



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Cabinet Agenda

5.00 pm

Tuesday, 11 January 2022

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

**Members and Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.**

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting.
2. Declarations of Interest.
3. To hear relevant representation (from Members and the General Public) on items on this Cabinet agenda.
4. To approve the Minutes of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 7 December 2021 (Pages 5 - 10)
5. Matters Referred to Cabinet –  
There are no matters referred back for reconsideration to this meeting
6. Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committee –  
There are no issues referred back from the Scrutiny Committees to this Meeting, other than where they have been specifically consulted on an issue and their comments are included in the contents of the relevant report on this agenda.
7. Key Decisions
  - (a) Maintained Schools Capital Programme - Summer 2022 and Section 106 Funding –  
Report of the Group Director of People.  
(Pages 11 - 16)
  - (b) Customer Services and Digital Strategy – Report of the Group Director of Operations.  
(Pages 17 - 34)

8. Access Opportunities for Young People – Report of the Chief Executive.  
(Pages 35 - 42)
9. Quarter 2 - Council Plan 2020/23 - Delivering Success for Darlington Performance Report – Report of the Chief Officers Executive.  
(Pages 43 - 106)
10. Feethams House - European Regional Development Fund – Report of the Chief Executive.  
(Pages 107 - 112)
11. Support Darlington Credit Union – Report of the Chief Executive.  
(Pages 113 - 118)
12. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which Cabinet appoints.
13. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting.
14. Questions.



**Luke Swinhoe**  
**Assistant Director Law and Governance**

**Thursday 30 December 2021**

**Town Hall**  
**Darlington.**

**Membership**

Councillors Clarke, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K Nicholson, Mrs H Scott and Tostevin

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Lynne Wood, Elections Manager, Operations Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. Fridays (e-mail [Lynne.Wood@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:Lynne.Wood@darlington.gov.uk) or telephone 01325 405803).

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE  
MONDAY 20 DECEMBER 2021**

**CABINET**

Tuesday, 7 December 2021

**PRESENT** – Councillors Mrs H Scott (Chair), Clarke, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K Nicholson and Tostevin

**INVITEES** – Councillors Curry and Harker

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Snedker and Tait

**C70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C71 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

**C72 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON TUESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2021**

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

**REASON** – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

**C73 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET**

There were no matters referred back for re-consideration to this meeting.

**C74 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

**C75 KEY DECISIONS**

There were no key decisions made at this meeting.

**C76 THE CARE LEAVER COVENANT**

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of People (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the signing of 'The Care Leaver Covenant' for the benefit of care leavers in Darlington.

The submitted report stated that in July 2016, the Government published a major policy

document entitled 'Keep on Caring', to support young people from care to independence; a key policy commitment in the paper was a strategic pledge to introduce a 'Care Leaver Covenant'; the Covenant worked with organisations across different sectors to provide support for care leavers aged between 16 and 25 years of age to help them to live independently; it was funded by the Department for Education and delivered by Spectra; it was an app that could be downloaded by care leavers and workers; and that there was no cost attached to signing up to the Covenant, more a commitment to continue to offer and strengthen opportunities for care leavers in Darlington. All young people are statutorily provided with support from their Local Authority, including being assigned a Personal Advisors, and these advisors would encourage young people to download the app and make use of any available offers.

It was reported that there were five care leaver 'outcomes,' which anchored all of the Care Leavers' Covenant activity, namely that care leavers were better prepared and supported to live independently; had improved access to employment, education and training; experienced stability in life and feeling safe and secure; had improved access to health and emotional support; and that they achieved financial stability.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the content of the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That approval be given for this Council to sign 'The Care Leaver Covenant' for the benefit of care leavers in Darlington.

**REASONS** – (a) To ensure that care leavers in Darlington are given the best opportunities to support them into independence and to achieve their potential.

(b) To ensure that as Corporate Parents the Council continues to be ambitious for its children and young people and offer the highest quality of service, in line with our Care Leavers Local Offer.

## **C77 REVIEW OF OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS MADE TO OMBUDSMAN**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Chief Executive, Group Director of Operations, Group Director of People and the Group Director of Services (previously circulated) providing Members with an update of the outcome of cases which had been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) since consideration of the report by this Cabinet in September (Minute C43/Sep/21 refers).

The submitted report stated that between 1 April and 30 September 2021 there had been seven cases that were subject to decisions by the LGSCO and no cases by the HOS; three upheld Maladministration Injustice decisions from the LGSCO, compared to one for the same period in 2020/21; organisational learning identified as a result of those complaints should ensure that there was no re-occurrence; and that LGSCO ceased investigating complaints between 26 March and 29 June 2020 due to Covid-19.

**RESOLVED** - That the contents of the report be noted.

**REASONS** - (a) It is important that Members are aware of the outcome of complaints made



to the LGSCO and the HOS in respect of the Council's activities.

(b) The contents of the submitted report do not suggest that further action, other than detailed in the report, is required.

## **C78 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 TO 2025/26**

The Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of Operations (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the proposals for the revenue budget, capital programme, rent levels and service charges for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2022/23, in the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to 2025/26 and the 30-year Business Plan.

The submitted report stated that the Council was the largest provider of social housing in the Borough, providing 5,275 homes to local residents; the homes were of a high standard of accommodation that met the Decent Homes Standard; as a result of the high quality of the homes and the services provided they were in high demand; to meet that demand the Council had an ambitious programme to build new homes in Darlington, funded through capital receipts from the right to buy sales, grant funding and borrowing of £15M; the proposed revenue budget expenditure of £25,448M included £4,282M to fund responsive repairs and maintenance and £17.618M to the capital programme; and the proposed capital programme of £32.98M included funding for work to current properties and £25.6M to deliver the new build Council housing programme.

It was reported that the key decision to be made regarding the HRA each year was the balance between setting rent and service charge levels that were affordable to the Council's tenants whilst ensuring there was sufficient resources to invest in housing stock, tackle climate change and maintain services; Local Authorities had the discretion to increase rents by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) plus one per cent, which meant that Members could decide to increase rents by up to 4.1 per cent; 70 per cent of tenants would have their rent and services charges covered by benefit payments; and that a number of options had been considered, taking into account the current economic pressures facing tenants and delivering ambitious capital and energy efficient programmes.

Particular references were made at the meeting to the proposal to increase the average weekly rent increase by two per cent and whether there was a reduction in the cleaning of communal areas. The Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio responded thereon.

**RESOLVED** - That the following recommendations be agreed for wider consultation, namely that :-

- (a) an average weekly rent increase of two per cent for 2022/23 be implemented giving an average social rent of £75.01 and affordable rent of £92.06;
- (b) garage rents and service charges be increased, as shown in Table 1 of the submitted report;

- (c) the revenue budget, as attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved;
- (d) the Housing Business Plan, at attached at Appendix 2 of the submitted report, be agreed;
- (e) the capital programme, as attached at Appendix 3 of the submitted report, be agreed; and
- (f) the Group Director of Operations be given delegated powers to proceed with new build schemes for affordable rent using the funding, as identified at paragraph 16 of the submitted report.

**REASON** - To enable the Council to deliver an appropriate level of service to tenants to meet housing need and to support the economic growth of the Borough through housing development.

#### **C79 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - INVESTING IN AND DELIVERING SUCCESS FOR DARLINGTON**

The Leader introduced the report of the Chief Officers Executive (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 to 2025/26 (also previously circulated) for consultation, including setting a budget and council tax increase for 2022/23.

The submitted report stated that the current MTFP remained deliverable, but it was not without risk and challenges; the proposed MTFP included the Risk Reserve at the same level as 2021; the Council still had financial capacity to deliver a four year balanced MTFP based on a core offer service level with limited discretionary services which was reliant on the use of balances across the four year MTFP; the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on the priorities of, and the way in which, the Council conducted its business; the financial pressure on the public sector as a whole, and the Council more specifically, had been significant over the last couple of years; there had been a decade of significant financial challenge following the economic downturn and the reductions in public sector spending; and that the Council had been successful in responding to those challenges.

It was reported that the October 2021 Spending Review announced a three year local government settlement, though it was likely there would only be a one year finance settlement at local level; the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP aimed to ensure that the Council could continue to provide vital services in response to Covid-19 should it be required and importantly continue to provide its core offer level of services to the residents of Darlington regardless of Covid-19; a healthy level of reserves had been maintained for medium term stability and that this was now a crucial component of the budget strategy which would allow time for the key ambition of economic growth to take effect.

Particular reference was made to the 'futures fund' which had been established in five areas that had great value to the community. Whilst the fund was initially established for a time limited period, the ongoing commitments contained within the fund were key to driving the

Council's ambition of growing the economy and as a result it was proposed to mainstream those areas into the budget from 2025/26.

Details of the projected expenditure and income, budget pressures and savings, schedule of fees and charges, assumptions used to prepare estimates, projected Revenue Outturn 2021/22 and proposed Capital Programme, were also appended to the submitted report.

**RESOLVED** - That the Revenue Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Capital Programme, as set out in Appendices 6 and 7 respectively of the submitted report, be approved for consultation, including:-

- (a) a Council tax increase of 1.99 per cent plus a one per cent Adult Social Care Precept to fund social care for 2022/23;
- (b) the Schedule of Charges, as set out in Appendix 3 of the submitted report; and
- (c) the mainstreaming of the ongoing services provided by the 'Futures Fund' into the budget from 2025/26, as set out in paragraph 63 of the submitted report.

**REASONS** - (a) The Council must set a budget for the next financial year.

(b) To enable the Council to continue to plan services and finances over the medium term.

(c) To ensure decisions can be made in a timely manner.

(d) To ensure investment in the Council's assets is maintained.

## **C80 MID-YEAR PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2021/22**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of Resources (previously circulated) seeking approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and providing a half yearly review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities.

It was reported that the mandatory Prudential Code, which governed the Council's borrowing, required Council approval of controls, called Prudential Indicators, which related to capital spending and borrowing. The indicators were set out in three statutory annual reports and the key objectives of those reports were set out in the submitted report, together with the key proposed revisions to the indicators which related to a reduction in the Operational Boundary to £174.081m and the Authorised Limit to £237.156m to allow for any additional cashflow requirements.

Particular reference was made to the investments of £30m in property funds, which were expected to increase the net return on investment by around £0.700m in future years.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the revised prudential indicators and limits, as detailed within Tables 1 to 6, 8, 10 and 12 to 17 of the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That the under-spend in the Treasury Management Budget (Financing Costs) of £0.243m,

as shown in Table 11 of the submitted report, be noted.

(c) That the report be forwarded to Council in order for the updated prudential indicators to be approved.

**REASONS** - (a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

(b) To inform Members of the performance of the Treasury Management function.

(c) To comply with the Local Government Act 2003.

(d) To enable further improvements to be made in the Council's Treasury Management function.

**C81 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.**

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**DECISIONS DATED –  
FRIDAY 10 DECEMBER 2021**

**CABINET  
11 JANUARY 2022**

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**MAINTAINED SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME – SUMMER 2022 AND SECTION 106 FUNDING**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Jon Clarke, Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
James Stroyan, Group Director of People**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Members' agreement to:
  - (a) Release the capital funding for the schools' summer works programme 2022.
  - (b) Release the devolved formula capital to the maintained schools.
  - (c) Release S106 funding for Heighington Primary, Hurworth Primary and Hurworth Secondary School capital works.

**Summary**

2. This report seeks Cabinet approval for the release of the School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding of £169,396 to undertake a programme of works across the maintained schools in Darlington during summer 2022. All works items have been identified as a priority for completion as part of a survey of the schools concerned. The surveys covered condition, electrical and mechanical.
3. The report also seeks the release of the 2021/22 Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) of £43,141. This funding is a formula-based grant provided to all maintained schools to help support their ongoing capital needs.
4. Finally the report seeks the release of Section 106 funding as follows:
  - (a) £156,515 from Bellway Homes and £133,533 from Kew Land Limited to improve the education provision in the village of Heighington.
  - (b) £106,666 from Bellway Homes and £193,985 from Miller Homes to enhance educational facilities in Hurworth schools.
5. All projects will be managed in line with the Corporate Capital Process procedures.

## **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that Members :-
- (a) Agree to formally release the School Condition Allocation of £169,396 to support the 2022 maintained schools' summer works programme, with the Group Director of People having delegated responsibility for approving individual schemes.
  - (b) Agree to formally release the 2021/22 Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) of £43,141.
  - (c) Agree to formally release Section 106 funding of £156,515 from Bellway Homes and £133,533 from Kew Land Limited to improve the education provision in the village of Heighington.
  - (d) Agree to formally release Section 106 funding of £106,666 from Bellway Homes and £193,985 from Miller Homes to enhance educational facilities in Hurworth schools.

## **Reasons**

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
- (a) Release of the funds will enable capital investment to be undertaken in the areas identified with the greatest need, in terms of asset management priorities; and
  - (b) Detailed planning to identify priorities has been undertaken which ensures effective use of all investment.

**James Stroyan**  
**Group Director of People**

## **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Paul Richardson : 0794 724 7224

S17 Crime and Disorder	Capital investment to improve facilities and provide better building maintenance will contribute to the reduction of crime and disorder.
Health and Wellbeing	The capital strategy outlined in this report will continue the Council's drive to provide buildings that enhance children's life chances and opportunities to thrive.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	All work undertaken will be designed and constructed with sustainability in mind and aim to reduce the carbon footprint, and re-use energy and environmental resources.
Diversity	This proposal projects have no specific impact on protected groups.
Wards Affected	Schools located in: Hurworth, Park East, Pierremont, North Road, Red Hall & Lingfield and Whinfield.
Groups Affected	Children and young people of school age (3-16) in Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision due to the amount of funding Members are requested to release.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
Council Plan	The Capital Programme is consistent with the Council Plan providing high quality facilities that support modern approaches to education in schools and for lifelong learning.
Efficiency	Defective materials and plant will be replaced with more efficient products e.g. increasing 'u' value on windows, insulation and modern highly efficiency boilers.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The proposed projects have no specific impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The Authority funds the capital maintenance and improvement of maintained schools from a variety of sources including capital allocations received from the Department for Education (DfE), bid based submissions for Central Government funding programmes (compiled and submitted by Officers or individual schools) and Section 106 agreements.

### School Condition Allocation (SCA)

9. The Department for Education (DfE) has allocated the local authority £169,396 of School Condition funding for 2021/22 to address capital maintenance needs across the borough's five maintained schools. The Education and Inclusion Service within the People Group is responsible for ensuring all funding is targeted to meet strategic priorities and the highest priority needs across maintained schools and nurseries.
10. Once a school has converted to an Academy it is no longer eligible to be considered for capital maintenance funding allocated to the LA but can apply direct to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for funding as required. No remaining maintained schools (for which the LA has building condition responsibility) are currently progressing to conversion.
11. The annual summer works programme is compiled using the information from local authority commissioned surveys covering building condition and electrical and mechanical services. A list of the highest priority works that fits within the available funding envelope is developed in conjunction with Building Services. That list is then subject to consultation with the maintained schools.

### Asset Management Costs

12. An amount equivalent to 27.5% of the SCA is set aside to cover survey and design fees as part of the asset management process. This will be monitored as the projects progress and, if possible, funding released for other schemes.

### Contingency / Urgent Works

13. The summer works programme retains a 13.5% contingency within the estimated value of the works. This is used to cover any unexpected costs or emergency works. This will be monitored as the projects progress and, if possible, funding released for other schemes. Members are asked to delegate responsibility for approving the allocation of this funding to the Group Director People.

### Devolved Formula Capital (DFC)

14. The Department for Education (DfE) has allocated £43,141 to Darlington maintained schools for 2020/21 on a formula led basis. Local authorities are required to distribute DFC to their schools in accordance with the DfE published allocations. Schools will be encouraged to manage spend in line with agreed priorities.



## **Section 106 Funding**

15. The Council has received Section 106 contributions as follows:

- (a) A second payment of £101,666 in relation to the Bellway Homes development (16/00886) towards enhancing the education infrastructure at Hurworth Primary.
- (b) Two payments totalling £193,985 in relation to the Miller Homes development (17/01194) towards enhancing the education infrastructure at Hurworth Primary and Hurworth Secondary.
- (c) £156,515 in relation to the Bellway Homes development in Heighington (18/00035) to improve the education provision in the village of Heighington.
- (d) £133,533 in relation to the Kew Land Limited development (16/00820) for the provision of education in Heighington.

16. The Section 106 funding from the Miller Homes development (17/01194) will be split between the two schools based on a proportion of their respective pupil numbers. The Hurworth Secondary share will be £145,869.77 and Hurworth Primary's £48,115.25.

## **Financial Implications**

- 17. The School Condition Allocation and the Devolved Formula Capital are both grants from the Department for Education (DfE). The Section 106 contributions are from housing developments. There is no impact on Council funds.
- 18. All funds must be spent in accordance with the DfE's 'Condition grants spend guidance', the latest edition being from April 2021.

## **Consultation**

- 19. Any capital works will be undertaken in consultation with the schools concerned and in line with the priorities identified as part of the school's surveys.

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**CABINET  
11 JANUARY 2022**

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## **CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL STRATEGY**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Scott Durham, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To approve the draft Customer Services and Digital Strategy for 2021-24 at **Appendix 1**.

#### **Summary**

2. The Customer Services and Digital Strategy for 2021-24 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how more of these will be delivered through digital channels.
3. The strategy also provides the commitment to support those customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
4. A public consultation and equality impact assessment screening undertaken on the strategy, together with planned actions to address issues raised are included in the main report.
5. This report was considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 6 January 2022.

#### **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
  - (a) Consider the contents of this report.
  - (b) Approve the Customer Services and Digital Strategy for 2021-24.

#### **Reasons**

7. The recommendations are supported as the implementation of the strategy will lead to improvements in our customer services, improvements to our digital services and actions taken to reduce digital exclusion in our community.

**Elizabeth Davison**  
**Group Director of Operations**

**Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues
Health and Wellbeing	There is no impact in this report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	The promotion of on-line digital services will help the Council to reduce its carbon impact
Diversity	The Customer Services and Digital Strategy will ensure that residents who are digitally excluded are provided with appropriate support
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All groups
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications
Key Decision	This is a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the plan to deliver the availability of Council services on-line
Efficiency	The increased use of on-line services will deliver efficiencies for the Council and its customers
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The Customer Services and Digital Strategy for 2021-24 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how more of these will be delivered through digital channels. The strategy also provides the commitment to support those customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
9. The strategy focusses on 7 key aims:
  - (a) **Provide excellent customer services** – delivering all services through face to face, telephone or digital channels to a clear set of performance standards. These standards will be developed in consultation with staff, Members and customers.
  - (b) **Provide good quality, easy to use digital services** – ensuring that we provide customers with safe and reliable digital access to all of our applications, service requests, enquiries and payments.
  - (c) **Make it clear how customers can contact us** – making digital the first choice for contacting the Council, but always providing customers with information about how they can speak to a member of staff.
  - (d) **Make it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't** – expecting those customers who can use digital self-serve channels to do so, freeing up our staff to help and support those customers who cannot use our on-line services.
  - (e) **Deliver value for money** – using technology to improve services and deliver efficiencies, investing any savings into providing extra support for customers who need it.
  - (f) **Invest in our people** – ensuring our staff have the right skills and IT equipment to support our customers.
  - (g) **Listen to our customers and use this to improve services** – asking customers about the services they have received and using this feedback to make improvements, including complaints about our services.
10. The strategy also sets out our proposals to support those customers who are digitally excluded. This will range from providing assistance to use our on-line services to full support, where this is required.
11. The strategy also sets out what improvements we are planning to the Council's website, further improvements to our Customer Services Centre and our proposals to increase the number of Council services available on-line.

12. The outcomes we expect to achieve as a result of the proposed improvements are set out at the end of the document and these can be reported to members at future Scrutiny meetings.

### **Equalities Considerations**

13. An equality impact assessment screening form is provided at **Appendix 2**. No amendments are recommended as a result of this assessment.

### **Consultation**

14. Public consultation was undertaken on the proposed strategy between 1 October 2021 and 31 October 2021 with the following results:
  - (a) 62 responses were received in total.
  - (b) 85% had accessed the Darlington Borough Council website in the last 12 months.
  - (c) 78% had used our on-line services to make a booking, make a payment, to check for information such as roadworks, or to report something.
  - (d) 44% reported that they found our website and/or on-line forms difficult to use. Most of these comments were about some of our more complex forms, such as our applications for benefits.
  - (e) 11% reported that they couldn't find what they wanted on-line so phoned, e-mailed or contacted us in another way to get the information they needed.
15. Some of the improvements suggested by respondents included the following:
  - (a) Making our website easier to use through our on-line "help" facility. Respondents also suggested "help" pop-up boxes on our on-line forms to assist with completion.
  - (b) There were some concerns around security and the potential for fraud, so some reassurance is required to provide customers with the confidence that our digital services, particularly around payments, are safe and secure.
  - (c) Providing a live "chat" support service.
  - (d) Providing the ability to video call staff and have an on-line forum facility to contact Councillors directly.
  - (e) Providing the facility for residents to remotely attend public meetings, such as planning, so working people or those with disabilities can attend easily.
16. The strategy was also considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 6 January 2022.

## Outcome of Consultation

17. As a result of the consultation, the following is planned:

- (a) We need to continue to improve the Council's website and on-line forms making them easier to understand and easier to use. Currently, an exercise is being undertaken to put the whole website into "Plain English" and training for staff is being organised to ensure any new information for the website is written in "Plain English".
- (b) We also need to ensure that we continue to provide help and support to those residents who are unable to access our on-line services, particularly as services continue to open up after Covid restrictions. We therefore need to promote the help and support available to ensure those customers who need assistance have the confidence to return to using our face to face services and PCs at the Customer Services Centre.
- (c) There is a clear appetite for continued investment in digital services such as webchat, further on-line forms, improvements to the website app and virtual access to Council meetings, staff and Members. Work will therefore continue, to explore the best use of the technology available to improve digital access.
- (d) We need to provide reassurance to all of our customers that our on-line services are safe and secure to use.
- (e) More information is required to those residents who are digitally excluded and the barriers we need to overcome for our on-line services. These issues will be investigated through the proposed Community Survey for 2022.
- (f) Plans are already in development to enhance the Darlington Borough Council mobile phone app features, including improvements to the 'report it' function that will enable people to track their cases, event notifications and reminders, and a biometric login option. Work on phase 2 is scheduled to start in the Spring once the Web Team has completed some business critical and time sensitive developments to the online refuse, recycling and garden waste collection system, in preparation for the launch of the 2022 garden waste collection service.

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**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



# Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021 - 2024

# Our Vision

We want to deliver excellent customer services that are easy to use and provide value for money to all our residents.

Where possible, we will provide digital access to all our services.

We will expect customers who can self-serve to do so, so that we can focus our resources on the people who need our help the most.

We will use digital technology to help us put the customer at the heart of everything we do.



## Make it clear how customers can contact us

- We will provide an easy to use website with information on how customers can contact us. Digital channels, where available, will always be the first choice. But clear information on how customers can speak to staff will also be provided.
- We will make all of our written communications easy to understand and clear about how customers can contact the Council.
- We will provide information in ways to suit our customers and ensure we make use of assistive technologies to improve access for people with disabilities.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure appointments are available to avoid customers queuing for services.

## Make it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't

- We will ensure all information about Council services is available on our website.
- We will be clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
- We will explain how long we will take to deal with requests and keep customers updated with progress.
- We will expect customers who can use on-line services to do so.
- We will be clear about what help and support we can provide to those customers who cannot use on-line services.
- We will ensure staff are available in our Customer Contact Centre to provide support for our customers to access on-line services.

# Our Aims

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## Provide excellent customer services

- We will provide excellent customer services through face to face, telephone or digital channels.
- We will minimise waiting times and ensure customers are connected to the right member of staff who can resolve their enquiry at the first point of contact.
- Our focus will be on quality, ensuring we get things right first time. By doing this we will reduce the need for customers to contact the Council repeated times to get their enquiry resolved.
- We will develop a clear set of customer performance standards and ensure we deliver all Council services to them.
- We will be helpful, compassionate and responsive to customers' needs by putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience.

## Provide good quality, easy to use digital services

- We will deliver all of our services digitally, including on-line applications, service requests, enquiries and payments.
- Our digital services will be so easy to use that they become the natural place for our customers to go. Our services will be safe and reliable to use, so that customers will want to access information and services using that method again.
- Our website will provide digital access to services and allow customers to request and pay for services on-line. Customers will be able to get all the information they need about Council services from our website, without having to speak to a member of staff.
- Access to services will be available through various devices such as desktops, laptops or smartphones.
- We will ensure we handle all of our customer's data safely and securely.







## Listen to our customers and use this to improve services

- We will listen to our customers and use their feedback to improve services.
- We will ask our customers about the service they have received and in particular, what we could do to improve.
- We will use customer data to better understand what our customers need and whether our services meet those expectations.
- We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.
- We will provide information on what we have done to improve services as a result of customer feedback.

## Deliver value for money

- We will make digital the first or only option for all high volume and transactional customer services, such as applying or paying for services.
- We will use our data to improve services for our customers and make them more efficient.
- We will use technology to automate as many repetitive activities as possible, so that we can focus our staff resources to help those people who need the most support.
- We will invest in new technology to make processes more efficient and ensure a joined-up approach from service request to service delivery.
- We will reduce the amount of paper we use by introducing on-line services, which will also help to reduce our carbon footprint.
- We will invest savings from digital efficiencies into providing extra support for our customers to use on-line services.

## Invest in our people

- We will help our own staff to get on-line so that they are in the best position to promote digital services to our customers.
- We will provide our staff with the right IT equipment and training to do their jobs efficiently and help our customers.
- We will ensure all front-line staff receive regular customer focussed training.
- We will be clear about our expectations for staff and recognise when they go the extra mile to help our customers.
- We will regularly ask our staff about how we can improve our services.
- We will keep our front-line staff safe and make this our first priority. We will make it clear to customers what behaviours are unacceptable and take action against those who verbally or physically abuse our staff.



# Digital Exclusion

Whilst we will promote the shift to digital channels as a way to deliver most services and communicate with residents, we also must ensure that no-one is left behind.

## The benefits of going online

Our aim is to get as many of our residents on-line, not just to access Council services, but to get the full advantage of using the internet including:

- Access to better utility deals, home insurance and cheaper credit, often only available on-line
- Access to welfare benefits and Government services, including information about health services and healthy living
- Access to employment, training and volunteering opportunities
- Avoiding social isolation by being able to contact friends and relatives. Finding out about local events and what's going on in the area
- Finding out information and advice using internet tools, video tutorials and 'live chat' support services.

## Why residents are digitally excluded

We recognise the reasons why some people don't use or can't use the internet that can limit their access to Council services. There are four main factors that create digital exclusion:

**Access:** People who can't physically access the internet or who do not have the financial means to go on-line, such as having computers, broadband or mobile phones.

**Motivation:** People who don't understand or appreciate the benefits of going on-line.

**Skills:** People who lack the digital skills to use the internet.

**Confidence:** People who are worried about fraud and on-line security.

## Community Survey

In the 2018 Darlington Community Survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents said they would be willing to contact the Council electronically. This percentage was higher amongst younger people and people in work, but lower for older age groups and those with disabilities.

The main reasons for respondents not willing to contact the Council electronically were:

- Not having any internet access
- Not being confident about using the internet
- Concerns about confidentiality and security.

## How we will assist and support customers who cannot access digital services?

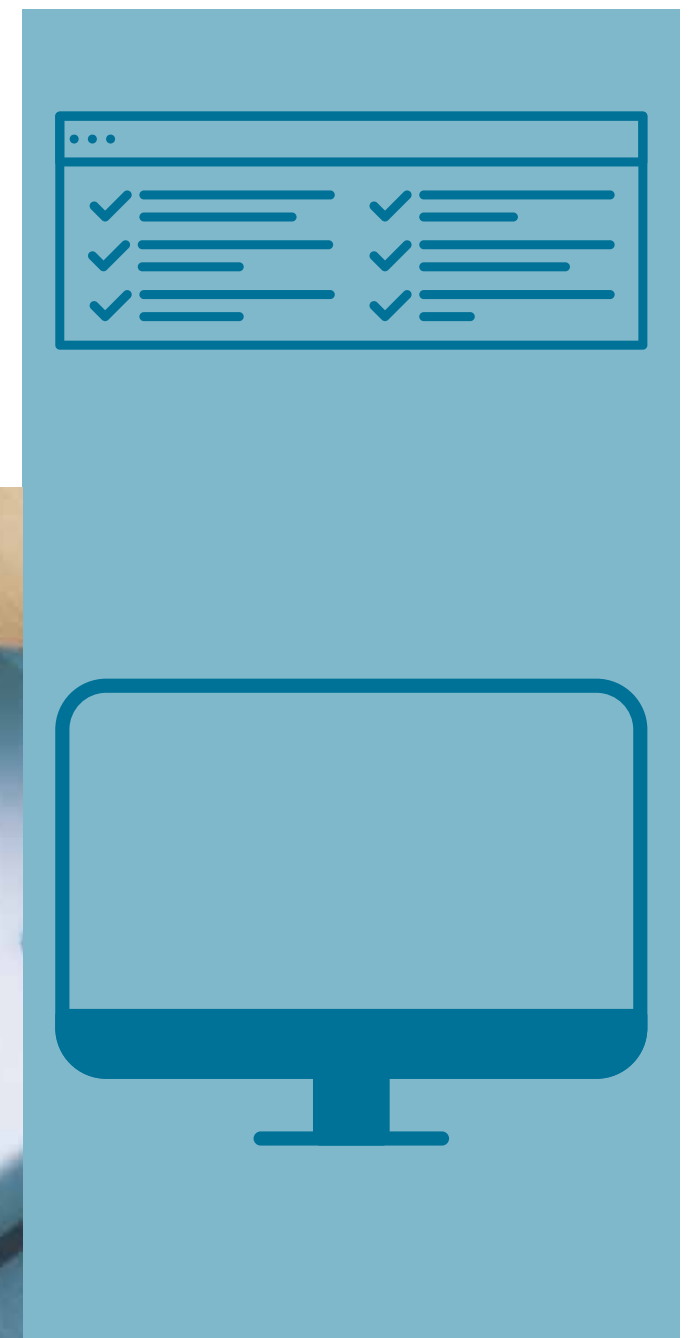
We recognise that if our customers are digitally excluded from our services, they will also be excluded from other services and the benefits of the internet as well. Therefore, our aim is to get more people on-line and connected to digital services, where we can.

For those who can use digital services, we will provide the right level of support for these customers.

For those who cannot use digital services, we will provide full support.

For those customers who cannot access the Council's digital services for whatever reason, we will always provide contact with a member of staff to assist.

For those customers who cannot physically access the internet or who do not have the financial means to go on-line, we will provide computer access to Council services in our Customer Contact Centre and other Council venues, free of charge.





# What we have done so far...

## Improved the Darlington Borough Council website

- Continued to make our on-line functions easy to use.
- Updated the website's layout, so mobile users can use the site as easily as desktop users.
- Continued to improve My Darlington, the resident account system, making it easier to use.
- Continued to enhance the security of My Darlington, so residents can be confident their personal information is safe.
- Registered over 16,000 people for My Darlington with over 3,600 visitors using the service each month.
- Updated the website coding to provide a better look, feel and easy, simple to use navigation.
- Developed and implemented a plan to ensure the Council's website is compliant with accessibility standards.

## Improved access to digital services

- Doubled the number of computers available in our Customer Contact Centre for customers to access Council digital services.
- Increased the number of floor walking staff to provide assistance and support for customers using Council computers.

- Installed free Wi-Fi access in our Customer Contact Centre and in Council sheltered housing schemes.
- Implemented a 'scan station' in our Customer Contact Centre to enable customers to scan their own documents, without having to queue.
- Implemented a 'my scan' solution which mirrors the scan station but allows customers to scan their own documents from home without having to visit the Customer Contact Centre.

## Increased the number of on-line services

- Implemented Council Tax and Business Rates on-line forms.
- Introduced an on-line portal for landlords to access their Housing Benefit payment schedules.
- Implemented Housing Benefits on-line forms.
- Implemented an on-line 'Citizens Access' and e-billing service allowing customers to log-in to their own Council Tax account to view details of payments and account balances and set up direct debits on-line.
- Implemented Darlington Home Online, a digital Housing portal for Council Tenants to view their rent account, make rent payments and report changes on-line.

- Implemented a Blue Badge parking permit on-line form with support for customers to access the digital service provided over the telephone or by face to face in our Customer Contact Centre.
- Implemented an on-line application for bulky waste collections.
- Updated the 'Contact the Council' page and ensured clear and up to date information about how to contact all Council services is available to customers.
- Implemented a facility to send reminder notifications about refuse collection days to users' web browsers and e-mail addresses.
- Implemented a reminder, renewal and subscription service for garden waste collections.
- Implemented an on-line ordering and payment system for replacement refuse equipment.
- Updated the on-line public access system for the submission and viewing of planning applications

## Improved Customer Services

- Replaced the existing telephony system, which has reduced customer waiting times and improved the ways customers can access Council services.
- Improved digital display boards in our Customer Contact Centre to give customers real-time information about current waiting times.





# How will we know if we have achieved our aims?

We will develop ways to monitor the benefits of our approach and use these to further improve services.

Improvements will include:

- More Council services being available on-line and more customers using them
- More computers and support for our customers in our Customer Contact Centre to access on-line services
- A reduction in digital exclusion, with more of our residents getting on-line and being able to take advantage of the full benefits of the internet
- More customers using the website to access information about Council services
- A reduction in face to face and telephone contacts
- A reduction in face to face and telephone waiting times
- Evidence that we are using our resources more efficiently and delivering value for money

- A reduction in customer demand caused by service failures
- Our staff will confirm they have the right tools and training to do their jobs
- A better understanding of our customer's current and future needs
- A better understanding of how we can further use technology to deliver those needs
- Improved customer satisfaction.



## What we are going to do...

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### Further improve the Darlington Borough Council website

- Review and update all content on the Council's website to ensure information is easy to access and in Plain English.
- Replace all 'paper based' forms on the Council's website with digital forms.
- Improve search results by rewriting webpage content in the language used by customers to achieve more meaningful results.

### Further improve customer services

- Capture customer satisfaction information on a simple to use digital feedback device.
- Implement a webchat function available on the Council's website to allow easy and clear access to information and/or services.
- Implement an easy to use and self-serve booking system for customers to make appointments for interviews or using digital services at the Customer Contact Centre.

### Increase the number of on-line services

- Implement an on-line self-appointed repairs option for Council tenants, for some basic repairs through Darlington Home Online.
- Implement a text message based 'chat bot' to issue permits for vans to use the Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Implement an on-line process for customers to report missed, lost or stolen bins.
- Replace the existing Choice Based Lettings system to improve the way customers can register and bid for social rented housing.
- Implement a facility to send reminder notifications about bulky waste collection days to users' e-mail addresses.
- Implement a 'report it portal' for customers to report highway defects easily on-line using an interactive map.







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**Initial equality impact assessment screening form**

This form is an equality screening process to determine the relevance of equality to an activity, and a decision whether or not a full EIA would be appropriate or proportionate.

<b>Directorate:</b>	Operations Group
<b>Service Area:</b>	Customer Services
<b>Activity being screened:</b>	Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021-2024
<b>Officer(s) carrying out the screening:</b>	Claire Gardner-Queen
<b>What are you proposing to do?</b>	Implement the Customer Services and Digital Strategy
<b>Why are you proposing this? What are the desired outcomes?</b>	The Customer Services and Digital Strategy for 2021-24 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how more of these will be delivered on-line through digital channels. The strategy also provides the commitment to support those customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use digital channels.
<b>Does the activity involve a significant commitment or removal of resources?</b> Please give details	No

**Is there likely to be an adverse impact on people with any of the following protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, or any other socially excluded groups?**


**As part of this assessment, please consider the following questions:**

- **To what extent is this service used by particular groups of people with protected characteristics?**
- **Does the activity relate to functions that previous consultation has identified as important?**
- **Do different groups have different needs or experiences in the area the activity relates to?**

**If for any characteristic it is considered that there is likely to be a significant adverse impact or you have ticked 'Don't know/no info available', then a full EIA should be carried out where this is proportionate.**

Protected characteristic	Yes	No	Don't know/ Info not available
Age		✓	
Disability		✓	

Sex (gender)		✓	
Race		✓	
Sexual Orientation		✓	
Religion or belief		✓	
Gender reassignment		✓	
Pregnancy or maternity		✓	
Marriage or civil partnership		✓	
<b>Other</b>		✓	
Carer (unpaid family or friend)		✓	
Low Income		✓	
Rural Location		✓	
<b>Does the activity relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g. disabled people’s access to public transport)? Please give details.</b>	<p>Potential impact on those groups of people who are digitally excluded, as follows:</p> <p>Older people may not have the skills to use the Council’s on-line digital services.</p> <p>People with visual impairments, physical disabilities or learning disabilities may be unable to use the Council’s on-line digital services.</p> <p>People in rural locations may not have good internet connectivity, affecting their ability to use the Council’s on-line digital services.</p> <p>People on low incomes may not be able to afford the IT equipment or broadband charges to enable them to use the Council’s on-line digital services.</p>		
<b>Will the activity have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.</b>	No		
<b>Decision (Please tick one option)</b>	EIA not relevant or proportionate:	✓	Continue to full EIA:
<b>Reason for Decision</b>	<p>The Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021-2024 specifically covers those groups of people with protected characteristics who are unable to use the Council’s on-line digital services. Specifically:</p> <p>Free to use PCs are available in the Customer Services Centre for those customers who do not have access to the internet, for whatever reason.</p>		

	<p>Support is available in the Customer Services Centre to assist customers to access the Council's on-line digital services and appointments can be booked for this.</p> <p>Support is available over the telephone to assist customers to access the Council's on-line digital services.</p> <p>Customer Services staff are available to complete on-line forms on behalf of customers who require full support to use the Council's on-line digital services.</p>
<b>Signed (Assistant Director)</b>	
<b>Date</b>	03/12/21

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**CABINET  
11 JANUARY 2022**

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## **ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Jon Clarke, Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval for a one-off investment in a range of interventions to support local young people giving them greater prospects of securing work.

#### **Summary**

2. Youth unemployment has been a persistent problem in Darlington for many years and it has increased more during the pandemic. Long-term youth unemployment in particular has grown significantly.
3. A multi-agency group was established and chaired by the Chief Executive and has been considering appropriate interventions over the summer of 2021.
4. At the group's last meeting on 29 September, it agreed that the package of additional supports outlined in this report would effectively augment existing services delivered by a range of stakeholders and make a positive impact on helping young people to access employment.
5. There has been major success in bringing employment to Darlington with Amazon setting up a major facility and 1700 jobs soon to be created by Government relocations. Maximising the potential of young people is key to sustained future prosperity of Darlington. These interventions will help ensure all young people are able to access quality employment opportunities.

#### **Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that up to £70,000 of Contain Outbreak Management Funds/Covid Reserve are released to fund the package outlined in this report.

#### **Reasons**

7. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) Youth unemployment has been comparatively high for years in Darlington, has worsened as a consequence of the pandemic.
- (b) The consequence of high long-term youth unemployment has detrimental economic and social impacts on the borough.

**Ian Williams**  
**Chief Executive**

**Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Seth Pearson : Extension 6090

S17 Crime and Disorder	No specific implication
Health and Wellbeing	No specific implication
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No specific implication
Diversity	No specific implication
Wards Affected	All Wards Affected
Groups Affected	Young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	Yes
Council Plan	This report aims directly to support the Council Plan’s priority of maximising the potential of our young people
Efficiency	No specific implication
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report considers the employment prospects or Care Leavers

**MAIN REPORT**

**Information and Analysis**

**Background**

- 8. Even prior to the pandemic, youth unemployment in Darlington was a priority issue. The local 18-24 year old claimant count had exceeded the regional average every month since at least January 2013 and was consistently in the top five to ten per cent of local authorities nationally for this metric. Whilst some of this is due to Darlington not having a university, even after adjusting for this Darlington consistently exceeded the national average.
- 9. The claimant count (those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit who are out of work) for Darlington 18–24-year-olds, at 10.1%, is the 24th highest of 374 British local authority areas. The average for the North East is 7.6% and for Great Britain is 6.5%. There were 735 Darlington residents aged 18-24 in September 2021

claiming benefits for reason of unemployment.

10. Youth unemployment was higher than for other age groups before the pandemic, and it has increased faster. Before the pandemic, 17% of 16–24-year-olds in Darlington were unemployed, compared to just 4.7% of over 25s.
11. Learning and Work Institute estimates modelling suggests that nationally long-term youth unemployment could potentially exceed 200,000 during 2021-22, treble pre-crisis levels, and remain significantly above pre-pandemic levels until 2026.
12. In Darlington, the number of 18–24-year-old jobseekers claiming for longer than six months increased 69% between February 2020 and August 2021, from 346 to 585. This is of particular concern as the scarring effects of long-term unemployment for young people in terms of future job and pay prospects are well documented. Without intervention the growth in younger residents claiming for more than six months is likely to have significant implications for the cohort's life chances and affect their ability to take advantage of the employment opportunities which are being generated.
13. The risk of youth unemployment varies significantly across different groups of young people:-
  - (a) Ward – youth unemployment varies across areas: 2.9% of 18–24-year-olds are claiming unemployment-related benefits in Hummersknott Ward, compared to 16.2% in Park East.
  - (b) Qualifications – young people with lower levels of qualification are far more likely to be unemployed, particularly during recessions.
14. Locally, youth unemployment has been identified as a priority issue for action by partners, in recognition:-
  - (a) Of the above evidence showing the ongoing issue of youth employment in the borough, which has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid on local employment opportunities for young people.
  - (b) That the reasons for youth unemployment are complex, and affected residents often face multiple barriers to quality work.
  - (c) That the collective experience of local stakeholders over the past decade has demonstrated that no one single lever can be pulled to effectively solve the problem; a multifaceted, partnership approach to the issue is required in order to maximise the likelihood of effectively tackling youth employment.

### **Proposed Approach**

15. A horizon-scanning exercise has been undertaken to identify effective approaches to tackling youth unemployment, which will remain an ongoing element of our approach to ensure that activity is evidence-led and based on what works. Based on this research, six key steps have been identified as vital components of a successful approach and so are proposed as a framework for local work to address youth unemployment.

16. The six steps are:

- (a) Agreeing clear objectives
- (b) Understanding the challenge
- (c) Researching what works
- (d) Mapping what support and services are already available
- (e) Developing options for interventions to improve outcomes
- (f) Understanding how we know if it's working.

17. Work has already begun on a number of the steps, including developing strategic and operational groups to tackle youth unemployment, desktop analysis of the issue locally, horizon scanning of effective initiatives elsewhere, and high-level mapping of local programmes.

18. A number of actions, highlighted in the below table, are intended to allow partners to develop work under a number of headings.

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
Youth-friendly steering group	Establish multiagency group of key local stakeholders to develop a Youth-Friendly Darlington vision and drive action
Mapping	Map existing provision, including accessibility/effectiveness/appeal of offer for all
Youth consultation	Recruit 6-12 peer researchers to engage 60 participants to improve understanding of local youth employment landscape and barriers
Skills audit	Engage circa 15 local employers to understand their current and future skills needs
Skills development	Develop and deliver bitesize employer-led training to create identified required skills
Youth-friendly campaign	Work with local employers to become 'youth-friendly'
Navigation portal	Develop a localised resource for young people to better find and access support and opportunities

19. Interventions will be delivered in a Covid-safe way to prevent contact and hence transmission. The navigation portal which will be a major product of this proposal will provide a mechanism for young people to search employment support and opportunities on line in a Covid-safe way.

**Activity to Date**

20. Officers have engaged with a number of specialist external organisations as potential partners for the proposals, including Youth Employment UK, the leading national youth unemployment charity with 9 years' experience in delivering evidence-based services, co-produced with young people, and expert policy and research. A costed proposal, based on the bid and discussions with potential providers during its development, has consequently been developed (**Appendix A**) which is intended to form the basis of a specification should Cabinet agree to release the funds being requested.



21. Should the funding proposed in this report be approved, additional funding will be sought from external sources, including national funders and local employers to, in particular, secure ongoing funding for the relevant element of the proposal (specifically, ongoing maintenance costs for the digital navigation resource).
22. A group of council officers has been established to:-
  - (a) Identify relevant internal and external representatives to develop an operational group to drive action
  - (b) Consider what level of resource relevant areas of the council can contribute to work
  - (c) Agree and further develop the proposed approach
23. As a result of the initial meeting of this group:
  - (a) A broader invite list – to include identified relevant partner agencies – has been drawn up and an initial meeting will be set up
  - (b) Economic Growth colleagues have agreed to allocate half of a new Skills and Investment Officer to support work, primarily focussing on employer engagement.
24. It is proposed that progress regarding the proposed programme would be made to Cabinet aligned to the Council Plan reporting processes with the portfolio lead for Children and Young People receiving regular briefings.
25. In addition, public sector agencies will be engaged through the Public Sector Executives Group chaired by Ian Williams.
26. Youth Unemployment is likely to be a key focus for the emerging Levelling Up Darlington Plan and the model of a focused, multi-agency operational group reporting to Cabinet and engaging with partners through the Public Sector Executives Group is anticipated to be a template for taking action forward.

### **Financial Implications**

27. As per Appendix A, the initial costs of the project are estimated at £70,000 with an ongoing £10,000 annual charge. The initial costs will be funded through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund where appropriate with any remaining costs paid for from the Covid reserve. There are sufficient funds available within these allocations to cover this initial outlay. It is anticipated that ongoing annual charges may be funded by contributions from partners.

### **Procurement Advice**

28. The Group Director of Operations has been consulted on these proposals.

### **Equalities Considerations**

29. Though it is not considered necessary to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment, careful consideration is being given to how people of protected characteristics will be benefitted.

### **Consultation**

30. Key partner agencies have been involved in developing and agreeing these proposals including DWP, Darlington College and Tees Valley Combined Authority. An internal officer group has also been established to shape these proposals including officers from People's Services and Economic Development.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

31. The proposals have been approved by external partners, including PSEG member agencies, the Department for Work and Pensions, and Council officers, all of which have agreed the proposed approach will be helpful in terms of developing a comprehensive evidence base and driving effective delivery actions already identified from our existing understanding.
32. Work is being undertaken by officers, with relevant stakeholders, to identify additional potential funding sources. This includes horizon-scanning for national opportunities and working with partners who may be able to access internal resource to understand the criteria and, consequently, determine whether any proposals could fit with this. Updates on the progress of this work will be provided on an ongoing basis.

## YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROPOSAL FOR DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Engaging young people and key stakeholders

1. Darlington has already developed key partnership networks of employers, policy leads, stakeholders and educators. The provider will bring these groups together along with young people as a key leadership group to drive the youth friendly place agenda. Together the group will set out a full plan that will identify the measures it wants to drive impact against such as claimant count, number of youth friendly vacancies etc.
2. The group will have oversight of the mapping work and support the development of a campaign that will engage employers, providers and young people. Utilising key assets such as the Good Youth Employment Charter and Young Professional Programme.

### Mapping local provision

3. The provider will create a data tool that will capture the current provision of the local area, this will include education and training opportunities, youth employment services and other provisions.
4. Once the data capture has been completed and verified by local stakeholders, the provider will analyse the information and provide a report based on its findings and recommendations.
5. The provider will support the youth friendly place leadership group and Darlington BC to understand what gaps it has in provision and identify solutions and opportunities for closing those gaps, utilising funding opportunities and government policy developments.

### A digital hub

6. The data from the mapping exercise will become the basis of building a digital hub for young people, providers and employers to access to connect to the current provision and showcase future opportunities.
7. The Darlington Hub will be built and managed by the provider. Providers consulted by officers have found that in other areas local employers are willing to contribute to cover the cost of the modest costs involve in manging the hub.

### Support young people to become Young Professionals

8. The provider will lead a campaign with young people in the Darlington are to encourage young people to sign up to and complete a young professional programme, which will include direct and constant access to the Digital Hub and confidence-building support to use the resource to find local services, training and employment opportunities.

## Create Youth Friendly Opportunities

9. The provider will also work with local employers to encourage them to sign up to be a youth-friendly employer and make their opportunities youth friendly. These opportunities will be listed through the Digital Hub and young people will be able to connect directly with good quality employers.

### Estimated Costings

Project Management	Establish and direct a local multiagency leadership group, coordinating with local organisations, providers, young people and DBC leads.	£20,000
Mapping	Bespoke build of a mapping tool, analysis, reporting & recommendations, insight dissemination and support with proposals	£15,000
Digital Hub	The design and build of a digital navigation hub, and marketing and promotion to increase user base.  Annual hosting and quarterly updates.	£15,000  £10,000 per annum
Young Professional Campaign	Work with young people, schools, colleges, providers and youth organisations to build a borough wide Young Professional campaign.	£10,000
Youth Friendly Employer Campaign	Work with employer groups to build a borough wide youth friendly employment campaign.	£10,000

**CABINET**  
**11 JANUARY 2022**

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**QUARTER 2 – COUNCIL PLAN 2020-23 – DELIVERING SUCCESS FOR DARLINGTON  
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –  
Councillor Heather Scott, Leader and all Cabinet Members**

**Responsible Director -  
Chief Officers Executive**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To present an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council Plan 2020-23 – Delivering Success for Darlington.
2. The report covers performance in and to the end of the first two quarters of the current financial year, from April to September 2021.

**Summary**

3. Delivering Success for Darlington is the Council Plan and it sets out the vision for the borough: *“Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.”* The Plan is structured around the following priorities:
  - (a) Growing Darlington’s Economy
  - (b) Maximising the Potential of our Young People
  - (c) Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential
  - (d) Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough
  - (e) A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council
4. The Performance report appended to this report outlines council performance up to the end of the second quarter of the 2021/22 financial year and is structured around the Council Plan, with:
  - (a) A high-level update on overall progress, across all portfolios, towards the overarching vision and priorities highlighted above.

- (b) An update on each Cabinet portfolio area, highlighting progress against key actions and relevant key performance indicators

### Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet consider progress against the Council Plan 2020-23, as set out in the performance report in Appendix 1.

### Reasons

6. The recommendation is supported as the purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the progress in implementing the Council Plan priorities.

### Chief Officers Executive

### Background Papers

The Council Plan 2020-23 - Delivering Success for Darlington

Natasha Telfer: Extension 6083

S17 Crime and Disorder	A number of performance indicators and key actions relating to crime and disorder are monitored as part of Council Plan performance reporting
Health and Well Being	The Council Plan outlines a number of key actions and priorities relating to improving the health and wellbeing of local residents, and so the performance report includes updates on how the Council has continued to support this over the first half of 2021/22.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	Progress towards the Council's climate change plan is outlined in the Council plan performance report.
Diversity	Equality measures are monitored as part of the Council Plan performance monitoring process
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report outlines progress against the Council Plan and is intended to be used to help inform strategic priorities going forward.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	This report outlines progress against the Council Plan.
Efficiency	The report highlights staff an organisational effectiveness in terms of meeting the key actions and priorities laid out in the Council Plan.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	As Looked After Children and Care Leavers are highlighted as corporate priorities in the Council Plan, the performance report includes updates on how the Council has continued to support these groups over the first half of 2021/22.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. The majority of measures in this performance report demonstrate progress towards achieving the council's strategic priorities, with the remaining measures demonstrating progress towards specific key actions aligned with individual portfolios as defined in the Council Plan 2020-23.
8. In most cases, progress against individual strategic priorities relies on action and support from services spanning multiple portfolios.

### *Growing Darlington's Economy*

9. In terms of delivering more sustainable, well-paid jobs across the borough:
  - (a) The number of jobs created increased in 2020, by 5%, in contrast to falls regionally and nationally
  - (b) The number of employed residents rose in 2021
  - (c) Average weekly wages increased in 2021, for both residents and employees
  - (d) The claimant count fell again in September, and is expected to continue falling as the local economy continues to recover from the immediate effects of the pandemic
10. The number of new businesses fell, in line with England, in 2021, but is expected to pick up again in 2022.
11. The Darlington housing market remains buoyant and, based on the number of new home completions to date this year, the Council expects to exceed the annual requirement once again in 2021/22.
12. The characteristics of the Borough contribute to creating the right conditions to attract more people to work, live and enjoy the Borough:
  - (a) The responsiveness to reports of fly tips and refuse remained high in the first half of the year, and the borough continues to score well on cleanliness measures.
  - (b) Incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour remained below pre-pandemic levels from April to September, and the Community Safety team remains proactive in working with the Police and other partners to address issues.
  - (c) The number of people injured in road casualty accidents has also continued to fall.
13. The implementation of the newly published Climate Change Strategy and action plan has helped ensure Darlington's CO2 emissions remain well below the regional average and continue to fall, reflecting significant work to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and that of the borough as a whole.
14. Considerable progress has been made towards adoption of the Local Plan over the period to support local economic growth, by giving the Council and developers confidence in future sustainable and accessible commercial and residential opportunities.

15. Delivery, with partners, of the Strategic Transport plan has continued despite the pandemic. Work to develop key projects to provide the improvements to support growth of the economy have progressed and these include the development of the Darlington Station Project, bus service improvement plans, sustainable transport initiatives, traffic management infrastructure and the availability of electric vehicle charging points are progressing. The proportion of local roads in need of maintenance also fell in 2021.

### ***Maximising the Potential of our Young People***

16. Darlington is now above the regional average for the proportion of local schools rated by Ofsted as “Good” or “Outstanding” has increased, and has no schools judged “Inadequate”.
17. In terms of removing barriers to young people reaching their potential:
  - (a) 61% of children eligible for free school meals achieve a good level of development at the end of their Reception year, above all comparator groups, and the proportion of all children achieving a good level of development at 2-2.5 years remains above the regional and national average
  - (b) No young people helped by the Council’s Youth Offending Service over the first two quarters of 2021/22 have gone on to reoffend and the number of first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System has continued to fall
18. The number of young people claiming unemployment benefits in Darlington peaked in May 2021, due to ongoing economic impacts from Covid-19, but then continuously fell to September

### ***Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential***

19. The proportion of working Darlington residents earning at least the Real Living Wage increased to 80.3% in 2021
20. A wide range of targeted interventions to support residents’ resilience, led by the Council and partners, have continued to deliver and expand over the first of the year, including The Bread and Butter Thing food waste project which is now running from seven hubs across the borough, and the School Uniform Exchange which supported hundreds of local families to dramatically cut the costs of going Back to School in September.
21. New emerging areas of focus have begun to be developed as part of the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery, including:
  - (a) scaling up the innovative Northgate Initiative – a partnership systems approach to addressing wellbeing at a neighbourhood-level – to complement national Levelling Up activity at a local level
  - (b) using the Towns Fund programme to improve local skills via the creation of a new adult learning facility
  - (c) working with partners to support local young people to take advantage of current and upcoming employment opportunities in Darlington.



### ***Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough***

22. In terms of providing care and support when needed:
- (a) The Council has won government funding to recruit additional staff to support residents at risk of homelessness.
  - (b) The number of older residents admitted to permanent residential or nursing care remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels, and the number of working age people admitted remains below comparator groups. These measures reflect the ongoing work of Adult Social Care to, wherever possible, support people to maintain their independence and remain in their own homes with support.
  - (c) The proportion of social care users and carers in receipt of self-directed support remains close to 100% and above regional and national averages.
23. The Council's Adult Social Care team have continued to demonstrate a 'Strengths Based' approach to practice and assessment, including by:
- (a) Increasing the number of bathing and/or mobility major adaptations provided to residents, and supporting the maintenance and improvement of mobility generally, and reduce the risk of falls, by encouraging service users to undertake armchair exercises
  - (b) Improving the proportion of Reablement service users who, on completion of their package, have no ongoing needs
24. The Council is working with local voluntary and community sector partners to develop a dedicated engagement forum to enable greater collaboration on programmes and initiatives to support vulnerable residents.

### ***A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council***

25. A new workforce strategy and plan, 'Working together to Deliver Success' has been developed and is now being implemented across the Council, to ensure all staff feel valued, have the right skills and are flexible and customer focused. Our four core values of Respect, Innovate, Collaborate and Deliver are at the heart of what the Council aims to consistently achieve. Immediate priorities include delivering new agile working processes, supporting employee wellbeing, and increasing apprenticeships.

### ***Adults Portfolio***

26. An evaluation of a number of small, local, voluntary sector-led initiatives to address social isolation, funded by the Council. has found positive impacts and work is being undertaken to further develop this work with partners.
27. The proportion of people with needs relating to mental health and/or learning disabilities supported by the Council to live at home or with their families remains above average, reflecting the strong ethos of the Adults service to maximise residents' independence and wellbeing.

28. A number of interventions to promote and increase the use of assistive technology have continued to be delivered over the period, including:
- (a) Piloting new digital self-management tools to support users' independence
  - (b) Supporting residents with sensory impairments to identify and provide equipment to improve their quality of life
  - (c) Increasing the proportion of referrals for assistive technology that result in equipment being provided.

### ***Children and Young People Portfolio***

29. Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) have continued to receive excellent services over the first half of 2021/22, including:
- (a) Delivery of 31 new placements for pupils with SEND across two new facilities in Red Hall and Rise Carr
  - (b) An increase in the proportion of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) educated in mainstream schools, reflecting our SEND strategy's ambition of educating SEND pupils, where possible, in their local community with the right support.
  - (c) Remaining above the national average for percentage of new EHCPs issued within twenty weeks
30. Work to minimise the need for children to be taken into care has continued, with the number of Looked After Children 12% lower in September 2021 than the year before, reflecting:
- (a) Positive work by the Children's Service Front Door team to ensure safe decisions are taken to safeguard children at the earliest available opportunity
  - (b) The relational practice of the Council's Strengthening Families programme which has continued to implement timely interventions to support families to stay together
  - (c) Success in reducing the number of Looked After Children by finding positive outcomes including adoption, Special Guardianship Orders and, where appropriate, working with families so that children can return home.
31. The total number of in-house foster placements available, as of September 2021, was higher than at the same time last year and is anticipated to grow further with nine families currently going through the foster carer assessment process as a result of a major campaign, including social media advertisements and online information events, to encourage more prospective foster carers to come forward.
32. The Council's residential homes for children have been incorporated into its new build programme, with the first move due in May 2022. Plans have also been finalised to repurpose the existing property into a residential short-breaks service to provide early targeted support to families to further reduce the need for children to be taken into care.
33. The proportion of care leavers who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) has continued to fall in 2021, and remains significantly below the average for England, the North East and statistical neighbours.

34. Despite youth unemployment increasing as a result of the pandemic, as elsewhere, the Council's Youth Employment Initiative service has continued to deliver high numbers of positive progressions and sustained destinations for participants, and the youth claimant count has been falling since May 2021. The proportion of working-age residents claiming Universal Credit for more than a year has also been falling since May 2021 and, as of September, was below the regional average.
35. Since March 2021, two of Darlington's secondary schools have been Ofsted inspected and had their ratings upgraded from "Requires Improvement" to "Good".
36. 115 new Year 6 pupils have been signed up to the Council's In2 programme. The project supports disadvantaged children to participate in arts, leisure and cultural opportunities to maximise their potential, and the first activity delivered in September was a theatre heritage project in the Hullabaloo.
37. A comprehensive Holiday Activities and Food programme was delivered across the Borough over the Easter and Summer school holidays, with an exciting timetable including trips to the Dolphin Centre, Head of Steam Museum and Darlington Hippodrome and a nutritious cooked meal provided for participants each day. The government has confirmed funding for the programme for the next 3 years.

### ***Economy Portfolio***

38. The first phase of improvements to the covered market opened in August 2021 and a great deal of positive feedback has been received from local residents and visitors. The outdoor market was also relocated to High Row which has led to an increase in the number of market traders.
39. Progress has been made over the period on a number of acquisitions of strategically positioned buildings and land in the town centre, to support delivery of the Town Centre Strategy, have taken place including the residential Skinnergate development and with the anticipated acquisition of the former Northern Echo building.
40. Key economic sites across the borough have continued to be developed so they are investor ready, including Faverdale Business Park, the National Biologics Centre, the Innovation Central site, Ingenium Park, and Central Park.
41. A temporary lease between the Treasury and Darlington Borough Council for Feethams House has been agreed, with Treasury and other government departments' staff due to start populating the building in early 2022/23.
42. Following Darlington Borough Council's successful allocation of government Covid-19 Additional Restrictions Grants to local businesses, a bonus grant of £631,000 has been received which is being used to further support and encourage start-ups and indigenous companies to grow.
43. Significant progress has been made with regards to the draft Local Plan, with formal hearings now complete and, following a public consultation on consequent modifications, it is expected the inspector will finalise their report before the end of the year.

44. Darlington housebuilding starts were up by 108 units and completions by 49 from March to September 2021 compared to the same period the previous year.
45. The capacity of the Council's Climate Change team has doubled in the first of 2021/22, with the recruitment of a new Climate Change Officer.
46. The Darlington Station project has advanced, with a strong delivery partnership, including Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), Network Rail, the Department for Transport and train operators now in place. Various planning permissions have been secured, the detailed design and land acquisition stages of the programme are progressing and improvements to the public realm and sustainable transport links on Victoria Road have been completed.

### ***Health and Housing Portfolio***

47. As Covid-19 limitations have been relaxed, the Dolphin Centre has reopened in line with ongoing national restrictions with customers returning to use the facilities, with the data showing dramatic increases in visitor numbers over the course of 2021, from 3,100 in March 2021 to 60,541 in September 2021, a nearly twenty-fold rise.
48. Local Outbreak Control meetings have continued to operate as required to deliver the Local Outbreak Plan. Darlington is also part of a Local Tracing Partnership with NHS Test & Trace with dedicated capacity to follow up hard-to-reach contacts and cases in Darlington.
49. 100% of Darlington Borough Council social housing stock continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard over the first half of 2021/22 and, despite pandemic-related disruption to housebuilding, a new scheme was delivered in 2020/21.
50. Rent collection rates for Council housing have remained higher than previous years and within expected levels, and officers continued to promote help and guidance, make affordable repayment plans, and assist with benefit claims and budgeting skills from March to September 2021.
51. 19 of the 28 actions outlined in Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy have now been completed. The Council has also successfully increased the number of temporary accommodation units by 36% to help meet growing demand resulting from the pandemic, successfully bid for additional government funding to recruit additional staff to deliver support and advice services to homeless people and been recognised by the NEPACS Ruth Cranfield Award for our dedication to housing and success in tackling homelessness during the pandemic.
52. The Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan has delivered, with partners, a number of evidence-based interventions to address the root causes of child obesity in Darlington including working with local schools and commercial premises to develop and roll out a healthy catering standard across the borough.
53. The percentage of Darlington 5 year olds with visually obvious dental decay has been falling for the past three years, and a new toothbrushing scheme has been delivered to support further progress.

54. The proportion of Darlington residents smoking fell slightly in 2020 and remains below regional and national averages, and work continues through the Council's commissioned Stop Smoking service to encourage and support residents to quit.
55. The Council's Lifeline team won the Stronger Communities award for 'Exceptional Care' and has restarted tenant engagement sessions and resident activities as Covid-19 restrictions have continued to be lifted.

### ***Local Services Portfolio***

56. The plan for the 2025 celebrations is being developed, with a core programme proposed to include live steam and motive power, early steam locomotives exhibitions, educational projects, community events and large-scale outdoor arts and street theatre.
57. The town centre has continued to attract visitors and residents in the first half of the year, with:
  - (a) Sixteen town centre events were held over the period, up from zero in 2020, including Pride, the Vintage Vehicle Rally and a range of food and music festivals
  - (b) Close to 100% of town centre areas passing litter inspections in each of the six months
58. A planning application for the Rail Heritage Quarter has been developed and submitted, with determination due in January 2022.
59. The Crown Street Library refurbishment and modernisation project has commenced on site, with work being undertaken to repair the building's roof and structure, upgrade mechanical and electrical installations and sympathetically restore the library interior.
60. The town centre parking offer has continued throughout the period, to support Covid-19 recovery, and a new parking strategy is under development.
61. The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan has now been agreed and a prospectus submitted to government to secure over £300m transport investment in the next 5 years across the sub-region. Recent updates of the programme include development of key road projects, ongoing delivery of the Darlington Station site, submission of a Bus Service Improvement Plan, and further development of walking and cycling schemes on Duke Street and Woodland Road.
62. The refurbishment of the crematorium, to include a new chapel, began on-site in June and is anticipated to be complete by Spring 2022.

### ***Resources Portfolio***

63. The draft Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 - 2025/26 is now out for consultation and is showing an affordable four-year position.
64. The Investment Fund provision of £50m is being utilised for Joint Venture (JV) and economic regeneration initiatives. The Council has invested in six JVs for house building to date, with all sites progressing well, and anticipated returns of over £6m.

65. The percentage of local council tax and business rates collected are expected to meet their year-end target.
66. More than a third of the Council's contracted spend in the first two quarters, equating to over £17.6M, was with Darlington-based suppliers. A new local anchor network has also been established with the Council's local public sector partners, to further develop a joint approach to maximising social value and local spend in procurement by developing a joined-up approach based on shared priorities for Darlington.
67. More than 100 council services are now available online and new online services have continued to be rolled out, included a new "Report it" facility which is ensuring a quicker response to public concerns. The growth in online functionality correlates with a growth in visitor numbers to the Council's website compared to pre-pandemic, which has also undergone improvements with new information and functions, easier to understand content and better navigation all delivered in the first half of the year.

### ***Stronger Communities Portfolio***

68. 4,302 volunteer hours were delivered in the first two quarters of 2020/21 by Darlington Cares members, compared to 0 hours over the same period last year when the majority of organisations were unable to release staff. As restrictions are lifted the pre-pandemic programme is being rebooted, including the popular Pick, Pie and a Pint litter picks, new volunteering opportunities are being explored, and discussions are being held with prospective new member organisations.
69. Following the pandemic, the Northgate Initiative – an innovative multi-agency programme to improve local wellbeing across a range of domains – is being reviewed by the steering group to refresh the programme's structure and focus and ensure it reflects emerging priorities.
70. There are now seven The Bread and Butter Thing hubs established in key areas of Darlington which, as of the end of September 2021, have provided local families with 21,421 sets of groceries, equating to 257 tonnes of food, 610,000 meals, and have collectively saved households nearly £600,000 in food costs.
71. The Council's Civic Enforcement team have successfully won funding from all three government 'Safer Streets' funds, enabling significant resource to be targeted at burglary-prevention, increasing CCTV coverage, and preventing violence against women and girls.
72. The proportion of Darlington residents who are in need of alcohol and/or drugs treatment but estimated not to be in it is below the national average and falling.
73. Reported town centre crime, incidents and anti-social behaviour were all down by approximately a third in the first two quarters of 2021 compared to the same period pre-pandemic, in 2019. Reflecting this positive performance, officers have prepared a renewal application for Purple Flag status, a national accreditation scheme that identifies town and city centres that meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night-time economy.

74. More than half of staff and two-thirds of Members have now received equality and diversity training. Feedback from the bespoke half-day training has been overwhelmingly positive and since its inception the proportion of staff who agree that the Council takes equality and diversity issues seriously has increased from 93% to 96%.
75. Two separate partnership studies to assess flood risk across the borough are underway and will be used to inform bids for funding to implement preventative solutions. Work has also been undertaken with the Environment Agency to remove debris from the Skerne to minimise flooding risk.

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# Darlington Borough Council

## Council Plan Performance Management Report

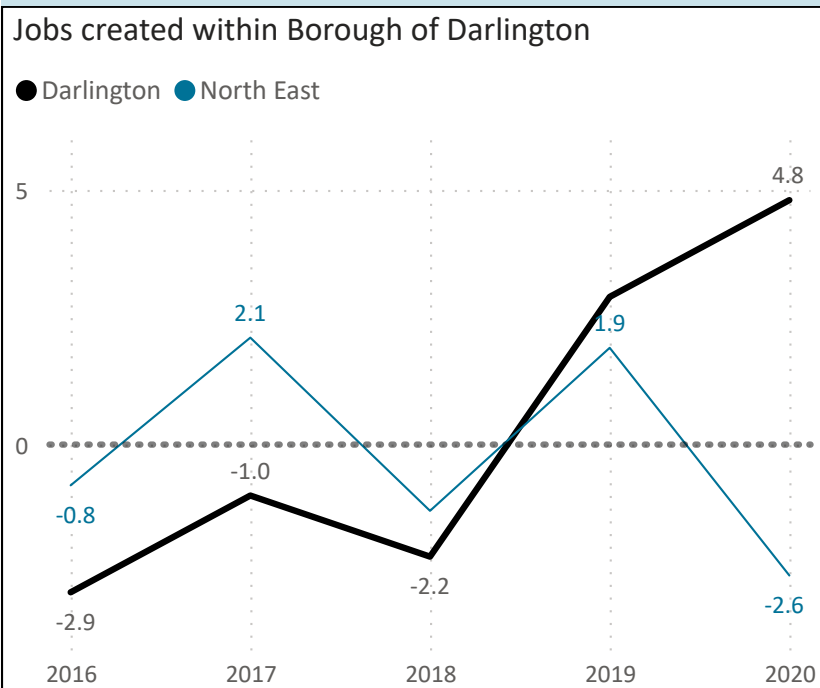
### April to September 2021/22

This report outlines council performance up to the end of the second quarter of the 2021/22 financial year.

The performance report is structured around the Council Plan, with:

- A high-level update on progress towards the overarching corporate priorities outlined in the beginning of the Council Plan document to highlight areas of strategic significance:
  - Growing Darlington's Economy (pages 2-12)
  - Maximising the Potential of our Young People (pages 13-15)
  - Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential (pages 16-17)
  - Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough (pages 18-21)
- Sections on each Cabinet portfolio area highlighting progress against key actions and relevant key performance indicators:
  - Adults (pages 22-23)
  - Children and Young People (pages 24-30)
  - Economy (pages 31-33)
  - Health and Housing (pages 34-39)
  - Local Services (pages 40-42)
  - Resources (pages 43-46)
  - Stronger Communities (pages 47-51)

## 1.1 Delivering - More sustainable well-paid jobs



This measure shows the difference in total employment (both Public and Private) compared to the same point 12 months previously, in order to show the number of jobs created in Darlington within the last year. As can be seen, the number of job opportunities increased again in 2020, in contrast to the regional and national picture where job opportunities fell during the first 9 months of the pandemic.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

### Number of people employed including self employed

Year	Darlington
2015	49,800
2016	48,600
2017	50,200
2018	49,400
2019	48,600
2020	48,400
2021	49,600

Employment growth continued in Darlington despite the Covid-19 pandemic, with an additional 1,200 employment opportunities recorded, including self-employment, in the local economy between July 2020 and June 2021 compared to the same period the year before.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

### Number of employees

Year	Darlington
2015	42,800
2016	42,600
2017	43,200
2018	44,500
2019	42,400
2020	43,300
2021	44,200

Employee growth also appears to have continued in Darlington despite the effects of the pandemic, with data showing 900 additional employees recorded in the local economy between July 2020 and June 2021 compared to the same period the year before.

## 1.1 Delivering - More sustainable well-paid jobs

### Median weekly full-time residence based earnings

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2012	348	412	374
2013	382	421	382
2014	387	843	773
2015	402	429	395
2016	437	442	405
2017	416	454	416
2018	415	466	420
2019	440	483	438
2020	428	484	436
2021	487	509	463

Darlington resident median weekly incomes increased in 2021, following a fall in 2020, to £487 per week (equating to £25,324 per annum). This metric is based on sample data, and therefore should be treated with some caution as smaller areas such as Darlington tend to show relatively high volatility between years. Looking back since 2014, however, suggests that Darlington median weekly earnings for residents are, and continue to be, in line with regional trends.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

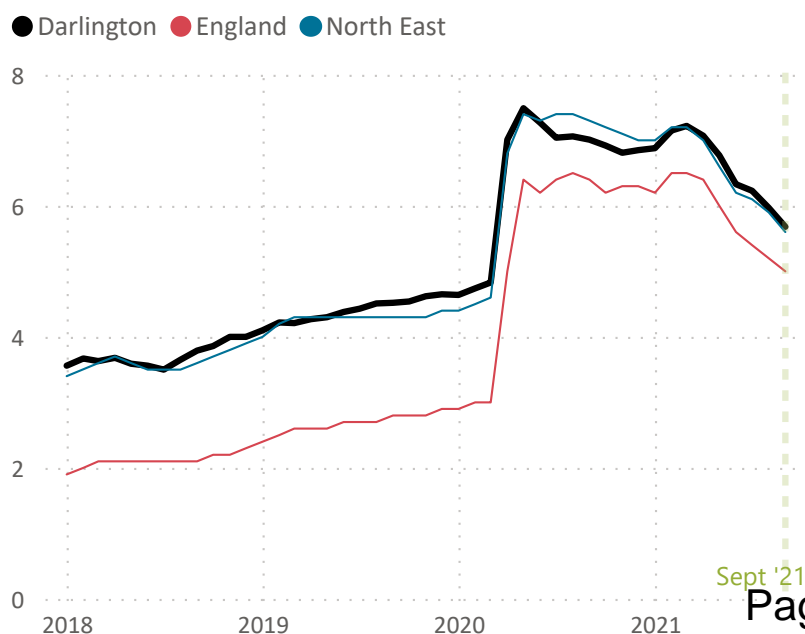
### Median weekly full-time employee based earnings

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2012	366	412	372
2013	330	421	379
2014	422	422	390
2015	437	429	395
2016	435	442	403
2017	423	454	417
2018	433	466	418
2019	457	483	438
2020	435	485	436
2021	457	510	458

Darlington employee median weekly incomes increased in 2021, following a fall in 2020, to £457 per week (equating to £23,769 per annum). This metric is based on sample data, and therefore should be treated with some caution as smaller areas such as Darlington tend to show relatively high volatility between years. Looking back since 2014, however, suggests that whilst Darlington median weekly earnings for employees have increased slightly over this period, the rate of increase has been slower than elsewhere and so fallen from being in line with the national average, to being in line with neighbouring authority areas. New civil service roles are expected to help improve this trend.

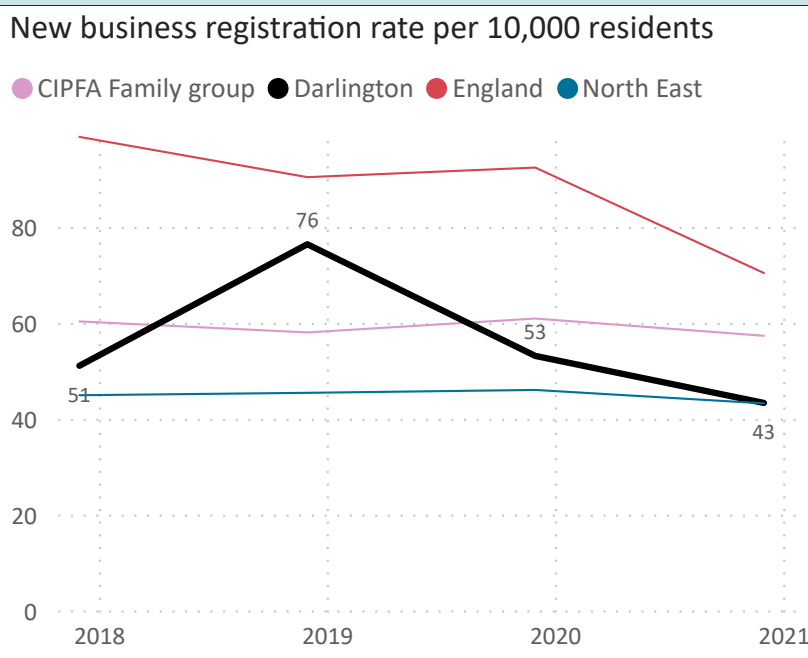
Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

### Monthly unemployed claimant count (%)



The number of Darlington residents claiming benefits for the reason of unemployment fell again in September, to 3,700 (5.7%), from 4,880 (7.5%) in May 2020 when the impacts of Covid-19 on worklessness reached its peak. Whilst Darlington remains above the national average for this measure, it is in line with neighbouring authorities in the North East and expected to continue falling as the economy recovers from the pandemic and growing vacancy numbers feed through into reduced unemployment.

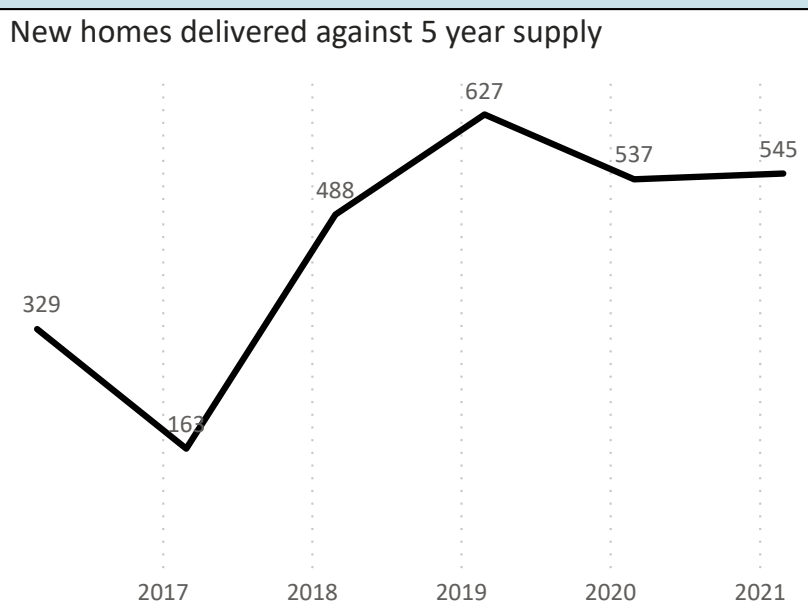
## 1.2 Delivering - More businesses



New business formation numbers have fallen in Darlington in both 2020 and 2021, due to the immediate impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and resulting limited opportunities for new enterprises. Despite this fall, however, the number of employment opportunities in the town, measured as absolute number of available jobs, has increased over the same period. Moreover, it is anticipated that as the local economy continues to recover from the pandemic and its aftermath the numbers of new businesses created in the borough will begin to recover, supported by recent positive developments including the arrival of hundreds of new civil service jobs in Darlington.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

## 1.3 Delivering - More homes



Despite the pandemic the housing market remains buoyant in the borough and, based on the completions so far in the first half of the financial year, we would expect to once again exceed the annual requirement. The Local Plan will hopefully be adopted early in the new year which will result in applications currently in the system being given approval. The adoption of the Local Plan will result in further applications being submitted to ensure we have a pipeline of permissions to ensure delivery of our 5 year supply going forward.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

## 1.4 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Clean

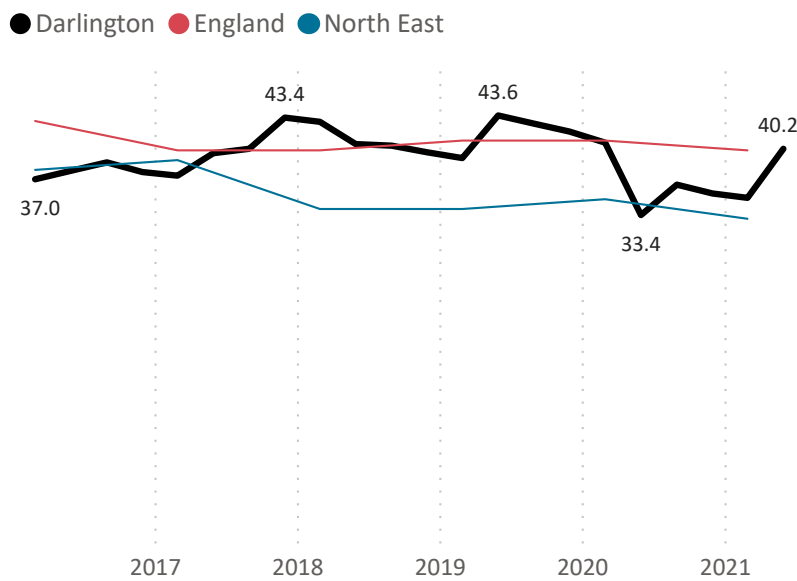
Percentage of complaints about refuse on private land investigated and completed within 28 days (except where there is non-compliance with enforcement action taken)

Year	Month	Darlington
2021	June	91.2%
	September	89.5%

Environmental Health investigate complaints of accumulations of refuse on private land and in financial year 2020/2021 received 306 service requests and 171 up to September this year. In the first instance for the majority of cases involving refuse accumulations in yards / gardens a Community Protection Warning is issued requiring disposal of the refuse in a proper manner and these have proved to be successful. For those case where the refuse has not been removed enforcement action is considered prioritising refuse which is causing a public health nuisance i.e. putrescible household refuse. The timescale within the target has been extended from 28 to 42 days to allow a longer period of time to be given to those responsible to dispose of the accumulation of refuse.

## 1.4 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Clean

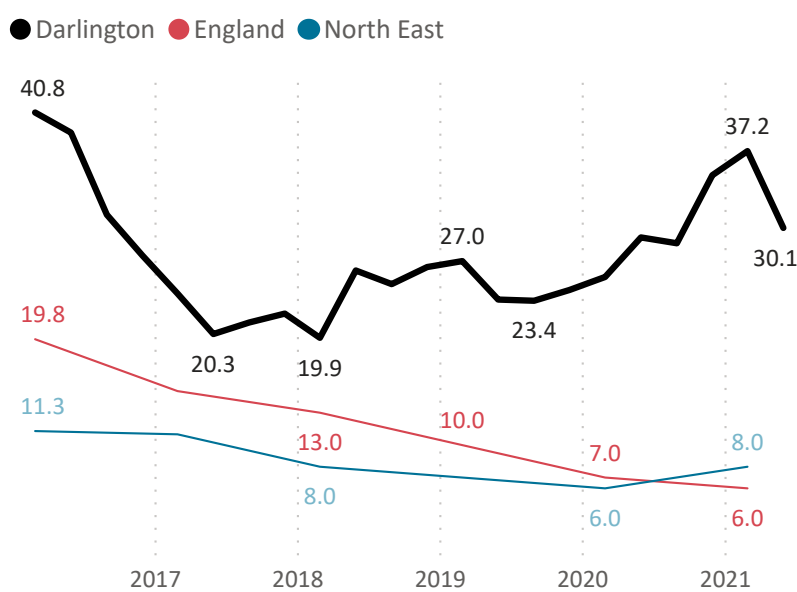
Percentage of household waste that is collected that is either reused, recycled or composted



Data for the proportion of local household waste reused, recycled or composted is only available for Quarter 1 of this year as the information is reported through a national system which has a three-month lag. The Quarter 1 data shows an increase, to 40.2%, for this measure, above the equivalent figure for the previous four quarters and above the most recent benchmarking data for England and the North East. Significant work continues to be undertaken by the Street Scene and Communications teams to increase recycling rates and reduce contamination by raising residents' awareness of what can be recycled through a variety of channels.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

Percentage of overall waste that is collected by the Council that is landfilled



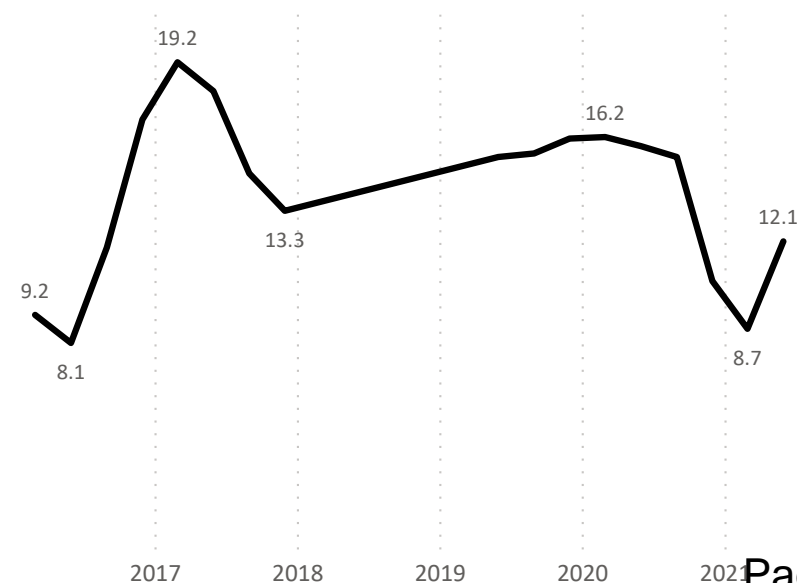
Landfill rates in Darlington have fallen significantly over the last fifteen years:

- The proportion of municipal waste sent to landfill since 2006/07 has reduced from more than 60% to 37%
- The proportion of household waste sent to landfill since 2006/07 has reduced from 80% to 38%

There are fluctuations over the years as there is a relationship with levels of recycling and waste sent to energy recovery. Darlington Borough Council performs worse than the rest of the North East as the majority of our neighbours send all residual waste to an energy recovery facility with limited waste going to landfill.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

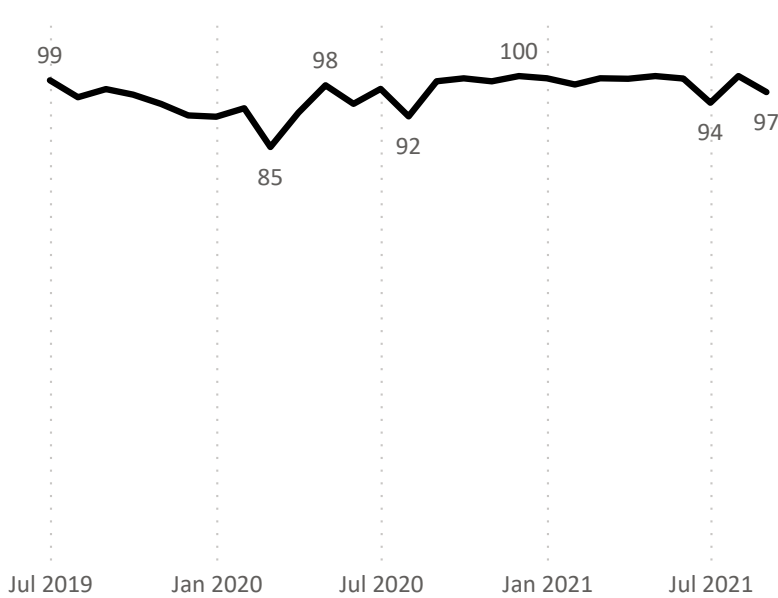
Percentage of overall waste that is collected by the Council that is used for energy recovery



The proportion of household waste sent for energy recovery dropped from 16% in 2019/20 to 9% in 2020/21. The reason for this reduction was the emergence of Covid-19, which led to a collapse of the market waste was sent to for energy recovery. As the markets begin to stabilise again, a new Tees Valley provider has been found to deliver this service and so more waste is now being sent as a fuel source to energy plants. This metric is expected to continue improving as the industry recovers from the effects of the pandemic.

## 1.4 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Clean

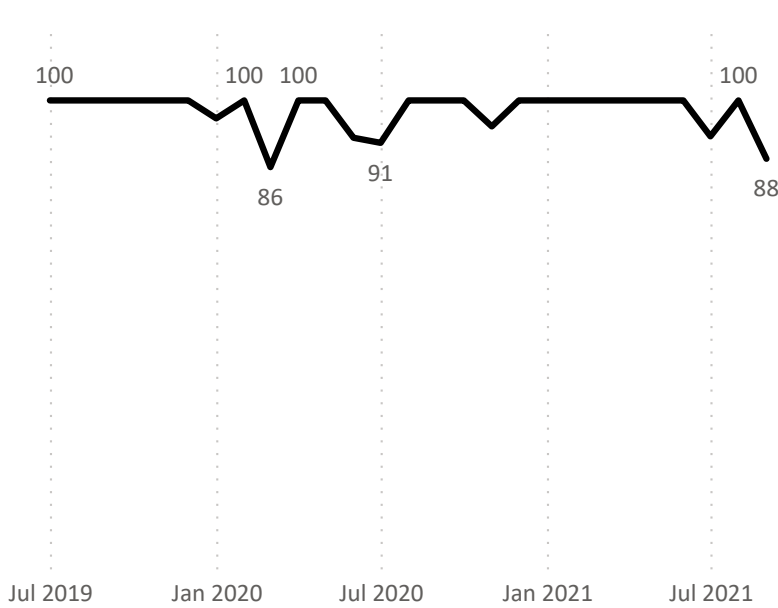
Percentage of small fly tips removed within target time (reported monthly)



Data for the first two quarters of 2021/22 shows that the Council's Street Scene team have continued to clear the vast majority of small fly tips within their target timescales, with monthly averages ranging between 94 and 100%.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

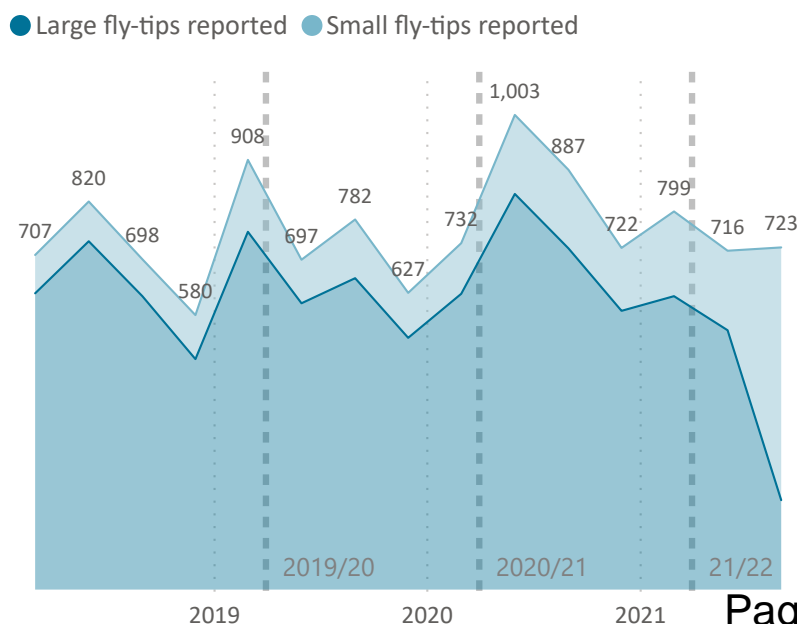
Percentage of large fly tips removed within target time (reported monthly)



The proportion of large fly tips removed in target time has fallen over the period, however this is due to a new process whereby large fly tips now initially go to the Council's Civic Enforcement team to investigate to see if there is any evidence to proceed to prosecution, rather than directly to the Street Scene team. Only once the initial investigation is carried out is Street Scene notified to collect the relevant fly tip, which has led to longer overall periods between notification and removal. As the target time was for Street Scene collection this measure will be reviewed to better reflect actual performance going forward.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

Total number of fly-tips reported in quarter



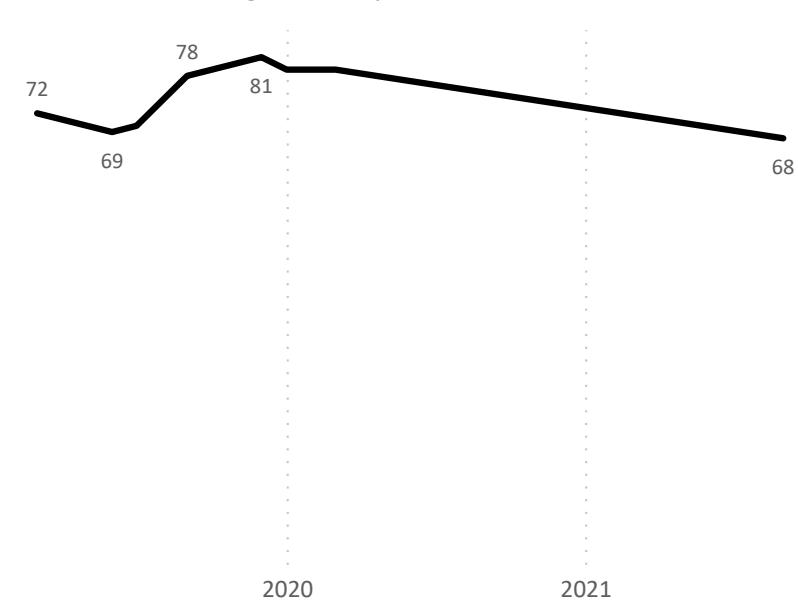
Following an increase due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of fly tips reported fell in the first two quarters of 2021/22, compared to both the previous two quarters and the same period in 2020/21.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson



## 1.4 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Clean

Land Audit Management System - Litter Score



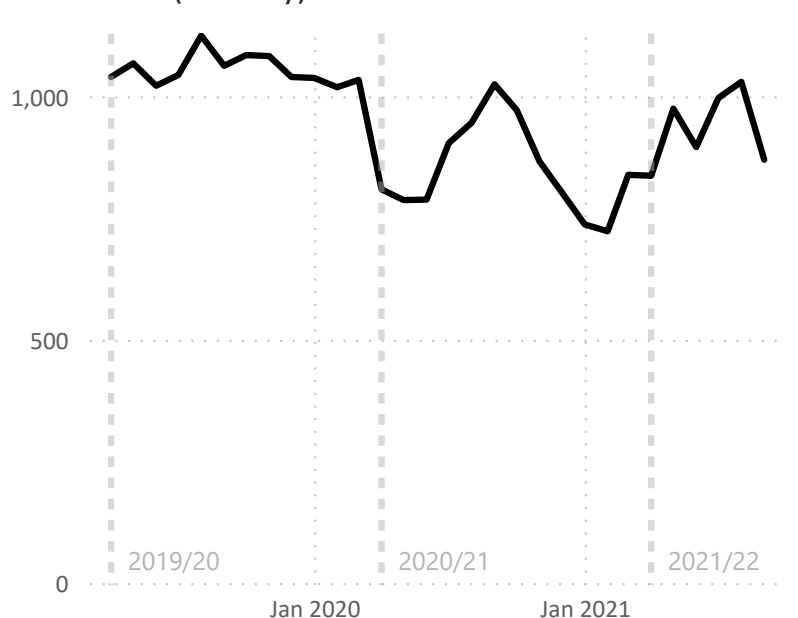
The scoring system used for monitoring litter as part of the Land Audit Management System (LAMS) is based on a grading structure; Grade A with no litter to Grade D which is heavily littered.

The majority of inspections carried out during the period were in the lightly littered grades and therefore passed the inspection. There will be a difference between periods as the inspections are carried out in different areas of town on a rolling basis with some areas having more challenging littering issues than others.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

## 1.5 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Safe

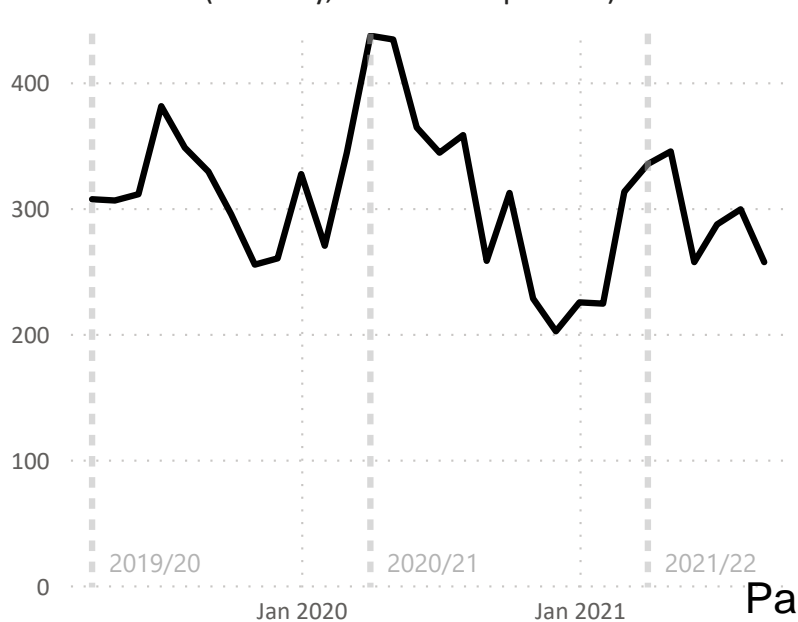
Total Crime (monthly)



Recorded crime for the first six months of 2021/22 increased 7% from the same period last year, however was still 11% lower than the same period pre-pandemic, in 2019/20. The types of reported crime showing increases are largely directly linked to the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, in areas such as violence against the person for example. The Council are working with Durham Constabulary and other partners to help address these issues and continue monitoring crime rates.

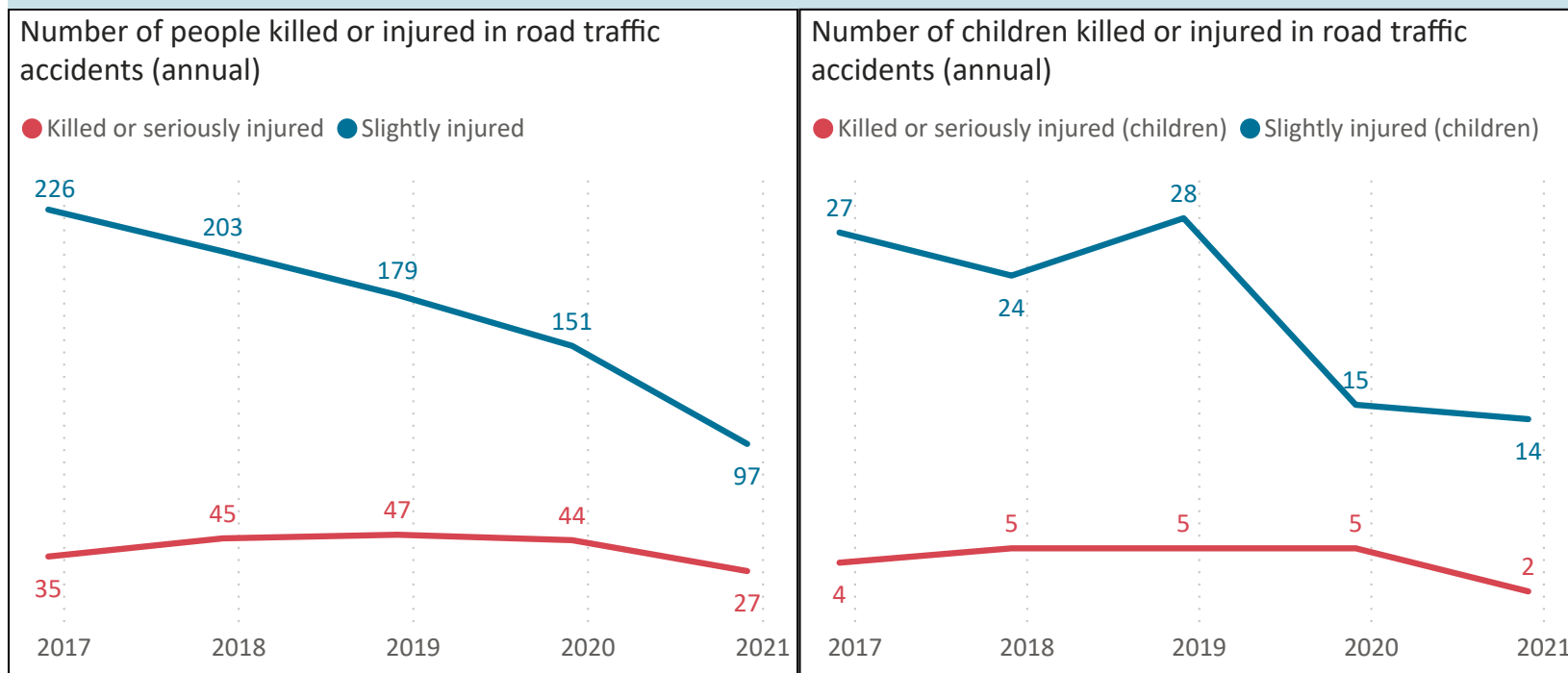
Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

ASB Incidents (monthly, excludes duplicates)



Whilst the rate of reported antisocial behaviour incidents across the borough continues to fall, the Council continues to be proactive in addressing issues. Over the past two quarters, for example, incidents of youths throwing missiles in areas to the east and north of Darlington have been a priority for the Community Safety team, with the Council's Civic Enforcement officers working closely with Durham Constabulary and other partners to identify individuals involved through a series of targeted operations. Several groups have subsequently already been identified and the Civic Enforcement team are in the process of interviewing parents and, where appropriate, referring individuals to the Youth Justice Service (YJS).

## 1.5 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Safe



Casualties are monitored annually and there has been significant progress in reducing the number of Slight casualties in Darlington over a sustained period.

Covid-19 has resulted in changing road traffic patterns with significantly less traffic recorded during lockdown periods. This will be a contributory factor in the significant reduction in people killed or seriously injured during the 2020/2021.

Whilst casualties are reducing, it is saddening that people are still injured on our roads. There have been no fatalities this year and number of people killed on our road since 2017 is 6. There have been no child fatalities since 2013.

Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt



## 1.6 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Healthy

Male healthy life expectancy at birth

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2014	62.2	63.4	59.6
2015	61.8	63.4	59.6
2016	61.1	63.3	59.6
2017	60.7	63.4	59.5
2018	60.3	63.4	59.4
2019	58.1	63.4	59.4

There is a two-year lag on this metric, however latest data, for 2017-19, shows Darlington is statistically similar to the North East average, at 58.1 years, but lower than the national average and falling at a faster rate than elsewhere since 2015-17. This indicator is considered an important summary measure of mortality and morbidity, by showing the years a person can expect to live in good health, rather than with a disability or in poor health. The measure is calculated using contemporary mortality rates and the prevalence of self-reported good health in local areas.

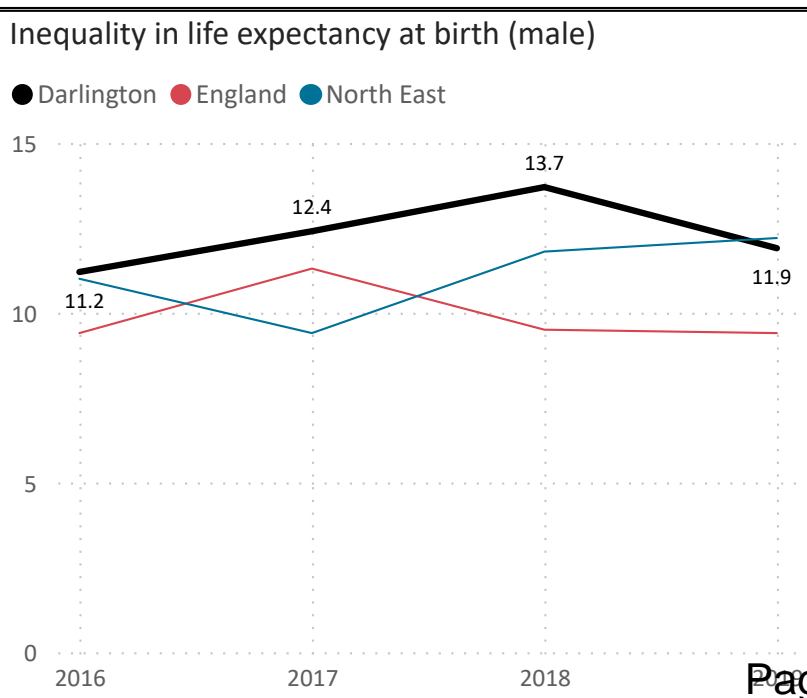
[Director Public Health - Penny Spring](#)

Female healthy life expectancy at birth

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2014	61.7	63.9	59.9
2015	61.4	64.1	60.1
2016	63.4	63.8	60.5
2017	64.3	63.8	60.4
2018	63.3	63.9	59.7
2019	62.2	63.5	59.0

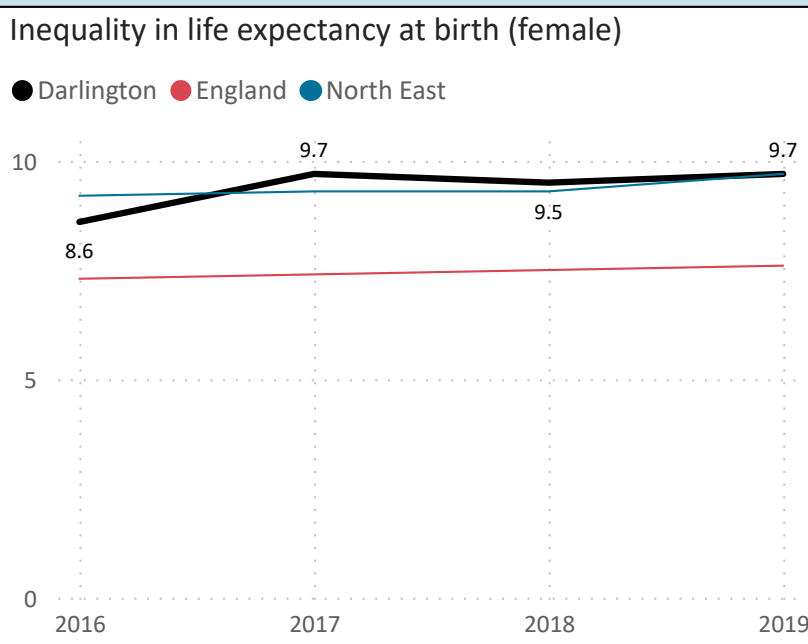
There is a two-year lag on this metric, however latest data, for 2017-19, shows Darlington performs relatively well compared to the rest of the North East in terms of healthy life expectancy for females and is statistically similar to the England average, at 62.2 years, however this measure has been falling at a faster rate than elsewhere since 2015-17. This indicator is considered an important summary measure of mortality and morbidity, by showing the years a person can expect to live in good health, rather than with a disability or in poor health. The measure is calculated using contemporary mortality rates and the prevalence of self-reported good health in local areas.

[Director Public Health - Penny Spring](#)



This indicator measures inequalities in life expectancy at birth within England as a whole, each English region, and each local authority. It takes account of health inequalities across the whole range of deprivation within each area and summarises this in a single number. This represents the range in years of life expectancy across the social gradient from most to least deprived, based on a statistical analysis of the relationship between life expectancy and deprivation. Inequality in life expectancy at birth for males in Darlington fell in 2019, from 13.7 to 11.9 years and is now slightly below the North East average of 12.2 years, although it remains above the national average.

## 1.6 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Healthy



This indicator measures inequalities in life expectancy at birth within England as a whole, each English region, and each local authority. It takes account of health inequalities across the whole range of deprivation within each area and summarises this in a single number. This represents the range in years of life expectancy across the social gradient from most to least deprived, based on a statistical analysis of the relationship between life expectancy and deprivation. Inequality in life expectancy at birth for females in Darlington increased very slightly in 2019, to 9.7 years, but remains in line with the North East average and above the national average.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

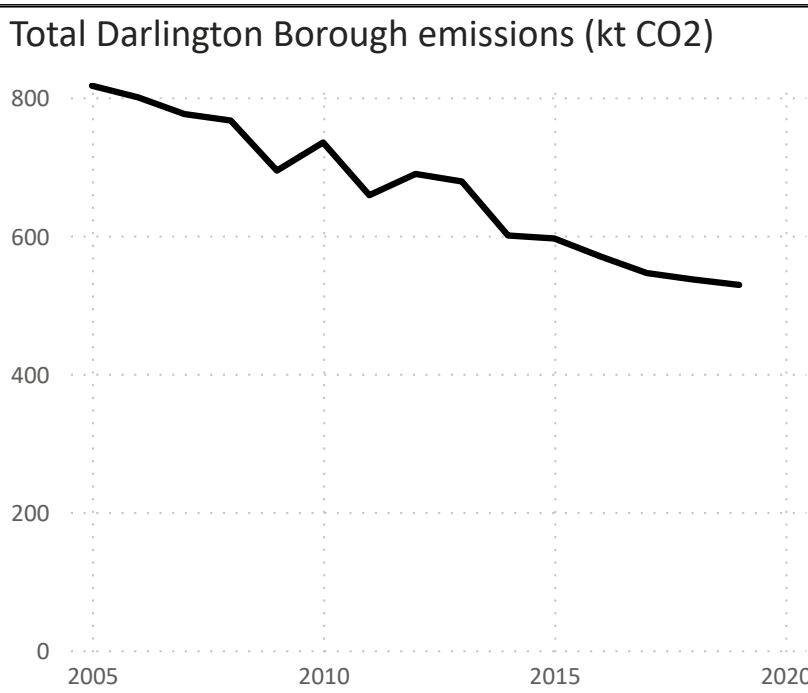
## 1.7 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Sustainable

**CO2 emissions per capita**

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2014	5.7	6.1	9.0
2015	5.6	5.8	8.1
2016	5.4	5.4	6.0
2017	5.1	5.2	6.0
2018	5.0	5.1	5.8
2019	4.9	4.9	5.5

As shown by the data, Darlington's emissions remain well below the North East average. Officers will use the lessons learnt from putting our own house in order to persuade and encourage businesses in the area to take their own actions to further deliver improvements for this measure. The Council will also step up its engagement with residents and schools over the coming period to ensure we are all equipped to play our part in tackling climate change.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman



The Council's climate change action plan has now been published, with almost 200 actions outlined to ensure we meet our climate declaration. In addition, almost £2m of grant funding has been received for work on the corporate estate and energy efficiency measures for almost 900 properties across Darlington. A compulsory staff training module has also been rolled out, ensuring Council employees understand their role in combatting climate change. Finally, a revised tree and woodland strategy has been published, including a commitment to plant at least 20,000 trees over three years, almost 10,000 of which have already been planted or are planned.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

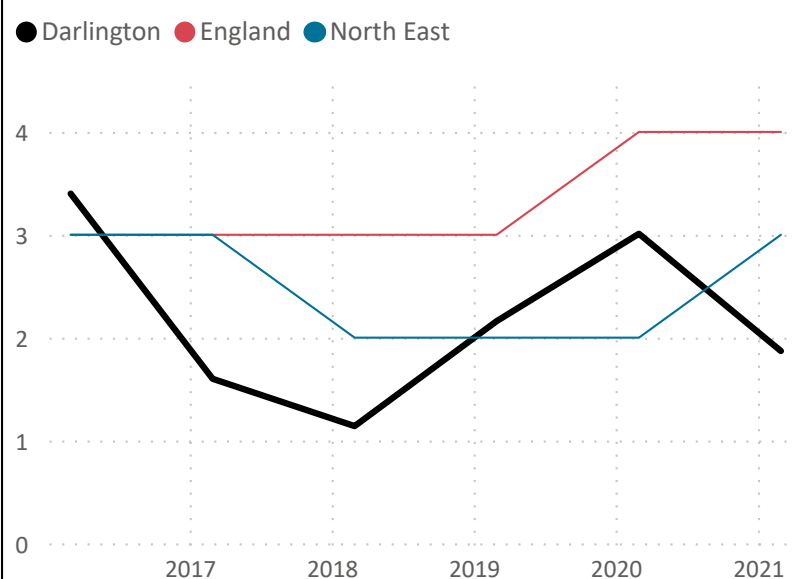
## 1.8 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - Well planned

The successful adoption of the Local Plan will ensure that a degree of confidence is given both to the Council and developers that commercial and residential growth will be permitted in a variety of sustainable and accessible locations, to meet both our ambitions and local needs. The development of new housing and new economic strategies will then further support and promote economic growth targets and priorities, as well as complement existing strategies including partnership plans at Tees Valley Combined Authority level, to ensure the Council continues to have a comprehensive, robust and deliverable action plan for continued economic growth.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

## 1.9 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - On the move

Percentage of principal roads where maintenance should be considered (A class)



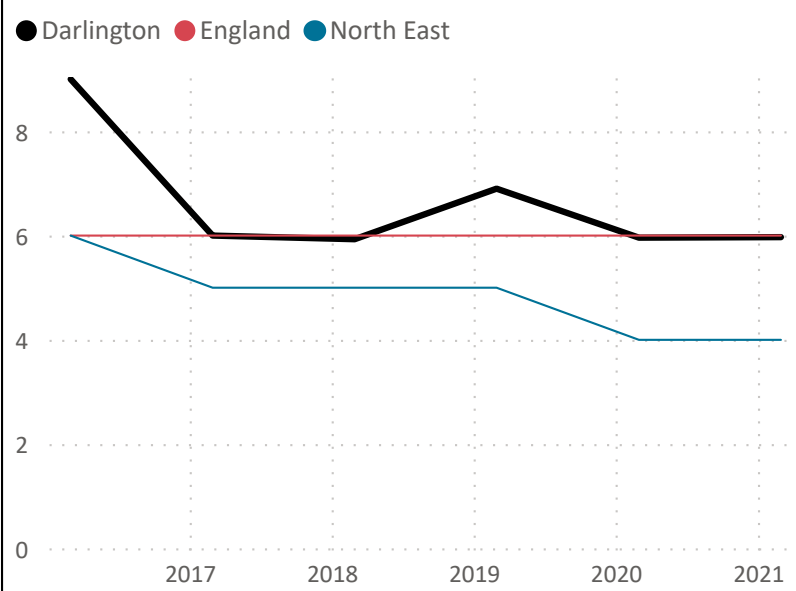
Due to Covid-19 restrictions on pedestrian social distancing, two of the 2020/21 programmed “A” road schemes had to be deferred, however the programme still delivered 1.16km of reconstructed and/or resurfaced A roads in Darlington, resulting in an improvement in the overall condition of the A road network.

The percentage of the A road network needing to be considered for maintenance fell to 1.9%, better than the national and North East average.

In Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 three A roads were completed; the A68 West Auckland Road, the A6072 Heighington Bypass and the A67 Merrybent.

Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt

Percentage of non-principal roads where maintenance should be considered (B and C class)



Due to Covid-19 restrictions on pedestrian social distancing, the investment planned on the B&C class road network planned in 2020/21 has had to be deferred until 2021/22.

The network condition remained at 6%, highlighting that there has been no deterioration in the condition of B and C class roads. Previous years investment has seen improvements to B and C Class roads and Darlington is now in line with the England average.

In Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 two resurfacing schemes on B and C class roads were completed; the C38 Middleton Road / Sadberge Road and the B6279 Tornado Way.

Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt

## 1.9 And we will support economic growth by keeping the borough - On the move

The Council continues to work in partnership with TVCA and the other Tees Valley local authorities to deliver the joint Strategic Transport Plan. This work is crucial in supporting the council plan's principal ambition of economic growth and work has continued on Darlington Station improvements, bus improvement corridors and the establishment of the Bus Partnership, development of Demand Responsive Transport, travel behaviour programmes, upgraded Urban Traffic Management and Control System, Wheels to Work, Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan investment and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

## 2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

### 2.1 Working with partners to maximise educational achievement

The Ofsted profile of local schools has improved significantly since 2020, reflecting the significant work continuing to be undertaken by local partners to support children and young people's attainment in Darlington. In January 2019 Darlington was highlighted in the Ofsted report "Flight or Fight" as one of 3 local authorities with the highest number of "stuck" schools in England that had received persistently poor inspection ratings and was locked in a cycle of low performance. At this point Darlington was also well below regional and national average on Ofsted performance for secondary schools. As of September 2021, however, the percentage of "Good" or "Outstanding" secondary schools in Darlington is now above regional average and the second highest in the Tees Valley. There has also been a significant improvement in the percentage of pupils attending "Good" or "Outstanding" schools, with Darlington also now outperforming the regional average on this measure. Furthermore, no schools are currently judged "Inadequate" in Darlington.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

### 2.2 Working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential

Percentage inequality gap in achievement across all the Early Learning Goals				
School year	Darlington	England	North East	Statistical Neighbour
2013/14	42.7	33.9	37.8	36.4
2014/15	40.5	32.1	35.3	34.3
2015/16	37.9	31.4	33.3	33.5
2016/17	36.9	31.7	32.3	33.3
2017/18	38.2	31.8	32.9	34.2
2018/19	40.0	32.4	33.4	34.5

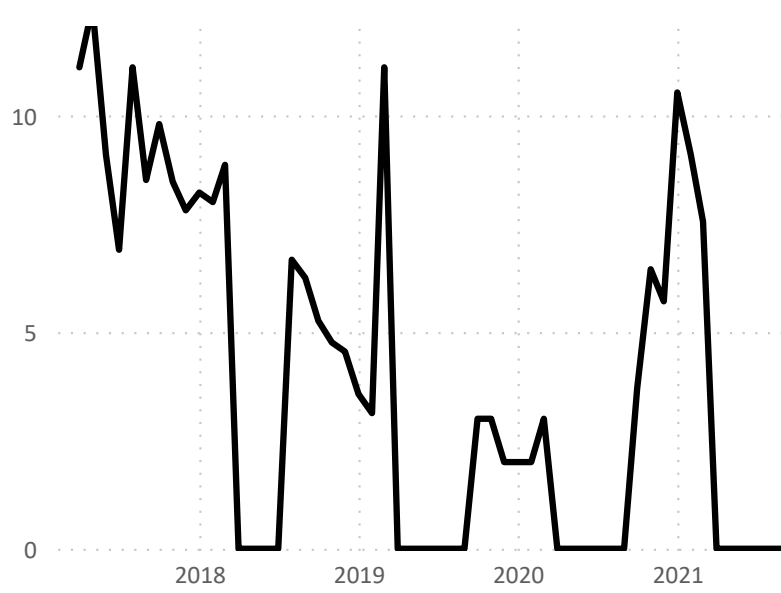
The percentage of children in Darlington schools achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception has been stable for the last 4 years and in line with national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators. The percentage of these children entitled to free school meals achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception in 2018/19 is greater than the regional and national averages. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths has improved year on year since 2015/16, and is currently 4% above the national average, with the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils narrowing at a greater rate than nationally.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

## 2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

### 2.2 Working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential

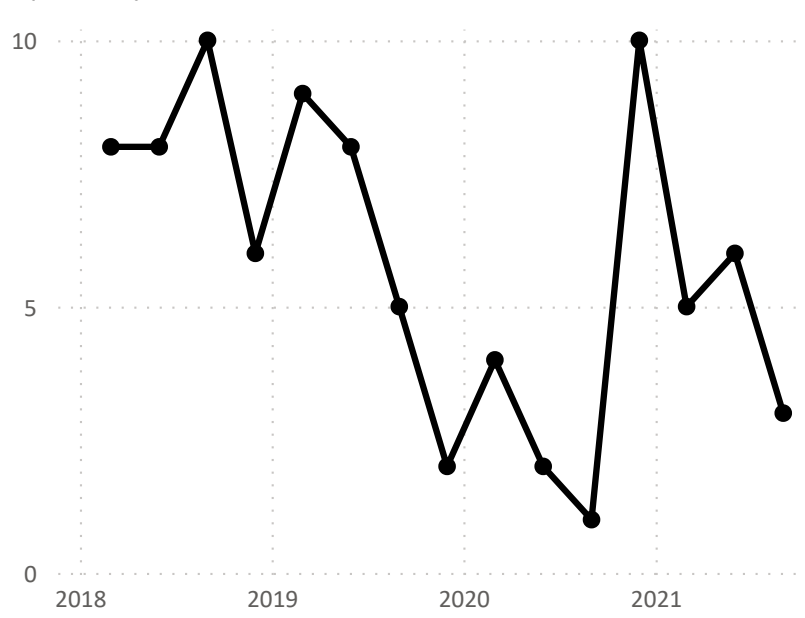
Percentage of reoffending rate of clients receiving a PCD



The Council's Youth Offending Service (YOS) had 20 young people referred to the service for diversionary disposals i.e., Pre-Caution Disposals (19) and Restorative Disposals (1) over the first six months of 2020/21. Over the same period, the team has achieved a 100% success rate in terms of young people not reoffending following engagement with the service.

Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell

Number of First Time entrants to the Youth Justice System (quarterly)



The number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System in Darlington remained lower than comparator areas in both 2019/20 and 2020/21. This continued positive performance reflects the good work of Council services and partners in early identification of young people in need of support, as well as impressive engagement levels with the Council's Youth Offending Service (YOS) team.

Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell



## 2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

### 2.2 Working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential

School Readiness: all children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception as a percentage of all eligible children (Early Years Foundation Stage profile)

School year	Darlington	England	North East	Statistical Neighbour
2013/14	55.3	60.4	55.8	56.1
2014/15	66.3	66.3	63.1	63.4
2015/16	69.6	69.3	68.4	67.3
2016/17	72.2	70.7	70.7	68.7
2017/18	72.6	71.5	71.5	70.0
2018/19	71.7	71.8	71.8	70.4

All end of key stage attainment data collections were cancelled for 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to Covid, so 2018/19 is the last academic year where data is available.

The 2018/19 results show that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has increased significantly since 2013/14 and, at 71.7%, remains in line with the national average (71.8%), those of statistical neighbours (70.4%) and North East local authorities (71.8%).

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

Child development: percentage of children achieving a good level of development at 2-2½ years

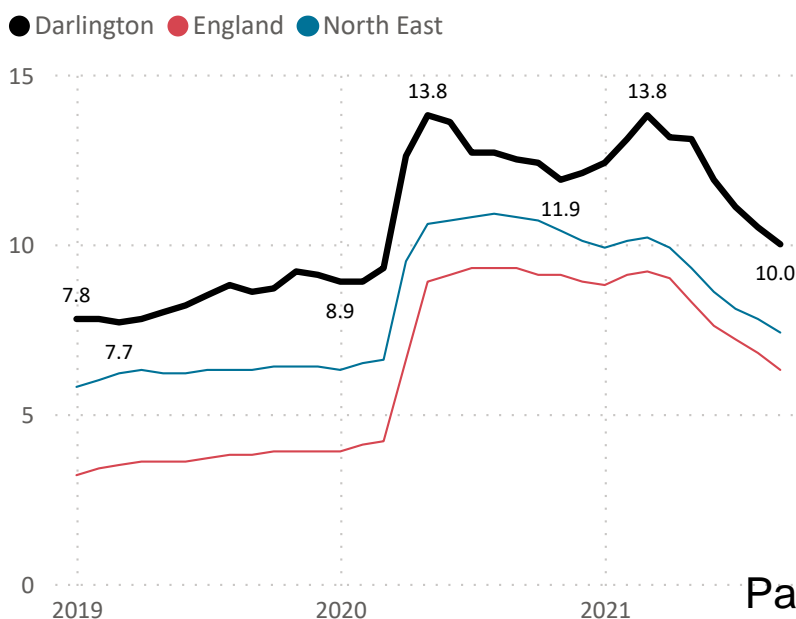
School year	Darlington	England	North East
2017/18	80.9	83.3	85.6
2018/19	91.8	84.1	87.6
2019/20	93.9	83.3	87.4
2020/21	93.9	82.9	87.2

The percentage of children achieving a good level of development at 2-2½ years, defined as the proportion of children who received a review who were at or above the expected level in all five domains, remains statistically better than the England and the North East averages, at 94% in 2020/21. The national average for this measure is 83%.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

### 2.3 Working at a Tees Valley level to match jobs with skills and training

18-24 Unemployment claimant count (%)



The 18-24 year old claimant count in Darlington has dropped steadily since March 2021 when reached its highest point at 13.8% or 1,005 young people. As of September 2021 it was down to 9.9% or 725 young people, and down from 12.5% in September 2020, but still above the North East average of 7.4% and the England average of 6.3% and above pre-pandemic levels - the local figure in September 2019 was 8.5% or 625 young people. The Council continues to proactively address this issue, with a number of working groups established to develop a partnership approach to supporting young people struggling to find suitable employment.

## 3. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO MAXIMISE THEIR POTENTIAL

### 3.1 Maximising the benefits of a growing economy for all communities

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2016	81.1	79.5	76.1
2017	77.7	80.5	77.1
2018	78.0	79.9	75.8
2019	77.3	82.4	78.1
2020	75.8	82.8	79.2
2021	80.3	85.2	81.3

The proportion of in-work Darlington residents earning the real living wage, calculated by the Resolution Foundation as being £9.50 an hour in 2021, significantly increased this year, to 80.3% but remained below the regional average of 81.3% and England average of 85.2%. This metric is based on sample data, and therefore should be treated with some caution as smaller areas such as Darlington tend to show relatively high volatility between years.

Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman

### 3.2 Targeting services where most needed

Council services, often in partnership, regularly engage with communities to help them to maximise their potential with The Bread and Butter Thing, the Northgate Initiative, and other activities through Darlington Cares just a few examples of innovative new approaches delivered in the last few years. More recently:

- a council-wide approach, working with partners, was undertaken to support communities throughout the pandemic.
- our Housing team secured funding to eradicate rough sleeping, have worked closely with the Public Health Team to run Covid-19 vaccination clinics for homeless people, and won a NEPACS Ruth Cranfield award in recognition of their dedication to residents through the pandemic.
- the Lifeline Team has delivered tenant engagement sessions within their Sheltered and Extra Care tenants, and local good neighbour communities, to give residents a say in tenancy management, policy, activity and all aspects of scheme development. The brilliant work of the team was evidenced by their recent win of the Exceptional Care award at the Darlington Stronger Communities Awards.
- a new digital inclusion initiative by the Council is offering residents the chance to borrow iPads, access training and support, and receive refurbished devices donated by fellow residents.

Head of Strategy, Performance & Comms - N. Bowerbank

### 3.3 Working with partners

The Council has a long history of working well with partners to effectively address local priorities, which has continued during the course of the pandemic. Having recognised a need for affordable food in local communities, for example, Darlington Borough Council collaborated with Cummins and Darlington Building Society to bring the charity The Bread and Butter Thing to Darlington, which now operates from 7 community hubs located in areas identified as in greatest need across the borough. During 2020 it became apparent that some families were going to struggle to buy uniform for their children's return to school. DBC worked with businesses through Darlington Cares to open a Uniform Exchange Scheme. DBC has established a Public Sector Executives Group which brings together the public sector agencies in Darlington to address shared concerns.

Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson



## 3. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO MAXIMISE THEIR POTENTIAL

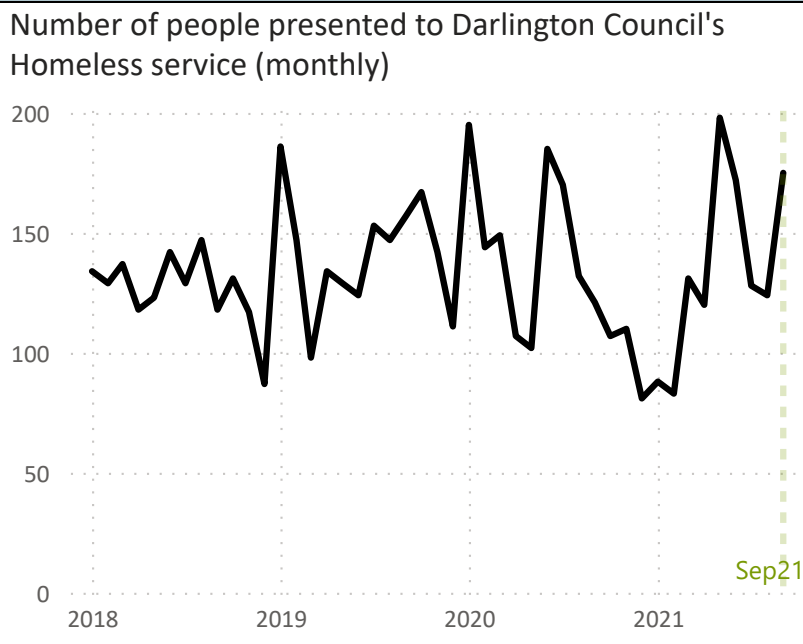
### 3.4 Working with communities

The Council is considering how it can generate activity to complement the national Levelling Up programme, ensuring that national investment generates the greatest prosperity for the people of Darlington. The focus would be on ensuring that residents of Darlington, no matter where in the borough they live, have the same access to opportunities to make the best of their talents and live a healthy and happy life as in any other part of the UK. In-depth engagement with local communities would be a core principle of activity. The Council is leading a multi-agency programme in Northgate which is acting as a testbed for how focused activity can help residents access opportunities. The Towns Fund presents an opportunity to create an adult learning facility to improve skills for work. In addition the Council is conferring with partner agencies to consider how all young people in Darlington can be supported to maximise their employment potential.

[Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson](#)

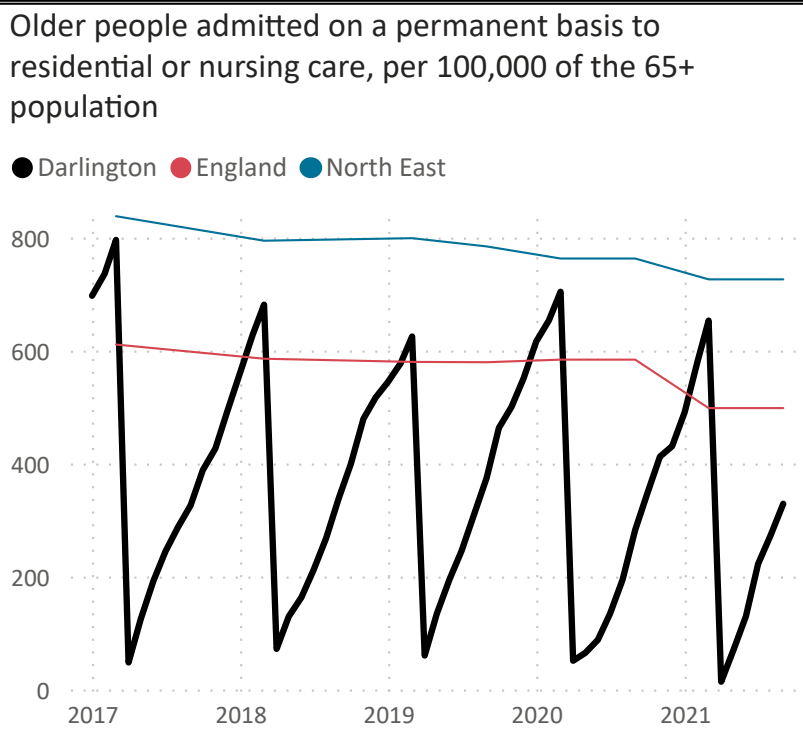
# 4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

## 4.1 Providing care and support when needed



Whilst there was a decrease in homeless placements during Quarter 2, the number of people presenting to the Council's Homelessness services remains high as a result of the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic and this is considered likely to increase during the winter months. Successful bids for Government funding has allowed the service to recruit additional staff to help manage growing demand, including an Outreach Support Worker, to deliver street support and floating support to prevent rough sleeping, and a new Housing Options Navigator, to carry out triage, duty to refer and low level case work.

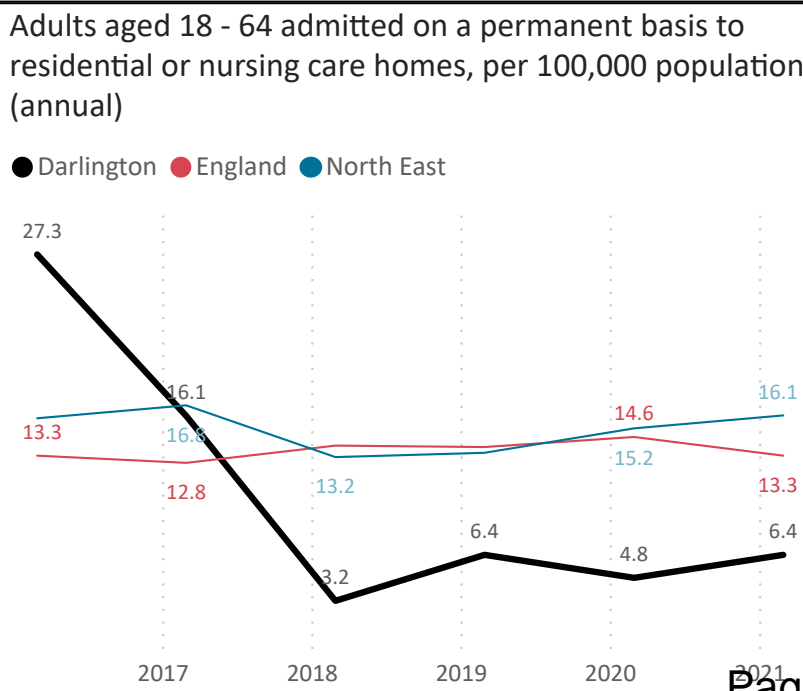
Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys



Between April and September 2021, the number of older people admitted into residential or nursing care was 71 (328.9 per 100,000 population). This is an increase from last year, when the number of permanent admissions during the same period was 61 (282.6 per 100,000 population), but still significantly below the pre-pandemic comparable figure from 2019 of 81 (375.2 per 100,000).

Note: The graph shows the monthly rate of older people being admitted into permanent care in Darlington from April of each year. As regional and national benchmarking data is only available for the end of each year, the 'peaks' for Darlington should be used to determine the borough's relative performance for this measure.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

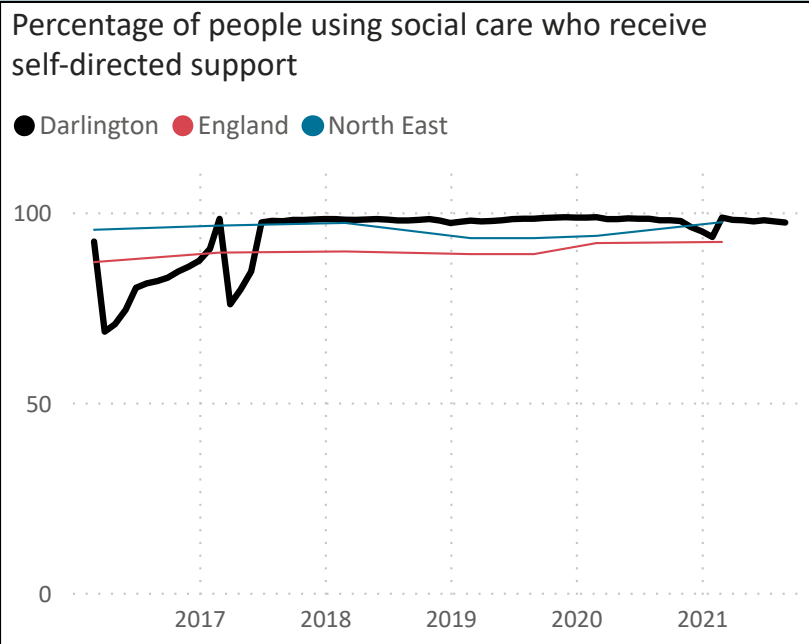


Between April and September 2021, 5 working age individuals (6.4 per 100,000 population) were admitted permanently into residential or nursing care homes, continuing trend since 2018 of being significantly below both regional and national average for this metric. A robust assurance process undertaken by Team Managers and the Council's Validation Panel continues to ensure that clients only enter permanent care when necessary, with clients supported to live independently with support wherever this is possible.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

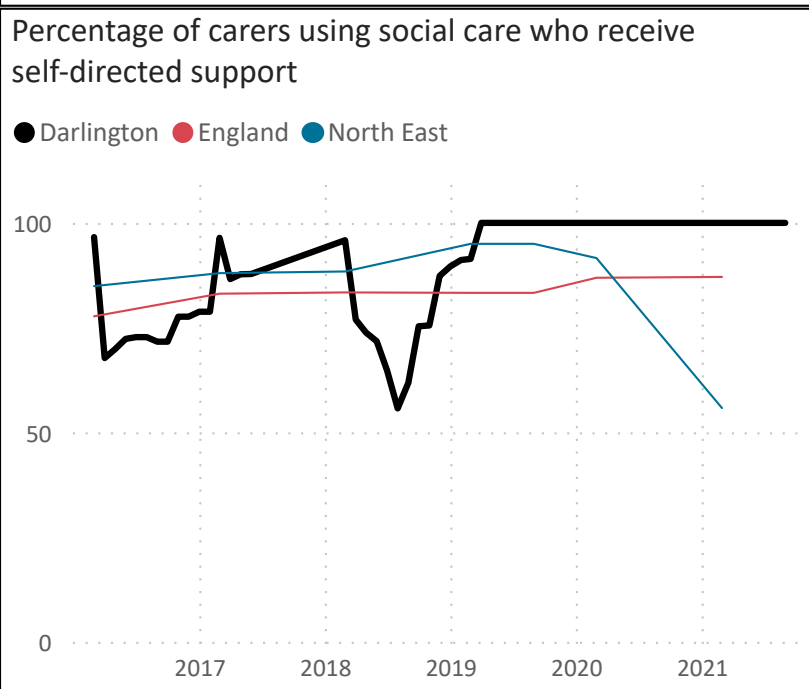
# 4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

## 4.1 Providing care and support when needed



As of the end of September 2021, 97.3% of 770 clients using social care were receiving self-directed support. Darlington typically exceeds both the national and regional averages for this measure, reflecting the strong ethos of the Council's Adult Social Care team of taking a strengths-based approach to support residents in need, maximising service users' choice and control over the services they receive to ensure these best suit peoples' particular needs and preferences.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron



Over the first half of 2021/22, 100% of 91 carers using social care receive self-directed support. This data, which shows Darlington exceeds both the national and regional average for this metric, reflects how all carers who are in receipt of a commissioned service now have a personal budget to maximise their independence and choice and, ultimately, to support their wellbeing and ensure they are able to access the support that best suits their needs.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

## 4.2 Working with people to build on their strengths to maximise their potential

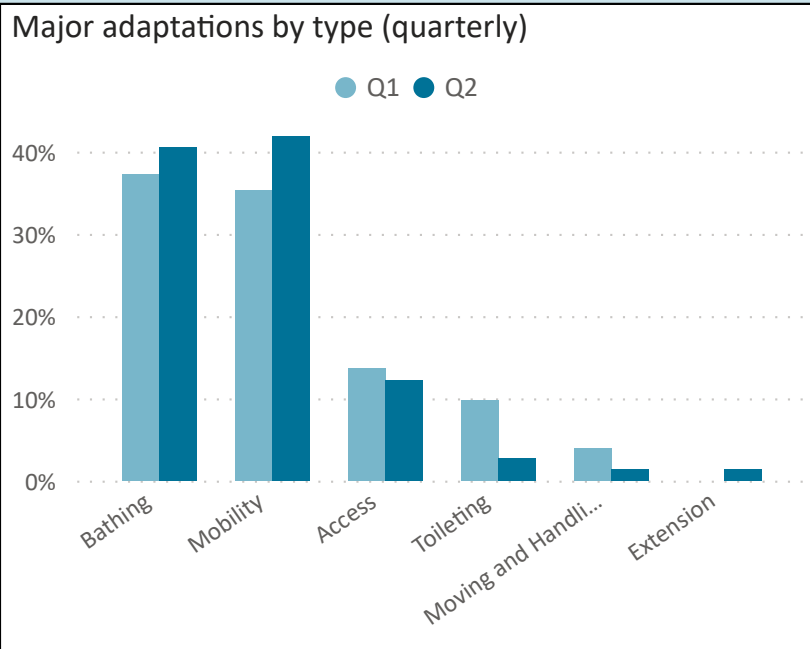
The Council's Adult Social Care team provides care and support to the most vulnerable adults in the community. This includes adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, and older people with long term conditions. The majority of what we do is governed by the Care Act 2014 and associated regulations and guidance. We actively seek to promote the wellbeing of the people that we work with and take a personalised approach to providing support. We also work closely with the NHS and other partners.

As a service we take a 'Strength Based' approach to practice and assessment. This means that we support people to become more resilient in meeting their care needs by developing their networks and personal strengths. We take this approach because it is the right thing to do and it is also consistent with our duty to 'prevent, delay or reduce' the need for formal support. Support plans focus on the abilities of the person, what resources and support they currently have and what they can access in their local community. The teams will encourage the use of aids and adaptations to ensure people remain as independent as possible for as long as possible.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

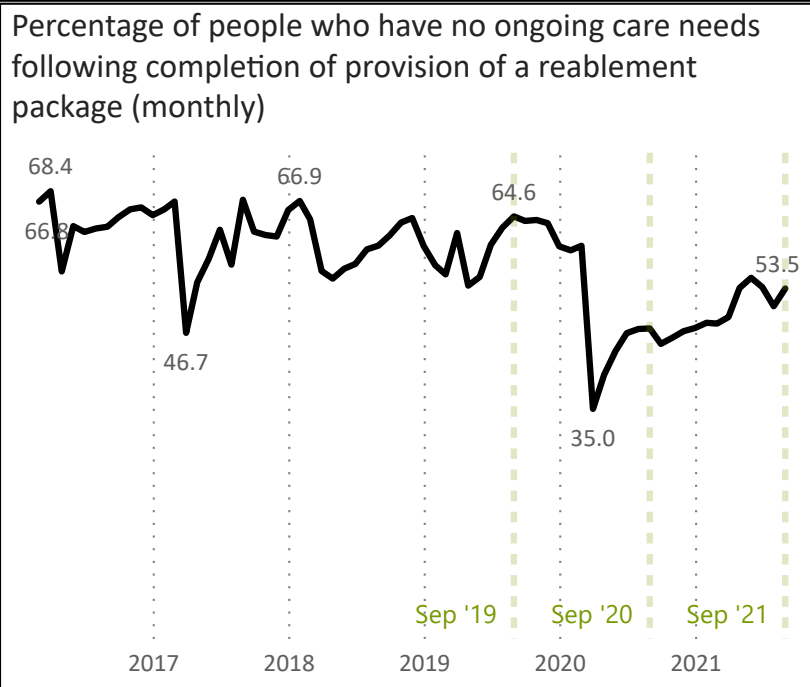
# 4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

## 4.2 Working with people to build on their strengths to maximise their potential



A increase in the number of service users receiving a bathing and/or mobility major adaptation was recorded in Quarter 2 of 2021/22. The increase in the number of people with less mobility is one of many possible impacts of Covid-19, and potentially related to people remaining in their homes more than pre-pandemic. In response to these increases, and to support people to remain independent, the Council's Reablement team are undertaking a project to encourage residents to undertake armchair exercises to improve and maintain their mobility levels.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron



Of the 230 clients who completed a reablement package between April and September 2021, 123 had no ongoing care needs. The current performance of 53.5% is a significant improvement from the same time in 2020/21 (47.4%). As the Council's Reablement team has become more established, using small aids and a strengths-based approach, outcomes for service users has improved, with increases in high need clients receiving reablement packages. We aim to improve performance in this indicator further by introducing chair-based exercises to reduce the number of falls by residents which can have a detrimental impact on mobility and wellbeing.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

# 4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

## 4.3 Working with partners

In 2019 the Council brought together a 'Third Sector Steering group' to advise on how a limited amount of discretionary funding should be used at local community level to improve the wellbeing of young people, people with disabilities and the elderly. The focus of the group was to provide small amounts of money to community organisations to enable them to make their services more available and/or pilot new approaches to addressing priority issues, including nine social isolation projects, support for the School Uniform Exchange to help low income families and a discretionary fund for schools to improve attendance. The steering group was chaired by Inclusion North, a regional organisation focused on developing local projects which increase the opportunities for people to participate. Following allocation of grants, the Council is now discussing with the group how it could become a more formal engagement body between the public and third sector in Darlington, enabling greater collaboration and advising the Council and its partners on third sector concerns.

Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation - Christine Shields

# 5. SUPPORTED BY

## 5.1 A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council

Darlington Borough Council's workforce is committed to Delivering Success for Darlington; we have a proud and dedicated workforce, a large percentage of who live in Darlington and who want the borough to flourish and grow. We employ over 2,000 people across a vast range of services and welcome approximately 200 new starters each year. It is therefore important to have a workforce strategy and plan to ensure staff are motivated with the right skills, at the right time who are flexible and customer focused. The newly adopted workforce strategy and plan, 'Working Together to Deliver Success' outlines how the Council will develop, support and motivate our staff to meet our business and community priorities, and is being embedded across the council. The strategy outlines four new values we work to and are at the heart of what the workforce does; Respect, Innovation, Collaboration and Deliver. Priorities in the plan over the next twelve months include rolling out new agile working processes, supporting staff's wellbeing and mental health, improving absence and attendance management, and increasing the intake and promotion of apprenticeships. Monitoring of the success will be evaluated through regular employee surveys, community surveys and via staff exit procedures.

Assistant Director Resources - Brett Nielsen

## A1. Continue to implement initiatives that tackle social isolation

Since 2019, a partnership group, coordinated by Inclusion North, has been commissioning and monitoring a number of pilot projects being delivered across the borough by the local voluntary and community sector (VCS). Outcomes from these projects have been overwhelmingly very positive and, pre-pandemic, work was underway with partners to secure future funding to enable these initiatives to continue and to develop new projects aimed at alleviating social isolation.

Following a pause, due to the pandemic, this work with Inclusion North with regard to vulnerable groups has now resumed, and the group's scope and priorities are being reviewed and will be reset in light of:

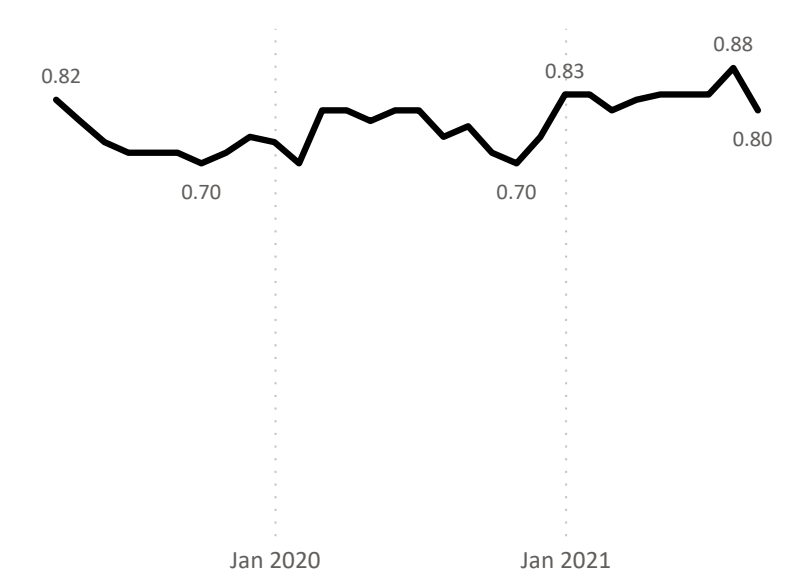
- o the new local health & well being priorities agreed by the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB),
- o the need to:

- re- target the work to address the changed local landscape
- sense check with local communities what is needed in the post-pandemic environment.

Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation - Christine Shields

## A2. Work with individuals to maximise independence and reduce demand on services

Proportion of adults with mental health needs helped to live at home in receipt of paid support (monthly)

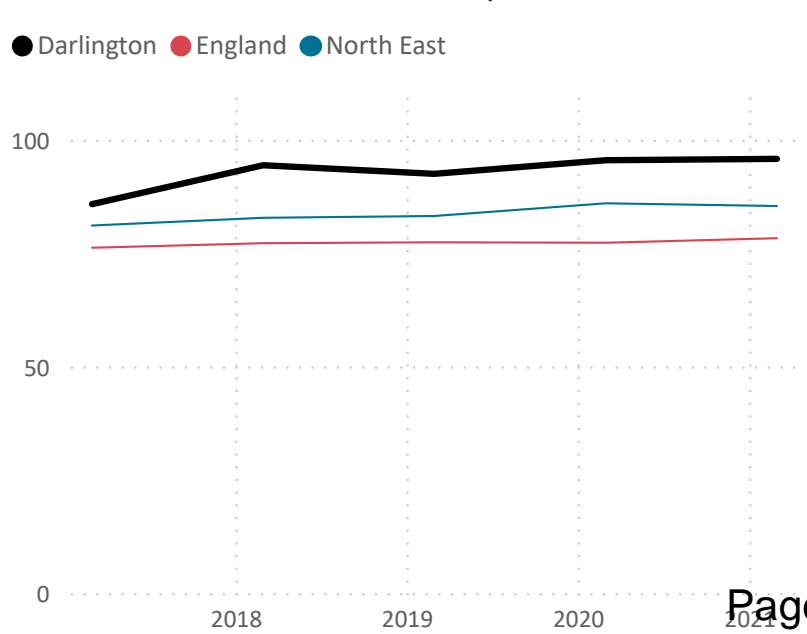


This indicator is primarily focussed on supporting adults with mental health to remain independent and living in their own homes.

Darlington has a very low number of people (50) with mental health requiring paid support. The Mental Health team within Adult Social Care work closely with the local trusts to support people to minimise escalation and maintain high levels of wellbeing and support to delay or prevent admission into hospital. We also have a number of support workers who support rehabilitation, reablement and recovery

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

Percentage of adults with a learning disability who live in their own home or with their family



This measure relates to working age individuals with a primary need of learning disability, which equates to just 285 of Darlington residents. Of these, 273 (95.8%) were living either in their home or with their family at the end of 2020/21, up from 95.5% the year before and significantly above national and regional averages. Darlington has one of the highest North East figures for individuals living in their own accommodation.

Again, this reflects the strong culture of Adult Social Care and the Life Stages team to support residents in need to be independent and have maximum control over their lives.



## A3. Continue to deliver modern transformed Adult Social Care that results in positive outcomes

Adult Social Care in Darlington has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. The services are focused on preventing and reducing need, improving people's independence and providing care and support where needed and teams have a range of responsibilities, including to:

- Provide information and advice including signposting to other resources and / or agencies
- Deliver Occupational Therapy including screening, advice, signposting and provision of low-level equipment
- Maximise independence by undertaking a strengths-based assessment, involving the person/carer/advocate to identify the individual's strengths and capabilities and their wider support networks. Assessments are carried out in accordance with the Care Act (2014) eligibility criteria
- Support individuals to undertake a self-assessment if they choose to do so
- Provide short term support and provide urgent social care support in a crisis
- Formulate support plans with individuals to meet their needs and work towards clearly defined outcomes
- Undertake carers assessments/support planning
- Undertake Mental Capacity assessments
- Ensure the safeguarding of adults at risk of abuse and in need of care and protection
- Maintain significant and strong relationships with the voluntary sector, the Foundation Trust and Community Nursing to support and promote admission avoidance, discharges from hospital and home care where required.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron

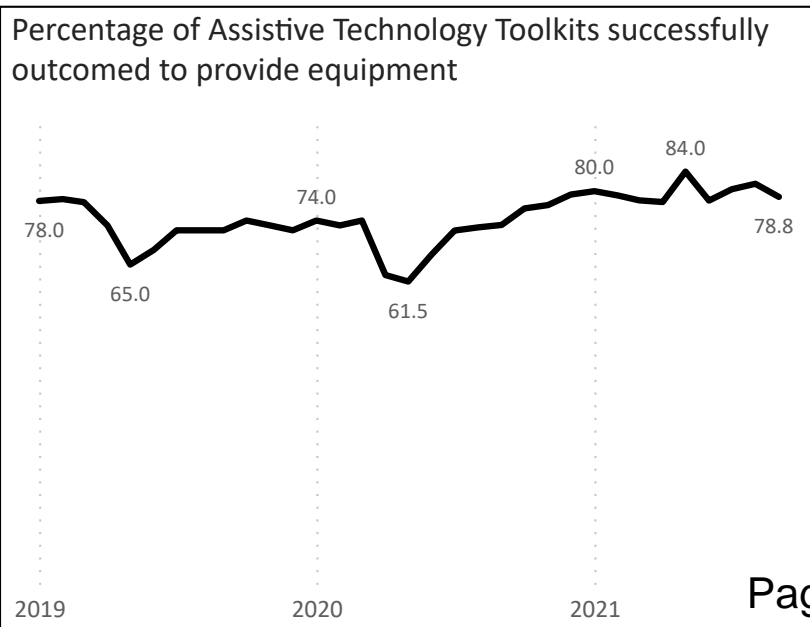
## A4. Promote and increase the use of assistive technology

Assistive technology is actively promoted within Darlington, with potential beneficiaries encouraged to use the technology available such as Lifeline, a local service which means a person can call for help 24 hours a day, and /or Telecare. In addition, over the first half of 2021/22, the Lifestages and Mental Health teams have been piloting a number of digital self-management support tools, including Buddi and Brain in Hand apps, which are packed with features to enable people to live as independently as possible. The Sensory team have also been working directly with deaf, hearing-impaired, visual loss, and dual hearing people in the community, undertaking home assessments and identifying equipment which will improve a person's quality of life and independence, including;

- Items to assist with hearing the television, telephone, doorbell & alarm clocks.
- Alerting systems like the Lisa pager, doorbell sensors, smoke alarms, baby alarms, clock vibrating pads and tabletops (devices that sit on the TV and flashes to alert).

The Council also continues to make referrals to lip-reading classes and specialist hearing support groups, support residents with daily living tasks, signpost and encourage clients to learn and develop their skills, and deliver one-to-one community-based support.

Assistant Director Adults - Joss Harbron



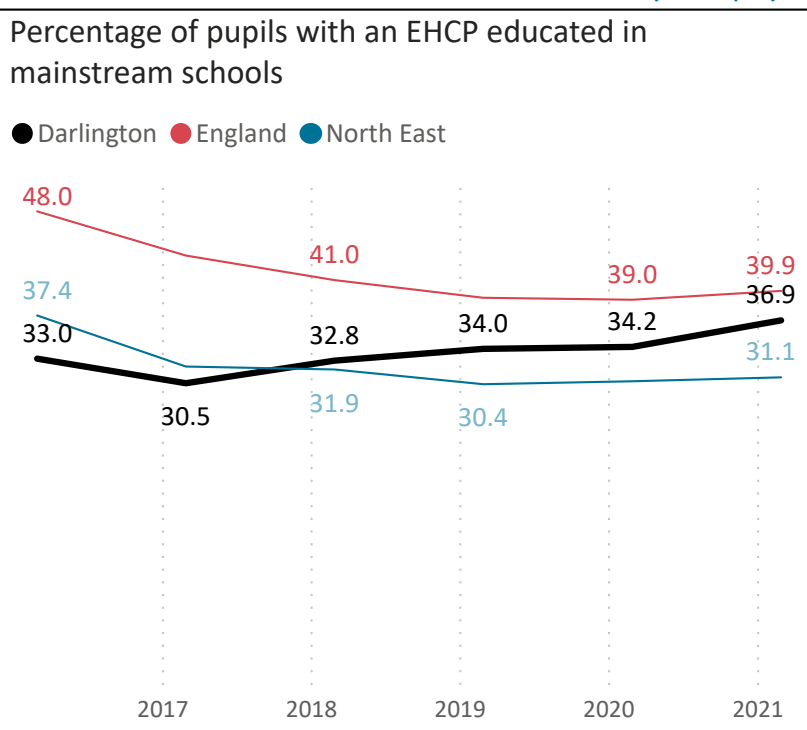
In the first six months of 2021/22, 108 of 137 Assistive Technology toolkit referrals assigned to Lifeline resulted in equipment being provided (78.8%). This is above the equivalent figures for same period for the past two years, which were 73.1% in 2020/21 and 72.3% during 2019/20.

For more information on how the Council's Adult Services support local residents to maximise their independence, please see Section 4 of this report.

## C1. Provide excellent services for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) - implement a new SEND strategy, increase the number of SEND places in schools and work to raise SEND funding levels from central government

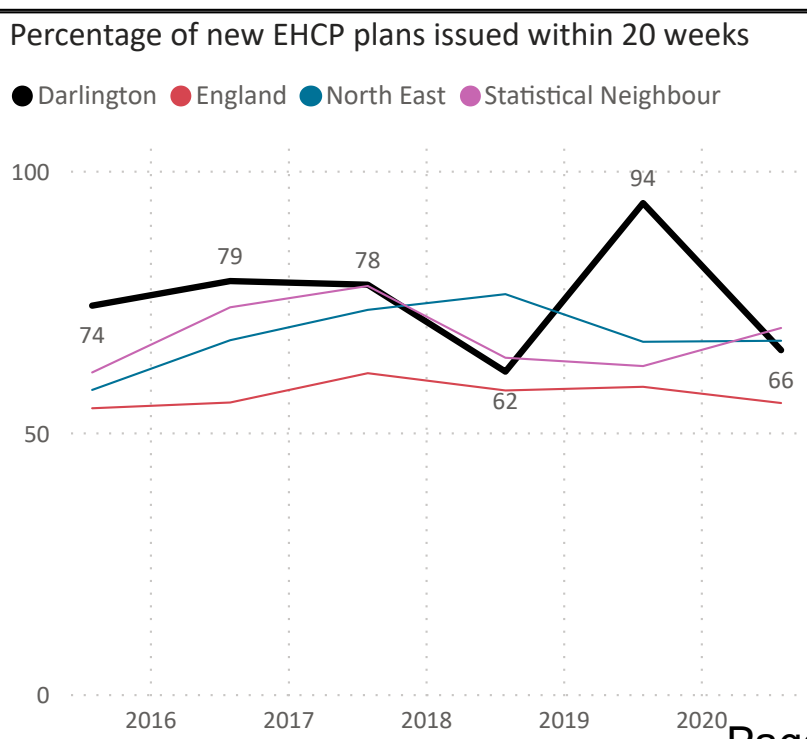
Covid-19 undoubtedly had a major influence on how children and young people with SEND were supported but the Darlington local area responded proactively: all services continued without pronounced interruption or disruption, schools remained open to those in need, statutory assessments largely continued to be completed within 20 weeks, health services remained being delivered and Darlington Parent Carers Forum continued a very active role. The Council's Education Partnerships services have also actively and continuously supported schools and settings over the course of the pandemic to maintain delivery of this offer. For example, the Darlington Educational Psychology Service, SEND Advisory team, Schools and Early Years settings have remained in frequent contact with local authority officers and all schools attended the virtual network for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) at least once in the last year. Moreover, enhancements to the local offer have continued to be delivered, with 31 new places created for pupils with SEND across two new facilities, in Red Hall and Rise Carr, in September 2021. Officers are also currently consulting with the Darlington Parent Carer Forum to establish usage of additional SEND Capital Grant to further expand places in Darlington.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy



The Darlington local area SEND Strategy emphasises that children and young people with SEND should, where possible, be educated in their local community with the right support that they need. The data shows more children with SEND are attending Darlington mainstream schools. The proportion of Darlington pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attending mainstream school settings in the borough has been steadily increasing since 2016/17, and is now significantly above average for neighbouring authorities but remains below the national average. The majority of pupils with an EHCP attend Beaumont Hill and Marchbank schools, which are the two special schools in Darlington and work continues to expand the number of SEND places available in the borough.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

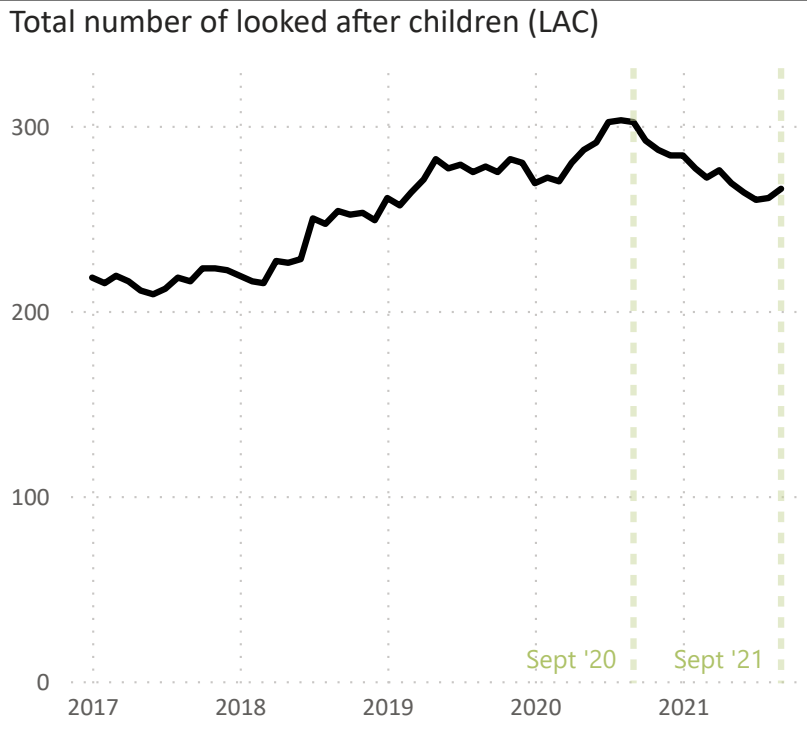


The percentage of new Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) issued by Darlington within twenty weeks (including exceptions) has consistently been above the national average since 2015. In 2020 the Darlington percentage for this timeliness measure, which excludes exceptions, was 65.7%, in line with regional and statistical neighbours and significantly above the national average of 55.6%.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy



## C2. Reduce the need for looked after children placements through effective implementation of the Darlington Strengthening Families programme



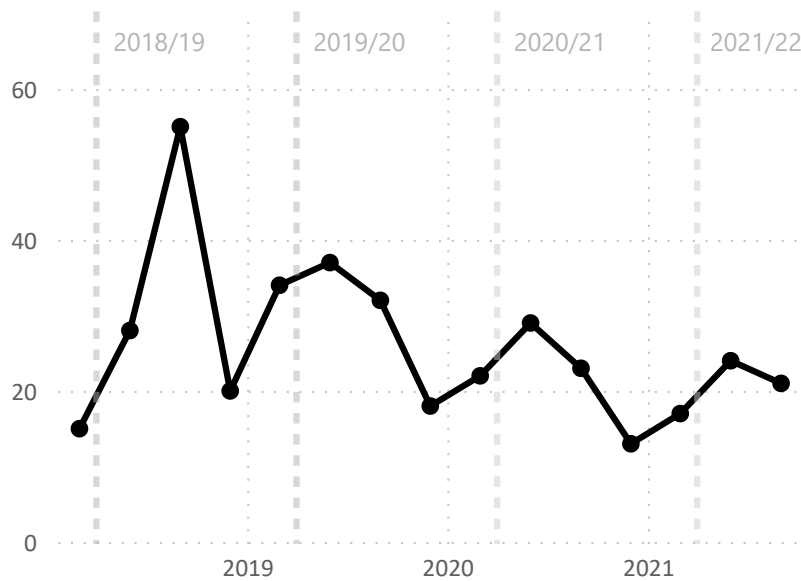
266 children were in care as at September 2021, a 12% reduction from the 303 children who were in care at the same point in 2020.

The Children's Services Front Door team has continued to effectively manage demand over the first two quarters of 2021/22 compared with neighbouring local authorities. By ensuring children, young people and their families receive the correct and appropriate support when needs are identified, and advising other practitioners of the correct routes for support, the team ensure safe decisions are taken about children at the earliest opportunity. This approach has led to a reduction of over 25% in referrals since its launch, which is being maintained despite the increasing demands reported elsewhere related to Covid-19.

[Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell](#)

## C2. Reduce the need for looked after children placements through effective implementation of the Darlington Strengthening Families programme

Total number of new cases of looked after children (LAC) within the quarter

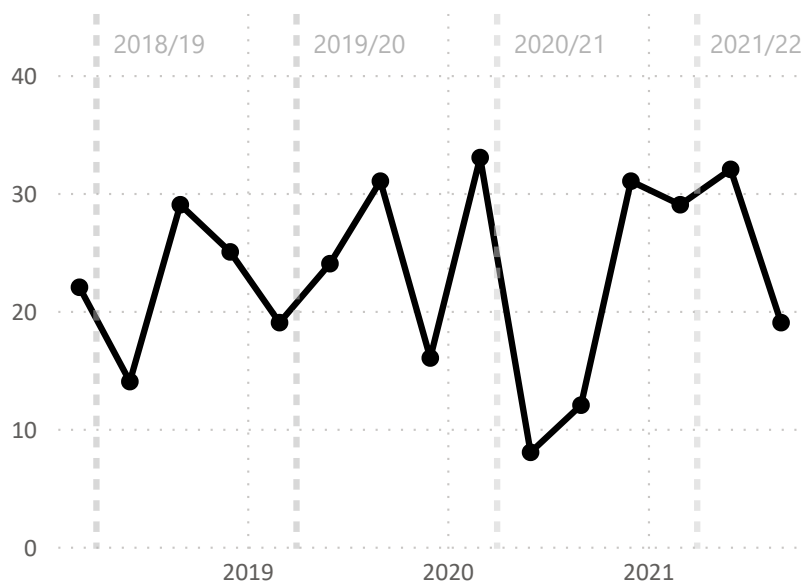


Twenty one children came into care in Quarter 2 2021/22, a 9% decrease compared to the same period in 2020/21 (23) and a 34% decrease compared to the year before that (32).

Over the last six months, the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme has continued to be embedded across Darlington Borough Council's Children's Services, utilising relational practice to ensure timely interventions which support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to become Looked After.

Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell

Total number of children that have ceased to be looked after children (LAC) within the quarter



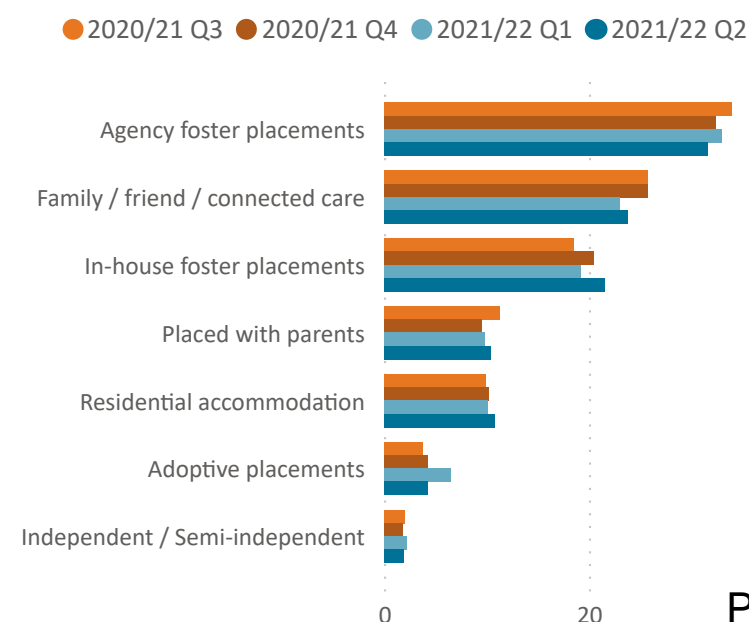
Nineteen children and young people ceased to be in care during in Quarter 2 2021/22, an increase from the same period last year (12) but down from the same time in 2019/20 (31). Of those:

- One young person became a care leaver
- Three children were adopted
- Five children had a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) granted
- Eight children returned home to their parent(s)
- Two young people, aged 16 and 17, moved to the YMCA

A further fifteen children are waiting to move into an adoptive placement or for an order to be granted, and eight children are waiting for a care order discharge

Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell

Percentage of looked after children by placement type



The majority of Darlington children in care at the end of September 2021 were in foster placements (181), of which 79 were agency, 57 were in-house and 45 were with a friend relative or connected carer. Half (91) of all foster placements were long-term.

Of the remaining Looked After Children in Darlington, 31 were placed with parents, 28 were living in residential accommodation and 13 were placed for adoption.

All placements have been confirmed as appropriate for the child enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care, and the proportion of children placed for adoption or with in-house foster carers has been increasing.

## C3. Continue to increase the number of in-house foster carers to reduce the need for independent placements

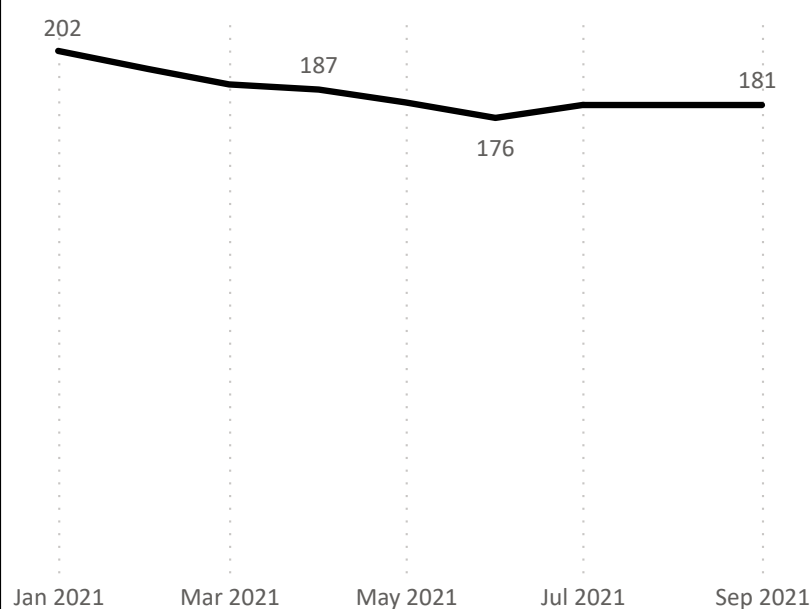
Total number of approved foster carers

# 54

There are currently 54 approved foster carer families in Darlington to provide placements to local children and young people in need. In addition, a further 9 families are going through the foster carer assessment process which, if approved, will represent a 17% increase and reflect the significant work undertaken by the Fostering and Communications teams to promote foster carer opportunities to residents.

[Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell](#)

Total number of foster care placements



Darlington's 54 approved foster carer families provided a total of 181 placements in Quarter 2 of 2021/22, which was a slight increase from 176 in the previous quarter.

It is anticipated that the number of placements available will further increase as new families are approved to be registered foster carers.

[Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell](#)

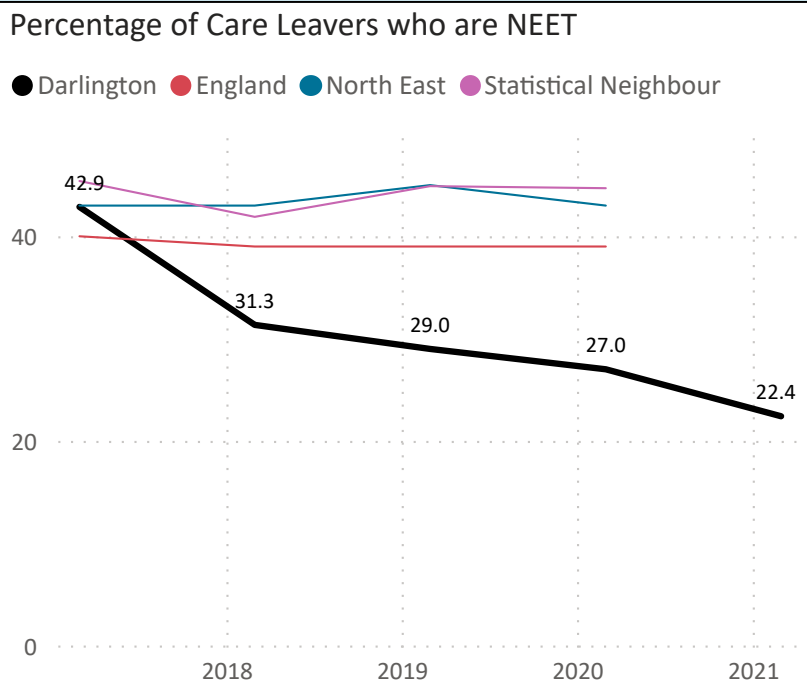
## C4. Review in-house residential care and consider the council's place in providing services

The Council's Children's Services team continue to explore ways to make our foster carer offer as attractive as possible to encourage more prospective foster carers to come forward, including awareness raising and advertising on via social media and promoting access to online information events for prospective foster carers. Engagement also takes place regularly with existing foster carers to enhance our support and offer.

In terms of residential care, the service is seeking to modernise and diversify the offer within children's homes to ensure it best meets the needs of children and young people, and to reduce reliance upon the external market. Recent work includes incorporating the existing children's homes into the Council's new build programme, and the first home to move to a new build is scheduled for May 2022. The existing home will then be repurposed into an Ofsted-registered residential short breaks service to provide earlier targeted support and so avoid escalating pressures and support needs. This service will support young people and work with the whole family in a relational way to address emerging needs and pressures and so reduce the risk of family breakdown. Staff recruitment for this service is due to commence in January 2022.

[Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell](#)

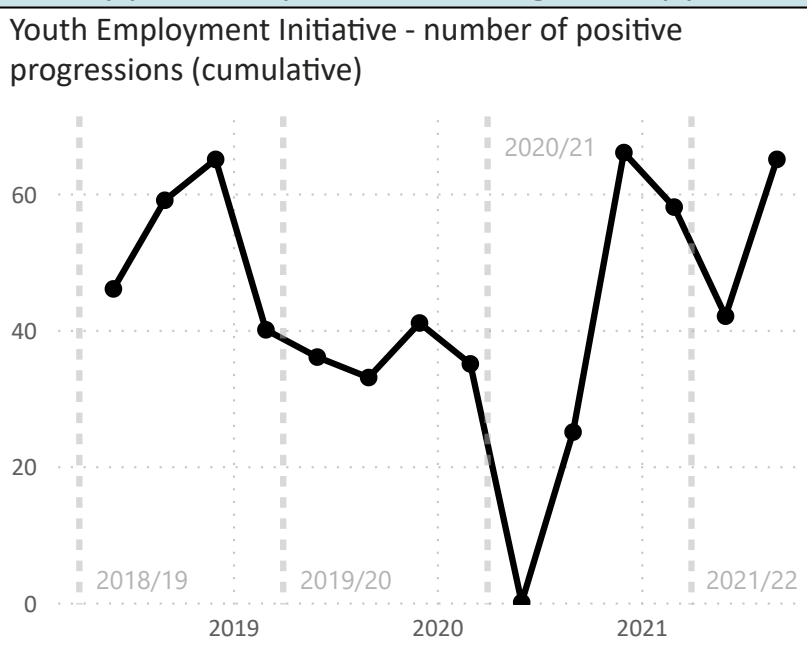
## C5. Improve employment opportunities for looked after children and care leavers



The proportion of Darlington care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) has continued to fall, to 22.4% at the end of 2020/21 from 27% in 2019/20, which is below the most recently available national and regional averages. This performance is particularly impressive given the impact of Covid-19, which has generally led to increases in NEETs nationally, and reflects the considerable work undertaken by the Care Leavers service, including with Job Centre Plus and businesses to increase opportunities. 10 care leavers are currently attending university and the teamwork with Learning and Skills officers to understand all school leaver destinations so further learning, training, and/or employment opportunities are encouraged.

Assistant Director Children's Services - Chris Bell

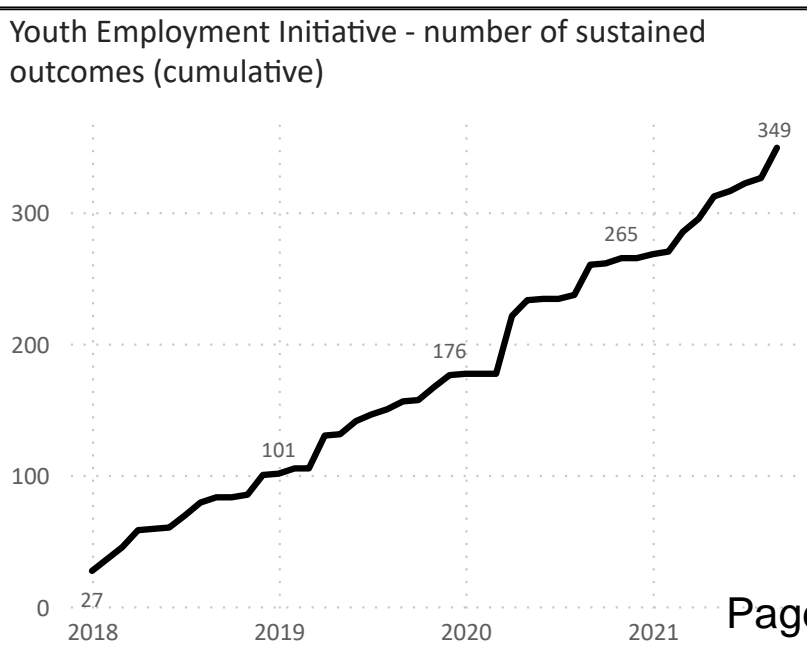
## C6. Work with partners to reduce youth and long-term unemployment, by increasing the opportunity for retraining and apprenticeships leading to gainful employment



Referrals to the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) have remained high during the first half of 2021/22 with young people continuing to move into education, employment and training. Having an embedded Job Centre Plus Youth Adviser within the service is working well and has helped increase client numbers over the period and local employment opportunities have also been rising.

The team have reported some reticence amongst some young people to engage with the service after, in some cases, almost two years of being out of employment, education and/or training, and are working to rebuild participants' confidence where required.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

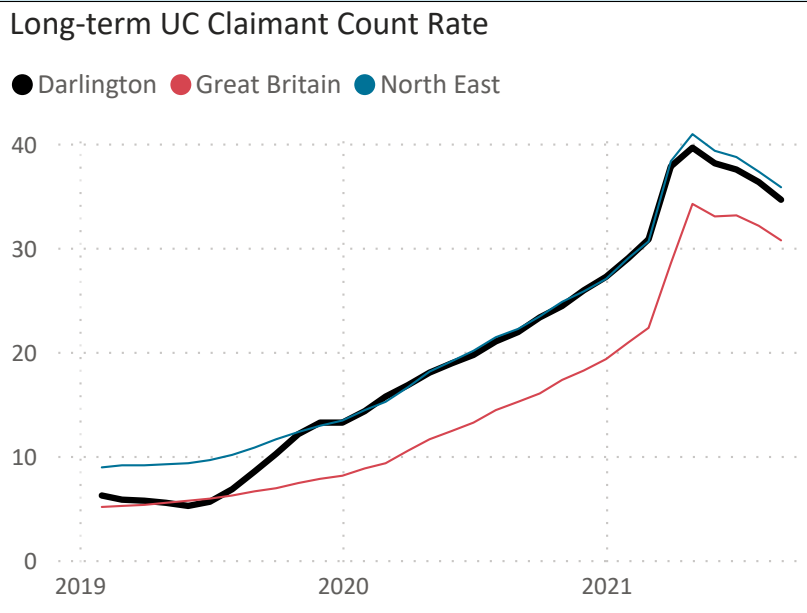


Young people using the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) service have continued to go into sustained outcomes between April and September 2021. As officers are sometimes unable to contact some young people at the six month sustained point or obtain the necessary evidence from employers (particularly due to home working), the true number achieving sustained employment is considered likely to be even higher.

Over the same period, however, some participants did not manage to sustain employment for a number of reasons, including a lack of necessary behaviours to succeed in a professional environment which will help inform future service delivery.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

## C6. Work with partners to reduce youth and long-term unemployment, by increasing the opportunity for retraining and apprenticeships leading to gainful employment

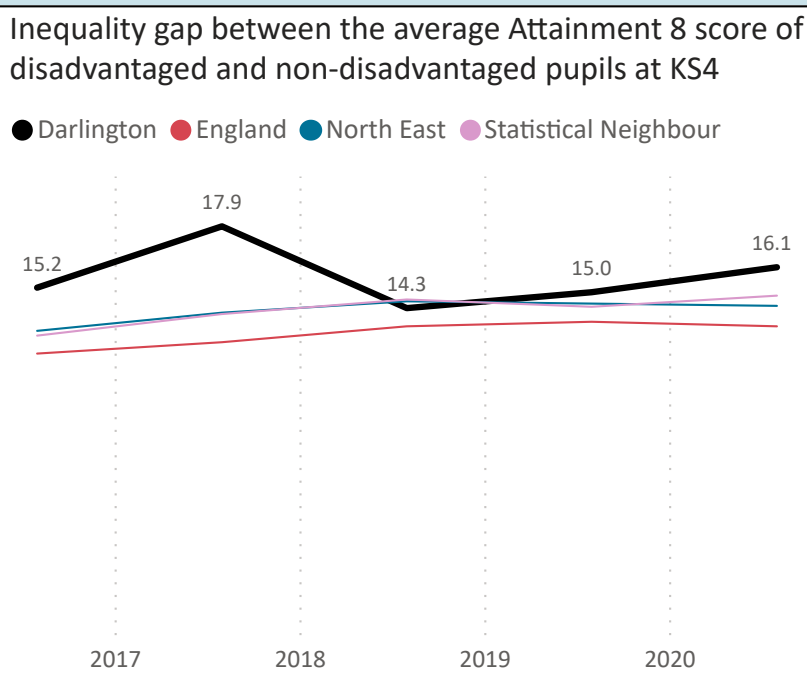


This measure shows the number of working age local residents claiming Universal Credit (UC) who are currently searching for work and who have been claiming UC for more than 12 months, per 1,000 working age population.

The rate has been falling since hitting a peak of 39.6 in May 2021 and, as of September 2021, was 34.6, still above the national comparator of 30.7 but below the regional average of 35.8. Numbers are expected to continue falling as the economy recovers from the pandemic and growing vacancy numbers feed through into reduced unemployment.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

## C7. Work with schools and the Regional Schools Commissioner to increase educational achievement across the borough and, in particular, for young people from deprived backgrounds



Attainment 8 is a measure of a pupil's average grade across a set of eight subjects. A high attainment 8 score indicates a pupil did well across a range of subjects including English and Maths. The most recent available data shows the average Attainment 8 score per pupil in Darlington increased from 45.8 in 2017/18 to 46.6 in 2018/19. This was greater than the regional and statistical neighbour averages, and only 0.2 points below the national average. Whilst average regional, national and statistical neighbour Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged pupils decreased since the 2016/17 academic year, the scores for Darlington increased. The average score for Darlington disadvantaged pupils was above the regional average and only 0.8 points below the national average.

Assistant Director Education and Inclusion - Tony Murphy

% of schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted (of schools inspected)

# 78.1%

OfSTED Rating	Number of schools
▲ Outstanding	2
Good	23
Requires Improvement	7
No inspection since converting to academy	9

Although the percentage of Darlington schools rated as Good or Outstanding has been below the national and regional averages since 2017, the gaps have been narrowing since 2018.

Since March 2021, two of Darlington's secondary schools have been inspected and had their ratings upgraded from Requires Improvement to Good. The percentage of Darlington secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding therefore increased from 50% to 75% between the end of March and September 2021.

## C8. Deliver and review the In2 Project to support disadvantaged children to participate in Arts, Leisure and Culture to maximise their potential

The series of Covid-19 lockdowns meant that face-to-face In2 activity was paused for much of 2020 and early 2021. The programme has now resumed with a new intake of 115 Year 6 pupils signed up to the programme to broaden their opportunities and experience of the arts, leisure and culture. There are 32 children from Corporation Road Primary School, 37 from Firthmoor Primary School and 46 from Northwood Primary School.

Activities undertaken by and/or planned for the new intake include a theatre heritage project in the Hullabaloo in September, 'Refresh' workshops with Zest Theatre and dance workshops at the Hippodrome in October, a Little Inventors project designed around Locomotion No 1 in November and a trip to the pantomime at the Hippodrome in December.

The programme continues to be closely monitored to understand its impact on participants including the transition to secondary school which has been identified as a key priority area for work to improve educational outcomes amongst local children and young people.

[Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson](#)

## C9. Look for innovative ways to try and deliver school homework clubs and holiday enrichment activities

Council officers have worked with a range of community settings to deliver activities over the Easter and Summer school holidays including at Firthmoor, Skerne Park and Red Hall and Eastbourne, the Kings Centre and Hummersknott Academy. The Dolphin Centre, Head of Steam Museum and Darlington Hippodrome have all also provided added value to the programme supporting additional activities.

Following on from this successful engagement, an exciting timetable of activities has been organised for free school meal-eligible children in Darlington to access over the festive period, with 17 events arranged throughout December with a total of 715 places available.

The activities on offer at various locations across the town include:

- trips to the pantomime
- travelling pantomimes being performed at schools
- bowling
- Santa at the station
- arts and crafts
- ice skating
- a magician
- drama sessions.

A hot cooked meal will continue to be provided at each event and children and families will be further supported by providing comprehensive activity packs and food bags to take home.

Finally, the Government have recently confirmed funding will be available for a continuation of the Holiday Activities Programme for the next 3 years, meaning the Council and partners will be able to continue delivering and enhancing local holiday enrichment activities.

[Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson](#)



## E1. Work with Market Asset Management to deliver a refurbished and vibrant covered market and successful outdoor market

The first phase of the improvement to the market opened in August 2021 and a great deal of positive feedback has already been received on the current offer to residents and visitors. Phase 2, which includes improvements to the existing trading area and market stalls, is due to commence in early 2022. Meanwhile, Phase 3 (the building of a temperate garden) has now received planning consent however an issue with gaining vacant possession of one of the existing units is causing delays in work.

In terms of the outdoor market, this has now been relocated to High Row and, as a result, experienced an increase in traders.

The work to support the local business and hospitality industry to re-open amidst Covid-19 rules has supported the town centre and the market. The successful events programme in the Market Square and town centre has also supported delivery of the market project.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E2. Deliver the Town Centre Strategy leading to a diversified and successful town centre

A key element of the Town Centre Strategy was the acquiring of strategically positioned buildings and land. Accordingly;

- Skinnergate residential development has now received planning consent and tendering and procurement process for the delivery of the development has commenced. It is anticipated that development will commence in February 2022 and will take 12 months to complete.
- Acquisition of former Northern Echo building has been completed, with architects now commissioned. The ground floor development for this project is due to commence in June 2022, subject to planning permission, for an opening date in September 2022.
- Various funding has been received for delivery of Towns Fund projects and all required business cases have been completed and forwarded to government. Stakeholder engagement has also commenced on Phase 2 of the Skinnergate, Yards and Coniscliffe Road elements of the project
- Examination of procuring a development partner for land and buildings with the town centre has commenced.
- Discussion with the owners of Queens Street continue with regard to future opportunities in the centre and on Commercial Street
- An options appraisal for the former Sports Direct Site as a residential site is being finalised
- Darlington Economic Campus has confirmed its temporary town centre location as Feethams House - more details at E4 below.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E3. Develop key economic sites to be investor ready at Central Park, Ingenium Park and Faverdale

Progress against this action remains strong, with recent developments including:

- commencement of the procurement of a development partner for Faverdale Business Park
- commencement of Phase 2 of the National Biologics Centre by the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI), which is due to be completed by the end of December 2021
- continuing construction of the new Innovation Central development on site with a completion date set for August 2022, with North East Business Innovation Centre being appointed as the building operator. Landscaping and further remediation at the site is also being developed, linked to the upcoming Treasury North economic campus opportunity.
- conclusion of a procurement exercise for drainage works at Ingenium Park
- development of land treatment and landscaping designs for Central Park with delivery anticipated next year to provide a high quality public realm to attract further investment and linked to the upcoming Treasury North economic campus opportunity
- development of Ingenium Park Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems for the whole site with delivery during the ecological window

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

## E4. Encourage new investment in the Borough and maximise employment opportunities for Darlington residents

Despite the pandemic, good progress has continued to be made in respect of securing new investment and employment opportunities in the borough. A temporary lease between the Treasury and Darlington Borough Council for Feethams House has been agreed, with Treasury and other government departments' staff due to start populating the building between March and July 2022. It is further anticipated that, following due process, the permanent location for staff from the seven government departments who have so far confirmed a Darlington base will also be decided in early 2022.

In addition, an outline planning application has been received for development of land adjacent to Lingfield Point to provide several commercial units with total potential provision of 328,900 square feet. Finally, interest in the availability office space in the town centre remains very high, in particular from sectors in the professional support services.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E5. Work with indigenous companies to identify and attract further job creating investment

The Covid-19 pandemic has undeniably had a detrimental impact upon the growth of local smaller indigenous companies. The Council has accordingly responded by facilitating and delivering various grants and support workshops to assist in the inevitable downturn in business activity. The total value of Covid-19 financial support grants awarded to Darlington businesses by the Council since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 was £44,007,072 as of the end of September 2021.

In addition, following Darlington Borough Council's successful allocation of Additional Restrictions Grants to local businesses, the Council received a bonus grant of £631,000, an element of which will be used to further support and encourage indigenous growth and start-ups.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E6. Successful adoption of the Local Plan

The Examination In Public by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Planning of the draft Local Plan commenced in May 2021, with hearings now complete. A number of main modifications were subsequently proposed by the Council to make the plan sound and were due to be the subject of a six week public consultation over October and November. Following consultation, the Council will prepare a report listing all representations received; a summary of the main issues raised; and the Council's response to those issues. This will be provided to the Inspector, along with all representations. The Inspector will then consider this evidence before finalising his report and it is anticipated that the Council will receive HMI's report by end of 2021. Should the report be favourable and supportive of the Local Plan, the next steps of the necessary decision-making process will commence in early 2022.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)



## E7. Create the conditions to deliver hundreds of new homes each year, ensuring sufficiency of affordable homes

Significant progress continues to have been made against this action over the last six months, including:

- Officers are continuing to work closely with Homes England to bring forward the proposed Burtree Garden Village, with a planning application anticipated to be received in early 2022.
- The developers of the Skerningham site are also looking to submit a planning application in mid-2022, subject to the outcome of the draft Local Plan.

Overall, the latest monitoring data shows circa 550 house completions due in 2020-21, with 317 starts and 277 completions in the first half of the financial year. Compared to the same period last year starts have increased by 108 units and completions are up by 49, although it must be remembered that there was a lockdown of building sites in the first quarter of the last financial year. The Council has completed 20 affordable new homes and is now on site at Neasham Road and Sherbourne Court.

If the Local Plan is adopted, it is expected more applications will be received over the coming months and years.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E8. Develop the council's response to the agreed Climate Change Emergency and begin delivery of the agreed plan

A local climate change action plan has now been completed by the Council's Climate Change Working Group and was agreed by Cabinet in October 2021. Milestones and a reporting mechanism will accordingly be established and agreed with the responsible lead officers, with future reports regularly produced to demonstrate progress towards our carbon neutral target. Each service area has already been tasked with delivering their respective actions under the plan.

In addition, the capacity of the Climate Change team has recently doubled with the creation of a new post of Climate Change Officer, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to delivery of the plan. Work has also continued over the last six months on the development of a District Heating System within the town centre and the Sustainable Darlington page on the website is being used to promote messages with a new section written by and for young people being developed. Regular articles are also produced and published in the One Darlington magazine and on social media.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## E9. Develop the Darlington Station project and regeneration opportunities for the surrounding areas including Victoria Road, the cattle market and Neasham Road areas

A strong delivery partnership has formed with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail and the train operators to drive forward this project, and recent updates include:

- Planning permissions being secured for the East and West Transport Interchanges that are being delivered by Darlington Borough Council and continuing development of detailed design
- Detailed design progressing on the station and rail track improvements that are to be delivered by Network Rail
- Acquisition of the land required for the project continuing to be progressed by agreement where possible. A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) has been progressed in parallel and the public Inquiry is scheduled for January 2022 to consider any land and properties that the Council has not been able to secure by agreement.
- Phase 1 of the improvements to Victoria Road were completed to enhance the public realm and improve walking and cycling connections from the station to the town centre.
- Planning permission is being sought for the cattle market site as temporary car parking whilst the station project is delivered.
- Regeneration opportunities will be developed for the cattle market in readiness for its availability.

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

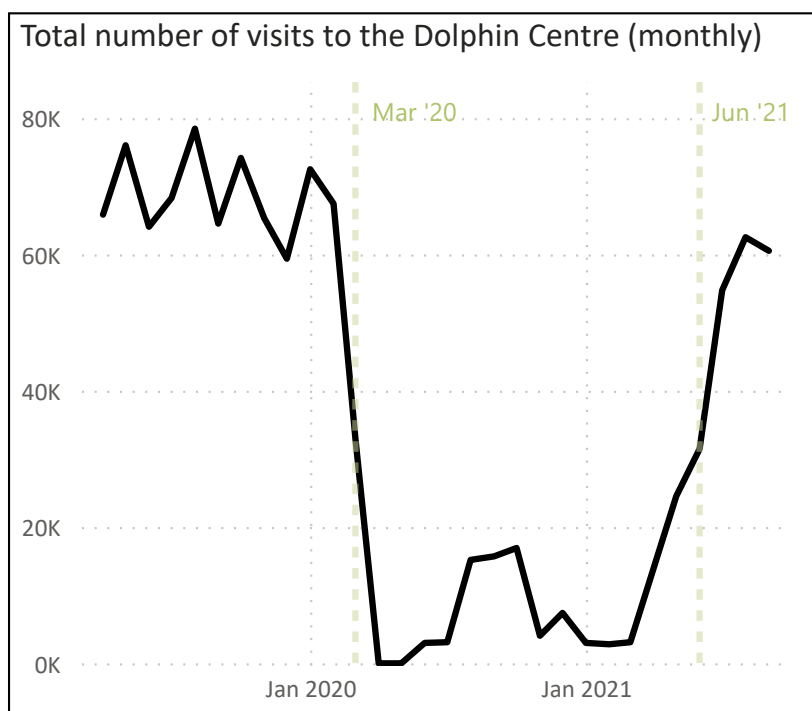
## H1. Review the vacant space within the Dolphin Centre to improve the leisure offer and so maximise income

In line with the government's announcement to ease restrictions from Monday 19 July 2021, operational changes were made at the Dolphin Centre to the safe systems of work but continued with a cautious approach over the summer. The key changes were around casual access to family swimming, soft play and the gym rather than having to pre book these activities, which was a welcomed change by customers.

Capacities have remained slightly lower than usual levels to avoid overcrowding and all good practice in relation to sanitising and hygiene have remained in place.

The remodelling of space to create the indoor bowling alley and extension to soft play have opened successfully and are proving to be extremely popular. There has been an excellent response from residents and visitors to the town for both facilities. Feedback has been very positive around the quality, look and overall experience. The space vacated by Council registrars and burial services has also been repurposed for a new commercial tenant, Connect Health.

### Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson



As Covid-19 limitations have been relaxed, the Dolphin Centre has reopened in line with ongoing national restrictions with customers returning to use the facilities, with the data showing dramatic increases in visitor numbers over the course of 2021, from 3,100 in March 2021 to 60,541 in September 2021, a nearly twenty-fold rise.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

## H2. Work to, and continue to review the Local Outbreak Plan for Coronavirus

The Local Outbreak Plan was initially developed in June 2020 and a review was undertaken in February 2021. The Health Protection Board continues to meet monthly and Outbreak Control meetings operate as required to continue to deliver the Local Outbreak Plan. The Health Protection Board continues to meet on a monthly basis. Darlington is also part of a Local Tracing Partnership with NHS Test & Trace with local dedicated capacity to follow up hard-to-reach contacts and cases in Darlington to ensure that they are isolating and the chain of infection is broken.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

## H3. Continue to build new council houses and ensure the existing council housing stock is maintained to a high standard and environmentally friendly

Housing Condition - Percentage of Council properties meeting the decent homes standard

March 2020

**100%**

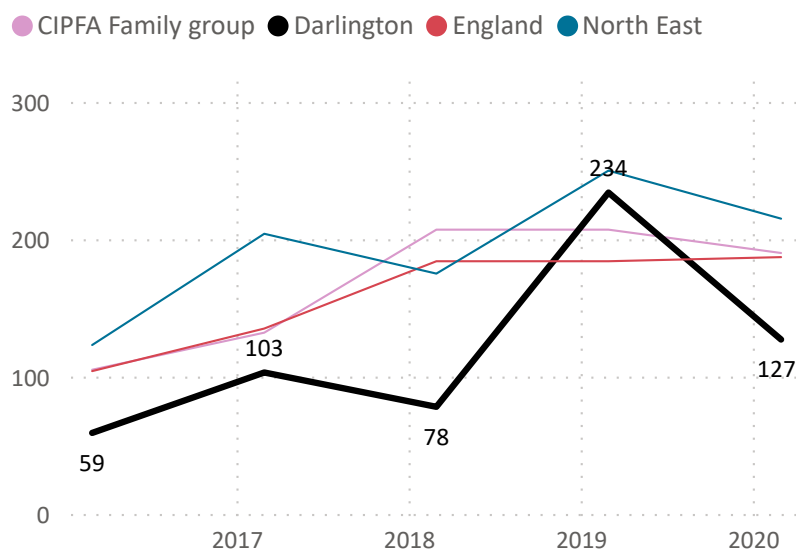
March 2021

**100%**

All of Darlington Borough Council social housing stock continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2020-21, demonstrating the ongoing commitment and good work of the Housing and Building Services teams over the course of the pandemic.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

Additional Affordable Housing Supply - Completions



The Council's Housing new build programme was significantly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, however one scheme was still able to be completed in 2020/21.

Building work has since recommenced with further new build 'pipeline' sites identified; these are currently being worked up in more detail to enable the appropriate planning permission to be sought.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

## H4. Maximise rental and service charge income from council tenants to ensure we are able to provide them with a comprehensive range of good quality housing management and support services

Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on HRA dwellings

Year	Quarter	Value
2019/20	Q1	107.7%
	Q2	96.8%
	Q3	96.5%
	Q4	97.5%
2020/21	Q1	96.1%
	Q2	96.6%
	Q3	97.1%
	Q4	101.6%
2021/22	Q1	98.1%
	Q2	97.4%

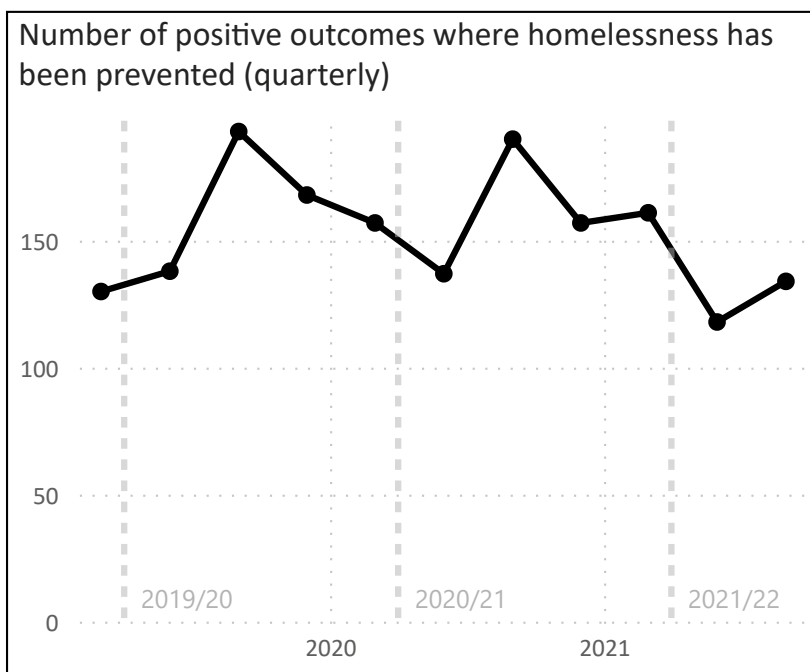
Rent collection rates for Council housing reduced slightly from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2 2021/22 but are still higher than previous years and remain within expected levels. Officers continue to promote help and guidance to tenants needing support, make affordable repayment plans with customers, and assist with benefit claims and budgeting skills. The number of tenants, at 1,650, in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) is at its highest level since UC was introduced, however average rent arrears for tenants receiving UC is lower than the regional average. Court hearings have recommenced and enforcement and eviction warrants have been carried out where orders have continually been breached; but levels of evictions, as a last option, remain low.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

## H5. Review the Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Progress against the new strategy is good, with 19 of the 28 actions already completed. Of the remaining actions, only 2 are currently not on track to meet their target timescales for completion due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During Covid, the number of homeless people placed in emergency accommodation by the Council in 2020/21 increased by 32% compared to the previous year and this increase has continued into 2021/22. However, despite these challenges the Council has successfully increased the number of temporary accommodation units by 36%, from 11 to 15, as well as purchased and refurbished 4 empty properties to provide 8 new units of accommodation. Officers have also successfully bid for additional funding through the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative to recruit 4 additional staff to deliver a range of support and advice services to homeless people, including a specialist mental health Housing Options Officer and an outreach support worker to deliver street support and prevent people from rough sleeping. In addition, the Housing Options Team have been recognised by the NEPACS Ruth Cranfield Award for their outstanding dedication to housing and success in tackling homelessness during the pandemic.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys



Despite ongoing challenges and restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's Housing Options team continued to achieve an increase in positive outcomes for homeless customers during Quarter 2. This has included negotiating with landlords, friends and family and support providers to find sustainable accommodation for residents in need of support with housing. The Council also been successful in bidding for a number of Government funding opportunities, which has further enabled the team to find the best outcomes for customers experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of being homeless.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

## H6. Maintain oversight and offer challenge to health and care services that support individuals to achieve good mental, physical and emotional health as identified in a wide range of partnership plans such as Best Start in life, autism awareness, alcohol plan, suicide prevention, healthy workforce, and ageing well

The Council's Public Health team have continued this work during Covid, including:

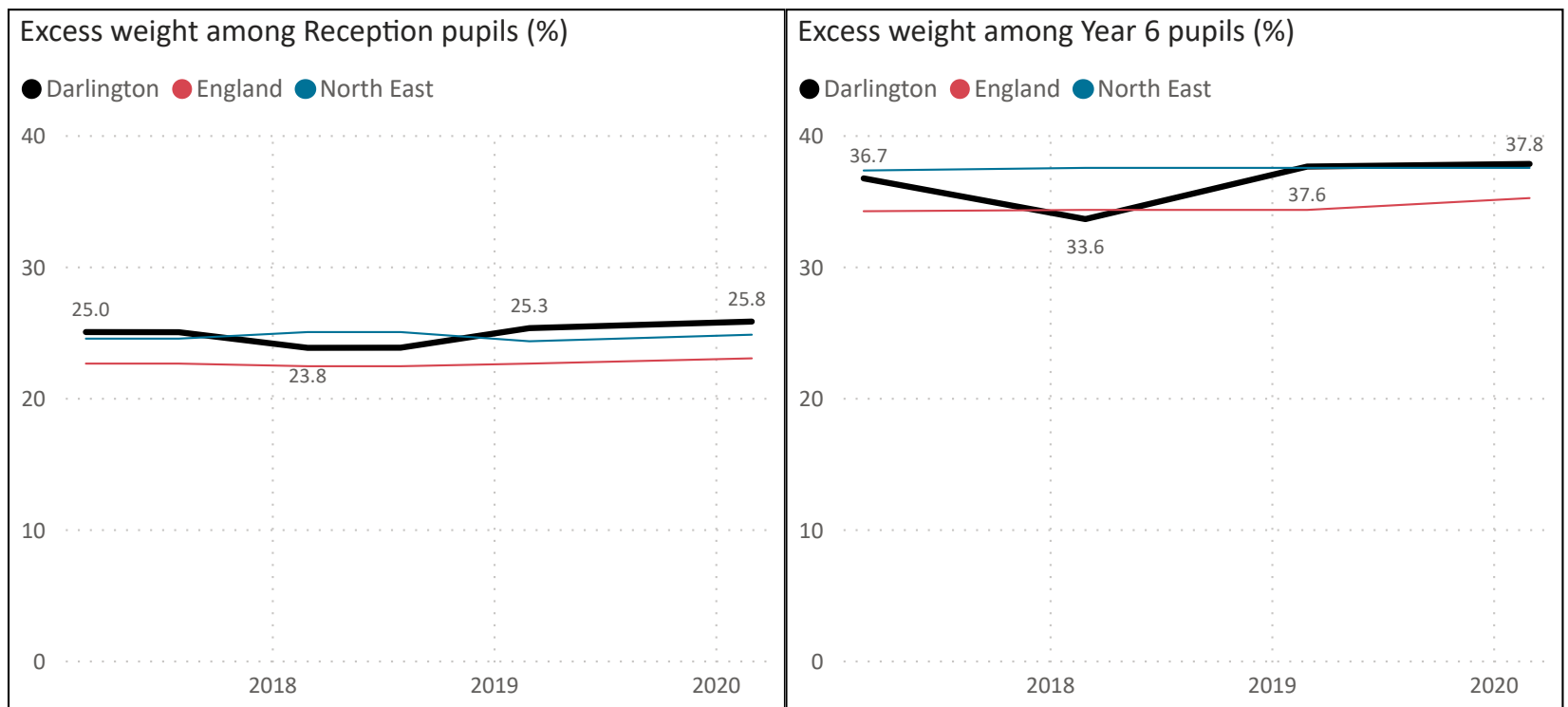
- Securing suicide prevention funding to promote 'Postvention' work with partners and distributing information and training across the borough.
- Coordinating a local Mental Health prevention funding opportunity
- Concluding work on an autism awareness programme, which delivered quiet times in the town centre and training to local businesses
- Rolling out 'Make Every Contact Count' training to frontline services and partners across the borough, using a train the trainer approach, and developing a range of toolbox talks to support delivery
- Reviewing and delivering the Healthy Lifestyle Survey to 8,400 local pupils across 32 Darlington schools including a new section on Covid-19 impacts
- Implementing a new Council healthy workforce programme
- Beginning work to re-procure the 0-19 Service.
- Continuing to develop a joint application for a local Mental Health Prevention Concordat which will be submitted to the Organisation for Health Improvement and Disparities.

## H7. Implement the Darlington Child Healthy Weight Plan with partners

The Darlington Child Healthy Weight Plan has begun to deliver on a number of its objectives, including :

- Launching a Healthy Families catering award
- Developing a healthy schools meal standard and training
- Training foster families in healthy meal options
- Encouraging utilisation of green spaces by supporting health campaigns and signage and delivering a town centre treasure hunt.
- Producing a children’s home food policy, guidance and workable menus, and training children’s home staff using a young people’s nutrition toolkit.
- Producing and piloting a new Healthy Early Years Toolkit with three nursery settings and an initial 10 childminders
- Developing, with the Learning and Skills team, an online Darlington School Food Award module to support individual schools to achieve school food standards.
- Working in partnership with the Cornmill Centre to display ‘Change4life’ weaning and healthy lifestyle messages in the form of posters and vinyls, and to implement a ‘Play on the way’ initiative with the use of a colourful hopscotch to share simple messages on why physical activity is good for children

Director Public Health - Penny Spring



The prevalence of overweight (including obesity) amongst Reception and Year 6 pupils rose slightly in Darlington in 2020, the rise is not a statistically significant and Darlington is in line with the regional average for these measures.

The Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan has identified a number of evidence-based interventions that are now being delivered with partners to systematically address some of the underlying causes of obesity in children and young people in Darlington, with some recent new work including activity with schools and local commercial food premises to develop a healthy catering standard to ensure a consistent and healthy food offer for children and their families across the borough.

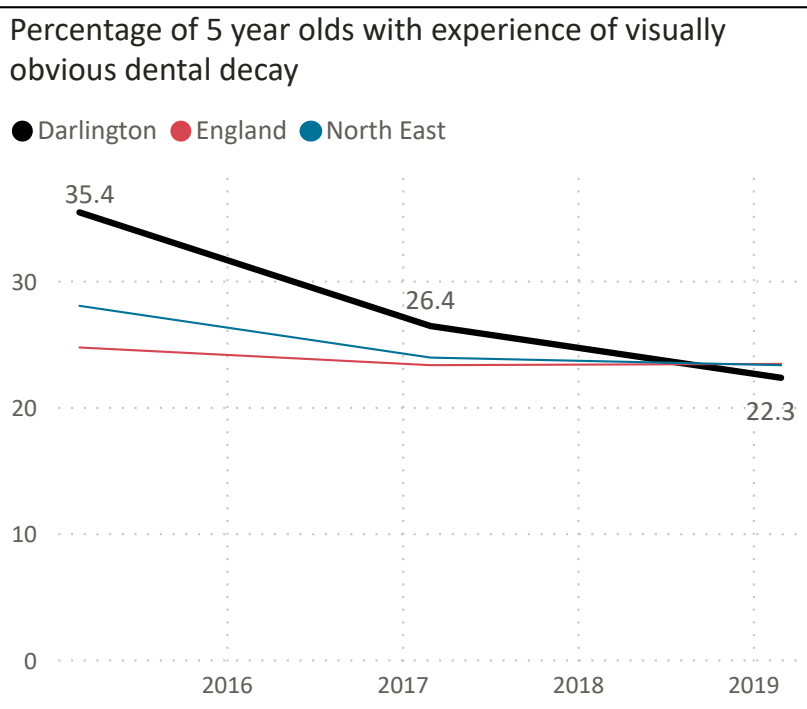
Director Public Health - Penny Spring

## H8. Implement the Darlington Oral Health Plan 2017-2022 with partners

The Darlington Oral Health Plan has been refreshed by Council's Public Health team to capture the impact on oral health from the pandemic and recent changes to legislation, and will be, subject to consultation and agreement by Members, in place in 2022. Meanwhile, recent work against the existing plan includes:

- o Implementation of a new toothbrushing scheme
- o Completion of a joint oral health needs assessment in conjunction with neighbouring Tees Valley local authorities

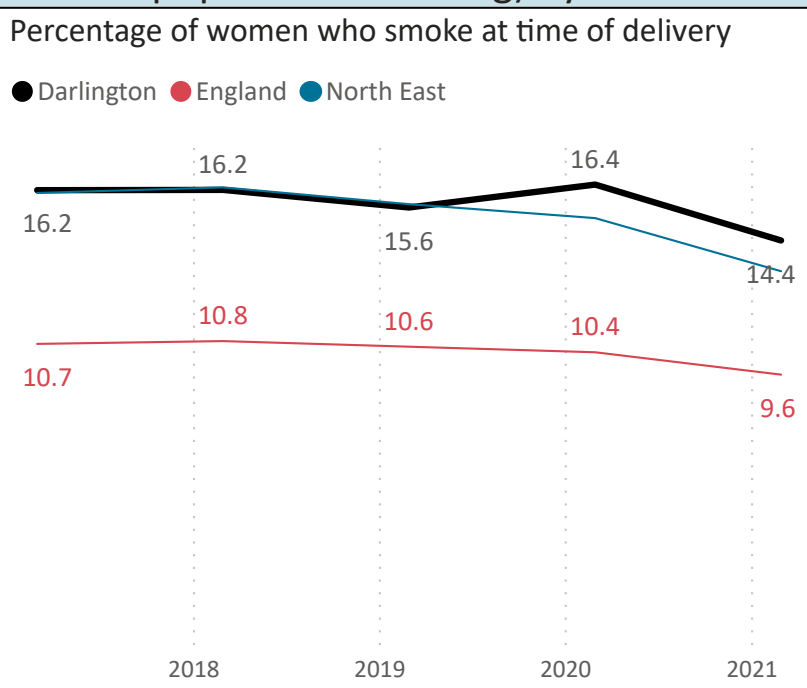
Director Public Health - Penny Spring



The percentage of Darlington 5 year olds with experience of visually obvious dental decay is statistically similar to both the England and North East averages, at 22.3% in 2018/19, and the proportion has been reducing for the past 3 years.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

## H9. Continue the reduction in smoking to achieve a smoke free Darlington (i.e. just 5% of total population smoking) by 2030



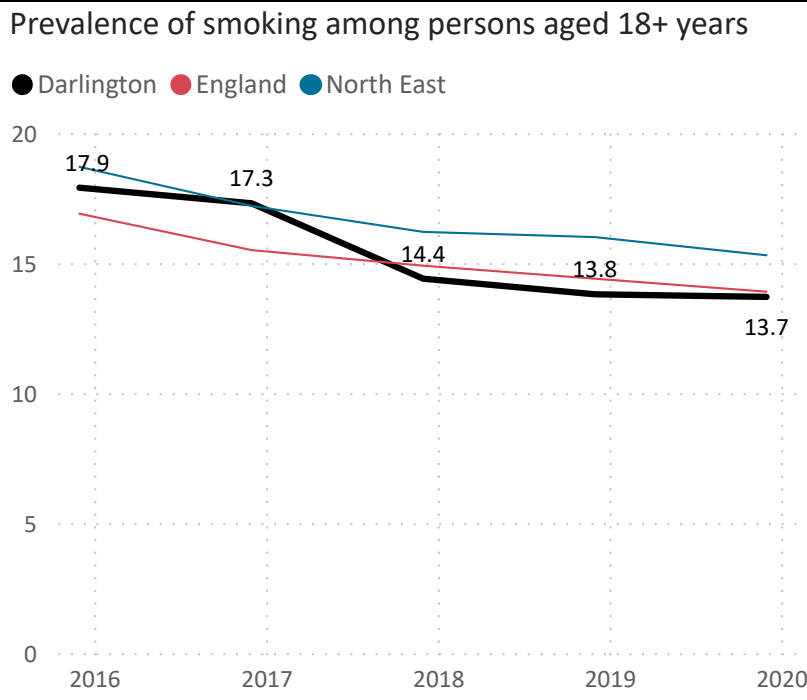
The proportion of Darlington women smoking at the time of delivery of their baby fell by two percentage points in 2020/21, from 16.4% to 14.4%.

Darlington remains statistically similar to our neighbouring North East authorities for this measure, and work continues with local maternity services, midwives and health visitors through the Council's commissioned Stop Smoking Service to continue supporting and encouraging residents, including pregnant mothers, to quit smoking at every opportunity.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring



## H9. Continue the reduction in smoking to achieve a smoke free Darlington (i.e. just 5% of total population smoking) by 2030



The prevalence of smoking among persons aged 18 years and over remains slightly below the England (13.9%) and North East (15.3%) averages, at 13.7%.

The trend is also continuing to reduce in line with elsewhere, and it is anticipated that further falls may be recorded going forward as the increase in people giving up smoking during the Covid-19 pandemic feeds through into the data.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

## H10. Continue to deliver the Lifeline services and increase promotion and take up

Number of clients receiving a Lifeline service

Year	Quarter	Value
2019/20	Q4	10,077
2020/21	Q1	10,100
	Q2	10,046
	Q3	10,053
	Q4	10,059
2021/22	Q1	10,072
	Q2	10,166

The Lifeline service continues to record consistent take up as experienced in earlier quarters, with an increase of 94 clients receiving a service in Quarter 2 of 2021/22. Due to the nature of the service, total numbers of service users tends to stay fairly steady as the growth in new clients requesting support is counteracted by other users not requiring the service anymore, due to moving into a care environment or passing away.

Feedback amongst service users remains positive with 10 compliments and no formal complaints received in Quarter 2. The Lifeline team also won the Stronger Communities award for 'Exceptional Care', and restarted tenant engagement sessions and resident activities.

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

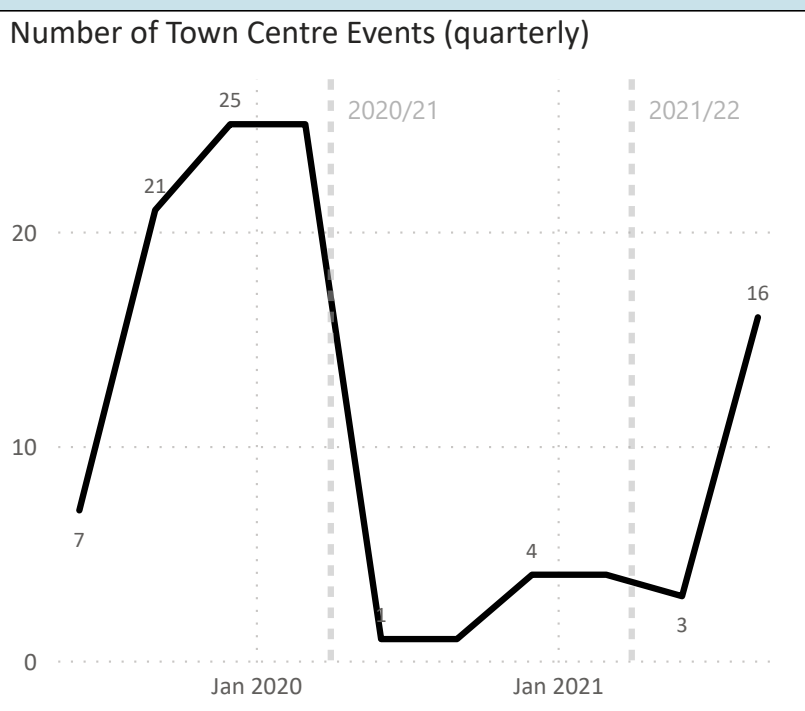
## L1. With the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), plan the 2025 celebrations for the Stockton and Darlington Passenger Railway

In addition to the significant capital investment at Darlington Station to ensure a new modern station is part of the 2025 celebrations, and the transformational project at the Rail Heritage Quarter to celebrate our heritage, work has continued through the period with partners to develop the 2025 celebrations programme. The partnership is seeking to deliver a core programme for 2025, built around the following core elements:

- Live steam and motive power;
- Exhibitions of early steam locomotives;
- Education and school projects;
- Knowledge sharing and conferences;
- Community events;
- Large-scale outdoor arts and street theatre.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

## L2. Ensure the town centre is clean, animated, and vibrant with an extensive range of events and festivals



As Covid-19 restrictions have been relaxed, the number of town centre events during Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, at 16, including Darlington Daytime Pride, the Vintage Vehicle Rally, the Darlington Food & Music Festival, the R&B Festival and the Darlington Arts Festival. This is significantly above both the previous two quarters, when there were just 3, and the same period last year, when there was just 1. As the borough continues to recover from the pandemic, more events will be held to support the town centre and encourage visitors to the borough.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

Town Centre cleaning - % pass rate of the 33 transects inspected for litter across the Town Centre

Year	Month	Value
2020	October	100%
	November	100%
	December	97%
2021	February	100%
	March	100%
	April	100%
	May	100%
	June	100%
	July	100%
	August	97%
	September	100%

The LAMS (Land Audit Management System) is a quality inspection system to monitor grounds maintenance and/or street cleansing, whereby a number of 'transects' or zones, covering a variety of amenity types, are inspected on a regular basis to identify issues such as litter. Overall, the data shows that the cleanliness of the town centre has continued to remain at a very high standard during the first half of 2021/22, with 100% of town centre transects passing their inspection in 5 of the 6 months inspections were undertaken, and thirty two out of thirty three zones passing in August.



## L3. Finalise plans for the Rail Heritage Quarter and initiate implementation of the plans together with partners

Work has continued developing and finalising the proposals for the Rail Heritage Quarter project during the first two quarters of 2021/22.

A planning application has been submitted and will be determined in January 2022.

The outcome of the development phase of the project will be subject to a future report to Cabinet, with project programmed to commence on site in April 2022 subject to approvals.

[Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson](#)

## L4. Deliver the refurbishment and modernisation of the Crown Street Library service

The Crown Street Library refurbishment and modernisation project has been delayed due to a number of technical issues associated with the age, complexity and restrictions on the building. However, the project commenced on site in late November.

The work will include repairs to the roof and structure of the building, upgrading the mechanical and electrical installations as well as restoration of the interior of the library. The work is anticipated to take between 12 and 14 months to complete.

The outcome will be a refurbished and restored library undertaken in a sympathetic way to reflect its heritage but also bring new technology and improvements to the service and building.

[Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson](#)

## L5. Review and deliver a revised car parking strategy

The town centre parking offers remain in place to support the town centre's recovery from Covid-19. Following the adoption of the Tees Valley Strategic Plan a new Darlington Transport Plan is being developed that will include a new parking strategy. The strategies will specifically consider transport and parking in the town centre to support recovery and align with the town centre strategy.

The draft plans are being developed in preparation for consultation this financial year and adoption early in the new financial year.

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

## L6. Work with TVCA to deliver improved transport links within Darlington and the Tees Valley

The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan has now been agreed and a prospectus was submitted to Government to secure over £300m transport investment in the next 5 years. There is strong governance and partnership working in place between Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the local authorities and the national agencies to deliver the programme of improvements.

Key updates of the programme are:

- Continued lobbying and development of key road projects including New Tees Crossing, Darlington Northern Link Road, A689. Development work on the A68 corridor also continued, looking at all modes of transport.
- Development and delivery of Darlington, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool station projects that will unlock national and local capacity issues. Feasibility is continuing on rail freight to improve access to and from TeesPort without having to utilise Darlington Station.
- The submission of a Bus Service Improvement Plan and development work towards an Enhanced Partnership with operators by the end of the financial year.
- Further development of walking and cycling schemes, including consultation and engagement on the Duke Street and Woodland Road Scheme with an anticipated start on Woodland Road of November 2021.
- Feasibility of electric vehicle charging with a planned investment of over £2m in the region expected to commence this financial year.

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

## L7. Modernise Darlington's crematorium service

Work commenced in April on the refurbishment of the cremators and associated building works. Delivery of the new chapel was delayed due to evidence of newts on the adjacent allotments site with work accordingly only commencing early June.

The revised programme has been developed with a view to try to catch up with a target end date for the project of early April 2022. As of the end of Quarter 2, work continues on the project with both the crematorium and new chapel progressing, with the crematorium due to be finished in early 2022 and the chapel in Spring 2022. The outcome will be a new modern chapel facility and crematorium that meets current environmental requirements. The project will also create capacity for further burials in West Cemetery.

[Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson](#)

## L8. Work with TVCA to develop a sustainable Teesside International Airport

Teesside International Airport continues to develop as an airport and location that attracts businesses that are related to aviation industries. Recent developments, led by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) with support as appropriate from the Council, include a number of new flights agreed and large scale improvements to passenger facilities within the airport, including an extensive, multi-million pound refit which has seen major changes to areas including check-in, security, departure gates and even, the addition of a restaurant and duty-free retail offer.

[Assistant Director Economic Growth - Mark Ladyman](#)

## R1. Deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and a positive Value for Money (VFM) outcome

The current Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is on track and, despite pressures from Covid-19 and utility costs, is anticipated to show an improved position at year end.

The draft MTFP for 2022/23 - 2025/26 is now out for consultation and is showing an affordable four-year position. Following consultation and scrutiny feedback Members will review the revised MTFP at full Council in February.

The Council accounts are scrutinised annually by Ernst and Young and have consistently delivered a positive Value for Money outcome.

[Assistant Director Resources - Brett Nielsen](#)

## R2. Oversee the successful completion of existing house building joint venture companies

The Council has invested in six joint ventures for house building to date, with all sites progressing well. Two of the projects, at Eastbourne and Heighington, are completed with the investment repaid and dividends received. There is one final plot at Middleton St George but all financing has been repaid and an interim dividend received. West Park joint venture, which is part of a larger scheme and will be completed over a seven year period, is progressing well with sales buoyant and ahead of target at present. The Council's out-of-borough joint venture with Esh Group is still in its infancy however one site has been purchased for the development of 75 houses and pre-construction works are progressing. Finally, Neasham Road joint venture has commenced with infrastructure works in progress on site. The first homes from this project are anticipated to be on sale from 2022.

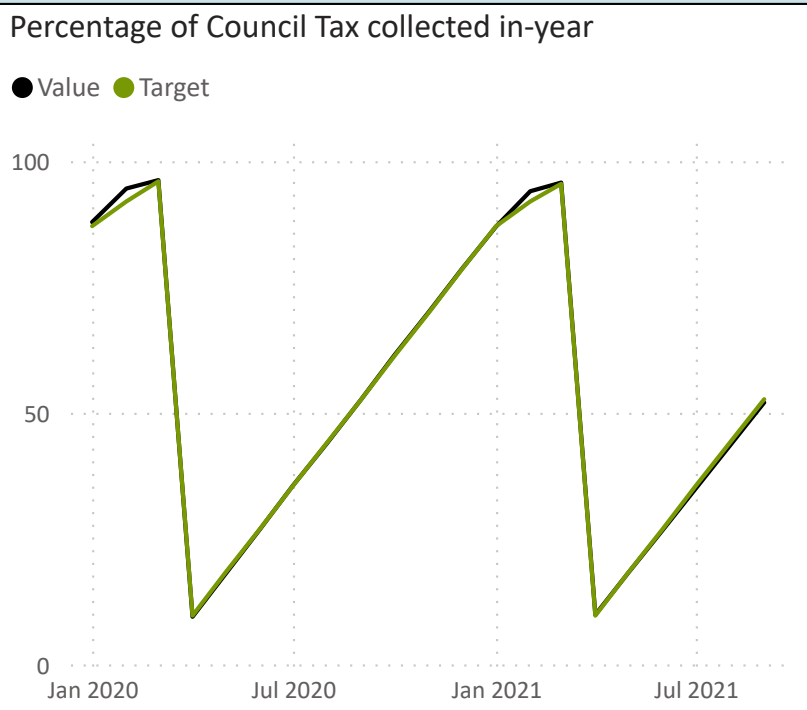
[Assistant Director Resources - Brett Nielsen](#)

## R3. Maximise the council's income from the council's Investment Fund, including further joint venture housing companies

The Investment Fund provision of £50m is being utilised for Joint Venture (JV) and economic regeneration initiatives. Returns on JV's are anticipated to be over £6m and two of the schemes have completed with the investment fully repaid and recycled back into the fund. The agreed Investment Fund of £50m has a commitment against it of £37.64m leaving a balance of £12.36m uncommitted. Officers are actively looking at schemes which subject to approval could utilise the fund to provide returns to the Council and wider economic benefits to the borough.

[Assistant Director Resources - Brett Nielsen](#)

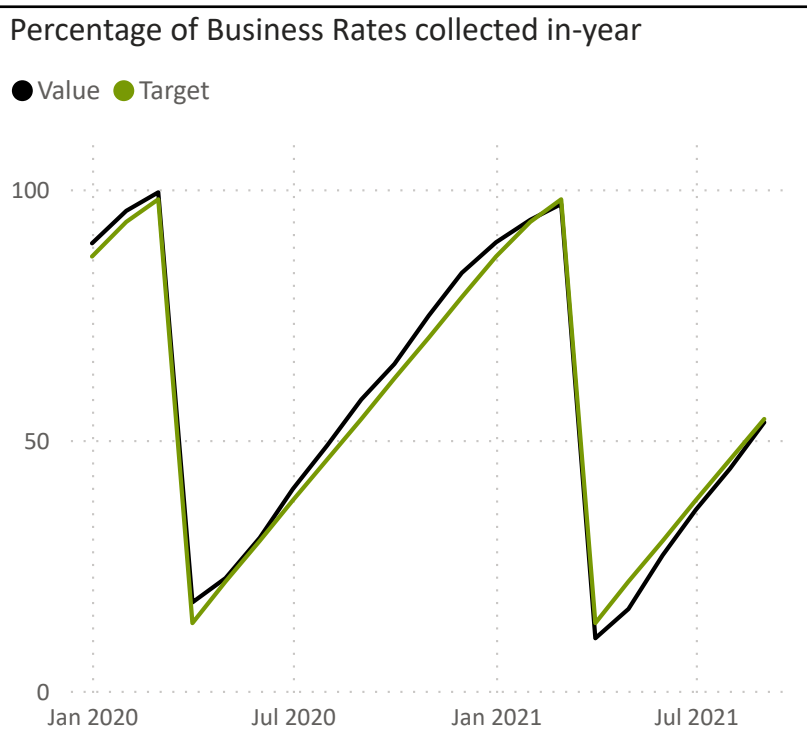
## R4. Maximise council tax and business rate income through robust income collection processes



The percentage of local council tax collected is currently on course to meet the Council's target for 2021-22. £36.4 million was collected in Quarter 2 by Revenues and Benefits officers, exceeding the amount collected in the same period last year by £3.03 million.

Year	Darlington	England
2016/17	95.8	97.2
2017/18	95.6	97.1
2018/19	96.0	97.0
2019/20	96.2	96.8
2020/21	95.8	95.7

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys



The percentage of local business rates collected in Quarter 2 is currently below target, due to businesses qualifying for retail and hospitality relief receiving 100% for Quarter 1 only and therefore only having to start paying business rates from Quarter 2 onwards. Collection rates are therefore expected to increase through the remainder of 2021-22, with the overall target for the year still anticipated to be met.

Year	Darlington	England
2016/17	97.9	98.2
2017/18	98.9	98.4
2018/19	97.7	98.3
2019/20	99.4	98.0
2020/21	97.1	93.0

Assistant Director Housing & Revenues - Anthony Sandys

## R5. Adopt a local wealth building approach to council procurement and work with the wider public sector in Darlington to do the same

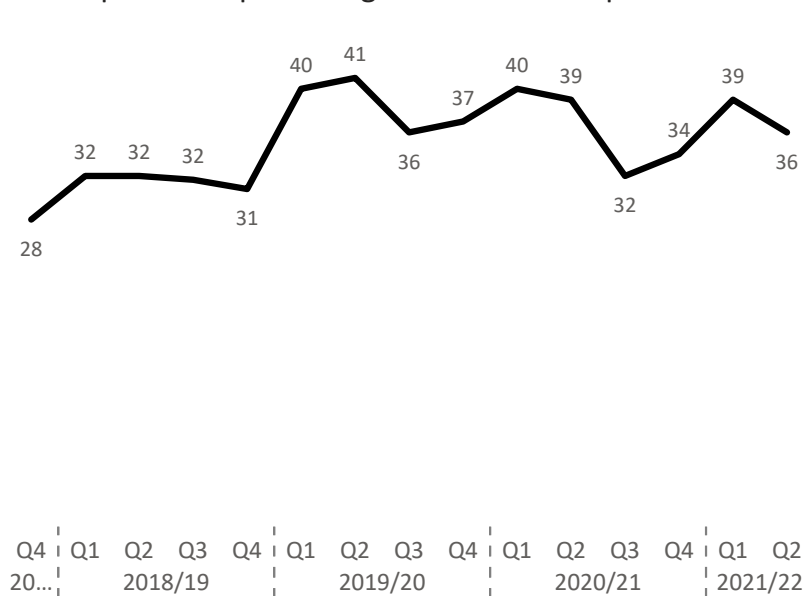
A Public Sector Executives Group has been established, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, which is a key mechanism through which the Council works with its public sector partners. It has accepted the role of 'Anchor Institutions Network' to further develop a joint approach to social value. The group has established a sub group of procurement leads which is focusing on two objectives:

1. Extract the maximum social value from public spend in Darlington
2. Tailor social value to the specific needs of Darlington

The group provides a space for agencies to share practice and is working through issues including assimilating social value output data and how agencies report outputs over differing geographies.

## R5. Adopt a local wealth building approach to council procurement and work with the wider public sector in Darlington to do the same

Local spend as a percentage of contracted spend



Despite a slight drop in Quarter 2, the proportion of Council spend with Darlington-based suppliers increased in the first half of 2021/22 and equated to more than £17.6M.

This improvement reflects the continued embedding of the Council's social value procurement framework for contracts which encourages officers to invite local providers where possible to tender for contracts. It also reflects ongoing work by the Council's Procurement and Economic Growth teams to support local businesses to find and bid for Council opportunities.

Assistant Director Law & Governance - Luke Swinhoe

## R6. Increasing the availability of council services online

Number of transactional services available via the corporate website

September 2021

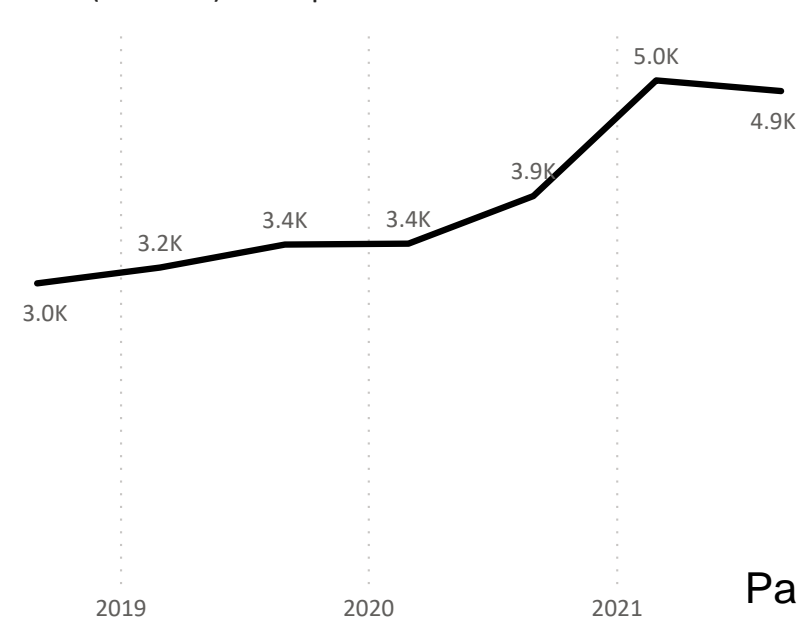
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This is the first time data has been captured, following an initial audit exercise to identify the current number of online functions offered by the council. It is expected, however, that there are likely more online services to be captured and therefore a further, more detailed piece of work is now underway to capture this additional information and so this number is expected to increase further.

The 2021 National Highways & Transport Public satisfaction survey ranked Darlington first out of 111 councils for 'Ease of contact for Enquiries'. The new Online "Report it" facility launched in June 2021 has seen over 500 reports made directly to delivery teams ensuring a quicker response to reported issues.

Head of Strategy, Performance & Comms - N. Bowerbank

Visits (sessions) to corporate website



There has been a steady increase in average daily visits to the Council website over the past 3 years, which is continually being improved with new information and functions, easier to understand content, and better navigation.

The spike in visits in 2020 was due to national Covid-19 announcements leading to people seeking information on local restrictions and Council services.

There was a small reduction in average usage from April 2021 compared to the previous period due to fewer pandemic-related visits, however numbers remain significantly higher than the same period in the previous year and future data will determine if Covid-19 has led to a step change in website usage going forward.

Head of Strategy, Performance & Comms - N. Bowerbank

## R7. Review and refresh the council's workforce strategy

The Council's new Workforce Strategy and Plan was agreed by the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), a forum comprising Elected Members, senior managers and trade union representatives, in July 2021. Rollout of the strategy commenced in October with communication to all staff through "The Briefing", a weekly staff email update, and a briefing session at Senior Managers Network. Work is ongoing to ensure that the strategy is embedded into everyday practices and monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken to assess the impact of the strategy. Further media presentations are being developed to widen the promotion throughout the whole workforce and how the strategy can be incorporated into employee induction. JCC and chief officers will receive an update on the impact of the strategy after one year.

[Assistant Director Resources - Brett Nielsen](#)

## S1. Utilise the skills and resources of businesses to increase volunteering and corporate social responsibility primarily through Darlington Cares

The lockdowns resulting from Covid-19 brought employer-supported volunteering to an almost standstill for much of 2020 and 2021, with many businesses not willing to potentially put their staff at risk in a volunteering situation. Despite this, some Darlington Cares member organisations continued to supply volunteers to support the roll-outs for both flu and Covid vaccinations, all of which were coordinated by the Darlington Cares programme officer. All business members are now back volunteering and, despite the hiatus, Darlington Cares has collectively delivered more than 7,000 hours of volunteer activity in 2020-21. As activity picks up to their previous levels, including the reintroduction of flagship initiatives such as Pick, Pie and a Pint, the board are focusing on growing member numbers, with a number of significant local employers keen to join.

### Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson

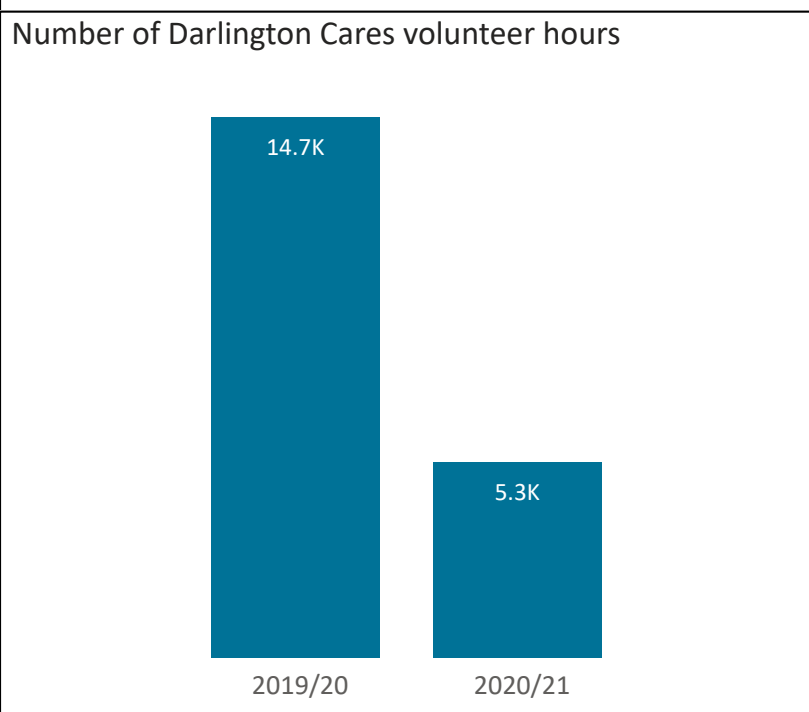
Year	Month	Value
2019	June	22
	September	23
	December	24
2020	March	24
	June	24
	September	24
	December	24
2021	March	24
	June	26
	September	26

During the lockdown stages of the pandemic, the majority of Darlington Cares member organisations were unable to release staff to volunteer due to health and safety concerns.

Covid-19 and its effects on both local employer and officer capacity also meant recruitment of new members was suspended during this period.

However, as restrictions are continuing to ease, the Board is now focusing on recruiting new members in 2022, with conversations currently being undertaken with a number of local interested organisations.

### Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson



Many of the volunteering programmes that Darlington Cares runs had to be suspended during the pandemic. However, Darlington Cares performed a pivotal role in the borough's Covid-19 response, including by providing and coordinating volunteer stewards and drivers to support various vaccination programmes. As restrictions are lifted the pre-pandemic programme is being rebooted, including the popular Pick, Pie and a Pint litter picks, and new volunteering opportunities are being explored.

The recovery in activity is demonstrated by 4,302 volunteer hours being delivered in the first two quarters of 2021/22, compared to 0 hours over the same period last year and 6,087 in 2019/20.

### Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson



## S2. Produce, deliver and appraise a pilot for a local neighbourhood renewal scheme including reviewing the approach to private sector landlord operations to ensure residents are best supported and protected

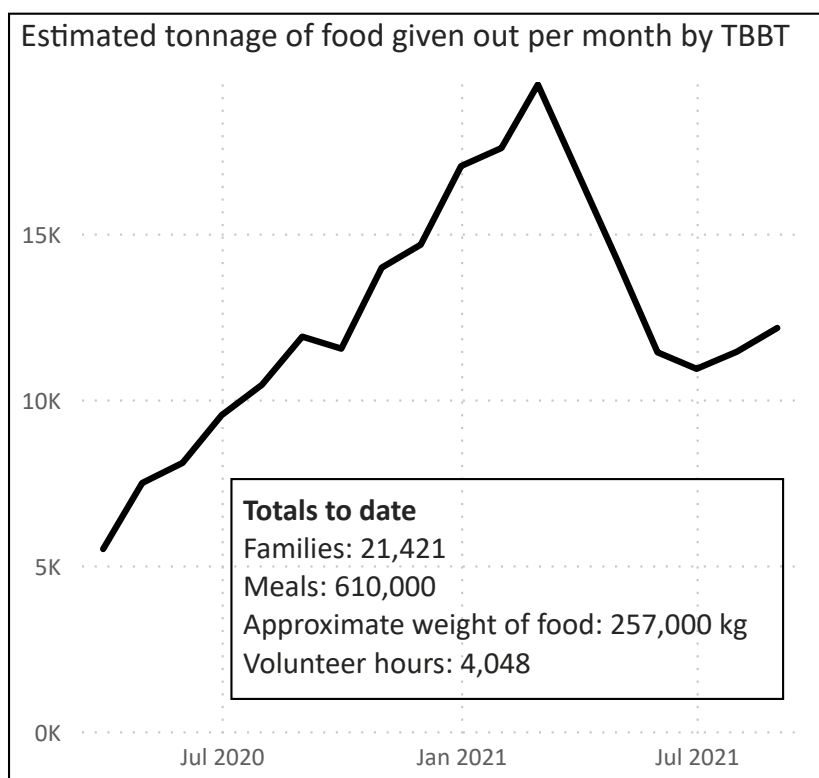
The Northgate initiative, a multi-agency programme which seeks to pilot a range of interventions in order to improve outcomes for local residents in all areas of wellbeing including economy, education and childhood, health, environment and social relationships, is now well established and delivering results across all domains, from improvements to the public realm and quick responses to reports of environmental crime, to delivery of an innovative new 'Eyes and Ears' training course to local stakeholders, purchasing and bringing back into use a number of long-term empty properties, implementing significant new capital projects as part of the Towns Fund programme, and preparing to roll out a groundbreaking new wellbeing service to support local residents' health outcomes. Appropriate workstreams have been developed which are held to account by a steering group chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council. As we come out of the pandemic the partnership steering group are also revisiting the initiative's ambitions and undertaking a target setting exercise to refresh the programme's structure and focus, and ensure it reflects emerging priorities.

Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson

## S3. Work with partners to address food instability

At the outset of the pandemic, in March 2020, the Council put an emergency package together to support the Kings Church Foodbank which, in addition to being the largest foodbank in the borough also supports the wider foodbank network in Darlington. Council staff from the Dolphin Centre staff were redeployed to support activity and food, purchased wholesale through the Dolphin Centre's suppliers, was provided. Also in March 2020, The Bread and Butter Thing - an initiative food surplus redistribution charity - began to operate in Darlington, undeterred by the first national lockdown which was announced 2 days before their first service. There are now 7 hubs established across Darlington which, as of the end of September 2021, have provided local families with 21,421 sets of groceries, equating to 257 tonnes of food and 610,000 meals. As each grocery set includes an average of £35 worth of shopping (one bag of fresh fruit and vegetables, one of chilled goods and one of cupboard items) for a set cost of just £7.50, this means that Darlington households have collectively saved over half a million pounds in food costs since the scheme began.

Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson



The launch date for the first The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) hub in Darlington was two days into the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020.

Despite this incredibly difficult operating environment, TBBT - supported by the Council and its partners - has stuck to and delivered its core mission of providing affordable food across the borough and reducing food waste, and there are now seven hubs located in areas of highest need across Darlington.

The success of the initiative is evidenced by the data showing that, as of September 2021, 610,000 meals have been provided to local families.

Director Darlington Partnerships - Seth Pearson



## S4. Embed the new Community Safety service and review its effectiveness and priorities

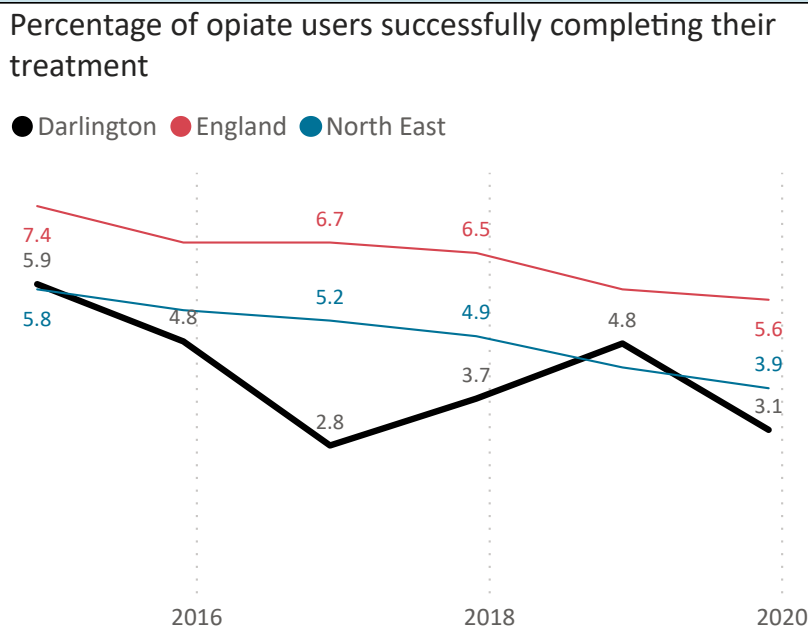
The Community Safety Unit continues to perform well and support a range of partners and services.

A review of the Civic Enforcement team's priorities was carried out at the beginning of 2021 to inform a refreshed service plan and ongoing management of the service's resources versus priorities is being kept under review with the portfolio holder. Following the review, the Civic Enforcement team continues to focus on three key areas of work: anti-social behaviour, environmental crime and parking enforcement, and there has been a particular focus in recent months on back lanes and environmental crime.

The effectiveness of the service is demonstrated by the fact the team have successfully won funding from all three government 'Safer Streets' funds, enabling significant resource to be targeted at burglary-prevention, increasing CCTV coverage across the borough and preventing violence against women and girls.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

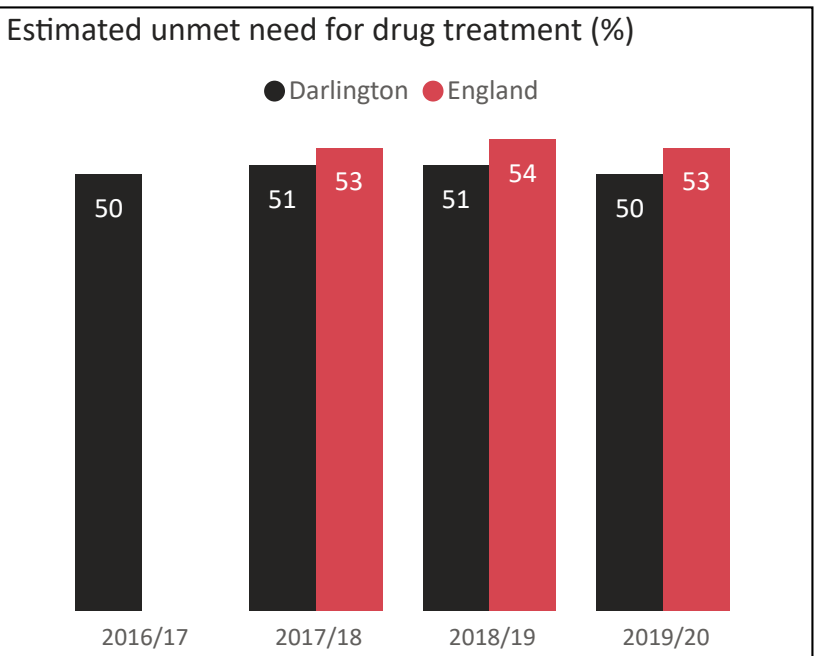
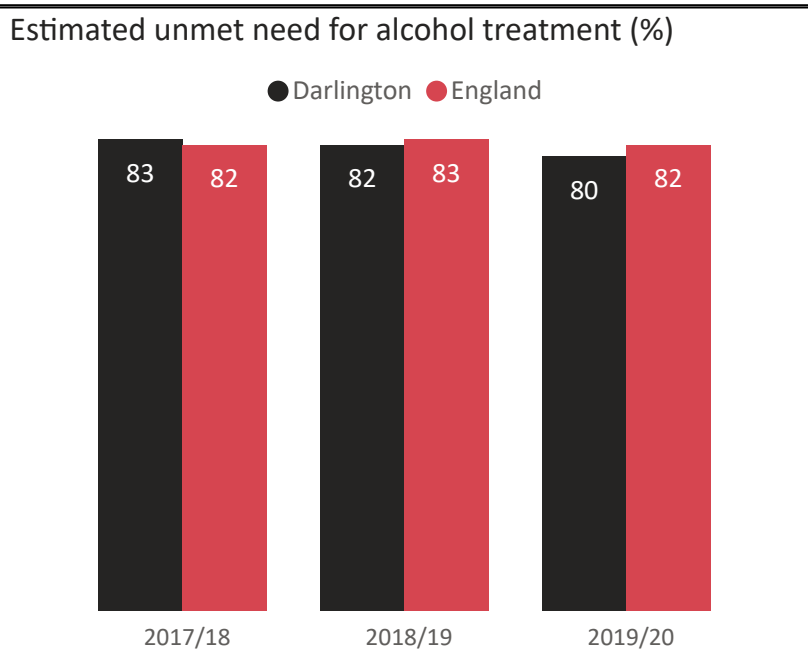
## S5. Work with Durham Constabulary and other key partners to improve our collective response to dealing with drug and alcohol issues



Darlington remains statistically similar to our neighbouring North East authorities for the proportion of opiate users successfully completing drug treatment, despite a small drop in the overall number of individuals who are successfully completing treatment.

The slight fall follows a period of sustained increase over the previous two years and occurred during a period of change where local services in Darlington were reprocurd through a competitive tendering process. Performance issues have been identified and are being tackled by the service's providers and it is hoped this will lead to further increases for this measure going forward.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring



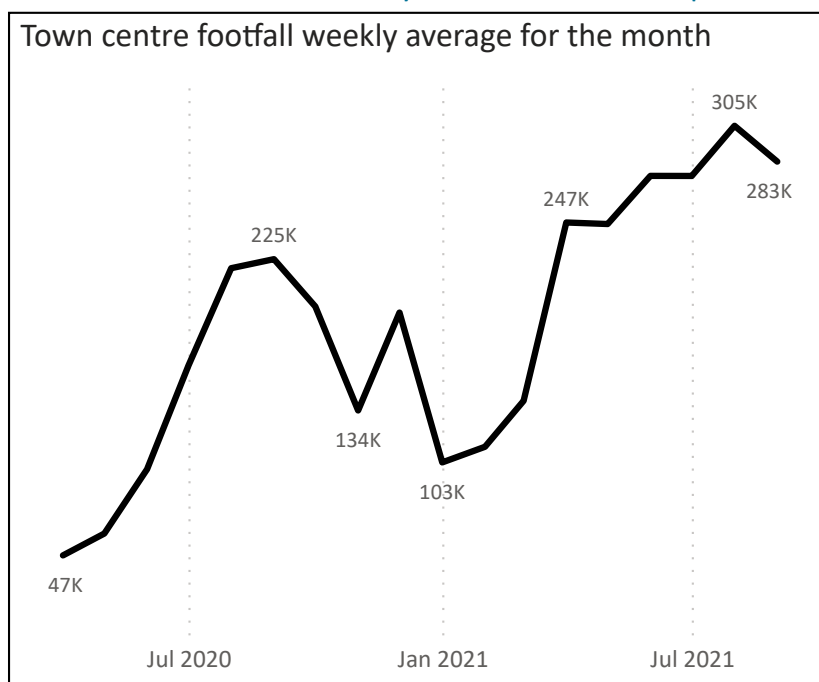
The estimated proportions of adults in need of alcohol and/or drugs (opiates and/or crack) treatment that are estimated not to be in it is lower in Darlington than the England averages and have been falling.

Director Public Health - Penny Spring

## S6. Support the development of the town centre economy by putting appropriate measures in place and demonstrating it is a safe place to visit

The Community Safety team have continued to support the recovery process across the town centre through the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to lead the Prevention and Compliance group, working across the Council and with partners. The Head of Community Safety has been working closely with both the Town Centre Partnership and Events Manager to inform the next renewal submission for Purple Flag status, a national accreditation scheme that identifies town and city centres that meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night time economy. The renewal application was due in October and will be followed by a virtual assessment in December 2021, with reaccreditation due to be announced, if successful, in January 2022. Reported town centre crime, incidents and anti-social behaviour were all down by approximately a third in the first two quarters of 2021 compared to the same period pre-pandemic, in 2019.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson



Town centre footfall levels have been closely correlated with Covid-19 lockdown periods during the course of the pandemic, with significant drops recorded during periods of tighter restrictions which have also been reported elsewhere. As these Covid-related restrictions have continued to reduce through the first two quarters of 2021/22, footfall in the town centre has continued to increase and, whilst directly comparable benchmarking data is not available, community mobility data released by Google since the beginning of the pandemic shows that Darlington mobility trends for 'retail and recreation' have recovered more strongly than the UK average.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

## S7. Review our approach to the use of CCTV in supporting community safety and work with partners to enhance the service further

A review of the Council's CCTV system has now taken place and options for the development of the service are being considered.

It is anticipated an action plan and business model will be developed this financial year.

Assistant Director Community Services - Ian Thompson

## S8. Oversee the implementation of the council's equality policy

Percentage of staff who have completed equality and diversity training

September 2021

**51.5%**

The Council's bespoke half day equality and diversity training has been available to and mandatory for all staff since January 2020, however the pandemic has led to delays in delivery with, for example, restrictions on maximum numbers for in-person training meaning significant numbers of frontline staff have not yet been able to attend. More in-person sessions, however, are planned for 2022 and online staff who have not yet attended are being sent reminders. Staff feedback from the training has been overwhelmingly positive and since its inception the proportion of staff who agree that the Council takes equalities issues seriously has increased from 93% to 96% on the staff survey.

[Head of Strategy, Performance & Comms - N. Bowerbank](#)

Percentage of elected members who have completed equality and diversity training

September 2021

**68.0%**

This indicator includes any Members who have completed at least one of two distinct and bespoke training sessions on equality and diversity on offer.

Engagement on the Members sessions has been excellent and more training sessions for those Members who have not yet been able to attend will be made available in the new year.

[Head of Strategy, Performance & Comms - N. Bowerbank](#)

## S9. Work with partners to assess flood risk for Darlington and develop solutions

Strong partnership and project teams are in place developing two studies that will inform and assist future planning, investment and bidding opportunities:

1. The Darlington Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership (NIDP) study. This is assessing all areas across the north and south Darlington catchments to determine risks and issues in relation to flood for the Environment Agency (EA), Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL) and the Council. The outcome will be evidence for a plan of interventions for the highest priority locations to inform bids to secure funding.
2. Flood Asset Risk Study. Looking at the risks and impact associated with the possible failure or blockage of key assets such as bridges and culverts to determine investment and maintenance strategies to minimise the risk of flooding. The outcome of the study will be evidence to inform bids to secure funding or re-prioritise existing resources.

Operational meetings occur on a regular basis between EA and officers and work has recently taken place to clear out debris from the River Skerne.

[Assistant Director Transport & Capital Projects - Ant Hewitt](#)

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**CABINET**  
**11 JANUARY 2022**

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## **FEETHAMS HOUSE – EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member**  
**Councillor Heather Scott – Leader of the Council**

**Responsible Director**  
**Ian Williams- Chief Executive**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to obtain approval for the repayment of £1,710,928.78 of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to facilitate the temporary use of Feethams House by the Treasury (HMT) and Other Government Departments (OGD).

#### **Summary**

2. In 2019 the Council commenced the building of a grade A office accommodation in the centre of the town. This was a speculative build project aiming to provide high quality office accommodation for small and medium enterprises (SME) and general business use. The overall project £8,460,880 was funded through Council capital contribution £3,329,848 Tees Valley Combined Authority £3,230,000 and ERDF contribution of £1,901,032. The ERDF contribution was specifically allocated for the provision of office accommodation for SMEs. The building was completed in 2020 and funding received to date from ERDF is £1,710.928.78.
3. In March 2021 it was announced that departments of HMT and OGD were to be relocated in Darlington. While a full and comprehensive review for the permanent relocation is currently being carried out it was highlighted that quality temporary accommodation for the early cohorts of officers relocating was required. Feethams House has been identified as the preferred temporary location with occupation commencing in March 2022. HMT and OGDs will require the whole building which means that the two floors identified for the use by SMEs will not meet the restriction imposed by ERDF funding. Officers have discussed with Government officials whether a deferment or some flexibility on repayment of this funding could be obtained, and it has now been confirmed that Government are able to offer repayment over a three-year term (March 2022 to March 2024) in line with the ERDF Programme.

## **Recommendations**

4. It is recommended that:
  - (a) Cabinet agrees to repay the £1,710,928.78 ERDF contribution for the construction of Feethams House.
  - (b) The funding to be sourced in the medium term from the Investment Fund which will be repaid through the rental income from Feethams House.

## **Reasons**

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
  - (a) To promote new development and Economic Growth.
  - (b) To facilitate the relocation of officers from HMT and OGDs which will provide several significant economic growth opportunities for the borough and the Tees Valley Region.
  - (c) To comply with the grant funding obligations.

**Ian Williams**  
**Chief Executive**

## **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Mark Ladyman: Extension 6306

S17 Crime and Disorder	The report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	The report has no implications for health and well being
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is potential for any new Building to be easily accessible by sustainable transport modes which will help ensure the carbon footprint of the development is acceptable.
Diversity	No implications
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the Budget or Policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	Supports the Council priority by bringing jobs potentially to Darlington, and facilitating development
Efficiency	The workload resulting from the recommendations in this report assumes additional resources will be required and funded through proposed rental values.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

6. It is anticipated that over 1,500 civil service jobs will be relocated to Darlington by 2024/2025. A full and comprehensive evaluation exercise on the preferred permanent location for these jobs has been carried out. However, in the meanwhile a temporary solution to accommodate the first cohorts of these posts is required. Various options have been considered by the Government Property Agency (GPA) and Feethams House has been selected as the ideal temporary location.
7. The Treasury and OGDs will require the use of the entire building which means that the funding received through ERDF will need to be repaid as the funding was specifically for the provision of office accommodation for SMEs. The EU regulations make specific provision to recover ERDF grant from projects that significantly change or cease to deliver in line with the offer of grant – in this case office space specifically for the use of SMEs - within five years of the last project payment made. As Feethams House will not deliver any agreed or eligible activity during the life of the ERDF Programme period, this is considered to constitute an irregularity requiring the repayment of ERDF grant.
8. Officers have discussed with Government officials whether a deferment or some flexibility of this funding repayment could be obtained, and it has now been confirmed that Government are able to offer repayment over a three-year term (March 2022 to March 2024) in line with the ERDF Programme.
9. It is anticipated that the relocation to Feethams House will commence in March 2022 and an early conclusion to the ERDF restrictions is required as soon as possible to allow the occupation of Feethams House to commence. The £1,710,928.78 ERDF funding will be sourced through the Economic Growth Investment Fund and will be repaid through the rental income from Feethams House.
10. The Government are conscious that the ERDF was originally allocated at Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Area level and have reviewed the reinvestment of the ERDF clawback both in respect of Darlington and the wider Tees Valley area and explore any opportunities for further ERDF investment.
11. It has been confirmed that Government is currently considering requests to invest around £4.5m additional ERDF in the Tees Valley Business Growth Fund. This is expected to support up to 200 businesses in Tees Valley, creating around 200 new jobs and bring new products to market. As a condition of the additional grant, it will be expected that the project takes steps to specifically target Darlington businesses and maximises the potential investment in the Darlington Area. Around £1m of ERDF will be earmarked for Darlington businesses if there is sufficient demand.

### Financial Implications

12. Repayment of the ERDF funding can be facilitated through the Investment fund, and it is anticipated to be fully repaid from rental income within 3 years. This will be achieved by prioritising any rental income received to repay the ERDF debt in place of the original



DBC/TVCA profit/risk share agreement. The profit/risk share agreement with TVCA will re-engage once the ERDF debt has been settled.

13. Under the expected head of terms with the GPA there is a 2-year break clause; while it is felt this is unlikely to be triggered, if it was then the outstanding ERDF debt would be £0.945m. While the risk of this may be low it should be noted as this would fall on DBC to fund as the TVCA profit/risk share arrangement is based on net profit/loss before borrowing costs for any party.
14. Following successful repayment of the ERDF debt it is expected that the original business plan would restart at year 1 with no detrimental impact for either DBC or TVCA within the constraints of the business plan.

### **Legal Implications**

15. As outlined above, the ERDF funding was conditional upon any disposals being by way of leases to ERDF eligible Small or Medium Enterprises. This condition is to be found at paragraph 10 of Schedule 1 of the ERDF grant funding agreement (“the Agreement”) dated 8 February 2019.
16. The proposed disposal will mean that the Council will not be compliant with this condition, this itself does not automatically bring the Agreement to an end: consent can be requested of the secretary of state for a disposal under clause 8.3(c) of the Agreement. Should consent not be forthcoming but the disposal proceeds then 8.3(d) requires all proceeds of the disposal to be held in trust for the Secretary of State.
17. Further, such a disposal without consent will be a material breach of the Agreement under clauses 12.2(d) and (e) the consequences for which are outlined in clause 12.3 and are (a) suspension of payments; (b) reduction of the sum of the grant; (c) cessation of payments; and (d) cancellation of the Agreement. In the circumstances, given that the grant has been fully paid to the Council, it is very likely that cancellation would be the consequence, and this would lead to immediate repayment.
18. In conclusion, given that consent for this disposal is unlikely/has not been forthcoming and that this disposal is not to an SME and therefore a material breach of the Agreement, the Council will be obligated to repay the grant in full.

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**CABINET  
11 JANUARY 2022**

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**SUPPORT DARLINGTON CREDIT UNION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Dulston – Deputy Leader and Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Members with details of a proposal to support Darlington Credit Union (DCU) as part of its investment and growth plan but also in light of the financial impact the union has sustained through the pandemic.
2. To seek Cabinet approval to allocate £25,000 as one-off grant funding to Darlington Credit Union, from the ARG covid grant and a £75,000 interest-free loan to be repaid over a 10-year period.

**Summary**

3. DCU provides a broad range of affordable, sustainable and ethical financial services to its members and encourages the development of good financial practice across the community. Since its formation in 2009 DCU has made an important contribution to the Town with over 8,000 members, providing support to around 1,200 people per year with the MoneySmart project, which offers financial literacy education and holistic support to those who are financially vulnerable; and helps children start off life in the habit of saving, with over 1,300 pupils in 13 schools having saved over £180,000. Their mission is to fight financial exclusion.
4. The Council has, since its foundation, supported the Darlington Credit Union (DCU). Over the years the Council has provided £65,000 in grants and holds £85,000 in deferred shares which in turn have allowed DCU to offer interest-bearing accounts and affordable loans, which reduce the risk of residents using loan sharks; supporting the strategy to address financial hardship and the dangerous consequences for families of resorting to unregulated and so-called “pay-day” lenders. The funding has also enabled DCU to strengthen capital balances to allow the business to expand.
5. DCU are seeking funding to enable growth but also to assist with the financial challenge the pandemic has presented.
6. After a period of investing in organisational capacity and capability DCU are looking to secure funding to aid the next stage of their sustainability and growth to enable more people to be supported and to leverage further investment.

7. Alongside this the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on businesses throughout the economy and the DCU is not an exception and has seen reduced income with demand for loans at an all time low, and conversely an increase in bad debts with some members who had never missed a payment finding themselves unable to meet their financial commitments.
8. DCU have taken a number of actions to improve the financial position and as part of this plan have looked for third party support. As part of that action they are seeking £150k in funding to stabilise their financial standing but also to ensure it is in a strong position to expand and increase income along with the business plan. Darlington Building Society have been approached and have agreed to provide funding of £50k, and £100k has been requested from the Council.
9. The Building Society and the Council have reviewed the 2022 and 2023 financial forecasts which show a positive return and are satisfied the credit union has plans and action in place to achieve the estimated returns.
10. The proposal to provide one-off grant funding of £25,000 to the Credit Union from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), government funding passported to businesses suffering the effect of Covid which the council has discretion to allocate, and in addition it is proposed to offer an interest-free loan of £75k repayable over 10 years.

### **Recommendations**

11. It is recommended that Cabinet;
  - (a) Approve one-off funding of £25,000 from the ARG grant fund.
  - (b) Approve a £75,000 interest-free loan repayable over 10 years to support the sustainability and growth of the Credit Union.
  - (c) Delegate to the Group Director of Operations, the authority to draw up a funding agreement for the loan.

### **Reasons**

12. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons;
  - (a) Using the credit union enables individuals to receive advice and support about saving and appropriate lending as well as helping them to avoid reaching crisis through high cost lending it also helps them to meet other commitments including payment of council tax and housing rent.
  - (b) ARG funding was designed to assist organisations which have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Ian Williams**  
**Chief Executive**

## Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Elizabeth Davison - Extension 4083

S17 Crime and Disorder	Enhanced support, promotion and development of the Credit Union's offer and existing low cost loan scheme will reduce the risk of illegal money lending activity to and also reduce the risk of criminal activity to pay off large interest payments on high interest loans.
Health and Well Being	Financial exclusion can impact adversely on the health and well-being of individuals and families. It can also impact on the ability of individuals to maintain housing tenancies.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact and climate change implications.
Diversity	This proposal is open to all who require low cost financial support to purchase items such as household white goods and electrical items, although the scheme will primarily appeal to people who are financially excluded and/or on a low income.
Wards Affected	All Wards within Darlington have the potential to be positively impacted through enhancement of the existing loan scheme proposal
Groups Affected	Financial exclusion is an issue that affects all age groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	<p>The development and promotion of an affordable low cost loan scheme is specifically designed to narrow the gap between those with poor credit ratings and others.</p> <p>Increasing the financial knowledge and competencies of individuals can increase the overall prosperity of Darlington, making it more commercially sustainable.</p>
Efficiency	This proposal will promote financial inclusion and ensure residents of Darlington will be able to access low cost credit.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Background

13. The Darlington Credit Union has become a part of the social infrastructure in Darlington with cross-referrals from over 50 local agencies, including council services. It is a significant and responsible lender of particular value to residents on low incomes. Most loans for example help residents to meet the additional costs of Christmas or unforeseen household repairs and without which those residents may rely on the non-standard consumer credit market including doorstep lenders, payday loan companies, pawn broking and high interest 'pay-weekly' consumer credit through High Street stores such as Bright House. Corporate investors, like the Council and other businesses, help to strengthen the capital reserves that enable more loans to be made to those in need.
14. DCU provides a broad range of affordable, sustainable and ethical financial services to its members and encourages the development of good financial practice across the community. It was set up in 2009 to offer savings and affordable loan facilities to its members, who live and/or work within Darlington and the surrounding areas, and provides a responsible and low cost alternative to the non-standard consumer credit market.
15. They provide eligible members with an affordable and low cost loan, even if they have no credit history. They provide a vital service to those with low household incomes and who may be financially excluded and therefore not able to access some of the lower cost mainstream credit channels and be vulnerable to door step lenders and even illegal money lenders.
16. The DCU plays an important part in reducing financial exclusion in Darlington and directly help with council services such as council tax and housing as they support residents with council tax and rent payments, but also indirectly in areas such as the mental health support team - a recent quote from a team member being:  
  
*"The project (MoneySmart) is essential and moves clients who are often in a state of chaos to improved behaviour, wellbeing, reduced stress and we have been able to move people on or sometimes discharge them from the service provided by our team'.*
17. The Council has previously supported DCU with one off grants and holds £85,000 deferred shares in the union.

#### Information

18. Prior to the pandemic the Credit Union was expanding as demand had never been greater with loans and deposits increasing. The Credit Union has invested in ICT infrastructure enabling online banking and a mobile app which has increased membership and access. The Credit Union have strong ambitions to continue this growth to enable more people to be supported.

19. As a credit union grows so does the capital asset ratio requirement it needs to sustain. The Financial Conduct Authority regulations which have tight stipulations in regard to reserve levels verses capital require a minimum ratio of 3% and for a Credit Union of Darlington size it should be at 5%. DCU's current ratio is 3.48%, and therefore it requires support to ensure longer-term viability.
20. As a not for profit organisation, credit unions, especially relatively new ones such as DCU, find it difficult to grow their reserves organically fast enough to meet these higher levels due to the low 'profits' they make on loans. Invariably, credit unions nearing a trigger point for the implementation of the next capital/asset ratio banding, are faced with either attracting external investment or halting growth.
21. DCU had laid the foundations for future growth through significant extension of products and services to allow to access new markets, however the pandemic stalled this progress with a financial impact both in regard to revenue generation and an increase in bad debts.
22. In regard to revenue, members witnessed a reduction in their outgoings especially on the social, hobbies and interests front which created more disposable income and allowed many to either reduce their indebtedness or extinguish it completely. Demand for loans was at an all time low with the usual reasons for borrowing no longer available e.g. holidays.
23. Conversely a number of benefit/low income members found their cost of living rising, through the pandemic, as many of the essential spends increased. Members who had never missed payments, previously, suddenly found themselves unable to meet their financial commitments. Furloughing and job losses also contributed. The net result of the was pressure on the Capital/Asset ratio, a key financial indicator for DCU.
24. The credit union has taken steps to deal with this situation including:
  - (a) Reducing staff and overheads to limit management expenses;
  - (b) Extension of a subordinate loan by two years to improve reserves;
  - (c) Securing external grant funding over the next five years;
  - (d) Loan campaigns focusing on reduced repayment periods and lower amounts which will be more recoverable;
  - (e) Seek third party funding supported.
25. As part of seeking third party support the Credit Union have approached Darlington Building Society and the Council for financial support. Darlington Building Society have agreed a funding package of £50k.
26. The proposal is for the Council to provide a £25k grant and a £75k interest-free loan repayable over ten years which would stabilise the capital ratio and allow room for expansion.

27. Any investment secured would be applied to their reserves to provide them with security over the longer term by maintaining the Capital/Asset ratio above the minimum requirements. This would provide them with the confidence to invest in growth but also provide a level of organisational resilience to survive challenging years that may from time to time occur.
28. The Council will meet with DCU every six months to review progress.

### **Financial Implications**

29. The £25k grant would come from the Covid Additional Restrictions funding which was specifically allocated for businesses struggling through the pandemic and would therefore have no direct impact on the Council's reserve levels.
30. In addition the £75k loan repayable over 10 years, whilst interest-free, will have limited financial impact on Council finances given the very low interest rates receiveable on investments.
31. The precise details of the loan arrangement will be agreed with the Credit Union and will be designed as far as possible to protect the Council's investment.

### **Legal Issues**

32. Given the value of the loan it is unlikely that there will be any state aid/subsidy control implications. Officers will need to ensure that the Credit Union have disclosed all monies received from public bodies in the past 3 years to ensure that the grant and loan are state aid/subsidy control compliant.