley Unlimited – Transport for Tees Valley

Regulatory:

35. All regulatory committees have 13 members with a quorum of 3. There is one central Planning Committee and two licensing committees one for general business and the other for Licensing Act 2003 responsibilities. There is a Licensing Sub-committee with 3 members.

**Licensing**

36. The Licensing Act 2003 legislation paragraph 6(1) specifies a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 15 members for the Licensing Committee (which is called the Licensing Act Committee in Darlington to differentiate from general licensing). The Licensing Act Committee also considers Gambling Act contested applications. The legislation is pretty specific on what can and cannot be delegated. In Darlington the majority of business is delegated to officers (i.e. non contested applications etc.) or to a sub-committee of 3 members where the application is contested.
37. The Licensing Act Committee sits on an ad hoc basis and sits immediately prior to the General Licensing Committee if there is something that the whole Committee needs to consider e.g. the annual report on the no. of licences granted. The sub Committees are also ad hoc and are arranged if an application is received for review of licence or a representation on an application. These functions cannot be delegated to Officers. This year we have had six Sub Committee hearings and four reports have gone to the full Committee. The Sub-Committee hearings are subject to statutory timescales.
38. The Licensing Act Committee membership replicates that of the General Licensing Committee (which deals with taxis etc.) except that for General Licensing the entire Committee sits. The General Licensing Committee sits every four weeks. It used to be every six weeks due to the large number of taxi drivers on each agenda and a decision was made to move to more regular meetings. If for any reason there is no business the meeting is cancelled.
39. Membership is fixed for the overarching committees. They do begin quorate but very often Members begin to drift away and the meetings sometimes struggle to remain quorate. This is particularly the case in the area of taxi licensing. For the Sub-Committees of 3 the meetings are always quorate however the democratic team do struggle to arrange the committees due to members other commitments in the first place to ensure that there will be three members present
40. Recent changes include the potential for elected members to become 'interested parties' involving more Councillor input on behalf of the local community. There is also a new role for the Director of Public Health now that local authorities have public health functions to comment on Licensing Applications.

## **Planning**

41. The Planning Applications Committee is a standing Committee of 13 members with a quorum of 3. Meetings take place every 4 weeks. There are also special Borough wide planning committees which tend to deal with single applications that are particularly complex or controversial. Work that Members do in relation to planning applications as part of their ward work is significant but is dealt with separately.

42. Generally attendance at the meeting is at a good level, typically with no more than 2-3 Members missing per meeting. With longer meetings some Members do tend to leave for other engagements but this rarely leads to the meeting becoming inquorate.
43. Since introducing the revised scheme of delegation a few years ago the Committee workload has been reduced allowing Members to focus on the more controversial applications.
44. Based on the number of planning applications decided April 2010 to March 2012 the level of delegation is significant:-
  - (a) Delegated decisions - 92%
  - (b) Committee decisions - 8%
45. The Council does not believe that there are any changes proposed to national policy or legislation which will have a significant impact on Committee workload.

#### Other Committees

The Council also has the following Committees and Panels:

#### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

This is a new statutory Committee was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to encourage Health and Social Care Services to work in an integrated manner to improve the population's health and wellbeing. . The Committee has five elected Members and 17 other Members. The Board enables the local authority to work closely with the new Clinical Commissioning Group are required to develop a comprehensive Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, a robust Joint Health and Well Being Strategy and to consider joint commissioning arrangements. Darlington has a large and active Health and Wellbeing Board with a programme of work for the months ahead.

#### **Standards Committee**

The Council has retained a full Standards Committee with 5 Council Members and two independent Members. The Committee is chaired by an independent Member. The Committee has responsibility for preparing the Code of Conduct, hearing complaints against Member for alleged breaches of the Code and also a range of other functions including oversight of attendance at Member training and development. The Council has also developed a set of Ethical Health Indicators which are a raft of performance measures which the Committee has responsibility for considering to identify the ethical health of the organisation as a whole.

#### **Audit Committee**

The Audit Committee has three elected Members and one other Member. It has responsibility for considering the annual report of the Head of Corporate Assurance,



considering individual audit reports. The annual audit letter of the external auditors and to consider a range of corporate governance issues including whistleblowing.

Human Resources Committee (including the Appointments Panel, Joint Consultative Committee and the Appeals Committee)

The main committee has fourteen elected members including four Cabinet members and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Resources Scrutiny Committee. It deals with Member appointments (staff at deputy Chief Officer level or above) and deals with staff dismissal and grievance appeals. Sitting as the JCC it has responsibility for liaison with the trade unions.

## **Rights of Way Panel**

The panel makes decisions in relation the modifications of the definitive map of rights of way. There are three elected members.

## **School Governors Appointments Committee**

The Committee has responsibility for the appointment and dismissal of school governors. There are five elected members.

New arrangements have created new roles for Members in relation to schools. In particular the change to acadmisation has mean that Members are often represented on academy board. There is also an additional role in relation to the School forum and the partnership arrangements under the banner of Schools at One Darlington.

## **Members Allowances**

46. Each member of the Council receives an allowance of £8,027.00 at a cost of £425,431 to the Council's budgets. In addition Special Responsibility Allowances amount to a further £294,301. A reduction in Members may necessitate further consideration by the Independent remuneration panel of the special responsibility allowances as there is a view that the number of members in receipt of special responsibility allowances should not exceed 50% of the total number of members.
47. Savings achieved directly by a reduction of Members without other changes such as a reduction in committee membership or changes to governance arrangements are therefore a small amount of administrative costs at the outset of the Members term and the basic allowance. The basic allowance is inclusive of Members' IT costs, which means that Members are responsible for meeting the costs of their own IT. They are also unable to claim any additional travel and subsistence within the Borough.

## Demands on time:

### **Role Description**

48. There is a formal job description for all Councillors which was agreed for the purposes of the Members Allowances Scheme. This does not form part of the Council's constitution but sets out the expectations of the role. The job descriptions are set out in the **Annex 2**. The Members PDRs are conducted in relation to the specific Job Descriptions that they have.

### **Specialist Roles**

49. In addition to the basic Councillor role there are a number of additional specific roles such as Chairs of Scrutiny Committees which carries with it a number of responsibilities for liaison with relevant bodies and specific activities as well as

liaison with the relevant Cabinet member. Chair of business Committees such as Planning, Licensing, Audit Committee. The most onerous of the roles is that of Mayor which is an annual appointment and involves a great many civic events including openings, award ceremonies, citizenship ceremonies, school visits and a great deal more. Last year the Mayor attended just under 300 engagements as Mayor during her year of office.

50. Members also carry out specialist roles on external bodies. For example this year the Leader of the Council is the Chair of Tees Valley Chief Leaders and Mayors group. The Lead Member for Children and Young People is chair of the Children's Collective. She is also the Regional Representative on The Council of Europe in both the Regional and Local Chamber. There is also involvement in the Association of North East Council's task and finish groups, and membership of bodies like North East Regional Employer's Organisation which deals with Human Resource Management Practice and Employee Relations and North Eastern Purchasing Organisation which deals with contracts and procurement across the North East.

## **Training**

51. There is a comprehensive training programme for Members. All members complete a Personal Development Record this is used to help develop the programme. There is also a training and development strategy. The programme includes mandatory induction training for new members which covers the basic knowledge of council services required to enable them to conduct a ward surgery, as well as Council rules, technical skills such as ICT, knowledge of local government finance and understanding of the council, how it operates and the interaction with the customer.
52. There are mandatory training courses for all Members which must be repeated periodically these include the Code of Conduct, Corporate Parenting, Planning and Licensing, Safeguarding Adults and Public Health.
53. There is then a range of training offered and members are assisted in identifying whether it is necessary to attend through PDRs. These include development of a skills such as Questioning and Listening Skills; Debating Skills; Challenging Skills and Research Skills.
54. Practical knowledge such as ICT Training; Use of Intranet; Microsoft Packages; including Publisher; How to develop individual Ward pages; Report Writing; Time Management; Recruiting and Interviewing Skills; Chaining Skills; Presentation Skills; Counselling Skills for Councillors; Speed Reading and Personal Safety.
55. Training on procedure rules; the constitution; finance and budgets; data protection and equalities form part of the programme to help Members to

develop understanding of the legal framework in which we operate.

56. There is service specific training which Members can choose to attend in relation to their respective scrutiny committees or portfolios. There is also training on the Local Strategic Partnership and the role of our strategic partners.
57. Finally there is training on emerging areas and new legislation including issues like Climate Change; Emergency Planning; Localism; Planning Developments; Website and the use of Social Media and asset Management. There is also specific training on the programme of Transformation work that the Council is currently engaged in.
58. Members also receive training for the roles they carry out outside the Council in their Community Development role. This includes a mix of knowledge and skills training and includes Understanding Community Engagement; How to build communities; How to overcome apathy; Support to make Grant Applications; Bringing Funding into the Ward/Legality of Fund Raising/How to go about Fund Raising; Third Sector and Charities Law and Rules; Model Rules and Procedures - accessible and easy to establish; Negotiation Skills; Motivational Skills; Communication Skills; Public Speaking Skills; Project Management Skills; Empowering Skills and Persuasiveness Skills

### **Expectation Demands**

59. A number of new Members were asked whether their expectations about the amount of work that would be involved in being a Councillor was accurate. Some Councillors, who have friends or family who are Councillors, found that they expected the level of work involved. However others who had less experience of what it might be like to be a Councillor found it more demanding than expected. Here is an example of a response we received.

'As one of the new Labour councillors, I have been surprised at the level and range of work. It is more than I had anticipated'.

60. I think there are several reasons for this:-
  - (a) While we hold regular surgeries, most ward work tends to come from individual approaches by telephone or email.
  - (b) With Central Ward being one of the town's poorest wards, there are greater issues around crime, anti-social behaviour and deprivation
  - (c) As well as our ward residents, we have a vast number of people working in the town centre who also expect us to represent their interests
  - (d) With the cutback in council officer numbers, councillors are now trying to contribute much more to policy-making through task and finish groups,

which has escalated the number of meetings which we need to attend.

- (e) With the increased workload on council officers, we quite often have to chase up queries and concerns which we have raised because they are not being dealt with always in the intended timescale.
- (f) And finally, Central Ward is not a coherent single community - it's a set of geographically diverse smaller communities stretched across a large area - Albert Hill, the Devonshire Drive area, the Larchfield Street area, the Stanhope Road community etc.'

### **Time Spent on Council Business**

- 61. A summary of the results of the survey together with all the survey answers are attached at **Annex 3**.

### **Outside Bodies**

- 62. The Council appoints members to a number of outside bodies. Members also sit on outside bodies as part of either their community role or specific areas of responsibility e.g. portfolio. The details of the bodies that members are formally appointed to by the Council or the Executive are set out in the list attached at **Annex 4**. Details of the amount of time spent by members sitting on outside bodies formed part of the questions in the Member survey and is detailed in the summary and information in relation to the survey at **Annex 3**.

### **Recruiting Members**

- 63. All wards are contested with each election and there have been no occasions when there are insufficient Members for a seat to be allocated. Elections are held in relation to seats for the Council and there are no occasions when seats have not been contested. The survey asked Members about their experience of recruiting candidates for election and further information is therefore available in the survey results at **Annex 3**.

### **Member Capacity**

- 64. There have been no specific instances where the Council was unable to carry out any particular role because there were insufficient members to attend other than as detailed in specific areas of committee attendance. There are at times difficulty in ensuring that Members are available but meetings are arranged to ensure that there can be Member attendance there has been some difficulty in finding a time when meetings remain quorate due to the other commitments of Members. Council meetings are generally well attended. It has not been possible to appoint to all the outside bodies which the Council has identified as suitable for Member appointment due to lack of available members able to attend these bodies.

### **Ward Budgets**

65. There are no individual ward budgets for any area. There are no discretionary budgets for Members.

## **PART THREE: SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS**

### **Scrutiny Functions**

#### **Overview**

66. A review of scrutiny was undertaken in September 2011 to enhance the effectiveness of scrutiny in Darlington. The scrutiny committees were aligned with the key themes of the Community Strategy and also with the other elements of a structural review already completed within the Council (Cabinet Portfolios and the management structure).
67. The aim of the review was to reduce the number of Cabinet Members and Officers attending Scrutiny meetings and enhance communication between Cabinet, Directors and Assistant Directors.
68. Scrutiny in Darlington comprises a Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and five Scrutiny Committees. Schedule 3 of Part 2 of the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny Procedure Rules (see **Annex 5**) details the role of Scrutiny in Darlington.

#### **Committees and Memberships**

69. The current Scrutiny structure comprises:-
  - (a) Scrutiny Monitoring and Co-ordination Group
  - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
  - (c) Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee
  - (d) Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee
  - (e) Place Scrutiny Committee
  - (f) Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
70. The five Chairs of Scrutiny make up the membership of the Monitoring and Co-ordinating Group and there are 11 Members serving on each of the five scrutiny committees (7 Labour; 3 Conservative; and 1 Liberal Democrat). Each Scrutiny Committee also has a designated lead support (2<sup>nd</sup> tier), generally from the relevant service area, this is very much a facilitating role.
71. Darlington also currently holds the Chair and Secretariat for the Tees Valley Health Joint Scrutiny (comprising three Members from each of the five Tees Valley authorities) and the Joint Committee meets on a monthly basis.

#### **Workload**

72. Darlington does not have a dedicated team of Scrutiny support for its Members. Scrutiny Members are supported by Democratic staff (to provide sufficient administrative support and information required) but Scrutiny in Darlington has been very much, since its inception in 2000, been seen to be 'Member led'.

73. The Council's Scrutiny Committees have always enjoyed wide powers to scrutinise all aspects of the Council business and have made significant contributions to key policy changes the Council has undertaken.
74. In terms of workload, Darlington has been careful to ensure that the workload of Scrutiny is manageable. The review last year highlighted how Members could be better engaged in the challenges facing the Council and be supported to work with their residents and local communities and be supported within the diminishing resources.
75. The Chairs of Scrutiny now, through Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, monitor work programmes to ensure that the workload and impact of Scrutiny is monitored. Monitoring and Co-ordination Group ensure work programmes are aligned to maximise the effectiveness of Scrutiny and ensure the greatest impact on the ambitious change programme the Council faces.
76. In deciding what Scrutiny Reviews are to be undertaken, Members take the following into account:-
- (a) Will the outcome make a difference?
  - (b) Discussions with senior management on reviews that can be undertaken to assist with the workload of the Service Group; and
  - (c) Local views and priorities (what the community would want scrutiny to get involved in to improve service delivery).
77. Darlington's Democratic Services participate in CIPFA's annual Benchmarking and the feedback on workloads e.g. allocation of FTE time and scrutiny effort by activity, number of requests for scrutiny, scrutiny reviews, call-ins, are detailed at **Annex 6**. This shows in particular that Darlington Scrutiny Members engage in the work between meetings then their counterparts in other Authorities.
78. Concerns were expressed by Members about the significant workload of the former Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee. Unlike other Council Scrutiny Committees it was expected to respond to agenda's set by external Health Organisations. The proposed changes to the NHS together with the on-going re-shaping of hospital services, presented a major challenge to that Scrutiny Committee and its workload was streamlined at the 2011 Review.

### **Scrutiny Work Programme**

79. The workload of Scrutiny is strictly timetabled. Each Committee has a work programme as an agenda item at its ordinary committee meetings and the procedure for Members to place an item on Scrutiny is attached at **Annex 7**.
80. The Chairs give an update at each full Council meeting on the work undertaken in the previous Committee cycle.



## **Scrutiny Activities between Formal Meetings**

81. Members undertake a number of activities between formal meetings, mainly in the form of Task and Finish Groups. Attached at **Annex 7** is a schedule of activities undertaken between meetings of Committee over the last 12 months; the Members involved in those activities and the time involved.

## **PART FOUR: Representational Role of Councillors**

### **Working in the Community**

82. Members undertake work in different ways within the community. Some Members have very active roles either as Members of residents associations, stimulating community projects or serving on formal bodies such as parish councils.
83. To provide a flavour of the way that members work within their ward three members, one from each political party, representing very different types of ward have provided more detailed accounts of the way they work in their communities (**Annex 8**)
- (a) Councillor Doris Jones, Conservative Member for Middleton St George
  - (b) Councillor Alan McNab, Liberal Democrat Member for North Road.
  - (c) Councillor Chris McEwan, Labour Member for Haughton East.

### **Councillor Communication with the Community**

84. Nearly all members produce a regular newsletter and a number of members use email networks, have blogs or use social media as well.
85. A list of the current social media and blog sites used by Members is available at **Annex 9**
86. An example of a sample of Member newsletters recently produced is available at **Annex 10**.

### **Minority Groups**

87. Some members engage specifically with minority groups as part of their portfolios or scrutiny responsibilities. Others engage with a range of groups within their ward. The use of electronic media and particularly social media helps to engage with younger people and a number of members have very active twitter accounts reporting from eg Council meetings, or about activities as they are out and about.

### **Parishes**

88. There are currently 12 parish councils in the Borough of Darlington and 14 parish meetings. The following link provides details of the membership. There are currently four Councillors who are also parish councillors. However many Councillors in relevant wards attend parish councils as non-members and as Borough Councillors.
- <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Democracy/electedrepresentatives/parish.htm>

## Support

89. The Councillors newsletters are printed by the Council and all newsletters are checked by senior officers, finance officers, lawyers etc. before sending out. The communications unit prepares some material when the Council wants specifically to share information about issues with residents outside the Council magazine 'Darlington Together'.
90. The Council's web team monitors Councillor sites and helps to provide advice and support to members wishing to use social media. The Leader's twitter account is also used to promote activities and events on behalf of the Council as a whole with a more personal feel. This is done through the Council's events and web team.
91. The Council's Complaints and Information Governance team runs a system called Respond which logs all Councillor requests from officers and monitors response times. A report is then provided to show the nature of these enquiries. The system does not record all requests because some are dealt with immediately or through other channels such as committee meetings or casual conversations. The most recent Respond report on Councillor requests to officers is available at **Annex 11**.
92. Darlington does not have any political advisors or support officers paid for by the Council as many authorities do. Therefore all research in relation to group proposals is conducted by Members themselves.

## The Changing Role of Councillors

93. There is some evidence that Councillors have already begun to play a more active role in partnership working, stimulating community activity and providing community leadership since the last review of Council size in 2001. The Council itself has changed significantly during that period with the shrinking of the senior management resource from 22 senior managers in 2009 to 14 in 2011. This reduced level of support to members does have an impact on the amount of support they are able to receive and the amount of their own enquiries, research and problem solving. On the whole however the governance arrangements for Members have not changed since the last review. A review of Council workloads was conducted for the Member Allowances IRP and the details of those reports are set out at **Annex 12**.

## **PART FIVE: THE FUTURE**

### **Commission on the Future of Local Government**

94. Reflecting on the findings of the research carried out by the Commission on the Future of Local Government it is possible to make some broad statements about the future of Local Government and roles of local councillors.
- (a) Local government faces unprecedented financial cuts deeper than any other sectors. There are in addition reductions in income and difficulties in recovery there is a period of low economic growth; unprecedented environmental challenges to reduce carbon and waste; social polarisation between local communities; significant re-organisation in areas like education and health; and rising demand for services. All these factors combine to place significant strain on the capacity of local councils to deliver. Darlington is a small unitary Council with a population of just over 100,000 which increases the impact of cuts. The Borough also has the second lowest Council Tax in the North East making our base small and capping restrictions provide little scope for increases. The changes to Business Rates and new homes bonus are detrimental to those areas of the Country where there is limited scope for business growth and house building within the current climate. The changes to welfare reforms are likely to have a significant effect on the resources available to Councils and the demands placed on services. The North East is likely to see a greater impact than other areas of the country as a result of welfare reforms.
  - (b) Local councillors work to champion the views of people and communities and provide local democratic leadership, in a way that is often not recognised. Councils like Darlington supported by local councillors work hard to stimulate good local economic growth and engage with local communities encouraging them to reduce the demand on services and to step into the breach left by the withdrawal of publicly provided services. Councils, and councillors, will need new approaches to do this successfully, such as utilising less formal social networks, participatory democracy, better engagement with young people and a broader influencing role, rather than the more formal traditional structures we associate with the public sector.
  - (c) There are crucial roles for councillors not only in being civic entrepreneurs but also in providing visible civic leadership to enable and support the work of others. Councillors work hard to foster strong relationships through the Darlington Partnership and within local communities, with Parishes and Community Associations to identify individuals from all walks of life, and organisations from all sectors who want to play a role and to inspire others to do the same and more.

(d) There is a need for Local ward councillors to reclaim their leadership role as the accepted and mandated voice of citizens. They need recognition and support, to help them enhance their role as key influencers and door-openers to other community leaders who can make things happen. Businesses create wealth, not the state and local government can create the conditions for enterprise to thrive by engaging the private sector and universities to develop their distinctive economic assets. In a decade of low growth, where the old models of funding economic and housing development have gone, councils can become a vital part of micro-economic policy, especially to create and support good growth with socially responsible approaches to employment and economic wellbeing. Polls suggest that the public know that they need to do more, with many willing to do so, but equally they cannot do so without well-functioning public services. The challenge is to change the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state, rebuild trust and ensure good local integration between health, social care and other services.

95. Building on City Deals, powers could be given to councils or collections of councils (such as Combined Authorities) that reflect the way local economies and markets work. In a decade of low growth and austerity, attempts to rebalance the economy geographically will only succeed if local areas can take more control over their own destiny. This requires new and vibrant public-private ventures that enable councils to become more enterprising and businesses to become more civic. These type of arrangements rely on the strength of the relationships between elected members, and other community leaders, across the region and in Darlington itself.
96. Councils like Darlington are supported by local councillors who aim to stimulate good local economic growth by working with local businesses and engage with local communities encouraging them to reduce the demand on services and to step into the breach left by the withdrawal of publicly provided services. Councils, and councillors, will need new approaches to do this successfully, such as utilising less formal social networks, participatory democracy, better engagement with young people and a broader influencing role, rather than the more formal traditional structures we associate with the public sector. Formal governance arrangements are therefore not the only determinants of Council size but the arrangements and partnerships in place as well as the informal relationships which exist within local communities between Councillors and their constituents are just as important in the new delivery model.
97. There are crucial roles for councillors not only in being civic entrepreneurs but also in providing visible civic leadership to enable and support the work of others. Councillors work hard to foster strong relationships through the Darlington Partnership and within local communities, with Parishes and Community Associations to identify individuals from all walks of life, and organisations from all sectors who want to play a role and to inspire others to do the same and more. There is a wealth of evidence about the strong role that members play in their communities and the work that goes on beyond the Town

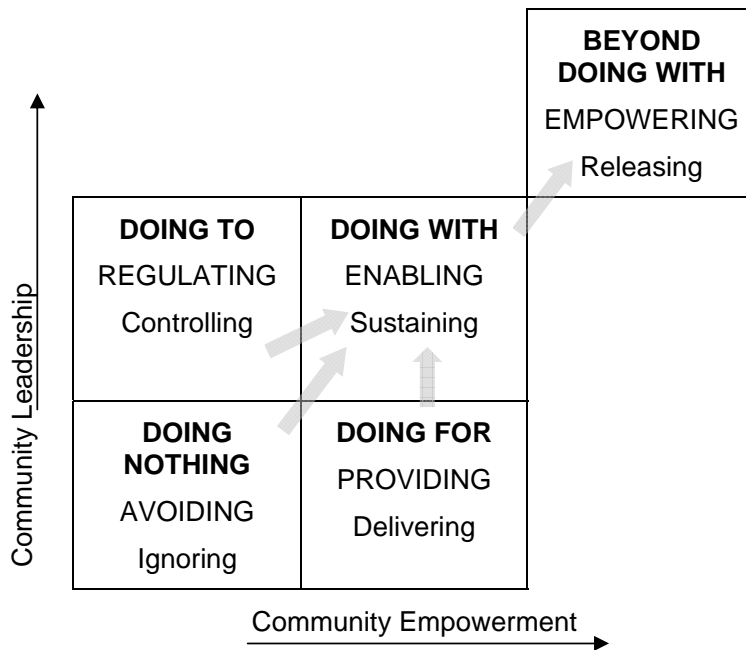
Hall. Darlington has a strong track record of partnership and close working relationships with key businesses and the economic sector. Councillors will play a vital role in building these relationships as well as stimulating communities.

98. There is a need for Local ward councillors to reclaim their leadership role as the accepted and mandated voice of citizens. They need recognition and support, to help them enhance their role as key influencers and door-openers to other community leaders who can make things happen. This view is supported by the research carried out by the Commission on the Future of Local Government.

### **Darlington Together**

99. The Council began to outline its response to the challenges and changed working through the Darlington Together initiative set out in a report to Cabinet in September 2011.
100. Darlington Together is an essential part of the Council's response to the need to show leadership and create the right conditions for people to take collective responsibility for their futures in a climate of declining public resources.
101. There are a number of reasons for the proposed approach:
  - (a) the high expectations of consumers used to a digitally-enabled 24 hour society;
  - (b) the inability of local authorities to sustain previous patterns of service delivery with fewer resources;
  - (c) the recognition that Darlington residents can be a key resource in ensuring that the commitment to One Darlington is fulfilled;
  - (d) the local authority has a proven track record and is well-placed again to provide clear leadership during a period of change;
  - (e) resilient communities are more likely to withstand external shocks (economic or otherwise).
102. A number of the policy provisions within the Localism Act are also important in setting the context for *Darlington Together*. These include:
  - (a) provisions relating to community empowerment, including the Community Right to Challenge local authorities on service delivery, the Right to Buy public or private assets of community value, and the power to instigate local referendums;
  - (b) strengthening of local democracy, including a general power of competence for local authorities to act on behalf of their communities, democratic provisions enabling a return to the committee system and a commitment to the creation of more directly elected mayors, and the freeing-up of councillors to campaign and express views on local issues;

- (c) reform of the planning system, including a right for communities to develop neighbourhood plans and permit development without the need for planning applications, and the Community Right to Build locally-supported development without planning applications.
103. *Darlington Together* is the Council's approach to meeting our shared local challenges.
104. The overall purpose of *Darlington Together* is to create a sustainable platform for community resilience in Darlington. The approach will:
- (a) put active citizenship at its core.
  - (b) progress through empowerment and collaboration, whilst the Council continues to fulfil its leadership role in mediating competing demands, prioritising and making decisions.
  - (c) create value through citizens and partners working together and co-production.
  - (d) mobilise the hidden wealth of social resources.
  - (e) engage with ideas of fairness and efficiency, and pursue the One Darlington principle of social inclusion and justice.
105. *Darlington Together* is about a repositioning of the Council from delivering top-down services, to a recognition that communities, with the Council and other partners working collaboratively, can develop services and solutions in response to local needs, which can also lead to additional capacity.
106. The Council is responsible for promoting and guiding change but the model set out requires collaborative working across all sectors. Therefore Darlington Partnership will also be an important player in realising this shift.
107. A helpful way of thinking about this cultural shift is illustrated below. The figure consists of four domains that, collectively, describe the way a traditional public service works. The proposed approach, *Darlington Together*, adds a 5<sup>th</sup> way of working – empowering.



108. Much of the traditional delivery of public services falls into the ‘doing for’ domain. The ‘doing for’ mode of delivery traditionally sees citizens in a more passive role and one which encourages a culture where citizens expect their local authority to play a significant role in meeting their needs. This way of working can be expensive, may be relatively unresponsive to changing needs and does not necessarily empower citizens. It is also no longer sustainable.
109. ‘Doing with’ is more about collaboration and encourages citizens and communities to become more involved. It places people at the heart of service design and delivery and can bring the innovation, efficiency and sharing of responsibility and risk that comes with the most effective collaborations. It involves a culture change that will help to strengthen Darlington’s resilience. ‘Beyond doing with’ is about both strong community leadership, engagement and empowerment.
110. This change requires stronger rather than looser leadership and decision making from the Council. *Darlington Together* will see the Council acting as both strong leader in decision making and as an enabler of community action to build resilience, increase self-sufficiency and, consequentially, reduce demands on services.
111. The relevance of the ‘Beyond Doing With’ dimension is because the Council in the future will usually be involved with new community initiatives on a time-limited basis. ‘Doing with’ must generate the self-sufficiency that leads projects



and services into an independent and sustainable state - called 'beyond doing with'.

112. The *Darlington Together* approach has implications for the way officers and Members work in future. The required cultural changes affect everybody, and is not the preserve of a particular team or portfolio holder.
113. The role of Ward Members within their communities has always been vital to the work of the Council and is critical to the success of *Darlington Together*. Members already act as champions for their wards and this can be delivered through channelling issues back to officers and by working with constituents to identify needs and issues and then to develop solutions and deliver outcomes. The proposal in *Darlington Together* would be in embedding the second role and in providing resources and a model to help Members in the enhanced leadership role.

### **Financial Situation**

114. Darlington is a small unitary which faces significant financial challenge. It currently has the second lowest Council Tax in the North East. Like other authorities in the region it faces limits on the scope for income generation; achieving additional New Homes Bonus, and Business Rates. It faces significant funding cuts from specific grant funding, as it has been very successful historically in attracting grants. Since the Governments Emergency Budget in 2010 the Council put in place plans to save £24m. The Council's budget for 2012-13 was £80.5 M. Latest forecasts suggest that the Council will have to save a further £19M before 2016.
115. Over the coming months therefore the Council intends to set on its most significant engagement and consultation exercise to date. Members of all parties will be helping the public to express their views about what is important to them. This will begin with a series of panels examining each of the Council's service area budgets in open forum with the opportunity for the public to get involved, as well as online education and consultation tools, social media and other electronic techniques designed to give the widest scope to public engagement.

### **New Challenges**

116. The Council acquired a range of new services on 1 April 2013. These include:-
  - (a) Responsibility for Public Health which will form part of the Health and Wellbeing executive portfolio and will sit with the Health Scrutiny Committee.
  - (b) The creation of the Health and Wellbeing Board a new statutory Council Committee with broad membership from the Clinical Commissioning Group, and a range of other bodies in the public and private sector.

- (c) The Social Fund with responsibility for decision making and distribution of a range of emergency payments previously administered by the DWP.
- (d) The Welfare Reforms create new responsibilities for collecting Council Tax from people who have previously been exempt, and implementing for example 'the bedroom tax'. The challenge of the Welfare Reforms will create additional work for members in supporting constituents affected by these changes.
- (e) In addition new responsibilities in relation to Police and Crime are developing as a result of the creation of the Police and Crime Commissioners and the Police and Crime Panels. Members of the Council sit on the newly created Panel working with colleagues in Durham County Council to scrutinise the work of the new Police and Crime Commissioners.

## **PART SIX: SUMMARY SUBMISSION**

### Preparation of the Submission:

117. The Council's submission has been developed by a cross-party Member Working Group which has been informed by evidence about current activity levels, contributions from all Members through a Member survey and detailed diaries from some members, informal feedback via briefings, email and face to face contact. The Council size proposal was also endorsed through a Full Council meeting on 2 May 2013.
118. The Member Working Group provided for a robust consultation process to ensure the views from across political groups and individual Councillors were sought and taken into consideration within this submission. A timetable showing the involvement of Members in the preparation of the submission is set out in **Annex 13**.
119. The Council welcomed the opportunity to consider its size and the following provides an account of members deliberations on Council size.

### Summary:

120. The existing arrangements were explored to consider the current demands on Member time. A Member survey was conducted and an analysis of the Council's governance. Although there are a number of points arising from this analysis overall the evidence does not suggest that Darlington is significantly different to other local authorities. Some findings are that Darlington has a higher number of employed councillors, that some Members have a significant role outside formal governance arrangements working in their local communities. It also suggests that Darlington spends more time on task and finish groups than other councils.
121. The Members also considered the future for Darlington. This included the likely population changes, the financial constraints and new ways of working. In particular Members considered that Local Government was changing very significantly and existing arrangements are not a significant factor in determining Council size. One option given the financial constraints was to radically reduce the number of Members but analysis suggested that this would not make significant savings in the context of the scale of the cuts required, but would have a detrimental impact on capacity. In particular it was identified that the Councillor of the future would have a vital role in stimulating community initiatives and activity to help new delivery models to fill the void left by the withdrawal of public services in areas like, culture and the arts, leisure and sport, community safety, supporting the vulnerable in the community and care for the local place and environment. There was also a significant role in working with local businesses to support the economy, encourage investment and create jobs. Taking these things into consideration the Members felt that it did not make sense to reduce the Membership significantly but rather to make a

small reduction and create a new set of expectations for the role of Members. A detailed analysis of Member numbers took place and concluded that it was not appropriate to reduce the number of Members to 50. The reasoning is set out below.

## **Governance Arrangements**

### **Cabinet**

122. The Council's governance arrangements are typical of arrangements at many other Councils and have no outstanding features. Cabinet is one short of the maximum size and workloads of Cabinet members are in excess of 20 hours per month on portfolios. A significant number of Cabinet members are employed. Cabinet members attend a number of meetings in addition to formal Cabinet meetings and also spend time sitting on a number of outside bodies as part of their portfolio responsibilities.

### **Scrutiny**

123. Darlington has five Scrutiny Committees and a Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee. This is not dissimilar to other unitary authorities although it is more than many. The Council has a well-developed Scrutiny function which is not resourced by dedicated officer support. Benchmarking shows that compared with other authorities Darlington has a higher proportion of work on Task and Finish Groups or work between Scrutiny meetings.

### **Other Committees**

124. Regulatory committees have reasonable levels of delegation 92% of planning decisions are delegated and the majority (non-contested) licensing applications are delegated. Evidence suggests that although committees are quorate, there has been a difficulty with Members leaving early in longer meetings to attend other commitments and there has been difficulty in arranging Licensing sub-committee meetings to ensure they are quorate. There are no area committees or area based forums.

### **Other Matters**

125. There are no area budgets. Members receive extensive training in Darlington some of which is mandatory and Members also sit on a range of outside bodies. The Council has not been prevented from carrying out any of its functions due to lack of Members but there are vacancies on some of the outside bodies due to lack of interest from Members. Use of Social Media, Member blogs is beginning to grow. The production of newsletters is widespread amongst Members. Overall 40% of Members have outside employment. There has been no significant difficulty recruiting candidates to stand for election.

## **Representational Role**

126. The representational role of Councillors within their wards is considered to be a significant role in Darlington. Generally all members engage in producing newsletters, holding surgeries and dealing with specific queries from constituents through reference to staff. The Council's respond system records the queries generated by Members. In addition many Members become involved in specific projects within their wards, and lead and drive forward community initiatives specifically those relating to funding bids for improving community assets. This is not however universal and is dependent on the particular member. Members in parished areas generally do attend parish meetings and some are Parish Councillors. Members attend a range of bodies within their wards in addition to their roles on Council appointed bodies.

## **Saving Money**

127. The average electorate per member in Darlington compared to other authorities is not identified as a relevant criterion in reaching a decision about Darlington's Council size. However it is acknowledged that Darlington is currently out of step with its neighbours. Recent reviews have tended towards a reduction in Members and the need to save money has been quoted as a rationale for reducing Council size. An analysis of savings which will be achieved by reducing the number of elected members shows that this produces a reduction in the number of basic allowances payable but this is minimal without a corresponding reduction in the number and size of special responsibility allowances. The cost of administration is not reduced as a result of a reduction in members unless there is a corresponding reduction in committee size and membership. In relation to financial savings there are limited savings as a direct result of reductions in members allowances or administration. Savings can be achieved by making different governance arrangements without the need for an overall reduction in Council size. Savings are therefore not a significant factor in determining Council size.

## **Localism**

128. However there is a strong rationale for Darlington as well as other Councils to look at the Council size and the members as a potential source of voluntary support which is cost effective and builds capacity. This is entirely in keeping with the proposed direction of travel nationally towards greater community involvement and local government shifting its position from providers to community leaders.
129. The role of Ward Members within their communities has always been vital to the work of the Council in helping to provide solutions for individual constituents. Members already act as champions for their wards and this has been delivered through channelling issues back to the Council. In the future it is envisaged that Members would work with constituents to identify needs and

issues and then to develop solutions locally and deliver outcomes themselves to meet the needs of their communities. The proposal in Darlington Together would be to help Members to develop networks and acquire the skills to carry out this enhanced leadership role. This more than an aspiration for members and it is a stated and approved philosophy of the Council which predates the Further Electoral Review. It is this role that has been the focus of Members consideration at the working group and beyond about the appropriate size and shape of our future Council. There is cross party support for this approach and the need to maintain the number of members to carry out this changing role. Members have signed up to a statement of expectations in relation to the future role of Members.

### **Increasing Members**

130. The population within Darlington has increased this is not a significant increase sufficient to warrant an increase in members. The financial climate is not a direct criterion but is relevant to how the Council will be required to operate in the future. Darlington has one of the lowest electorate to Member ratios within the North East. This is relevant to the extent to which there will be public acceptance of the need for Darlington to have a larger number of members. Whilst there is a case for a changed way of working and the need to retain experienced members, it is suggested that there is not a case for increasing the number of members. It is therefore suggested that the high parameter should not be greater than the current number of members and therefore the upper limit should be 53.

### **Significant Reduction**

131. At the lower end Members of all parties have made it clear that they do not wish to see a significant change in the number of members. However reflecting the views of Members and the suggestion for the need for Members to ensure that it can continue to have viable governance in the future, it has been suggested that 40 is the lower end figure for the number of members.
132. Whilst it is not a factor in determining what the Council size should be it is important in considering what factors should influence the Council size of the future. The local government world is changing in an unprecedented way, following the trends for authorities over the last 10 years where decisions were made in a very different context. Members considered carefully whether the reduction in Council size really does represent the right approach or whether the Council of the future may need to take a very different view of the future role of members and the contribution they can make.
133. Members considered a number of possible scenarios for the future role of Members. They could be summarised as:
- (a) An enhanced role for Member taking on a community leadership role, stimulating a community response which is designed to address the reduction

in services and the need for greater partnership working to make maximum use of limited publicly funded resources and stimulating the response from other sectors such as the business and voluntary sector to supplement the resource which in the future will not be available from employed staff. It is proposed that this would be in the region of 49-53 Members.

- (b) An enhanced role for Members taking on additional community functions but in a more limited way.. In this scenario it is assumed there will be a reduced member workload in areas where cuts to services have reduced the Council's areas of responsibility. There would need to be a reduction in Scrutiny Committees and other formal elements of the workload in order to free up member time to take on the enhanced role. There would be less formal meetings and a limit to the extent of the ? role. It is proposed that this would result in a reduction of 5-8 Members. This would lead to a membership in the region of 44-48 Members.
- (c) The final scenario is one in which Members do not have an enhanced community role and there is a significant reduction in Scrutiny work and other council functions due to service cuts. It is suggested that the lowest level that Members could reasonably be reduced without affecting the ability of the Council to function is 40 so this would be in the region of 40-43 Members.

134. It is therefore proposed that the Members consider and analyse in more depth the range of 40–53 Members.

135. Members at the working groups were invited to consider the options:

- (d) A proposal at the lower end as detailed in (c) above was rejected for the following reasons:
  - (i) Electors will not be effectively represented at this level
  - (ii) There would be insufficient Councillor capacity to attend quasi-judicial committees such as Planning and Licensing and to carry out other Council governance effectively.
  - (iii) There would be a reduction in the ability of individual Councillors to serve their communities at a time when demand for this resource is likely to increase with the proposed cuts to local government and welfare reforms.
  - (iv) There will also be an increase in workload derived from the responsibilities for public health and the new relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner.
  - (v) There is a concern that a reduction in Member involvement in Scrutiny will place an added burden on officers at a time when officer numbers are being reduced.
  - (vi) There would be a reduction in the capacity of Members to engage in the Scrutiny role at a time when the Council is making some of the most significant financial decisions and cuts to Council services requiring the highest level of scrutiny.

- (vii) It would not provide Member capacity for the level of partnership working necessary for a small Council like Darlington which relies on partnership and collaboration to deliver the range of services delivered by larger Councils.
  - (viii) It would be a barrier to the recruitment of the number of Councillors within the Borough, particularly the mix of Councillors including employed Councillors who have the cross section of skills necessary to deliver the challenging agenda ahead.
  - (ix) The level of savings likely to be achieved at even the bottom end is not sufficient to outweigh the detriment of a significant reduction in members.
- (e) In seeking to determine the appropriate level of Members it was therefore decided to consider a range between 45-48 and 49-53.

136. In favour of a lower number of members the following points were made:

- (i) In the context of the current financial climate, the percentage of cuts which will be necessary across all budgets and the corresponding reduction of staff numbers retaining the current level of Members is likely to be perceived negatively.
  - (ii) There is no evidence currently that there is an inability to recruit Members to stand for election or that there is insufficient Members to attend all the Council's committees.
  - (iii) There is evidence that whilst some Members have high levels of community involvement and commit significant hours per month to this role, this commitment is not consistent across the entire Member body.
  - (iv) Given the commitments of working members it is not possible to require Members to carry out significant community roles, so the disparity between the commitment of some members to others is likely to continue.
  - (v) Darlington has the lowest number of electors per member in the North East and one of the lowest nationally.
  - (vi) There is not sufficient difference in the operation of the Council to justify the low electorate per member ratio.
  - (vii) There is no evidence to suggest that there will be a significant population increase within Darlington to justify maintaining the current low ratio of Members.
  - (viii) In order to make efficiencies in the corporate core there is a need to make further changes. Options to consider include reducing the number of Member meetings including the number of scrutiny committees, increasing officer delegation and looking to reduce the number of special responsibility allowances for members.
- (f) At the higher end the following points were made



- (i) A number between 49-53 Councillors is the number necessary to adequately fulfil the governance roles currently set out within the Council's constitutional arrangements.
- (ii) Darlington prides itself on having a diverse skills set within its membership which enables Members to contribute effectively to decision making and scrutiny and is representative of the community it serves.
- (iii) The need to ensure that employed individuals are able to stand and serve as councillors is essential to maintaining this. In order to do this proposed workloads need to allow for Members to be working full time.
- (iv) There is a need to ensure that there is diversity within the Membership body a smaller number of Members will reduce the scope for the Membership to adequately represent the community it serves in relation to minority groups.
- (v) Darlington has a mix of rural and urban areas and it is important to ensure that appropriate representation is given to all communities across the entire Borough and to ensure that the electorate ratio numbers retain Members for the rural wards.
- (vi) Darlington has a strong reputation for partnership working through its Local Strategic Partnership and other arrangements. Maintaining sufficient members is necessary to enable the Council to continue and enhance partnership working in particular to stimulate economic growth.
- (vii) The 'Darlington Together' philosophy is essential if a small council like Darlington is going to be able to serve its population effectively. Members will need to work longer hours within their communities if they are likely to stimulate community involvement, reducing the number of members runs counter to this approach.
- (viii) The future for all local authorities is likely to be very different. National research supports the idea of an enhanced role for members in the future with corresponding demands on Member time. Members have considered carefully, within the time constraints of this review, what the future will look like and all the indications are that it does not support a significant reduction in the voluntary elected member resource at this time.
- (ix) Savings that can be achieved by a reduction in Members is minimal when set against the wider financial challenge, and this does not outweigh the detriment in the reduction of the Member resource.
- (x) The population of Darlington has risen by 7,700 since mid-2001 at the time of the most recent census. Population forecasts show that a programme of house-building will lead to a further increase before 2019.

## Conclusion

137. The following chart summarises and weights the conflicting factors. Balancing the various factors that go towards determining an appropriate Council size the Member working group have concluded that a small reduction is the best outcome for Darlington and therefore it is proposed to reduce the Council size

at the bottom end of option (a) above and recommend to the LGBCE a reduction in Members for the Borough of Darlington to 50.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Reduction Yes/No</b>	<b>Rated 1 to 12</b>
The nature of Darlington's specific Governance Arrangements	Darlington's arrangements have a high levels of delegation in regulatory committees and no area committees. On the other hand Darlington has a high number of scrutiny committees and particularly task and finish groups. Darlington has one less than the maximum number of Cabinet members but overall this is not significantly different to other Councils and was therefore considered to be not a significant factor.	No	11
Partnership working	The need for Members to have a significant role in the future to work with key business and local community partners to build capacity, and to maintain the successful track record Darlington has for partnership working was considered to be a significant factor.	No	2
Adequate representation	There is a need to maintain effective Councillor representation across Darlington. Levels of representation within Darlington are high compared to neighbours. Elector/Member ratio is not a relevant factor for consideration provided there is adequate representation and this is therefore not considered a significant factor.	Yes	9
Cost	The cost of Members basic allowances is £425,431 overall but a reduction of members would produce only £8,027 saving per member. More significant savings can be achieved by changing governance arrangements rather than Council size. Cost was considered to be not a significant factor in Council size.	Yes	6
Voluntary Resource	Although Members receive an allowance this is not commensurate with the salary that would be payable if a member of staff was carrying out the same work within the community. Members therefore provide a relatively cost effective resource.	No	4

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Reduction Yes/No</b>	<b>Rated 1 to 12</b>
Population Forecast	Darlington's population has grown by 7700 since mid 2001 but it is not a significant growth. Whilst there is some growth which does not support reduction the growth is minimal and therefore not a significant factor.	No	7
Membership capacity	There is no evidence to support the view that there are insufficient members to stand for election; however there is limited evidence that there are insufficient members to attend all regulatory committees and outside bodies.	No	10
Diverse Membership	Darlington is keen to have a diverse membership with different backgrounds, age, sex and ability represented. The smaller the membership the greater the risk to diversity.	No	7
Employed Membership	Darlington has a reasonable percentage of members with some form of outside employment 40% with 25% having full time employment. The Council is keen to maintain this diversity within its membership.	No	5
Public Perception	There is a public perception and amongst staff that fewer members means reduced costs, and that members should share the pain of staff. This is not directly relevant to the question of Council size but has been considered as part of the working group but is not considered to be significant.	Yes	12
Community Leadership	The need for members to have the capacity to develop and enhance the current levels of community support and leadership was also a significant factor.	No	1
Economic Growth	The need for Members to be able to work with local businesses and to be advocates for Darlington within the wider political field, across the region and nationally in order to influence and build growth in Darlington was also considered to be a significant factor.	No	3