



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 25 January 2024

Central Hall, Dolphin Centre, Horsemarket, Darlington. DL1 5RP

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

1. Introductions / Attendance at Meeting.
2. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Council held on 30 November 2023 (Pages 5 - 10)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given from):-
  - (a) The Public;
  - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
  - (a) Council Tax Calculation of Tax Base 2024/25 – Report of the Group Director of Operations (Pages 11 - 18)
  - (b) Members' Allowances Review – Report of the Chief Executive (Pages 19 - 70)
  - (c) Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023 – Report of the

Group Director of Operations  
(Pages 71 - 114)

8. Cabinet Reports.

- (a) Mid Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2023/24 – Report of the Group Director of Operations (Pages 115 - 130)
- (b) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 131 - 134)
- (c) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 135 - 138)
- (d) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 139 - 140)
- (e) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 141 - 150)
- (f) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 151 - 154)
- (g) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 155 - 160)
- (h) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 161 - 164)
- (i) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 165 - 170)

9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-

- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 171 - 174)
- (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 175 - 178)
- (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 179 - 182)
- (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 183 - 188)
- (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 189 - 194)

10. Notice of Motion

- (a) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Durham and seconded by Councillor Bartch –

**Constitutional Amendment**

**Preamble**

- 1. This Council has often found itself debating issues which it has no operational responsibility for, or influence over, most recently, in respect of the conflict in the Middle East.

2. As Councillors, we are elected to represent residents within the Borough on matters which this Council has control over, we are not elected to protest, champion a cause or political ideology.
3. The lack of focus hasn't gone unnoticed by residents, who, quite rightly, expect those they elect to focus on Darlington and nothing else.
4. This very simple Motion provides residents with comfort that is all we are focused on and I hope all Members see no need for a prolonged debate on this and support this Motion.

### **Proposed Motion**

This Council resolves to amend paragraph 22 of Council Procedure Rules, contained within this Council's Constitution to include:-

'Any motion submitted to the Council shall be about matters for which the Council has statutory powers, duties or functions or address the built or natural environment of the Borough of Darlington or address a matter of local, regional or national policy that affects the lives of people in the Borough of Darlington. The ruling of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Mayor shall be final as to the relevance of the motion.'

**(NOTE – If the Motion is approved, paragraph 22 will subsequently read :-**

A Motion given on notice, must be given in writing to the Assistant Director Law and Governance, at least seven clear working days (that is not counting the day of the meeting or the day of delivery) before the relevant meeting and be signed by the Member(s) giving the notice. Any Motion submitted to the council shall be about matters for which the Council has statutory powers, duties or functions or address the built or natural environment of the Borough of Darlington or address a matter of local, regional or national policy that affects the lives of people in the Borough of Darlington. The ruling of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Mayor shall be final as to the relevance of the Motion.)

11. Membership Changes - To consider any membership changes to Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies.



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

**Wednesday, 17 January 2024**

**Town Hall  
Darlington.**

**Membership**

The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Anderson, Baker, Bartch, Beckett, Coe, Crudass, Crumbie, Mrs Culley, Curry, Dillon, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Keir, Laing, Lawley, Layton, Lee, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Marshall, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, K Nicholson, M Nicholson, Pease, Porter, Ray, Renton, Dr. Riley, Robinson, Roche, Mrs Scott, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Paul Dalton, Democratic and Elections Officer, 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 Email: [paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk) or Telephone 01325 405805

## COUNCIL

Thursday, 30 November 2023

**PRESENT** – The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Anderson, Baker, Bartch, Beckett, Coe, Crudass, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Keir, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Marshall, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, K Nicholson, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Renton, Dr. Riley, Robinson, Roche, Mrs Scott, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Mrs Culley, Laing, Lawley, Lee and Pease.

### 38 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**Submitted** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 28 September 2023.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 28 September 2023, be approved as a correct record.

### 39 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### 40 **SEALING.**

**Presented** – The Register showing the documents which had been sealed since the last meeting of Council.

### 41 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

**Remembrance of those lost in Conflict** – The Mayor invited Members to observe a minute's silence in remembrance of those lost in the conflicts in Palestine and Israel, and in Ukraine.

**Mayor's Carol Concert – Sunday, 17 December 2023** – The Mayor reminded Members of the Mayor's Carol Concert, which was scheduled to take place at 6pm on Sunday, 17th December at St. Cuthbert's Church. The Mayor advised that the service was open to everyone in the town, and that all monies raised from the collection plate would be shared between the Mayoral charities and St Cuthbert's Church.

### 42 **QUESTIONS - TO ANSWER QUESTIONS (WHERE APPROPRIATE NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN FROM):-**

#### (1) **THE PUBLIC;**

There were five questions, with notice, from Members of the Public, who each received an answer thereon.

#### (2) **MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;**

There were no questions from Members, where notice had been given, for the Mayor, Members of the Cabinet, or the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

**43 COUNCIL REPORTS.**

There were no reports to be decided by Council, which had not been considered by Cabinet.

**44 CABINET REPORTS.**

The Cabinet Members each gave a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken under their relevant portfolio during the previous cycle of meetings. Cabinet Members answered questions on their portfolios.

**45 COUNCIL TAX CHANGES TO EMPTY PROPERTY PREMIUMS 2024-25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) which requested approval of proposed changes to Council Tax Empty Property Premiums for 2024-25.

The submitted report stated that a 50% Council Tax premium (additional charge) was introduced in April 2013 for all unoccupied and unfurnished domestic properties which had been empty for 2 years or more, being the maximum that the Council was permitted to charge.

It was reported that new legislation was introduced in 2018 and changes were made to the Council Tax Empty Property Premiums, which were outlined in the submitted report.

The submitted report stated that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 contained a provision to amend the definition of long-term empty homes, so that from 2024-25 onwards, unfurnished properties that have been empty for one year or more are liable to the Empty Property Premium. In addition, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 also included a provision to introduce a 100% Council Tax Premium for furnished properties periodically occupied (referred to as “second homes”) from 2025-26.

The submitted report set out the proposals for the new Council Tax Empty Property Premiums. It was stated that the report had been considered by Cabinet on 7 November 2023, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Council.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the following changes to the Council Tax Empty Property Premiums be approved:

- (i) Amend the definition of long-term empty homes, so that from 2024-25 onwards, unfurnished properties that have been empty for one year or more are liable to the Council Tax Empty Property Premium from 1 April 2024.
- (ii) Apply a 100% Council Tax Premium to second homes. As 12 months’ notice to existing owners of second homes is required, the earliest that the new charges will apply is from 1 April 2025.

- (iii) Implement exemptions for the second homes Council Tax Premium, as set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the submitted report.

**REASON** - To further encourage landlords and property owners to bring their empty homes back into use as soon as possible, and to penalise those owners who deliberately leave their properties empty for years.

#### **46 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - SCHEME APPROVAL 2024-25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) which requested that the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for 2024-25 be approved.

The submitted report stated that Councils are required to set a CTS scheme each year, and as part of that exercise they must consider whether any changes should be made to any existing scheme, and, where changes are made, consider what transitional protection, if any, should apply to anyone affected by those changes. The submitted report outlined the details of the proposed CTS scheme for 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That the CTS scheme for 2024-25, as appended to the submitted report, be approved.

**REASONS** - (a) The Council is required to publish a local CTS scheme for 2024-25 by 11 March 2024.

(b) The CTS schemes since 2013 have all been implemented successfully without any major challenges.

(c) The continued application of a reduced entitlement for working aged people is still appropriate, given the current financial position of the Council.

(**NOTE:** The Mayor used her discretion to vary the Agenda, and took the items at Minute 45 and Minute 46 prior to Minute 44).

#### **47 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-**

The Scrutiny Committee Chairs each submitted a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken by their relevant Scrutiny Committee during the last cycle of Committee meetings, and responded to any questions thereon.

#### **48 NOTICE OF MOTION**

##### **(1) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR HOLROYD, AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR LAWLEY**

The Motion was withdrawn by Councillor Holroyd at the meeting.

##### **(2) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SNEDKER, AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR MAMMOLOTTI**

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Snedker, and seconded by Councillor Mammolotti:

### **Stopping Conflict in Israel-Palestine**

#### **Preamble**

- a) Palestine has been recognised as a sovereign state by 138 of 193 UN member states;
- b) East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza are illegally occupied by Israel; and Gaza has been subject to 16 years of blockade;
- c) the UK, at the UN Security Council on 18 October 2023, refused to vote for “humanitarian pauses” to deliver lifesaving aid to millions in Gaza;
- d) Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, B’tselem and the South African government recognise that the state of Israel is enacting a system of apartheid; and
- e) the capture and detention of civilians without legal process as a form of punishment is a breach of the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention.

#### **This Council therefore believes:-**

- a) all atrocities committed against civilians must be condemned and investigated;
- b) all forms of racism, including anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have no place in our Borough and condemns any attacks on Palestinian, Jewish or Muslim people;
- c) all political leaders have a responsibility to try to prevent genocide; and
- d) the only one way to secure peace between Israelis and Palestinians is for a just political settlement based on the end of the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and an end to what one UN Special Rapporteur has described as “apartheid practices”, and another has described “settler-colonialism” and “ethnic cleansing”;

#### **This Council resolves:-**

- a) to call upon the UK Government to :-
  - a. call for an immediate ceasefire and to vote for this at the UN;
  - b. call for an immediate release of all civilians captured and detained without legal process;
  - c. cease all arms sales to Israel and end military aid for Israel; and
  - d. call on Israel to resume negotiations with the Palestinians;



- b) requests the Chief Executive to submit this Motion to the UK Government.

The following Amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor Harker, and seconded by Councillor Dr. Riley:

**Preamble**

- a) In recent weeks there has been a dramatic escalation in the conflict in Palestine and Israel.
- b) Many thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of hostages taken.
- c) The capture and detention of civilians without legal process as a form of punishment is a breach of the fourth 1949 Geneva Convention.
- d) On Wednesday 22 November, Israel and Hamas agreed a four-day truce.
- e) The situation in Israel and Palestine remains uncertain.

**This Council therefore believes:-**

- a) all atrocities committed against civilians must be condemned and investigated;
- b) all hostages must be released;
- c) It is essential that humanitarian aid is allowed to get through to Gaza;
- d) All people living in Gaza should have access to energy supplies, water, food and medical assistance;
- e) all forms of racism, based on nationality, race, religion or any other basis, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have no place in our Borough and condemns any attacks on any individual or community; and
- f) the only one way to secure peace lasting between Israelis and Palestinians is for peace talks based on creating a two-state solution.

**This Council resolves:-**

- a) to call upon the UK Government to :-
  - (i) support all efforts in Israel and Palestine to :-
    - (a) end all violence against civilians;
    - (b) secure the release of all hostages;
    - (c) avert a humanitarian disaster in Gaza; and

(d) bring about a lasting peace, based on a two state solution

(ii) build on existing efforts to raise awareness of and challenge all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; and

(iii) support all of our communities to feel safe.

(b) That the Chief Executive be requested to submit this Motion to the UK Government.

At the request of five Members, a Named Vote was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:

**For the Amendment:** The Mayor; Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Coe, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Harker, Haszeldine, Johnson, Kane, Layton, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M. Nicholson, Porter, Dr. Riley and Wallis (21)

**Against the Amendment:** Councillors Ali, Henderson, Holroyd, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Ray, Robinson, Snedker and Toms (9)

**Abstentions:** Councillors Garner, Renton, Roche and Storr (4).

(NOTE: Prior to the consideration of the Motion, and the subsequent vote, Members of the Conservative Group and Councillor K. Nicholson withdrew from the meeting).

The Amendment was Carried.

The Amendment became the Substantive Motion and was put to the meeting and carried.

(NOTE: The Mayor used her discretion to vary the Agenda, and took the items at Minute 48 (1) and Minute 48 (2) immediately following the Questions submitted at Minute 42.

#### **49 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND OTHER BODIES.**

Consideration was given to membership changes of the Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/24 that:

(a) That Councillor Mrs. H. Scott replace Councillor Lee on the Climate Change Group; and

(b) That Councillor Beckett replace Councillor Wallis on the Planning Applications Committee.

**COUNCIL  
25 JANUARY 2024**

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## **COUNCIL TAX CALCULATION OF TAX BASE 2024/25**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Mandy Porter,  
Resources Portfolio**

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To determine the Council's tax base for 2024/25.

#### **Summary**

2. In accordance with Section 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the Council must decide its tax base by 31 January in the year preceding that for which the tax base applies. This has then to be notified to any precepting authorities and is used in the calculation and setting of the Council Tax. The relevant tax base calculations are shown in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

#### **Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) The report for the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2024/25 be approved.
  - (b) The tax base for the Council of 35,300.8 and the individual tax base for the parishes as set out at Appendix 2 be approved.

#### **Reasons**

4. The recommendations are supported to comply with statutory requirements, enabling the Council Tax for 2024/25 to be set by Council in February 2024.

**Elizabeth Davison  
Group Director of Operations**

**Background Papers**

Council Tax regulations

Council Tax database

Judith Murray - Extension 5401

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Well Being	There are no health and wellbeing issues
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact or climate change implications
Diversity	There are no diversity issues
Wards Affected	The proposals affect all wards
Groups Affected	The proposals affect everyone liable for Council Tax
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not represent a change to the Budget or Policy framework
Key Decision	This is not an Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Executive decision.
Council Plan	This report has no implications for the Council Plan.
Efficiency	The reports do not have any efficiency implications
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

5. The tax base is the total number of domestic properties in the Borough, calculated as a weighted average 'Band D equivalents'. The amount of Council Tax payable for properties in each of the eight valuation bands A to H is statutorily determined as proportions of Band D. The tax base is adjusted for discounts, exemptions, and estimated changes over the coming year. An estimate of the collection rate is also applied. The tax base represents the amount of revenue that it is estimated will be raised by each £1 of Band D Council Tax. It is, therefore, an important part of setting the Council Tax.
6. The council tax base is, for the purpose of calculating a billing authority's and a major precepting authority's Council Tax, the taxable capacity of an area or part of an area. The amounts are calculated for each financial year and represent the estimated number of chargeable dwellings after allowing for reductions and discounts and adjusted to take account of the authority's collection rate.
7. The regulations changed the formula for calculating the council tax base to take account of any reductions which will be made under the local council tax reduction scheme or increases for local premiums for empty or long-term empty dwellings.
8. Under the previous council tax benefit system, billing authorities received payment to cover 100% of the cost of council tax benefit paid. The council tax base was therefore unaffected by changes in council tax benefit granted because the billing authority did not forgo any council tax income from dwellings in receipt of council tax benefit.
9. However, under the local council tax support scheme, the council tax base is affected by whether a dwelling is in receipt of a council tax reduction awarded under the scheme, as the authority is foregoing council tax income from these dwellings.
10. Local council tax support reductions need to be reflected in the calculation of the council tax base, in order to calculate the correct amount of Band D council tax for the billing or major precepting authority area. If the council tax base did not reduce, authorities would set their council tax bills based on an incorrect level of taxable capacity. The outcome being that dwellings where an occupier was eligible to receive a reduction under the local authority's council tax reduction scheme would not be required to pay the full amount of Council Tax and the authority would not therefore be able to collect the correct amount of Council Tax to meet its Council Tax requirement, with a deficit being created on the Collection Fund.
11. Similarly, the tax base is increased by the premium generated through the empty and long term empty homes scheme whereby the consequent increase in the council tax base is used to lower council tax bills.
12. The actual calculation of the tax base is prescribed in the above regulations and has several components. Calculations must be made of the 'relevant amount' for the year, for each of the 8 valuation bands as shown in the Council's Valuation List submitted by the Listing Officer (HM Revenue and Customs) on 30 November 2023 and the Band A(-)

category introduced with effect from 1 April 2000 to provide relief to disabled persons residing in Band A properties. The relevant amount for each band represents the number of chargeable dwellings, as adjusted for exemptions, disabled reductions, discounts, and estimated changes up to 31 March 2025. The final total for each band must be converted to the equivalent number of Band D dwellings.

13. The relevant amounts for the individual bands are then totalled and the estimated collection rate for the year is applied. The collection rate is based on the proportion of the amount payable into the Collection Fund for the year, including appropriate adjustments for benefits and any transitional relief, which the Council believes will be collected. The resulting figure, plus any contributions in lieu from the Ministry of Defence in respect of forces accommodation, is the Council's tax base for its area for the year concerned.
14. The estimates and calculations outlined above in respect of the tax base for 2024/25 are shown in **Appendix 1**. Members will see that the calculations produce a total Band D equivalent of 35,641.9 (line 17) which, when combined with an estimated collection rate of 99.0% and contributions in lieu, results in an overall tax base figure of 35,300.8 which is a 1.40% increase on 2023/24.
15. Similar calculations also need to be made in respect of the parishes and the same estimated collection rate must be applied as that used for the whole of the Council's area. The tax base calculations for each parish are as shown in **Appendix 2**.

#### **Outcome of Consultation**

16. This is a technical report, which follows a prescribed format. There has been no consultation in compiling this report.

## DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2024/25

	Band	A (-)	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
1	Dwellings per Valuation List	0	23,117	11,070	7,684	5,826	3,495	1,382	683	54	53,311
2	Disabled Band Relief	0	(62)	(50)	(41)	(50)	(39)	(21)	(8)	(14)	(285)
3	Disabled Band Relief (Chargeable)	62	50	41	50	39	21	8	14	0	285
4	Disabled Band Relief (Adjusted)	62	(12)	(9)	9	(11)	(18)	(13)	6	(14)	0
5	Exemptions	0	(754)	(186)	(127)	(78)	(36)	(14)	(10)	0	(1,205)
6	Single discount (25%)	(28)	(11,258)	(4,261)	(2,509)	(1,399)	(628)	(243)	(85)	(2)	(20,413)
7	Double discount (50%)	(1)	(25)	(7)	(15)	(15)	(11)	(4)	(19)	(8)	(105)
8	Equated discounts	(7.50)	(2,827.00)	(1,068.75)	(634.75)	(357.25)	(162.50)	(62.75)	(30.75)	(4.50)	(5,155.75)
9	Empty Homes Premium (100%)	0	76	12	9	5	3	3	4	0	112
10	Empty Homes Premium (200%)	0	10	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	16
11	Empty Homes Premium (300%)	0	11	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	16
12	<b>Chargeable Dwellings</b>	<b>54.50</b>	<b>19,653.00</b>	<b>9,835.25</b>	<b>6,942.25</b>	<b>5,387.75</b>	<b>3,284.50</b>	<b>1,295.25</b>	<b>652.25</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>47,142.25</b>
13	Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)	(19.43)	(4,397.01)	(934.94)	(297.29)	(112.51)	(34.65)	(10.45)	(3.92)	(0)	(5,810.20)
14	<b>Chargeable Dwellings after CTRS</b>	<b>35.07</b>	<b>15,255.99</b>	<b>8,900.31</b>	<b>6,644.96</b>	<b>5,275.24</b>	<b>3,249.85</b>	<b>1,284.80</b>	<b>648.33</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>41,332.05</b>
15	Estimated Changes					364					364
16	Band D Multiplier	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
17	Band D Equivalent (Relevant Amount)	19.5	10,170.7	6,922.5	5,906.6	5,639.2	3,972.0	1,855.8	1,080.6	75.0	35,641.9
18	Estimated Collection Rate										99.0%
19	Contributions in Lieu					15.3					15.3
20	<b>Council Tax Base</b>										<b>35,300.8</b>

**ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2024/25 – EXPLANATION OF TERMS**

	Each column shows the totals for each Council Tax band A to H. The TOTAL column is the total for the whole Council. The Band A(-) column is the total in Band A where a disabled band relief applies.
<b>Lines</b>	
Line 1	The number of dwellings in each Council Tax band as per the Valuation List, as at 30/11/2023.
Line 2	The number of dwellings in each band where a disabled band relief applies
Line 3	The number of dwellings in each band after the disabled band relief has been applied
Line 4	The net number of dwellings in each band after the disabled band relief has been applied (Line 3 - Line 2)
Line 5	The number of dwellings in each band that are exempt from Council Tax (where an exemption applies), to be deducted from the total number of dwellings
Line 6	The number of dwellings in each band where a single (25%) discount applies
Line 7	The number of dwellings in each band where a double (50%) discount applies
Line 8	The adjustment for each band where a discount applies (Line 6 x 25%) + (Line 7 x 50%)
Line 9	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period in excess of one year and which attract a 100% Premium.
Line 10	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period in excess of five years and which attract a 200% Premium.
Line 11	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period in excess of ten years and which attract a 300% Premium
Line 12	The equivalent number of chargeable dwellings before the application of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Line 13	The equivalent number of properties in receipt of council tax benefit in each band
Line 14	The equivalent number of properties after the application of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Line 15	The estimated number of additional band D equivalent dwellings that will be included in the tax base during 2024/25
Line 16	The band D multiplier that is applied to the number of chargeable dwellings in each band (this multiplier is prescribed in law)
Line 17	The adjusted number of chargeable dwellings in each band after applying the multiplier (Line 14 + Line 15) x Line 16
Line 18	The estimated percentage collection rate
Line 19	The estimated number of band D equivalent dwellings for contributions in lieu. (Armed Forces Accommodation)
Line 20	The Council Tax Base for 2024/25 (Line 17 x Line 18) + Line 19



## PARISH COUNCILS – ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2024/25

Parish	Current Parish Tax Base (1)	Adjusted Band D Equivalent 24/25 (2)	Collection Rate	Parish Tax Base
Bishopton	179.0	179.9	99.0%	178.1
Heighington	1,113.2	1,127.3	99.0%	1,116.1
High Coniscliffe	110.8	112.2	99.0%	111.1
Hurworth	1,488.3	1,559.9	99.0%	1,544.3
Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent	355.6	353.2	99.0%	349.7
Middleton St. George	2,059.0	2,101.6	99.0%	2,080.6
Neasham	244.3	248.4	99.0%	246.0
Piercebridge	62.8	63.9	99.0%	63.3
Sadberge	301.2	310.3	99.0%	307.2
Whessoe	529.4	588.7	99.0%	582.8

## PARISH COUNCILS ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2024/25 – EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Columns	
Current Parish Tax Base (1)	The current Council Tax base for each Parish, using the methodology set out in Appendix 1, for 2023/24
Adjusted Band D Equivalent 24/25 (2)	The calculated Council Tax base for each Parish, using the same methodology set out in Appendix 1, and after the estimated changes for 2024/25 have been applied
Collection Rate	The estimated percentage collection rate
Parish Tax Base	The Council Tax Base for 2024/25 for each Parish

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**COUNCIL  
25 JANUARY 2024**

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## **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES REVIEW**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader**

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To consider the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel appointed by the Council in relation to the adoption of a new Scheme of Members' Allowances.

#### **Summary**

2. The Independent Remuneration Panel has produced a report (**Appendix 1**) with recommendations in accordance with the Council's terms of reference for the Panel. The report covers a wide range of issues and the Panel's reasoning for its recommendations.
3. Members will see from the report that the Panel have recommended that no changes should be made to the current scheme apart from one in relation to the Audit Committee to allow for the possibility of a future appointment of a co-optee. Any co-optee would need to be suitably qualified by having the requisite financial experience and knowledge and, on this basis, the Panel recommended that it would be appropriate to pay an allowance for such a post, if and when, it was appointed to.
4. Members can accept the Panel's recommendations in full, or part, or reject them. If the Panel's recommendations are accepted, the revised Members' Allowances Scheme is attached (**Appendix 2**).

#### **Recommendation**

5. Members are requested to :-
  - (a) consider the Members' Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations as detailed in Appendix 1 (and as detailed in paragraphs 10 to 19 below) and accept the recommendations in full or part, with effect from 1 April 2024; and
  - (b) should the Panel's recommendations be approved, in full, approve the new Members' Allowances Scheme attached at Appendix 2; or amend the Scheme in accordance with the decision of Council.

**Reasons**

- 6. To implement a new Members’ Allowances Scheme with effect from 1 April 2024

**Ian Williams  
Chief Executive**

**Background Papers**

Independent Panel’s report and Members’ Allowances Scheme

Shirley Wright Ext 5998

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has no implications to address Health and Well Being for the residents of Darlington.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no direct implications which this report needs to address.
Diversity	There are no direct implications to Diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	There is no direct impact on any individual Ward
Groups Affected	There are no Groups affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not an Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Executive decision
Council Plan	There are no links.
Efficiency	There are no efficiency proposals identified as part of this review.
Impact of Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report does not impact on Looked After Children

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. Council at its meeting held on 30 July 2023 asked its Independent Remuneration Panel to review its Members' Allowances, as a review was due (reviews have to be undertaken every four years – the maximum period that indexation extends to allowances). Council also asked the Panel to consider the Mayoral allowances and the remuneration to the members of the Education Appeals Panel. A review has been conducted in accordance with the terms of reference approved by Council and the report of the Panel is attached at Appendix 1.

### Panel's Review

8. The report covers a wide range of issues and the Panel's reasoning for its recommendations. The process and methodology of the Review is detailed in paragraphs 9 and 10 of Appendix 1 and the Principles and Key Messages are detailed in Paragraphs 15 to 20.
9. The Panel found that Darlington Borough Council's current Members' Allowances Scheme is based on a number of principles that are not always apparent in other schemes i.e Transparency, Equity and Simplicity and there was a general view that these principles should continue to be adhered to unless there was a clear case to deviate from them.

### Recommendations of the Panel

#### Basic Allowance

10. In respect of the Basic Allowance (paid to all Members of the Council), the Panel has recommended that the Basic Allowance should remain at the current level, subject to any indexation that may apply. In making this recommendation the Panel noted that, although the Basic Allowance was markedly below that paid to regional peers, with a benchmarking group based on other North East/Northern Unitary and Metropolitan Councils, that in itself was not a reason to revise the Basic Allowance. However, it did highlight that the Basic Allowance may be in danger of not fulfilling the function of enabling most people to be a Councillor as it has started to drift below the average in peer Councils.
11. In recommending the basic allowance (Paragraph 36 Appendix 1), the Panel used the basic allowance figure of £8,668, as indexation for 2023/24 had not been agreed at that point in time. With indexation now applied the basic allowance is now £9,003.87.
12. Despite this and the representations received from Members that the Basic Allowance was too low, the majority of Members who did make representations to the Panel, felt that it was not the time to have an above indexation increase in the Basic Allowance whilst many of their constituents were facing difficult economic times and the Panel took this view on board in making its recommendation.
13. The IRP was also of the view that the Basic Allowance is still deemed sufficient to include the costs of incidental expenses and ICT equipment (except the Council provided laptop),

consumables and peripherals and in-Borough travel and subsistence costs incurred on the part of Members.

### **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA's)**

14. In relation to Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA's), the Panel has recommended no change in any of the current SRA's payable and the narrative which supports this in relation to each of the SRA's is contained in the Panel's report.
15. They also recommended that Members continue to claim only one SRA and that any indexation apply to all SRA's.

### **Mayoral Allowances**

16. In relation to the Mayoral Allowances, the Panel has recommended that there is no increase in the current Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral Allowances subject to any indexation that may apply.

### **Audit Committee - Co-optee**

17. Some Audit Committees have a suitably qualified (financial experience and knowledge) independent member co-opted to the committee. To allow for the possibility of having a co-optee on the Audit Committee, the Panel has recommended that a co-optee allowance should be paid for such a post, if and when, it is appointed to.
18. The Panel recommended that this allowance should be set at ten per cent of the Basic Allowance, subject to any indexation that might apply.

### **Independent Members on School Appeals Panels**

19. In relation to the Independent Members on School Appeals Panels, the Panel has recommended that the Financial Loss Allowance (FLA) and allowances that may be claimed by the Independent Members appointed to the Council's School Appeals Panels are maintained at their current rates, subject to any indexation that may apply.

### **Other Allowances and Expenses**

20. In relation to other allowances and expenses, the Panel has recommended the following :-
  - (a) **Dependent Carer's Allowances (DCA)** – The Panel recommends no change to the current conditions and scope for which the DCA may be claimed for subject to any index that may be applied.
  - (b) **Co-optees Allowances** – As there are currently no Co-optees appointed under the Local Government Act 2000, the Panel makes no recommendations in this regard.
  - (c) **Travelling and Subsistence Allowances** :-

- (i) **Subsistence Allowances** – The Panel does not recommend any changes to the current rates and terms and conditions of the Subsistence Allowance Scheme
- (ii) **Travel Allowances** –
  - Within the Borough.** The Panel recommends that no change be made to the current scheme in relation to travel within the Borough
  - Outside the Borough.** The Panel recommends that no change be made to the current scheme in relation to travel outside the Borough, but that it be clarified that, where a Member is using an electric or hybrid vehicle on an approved duty outside of the Borough, that they are able to claim mileage at AMAP rates (currently 45 pence per mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25 pence per mile thereafter).
- (d) **Approved Duties and Attendance at other Statutory Bodies** – The Panel recommends that the current approved duties, terms and conditions that are applicable for which Members can claim travel mileage allowances and the reimbursement of public transport (where used) remain unchanged.
- (e) **Indexation** – The Panel recommends and confirms the use of the following indices for allowances for the next four years :-
  - (i) Basic Allowance, SRA's, Civic Allowances and Appeals Panel Members Financial Loss Allowance – to be increased by the same percentage applied annually to the pay of local government staff, implemented at the start of each Municipal Year (linked to spinal column point 43 of the NJC scheme) starting from annual meeting on 21 May 2024;
  - (ii) DCA – Elderly/Disabled Element – Indexed to the hourly rate chargeable by the Council for provision of a Home Care Assistant;
  - (iii) Travel – (out of authority only) - Mileage rates to be indexed to HRMC rates. Other travel will be reimbursement of actual costs taking into account the most cost-effective means of transport available and the convenience of use; and
  - (iv) Subsistence (out of authority only) – Indexed to the same rates that apply to Officers of Darlington Borough Council, for reimbursement of actual costs up the maximum rate applicable.
- (f) The Panel further recommends that, as per the regulations, the indices recommended by the Panel are to run for four years from 21 May 2024, or until the Council requires a further review.

### **Members' Allowances Scheme**

21. Should any, or all of the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations be approved it will be necessary to amend Darlington Borough Council's Members' Allowances Scheme.

22. An amended scheme is attached at Appendix 2 which takes into account the recommendation suggested by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

**Panel's Recommendations**

23. Council can accept the Panel's recommendation in full or part or reject them entirely.



**A Review of  
Members' Allowances  
For  
Darlington  
Borough Council**

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**A Report**

**By the**

**Independent  
Remuneration Panel**

**Dr Declan Hall (Chair)  
Paul McGee  
Rob Shotton**

**November 2023**

**Report  
Of the  
Independent Remuneration Panel:  
Review of Members' Allowances  
For  
Darlington Borough Council  
November 2023**

**Introduction: The Regulatory Context**

1. This report is a synopsis of the deliberations and recommendations made by the statutory Independent Remuneration IRP (the IRP) appointed by Darlington Borough Council (Darlington BC) to provide advice on the Councils' Members' Allowances scheme.
2. The IRP was convened under *The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021)* (the 2003 Regulations). These regulations, arising out of the relevant provisions in the *Local Government Act 2000*, require all local authorities to maintain an independent remuneration panel (also known as an IRP) to review and provide advice to their respective councils on Members' allowances. This is in the context whereby the Council retains the right to determine Members allowances.
3. All Councils are required to convene their IRP and seek its advice before they make any changes or amendments to their members' allowances scheme and they must 'pay regard' to their IRP's recommendations before setting a new or amended members' allowances scheme.
4. In particular, the IRP has been reconvened under the 2003 Regulations [10. (5), which states:

Where an authority has regard to an index for the purpose of annual adjustment of allowances it must not rely on that index for longer than a period of four years before seeking a further recommendation from the independent remuneration IRP established in respect of that authority on the application of an index to its scheme.

5. This mechanism is the means by which all councils are required to reconvene their IRP at least once every four years thus ensuring a degree of public scrutiny and accountability vis-à-vis their Members' Allowances schemes. It is under this requirement that the IRP has undertaken this review of Members' Allowances for Darlington Borough Council.

### **Terms of Reference**

6. The IRP was given the following terms of reference as agreed by Council on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 as contained in a report to Council,<sup>1</sup> namely to make recommendations on:
  - I. The amount of Basic Allowance that should be payable to Members
  - II. The categories of Members who should receive a Special Responsibility Allowance and the amount of such an allowance;
  - III. The duties for which a Travel and Subsistence Allowance can be made and as to the amount of these allowances;
  - IV. The scope and amount of Co-optees' allowances, where applicable;
  - V. The expenses of arranging for the care of children and dependants (the Dependants' Carers' Allowance) and the amount of these allowances and the means by which they are determined;
  - VI. Whether the annual adjustments of allowances should continue to be referred to employees annual pay awards (the National Joint Committee for Local Government Employees or NJC index) or another index if any;
  - VII. The Mayoral or the Civic Allowances;
  - VIII. On allowances to be paid to Independent Members appointed to the Education Appeals Panel;
  - IX. The implementation date for the new Scheme of Allowances;
  - X. Any other issues that are brought to the attention of the IRP.

### **The IRP**

7. Darlington Borough Council reconvened its IRP and the following Members were appointed to carry out the independent allowances review, namely:
  - Dr Declan Hall: IRP Chair and a former academic at the Institute of Local Government, The University of Birmingham, now an independent consultant specialising in Members' allowances and support.
  - Paul McGee: Paul has a background that spans the private, public and social enterprise sectors. He currently retains an involvement in industry as Commercial Director of an engineering consultancy. He was formerly a member of the Chief Officer Management Team of Cleveland

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Williams, Chief Executive of Council, (responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader of the Council), "Members' Allowances Review" 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023

County Council and has been active in promoting social enterprises for over 30 years. He has contributed to a number of award and assessment IRPs and was previously a member of Stockton-On-Tees IRP.

- Rob Shotton: Former Chair of Business-Link, Tees Valley, now a businessman.

8. The IRP was supported by

- Shirley Wright: Democratic Manager, Democratic Services

### **Process and Methodology - Evidence Reviewed by the IRP**

9. The IRP met at the Town Hall, Darlington on 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> October 2023 to consider all the evidence and hear representations from Members and receive factual briefings on the Council by Officers. All Members were invited to make written submissions to the IRP (of which nine were received) and a number of Members met the IRP – see appendices one and two for details. The IRP also reviewed further written information pertinent to the review, such as meetings schedules, benchmarking data, statutory guidance, etc. See appendices three and four for further details. The IRP meetings were held in private session to enable the IRP to meet with Members and Officers and consider the evidence and undertake its deliberations in confidence.
10. For full details of whom the IRP met and full range of information reviewed see:
- Appendix 1: for Members who met with the IRP and Officers who provided a factual briefing to the IRP
  - Appendix 2: for a list of the full range of written evidence considered by the IRP
  - Appendix 3: summary the other allowances schemes referred to by the IRP for benchmarking purpose

### **Considering the Evidence – A Tiered Approach**

11. As per previous reviews, the IRP took a tiered approach in considering the evidence. It is required to operate within the broad statutory framework laid down by the 2003 Regulations and 2006 Members' Allowances Statutory Guidance. The 2003 Regulations sets out the legal framework within which the IRP is required to operate, i.e., providing discretionary authority for the payment of SRAs, and while mandating the payment of a Basic Allowance, paid equally to all Members. Within this legislative context, the IRP is obligated to pay regard to the 2006 Statutory Guidance, which for instance mandates IRPs to consider a number of variables in arriving at their recommendations.

12. The next level of evidence considered by the IRP was the representations made by the Members, both oral and written, which obtained the views of the groups and individual Members of the Council. The interviews were deliberative in nature and provided the IRP with a qualitative feel of the issues facing Members in relation to the topics under consideration. The meetings with Officers served to update the IRP on developments in the council since the last review in December 2019. Finally, all the evidence and representations have been reviewed and evaluated within the comparative context where meaningful comparisons can be made.

## Operating Principles for the IRP

### The Darlington BC model of remuneration: transparency, equity and simplicity

13. Benchmarking highlighted that the Darlington BC members' allowances scheme is based on a number of principles that are not always apparent in other schemes. In particular the scheme is underpinned by:
- A. Transparency:
    - largely a function of the '1-SRA only' rule and the fact that the Basic Allowance is inclusive of a range of expenses that Members may incur in carrying out their duties. The Darlington BC allowances scheme does not provide for a range of allowances and the reimbursement of expenses that are often available in other authorities. The stated Basic Allowance and SRAs are in the main the sole payments received by Members.
  - B. Equity:
    - Compared to other council Darlington pays relatively few SRAs. In accordance with the 2006 Statutory Guidance no more than 50% of Members can be paid an SRA. For those SRAs payable in Darlington BC, there is a limited number of SRA bands. Other schemes will differentiate across the whole range of SRAs payable.
  - C. Simplicity:
    - The Darlington BC Members' Allowances scheme is simple to administer in that Members are not required to make a plethora of claims and Officers are not required to devote scarce resources that would be required for instance if Members were able to claim for instance travel and subsistence for duties carried out within the Borough. The scheme is not administratively burdensome.
14. These principles, which continue to underpin the current Darlington BC allowances scheme, were understood by interviewees and recognised as being beneficial. There was a general view that these principles should continue to be adhered to unless there is a clear case to deviate from them.

## Key Messages - A low Basic Allowance and some SRAs

15. It became clear during the course of the review that the Basic Allowance and some SRAs (the Leader in particular) have fallen behind and have lost value over the years. This is a result of intermittent indexation since 2012. The IRP identified this issue in both its 2016 and 2019 review by recommending uplifting to the Basic Allowance, which the Council chose not to accept. The Council has every right not to apply all or part of the operative indices if it so chooses or accept the previous recommended increases. Yet, it is not without cost and not just in losing relative value – it slowly but surely increases the financial barrier to being an elected Member. Moreover, the IRP notes that indexation alone does not address this erosion in relative value of the Basic Allowance in particular.

### **Function of Members Allowances – an enabler**

16. It was mentioned during meetings with Members that the levels of remuneration payable under the current Darlington BC Members' Allowances scheme were not sufficient to 'attract' a wider range of people to put themselves forward to stand for Council. Moreover, they were insufficient to enable the role of a Member to be effectively a full time professional role. Indeed, this may well be the case, however, members' allowances schemes are not intended to 'attract' candidates for Council - they would have to be at a level so as not to be publically acceptable. Moreover, the IRP was not at ease with the argument on a conceptual level - if elected Members were standing for and remaining on the Council out of any financial appeal it would run contrary to the public service ethos and the desire to serve local communities and residents as the prime motive for being a Councillor. Members' allowances were never intended to be paid at full 'market rates' or support a body of full time professional local politicians.
17. The intention behind the requirement to establish a Members' Allowances scheme for all English councils is to enable and facilitate the Members' roles and responsibilities as far as practically possible while taking into account such factors as the nature of the council, local economic conditions and comparative and good practice. The current level of allowances, particularly the Basic Allowance, is in danger of not fulfilling the function of being an enabler.

### **Issue of Members in receipt of Benefits**

18. Another issue emerging during the course of the review was the impact of receiving allowances had on Members in receipt of benefits. In effect, for the Basic Allowance in particular the amount received more or less was deducted from a Members' Benefits with the concomitant issue of having to pay such things as Council tax and prescription charges that in effect left them worse off by serving as an elected Member. The IRP is sympathetic to any Member who finds themselves in this conundrum however it is not able to address it through a Members' allowances review. It is simply out of the hands of the IRP, national legislation governs rules for those in receipt of benefits and any other income they may receive and the IRP cannot change that.

## The Key Message – Now is not the time to increase allowances

19. Despite the case that can be made to increase the Basic Allowance and some of the SRAs the overwhelming message the IRP received in the representation received was now was not the time to make such recommendations. The IRP has taken this message on board; to do otherwise would simply be making recommendations in the abstract that would leave Members in the invidious position of having to reject the advice of the IRP.
20. Nonetheless, the IRP has thoroughly reviewed all the allowances to show how they would be arrived at in an ideal world and flag up where the IRP feels they might well be set at.

## Recommending the Basic Allowance

21. In considering the appropriateness of the current Basic Allowance, the IRP has adopted a ‘triangulation’ process. This has been done by arriving at a tentative Basic Allowance via three different approaches namely
  - I. Recalibration based on the 2006 Statutory Guidance
  - II. Benchmarking
  - III. The representation received from Members

## The basis of the current Basic Allowance (2003)

22. The methodology to arrive at the current Basic Allowance (£8,668) has not been revisited since 2003, when the IRP, in line with the advice laid out in the 2003 (since revised in 2006) Statutory Guidance, calculated the Basic Allowance for Members of Darlington Borough Council (2003) based on the following formula:
  - 104 days annual expected input – 45% (46.8 days) per year Public Service Discount = 57.2 remunerated days per year
  - 57.2 days per year x £122.10 per day (LGA day rate) = **£6,984**
23. In 2003, this recommended Basic Allowance was also deemed to be inclusive of incidental expenses such as in-borough travel and subsistence. Through intermittent indexation the Basic Allowance is now £8,668.

## Recalibrating the Basic Allowance (2023)

24. The IRP recalibrated the Basic Allowance based on the most recent and relevant data available for the three variables used in the formula as set out in paragraphs 67-69 of the 2006 Statutory Guidance to arrive at a recalibrated Basic Allowance as follows:

Increasing expected time input to 152.5 days per year

25. The latest (2022) LGA Census of Councillors (England) shows that Councillors in unitary authorities who hold no positions of responsibility put in an average of 22.8 hours per week on “Council business”. This includes dealing with constituent/ward issues, community related meetings and other associated work such as emails, reading and preparation. It excludes group and other party business.<sup>2</sup> This equates to 148.2 days per year on an 8 hour working day. The IRP has adopted 148.2 days per year as the time expectation to recalibrate the Basic Allowance.

The Public Service Discount (PSD): no change at 45%

26. When considering the Basic Allowance, the 2006 Statutory Guidance (paragraph 68) states that it “is important that some element of the work of members continues to be voluntary – that some hours are not remunerated.” This is often called the ‘Public Service Discount’ (PSD).
27. A PSD of 45% is slightly towards the higher end of the normal range (35-50%) used to recognise the principle of voluntary service within the Basic Allowance. However, the IRP has always conceptualized this as the element of work that relates to Members wards and local communities and in Darlington BC if anything this aspect has increased. The IRP is content that a PSD of 45% remains appropriate. This gives a voluntary contribution of 66.7 days per year and leaves a remunerated time of 81.5 days per year.

Rate of Remuneration at £116.44 per day

28. Historically the IRP utilised the Local Government (LGA) ‘day session’ rate as the relevant rate of remuneration. This was a daily rate published each year by the Local Government Association (LGA) as a service to councils and IRP chairs. However, the LGA since 2011 stopped providing such advice. By that date most IRPs had switched to a more locally based rate of remuneration. They were able to do this as the Office of National Statistics starting to publish average earnings on an authority by authority basis as set out each year in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). The most recent ASHE publication (November 2022) shows the median daily gross earnings for all full time employees within Darlington BC area is £116.44.<sup>3</sup>
29. By replicating the formula approach with up dated variables it produces a recalibrated Basic Allowance as follows:
- 148.2 days annual expected input – 45% PSD (66.7 days)  
= 81.5 remunerated days per year

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<sup>2</sup> This information is derived from the 2022 Councillors Census and the breakdown by type of council and by whether there are any posts held has been supplied to the Chair in an email from the Stephen Richards, LGA, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> ASHE shows the median gross weekly earnings for all full time jobs in the Borough of Darlington to be £582.20, Table 7.1a, ONS, November 2022. To arrive at a daily rate, the IRP divided this sum by 5 working days, which equates to £116.44. The ONS advises that the median, rather than mean, is a more accurate measure of average earnings due to a few high earners and a high number of employees on or just over the national living wage.



- 81.5 days per year x £116.4 per day  
= **£9,490**

30. The IRP was attracted to this recalibrated Basic Allowance of £9,490 as it replicates the original methodology with updated variables and at the same time restores its relative value.

### **Benchmarking the Basic Allowance**

31. Benchmarking against all other North East/Northern Unitary and Metropolitan Councils shows the following:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Basic Allowance   | £10,867 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Basic Allowance | £9,985  |
| • Darlington BC current Basic Allowance     | £8,668  |

32. Clearly, the current Darlington BC Basic Allowance is now markedly below that paid to regional peers, with a benchmarking group based on other North East/Northern Unitary and Metropolitan Councils. This in itself is not a reason to revise the Basic Allowance but it does show that the Darlington BC Basic Allowance may be in danger of not fulfilling the function of enabling most people to be a Councillor as it has started to drift below the average in peer councils.

### **The Representation received by the IRP**

33. In the main the representation received supported the view that the Basic Allowance no longer fulfilled the purpose of being an enabler. There was a general feeling that over the years the value of the Basic Allowance had been eroded. Part of this was due to the fact that the Basic Allowance had not been consistently indexed over the years. Another reason cited was due to the fact that as the Basic Allowance includes nearly all expenses Members incur. The cost of living crisis meant that these expenses, such as broadband, telephone calls, IT peripherals, in-Borough travel and subsistence and use of their home as an office had all dramatically increased recently. In addition, there was a strong view that as the value of the Basic Allowance had been eroded over the years the demands on Members have increased particularly with the widespread use of social media requiring immediate responses from Members.

34. However, while the majority representation supported the view that the current Basic Allowance was too low nearly all those who supported that view added that now was not the time to do so. Members felt that they could not be seen to have an above indexation increase in the Basic Allowance while many of their own constituents were facing difficult economic times.

35. Despite the evidence supporting an increase in the Basic Allowance the IRP has taken this message on board. There is no point in making a recommendation that the Council would not support. As such, the IRP is recommending no

change to the Basic Allowance at this juncture.

### **The recommended Basic Allowance (2023/24)**

36. **The IRP recommends that the Basic Allowance for 2023/24 should remain at £8,668, subject to any index that may apply.**

### **The Basic Allowance and Expenses – ICT and a Paper-Light Policy**

37. On the recommendation of the IRP in 2011, the Council agreed that the Basic Allowance is deemed sufficient to include the costs of incidental expenses and ICT equipment, consumables and peripherals incurred on the part of Members. Members are also expected to meet any broadband and associated line rental and operational costs out of their Basic Allowance. However, since the onset of Covid Members are now supplied with a laptop by the Council. The IRP received no evidence to change this approach
38. **The IRP recommends that the Basic Allowance continues to be deemed sufficient to include the costs of incidental expenses and ICT equipment (except the Council provided laptop), consumables and peripherals and in-Borough travel and subsistence costs incurred on the part of Members.**

### **Arriving at the Special Responsibility Allowances - the Leader's SRA**

39. Like all other SRAs, the Leaders' SRA was frozen between 2012 and 2021. This is in a context where the Leader and other executive Members are increasingly called upon to undertake a regional and sub-regional role, whether it is with the Darlington Partnership and the Teesside Combined Authority, an aspect of the Leader's work which has increased since the last review with the Leader now having the Combined Authority Portfolio for Local Services.
40. Historically the IRP arrived at the Leader's SRA by following the advice of the 2006 Statutory Guidance (paragraph 76) which states:
- One way of calculating special responsibility allowances may be to take the agreed level of basic allowance and recommend a multiple of this allowance as an appropriate special responsibility allowance for either the elected mayor or the leader.
41. This is known as the factor approach and is the most common approach utilised by IRPs to arrive at the recommended SRA for Leaders. Benchmarking shows that the mean SRA for Leaders is three times that of the mean Basic Allowance. This factor was originally utilised in arriving at the recommended SRA for the Leader of Darlington BC, but it is now 2.9 times the current Basic Allowance as SRAs have not been indexed to the extent that the Basic Allowance has. Simply to restore the original differential between the Basic Allowance and Leader's SRA the latter would have to be £26,004 (three times the current Basic Allowance). The current SRA for the Leader is £24,945.

42. Benchmarking also shows that the Leaders' SRA (£24,945) continues to drift markedly below that of peers:

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Leaders' SRA   | £32,680 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Leaders' SRA | £27,000 |
| • Darlington BC Leader's current SRA     | £24,945 |

43. In the representation received it was also generally accepted that the SRA for the Leader was low. However, as was the case across the board this view came with the codicil that despite the case to increase the Leader's SRA now was not the time to do so. The IRP has taken this on board and is not recommending any change to the Leader's SRA at this juncture.

44. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the Leader should be maintained at £24,945 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### The Deputy Leader

45. Currently the Deputy Leader receives an SRA that has been set at 60 per cent of the Leader's SRA, in line with the pro rata approach as set out in paragraph 76 of the 2006 Statutory Guidance. Many of the observations regarding the role of Leader are also pertinent for the Deputy Leader, they are also required to take up a larger external role and their SRAs are generally lower than peers. Benchmarking shows the following:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Deputy Leaders' SRA   | £16,285 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Deputy Leaders' SRA | £16,528 |
| • Darlington BC Deputy Leader's current SRA     | £14,965 |
| •   |         |

46. Nonetheless, for the same reasons the IRP has recommended no change to the Leader's SRA the IRP is doing the same for the Deputy Leaders SRA.

47. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the Deputy Leader of Darlington Borough Council remains at £14,965 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### Other Cabinet Members (6)

48. Currently the other Cabinet Members receive an SRA of £12,472 that has been set at 50 per cent of the Leader's SRA. Benchmarking shows that this SRA is broadly on a par with peers:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Other Cabinet Members SRA   | £12,062 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Other Cabinet Members SRA | £11,861 |
| • Darlington BC Other Cabinet Members current SRA     | £12,472 |

49. Moreover, there was limited representation received regarding this SRA, but such as it was it argued that it merited an increase. The IRP concluded that the

role of other Cabinet Members had not increased to the extent of that of the Leader and Deputy Leader, particularly with the latter's roles on the Teesside Combined Authority.

50. One issue raised with the IRP was the degree of difference between the Cabinet Members' SRA (£12,472) and chairs of the main committees SRA (£9,977) being too narrow to reflect the real differentials in workloads and responsibilities. There is not a strong case to increase the SRA for Other Cabinet Members, the IRP, as per the SRA for the Leader and Deputy Leader is not recommending any change at this stage.
51. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the other Cabinet Members (6) remains at £12,472 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees

52. All the chairs of the main committees receive the standard SRA (£9,977) for such posts and have been set at 40 per cent of the Leader's SRA. There was some representation that argued there is a case to differentiate between these committees but overall the principle of having flat rate SRAs for the Chairs of the main committees retained broad support. While differentiations can be made between the workloads of the main committees it is not overwhelming.
53. Benchmarking shows the following
- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Scrutiny Chairs SRA     | £6,998 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Scrutiny Chairs SRA   | £5,595 |
| • Darlington BC Other Scrutiny Chairs current SRA | £9,977 |
54. Clearly, the Scrutiny Chairs in Darlington BC receive an SRA above that paid to their peers. Indeed there was some representation arguing that the Chairs of Scrutiny should not be paid on a par with the Chairs of Planning and Licensing. However, the averages for the SRA for Scrutiny Chairs is skewed by Durham (£2,660) and Cumberland (£1,000 – which is an interim arrangement) paying their Scrutiny Chairs such a low SRA. Moreover, a number of councils in the benchmarking group also pay an SRA to a main Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair in addition to Vice Chairs of Scrutiny, e.g., Durham, Stockton, Newcastle and Sunderland. In this context, the SRA for the Scrutiny Chairs in Darlington BC is not so excessive.
55. In some of the representation received it was suggested that Scrutiny was not always working effectively. This is not an issue unique to Darlington BC; the same complaint is often made across English councils. It is not the role of the IRP to comment on the Council's governance arrangements except to say that when working effectively Scrutiny has a valuable contribution to make to the work of the Council. This is shown by having some of the work of scrutiny being done outside the formal scheduled meetings, through Review or Task and Finish Review Groups.
56. It was also suggested that there was a case to differentiate between the SRAs

for the Chairs of the five Scrutiny Committees as some have larger remits than others. Indeed, a case can be made that not all the Scrutiny Committees carry a similar range of responsibility and workload and some Scrutiny Committees may have a more extensive brief than others but that is partly due to issues rising up and falling down the local government agenda over time and there is an element of swings and roundabouts at play. Moreover, the Scrutiny Committees now have greater control of their own work programme since the demise of the Scrutiny Monitoring and Coordination & Group. The IRP further notes that Scrutiny are statutory committees and it was always the intent behind the 2000 Local Government Act that introduced statutory Scrutiny Committees that Scrutiny should be well supported. Finally, it is further noted that in the main the representation received supported the SRA for Scrutiny Chairs being on a par with the SRA for the Chairs of the Planning and Licensing Committees, it also meets the IRPs criteria of keeping the allowances scheme simple in not differentiating the SRA for the Chairs of the main committees. The IRP is not recommending any change to the SRA paid to the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

57. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees (5) remains at £9,977 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### The Planning Committee

58. The Planning Committee does have more scheduled meetings (12 per year) than the Licensing and Scrutiny Committees, as the Planning Committee has to deal with planning applications within a statutorily defined timeframe. The Chair is also paid an SRA of £9,977, set at 40 per cent of the Leader's SRA.

- Benchmarking Group Mean Planning Chairs SRA £9,852
- Benchmarking Group Median Planning Chairs SRA £8,350
- Darlington BC Planning Chairs current SRA £9,977

59. Benchmarking shows that the SRA for the Chair of Planning is broadly on a par with that paid in peer authorities. No representation was received to suggest that this SRA required revision.

60. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for Chair of the Planning Committee remains at £9,977 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### The Chair of the Licensing Committee

61. As with the Chairs of other main Committees the Chair of the Licensing Committee receives an SRA of £9,977, set at 40 per cent of the Leader's SRA.

62. Benchmarking shows that this SRA is noticeably above that paid to peers:

- Benchmarking Group Mean Licensing Chairs SRA £7,002
- Benchmarking Group Median Licensing Chairs SRA £6,500
- Darlington BC Licensing Chairs current SRA £9,977

63. However, this has to be put in context, the Chair of the Licensing Committee actually chairs two committees:
- The General Licensing Committee which normally meets four times per year, although there were six meetings in 2022/23
  - The Licensing Act 2003 Committee which meets no more than a couple of times per year, although there were no meetings in 2022/23
64. The Chair of the Licensing Committee chairs both committees, although they are both held on the same day
65. Moreover, much of the of the work of the Licensing Committees is done through
- The General Licensing Sub Committee (mostly dealing with taxi/private hire applications/objections), which meets as and when required but met seven times during 2022/23, and
  - The Licensing Act 2003 Sub Committee (which deals mainly where there are objections to applications for obtaining an alcohol license or variation in hours of an already licensed premise), which also meetings as and when required but actually met twice during 2022/23
66. While the Chair of the Licensing Committee does not always chair the sub committees the expectation is they will be chaired by the Chair of the Licensing Committee and in the majority of cases actually does so. Where the Chair has not done so it is expected that the Vice Chair of Licensing will do so and when not chairing a Licensing Sub Committee is expected to sit on them.
67. As such, the workload and responsibility of the Chair of the Licensing Committee has unlike in many of the comparator councils a defined role in the Licensing Sub Committees, as does the Vice Chair of the Licensing Committees. Moreover, in the representation received there was only a very limited argument presented to alter the current SRA for the Chair of the Licensing Committees.
68. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for Chair of the Licensing Committee remains at £9,977 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply**

### **Vice Chairs of the Regulatory Committees (Planning and Licensing)**

69. Currently the Vice Chairs of the Planning and Licensing Committees each received an SRA of £2,494, set 25 per cent of their Chairs SRA. It was set on this level on the basis that all the Vice Chairs undertook a standard set of duties, including:
- I. Stand in for their respective Chairs when required
  - II. Attend relevant pre-meetings and briefings with Officers with their Chairs
  - III. Generally keep up to speed on their committees remit and support their Chair as required
  - IV. For the Vice Chair of Licensing taking a lead role in chairing Licensing

Sub Committees when Chair is unable to do so or otherwise sit on Licensing Sub Committees

- V. For the Vice Chair of Planning it's recognised they have to stand in on occasion due to the restrictions imposed by Planning law, such as conflict of interest where the Chair has to stand down; for instance there may be a particular application in their ward
70. The case remains that the Vice Chairs of the Planning and Licensing Committees have to stand-in regularly for the former and take an active part in the Sub Committees on the part of the latter. In particular, the animated nature of many Planning Committee meetings means the Chair has to regularly rely on the Vice Chair to keep things on track.
71. Benchmarking shows that the SRAs for these Vice Chairs is somewhat below that paid to peers:
- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Planning Vice Chairs SRA   | £3,935 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Planning Vice Chairs SRA | £3,450 |
| • Darlington BC Planning Vice Chairs current SRA     | £2,494 |
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Licensing Vice Chairs SRA  | £3,097 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Licensing Chairs SRA     | £2,494 |
| • Darlington BC Licensing Chairs current SRA         | £2,494 |
72. However, not all of the comparator council's pay this Vice Chairs SRA. It is noted that out of the 14 other Councils in the benchmarking group, ten pay Planning Vice-Chairs and nine pay Licensing Vice Chairs. So, while not always paid elsewhere they are somewhat above that paid in Darlington, more so for Planning. Nonetheless, the IRP received no further evidence that the SRAs for the Vice Chairs of the Planning and Licensing Committees warranted revision.
73. **The IRP recommends that that the SRA for the Vice Chairs of the Planning and Licensing Committees remains at £2,494 for 2023/24, subject to any indexation that may apply.**

### Chair of the Audit Committee

74. Currently, the Chair of the Audit Committee receives an SRA of £2,494, which was set in the 2019 review at 10 per cent of the Leader's SRA.
75. There was general agreement in the representation received that the Audit Committee is not a main committee, it only has four scheduled meetings per year. However, there was a further view that the post merited an increase in the SRA paid as it undertakes a number of regulatory functions including reviewing the Council's policies and procedures regarding:
- Governance, risk and control
  - Internal Audit
  - External Audit

- Financial Reporting
- Treasury Management
- Ethical Standards

76. Benchmarking shows that indeed the SRA for the Chair of the Audit Committee is noticeably below peers:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| • Benchmarking Group Mean Audit Chairs SRA   | £5,448 |
| • Benchmarking Group Median Audit Chairs SRA | £5,044 |
| • Darlington BC Audit Chairs current SRA     | £2,494 |

77. While the IRP concluded that there was a case to increase SRA for the Chair of the Audit Committee as backed up by the benchmarking it is not making such a recommendation in response to the key message arising out of the representation received, i.e., no increases in allowances, recommending an increase at this juncture.

78. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the Chair of the Audit Committee remains at £2,494 for 2023/24, subject to any indexation that may apply.**

### The Leader of the Main Opposition Group

79. The SRA (£9,977) for the Leader of the Opposition has been linked to that paid the Chairs of the main committees and set at 40% of the Leader's SRA. Benchmarking shows this is a comparatively high SRA:

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| • BM Group Mean Main Opposition Group Leaders SRA         | £6,892 |
| • BM Group Median Main Opposition Group Leaders SRA       | £5,200 |
| • Darlington BC Main Opposition Group Leaders current SRA | £9,977 |

80. One reason for this comparative divergence may be down to the size of the Opposition Group - often the smaller the Opposition Group the smaller the SRA. In Darlington BC the Opposition Group has consistently remained large, currently 14 Members. Nonetheless, the IRP is content with the current SRA. There is a duty on the Opposition Group Leader to provide challenge across the Council and for a healthy democracy to flourish the Opposition must be resourced. This view is underpinned by the 2003 Regulations (5. [2.] [b.]), which require an SRA to be paid to an Opposition Member where members divided into groups and a majority of Members form a ruling group.

81. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the Leader of the Main Opposition Group remains at £9,977 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may be applied.**

### The Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group

82. Currently, the Deputy Leader of Main Opposition Group receives an SRA of £1,248, set at five per cent of the Leader's SRA. Benchmarking shows that this post is not typically paid with only three out of the other comparator councils



paying such a role.

83. The IRP received no evidence to alter this SRA and has decided to maintain this SRA at £1,248.
84. **The IRP recommends that the Main Opposition Group Deputy Leader's SRA remains at £1,248 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### **Leaders of the Minority Opposition Groups**

85. The IRP deliberated whether there was a case to set a qualifying criterion before the current SRA (£1,248) paid to the Leaders of the two Minority Opposition Groups became operable. This is type of qualification threshold is not uncommon. For instance, Middlesbrough pay Leaders of Minority Opposition Groups an SRA of £2,798 but only when such a Group attains 10 per cent of the Council membership. The IRP decided not to go down this route largely on the grounds that historically the political context (and currently with a minority administration) means that the Minority Opposition Groups will be integral to the operation of the Council.
86. **The IRP recommends that the SRA for the Leader[s] of Minority Opposition Group[s] remains at £1,248 for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**

### **SRAs not recommended – Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees**

87. The IRP received representation that it was inequitable that the Vice Chairs of Planning and Licensing received an SRA but the Vice Chairs of Scrutiny did not. It is noted that the IRP recommended the discontinuation of SRAs for the Vice Chairs of Scrutiny in 2019 and the Council accepted that recommendation.
88. The IRP took a long look at the role of the Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees. It remains the case that there is no standard brief for these Vice Chairs, their workloads and responsibilities being variable. For instance, the IRP was informed that there is no expectation that Scrutiny Vice Chairs will take a lead role in charring task and finish review groups, some may but it is not a discrete task specifically assigned to Scrutiny Vice Chairs across the board; in practice it is not consistent. The Vice Chairs of Planning and Licensing relate to regulatory committees and they each have discrete tasks to undertake. This does not apply to the Vice Chairs of Scrutiny.
89. One suggestion put to the IRP was to pay an SRA to the Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees when they have to stand-in for their Chair. However, the IRP rejected this approach as it cuts across the principle of simplicity.
90. Benchmarking shows that in eight of the 14 other comparator councils the Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny are paid an SRA (mean/median £3,486/£2,713). However, what the benchmarking does not show is the role(s) that may be undertaken such as charring sub-committees or task and finish review groups.

91. The IRP still feels that the role of Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees is not significant enough to merit an SRA. **As such, the IRP is not recommending that the Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees are paid an SRA.**

### **Confirmation of the 1-SRA only rule**

92. The 2003 Regulations do not prohibit the payment of multiple SRAs to Members. The limit of 1-SRA only regardless of whether a Member holds more than one remunerated post is an internal rule agreed by the Council Members' Allowances going back to the recommendation of the IRP of 2003. The majority of Councils have a similar internal rule.
93. Moreover, this restriction on the payment of SRAs to Members means that posts are not simply sought out for financial reasons. Indeed, the pressure is that if anything, posts tend to be spread around more. It also makes for a more transparent allowances scheme and in practice it will also lead to a slight reduction in amounts paid out in SRAs, as there is often at least one Member who also holds more than one remunerated post, Due to the 1-SRA only rule such a Members is only paid the higher SRA.
94. **The IRP recommends that the Council retains the 1-SRA only rule within the Darlington Borough Council Members' Allowances scheme.**

### **The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Council and the Civic Allowances**

95. The Civic Allowances are constitutionally outside the formal remit of IRPs. The Civic Allowances are paid under the Local Government Act 1972 (sections 3.5 and 5.4), not as remuneration (although in many authorities it has in effect become a substitute salary), but to meet the expenses of holding the office of Civic Head and Deputy Civic Head of the Council. However, many IRPs are often asked to provide advice on the Civic Allowances in lieu of a council being able to draw upon any external validation.
96. Meaningful benchmarking is difficult when it comes to the Civic Allowances as some authorities explicitly remunerate their equivalent of Mayor and Deputy Mayor through an SRA in addition to the provision of a civic allowance for meeting the cost of holding office. Moreover, not all councils publish the Civic Allowances in their allowances scheme.
97. The IRP recognises the Mayoral role is an important one with the post holder expected to attend functions in and out of the Borough on an almost daily basis. The Mayor is the public face of the Council for most of the Borough's residents. Nonetheless, no evidence was received that the current Civic Allowance for the Mayor is insufficient to meet the cost of holding civic office and associated out of pocket expenses. The IRP received no evidence that the current level of the Mayoral Allowance (£11,500) left the Mayor out of pocket by virtue of holding the office.

98. **The IRP does not recommend any change to the current Civic Allowance (£11,500) paid to the Mayor of Darlington Borough Council for 2023/24, subject to any index that may apply.**
99. The Deputy Mayor, who is always the Mayor in waiting in Darlington, receives a Civic Allowance of £929 to meet their operational out of pocket expenses. This much lower sum is appropriate as the Deputy Mayor's main role is to stand-in where the Mayor is unable to attend a function. No evidence was received to change this allowance.
100. **The IRP recommends that the Civic Allowance for the Deputy Mayor of Darlington Borough Council for 2023/24 remains at £929, subject to any index that may apply.**

### **The Co-optees' Allowances – Audit Committee Co-optee**

101. Currently the allowances scheme does not provide for a Co-optees' Allowance. This is an allowance that may be paid to independent non-voting Members co-opted onto committees under the Local Government Act 2000. In Darlington, these co-optees are currently restricted to the parent and religious governor representatives on the Children and Young Peoples' Scrutiny Committee. No evidence was received to indicate there was a case to pay these co-optees in Darlington Borough Council a Co-optees' Allowance.
102. However, the IRP was informed that in the near future there may be a requirement for Audit Committees to appoint a co-optee who would be suitably qualified by having the requisite financial experience and knowledge. On this basis the IRP concluded that if the Audit Committee is required to appoint a co-optee and to future proof the allowances scheme that it should recommend a Co-optees' Allowance for such a post for if and when it is appointed.
103. Without experience of what the role will entail the IRP has simply set the Audit Committees' Co-optees' Allowance at 10 per cent of the Basic Allowance. The IRP will revisit this level if and when experience of the role has been gained at its next review.
104. **The IRP recommends that if the Council is required to appoint a co-optee to the Audit Committee then they should be paid a Co-optees' Allowance of £867, subject to any indexation that may be applicable.**

### **Travel and Subsistence Allowances**

#### **The Subsistence Allowance – Within the Borough**

105. The right for Members to claim a Subsistence Allowance has been discontinued, it is deemed to be covered by the Basic Allowance. This is typical practice in the more geographically compact councils. The IRP received no evidence to revisit this provision; it is in line with the IRP's principle of simplicity.

106. **The IRP recommends that the Basic Allowance continues to be deemed to inclusive of subsistence costs incurred by Members for undertaking Council-related duties within the Borough.**

### **The Subsistence Allowance – Outwith the Borough**

107. There were no issues brought to the IRP’s attention regarding the scope and levels payable under the Subsistence Allowance scheme which Members can claim for undertaking approved duties outwith the Borough. The rates and terms and conditions are the same that apply to Officers. **The IRP does not recommend any changes to the current rates and terms and conditions of the Subsistence Allowances scheme for Members undertaking approved duties outwith the Borough.**

### **The Travel Allowance – Within the Borough**

108. As with the Subsistence Allowance the Basic Allowance is currently deemed sufficient to cover Members’ travel costs while carrying out Council-related duties within the Borough. There was however one issue that was raised with the IRP in this regards, namely the extra mileage costs incurred by Members living in or representing the more rural wards, whether it be travelling to Council, Parish Council or local community meetings or visiting constituents.
109. The IRP acknowledges that there can be additional costs in the case of Members representing the more rural wards as there are 10 Parish Councils and 15 Parish Meetings within the Borough. Although attending Parish Councils/Meetings is not part of a Member’s formal duties it can be seen as part of their larger community role and advantageous for the Council to have an informal direct link to the Parishes.
110. Yet, the IRP is not making a recommendation regarding recognising additional travel costs associated with representing/living in a rural ward. To make an exception in this case would undermine the IRP’s principles of simplicity and transparency. In particular there would be a below the line administrative cost incurred through Officers having to check and process such claims. Also, this type of supplementary travel related costs will be incurred by nearly all Members from time to time. Finally, it is noted that even when (up until the end of 2003) Members had a statutory right to claim in-Borough travel allowances attending parish council meetings and other ward and constituent related duties was never an approved duty.
111. **The IRP recommends that the Basic Allowance continues to be inclusive of all travel related costs incurred by Members while carrying out Council-related duties within the Borough.**

### **The Travel Allowance – Outwith the Borough**

112. Currently, the mileage rates that Members can claim for undertaking approved

duties outwith the Borough are based on the HMRCs "Authorised Mileage Approved Mileage" (AMAP) rates. These rates are typically utilised by local authorities in determining Members' (and in some cases Officers') mileage rates; primarily because they are tax efficient in that they do not incur any tax liability for Members. The HMRC mileage rates are also the most prevalent mileage rates in the wider public sector. The IRP received no evidence to revise these rates.

113. **The IRP recommends that the outwith current (HMRRRC) mileage rates, approved duties, terms and conditions that are applicable for which Members can claim travel mileage allowances and the reimbursement of public transport (where used) remain unchanged.**

### **Dependants' Carers' Allowance (DCA)**

114. The Local Government Act 2000 explicitly clarifies the right of local authorities to pay a Dependants' Carers' Allowance (DCA), which Members can claim to assist in meeting costs for care for their dependants while on approved Council duties. It is an allowance explicitly designed to enable a wider range of candidates to stand for and remain on Council. In the 2003 review, the IRP recommended that the Council make available the DCA to those Members who have dependants living with them. It has been further refined to recognise two categories of care:

- Childcare – reimbursement of actual expenditure up to a maximum of 35 hours per week regardless of the number of dependants a Member may have and paid on a self-monitoring basis in that a Member self-registers with the Monitoring Officer that they have dependent children under 16 living with them and the allowance can be claimed either on production of receipts or signed statement that the care has been provided
- Social/Medical care – paid at a similar rate chargeable by Darlington Borough Council for provision of a Home Care Assistant. Again, such dependents much be registered with the Monitoring Officer and as such care will have to be provided by professional carers a formal receipt has to be provided. There are no limits on the claims for Social/Medical care.

115. While it is not often claimed there was almost universal support for maintaining the DCA as it helped reduce barriers to public service. It is also noted that the DCA is now made available by almost all English councils.

116. The only issue raised regarding the DCA was that it was felt it was not particularly accessible and over restrictive in how it can be claimed. The IRP has had this issue raised in the past and made amendments over the years to increase the accessibility of the DCA. It has also set out above the broad terms and conditions by which the DCA may be claimed to show that the DCA is readily accessible and not over restrictive, particularly when compared to how the DCA is set out in some of the comparator councils allowances schemes. The IRP concluded that there may be an issue that where a Member has dependents that they may not be fully aware of how the DCA operates. The IRP urges that any Member with dependents to discuss the DCA with the Democratic Services Manager to help them claim the DCA. Otherwise the IRP

concluded that no changes were needed to the DCA.

117. **Consequently, the IRP recommends no change to the current conditions and scope for which the DCA may be claimed for 2023/24 subject to any index that may be applied to the care for dependants on social/medical grounds.**

### Independent Members on School Appeals IRPs

118. The School Admission (Appeals Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 (paragraph 6.1) provide for the payment of a Financial Loss Allowance (FLA) to independent members appointed to school appeals panels when attending "a meeting of an appeal panel or associated training." The Statutory Guidance 2012<sup>4</sup> provides further clarification in that in addition to a FLA such appointees are eligible to receive travel and subsistence allowances and to be compensated for any expenses, including child minding costs. The Statutory Guidance also states that the "rate of payment for community and voluntary controlled schools is set by the local authority which must have regard to the recommendations of its independent remuneration IRP."

119. Currently Darlington Borough Council pays independent appointees to its school appeals panels:

- FLA: £27.65 (meetings up to 4 hours)  
£55.31 (meetings over 4 hours)
- Subsistence Allowance: at same rates that are applicable to Officers & elected Members although the conditions vary slightly
- Mileage Allowance: at HMRC AMAP rates
- DCA: at the same rates and conditions applicable to Members

120. No evidence was received to indicate the FLA or other allowances that may be claimed by the Independent Members on the Educations Appeals Panels required revisiting. **The IRP recommends that the FLA and allowances that may be claimed by the Independent Members appointed to the Council's School Appeals Panels are maintained at their current rates for 2023/24, subject to any indexation that may be applicable.**

### Confirmation of Indexing

121. Although the Council has not consistently implemented indexation over the years it has done since 2021. It is noted that the majority of English councils now have indexation of allowances in place. The principle of indexation was overwhelmingly supported in the representation received. The IRP continues to support the principle of the indexation of allowances as it helps to prevent the

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, School Admission Appeals Code: Statutory Guidance for School Leaders, Governing Bodies, and Local Authorities, paragraph 1.15, February 2012

loss of relative value that necessitates periodic increases that go beyond any uplift for cost of living increases.

122. The IRP has always recommended that the Basic Allowance and SRAs are indexed to the annual percentage salary increase received by Officers, as agreed each year by the National Joint Council for Local Government Staff (known as the NJC index). It conforms to one of the IRP's principles, namely equity, if Officers receive no annual percentage increase (which has occurred in the past) then the applicable percentage increase for Members is 0 per cent. Moreover, non-indexation of the Basic Allowance and SRAs as a matter of course has led to an erosion in their value over the years, to continue not indexing the Basic Allowance and SRAs would only exacerbate that context.
123. **The IRP recommends and confirms the use of the following indices for allowances for the next four years:**
- **Basic Allowance, SRAs, Civic and Co-optees' Allowances and Education Appeals Panel Members FLA:**
    - Increased by same percentage applied annually to the pay of local government staff, implemented at the start of each municipal year (linked to spinal column point 43 of the NJC scheme) starting from annual meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024.
  - **DCA: Social/Medical care element:**
    - Indexed to the hourly rate chargeable by the Council for provision of a Home Care Assistant.
  - **Travel (out of authority only):**
    - Mileage rates to be indexed to HMRC rates. Other travel will be reimbursement of actual costs taking into account the most cost effective means of transport available and the convenience of use.
  - **Subsistence (out of authority only):**
    - Indexed to the same rates that apply to Officers of Darlington Borough Council, for reimbursement of actual costs up to the maximum rate applicable.
124. **The IRP further recommends that as per regulations, the indices recommended by the IRP are to run for four years from 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024 up until the day before the annual meeting of the Council in May 2028 or until the Council requires a further review.**
125. The IRP notes that if the Council does not have provision for indexation in place it cannot apply any indices. Yet, if the provision is in place the Council can still decide not to apply all or any of the indices that may be applicable, e.g., the Council could decide to apply adopted index to the BA but not SRAs in any one year. It was only by adopting the principle of indexation in 2016 that enabled the Council to apply a one off uplift to the Basic Allowance in 2017.

## **Implementation**

126. **The IRP recommends that the recommendations within this report (with any amendments as agreed by Council) are implemented with effect from the date of Annual Meeting of the Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024 or any date beforehand that the Council may agree upon subsequent to the publication of report.**



## **Appendix One Members and Officers who met with the IRP**

### **Members who met with the IRP**

Cllr J. Coe	Vice Chair Scrutiny Committee – Communities & Local Services (Liberal Democrat)
Cllr J. Cossins	Mayor of Council (Labour)
Cllr A-M Curry	Leader of Liberal Democrat Group and Cabinet Member for Adults
Cllr J. Dulston	Leader of Main (Conservative) Opposition Group
Cllr S. Harker	Leader of the Council and Labour Group with responsibility for Corporate Strategy
Cllr J. Haszeldine	Chair of Planning Committee (Labour)
Cllr R. Henderson	Chair of Audit Committee (Green)
Cllr B. Holroyd	Backbench Member (Green)
Cllr S. Kane	Vice Chair of Licensing Committee (Labour)
Cllr D. Laing	Former Chair of Planning Committee (Conservative)
Cllr C. McEwan	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration (Labour)
Cllr J. McGill	Chair Scrutiny Committee - Communities & Local Services (Labour)
Cllr K. Nicholson	Chair of Licensing Committee (Independent)
Cllr Dr A. Riley	Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities (Labour)
Cllr M. Snedker	Leader Minority Opposition (Green) Group
Cllr L. Tostevin	Backbench Member (Conservative)

### **In addition there were 9 Written Submissions:**

### **Officers who provided factual briefings to the IRP**

Ian Williams:	Chief Executive, Darlington Borough Council
Luke Swinhoe:	Assistant Director Law & Governance
Shirley Wright:	Democratic Services Manager

## **Appendix Two Information Received by the IRP**

1. Darlington Borough Council, Members Allowances Review - Council report dated 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 (including Terms of Reference)
2. The local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003
3. New Council Constitutions: Guidance on Regulation for Local Authority Allowances May 2006 version (Extract of section on allowances)
4. Darlington Borough Council current Members' Allowances Scheme 2023/24
5. Darlington Borough Council statutory publication of allowances and expenses received by Members 2022/23
6. Darlington Borough Council Committee Information:-
  - Memberships of Cabinet/Committees and Joint Arrangements – 2023/24;
  - Calendar of Meetings 2023/24; and
  - Political Balance/Council
7. Number of meetings of Licensing Committees and Subs :-
  - General Licensing Committee met six times during the 2022/23 Municipal Year;
  - General Licensing Sub-Committee met seven times during the 2023/24 Municipal Year
  - Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committees met two times during the 2023/24 Municipal Year; and
  - Licensing Act 2003 Committee did not meet the 2023/24 Municipal Year
8. Darlington Borough Council remit or responsibility for functions for main committees and sub committees:-
  - Schedule 1 –Council Committees; their membership and powers :-  
Council :-  
    Planning Applications Committee;  
    General Licensing Committee;  
    General Licensing Sub-Committee;  
    Licensing Act 2003 Committee;  
    Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee;  
    Member Standards Hearing Committee  
    Audit Committee
  - Schedule 2 – The Executive :-  
    Executive Portfolios;  
    Delegation of Executive Functions;  
    Cabinet Sub Committee

Executive Members Scheme of Delegation

- Schedule 3 - Scrutiny Committees :-  
Efficiency and Resources;  
Adults;  
Housing, Health and Partnerships  
Children and Young People  
Place Scrutiny Committee  
General Role of the Council's Scrutiny Committees  
Monitoring and Co-ordination Group
9. Report of the IRP, A Review of Members' Allowances for Darlington Borough Council, December 2019
  10. Members' Allowance:
    - a. Council Report 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (including report of the IRP December 2019)
    - b. Council Minutes 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 that shows amendment to Report and subsequent approval
  11. Councillors' Census 2022 (LGA), breakdown of weekly hours worked (mean) by councillors by Council type and whether position is held, as set out in personal email to the IRP Chair from Stephen Richards (LGA) 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023
  12. Benchmarking information :-
    - Summary of Basic Allowances and SRAs paid in all 14 North East/Northern Unitary and Metropolitan Councils: BM1-3
  13. Education Appeals Panel :-
    - Department for Education, School Admissions Appeals Code, Statutory Guidance for school leaders, governing bodies and local authorities (with particular reference to paragraphs 1.4-1.5 – Costs), February 2012; and
    - Darlington Borough Council – Scale of Allowances currently paid to Education Appeals Panel Members
  14. Written submissions from members (X9)
  15. Office for Low Emission Vehicles, Tax Benefits for Ultra Low Emission Vehicles, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018
  16. Short Briefing Paper for IRP by IRP Chair Dr Declan Hall
  17. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), Table 7.1a, weekly pay (Gross) - all full time employee jobs in area of Darlington Borough Council, Office of National Statistics (Work Geography), 2022

18. National Joint Council for Local Government Services, Local Government Pay Offer 2023-24, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023

## Appendix Three: Benchmarking – all North East/Northern Unitary and Metropolitan Councils

BM1 Darlington BM Group- Teesside & Adjacent Unitaries + NE/Northern Mets & Unitaries: BA + Leaders/Elected Mayors + Exec & Scrutiny SRAs 2023/24 (unless Indicated)										
Comparator Council	Basic Allowance	Leader or Elected Mayor	Leader or Elected Mayor Total	Deputy Leader or Mayor[s]	Exec Members	Mayoral or Exec Support	Chair Main O&S	V/Chair Main O&S	Chairs or Leads Scrutiny	V/Chairs Scrutiny
Durham	13,300	36,575	49,875	19,950	13,300		13,300	7,980	2,660	1,330
Hartlepool (22/23)	8,330	24,990	33,320		Committee Governance Model					
Middlesbrough (22/23)	7,608	55,952	63,560	19,518	11,190		11,190		5,595	
Redcar & C'land (22/23)	9,985	22,037	32,022	11,973	10,120				2,981	1,037
Stockton	9,300	25,000	34,300	13,750	11,250		6,250	3,125	6,250	3,125
North Yorks	15,500	39,654	55,154	21,165	19,554		11,052	1,842	5,526	1,842
Cumberland (22/23)	12,000	21,000	33,000	11,229	6,735				1,000	
Gateshead (22/23)	11,941	35,831	47,772	23,883	17,917				17,917	7,467
Newcastle (22/23)	9,200	18,400	27,600	9,200	6,900		4,600	2,300	4,600	2,300
Sunderland	8,369	37,667	46,036	25,111	20,716	12,556	12,556	6,277	5,179	
S. Tyneside (22/23)	8,497	29,257	37,754	18,617	12,736				10,638	5,319
N. Tyneside (22/23)	10,829	68,499	79,328	7,537	3,332		3,332	2,330		
Northumberland (22/23)	16,476	27,000	43,476	18,090	14,850				12,150	5,467
Westmoreland & Furness	13,000	23,400	36,400	13,000	7,800		6,500		6,500	
<b>Darlington</b>	<b>8,668</b>	<b>24,945</b>	<b>33,613</b>	<b>14,965</b>	<b>12,472</b>				<b>9,977</b>	
Mean	10,867	32,680	43,547	16,285	12,062		8,598	3,976	6,998	3,486
Median	9,985	27,000	37,754	16,528	11,861		8,776	2,728	5,595	2,713
Lowest	7,608	18,400	27,600	7,537	3,332		3,332	1,842	1,000	1,037
Highest	16,476	68,499	79,328	25,111	20,716		13,300	7,980	17,917	7,467
BMG Mean Ratios		3 X BA		50%	37%		26%	46%	21%	50%
DBC Ratios		2.9 X BA		60%	50%				40%	

BM2 Darlington BM Group- Teesside & Adjacent Unitaries + NE/Northern Mets & Unitaries: Main Regulatory SRAs 2023/24 (unless Indicated)										
Comparator Council	Chair Planning	V/Chair Planning	Chair Licensing (inc Regulatory)	V/Chair Licensing	Chairs Licensing Subs	Chair Audit & Risk/Other	V/Chair Audit	Chair Standards	Chair Appeals	V/Chair Appeals
Durham*	13,300	6,648	3,325	1,662	3,325	2,660	1,330	2,660	2,660	1,330
Hartlepool (22/23)	8,330		4,998			8,330				
Middlesbrough (22/23)	8,393		8,393			5,595		2,798	2,798	
Redcar & C'land (22/23)	5,055	2,074	Inc. in Planning			2,203	648			
Stockton	6,250	3,125	6,250	3,125		6,250	3,125			
North Yorks	6,971	2,141	3,931	1,842	250	4,769		4,421	5,526	921
Cumberland								500	500	
Gateshead (22/23)	14,926	7,467	14,926	7,467		14,926	7,467		14,926	7,467
Newcastle (22/23)	6,900	3,450	4,600	2,300	2,300	Co-optee	1,725	Co-optee	4,600	2,300
Sunderland	8,369	4,184	8,369	4,184				5,000		
S. Tyneside (22/23)	7,978	3,901	7,978	3,901		5,319	2,659	5,319		
N. Tyneside (22/23)	3,332	2,330	2,330	1,636		2,330	1,636	3,332	2,330	1,635
Northumberland (22/23)*	12,150	5,467	9,450	2,363		4,005	1,350	2,700		
Westmoreland & Furness**	26,000		6,500			6,500		5,200	5,200	
<b>Darlington</b>	<b>9,977</b>	<b>2,494</b>	<b>9,977</b>	<b>2,494</b>		<b>2,494</b>				
<b>Mean</b>	<b>9,852</b>	<b>3,935</b>	<b>7,002</b>	<b>3,097</b>	<b>1,958</b>	<b>5,448</b>	<b>2,493</b>	<b>3,548</b>	<b>4,818</b>	<b>2,731</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>8,350</b>	<b>3,450</b>	<b>6,500</b>	<b>2,429</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>5,044</b>	<b>1,681</b>	<b>3,332</b>	<b>3,699</b>	<b>1,635</b>
<b>Lowest</b>	<b>3,332</b>	<b>2,074</b>	<b>2,330</b>	<b>1,636</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>2,203</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>921</b>
<b>Highest</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>7,467</b>	<b>14,926</b>	<b>7,467</b>	<b>3,325</b>	<b>14,926</b>	<b>7,467</b>	<b>5,319</b>	<b>14,926</b>	<b>7,467</b>
<b>BMG Mean Ratios</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>DBC Ratios</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>25%</b>		<b>10%</b>				
* Durham Planning SRAs = 4 X Area Chairs £3,325 + V/Chairs £1,662					Westmoreland Planning SRA = 4 Planning Committees = £6,500 per Chair					

BM3 Darlington BM Group- Teesside & Adjacent Unitaries + NE Mets & Unitaries: Group & Misc. SRAs 2023/24 (unless Indicated)						
Comparator Council	Main Opp Group Leader	Main Opp Deputy Leader	Minor Opp Group Leaders	Council Chair	Council Deputy Chair	Comments or Other
Durham	6,650		3,325	6,650	3,325	Chair + V/Chair General Licensing & Registration £3,325 & £1,662, Chairs + V/Chairs Highways + Corporate Parenting £2,660 + £1,330
Hartlepool (22/23)	4,998			8,330		
Middlesbrough (22/23)	2,798		2,798	5,595		
Redcar & C'land (22/23)	5,055		5,055	13,476	3,377	Chair + V/Chair Employment £2,974 & £1,037
Stockton	5,000			15,625	4,910	
North Yorks	6,821		3,527	12,142	4,027	Area Chairs +V/Chairs £3,815 + £1,456, Chairs Area Committees £5,526, Chair + V/Chair Statutory Licensing £3,500 + £1,842, Member Champions £1,842, Group Secretaries £2,763 + £1,842 + £921
Cumberland	4,500		1,128	4,887		
Gateshead (22/23)	17,917	7,378				
Newcastle (22/23)	6,900	3,450		9,200	3,450	Shadow Exec £2,300, Chairs Climate Change + HWB £3,450, V/Chair Climate Change £1,725, Chair + V/Chair Constitutional £2,300 & £1,150, V/Chair Standards £1,150, Members Planning + Licensing £1,380 + £460
Sunderland	9,417		4,708	12,000	6,000	Cabinet Secretary £25,111, Area Chairs + V/Chairs £10,30 + £6,277
S. Tyneside (22/23)	2,659			10,024	3,423	Area Chairs £6,298, Chairs + V/Chairs HR + Performance Panels £5,319 & £2,659, V/Chair Standards £2,659
N. Tyneside (22/23)	3,332		3,332	12,213	4,434	Chair + V/Chair HWB £3,332 & £2,330, V/Chair Standards £1,635
Northumberland (22/23)*	12,150	4,860	2,430	5,400	1,620	Council Business Chair + Dep Chair £14,850 & £9,900, Area Chairs + V/Chairs £10,800 & £3,645, Chair + V/Chair Rights of Way £9,450 & £5,467, Chair + V/Chairs Cabinet + Council WGs £4,005 & £1,350, Group Secretaries £15 p/Mbr
Westmoreland & Furness	5,200		2,600	6,500	2,600	Chairs Locality Boards + Lake Admin Committee £5,200
<b>Darlington</b>	<b>9,977</b>	<b>1,248</b>	<b>1,248</b>	<b>11,500</b>	<b>971</b>	
Mean	6,892	4,234	3,015	9,539	3,467	
Median	5,200	4,155	3,062	9,612	3,423	
Lowest	2,659	1,248	1,128	4,887	971	
Highest	17,917	7,378	5,055	15,625	6,000	
BMG Mean Ratios	21%	13%	9%	29%	36%	
DBC Ratios	40%	5%	5%	46%	8%	





## **Members' Allowances Scheme**

The Darlington Borough Council, in exercise of the powers conferred by the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended), hereby makes the following scheme:-

### **Introduction**

1. This scheme may be cited as the Darlington Borough Council Members' Allowances Scheme, and shall have effect for the period commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2024 and shall continue in force thereafter until amended.
2. The previous Darlington Borough Council Members' Allowances Scheme is revoked with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024
3. In this scheme,  
  
    'the Authority' means Darlington Borough Council;  
  
    'Councillor' means a Member of the Darlington Borough Council who is a Councillor; and  
  
    'Year' means the period beginning 1st April to 31st March.

### **Basic Allowance**

4. For each year a basic allowance ('Basic Allowance') set out in Schedule 1 shall be paid to each Councillor.
5. Where the term of office of a Councillor begins or ends otherwise than at the beginning or end of a year, his/her entitlement shall be to payment of such part of the basic allowance as bears to the whole the same proportion as the number of days during which his/her term of office as Councillor subsists bears to the number of days in that year.

### **Special Responsibility Allowances**

6. For each year for which this scheme relates a Special Responsibility Allowance ('Special Responsibility Allowance') shall be paid to those Councillors who have the special responsibilities in relation to the Authority that are specified in Schedule 2.
7. The amount of each Special Responsibility Allowance shall be the amount specified against that special responsibility in Schedule 2.
8. Where a Councillor does not have throughout the whole of the year any such special responsibilities as entitle him/her to a Special Responsibility Allowance, his/her entitlement shall be to payment of such part of the Special Responsibility Allowance as bears to whole of the same proportion as the number of days during which he/she has such Special Responsibilities bears to the number of days in that year.

9. Any Councillor who will be entitled to claim more than one special responsibility allowance in accordance with Schedule 2, shall only be entitled to receive one such allowance (and where the allowances are of different amounts, the entitlement shall be to the highest amount), unless otherwise provided in Schedule 2.

#### **Mayoral Allowances**

10. Allowances will be payable as detailed in Schedule 3

#### **Dependent Carers' Allowance**

11. An Allowance ('the Dependent Carers' Allowance') will be paid to each Councillor who needs to incur the expenses of arranging for the care of their children or dependants whilst undertaking the duties as specified in Schedule 4.
12. The Dependents' Carers' Allowance will be payable in respect of actual expenditure up to a maximum of 35 hours in any one week, as specified in Schedule 4.

#### **Travel and Subsistence Allowances**

13. No allowance will be made to any Councillor for any travelling or subsistence incurred whilst performing Council duties within the Borough Council boundary.
14. Travelling and Subsistence Allowances will be paid as specified in Schedule 5.

#### **Education Appeals Panel Members**

15. Allowances will be payable as detailed in Schedule 6.

#### **Amendments and Repayment of Part of Allowances**

16. This scheme may be amended at any time but may only be revoked with effect from the beginning of a year.
17. This scheme makes provision for an annual adjustment of the Basic, Special Responsibility allowances for a period of four years as detailed in paragraph 26 below.
18. Where an amendment is to be made which affects an allowance payable for the year in which the amendment is made, the entitlement to such allowance may apply with effect from the beginning of the year in which the amendment is made.
19. Where payment of any allowance already being made in respect of any period during which the Councillor concerned :-
  - ceases to be a Councillor; or
  - is in any other way not entitled to receive the allowance in respect of that period,

The Authority may require that such part of the allowances relates to any such period be repaid to the Authority.

20. Where a Councillor is also a Member of another Authority (as defined in the Regulations) that Councillor may not receive allowances from more than one Authority in respect of the same duties.

#### **Election to Forego Allowances**

21. A person may, by notice in writing given to the Assistant Director Law and Governance, elect to forego all or part of his/her entitlement to any allowances under this scheme.

#### **Payments**

22. Payments shall be made in respect of basic and special responsibility allowances, in instalments of one-twelfth of the amount specified in this scheme.
23. Where a payment of one-twelfth of the amount specified in this scheme in respect of the basic allowance or a special responsibility will result in the Councillor receiving more than the amount to which, by virtue of the basic and special responsibility allowance, he/she is entitled, the payment shall be restricted to such amount as will ensure that no more is paid than the amount to which he/she is entitled.

#### **Publicity**

24. The Council is required to make arrangements for the publication of this Scheme within the Council's area as soon as practicable after it is made.
25. The Council is also required to publish after the end of the year the total sum paid to each Councillor during the year.

#### **Indexation**

26. The following indices are applied to the remuneration and allowances paid to Members of Darlington Borough Council :-

##### **Basic Allowance, SRAs, Civic Allowances and Education Appeals Panel Members Financial Loss Allowance :-**

- Increased by same percentage applied annually to the pay of local government staff, implemented at the start of each municipal year (linked to spinal column point 43 of the NJC scheme)

##### **Dependant Carers Allowance: Elderly/Disabled element :-**

- Indexed to the rate chargeable by the Council for provision of a Home Care Assistant

**Travel :-**

- Mileage rates to be indexed to HMRC rates. Other travel will be reimbursement of actual costs taking into account the most cost effective means of transport available and the convenience of use.

**Subsistence (out of authority only) :-**

- Indexed to the same rates that apply to Officers of Darlington Borough Council, for reimbursement of actual costs up to the maximum rate applicable.

**Basic Allowance 2024/25**

The amount of the Basic Allowance payable to each Member of the Council is **£9,003.87**.

(The Basic Allowance is deemed sufficient to include the costs of incidental expenses and ICT equipment (except the Council provided laptop), consumables and peripherals and in-Borough travel and subsistence costs incurred on the part of Members).

**Special Responsibility Allowance 2024/25**

The following are specified as special responsibility allowances in respect of which special responsibility allowances are payable, and the amounts of those allowances, subject to the provisions contained in this scheme are:

	£
Leader	25,913.04
Deputy Leader (60 per cent of Leader)	15,548.04
Cabinet Member (50 per cent of Leader)	12,956.04
Scrutiny - Chair (40 per cent of Leader)	10,365.00
Chair - Planning (40 per cent of Leader)	10,365.00
Vice-Chair - Planning (25 per cent of Chair of Planning)	2,591.04
Chair - Licensing (40 per cent of Leader)	10,365.00
Vice-Chair - Licensing (25 per cent of Chair of Licensing)	2,591.04
Leader of Opposition (40 per cent of Leader)	10,365.00
Deputy Leader of Opposition (5 per cent of Leader)	1,296.00
Leader of Minority Group (5 per cent of Leader)	1,296.00
Chair - Audit Committee	2,591.04
Audit Committee – Co-optee	867.00

**MAYORAL ALLOWANCES**

The following allowances are payable:-

Mayor	£11,946.00
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Deputy Mayor	£1,008.67
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## Darlington Borough Council

### Dependent Carers' Allowance Scheme

1. A Councillor may claim a Carers' Allowance in accordance with this scheme when they incur additional expenditure for the care of children or dependent relatives whilst undertaking the following 'approved duties' :-
  - a meeting of Council
  - a meeting of Cabinet or its Sub-Committee
  - a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee or a Task and Finish Group
  - a meeting of Planning Applications Committee or its Sub-Committee
  - a meeting of Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committee
  - a meeting of the Audit Committee
  - a meeting of a Subsidiary Body appointed by the Council
  - a Training and Development Session
  - a meeting of an outside body

#### The Childcare Element

2. The childcare element reimburses reasonable expenses incurred for the care of dependent children whilst a Member carries out approved duties as specified in the 2003 Members' Allowances Regulations.
3. The re-imbusement is for actual expenditure incurred up to a maximum of 35 hours in any one week. A Member can therefore claim for care for multiple children but the total number of hours claimed for can be no more than 35 hours in total in any one week. The maximum hours claimable also allows for cancellation of meetings and for childcare that has to be booked in pre-defined blocks of time.

#### Qualifying Criteria

4. The childcare element of the allowance is paid on the basis of self monitoring. A Member must :-
  - (a) self-register with the Council's Monitoring Officer (the Assistant Director – Law and Governance) that they have a dependent child or children under the age of 16 living with them; and
  - (b) claim the allowance on production of a receipt or signed statement, which declares that the childcare has actually been provided by a childminder and not by a member of the immediate family normally resident at the Member's home address.



### **Care for Dependents on Social/Medical Grounds**

5. The DCA also provides for care of dependents on social/medical grounds, such as dependents who are elderly and/or disabled. The social/medical dependent care element of the allowance will be paid at a similar rate chargeable by Darlington Borough Council for provision of a Home Care Assistance.
6. The allowance is to be paid only on the production of a receipt for actual expenditure incurred whilst a Member is on approved duties. As care for dependents with social/medical needs will be provided by professional carers they will be in a position to provide formal receipts in a way that many child carers will not be able to do so.
7. The social/medical element of the Dependants' Carers Allowance is available to Members who have an express need for such an allowance. This express need is to take the form of a written declaration by a Member, which is lodged with the Monitoring Officer (the Assistant Director Law and Governance).

### **Further Restrictions on Claiming the DCA**

8. Members cannot claim for multiple carers for multiple dependents within the same category of care.

## Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

### Subsistence Allowance: Outside the Darlington Borough Council area

The Subsistence Allowances, and the conditions by which they can be claimed, by Members attending approved duties outside the Darlington Borough Council area are based and indexed to the same rates that apply to Council Officers.

Only reasonable claims will be reimbursed (only outside normal working hours in accordance with the Officers scheme) and receipts must be provided.

- **Overnight Accommodation:** Any overnight accommodation required by Members will be reserved and paid for in advance by the Council

### Mileage Allowance – Within Darlington Borough Council Area

There is no change to the provision prohibiting Members claiming Mileage Allowance for attending meetings within the Darlington Borough Council area.

### Mileage Allowance – Outside Darlington Borough Council Area

No change to the mileage rates claimable by Members undertaking approved duties outside the Borough; they are linked to rates applicable to Officers (casual user rate).

The applicable mileage rates are set out below:-

Vehicle Type	First 10,000 business miles in the tax year	Each business mile over 10,000 in the tax year
Cars and vans (including electric or hybrid)	45p	25p
Motor cycles	24p	24p
Bicycles	20p	20p
Passenger Supplement Rate	5p per passenger	5p per passenger

### Approved Duties and Attendance at other Statutory Bodies

A full schedule of approved duties for which Members may claim travel and subsistence allowances (when taking place outside the Borough Boundary is detailed in the schedule below:-

**Travelling and Subsistence Allowances can be claimed for the activities and meetings below when the sessions take place outside the Borough Boundary**

**Travelling and Subsistence Allowances cannot be claimed where the external body pays a travel and subsistence allowance or when has its own Members Allowances Scheme**

### Training and Development Events Courses, Seminars and Conferences Council Appointments

<p>Association of Councillors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) General Management Committee</li> <li>(b) Northern Branch Committee</li> </ul>
<p>Association of North East Councils:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Leaders' and Elected Mayor's Group</li> <li>(b) Collaborative Procurement Sub-Committee</li> <li>(c) North East Cultural Partnership</li> <li>(d) Health and Well Being Chairs Network</li> <li>(e) Resources Task and Finish Review Group</li> </ul>
<p>Combined Fire Authority – <b>Travelling and Subsistence not claimable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Appointments Panel</li> <li>(b) Appeals Committee</li> <li>(c) Audit and Risk Committee</li> <li>(d) Finance and General Purpose Committee</li> <li>(e) Policy and Performance Committee</li> <li>(f) Joint Consultative Committee</li> <li>(g) Salary Review Group</li> </ul> <p><b>Other Bodies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Local Government Association</li> <li>(b) Community Interest Group</li> <li>(c) Vital Fire Solutions Ltd</li> </ul>
<p>Cruse Bereavement Care (Tees Valley)</p>
<p>Darlington and District Town Twinning Association Management Committee</p>

Darlington Community Carnival Committee
Darlington Young Men's Christian Association – Local Management Board
Local Government Association
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
Willow Road Community Centre – Management Committee

### **Cabinet Appointments**

Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities Rail North Ltd. Transport for the North North East Rail Management Unit
Community Library (Cockerton Ltd.)
County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust – Board of Governors
Creative Darlington
Darlington Cares
Darlington Partnership Board
Darlington Railway Museum Trust
Darlington Town Centre Deal Board
Durham County Pension Fund Committee
Family Help Organisation
Fostering Panel
Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve (Associate Member)
North East Ambulance Service
North East Child Poverty Commission
North East Regional Employers Organisation Executive Committee
North East Strategic Migration Partnership
Northern Housing Consortium
Northumbrian Regional Flood and Coastal Committee
Poor Moor Fund
RELATE North East
Teesside International Airport Limited – Board

Teesside International Airport Limited – Consultative Committee
Tees Valley Local Access Forum
Tidy North Regional Consultative Committee

**SCHEDULE 6****Education Appeals Panel Members**

1. Panel Members are entitled to claim any financial loss occurred whilst attending a Panel meeting at the following rates:-
  - £27.65 (meetings up to 4 hours)
  - £55.31 (meetings over 4 hours)
2. Dependant Carers Allowances are payable to Education Appeals Panel Members as detailed in Schedule 4.

**Subsistence Allowances**

3. Only reasonable claims will be reimbursed (only outside normal working hours in accordance with the Officers scheme) and receipts must be provided.

**Mileage Allowances**

4. The applicable mileage rates are set out below:-

<b>Vehicle Type</b>	<b>First 10,000 business miles in the tax year</b>	<b>Each business mile over 10,000 in the tax year</b>
<b>Cars and vans (including electric or hybrid)</b>	45p	25p
<b>Motor cycles</b>	24p	24p
<b>Bicycles</b>	20p	20p
<b>Passenger Supplement Rate</b>	5p per passenger	5p per passenger

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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## **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS 2023**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -**  
**Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To give consideration to the outcome of the recent review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner Election and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election on 2 May 2024, and prior to the UK Parliamentary (General) Election, which must take place prior to January 2025.

#### **Summary**

2. The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires that local authorities conduct reviews of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations within their local authority area. The next compulsory review was due to commence within a sixteen-month period beginning on 1 October 2023, and at the July 2023 Council meeting a timetable for the next compulsory review was agreed.
3. At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council in July 2023, a timetable for the next compulsory Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations was agreed.
4. This report sets out the process of that review and recommends a small number of changes to the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations that have been previously used in past elections.

#### **Recommendation**

5. Council are requested to:-
  - (a) Note the consultation responses received;
  - (b) Approve the changes proposed to the existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner Election and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election on 2 May 2024, and prior to the UK

Parliamentary (General) Election, which must take place prior to January 2025, as follows:

- (i) That the Polling Districts within the Brinkburn and Faverdale Ward, be renamed BFA, BFB, BFC and BFD (as opposed to BFA(S), BFA(D), BFB and BFC respectively).
  - (ii) That the name of the Polling Place at The Rydal Academy, used in Polling Districts BLB and BLC, reflected the use of the Community Hub in the title.
  - (iii) That St. Mary's Church, Piercebridge remain listed as the Polling Place for Polling District HCG, however that the Polling Station be sited at an alternative Polling Place until the works to upgrade the Church to ensure that it is fit for purpose are completed.
  - (iv) That an amendment to the North Western boundary between Polling District HUA and HUB be made. The North Western boundary currently follows Snipe Lane, to the right of Blackwell Moor Farm and Snipe Meadows, up to the A66. The amendment would move the boundary further west to follow the railway line, which would result in Blackwell Moor Farm, Snipe Meadows and a few other properties, together with the development comprising of Gill Beck Lane, Ash Brook Lane, Elder Brook Avenue and Buckthorn Court, moving from Polling District HUA to Polling District HUB. This would have no impact on the number of voters across the Ward, however would mean a change in Polling Station for a small number of voters. The amendment can be viewed at [Hurworth Ward and Polling Districts \(darlington.gov.uk\)](http://darlington.gov.uk/HurworthWardandPollingDistricts).
  - (v) That the use of the Skerne Park Youth and Community Centre as a Polling Place in Polling District PEE be discontinued, and that the electors resident in Polling District PEE vote in the Polling Place at The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington.
  - (vi) That the electors from Polling Districts SME, SMG and SMH now vote at Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge, as opposed to St. Anne's Church Hall on Welbeck Avenue, Darlington.
- (c) Authorise the publication of the proposals for Polling Places, as set out in **(Appendix D)**.

#### Reasons

- (a) To ensure that polling places and polling stations are accessible to voters and have reasonable facilities for voting.



- (b) To comply with the requirements of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Equality Act 2010 and the Elections Act 2022.
- (c) To enable the decisions to be made, publicised and implemented in good time for the elections scheduled for May 2024.

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

**Background Papers:**

Council Report, of 20 July 2023, entitled ‘Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023’.

Lynne Wood: Extension 5803

S17 Crime and Disorder	The report has no direct impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to health and wellbeing which this report needs to address.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues relating to carbon impact and climate change.
Diversity	All polling places are assessed to ensure that they are accessible for voters who have a disability.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected, but in particular the wards where polling places or stations change (as set out in the recommendations).
Groups Affected	The proposals affect Darlington voters.
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not change the Council’s budget or Policy Framework but needs to be considered by Council.
Key Decision	The is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This not an executive decision.
Council Plan	There report has no links to the Council Plan.
Efficiency	There are no efficiency proposals identified as part of this review.
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**

**Timetable of the Review**

7. The Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983), as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, requires that local authorities conduct reviews of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations within their local authority area.

8. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 subsequently governs the timing of compulsory Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station Reviews, with the next compulsory review due to commence within the sixteen-month period beginning on 1 October 2023.
9. At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council in July 2023, a timetable for the next compulsory Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations was agreed.
10. A Notice advising of the formal start of the review was placed on the Council's website on Monday, 2 October 2023. All Members of the Council, local political groups, the Members of Parliament (MPs) for the constituencies of Darlington and Sedgefield, Darlington Association on Disability, and a number of Parish Councils and community groups were also advised that a review was taking place, and that representations could be made accordingly.
11. Those minded to submit representations which objected to the current Polling Places were encouraged to suggest alternative venues within the Polling District. In addition, Presiding Officers, Polling Station Inspectors, stakeholders and residents of the Borough were invited to comment.
12. Representations were invited in writing and via e-mail, with information placed on the Council's website (<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/elections/polling-districts-places-and-stations-review/>) and social media profiles.
13. The initial consultation period ran from Monday 2 October 2023 to Sunday 12 November 2023, and encouraged respondents to comment on our existing Polling Districts and Polling Places (**Appendix A**), or make suggestions as to alternative provision.
14. The initial proposals did not recommend any changes to Polling Districts, as it was considered that the current boundaries are well-defined and reflect natural boundaries within each area (main thoroughfares, railway lines, rivers, etc.). We have not been informed of any major obstacles in place that would prohibit electors from reaching their Polling Place.
15. Between 13 November and 24 November 2023, draft recommendations were formulated taking into consideration the representations received, any suggested alternative places submitted, premises inspections, the provisions within the Elections Act 2022, the draft recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023 and the comments of the Returning Officer.
16. A further period of consultation on those draft recommendations then took place between 27 November 2023 and Sunday, 7 January 2024.

#### **Representations received during the initial consultation stage**

17. During the initial consultation stage, representations were received from one Presiding Officer, a representative of one of our Polling Places, a representative of another venue

offering their services, Hurworth Parish Council and seven Members of the Public. The representations are reflected in **Appendix B**, together with the comments of Officers, and are summarised below.

18. The representation received from the Presiding Officer related to the use of Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club and affirmed that the building remained a suitable venue for use as a Polling Place, in the view of that Presiding Officer.
19. The representation from a representative of the Walworth Castle Hotel reaffirmed their commitment to allowing the building to be used as a Polling Place.
20. A representation was received from the Chair of Darlington Mowden Park RFC offering the use of the Darlington Arena as a venue for a Polling Place. Darlington Arena is situated in the Eastbourne Ward, and more specifically within Polling District EAC, which is currently served by a Polling Place at Pilmoor Green Community Centre. The existing Polling Place is much more central to the residential area for Polling District EAC, than the Darlington Arena, and Pilmoor Green Community Centre offers a greater security of tenure for unscheduled elections.
21. The representations from Hurworth Parish Council and the seven Members of the Public centred on the use of Hurworth Primary School as a Polling Place, with the suggestion made that the Council use The Grange Community Centre as an alternative Polling Place.
22. Officers visited The Grange Community Centre during the interim review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations in 2022, and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place. However, concern was expressed at that time as The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria outlined by the Electoral Commission when considering the siting of Polling Places is that the location should provide the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. Officers also remained conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road and at Elderbrook, and again, Hurworth Primary School provides a much more convenient Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.
23. Concerns were expressed by residents that the school closes on a Polling Day. In terms of the decision to close, this is one for the Head Teacher and should be based on whether the school can safely operate whilst being used as a Polling Place. If a school chooses to close, the Department for Education offer schools advice on how this can be made up. In terms of scheduled elections, Hurworth Primary School use one of their allocated INSET days to allow teaching staff to attend for training or to complete administrative tasks.

## Draft Recommendations

24. Taking these representations and views into consideration, and giving consideration to the provisions within the Elections Act 2022 and the draft recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023, we reviewed our findings between Monday 13 November 2023 and Friday 24 November 2023, and revised our draft recommendations, as set out in **Appendix C**.
25. Our draft recommendations proposed the following changes:
- (a) The renaming of the Polling Districts within the Brinkburn and Faverdale Ward, changing the names from BFA(S), BFA(D), BFB and BFC to BFA, BFB, BFC and BFD, to reflect the fact that this Ward would no longer partly sit in the Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituency. We were, unfortunately, unable to recommend the combination of the split Polling District BFA(S) and BFA(D), as BFA(S) remains 'parished' and must remain a Polling District in its own right.
  - (b) That the name of the Polling Place at The Rydal Academy, used in Polling Districts BLB and BLC, reflected the use of the Community Hub in the title.
  - (c) The discontinued use of St. Mary's Church in Piercebridge as a Polling Place in Polling District HCG, with those electors registered to vote in Polling District HCG moved to St. Edwin's Church, The Green, High Coniscliffe, alongside the electors from Polling Districts HCH and HCI. It is Officers view that St. Mary's Church is currently no longer fit for purpose as a Polling Place. The building lacks heating and toilet facilities, with a portaloos sited outside the Church for staff on Polling Days. There are also issues with the lighting and electrics within the Church, and concerns about disabled access.
  - (d) A small amendment to the Northern boundary between Polling District HUA and HUB – the Northern boundary currently follows Snipe Lane, to the right of Blackwell Moor Farm and Snipe Meadows, up to the A66. Our proposal is to move the boundary further west to follow the railway line, which would result in Blackwell Moor Farm, Snipe Meadows and a few other properties, together with the development comprising of Gill Beck Lane, Ash Brook Lane, Elder Brook Avenue and Buckthorn Court, moving from Polling District HUA to Polling District HUB. This would have no impact on the number of voters across the Ward, however would mean a change in Polling Station for a small number of voters. The amendment can be viewed at [Hurworth Ward and Polling Districts \(darlington.gov.uk\)](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/hurworth-ward-and-polling-districts)
  - (e) The discontinued use of the Skerne Park Youth and Community Centre as a Polling Place in Polling District PEE. Polling District PEE exists as it currently sits in the Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituency. However, once the recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023 are enacted it will become part of the Darlington County Constituency, and therefore there will be no reason to separate the electors in Polling District PED and Polling District PEE, so our proposal is that both sets of electors vote at The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington.

- (f) That the electors from Polling Districts SME, SMG and SMH now vote at Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge, as opposed to St. Anne's Church Hall on Welbeck Avenue, Darlington. Electors living in the Sadberge and Middleton St. George Ward will no longer vote in the Darlington Constituency following the enactment of the recommendations in the Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023, but will instead vote in the Stockton West County Constituency. Keeping the electors of Polling Districts SME, SMG and SMH at St. Anne's Church Hall would risk the cross-pollination of Ballot Papers with those electors from Polling District HSC, who also vote at the venue. Separating the voters accordingly eliminates that risk.
26. Whilst the Returning Officer appreciated the depth of concern expressed by those who submitted representations in relation to the use of Hurworth Primary School, and the suggested use of The Grange Community Centre, the school continues to provide a much more convenient location for the vast majority of the residents in Polling District HUB. It is felt that it may disenfranchise the electors of Polling District HUB, as the existing Polling Station at Hurworth Primary School is central to the main residential area within the Polling District. It should also be noted that the school themselves have not objected to being used as a Polling Place.
27. In terms of the use of schools, the Representation of the People Act 1983 allows the Returning Officer to use schools and public rooms, free of charge, for the purposes of taking the poll:

*'Use of schools and public rooms*

*22 (1) The Returning Officer may use, free of charge, for the purpose of taking the poll –*

*(a) a room in a school to which this rule applies;*

*(b) a room the expense of maintaining which is payable out of any rate. This rule applies:*

*(i) in England and Wales, to a school maintained or assisted by a local education authority or a school in respect of which grants are made out of moneys provided by Parliament to the person or body of persons responsible for the management of the school.'*

28. This does not necessarily mean that a school must close, and the Elections Team have worked closely with schools and colleges across the Borough in an attempt to keep many schools fully, or partially, open, where suitable safeguarding arrangements can be implemented.
29. Guidance received from the Department for Education states:

*"Schools which need to close as a result of being used as Polling Stations can move to alternative accommodation or make up the lost day by other means. The lost day could be made up at the beginning or end of a term, or a training day could be arranged on the day of the poll if the head teacher or governors so wish."*

30. Our rationale for the proposed changes was communicated to the relevant Ward Councillors, and our draft recommendations were published on the Council's website on Monday 27 November 2023, for further consultation, together with the observations of the Returning Officer and the situation of Polling Stations within Polling Places, and a link to the relevant webpages was once again circulated to interested parties.

#### **Further Representations Received**

31. As part of the second phase of consultation the following representations were received:

##### **St. Mary's Church, Piercebridge**

32. Concerns were raised by the Parish Council via the Ward Councillor as to the loss of the Polling Place in Polling District HCG, and Officers were advised that works were planned to install a toilet, kitchen, heating, upgrade the electrics and improve external lighting. Officers were initially informed that work would be started early in the New Year (2024), with a completion date of Easter 2024. It is anticipated that this upgrade would ensure that the building was fit for purpose and allow the Church to continue to be used as a Polling Place.
33. Unfortunately, following the meeting of Piercebridge Parish Council on Monday 8 January 2024, and a St. Mary's Refurbishment Project meeting, it has been confirmed that the upgrade to the Church will not be made until Autumn 2024.
34. Officers propose that St. Mary's Church, Piercebridge remain listed as the Polling Place for Polling District HCG, however that the Polling Station be sited at an alternative Polling Place until the works to upgrade the Church are completed.

##### **Havelock Centre, Katherine Street, Darlington**

35. On 4 January 2024, a suggestion to the use of the Havelock Centre, Katherine Street, Darlington was submitted by the Ward Councillor to alleviate an issue in Polling District NRD. Officers were informed that residents living on the southern side of the Polling District were experiencing difficulties voting at Northwood Primary School as the school closed a side gate during the day resulting in residents having to walk up to North Road, along to St. Paul's Terrace and then down to the school.
36. The Havelock Centre was visited on Monday 8 January 2024, and it was concluded that the venue would be a suitable Polling Place. The Scheme Manager provided assurance that the premises fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, in terms of disabled accessibility, and building certainly has sufficient space to accommodate the additional duties contained within the Elections Act 2022. For comparison, the existing Polling Place at Northwood Primary School also complies with the Equality Act 2010, and would have sufficient space to accommodate the additional duties imposed by the Elections Act 2022.

37. In addition to Polling District NRD, Northwood Primary School does also serve Polling District NRC, and in Officers view, is therefore a more attractive option as a Polling Place. It should be noted that Northwood Primary School also remains open and operational during Polling Days. Officers are willing to liaise with the school to ascertain whether the aforementioned gate can remain open on Polling Days to improve residents' access arrangements.

#### **Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington**

38. It was drawn to Officers' attention on 10 January 2024 that Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington required some repairs and may be subject to a possible sale. The Booking Agent for the Hall was contacted, and has been assured that, although the building is starting to show its age, and that work is ongoing to look at what is needed to maintain the Hall, the Hall remains available for hire for the foreseeable future.

#### **Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington**

39. A report was taken to Cabinet on Tuesday 9 January 2024, which proposed changes to the operational arrangements to Haughton Children's Centre. The work is not planned to start until after exams have taken place in Summer 2024, so the premises will be available for the forthcoming Police and Crime Commissioner Election and Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Election on 2 May 2024. The work is planned for eight weeks, and so the venue should be available once again after the school holidays.

#### **Other Representations Received**

40. The Clerk of Bishopton Parish Council advised that the Parish Council had no comments to make on the proposals.

#### **Legislation**

41. The Equality Act 2010 prohibits local authorities from doing anything that constitutes unlawful discrimination, including over the provision of services when exercising public functions and requires reasonable adjustments to enable disabled people to be able to vote.
42. The Elections Act 2022 includes voter ID requirements for people who vote in person. Suitable arrangements will need to be available at polling places to allow people who choose to wear a face covering to have their identity checked in a way that respects privacy, religious or cultural beliefs.

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## Existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Polling District	Polling Place Address	Post Code	Polling Station Number	Polling Station Voters (as at October 2023)
<a href="#">BFA (D)</a> [pdf document]	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	1	1257
<a href="#">BFA (S)</a> [pdf document]	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	2	8
<a href="#">BFB</a> [pdf document]	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	3	1229
<a href="#">BFC</a> [pdf document]	Darlington Railway Athletic Club (Snooker Room), Brinkburn Road, Darlington	DL3 9LF	4	1798
<a href="#">BLA</a> [pdf document]	King William Street Community Centre, King William Street, Darlington	DL1 4YS	5	747
<a href="#">BLB</a> [pdf document]	Rydal Academy, Rydal Road, Darlington	DL1 4BH	6	1003
<a href="#">BLC</a> [pdf document]	Rydal Academy, Rydal Road, Darlington	DL1 4BH	7	1124
<a href="#">BLD</a> [pdf document]	St. John's Church of England Academy, Fenby Avenue, Darlington	DL1 4UB	8	734
<a href="#">CKA</a> [pdf document]	Cockerton Library, Woodland Road, Darlington	DL3 9AA	9	1662
<a href="#">CKB</a> [pdf document]	'Little Learners', Mount Pleasant Primary School, Newton Lane, Darlington	DL3 9HE	10	1160

<a href="#">CKC</a> [pdf document]	The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Eggleston View, Darlington	DL3 9SH	11	931
<a href="#">COA</a> [pdf document]	Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Sports Field, Abbey Road, Darlington	DL3 7RD	12	1018
<a href="#">COB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">COC</a> [pdf document]	Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Sports Field, Abbey Road, Darlington	DL3 7RD	13	1488
<a href="#">EAA</a> [pdf document]	Geneva Road Evangelical Baptist Church, Geneva Road Darlington	DL1 4HS	14	813
<a href="#">EAB</a> [pdf document]	Firthmoor Community Centre, Burnside Road, Darlington	DL1 4SU	15	1641
<a href="#">EAC</a> [pdf document]	Pilmoor Green Community Centre, West Moor Road, Darlington	DL1 4LN	16	1234
<a href="#">HCA</a> [pdf document]	Heighington Village Hall, Heighington	DL5 6QX	17	1778
<a href="#">HCB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCE</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCF</a> [pdf document]	Walworth Castle Hotel, Walworth	DL2 2LY	18	143
<a href="#">HCC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCD</a> [pdf document]	Summerhouse Village Hall, Summerhouse	DL2 3UD	19	97
<a href="#">HCG</a> [pdf document]	St. Mary's Church, The Green, Piercebridge	DL2 3SH	20	87
<a href="#">HCH</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCI</a> [pdf document]	St. Edwin's Church, The Green, High Coniscliffe	DL2 2LJ	21	596

<a href="#">HCI</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCK</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	22	191
<a href="#">HCL</a> [pdf document]	Brafferton Village Hall, Brafferton	DL1 3LB	23	94
<a href="#">HHA</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	24	688
<a href="#">HHB</a> [pdf document]	Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club, Salters Lane North, Darlington	DL1 3DT	25	2009
<a href="#">HHC</a> [pdf document]	D.S.R.M. Social Club, Longfield Road, Darlington	DL3 0HX	26	1046
<a href="#">HKA</a> [pdf document]	Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington	DL3 8JP	27	754
<a href="#">HKB</a> [pdf document]	Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington	DL3 8JP	28	1286
<a href="#">HSA</a> [pdf document]	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN	29	1464
<a href="#">HSB</a> [pdf document]	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN	30	912
<a href="#">HSC</a> [pdf document]	St. Anne's Church Hall, Welbeck Avenue, Darlington	DL1 2DR	31	1324
<a href="#">HUA</a> [pdf document]	Linden Court, Linden Drive, Hurworth Place	DL2 2DL	32	735
<a href="#">HUB</a> [pdf document]	Hurworth Primary School, Westfield Drive, Hurworth	DL2 2ET	33	1484
<a href="#">HUC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HUD</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HUE</a> [pdf document]	The Reading Room, Neasham, Darlington	DL2 1PH	34	325

<a href="#">MOA</a> [pdf document]	Mowden Junior School (Staff Room), Federation of Mowden Schools, Conyers Avenue, Darlington	DL3 9QG	35	945
<a href="#">MOB</a> [pdf document]	Mowden Junior School (Staff Room), Federation of Mowden Schools, Conyers Avenue, Darlington	DL3 9QG	36	1159
<a href="#">NGA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">NGB</a> [pdf document]	Corporation Road Community Primary School, Corporation Road, Darlington	DL3 6AR	37	1814
<a href="#">NGC</a> [pdf document]	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG	38	277
<a href="#">NRA</a> [pdf document]	St. Thomas Aquinas Church Hall, North Road, Darlington	DL1 2PU	39	914
<a href="#">NRB</a> [pdf document]	Rise Carr College, Eldon Street, Darlington	DL3 0NS	40	961
<a href="#">NRC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">NRD</a> [pdf document]	Northwood Primary School, Pendleton Road South, Darlington	DL1 2HF	41	1564
<a href="#">PEA</a> [pdf document]	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF	42	499
<a href="#">PEB</a> [pdf document]	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG	43	442
<a href="#">PEC</a> [pdf document]	St. Columba's Church and the Clifton Centre, Clifton Avenue, Darlington	DL1 5EE	44	1441
<a href="#">PED</a> [pdf document]	The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington	DL1 5AJ	45	1246
<a href="#">PEE</a> [pdf document]	Skerne Park Youth and Community Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington	DL1 5AP	46	152

<a href="#">PIA</a> [pdf document]	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ	47	1113
<a href="#">PIB</a> [pdf document]	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ	48	908
<a href="#">PIC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PID</a> [pdf document]	Reid Street Primary School, Reid Street, Darlington	DL3 6EX	49	1459
<a href="#">PWA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PWB</a> [pdf document]	All Saint's Millennium Centre, Ravensdale Road, Darlington	DL3 8DT	50	1537
<a href="#">PWC</a> [pdf document]	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF	51	1110
<a href="#">RLA</a> [pdf document]	Red Hall Community Centre, Headingley Crescent, Darlington	DL1 2ST	52	805
<a href="#">RLB</a> [pdf document]	St. Herbert's Church Hall, Yarm Road, Darlington	DL1 1BD	53	1805
<a href="#">SMA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMC</a> [pdf document]	Bishopton Village Hall, Church View, Bishopton	TS21 1HB	54	362
<a href="#">SMD</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMF</a> [pdf document]	Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge	DL2 1SB	55	484
<a href="#">SME</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMG</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMH</a> [pdf document]	St. Anne's Church Hall, Welbeck Avenue, Darlington	DL1 2DR	56	129

<a href="#">SMI</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	57	483
<a href="#">SMJ</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	58	2585
<a href="#">STA</a> [pdf document]	St. James the Great Church Hall, Barton Street, Darlington, (Entrance on Grey Street)	DL1 2LD	59	967
<a href="#">STB</a> [pdf document]	Eastbourne Sports Complex, Bourne Avenue (off Hundens Lane), Darlington	DL1 1LJ	60	1553
<a href="#">WHA</a> [pdf document]	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT	61	1436
<a href="#">WHB</a> [pdf document]	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT	62	784

# Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review 2023

## Representations received:

Date and time of receipt	From	Polling District / Polling Place	Representation	Comments from Officers
6.20pm, Monday, 2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2023	David Coates (Presiding Officer)	Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club	Fine with mine Harrowgate Club from a Presiding Officer perspective.	Officers are satisfied that Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club continues to provide a viable option as a Polling Place.
10.06am, Tuesday, 3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2023	Rachel Swain (Walworth Castle Hotel)	Walworth Castle Hotel	We are still happy for DBC to use the hotel as a polling station if required.	Officers are satisfied that Walworth Castle Hotel continues to provide a viable option as a Polling Place.
1.11pm, Wednesday, 4 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Mick Birch, Chairman, Darlington Mowden Park RFC	Eastbourne Ward	I would like to offer the Darlington Arena to be considered as a possible location as a polling Station. The Darlington Arena has a variety of easily accessible areas with unlimited easy access car parking. I	Darlington Arena is situated in Polling District EAC, which is currently served by a Polling Place at Pilmoor Green Community Centre. The current Polling Place is much more central to the residential area than the Darlington

			look forward to hearing your thoughts.	Arena.
6.46pm, Wednesday, 4 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Judith Myers	Hurworth Primary School	My only comment around the review is that I think it is disappointing that students have to miss out on a day of education when Hurworth Grange is up the road that could be used as a polling station, rather than the primary school. Given the emphasis on attendance it seems silly to use a school when there is an alternative.	Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.  Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.
1.51pm, Tuesday,	Hurworth Parish	Hurworth Ward	In the past the DBC Election team has visited Hurworth Grange, and after their	Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim



<p>10<sup>th</sup> October 2023</p>	<p>Council</p>		<p>inspection confirmed that it would be a suitable location for a Polling Station, as there are suitable rooms, disabled entrances and toilets plus ample parking facilities.</p> <p>Hurworth Grange is owned by Hurworth Parish Council, and we have no objection to DBC using this facility for forthcoming elections.</p> <p>Hurworth Parish has expanded quite appreciably over the last seven years, and with the growing Elderbrook estate opposite the Darlington Arena, and Hurworth Springs at Skybridge, it now quite widespread.</p> <p>The view of the Parish Council is that you are welcome to utilise Hurworth Grange, but we do not wish to influence your committee, if you think it is more appropriate to use the school premises and Linden Court.</p> <p>Individuals may contact you independently with their views, which is quite natural.</p>	<p>review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.</p>
<p>7.37pm,</p>	<p>Laura</p>	<p>Hurworth Primary</p>	<p>I wanted to write to you as a parent from</p>	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community</p>

<p>Saturday, 21st October 2023</p>	<p>Walton</p>	<p>School</p>	<p>Hurworth Primary School And as the chair on school’s PTA.</p> <p>I would like to raise my concerns about using the school as the polling station and closing it for the day to the pupils</p> <p>I am concerned they have already had 8 days off due to national strike days</p> <p>They missed so much education through lockdowns with Covid and then your wanting to close the school to use it for the village’s polling day.</p> <p>I do not know why the primary school has been a venue anyway when it means 210 pupils missing an educational school day for it and all the parents that work and have to find alternative childcare for that day or take time off work.</p> <p>Especially as there are other very suitable options/venues to use within the village location my suggestions would be The Grange community centre or the mustard tree cafe/ Methodist chapel</p> <p>Both these venues have disabled access,</p>	<p>Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.</p> <p>As much as possible, Officers must seek venues that offer security of tenure, especially in relation to snap/unplanned elections. Unfortunately, businesses such</p>
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			<p>parking facilities and toilets and function rooms as well.</p> <p>There is also the village hall, however I don't think this has disabled access.</p> <p>There is also a number of pubs and the local workings men's club has a large function room.</p> <p>I would be very disappointed if the school is used again as the polling station and I am speaking on behalf of many parents as they have mentioned their concerns to me as well within my role as the PTA chair.</p>	<p>as the Mustard Tree Café might not be in a position to offer us that security of tenure.</p> <p>In terms of the loss of a school day, the Department for Education offer schools advice on how this can be made up or averted.</p>
7.51pm, Saturday, 21st October 2023	Nicole McLaren	Hurworth Primary School	<p>I would like to formally request that you consider moving the Hurworth on Tees polling station it is currently located at the primary school which means that every polling day all of the children have to miss a day of school. This has a huge impact on the local community as parents have to arrange alternative childcare arrangements. I would propose it is moved to the Grange community centre which is partially owned I believe by the parish council. There is parking onsite, plenty of room, it is fully accessible for people in wheelchairs or have mobility issues and acts as a hub for the community. It would also not adversely</p>	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School</p>

			<p>affect a good proportion of the residents and not result in further disruption of our children who have missed enough school as a result of strike action and Covid restrictions.</p>	<p>within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.</p>
<p>10.09pm, Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023</p>	<p>Anne-Marie Hall</p>	<p>Hurworth Primary School</p>	<p>I am writing to implore you to consider changing the venue for the polling station for Hurworth residents.</p> <p>Currently it is at Hurworth Primary School causing the school to shut for the day. Due to Covid and teacher strikes the children are finally having their first full year, in four years, of education. Have the polling station there is another excuse to push the children's education aside for something that could be done in another venue in the village.</p> <p>I would suggest either the Grange Community Centre that has access for all abilities or All Saints Church that also has access for all abilities, however parking is limited around the church.</p>	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill</p>

				Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.
9.56am, Tuesday, 24 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	A. J. Terry	Hurworth Primary School	Please stop the disruption of my child's education and move the Hurworth on Tees polling station from the primary school to the grange community centre. It has disabled access too.	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The</p>

				<p>Grange Community Centre.</p> <p>In terms of the loss of a school day, the Department for Education offer schools advice on how this can be made up or averted.</p>
<p>10.23am, Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023</p>	<p>Karen Wesson</p>	<p>Hurworth Primary School</p>	<p>I am writing to ask that Hurworth Primary School is not used as a Polling Station.</p> <p>Closing the school is very disruptive for the children. As the Special Guardian for a child at the school I know that missing a day has a negative impact on the childrens' education and wellbeing.</p> <p>There are other suitable places in the village which could be used instead of the primary school, for example, Hurworth Grange.</p> <p>I find it ridiculous that parents can be fined if their child doesn't attend school, but by closing a school for an election the state is essentially condoning children missing school. This is a very mixed message.</p>	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill Road, and again, Hurworth Primary</p>

				<p>School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.</p> <p>In terms of the loss of a school day, the Department for Education offer schools advice on how this can be made up or averted.</p>
10.31am, Tuesday, 24 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Chris Barron	Hurworth Primary School	<p>As a parent of a child attending Hurworth Primary School, I wanted to register my opinion that the school, located on Westfield Drive, is a poor choice of venue as the village’s usual polling station.</p> <p>Every election, it means hundreds of children losing a day from their education, plus a dramatic knock-on effect for parents having to arrange additional childcare or time away from work. Given the current cost of living crisis, this additional expense can be significant.</p> <p>This is unnecessarily disruptive.</p> <p>A far better choice of venue would be Hurworth Grange Community Centre, which has sufficient interior space and car parking, is disabled accessible, and is</p>	<p>Officers visited The Grange Community Centre last year during the interim review and we were satisfied that the venue in itself would be suitable as a Polling Place.</p> <p>Our only slight concern is that The Grange Community Centre sits on the very western boundary of Polling District HUB. One of the criteria we are required to consider when establishing Polling Places is a location which provides the greatest convenience to local residents. Hurworth Primary School is sited central to the Polling District, sitting in the heart of one of the main housing estates. The position of Hurworth Primary School within the Polling District makes it very convenient for residents to attend, either on foot or by car, and cast their vote. We are also conscious of the new housing developments on Roundhill</p>

			<p>sufficiently central that it could potentially even serve as the village's sole polling station, negating the need to run a second station in Hurworth Place.</p> <p>Furthermore, as our local dedicated community centre, functioning as a polling station is surely within its core mission.</p> <p>For these reasons, I think it would be sensible to move the polling station from Hurworth Primary School to Hurworth Grange in time for the next polling day.</p>	<p>Road, and again, Hurworth Primary School would provide a closer Polling Place for these residents than The Grange Community Centre.</p> <p>In terms of the loss of a school day, the Department for Education offer schools advice on how this can be made up or averted.</p>
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## Draft Recommendations - Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Polling District	Polling Place Address	Post Code	Polling Station Number	Polling Station Voters (as at October 2023)
<a href="#">BFA</a>	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	1	8
<a href="#">BFB</a>	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	1	1257
<a href="#">BFC</a>	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF	2	1229
<a href="#">BFD</a>	Darlington Railway Athletic Club (Snooker Room), Brinkburn Road, Darlington	DL3 9LF	3	1798
<a href="#">BLA</a> [pdf document]	King William Street Community Centre, King William Street, Darlington	DL1 4YS	4	747
<a href="#">BLB</a> [pdf document]; <a href="#">BLC</a> [pdf document]	Community Hub, The Rydal Academy, Rydal Road, Darlington	DL1 4BH	5	2127

<a href="#">BLD</a> [pdf document]	St. John's Church of England Academy, Fenby Avenue, Darlington	DL1 4UB	6	734
<a href="#">CKA</a> [pdf document]	Cockerton Library, Woodland Road, Darlington	DL3 9AA	7	1662
<a href="#">CKB</a> [pdf document]	'Little Learners', Mount Pleasant Primary School, Newton Lane, Darlington	DL3 9HE	8	1160
<a href="#">CKC</a> [pdf document]	The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Eggleston View, Darlington	DL3 9SH	9	931
<a href="#">COA</a> [pdf document]	Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Sports Field, Abbey Road, Darlington	DL3 7RD	10	1018
<a href="#">COB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">COC</a> [pdf document]	Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Sports Field, Abbey Road, Darlington	DL3 7RD	11	1488
<a href="#">EAA</a> [pdf document]	Geneva Road Evangelical Baptist Church, Geneva Road Darlington	DL1 4HS	12	813
<a href="#">EAB</a> [pdf document]	Firthmoor Community Centre, Burnside Road, Darlington	DL1 4SU	13	1641
<a href="#">EAC</a> [pdf document]	Pilmoor Green Community Centre, West Moor Road, Darlington	DL1 4LN	14	1234

<a href="#">HCA</a> [pdf document]	Heighington Village Hall, Heighington	DL5 6QX	15	1778
<a href="#">HCB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCE</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCF</a> [pdf document]	Walworth Castle Hotel, Walworth	DL2 2LY	16	143
<a href="#">HCC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCD</a> [pdf document]	Summerhouse Village Hall, Summerhouse	DL2 3UD	17	97
<a href="#">HCG</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCH</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCI</a> [pdf document]	St. Edwin's Church, The Green, High Coniscliffe	DL2 2LJ	18	683
<a href="#">HCJ</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCK</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	19	191
<a href="#">HCL</a> [pdf document]	Brafferton Village Hall, Brafferton	DL1 3LB	20	94
<a href="#">HHA</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	21	688
<a href="#">HHB</a> [pdf document]	Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club, Salters Lane North, Darlington	DL1 3DT	22	2009

<a href="#">HHC</a> [pdf document]	D.S.R.M. Social Club, Longfield Road, Darlington	DL3 0HX	23	1046
<a href="#">HKA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HKB</a> [pdf document]	Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington	DL3 8JP	24	2040
<a href="#">HSA</a> [pdf document]	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN	25	1464
<a href="#">HSB</a> [pdf document]	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN	26	912
<a href="#">HSC</a> [pdf document]	St. Anne's Church Hall, Welbeck Avenue, Darlington	DL1 2DR	27	1324
<a href="#">HUA</a>	Linden Court, Linden Drive, Hurworth Place	DL2 2DL	28	735
<a href="#">HUB</a>	Hurworth Primary School, Westfield Drive, Hurworth	DL2 2ET	29	1484
<a href="#">HUC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HUD</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HUE</a> [pdf document]	The Reading Room, Neasham, Darlington	DL2 1PH	30	325
<a href="#">MOA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">MOB</a> [pdf document]	Mowden Junior School (Staff Room), Federation of Mowden Schools, Conyers Avenue, Darlington	DL3 9QG	31	2104
<a href="#">NGA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">NGB</a> [pdf document]	Corporation Road Community Primary School, Corporation Road, Darlington	DL3 6AR	32	1814
<a href="#">NGC</a> [pdf document]	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG	33	277

<a href="#">NRA</a> [pdf document]	St. Thomas Aquinas Church Hall, North Road, Darlington	DL1 2PU	34	914
<a href="#">NRB</a> [pdf document]	Rise Carr College, Eldon Street, Darlington	DL3 0NS	35	961
<a href="#">NRC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">NRD</a> [pdf document]	Northwood Primary School, Pendleton Road South, Darlington	DL1 2HF	36	1564
<a href="#">PEA</a> [pdf document]	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF	37	499
<a href="#">PEB</a> [pdf document]	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG	38	442
<a href="#">PEC</a> [pdf document]	St. Columba's Church and the Clifton Centre, Clifton Avenue, Darlington	DL1 5EE	39	1441
<a href="#">PED</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PEE</a> [pdf document]	The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington	DL1 5AJ	40	1398
<a href="#">PIA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PIB</a> [pdf document]	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ	41	2025
<a href="#">PIC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PID</a> [pdf document]	Reid Street Primary School, Reid Street, Darlington	DL3 6EX	42	1459
<a href="#">PWA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PWB</a> [pdf document]	All Saint's Millennium Centre, Ravensdale Road, Darlington	DL3 8DT	43	1537

<a href="#">PWC</a> [pdf document]	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF	44	1110
<a href="#">RLA</a> [pdf document]	Red Hall Community Centre, Headingley Crescent, Darlington	DL1 2ST	45	805
<a href="#">RLB</a> [pdf document]	St. Herbert's Church Hall, Yarm Road, Darlington	DL1 1BD	46	1805
<a href="#">SMA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMC</a> [pdf document]	Bishopton Village Hall, Church View, Bishopton	TS21 1HB	47	362
<a href="#">SMD</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMF</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SME</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMG</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMH</a> [pdf document]	Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge	DL2 1SB	48	613
<a href="#">SMI</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	49	483
<a href="#">SMJ</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	50	2585
<a href="#">STA</a> [pdf document]	St. James the Great Church Hall, Barton Street, Darlington, (Entrance on Grey Street)	DL1 2LD	51	967
<a href="#">STB</a> [pdf document]	Eastbourne Sports Complex, Bourne Avenue (off Hundens Lane), Darlington	DL1 1LJ	52	1553
<a href="#">WHA</a> [pdf document]; <a href="#">WHB</a> [pdf document]	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT	53	2220

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## Final Recommendations - Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

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<a href="#">HCA</a> [pdf document]	Heighington Village Hall, Heighington	DL5 6QX	15	1778
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<a href="#">HCG</a> [pdf document]	St. Mary's Church, Piercebridge	DL2 3SH	18	87
<a href="#">HCH</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCI</a> [pdf document]	St. Edwin's Church, The Green, High Coniscliffe	DL2 2LJ	19	596
<a href="#">HCI</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">HCK</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	20	191
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<a href="#">HHA</a> [pdf document]	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA	22	688

<a href="#">HHB</a> [pdf document]	Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club, Salters Lane North, Darlington	DL1 3DT	23	2009
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<a href="#">NGA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">NGB</a> [pdf document]	Corporation Road Community Primary School, Corporation Road, Darlington	DL3 6AR	33	1814

<a href="#">NGC</a> [pdf document]	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG	34	277
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<a href="#">PED</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PEE</a> [pdf document]	The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington	DL1 5AJ	41	1398
<a href="#">PIA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PIB</a> [pdf document]	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ	42	2025
<a href="#">PIC</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PID</a> [pdf document]	Reid Street Primary School, Reid Street, Darlington	DL3 6EX	43	1459
<a href="#">PWA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">PWB</a> [pdf document]	All Saint's Millennium Centre, Ravensdale Road, Darlington	DL3 8DT	44	1537

document]				
<a href="#">PWC</a> [pdf document]	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF	45	1110
<a href="#">RLA</a> [pdf document]	Red Hall Community Centre, Headingley Crescent, Darlington	DL1 2ST	46	805
<a href="#">RLB</a> [pdf document]	St. Herbert's Church Hall, Yarm Road, Darlington	DL1 1BD	47	1805
<a href="#">SMA</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMB</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMC</a> [pdf document]	Bishopton Village Hall, Church View, Bishopton	TS21 1HB	48	362
<a href="#">SMD</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMF</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SME</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMG</a> [pdf document], <a href="#">SMH</a> [pdf document]	Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge	DL2 1SB	49	613
<a href="#">SMI</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	50	483
<a href="#">SMJ</a> [pdf document]	Middleton St. George Community Centre, Station Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1JG	51	2585
<a href="#">STA</a> [pdf document]	St. James the Great Church Hall, Barton Street, Darlington, (Entrance on Grey Street)	DL1 2LD	52	967
<a href="#">STB</a> [pdf document]	Eastbourne Sports Complex, Bourne Avenue (off Hundens Lane), Darlington	DL1 1LJ	53	1553

<a href="#">WHA</a> [pdf document]; <a href="#">WHB</a> [pdf document]	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT	54	2220
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**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DISPENSATION – SECTION 33 OF THE LOCALISM ACT, 2011**

A report about the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling stations, is to be considered by the Council meeting on 25 January 2024.

A number of councillors serve on the management committee of a community association/organisation, school governing body, parish council or charity or similar body or are employed by such a body.

The report includes proposals to use a number of venues owned or operated by bodies of this type as a polling place (for which the council pays a fee).

Venues operated by local community organisations can be appropriate locations for polling places. Members who serve on these bodies ought not to be excluded from participation on decisions about the suitability of venues as polling places.

Allowing members to participate, is not in my view likely to damage public confidence in the conduct of the Councils business.

I have had regard all relevant circumstances and to Section 33(2) of the Localism Act 2011; and consider in particular grounds 33(2) (c) and (e) apply (see explanatory note below).

It is my view that it is right to grant a dispensation in the terms set out below.

To the extent that councillors have an interest in a venue that is proposed to be used as a polling place, a general dispensation is granted, in respect of any disclosable pecuniary interests occasioned thereby, to allow full participation on the report to be discussed at the Council meeting of 25 January 2024.

Signed:



Luke Swinhoe  
Monitoring Officer

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024

### Explanatory Note

Section 33(2) of the Localism Act, 2011:

- (a) that without the dispensation the number of persons prohibited by Section 31(4) from participating in any particular business would be so great a proportion of the body transacting the business as to impede transaction of the business;
- (b) that without the dispensation, the representation of different political group on the body transacting the business would be so upset as to alter the likely outcome of any vote relating to the business;
- (c) that granting the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the Authority's area;
- (d) (in the case of an authority operating executive arrangements) that it is considered that without the dispensation each member of the authority's executive would be prohibited by section 31(4) from participating in any particular business to be transacted by the authority's executive; or
- (e) that it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

**COUNCIL  
25 JANUARY 2024**

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**MID YEAR PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT  
MONITORING REPORT 2023/24**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –  
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

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

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and provides a mid-yearly review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities.

**Summary**

2. The mandatory Prudential Code, which governs Council's borrowing, requires Council approval of controls, called Prudential Indicators, relating to capital spending, and borrowing. Prudential Indicators are set in three statutory annual reports, a forward looking annual treasury management strategy, a backward looking annual treasury management report and this mid-year update. The mid-year update follows Council's approval in February 2023 of the 2023/24 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy.
3. The key objectives of the three annual reports are:
  - (a) To ensure the governance of the large amounts of public money under the Council's Treasury Management activities:
    - (i) Complies with legislation.
    - (ii) Meets high standards set out in codes of practice
  - (b) To ensure that borrowing is affordable.
  - (c) To report performance of the key activities of borrowing and investments.
4. The key proposed revisions to Prudential Indicators are that the Operational Boundary will reduce to £148.025m and the Authorised Limit to £245.331m, which will allow for any additional cashflow requirement.

## **Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that:
  - (a) The revised prudential indicators and limits within the report in Tables 1 to 6, 8, 10 and 12 to 17 are examined.
  - (b) The Treasury Management Budget (Financing Costs) projected outturn shown in Table 11 is noted.
  - (c) Council approve the updated prudential indicators.

## **Reasons**

6. The recommendations are supported by the following 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.

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

## **Background Papers**

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24
- (ii) Prudential Indicators & Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24
- (iii) Accounting records
- (iv) The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities

Judith Murray: Extension 5204

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for S17 Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has no implications for the Council's Health and Well Being agenda.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	There are no specific implications for the Council's diversity agenda.
Wards Affected	All Wards.
Groups Affected	All Groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report must be considered by Council.
Key Decision	This is not an executive decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purposes of call in this report is not an urgent decision.
Corporate Plan	This report has no implications for the Corporate Plan.
Efficiency	The report refers to actions taken to reduce costs and manage risks.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report does not impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. This mid-year review report meets the regulatory framework requirement of treasury management. It also incorporates the needs of the Prudential Code to ensure monitoring of the capital expenditure plans and the Council's prudential indicators (PIs). The Treasury Strategy and the PIs were previously reported to Council on 16 February 2023.
8. This report concentrates on the revised positions for 2023/24. Future year's indicators will be revised when the impact of the MTFP 2024/25 onwards is known.
9. A summary of the revised headline indicators for 2023/24 is presented in Table 1 below. More detailed explanations of each indicator and any proposed changes are contained in the report. The revised indicators reflect the movement in the Capital MTFP since its approval in February 2023 and how it is financed.

**Table 1 Headline Indicators**

	<b>2023/24 Original Estimate</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Estimate</b>
	£m	£m
Capital Expenditure (Tables 2 and 3)	45.493	81.296
Capital Financing Requirement (Table 4)	235.933	233.649
Operational Boundary for External Debt (Table 4)	181.077	148.025
Authorised Limit for External Debt (Table 6)	247.730	245.331
Ratio of Financing Costs to net revenue stream- General Fund (Table 14)	3.82%	4.47%
Ratio of Financing Costs to net revenue stream- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)(Table 14)	12.78%	12.78%

10. The capital expenditure plans and prudential indicators for capital expenditure are set out initially, as these provide the framework for the subsequent treasury management activity. The actual treasury management activity follows the capital framework and the position against the treasury management indicators is shown at the end.
11. The purpose of the report supports the objective in the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Investment Guidance which state that Members receive and adequately scrutinise the treasury service.
12. The underlying economic environment remains difficult for Councils. It is essential that the Council continues to monitor its cashflow in these times of high inflation and interest rates. Borrowing rates are higher than investment returns, and this background encourages the Council to continue investing over the shorter term and with high quality counterparties, but also limit any borrowing to only that which is essential and for the shorter term where possible until interest rates start to fall.

## Key Prudential Indicators

13. This part of the report is structured to update:
- (a) The Council’s capital expenditure plans
  - (b) How these plans are financed
  - (c) The impact of the changes in the capital expenditure plans on the PI’s and the underlying need to borrow.
  - (d) Compliance and limits in place for borrowing activity.
  - (e) Changes to the Annual Investment Strategy
  - (f) The revised financing costs budget for 2023/24

## Capital Expenditure PI

14. Table 2 shows the revised estimates for capital expenditure and the changes since the capital programme was agreed at the budget.

**Table 2**

Capital Expenditure by Service	2023/24 Original Estimate	2023/24 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
General Fund	20.874	56.727
HRA	24.585	24.535
<b>Total Estimated Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>45.459</b>	<b>81.262</b>
Loans to Joint Ventures	0.034	0.034
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.493</b>	<b>81.296</b>

15. The changes to the 2023/24 capital expenditure estimates have been notified to Cabinet as part of the Capital Budget monitoring process (Quarterly Project Position Statement Report).
16. The current capital programme that has not already been financed now stands at £156.697m, but this includes a number of schemes that will be spent over a number of years not just in 2023/24. A reduction of £76.401m has been allowed for schemes which are known will be finalised in future years, but it is likely that other schemes will also slip into future years.

## Impact of Capital Expenditure Plans

### Changes to the financing of the Capital Programme

17. Table 3 draws together the main strategy elements of the capital expenditure plans shown above, highlighting the original elements of the capital programme, and the expected financing arrangements of this capital expenditure. The borrowing element (Borrowing Need) increases the underlying indebtedness of the Council by way of the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). Borrowing need has reduced for 2023/24 due to schemes

that have been estimated to have slipped into future years. This direct borrowing need may also be supplemented by maturing debt and other treasury requirements.

**Table 3**

<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	2023/24 Original Estimate	2023/24 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
General Fund	20.874	56.727
HRA	24.585	24.535
Loans to Joint Ventures	0.034	0.034
<b>Total Capital expenditure</b>	<b>45.493</b>	<b>81.296</b>
<b>Financed By:</b>		
Capital Receipts - Housing	0.303	0.433
Capital Receipts –General Fund	2.950	5.158
Capital grants	7.890	32.851
JV Repayments	2.260	1.000
HRA Revenue Contributions	12.609	24.077
GF Revenue Contributions	0.000	0.403
Self-Financing - GF	6.400	16.036
<b>Total Financing</b>	<b>32.412</b>	<b>79.958</b>
<b>Borrowing Need</b>	<b>13.081</b>	<b>1.338</b>

### **The Capital Financing Requirement (PI), External Debt (PI) and the Operational Boundary**

18. Table 4 shows the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), which is the underlying external need to borrow for capital purposes. It shows the expected actual debt position over the period. This is called the Operational Boundary. The reduction in Borrowing Need (Table 3) is around £11.7m and currently actual borrowing for the Council is £148.014m. The reduction is due to slippage in the Housing programme. It is proposed to set an actual borrowing figure of £141.014m this will accommodate the additional borrowing need and any debt requirements for cash flow purposes. Other Long-term liabilities (the PFI scheme) will be added to give the revised operational boundary for 2023/24.



**Prudential Indicator- External Debt/ Operational Boundary****Table 4**

	2023/24 Original Estimate	2023/24 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
<b>Prudential Indicator- Capital Financing Requirement</b>		
Opening CFR- Post Audit of Accounts	<b>230.542</b>	<b>228.660</b>
CFR General Fund	128.723	147.259
CFR General Fund PFI/Leasing IFRS	21.051	7.011
CFR – Housing	76.798	76.631
CFR – Loans to Joint Ventures	9.361	2.748
Total Closing CFR	<b>235.933</b>	<b>233.649</b>
Net Movement in CFR	5.391	4.989
Borrowing	160.026	141.014
Other long-Term Liabilities	21.051	7.011
<b>Total Debt 31 March- Operational Boundary</b>	<b>181.077</b>	<b>148.025</b>

**Limits to Borrowing Activity**

19. The first key control over the treasury activity is a PI to ensure that over the medium term gross borrowing should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2023/24 and the next two financial years. As shown in **Table 5** below.

**Table 5**

	2023/24 Original Estimate £m	2023/24 Revised Estimate £m	2024/25 Revised Estimate £m	2025/26 Revised Estimate £m
Gross borrowing	160.026	141.014	151.014	166.014
Plus Other Long Term Liabilities	21.051	7.011	5.912	4.817
Total Gross Borrowing	<b>181.077</b>	<b>148.025</b>	<b>156.926</b>	<b>170.831</b>
CFR* (year-end position)	235.933	233.649	236.815	236.056

\* Includes on balance sheet PFI schemes and finance leases

20. The Group Director of Operations reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current and future years in complying with this PI.
21. A further PI controls the overall level of borrowing, this is the Authorised Limit which represents the limit beyond which borrowing is prohibited and needs to be set and revised by Members. It reflects the level of borrowing which while not desirable, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term. The Authorised Limit is currently set 5% above the Capital Financing Requirement to allow for any additional cashflow needs, the revised figure for 2023/24 has been raised by 5% of the new CFR total.

Whilst it is not expected that borrowing would be at these levels this would allow additional borrowing to take place should market conditions change suddenly and swift action was required. This is a Statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

22. It is proposed to move the Authorised Limit in **Table 6** in line with the movement in the overall Capital Financing Requirement.

**Table 6**

<b>Authorised Limit for External Debt</b>	2023/24 Original Indicator £m	2023/24 Revised Indicator £m
Capital Financing Requirement	235.933	233.649
Additional headroom to Capital Financing Requirement	11.797	11.682
<b>Total Authorised Limit for External Debt</b>	<b>247.730</b>	<b>245.331</b>

23. A forecast of future interest rates is provided by the Council’s treasury management advisors Link Asset Services. Updates are provided by Link throughout the year. The following forecast was provided on the 25 September and is therefore an update to the previous forecast which was included in the report to Audit Committee. It is prudent that Cabinet receive the most up to date information.

**Interest Rate Forecasts Provided by Link Asset Services (as at 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023)**

**Table 7**

	<b>Bank Rate</b>	<b>PWLB rates for borrowing purposes*</b>			
		5 year	10 year	25 year	50 year
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>2023/24</b>					
Sept 2023	5.25	5.60	5.20	5.40	5.30
Dec 2023	5.25	5.10	5.00	5.40	5.20
March 2024	5.25	5.00	4.90	5.20	5.00
<b>2024/25</b>					
June 2024	5.25	4.90	4.80	5.10	4.90
Sept 2024	5.00	4.70	4.60	4.90	4.70
Dec 2024	4.50	4.40	4.40	4.70	4.50
March 2025	4.00	4.20	4.20	4.40	4.20
<b>2025/26</b>					
June 2025	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.30	4.10
Sept 2025	3.00	3.90	3.80	4.10	3.90
Dec 2025	2.75	3.70	3.70	4.00	3.80
March 2026	2.75	3.70	3.60	3.90	3.70

\*PWLB rates above are for certainty rates (which are provided for those authorities that have disclosed their borrowing/capital plans to the government. Darlington Borough Council will be able to access these certainty rates which are 0.2% below PWLB’s normal borrowing rates.

24. The latest Bank Rate increase was implemented on the 3 August. After a 6-3 vote in favour, Bank Rate shifted up 25bps from 5.00% to 5.25%, but the MPC was careful to keep its options open regarding future decision-making (also note that one vote was for no increase and two voted in favour of a 50bps increase).
25. The bank rate has subsequently remained at 5.25% at the last 2 MPC meetings, the latest being on 2 November 2023.
26. In terms of Key Assumptions and Risks past increases in Bank Rate, and the higher path of market interest rates on which the forecast is conditioned, weigh to an increasing degree on the UK economy in coming quarters. GDP growth remains below pre-pandemic rates in the medium term, reflecting relatively weak potential supply and a waning boost from fiscal policy.
27. The UK economy has been in excess demand over recent quarters, but an increasing degree of economic slack is expected to emerge after the middle of next year. The second-round effects in domestic prices and wages are also likely to take longer to unwind than they did to emerge.
28. Inflation is expected to continue to fall in Q3 and Q4 to 4.9%. In the modal forecasts conditioned on market interest rates, increasing degree of slack in the economy and declining external cost pressures – the Bank sees CPI returning to 2% target by Q2 2025 and below target inflation in the medium term but this has a lesser degree of certainty than thought back in May.
29. In the aftermath of the MPC decision markets have concluded that it is more than likely rates have peaked at 5.25% although there does remain an outside chance of one more increase to come before the tightening cycle is concluded.
30. Investors will likely remain nervous about the impact of inflation until there is unambiguous evidence it is falling materially and consistently, and whilst a further increase in the bank rate it is likely that the bank rate will stay on hold for the best part of a year at 5.25%. The pace of any future decreases will very much depend upon wage and inflation data and if inflation starts to push upwards or remains overly-sticky then further tightening in policy would be required.
31. Furthermore there is the matter of a General Election late next year so Government fiscal policy may potentially loosen at the same time as the Bank's monetary policy is still trying to take momentum out of the economy.
32. Of course, what happens outside of the UK remains critical to movement in gilt yields as well. The European Central Bank has made it abundantly clear that policy tightening is at, or close to, the terminal rate (currently 4%) whilst the US FOMC has held its bank rate equivalent in the range of 5.25%-5.5%.
33. From a practical standpoint those looking to borrow will, most probably, need to continue to focus on optimising their cashflow forecasts, and given the elevated level of rates right across the curve at present, seek to fund either temporarily from local authorities or with short-dated loans from the PWLB. In term of borrowing advice although temporary

borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come it may prove the best option whilst the market continues to wait for inflation and therein gilt yields to drop back later in 2023 and 2024.

### Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 and Annual Investment Strategy Update

34. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, (TMSS), for 2023/24 was approved by Council on 16 February 2023.
35. There are no policy changes to the TMSS.
36. The details in this report update the position in the light of the updated economic position and budgetary changes already approved.

### Debt Activity during 2023/24

37. The expected net borrowing need is set out in **Table 8**

**Table 8**

	<b>2023/24 Original Estimate £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Estimate £m</b>
CFR (year-end position) from Table 4	235.933	233.649
Less other long term liabilities PFI and finance leases	21.051	7.011
Net adjusted CFR (net year end position)	<b>214.882</b>	<b>226.638</b>
Expected Borrowing	160.026	141.014
(Under)/ Over borrowing	<b>(54.856)</b>	<b>(85.624)</b>

38. The Council has taken on £20m of new short debt in the current year to date which will be repaid using short term maturing investments.
39. The amount borrowed by the Council now stands at £141.014m, this excludes any additional cashflow loans which may be required.
40. There will still be an element of under-borrowing by the Council at the end of March 2024.

### Debt Rescheduling

41. Debt rescheduling opportunities have been very limited in the current economic climate given the consequent structure of interest rates and following the increase in the margin added to gilt yields which has impacted PWLB new borrowing rates since October 2010. No debt rescheduling has therefore been undertaken to date in the current financial year.

### Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24

#### Investment Portfolio

42. In accordance with the Code, it is the Council’s priority to ensure security of Capital and liquidity, and to obtain an appropriate level of return which is consistent with the Council’s risk appetite. Successive interest rises over the past year have meant that current investment returns are much higher than we have seen in previous years and in line with the current bank rate of 5.25%. During this period of greater returns the Council are actively investing where possible.

**Treasury Management Activity from 1 April 2023 to 31 August 2023**

43. Current investment position – The Council held £57.339m of investments at 31/08/2023 and this is made up of the following types of investment.

**Table 9**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Up to 1 year £m</b>
Banks	UK	20.000
AAA Money Market Funds	Sterling Funds	7.340
Property Funds - CCLA	UK	10.000
Hermes		10.000
Lothbury	UK	9.999
<b>Total</b>		<b>57.339</b>

**Short Term Cashflow Investments**

44. Cash balances are invested daily to maximise the benefit of temporary surplus funds. These include investments in Money Market Funds, the Government’s Debt Management Office, and bank short term notice accounts. A total of 66 investments were made in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 August 2023 totalling c£105m these were for short periods of up to 180 days and earned interest of £0.526m on an average balance of £26.940m which equated to an annual average interest rate of 4.69%.

**Investment returns measured against the Service Performance Indicators**

45. The target for our investment returns is to better or at least match a number of external comparators, this performance indicator is also known as yield benchmarking. As can be seen from Table 10, the short term investment achievements (up to 6 months) are above market expectations.

**Table 10**

	<b>Cashflow Investments %</b>
<b>Darlington Borough Council - Actual</b>	<b>4.69%</b>
<b>External Comparators</b>	
Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) – 6 months	4.63%

## Treasury Management Budget

46. There are three main elements within the Treasury Management Budget:-

- (a) Longer term capital investments interest earned – a cash amount of which earns interest and represents the Councils revenue balances, unused capital receipts, reserves and provisions, this will now include Property Funds.
- (b) Cash flow interest earned – the authority has consistently had a positive cash flow. Unlike long term capital investments it does not represent any particular sum, but it is the consequence of many different influences such as receipt of grants, the relationship between debtors and creditors, cashing of cheques and payments to suppliers.
- (c) Debt serving costs – this is the principal and interest costs on the Council’s long term debt to finance the capital programme.

**Table 11 - Changes to the Financing Costs Budget 2023/24**

	£m	£m
<b>Original Financing Costs Budget 2023/24</b>		<b>3.477</b>
Add Increased debt costs	0.207	
Less Increased returns on Investments	(0.159)	
Add increased returns on Property Funds	(0.048)	
Total adjustments		<b>0.000</b>
<b>Revised Treasury Management Budget 2023/24</b>		<b>3.477</b>

47. This statement concludes that the Treasury Management budget is forecast to Outturn on budget in 2023/24, this will be reflected in the current MTFP projections.

## Risk Benchmarking

48. A regulatory development is the consideration and approval of security and liquidity benchmarks. Yield benchmarks are currently widely used to assess investment performance, and these are shown in Table 12. Discrete security and liquidity benchmarks are also requirements of member reporting.

49. The following reports the current position against the benchmarks originally approved.

50. **Security** – The Council’s maximum security risk benchmarks for the current portfolio of investments, when compared to historic default tables were set as follows;

**0.077% historic risk of default when compared to the whole portfolio.**

**Table 12**

Maximum	Benchmark 2023/24	Actual May	Actual July
Year 1	0.077%	0.013%	0.006%

N.B. this excludes Property Funds

51. The counterparties that we use are all high rated therefore our actual risk of default based on ratings attached to counterparties is very low.

52. **Liquidity** – In respect of this area the Council set liquidity facilities/ benchmark to maintain

- (i) Bank overdraft - £0.100M
- (ii) Liquid short term deposits of a least £3.000M available within a weeks’ notice
- (iii) Weighted Average Life benchmark is expected to be 0.4 years with a maximum of 1 year

53. The Group Director of Operations can report that liquidity arrangements have been adequate for the year to date as shown in Table 13

**Table 13**

	<b>Benchmark 2023/24</b>	<b>Actual May</b>	<b>Actual July</b>
<b>Weighted Average Life</b>	0.4 – 1 year	0.45 years	0.45 years

54. The figures are for the whole portfolio of cash flow investments deposited with Money Market funds on a call basis (i.e. can be drawn on without notice) as well as call accounts that include a certain amount of notice required to recall the funds.

**Treasury Management Indicators**

55. **Actual and estimates of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream** – This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (financing costs net of interest and investment income) against the net revenue stream.

**Table 14**

	<b>2023/24 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Indicator</b>
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>3.82%</b>	<b>4.47%</b>
<b>HRA</b>	<b>12.78%</b>	<b>12.78%</b>

**Treasury Management Prudential indicators**

56. **Upper Limits on Variable Rate Exposure** – This indicator identifies a maximum limit for variable interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments.

57. **Upper Limits on Fixed Rate Exposure** – Similar to the previous indicator this cover a maximum limit on fixed interest rates.

58. Historically for a number of years this Council has used these percentages; together they give flexibility to the treasury management strategy allowing the Council to take advantage of both fixed and variable rates in its portfolio whilst ensuring that its exposure to variable rates is limited.

**Table 15**

	<b>2023/24 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Indicator</b>
Limits on fixed interest rates	100%	100%
Limits on variable interest rates	40%	40%

59. **Maturity Structures of Borrowing** - These gross limits are set to reduce the Council’s exposure to large, fixed rate loans (those instruments which carry a fixed interest for the duration of the instrument) falling due for refinancing. The higher limits for longer periods reflect the fact that longer maturity periods give more stability to the debt portfolio.

**Table 16 - Maturity Structures of Borrowing**

	<b>2023/24 Original indicator</b>	<b>2023/24 Actual to Date</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Indicator</b>
Under 12 months	40%	15%	20%
12 months to 2 years	50%	30%	40%
2 years to 5 years	60%	51%	60%
5 years to 10 years	80%	78%	80%
10 years and above	100%	100%	100%

60. **Total Principal Funds Invested** – These limits are set having regard to the amount of reserves available for longer term investment and show the limits to be placed on investments with final maturities beyond 1 year. This limit allows the authority to invest for longer periods if they give better rates than shorter periods. It also allows some stability in the interest returned to the Authority.

**Table 17 - Principal Funds Invested**

	<b>2023/24 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2023/24 Revised Indicator</b>
Maximum principal sums invested greater than 1 year	£50m	£50m

**Conclusion**

61. The prudential indicators have been produced to take account of the Council’s borrowing position. The key borrowing indicator (the Operational Boundary) is £148.025m. The Council’s return on investments has been good, exceeding both targets. Based on the first



five months of 2023/24 the Council's borrowing and investments is forecast to be on target on the approved 2023/24 budget.

62. The Council's treasury management activities comply with the required legislation and meet the high standards set out in the relevant codes of practice.

**Outcome of Consultation**

63. No consultation was undertaken in the production of this report.

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**COUNCIL  
25 JANUARY 2024**

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**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

**Strategic Transport**

2. The following sections provide an overview of some of the work progressed in partnership with TVCA on the strategic transport portfolio relating to Darlington.

**Strategic Transport Programme**

3. TVCA have developed a programme of schemes that could feature in the Department for Transport's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) round 2. This will be subject to a TVCA Cabinet report on 26 January 2024. The Department for Transport have also indicated larger increases in Highway Maintenance settlements from 2025/26 that will require pipeline of maintenance schemes to be developed by Local Authorities during the next financial year.

**Darlington Station**

4. Work on the Darlington Station project continues to progress. On the Eastern Gateway element of the scheme, where the new station building and multi storey car park is being built, the steelwork was completed prior to the Christmas break. The project is now moving into the next phase, which will see the external brickwork commence.
5. Also, on the eastern side Network Rail has established their site compound and begun their enabling works. A communications strategy will be rolled out to passengers at the station from the beginning of January, ahead of hoardings being installed from the beginning of February, to enable works to commence to the retail units and ticket office area. A new temporary ticket office will open from mid-March.
6. On the Western Gateway preparatory work is continuing ahead of the demolition of the remaining properties that have been acquired.

## **Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP)**

7. Following the Arriva service withdrawals and the introduction of a number of subsidised services from summer 2023, using Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) funding, there has been agreement in principle that Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) will extend these through to March 2025, subject to procurement. In Darlington this includes:-
  - (a) Services 6/6A – continuation of the new service (6/6A), which connects Darlington and Stockton via the Airport and includes Hurworth (replacing the previous service 12)
  - (b) Services 17 and 18 – reinstatement of hourly service between Mowden and Darlington (replacing part of the previous service 3), and reinstatement of hourly service between Darlington and Harrowgate Farm (replacing part of the previous service 3A).
  - (c) Services 3 and 4 – Reinstatement of late Monday – Saturday evening, and a Sunday daytime service.
8. From the BSIP / BSIP+ funding which has been awarded to TVCA, £4.991m remains available and will be used to deliver elements of the Tees Valley 5-point Bus Service Improvement Plan which are unfunded, with a particular focus on:-
  - (a) Working with the operators to identify options around fare offers
  - (b) Making improvements to bus shelters and timetable information
  - (c) Delivering service marketing and promotional campaigns
9. Furthermore, to support the BSIP priority around decarbonising the bus fleet, TVCA has worked with Arriva and Stagecoach to submit a Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) round 2 bid which seeks to support the operators to invest in the infrastructure at their depots and introduce an electric bus fleet on some of the Tees Valley routes. Should the Tees Valley bid be successful, then we could see up to 62 electric buses being implemented across the Stagecoach Stockton depot, and Arriva Redcar and Darlington depots.

## **Traffic Signals Obsolescence Grant (TSOG)**

10. A funding bid for £2.5m has been submitted to the Department for Transport to fund the replacement of obsolete assets, improve network performance, reduce maintenance requirements, and deliver energy / CO2 emission reductions across the Tees Valley. In Darlington the most aged assets identified for replacement are:-
  - (a) Yarm Road / Hewitson Road pedestrian crossing
  - (b) Victoria Road / Sainsbury's pedestrian crossing
  - (c) Northgate / Chestnut Street pedestrian crossing
  - (d) Yarm Road / Hundens Lane junction traffic signals
  - (e) Northgate / John Street junction traffic signals

## **Climate Change**

11. The Climate Change Cross Party Working Group was held on 21 December, where we welcomed Cllr Scott to the Group as the Conservative member. The Group discussed the outcomes from COP28, the recent government reshuffle and future guests at Group meetings. The Group also discussed climate emissions related to procurement and commissioning.

## **External Meetings and Engagement**

12. The following are some of my external meetings since the last Council meeting: briefing from Simon Hoare MP (Minister for Local Government), Transport for the North, TVCA Cabinet, Citizenship Ceremony, Mayor's carol service, unveiling of the Library plaque to record those who worked on the restoration of the Library, visit to meet Sue Jacques at Darlington Memorial Hospital, ANEC board.

**Councillor Steve Harker**  
**Leader of the Council Portfolio**

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**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy Portfolio.

**Environmental Health**

2. Officers from Environmental Health are running a publicity campaign with regard to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and encouraging people to “Check them out before you eat out”. This follows a marked decline in hygiene standards in certain sectors of the food trade since Covid. The digital screens across the town will display bold graphics (see below) incorporating a rating award of 5, there will be an article in the next issue of One Darlington and the message will be delivered in various Council and Business publications.



3. The ‘Burn Right’ campaign has been launched by Environmental Health to educate the public on the requirements of smoke control areas, the burning of the right fuel for the stove/wood burner and the impact of wood burners on air quality. Most of Darlington is in a smoke control area and changes to Clean Air legislation were introduced by the Environment Act 2021.

**Climate Change**

4. We are pleased that interviews for the new Climate Change Officer have been held, and the post was offered to an outstanding candidate who started with us on 17 January 2024.
5. The revised strategy and interim action plan were approved by Cabinet on 9 January. The new Climate Change Officer will be managing the Council’s journey to carbon neutral and will work to develop the action plan further.

## **Estates and Property**

6. Infrastructure works to the residential development at Neasham Road (Cell C) are progressing well despite the recent inclement weather.
7. Negotiations for one of the remaining plots of land at Faverdale East Business Park are continuing and are expected to conclude early in the new year.
8. Proposals to bring Plot 1 at Ingenium Parc forward for development remain in place and while discussions continue to be positive the timeline for delivery has slipped.
9. The planning application for the proposed residential development and parkland restoration at Blackwell Grange was considered and agreed at a Special Planning Committee meeting on 20 December.
10. Terms to acquire the leasehold interest of the former Wilko's store on East Street will be reported to a forthcoming Cabinet. Following a decision solicitors will be instructed. .

## **Business Investment**

11. The number of business investment enquiries continues to increase, with the main area of interests from the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors.
12. The roll out of UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support activities has commenced, beginning with the launch of the Tees Valley Net Zero programme, followed by a range of other support measures such as Digital development and Supply Chain development. The Business Team are working with the Tees Valley Combined Authority to raise awareness of these schemes and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.
13. The Council have introduced a new Town Centre Shop Front Improvement Scheme to extend the successful work of the Towns Fund programme. The new scheme offers grants up to £5,000 to support:
  - (a) New shop fronts
  - (b) Replacement windows/doors/repainting of shop front
  - (c) Signage
  - (d) External lighting
14. Officers from the Business Investment Team have been working on 2 forthcoming events in Darlington:
  - (a) Darlington Jobs Fair – 8 February 2024
  - (b) STEMfest Tees Valley – 6/7 March 2024



## **Town Fund**

15. Delivery onsite continues on Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements completed to a significant number of properties and to the public realm.
16. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
17. Proposals for the former Northern Echo building continue to progress. A procurement exercise has been completed to identify an experienced and imaginative development partner to design, redevelop, repurpose, and once complete to operate, manage, and maintain the entire building. This includes the Adult Skills facility on the ground floor.
18. The proposals for the re-development of number 156 Northgate have been submitted to the Planning Authority. This property is now owned by the Council.
19. A feasibility options study for the Edward Pease House is being progressed.
20. The design of a number of property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and will be commencing onsite in January 2024. The improvements to the pocket park at the junction with the ring road have been completed.

## **Planning Policy**

21. Darlington continues to be successful in developers securing Nutrient Neutrality Credits within the first scheme introduced nationally by Natural England, this has allowed the approval of over 1,600 dwellings recently.
22. Biodiversity Net Gain will be introduced as a statutory requirement in January (the date was not known at the time of writing). Officers continue to liaise with Natural England and DEFRA on the implications for development within Darlington.
23. The Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report has now been published on the Council's website.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Economy Portfolio**

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**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Adults Portfolio.

**Operational Services**

2. The new provider manager started in September 2023 and has applied for registration via CQC. We had an announced inspection on 4 December 2023 for the Domiciliary provision provider throughout our in-house services including; Reablement and one supported living scheme. Initial feedback was positive and the final report confirmed a Good rating overall.
3. Demand remains high including new referrals, supporting hospital discharges, and increased safeguarding referrals as well as requests for support for existing cases. We are continuing to operate waiting lists within our Adult Contact, Occupational Therapy, and sensory teams for new referrals.
4. We apply a Risk Triage tool following initial screening, advice, information and signposting to prioritise allocations. This means we assess the most urgent cases first and prioritise where possible.
5. The Responsive Intervention, Assessment and Care Team (RIACT) continue to successfully support hospital discharge pathways, including managing timely and safe discharges, referrals to the Reablement service and where required bed-based provision and two social workers continue to be based within the Darlington Memorial Hospital (DMH). DMH have experienced a high level of pressure and demand resulting in Operational Pressures Escalation Levels (OPEL) being at their highest demand level of four for several weeks which in turn increases demand on Adults Social Care (ASC) and provisions. The team have continued to work tirelessly under these demands and positive feedback has been received in relation to timely discharge and low reports of delayed transfers of care from County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT).
6. Training has recently been delivered to the ASC teams to launch the Strengths based practice and Pillars of Practice framework. The sessions were well attended, and engagement was positive. Other training has included Continuing Health Care, and Mental Capacity Act. Care Act refresher training is arranged for the spring of 2024.
7. Ongoing activity to inform the self-assessment and readiness for the forthcoming Care Quality Commission assurance is underway with work plans supporting specific areas of development.

### **Commissioning and Contracts**

8. Contract reviews have been undertaken across older people and adults services specifically in relation to Residential Care, Home Care/Supported Living and Day Opportunities with a view that new contracts will be issued in 2024 and early 2025.
9. Provider engagement sessions have been taking place across all of the above areas to inform the development of the new service specifications and fee formulae.

### **Climate Change**

10. The Management team have undertaken sessions with the teams alongside the Climate change officer and developed a climate change action plan for the teams with actions to be monitored on a quarterly basis. Actions include reviewing contingency plans, supporting staff to reduce their carbon footprint, providing information to people on how they can adapt to climate changes and developing risk management plans to support people where climate change may impact service delivery.
11. The commissioning team will continue to support the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the provider market to promote reduction in their carbon footprint through a review of contracts.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

12. The Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report has now been published. The report summarises and reflects on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information. The report is being presented to Adults Scrutiny Committee in February 2024 and is available on the Partnership website.
13. An Independent Author has been commissioned to lead a non-Statutory Learning Lessons Review (LLR) for the Partnership following a fatal house fire in Darlington. The scope and focus of the review are currently being determined, once the review is finalised the learning will be published.
14. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners have not met in this period and therefore, there are no further adult safeguarding updates to provide at this time.

**Councillor Anne-Marie Curry**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults**

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

2. During the second quarter of this year the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) have continued with a consistent high workload of contacts and referrals to social care with the normal reduction during school summer holidays. In Quarter 2 there were 2208 total contacts. Following the regional data highlighting our high conversion rate in terms of the number of contacts that become a referral to social care, refresher training and staff development has been completed and the conversion rate is being closely monitored and has fallen which is positive.
3. In terms of staffing there is one member of staff on maternity leave for which there is agency cover and there is also another agency Social Worker in post due to workload and capacity needs.
4. The 4 kids project was developed in early 2020. The project is a partnership development between Police and DBC to help reduce the number of children becoming looked after, this was to be achieved by identifying those at risk at the earliest possible opportunity so that interventions and preventative measures could be put in place, the focus is on domestic abuse in the household and the impact this has. The feedback received is very positive:

*'I really appreciate the honesty and reassurance when I have been in contact. I feel like the door will be open for as long as I need it. A massive thank you.'*

*'I would like to say that the service received by 4kids, Christopher Horner and Harbour have been brilliant. They have all done a marvellous job and cannot thank them enough.'*

5. We continue to work closely with our colleagues in Police to ensure that we have sufficient representation within morning meetings and to collate the MASH information that informs our decision making. The Police Representative has now been located in the Durham MASH office so we are monitoring the work closely to ensure that we continue to receive the effective service and response that we require.
6. The survey monkey has provided excellent feedback for the Children's Initial Advice Team within Qtr 2.
  - (a) 100% of callers said they felt that their wishes and views were listened to during the call.
  - (b) 100% of callers felt that their expectations with regard to the call being respectful and polite were met.

- (c) 100% of callers felt that the call would have a positive impact on the child, young person or family.

***'I have dealt with many other agencies during my career and it was a pleasure to speak to someone who was so helpful and friendly, who listened to my concerns and offered advice in such a supportive way. Hayley Carey is a credit to your organization'.***

***'A great service in that I can discuss my concerns with a duty social worker, rather than having to complete a lengthy referral form which is how the rest of Durham Children's services operate. This is a far better service'.***

7. The Missing and Exploited Team continues to provide oversight with regard to all of our missing and young people in Darlington. The embedding of Harm Away from Home (the approach taken in Darlington to respond to contextualised safeguarding) continues along with our colleagues throughout social care and work is beginning with IT/Liquid Logic system.

### **Building Stronger Families Service**

8. The drop-in sessions at Daisy Chain (organisation that supports autistic and neurodivergent children, young people and adults) have been going well, and staff attending have been able to divert some of the families who are raising concerns about their children presenting with autistic type behaviours to Building Stronger Families instead, with some taking up early help assessments to try to address the root cause of behavioural challenges first before being placed on the neurodevelopmental pathway. The staff are also giving advice and guidance about de-escalation of extreme behaviours, which families are finding helpful.
9. Targeted groups continue to develop and are delivered from the Children's Centres (Mount Pleasant; Dodmire/Maidendale; Skerne Park) that act as Family Hubs and are situated across the whole town. There is good attendance from children and families at the Families Together group based at McNay Street. The group focuses on positive parenting, led by parents to identify what their greatest needs are. Themes around parenting practice have been focused on the impact of trauma on children's behaviour, as well as positive reward and quality time to promote behaviour, and parents accepting they play a part in shaping how children do behave. At the same time, groups of children and young people are working with practitioners skilled in therapeutic interventions, regulating emotions, and also helping them build positive self confidence and self-esteem.
10. Plans are underway for early next year to develop a baby group from Mount Pleasant School, alongside health colleagues who will be delivering a well-baby clinic. The aim of the baby group will be to support parents to promote speech and language in children, with our First Words Together programme, which is accredited, and serves to help parents build confidence with sharing books, stories and songs with their babies. Speech and language is something that the head of the school has identified as a problem for some of the children entering the school nursery at age 2. The hope is to develop something similar from Skerne Park next year too, this will ensure that programmes reach across the whole town, and are inclusive for all.

11. The BSF team continue to lead on high numbers of early help assessments supporting families across Darlington, working closely with partners to ensure best outcomes for children, with a whole family approach in line with the Supporting Families Program.

### **Young People's Engagement and Justice Service**

12. The service has now recruited a Reparation Officer and a Family Worker to deliver on the Immediate Justice requirements set down in the ASB Action Plan. Performance is being reported to the PCC Office and Home Office on a monthly basis which shows a steady number of young people engaging in reparative intervention. The independent evaluation of this programme has commenced and the service are represented in this.
13. Developing Resilience Programme – this is an intervention for early support for vulnerable children and young people to help them become more resilient to life's challenges, this helps build stronger and safer communities and means they are less likely to need or instigate 'blue light' services. The Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have been working in partnership with Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service of the delivery of a Developing Resilience Programme. The target group are those aged 13 and who are at risk of ASB/criminal activity. Each young person will work towards achieving The Prince's Trust level 1 Award. Eight young people have successfully graduated and attended their passing out ceremony in relation to The Princes Trust Award, this ceremony was held on 30 November and our young people were accompanied by their family and friends. Each young person has developed a portfolio which will be submitted to The Princes Trust for a level 1 qualification in the coming weeks.

### **Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities**

14. 190 referrals, involving 341 children were started in Q2 2023/24. This is a slight decrease on the referral numbers for Q1 23/24, reflective of the school summer break and reduction in referrals. Whilst this is an 8.6% reduction on the referrals received in Q2 22/23 it is an 50.5% increase (the largest in the region) on the pre-COVID rate in 2019/20. Analysis has been conducted to understand the continued rise in referrals. Domestic Violence remains our single largest presenting referral issue, however, there has been a marked increase in 'Child behaviour' referrals in Q2 23/24.
15. Analysis of the North East ADCS Benchmarking report for quarter 2 informs that our referral rate per 10,000 saw a slight decrease from 2022/23 levels (from 725.7 to 663.3), although it remains significantly higher than levels in 2021/22 (445.8). However, for the last five reporting years Darlington has been consistently below all benchmarking measures. The North East rate of referrals at the end of 2022/23 (664.8) is 3.2% higher than in 2021/22. The regional rate of referrals continues on a downward trend; reducing by 10.2% at the end of Q2 2023/24, compared to the end of Q2 2022/23.
16. We have seen a slight decrease in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to quarter 1 with 78 children being re-referred within 12 months. Year to date figures however indicate that re-referral rates for 2023/24 are likely to be similar to those of 2022/23. Service managers review the re-referrals each month to identify any reoccurring theme or how we can

improve our processes and decision-making to reduce the need for families to come back into our service.

17. 376 C&F Assessments were completed in Q2, which is a slight decrease on numbers completed in quarter 1. Year to date figures indicate that the projected year-end figures will be similar to 2022/23. This figure continues to be impacted by delayed assessment completion within the Assessment & Safeguarding Service as work to write up and close off these assessments continues.
18. 79 children went on to have a Child In Need plan, two children proceeded to a strategy meeting, the majority of strategies being undertaken prior to completion of the C & F Assessment. 62 stepped down to BSF/Other actions and 227 concluded C&F as No Further Action. A NFA C&F review meeting is being Instigated up so this can be further explored and understood on a regular basis.
19. Significant efforts to reduce out of date work has been completed locality teams continues. Service Managers oversight continues to be in place around caseloads, workflows and timeliness of work being completed to ensure delay does not continue to grow in this area.
20. 293 children were on an open CiN plan at the end of Q2. 99 children had their CiN plan started within Q2 and 87 children's CiN plan ended. There is good flow through CiN processes for children with timely interventions with 87.8% of children having their plan in place for less than one year.
21. 16.4% of CiN plans are Children with Disabilities who remain eligible for continued support from the team. Eligibility is reviewed a minimum of 2 x per year to ensure good oversight of these plans remain in place and plans are supporting development and independence.
22. 113 strategy discussions were started in Q2 2023/24 involving 210 children, and 11 children had a strategy whilst on an open CP plan. Whilst this is a slight decrease on the numbers of strategies held in Q1 (164), over the past three years we have seen a continued rise in the number of strategies held with a further rise this quarter when compared to 92 strategy discussions (for 156 children) in Q1 2022/23, 79 (for 128 children) in Q1 2021/22, 64 (for 134 children) in Q1 2020/21.
23. The Sector Led improvement work on strategies, section 47 investigations and Initial Child Protection Conferences commenced in quarter 2. This work is now complete and the findings will be shared internally and with partners in the new year.
24. Twenty-seven Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held in Q2 2023/24 for 59 children, which is broadly similar to Q1 2023/24 which had 28 ICPC's for 54 children. Although we have not seen a percentage rise in section 47 enquires outcoming to an ICPC, we have seen an increase in referrals and those requiring a strategy and section 47 enquiry which would result in this increase compared to last year.
25. 76.3% (45/59) of children who had an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) in Q2 2023/24 became subject to a Child Protection plan (CP). This is this is a slight decrease compared to previous quarters.



26. 123 children were subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of quarter 2. This is broadly similar to the numbers in June 2022 but our rate per 10,000 population remains below that of our statistical neighbours at 55.3.
27. Thirty-nine children and young people came into our care in quarter 2; four Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, five Placed with Parent, one residing with Connected Carers, seven residing in foster care, two into residential care, two into supported living and 20 in unregulated family placements.
28. Our commitment to family placements is further evidenced by the 19 children who ceased to be in our care due to a Special Guardianship Order or returning to the care of their parents.
29. Two children were placed for adoption in Quarter 2.
30. Arrangements for transferring young people from our Children with Disabilities team to Adult Social care are increasingly well embedded through the Transfer to Adult Social Care panel process and young people are starting their preparation for adulthood at an earlier stage. Ongoing scoping exercise to broaden the scope to be a preparation for adult pathway for the wider SEND population.
31. The Locality model of working for the Assessment and safeguarding teams is now in place and functioning well. The team managers have begun to develop links with their local Secondary schools. The demands on the teams are constantly reviewed and boundaries adjusted accordingly. An increase in referrals from the North Road area has led to a recent revision of the boundaries of our North Team, to ease pressures within that team.

### **Looked After and Care Leaver statistics**

32. All children in our care have an allocated social worker.
33. At the end of October 2023 we had 346 children in our care. 19 of which were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child.
34. 67 children also ceased to be cared for since April 2023 to October 2023 during this period with the children returned home.
35. Statutory visits are carried out by the social worker to children in our care on a child protection plan. They have a set minimum frequency, 6 weeks for children in our care and 15 working days for children on a child protection plan. There has been an decrease in Statutory visits recorded in timescales from previous quarter to 82.7% and this continues to be an area of focus.
36. Numbers of moves, i.e. 3+ in the last 12 months has increased slightly to 13.7% of the looked after children population when the target is less than 10% and also the amount of children we care for who live more than 20miles away from home has decreased slightly to 11.6% when we aim for no more than 10%.
37. We have 10 young people living in unregulated provision at this time the majority being older 17+ unaccompanied asylum seekers.

38. Problems with registration at dental practices for our UASC have now been resolved and they are registered with the Smile Clinic at Shildon. However, some of our looked after children continue to be on a waiting list for NHS registration. To date only 54.2% of our Children have had a dental check-up completed which is not on target.
39. **Education** attendance remains good and on target for primary 95.5% down 0.5% and Secondary almost 81.6 % up by 0.01%. However, 10 children in our care were suspended for 85 sessions a total of 61 days.

### Care leavers

#### Accommodation

40. 98.4% (remains the same as previous Quarter) of our care leavers aged 19-21 and 95.2% of our care leavers aged 22-25 were in suitable accommodation at the end of October 2023. This was due to four young people ( one aged 19-21, and three aged 22-25 ) being in custody.
41. Thirteen young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education at university and 33 young people were in training or employment.
42. We know all of the young people who are not in training and education and reasons around this, for example, poor mental health or parenting children. NEET figures are 19% for 19–21-year-olds which is positively well below the target of a maximum of 30% for this age group. This is achieved by knowing our children and supporting them into training and employment when at all possible. This is reviewed monthly in supervision with the Team Manager. We are intouch with all our Care Leavers.

#### Fostering and Supported Lodgings

43. Foster carers consultation has continued, with carers advising of an increase in satisfaction in service and carers feeling their voice is heard and management following through on actions. Evidence makes clear that children and young people who are looked after by Darlington's foster carers and in our residential homes tend to experience longer and more stable placements than those offered by external agencies – it is vital that we support our foster carers who deliver a caring and dedicated service.
44. Following the decision taken by Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023, consultation has begun with foster carers regarding the suggested offer. Together with officers, I met with foster carers on 15<sup>th</sup> December, where the proposals were well received. It is this Administration's ambition to use the increased financial incentives to boost numbers of our in-house foster carers. This will lead to better outcomes for children in our care, as well as reducing the need for more expensive private sector placements.
45. Since 11 January 2023 we have worked with support from Blue Cabin on a music project for toddlers titled "This is the Place". The project is aimed at supporting foster carers and pre-school children to engage in making music together to help develop skills and relationships. Blue Cabin is in a phase of evaluation which we are awaiting. Foster Carers have fed back the sessions have allowed them to build relationships with fellow carers which in turn has opened their support group. Carers also report the sessions have supported babies and toddlers to regulate and build attachment through music. Carers have continued to use the songs and music therapy outside of the sessions. Blue Cabin are preparing music bags for all cared for children in Darlington aged 0 -3, this will support the music making sessions with instructions on how to use sensory items and songs.

46. Mockingbird continues to offer stability of placement for our cared for children. The constellation meets monthly for social events and biweekly coffee sessions are offer to carers. Feedback from the constellation “without the Hub Carer and other carers in Mockingbird, I would not have a support network and I do not think I would have continued as a foster carer”. Work is commencing to launch a second constellation in February 2024.
47. We continue to contribute to the creation of Foster with Northeast; this is a collaborative partnership between 12 local authorities from across the Northeast of England. Fostering services all across the region are joining forces to recruit much-needed prospective foster carers. For the first time, anyone considering fostering in our region will benefit from a united, single support hub. The hub provides additional support for prospective foster carers and is supported by the Department for Education. Year to date we have received 43 enquiries and have 21 open applications. Some data cleansing of this is required but we have nine ongoing form f assessments (assessments of foster carers).

### **Residential Services**

48. All of our children’s homes, Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling Crescent, are at full capacity with three children placed in each home with no planned or emergency admissions.
49. Harewood Hill Lodge provides short break care for Children with additional needs and had 68% of beds occupied with 19 nights utilised by children from other authorities which generates income. Eldon staff and young people moved to new home Lancaster Close on 29 June 2023. Eldon will repurpose into CEDARS which will offer short breaks and emergency provision for our young people from Friday to Monday a.m. From the most recent Ofsted grading, all our mainstream homes have been graded as Requires Improvement and HHL has been graded Good. Of note are the improvements Dunrobin has made rising from inadequate last year. Multi -agency work has seen a significant decline in the number of children missing five children had 27 missing episodes from our three mainstream homes. In the same period as last year, eight children had 271 missing episodes.
50. Harewood Hill Lodge was inspected by Ofsted on 22 and 23 November 2022 and maintained their grading of Good. No assurance visits have taken place.
51. Gilling was inspected by Ofsted on 12 and 13 May 2023 and gained the grading of Requires improvement to be Good. An assurance inspection on 8 March 2023 identified no safeguarding concerns, we do not receive gradings on assurance inspection.
52. Dunrobin was inspected by Ofsted on 29 and 30 November and has gained the grading of Requires improvement to be Good which is an improvement on the grading of inadequate from their last inspection.
53. Eldon was inspected by Ofsted on 23 March 2022 and has gained the grading of Requires Improvement to be good. An assurance inspection on 7 March 2023 identified no safeguarding concerns.
54. Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling staff continue to receive Dyadic Development Psychotherapy training delivered by Leon Crook and Alan Welsh. Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that can help form and repair connections and attachment between children, young people and their parent/carers. Monthly support sessions are diarised to support staff to reflect on interactions with our young people and implement the basics of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy). Alongside this work, training is being delivered to all homes focusing on

relational practice, and supporting strength-based case notes which are recorded to the young person.

55. The new and updated Child Exploitation Matrix has been rolled out to all staff and this is being incorporated electronically onto Liquid Logic on 1 January 2024.
56. The contact team are now known as the 'Children and Family Time Service' with the workers being called 'Children and Family Time Workers'. We continue to support work in other areas of the service with the wide range of skills and experience within the children and family time service. Moving into 2024 we shall be analysing their workload, role and capacity across all service areas in order to ensure that we are utilising their skills and experience to the maximum whilst considering the most efficient and effective way for them to function.
57. For the festivities the family time service have created a Santa's Grotto to enable our children and their families to visit Santa together, receive a gift and make photographic memories.
58. Moving into 2024 discussions are also underway for a Community Shop to be created within Harewood that can support our vulnerable and needy children and their families.

### Education

59. Hurworth Primary School was recently inspected by Ofsted and retained its "Good" rating. Inspectors recognised that school is a place of calm and kindness, pupils quickly become skilled readers and writers and leave school as well-rounded individuals, well equipped for the next phase of their education.
60. Holy Family Catholic Primary School was also recently inspected and retained its "Good" rating. Inspectors recognised leaders ensure that every person is valued, nurtured and respected as an individual, provision for personal development is exceptional and pupils thrive at this ambitious school.

### Youth Unemployment

61. **Youth Unemployment Claimant Count** - The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count has fallen slightly from 7.4% (555 young people) in August 2023 to 7.1% (530 young people) in October 2023. This compares with the North-East average which has remained static at 6.0%, and the national average which has risen by 0.1% to 5.0%
62. The figures for the Tees Valley were as follows:

Hartlepool	9.5%
Redcar and Cleveland	8.6%
Middlesbrough	8.4%
Stockton -on-Tees	7.8%
Darlington	7.1%

63. **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and other employability programmes** - Since that start of the YEI programme at the end of May 2016 up to the end of November 2023 the programme supported 1,584 16-29 year olds. Of the 1,584 participants 1,471 (92.9%) of

those progressed into employment or training and 848 (57.6%) of those who started the programme were still in those destinations six months later.

64. The DWP/ESF external funding for the YEI programmes ended on 31 July 2023. However, funding was put in the MTFP to continue this programme until 31 March 2024 to bridge the gap between funding streams and help retain staff. Unemployed young people will still be able to access other Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programme, such as Restart operated by People Plus in Darlington.
65. In conjunction with the other Tees Valley Authorities, Darlington has secured UKSPF funding from TVCA to deliver an employability programme for all ages. Funding for that programme is targeted at those who are economically inactive and are; early retirees aged over 50, those looking after the family or home, or those who are short-term sick (under 12 months). That funding will run until 31 March 2025. Some YEI staff will be redeployed onto the UKSPF programme. UKSPF cannot be used to replicate existing DWP programmes such as that offered by Restart.
66. It should be noted that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has also refocused their efforts more towards getting early retirees back into work to fill the current skills gap.

### **Children's Commissioning and Contracts**

67. All Darlington-based providers of supported accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers aged 16 and 17 years old had validated registration applications with Ofsted ahead of the 28 October 2023 deadline.
68. Darlington children's commissioners have led a subregional procurement for the provision of the SEND mediation services. The successful contractor was "Why Mediate" who will provide SEND mediation services effective from 8 January 2024.
69. Children's Commissioners have continued to work with key strategic partners to maximise the range of supported accommodation available for young people in Darlington who are transitioning to adulthood. Children's Commissioners have worked in conjunction with colleagues in Housing Services and the local VCSE provider, Humankind to submit a bid to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for an additional eight units of dispersed supported accommodation in Darlington for young people aged 18-24.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

70. The Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report has now been published. The report summarises and reflects on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information. The report was presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and is available on the Partnership website.
71. The Partnership has also published its Family H Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). Family H are a sibling group and enquiries led police to believe they were victims of sexual abuse. The review focussed on a number of key episodes over a ten-year period and identified a number of instances where opportunities to assess the risk to the children

were missed and this information was not shared with partner agencies. The final Report and Executive Summary are available on the Partnership website.

72. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners have not met in this period and therefore, there are no further child safeguarding updates to provide at this time.

**Councillor Nick Wallis**  
**Children and Young People Portfolio**

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Health and Housing Portfolio were as follows:-

**Public Health**

Stopping the Start:

2. In October 2023, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published its policy paper, *Stopping the start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation*, where the government set out an intention to create the first 'smokefree generation'.
3. The Department of Health and Social Care launched a consultation on the proposals set out in the policy paper on 12 October 2023, and inviting responses until 6 December 2023.
4. Specifically, DHSC is seeking views on introducing new legislation to raise the age of sale for tobacco, further regulating vaping to reduce its appeal to children, and introducing new powers for local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices to enforce age of sale legislation for tobacco products and vapes.
5. The Director of Public Health and I responded to the consultation on behalf of the Council supporting the governments proposal to change the age of sale for tobacco products and change regulations around the selling, advertising of vapes to young people and particularly of disposable vapes. We also recommended that local authorities are provided the funding to properly regulate and enforce any new legislation.

**Health and Well Being Board**

6. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 14<sup>th</sup> December and the agenda included a paper outlining Darlington's Commitment to Carer, a review of the current terms of reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board and a paper by the Director of Public Health around the next steps to develop a Darlington Joint Local Health and Wellbeing strategy.
7. Following the formal board there was a facilitated workshop with all members of the Health and Wellbeing board to review and identify the local priorities for improving health and wellbeing in the light of the evidence and context discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2023.
8. The workshop considered the priorities across a life course using the following thematic approaches:
  - (a) Children and Young People: Best Start in Life

- (b) Staying Healthy and Living Well
- (c) Healthy Places
- (d) Healthy Ways of Working

9. A report describing the outcome of the workshops will be brought to the Health and Wellbeing Boards next meeting in 2024 before being shared with wider stakeholders.

## **Housing Services**

### **New Build**

10. Work is continuing at a pace to complete the first homes on our Neasham Road new build site. The first phase of the construction, being undertaken by our Building Services team, will see 22 properties due for completion in March 2024. These will be handed over to our Housing Services team who will commence advertising for rent.

### **Climate Change**

11. I am pleased to report that the Housing Services Climate Change Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 9 January 2024. This strategy sets out the aims and actions for our Council homes to become net zero carbon, although it is accepted that this is a long term project that will take a number of years and significant investment, currently estimated at over £140m.
12. Substantial work has already been undertaken with successful Government bids for over £1.5m benefitting 760 Council homes, with the Council investing £1m for these properties as well. This is in addition to the £2.7m invested by the Council to complete the replacement of all single glazed windows in Council homes.
13. The Social Housing Decarbonisation wave 2 project is now underway. A contractor is currently being procured and work is due to start in April 2024. This work will provide upgrades to 130 Council homes, including external wall insulation and low energy lighting, utilising £1.2m of Government funding and £1.2m of Council investment.
14. Proposals are included in the Housing Revenue Account MTFP for 2023-24 to increase our annual investment in energy efficiency measures from £1m to £3m each year. If agreed this will enable us to have the financial capacity to bid for further Government funding, as this becomes available, and to accelerate some of our capital improvement programmes, reducing our carbon emissions and lowering utility bills for our tenants.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

15. Our Housing Services Tenancy Enforcement team continue to ensure that our tenants enjoy the right to a safe home and community by taking firm action against those who commit anti-social behaviour. A successful eviction was carried out in the North Road ward in November 2023 against a tenant engaged in drug related anti-social behaviour, following close work with the Police and local residents.
16. A further eviction was carried out in December 2023 in the Bank Top and Lascelles ward against a tenant engaged in drug related, noise nuisance and property damage anti-social



behaviour. Again, this was achieved with close work between Tenancy Enforcement Officers, the Police and neighbours.

### **Dolphin Centre**

17. The Dolphin Centre Christmas events programme has been extremely successful with six party nights welcoming 180 guests to each evening, which included a three-course meal, live entertainment, and DJ. Several guests have reserved tables for 2024.
18. Bowling and soft play continued to be very popular during the festive period. New events introduced to the programme included Bowling with The Grinch and Breakfast with Santa, with both events selling out.
19. Membership campaigns have maintained numbers around 2000 with the new year campaign in full swing. There is currently a review taking place around the GP referral scheme to identify best practice nationally and options around self-referral to encourage attendance and retention.
20. Water education and Key Stage 2 swimming have continued to be a priority during the pool closure with new reporting systems in place to highlight positive progression for children within the scheme.
21. It is great news that the main pool at the Dolphin Centre will reopen on Friday 26 January 2024. As previously reported, this will continue to require alternative access arrangements due to the toddler pool area and walkway still undergoing works. This will mean that the showers in the toddler pool area and the two slides will continue to be out of use during this period. The toddler pool and new features, along with the remaining facilities, will be available for customers to enjoy in Spring 2024.

### **Haughton Matters Project**

22. Since securing £6,690 from Sport England's Small Grants, the Health in Haughton Project has continued to grow. Throughout November, 68 residents took part in the programme with over 250 attendances recorded. The project currently consists of Tai Chi, Yoga, Pilates, Dance Fit and Low Impact Fitness. Each session has a strong group of participants who are committed to attending weekly. The aim is to see each session continue to grow and flourish in 2024 with extra promotion.

### **Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital Project**

23. Eastbourne Sports Complex capital project is nearing completion. The UK Track Mark standard athletics track, and additional stadia artificial grass pitch opened in September 2023 as part of a phased opening programme. The phased programme was implemented as soon as possible to allow clubs and users to access the facilities which had been greatly missed during the development, whilst the remaining works were completed. The new reception area, changing facilities and improved car parking facilities are substantially complete apart from some final works, including the connections to the site by Northern Power grid, which is expected to be fully completed by the end of January 2024 with an opening ceremony targeted for February.

24. This project will strengthen current community delivery and will further develop Eastbourne Sports Complex facilities to be accessible for a wide range of new community groups, partners, and additional visitors with the aim to become the leading outdoor facility provider in the area. The site can be acknowledged as home of athletics in Darlington and the response from athletics and football users has been extremely positive, which has included greater usage of the 3G football facilities than originally anticipated.

**Councillor Matthew Roche**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing**

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Local Services Portfolio.

**Climate Change**

2. In support of our LTP priority to reduce the impact of transport on the environment, Darlington Travel Advisors are working with Sustrans (Active Travel Hub), to promote the new cycle route on Woodland Road with employers/businesses along the route, including Darlington Memorial Hospital.
3. Meetings have also been held with Durham Wildlife Trust, to collaborate on designing some guided rides to include our local nature reserves. They are keen to explore options to install cycle parking at some key locations to support public access.
4. Support for modal shift is available through the active travel drop-in sessions at Crown Street Library. These Tuesday afternoon sessions have been working well, with the team engaging with several individuals interested in learn-to-ride sessions. There are also free fortnightly Dr Bike sessions at the Market Hall, where residents can get a full health check for their bike.

**Highway Maintenance Programme**

5. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
  - (a) C71 Houghton Bank, Heighington: Drainage Repairs / Carriageway Reconstruction (0.188km)
6. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
  - (a) C182 Thompson Street East: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.183km)
7. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
  - (a) A67 Merrybent (Phase 3): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.426km)
  - (b) C39 Walworth Road, Heighington: Carriageway Recycling (0.668km)
  - (c) Unc. Priestgate/Prebend Row: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.227km)
  - (d) B6279 Staindrop Road: Carriageway Patching (0.323km)
  - (e) Unc. Coombe Drive: Carriageway Patching (0.534km)
  - (f) C34a Lime Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.585km)
  - (g) Unc. Bates Avenue: Footway Refurbishment (0.108km)

8. The last few months have seen higher levels of rainfall than normal, and this has impacted on flooding incidents and road conditions.
9. There have been issues with rural roads, mainly due to the amount of water coming off the already saturated fields. The ditches and drainage have struggled to cope. Each of these areas will be revisited once it is dry enough to carry out a full survey at each location and ensure that the drainage system in place is working as it should be. We will also be looking to improve any of these areas if possible.
10. Working with Councillor Riley, ditches on private land that have not been maintained by the landowner have been identified. We will be writing to them to remind them of their obligations.
11. The Department for Transport have also indicated larger increases in Highway Maintenance settlements from 2025/26 that will require pipeline of maintenance schemes to be developed by Local Authorities during the next financial year. Further guidance is awaited from Government.

#### **Local Transport Plan (LTP)**

12. TVCA and Local Authorities are developing initial concepts on a pipeline of programmes and schemes that could feature in the Department for Transport's City Region sustainable Transport settlement (CRSTS) round 2. Further guidance is awaited from Government.
13. In March this year, Cabinet approved the LTP programme of works for 2023/24, investing £3.5M in our transport network, including maintenance schemes. Below is an update on delivery of the LTP:
  - (a) Officers are reviewing the significant number of responses to safe routes to school consultation at Hurworth Comprehensive School and St. Augustine's Primary School, with design changes in progress for the latter.
  - (b) Consultation will take place in the New Year on the Abbey Juniors and Infants safe routes to school scheme, on Abbey Road and Cleveland Avenue.
  - (c) Officers are reviewing the current town centre cycle parking provision, with a view to making improvements enabling parking to be safer and ensuring that supply is adequate and appropriate for use.
  - (d) Officers are currently in the process of reviewing all bus stops in the borough to address maintenance issues. This audit will seek to identify and then rectify issues at bus stops such as replacing broken/damaged timetable cases, repairing bus stop shelters and renewing lining/signage where required.

## **Bus Services**

14. Connect and TVCA are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. The review will include a revised layout of information, possibly displaying departures in a chronological order rather than by service as now and removal and replacement of Connect branding with new TVCA branding. TVCA will consult with Local Authorities on the new design for at stop timetables and but hope to roll out the new design in January 2024.
15. There are a few minor timetable changes to bus services taking effect in the New Year these include:
  - (a) Additional early morning weekend journeys on service 2A to support Amazon's new shift pattern. This is a DBC supported service using DfT grant funding ringfenced to the 2/2A.
  - (b) Withdrawal of three early morning and three early evening X26/X27 journeys from Faverdale and West Park. These are being withdrawn to improve punctuality and reliability on the rest of the route through to Catterick.

## **Hopetown Darlington**

16. Pupils from Reid Street Primary School and Directors from Homes By Esh were invited on site to see where Wagon Woods will be constructed in the new year. Sponsored by Homes by Esh and designed by Creating Adventurous Places (CAP.co), Wagon Woods is the brand new £600,000 railway-themed, immersive outdoor adventure playground, part of the £35 million scheme at Hopetown Darlington.
17. Hopetown's community engagement programme continues with 155 children engaging with the school outreach programme, and over 950 people enjoying the 'Santa on the Move' event at Firthmoor Community Centre.

## **Darlington Hippodrome**

18. This year's pantomime, 'Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs', opened on Friday 8 December to a full house and ran until Sunday 31 December. Starring Gareth Gates, the pantomime received excellent reviews from theatre reviewers and audiences and is forecast to exceed the financial success of the previous year's pantomime.
19. The Theatre's charitable fund, 'A Place for Everyone', has supported the local community and schools this year, awarding £24,017 in total. Support included offering visits to the theatre to see shows, supporting transport costs, delivery of theatre workshops and tours, funded places for looked after children on youth theatre and dance courses, and enabled artist development in Darlington.

## **Libraries**

### **Libraries supporting older people**

20. Recruitment has taken place for more volunteer drivers to help with the free home deliveries service. A monthly delivery of books or audiobooks can be arranged to the homes of anyone living in Darlington aged 60 or over, along with a friendly doorstep chat.
21. Darlington Library reopened with a wonderful Reminiscence Room, bookable and free for older people and/or those with dementia. The Library has a specially curated Reminiscence Collection, which can be enjoyed when using the space.
22. A monthly group at both Cockerton and Darlington Libraries is held for older people called 'Musical Memories'. Staff lead the session using music, photographs, stories and Reminiscence Boxes, to help spark enjoyable memories and encourage discussion.

### **Libraries at Christmas**

23. Both libraries were decorated for Christmas with beautiful displays which captured the imagination of adults and children alike. A special video was produced showcasing Christmas at the Library, and the joy of reading alone or as a family.
24. Christmas Parties were held for young children with a visit from Santa and a special party with The Grinch. Adults were treated to an evening of poetry, spoken word and live music at our sold-out Winter HARK! Event. There were also festive-themed Musical Memories sessions and a festive talk from a fashion historian.

### **Libraries School Engagement**

25. Arts Council England funded the brand-new digital innovation centre, 'The Hive', at Darlington Library. Engagement has taken place with schools, and many are now buying into the newly designed library packages, which aim to improve opportunities for school pupils to engage in STEM, art and literature activities. School pupils are enjoying designing and making items utilising the 3D printers, laser cutters, Cricut machines, and learning via the VR headsets.
26. Schools also took part in the Northern Children's Book Festival, participating in workshops with a range of different authors, with many pupils also visiting to borrow books from the Library.

### **Libraries Neurodiverse Offer**

27. In a bid to support health services, Cockerton Library now offers a neurodiverse session. The free, bookable session has been designed with support from Daisy Chain and is specifically for pre-school children who have already received a diagnosis or whose parent/carer believes they may be neurodiverse.
28. 'Quiet Time' has also been introduced at Darlington Library weekly to support children who may benefit from knowing when the Children's Library will be free from activity.

## **Creative Darlington**

29. Cabinet of Curiosity Studios delivered three family focused 'Grow Your Own Creativity' workshops free of charge in Darlington Library in December 2023, with Arts Council England and Heritage & Culture Fund (Creative Darlington) budget support. An additional activity will also be provided in Darlington venues in Spring 2024.
30. Darlington Tracks HARK! Winter event, part of Darlington Library's 'Your Creative Story' programme was a sell-out success, with performances from artists and bands, including the Ivor-Novello award winning The Bookshop Band, set alongside readings and a first performance of a newly commissioned song by Pat Plumb and Eve Conway (both Darlington based). The event was backed by Creative Darlington, Darlington Library and Arts Council England Project funding.
31. The 'Your Creative Story' programme was one of three programmes in the North East nominated by Arts Council England for their Arts Council Award within the Journal Culture awards 2023, which were held at the Fire Station in Sunderland on Thursday 13 December.
32. Laura Wilson's 'Circling' exhibition opened in Darlington Library on Saturday 16 December, celebrating Darlington's textile heritage and links to linen, alongside exploring the artist's weaving practice.

## **Town Centre Partnership and Events**

33. Town centre independent businesses were all proactive and joined in Colour Friday - the anti-Black Friday promotional day at the end of November. Both online and instore activity encourages shoppers to support independent retailers. Support was given from Holly Tucker & Co giving national coverage and promotion. BBC Look North aired the story throughout the day to highlight the businesses coming together in Darlington and showcasing the town's offer.
34. Christmas themed events were scheduled on weekends to attract visitors. 12 ice sculptures were displayed around the town centre on Saturday 9 December to attract visitors to Darlington and move around the town centre to explore and see new places.
35. The Town Centre team also supported the Purple Flag assessment, which took place in the town centre on Saturday 9 December with visiting Assessors from Liverpool and York. The Purple Flag Award is given to Towns/Cities with a diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture. Towns given this award must provide a safe, vibrant and varied night out. A whole range of partners and venues took part in the assessment, showcasing the town, including The Covered Market, Forum Music Centre, Darlington Hippodrome, Number Forty, Dolphin centre, Gaming Lounge and several others. Assessors met a wide range of licensees, police officers, restaurant owners, CCTV operators, Town Centre Partnership Team and the Deputy Leader of the Council.
36. Assessors were impressed with the sheer diversity of the evening economy in the town, the self-evident strong partnerships between operators, the Council and the Police and the safe atmosphere across Darlington.

37. The Town Centre Partnership Team trialled a 'pop-up' lunchtime stand at Redde Northgate. The aim was to engage with employees at a local large business to promote the town centre. It was well received and future dates across Darlington in other large organisations are being planned. This promotional activity is to increase awareness of the high street and highlight the events programme to different audiences.

**Councillor Libby McCollom**  
**Local Services Portfolio**



**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Resources Portfolio.

**Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)**

2. The draft MTFP proposed at Cabinet in December is out for consultation and has been discussed at all Scrutiny Committees along with an all Member briefing held on 13 December 2023. The draft Local Government Finance settlement was received on 18 December and the MTFP will be updated accordingly in the final draft going to Cabinet and to Council in February.

**Revenues and Benefits**

3. Our Revenues and Benefits team continue to perform exceptionally well in recovering long-standing debts to the Council, including the following cases, which also demonstrate the supportive role that the team undertake in establishing entitlement to benefits:
  - (a) A local resident owed over £4,200 in unpaid Council Tax for two properties, as well as a Housing Benefit overpayment of £950. Following intervention and negotiation by Recovery Officers, all the debts were paid in full.
  - (b) A local resident owed over £5,000 in unpaid Council Tax. Following contact by a Recovery Officer it was established that the resident was not working and receiving Universal Credit. The resident was supported to apply for Council Tax Support, which reduced the debt to £2,200 which is being collected by deductions from Universal Credit.
  - (c) A local resident owed over £2,800 in unpaid Council Tax. Following contact by a Recovery Officer it was established that the resident was receiving Universal Credit and entitled to Council Tax Support, which reduced the debt to £750 which is being collected by deductions from Universal Credit.
  - (d) A local resident owed over £2,500 in unpaid Council Tax. Following contact by a Recovery Officer it was established that the resident was receiving Universal Credit and entitled to Council Tax Support, which reduced the debt to £675 which is being collected by deductions from Universal Credit.

**Customer Services**

4. Our Customer Services team and other customer telephone teams across the Council continue to perform extremely well against our Customer Standards to answer telephones

within 5 minutes. The average waiting time for customers in September 2023 was 2 minutes 12 seconds, reducing to 2 minutes 1 second in October 2023 and 1 minute 38 seconds in November 2023 and 93.45% of calls answered.

### **Universal Credit**

5. The migration of Darlington residents from legacy benefits to Universal Credit continues at a pace with over 70% of working aged people who receive Council Tax Support now receiving Universal Credit.
6. The next phase of Universal Credit implementation will commence in 2024 with the managed migration of residents receiving long-term legacy benefits. These are mostly people on benefits such as Employment Support Allowance, who have not had a change in their circumstances that would normally trigger a Universal Credit claim.
7. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) will be providing more detail from April 2024 about the managed migration of these customers and how they will be supported with the move to Universal Credit. Our Customer Services and Tenancy Sustainment teams are well prepared to assist our vulnerable customers with the move, together with our long-standing good working relationship with the Jobcentre Plus Office in Darlington.

### **Climate Change**

8. Our Revenues and Benefits team continue to promote e-billing as an alternative to sending paper Council Tax and Business Rates bills. Over 5,000 bills were sent electronically in 2022-23 but more work needs to be done to promote the e-billing option, which also allows local residents and businesses to access their accounts on-line, checking for payments and instalments due.
9. A promotional leaflet will be sent out with all the paper annual bills in March 2024, and I would urge Members to sign-up for e-billing, if they have not already done so, and promote this option to local residents.

### **Capital Projects and Design Services Management**

10. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
  - (a) On the Darlington Railway Station scheme which is being managed by TVCA the steel frame and floors for the new car park are now complete.
  - (b) The Hopetown Darlington project continues onsite with refurbishment works to the former Head of Steam, Goods Shed and Carriage works buildings. The entrance works to the Goods Shed directly off McNay Street are progressing well and should re-provide a more direct pedestrian route back to the North Road Railway Station from the end of February 2024.
  - (c) Site work is ongoing at the Dolphin Centre, Whinfield school and at the Neasham Road housing scheme.

- (d) A procurement exercise for a developer/operator for the refurbishment of former Northern Echo Building has concluded and a decision on who to appoint is expected shortly.
- (e) There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

### **Police and Crime Commissioner and Tees Valley Combined Authority Elections**

- 11. Preparations are underway for the elections that are due to take place on Thursday 2 May 2024 to elect the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for the Durham Police Area and the Mayor for the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). Durham County Council is the lead authority for the PCC election and Stockton Borough Council is the lead authority for the TVCA Mayoral Election.

### **Elections Act 2022**

- 12. Work is continuing to implement further elements of the Elections Act 2022 in preparation for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral (TVCAM) Elections scheduled to be held on 2 May 2024 and the next Parliamentary (General) Election. The introduction of Voter Authority Certificates and changes to the postal and proxy voting arrangements have already been introduced and implemented.
- 13. Other changes that will be implemented for future elections are undue influence and intimidation; digital imprints; removal of the 15 year limit for overseas electors; candidate addresses and commonly used names for UK Parliamentary (General) Elections; EU Voting and candidacy rights; and postal vote handling and secrecy rules.

### **Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023**

- 14. The compulsory review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations commenced on 2 October 2023. Two six-week consultation periods were held during which time the comments of Members, the public and other bodies were welcomed. The final proposals for the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations can be seen in a separate report elsewhere on this agenda, and once approved, they will be used for all future elections. As the proposals have resulted in changes to a number of polling districts, it may be necessary to republish the Register of Electors.

### **Review of Parliamentary Constituencies 2023**

- 15. The Parliamentary Constituencies Order 2023 came into force on 29 November 2023. The new constituencies will be used for the next Parliamentary (General) Election, which will take place before the end of January 2025. The main changes for this Council involved the Heighington and Coniscliffe Ward moving from the Sedgefield Constituency into the Darlington Constituency and the Sadberge and Middleton St George and Hurworth Wards moving from the Sedgefield Constituency to the Stockton West Constituency.

### **Communications and Marketing**

16. The digital billboard adjacent to Feethams roundabout operates 365 days per year. It is switched on from 6am to 2am the following day and has up to nine advertisements in rotation at any one time. To help offset the running costs of the billboard, the Council has opened up the opportunity for a limited number of businesses and non-profit organisations to place their advertisements on the billboard. Priority will be given to local organisations, and their advertisements will sit in the same rotation cycle as the Council's advertisements. More information can be found at [www.darlington.gov.uk/billboard](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/billboard).
  
17. The One Darlington magazine model has been in place since September 2015. It is an effective way of sharing information with many people across the borough. The magazine has and will continue to operate in partnership with a number of public and voluntary sector organisations. Not only does this lead to a magazine that is rich in content, it also helps to offset some of the costs for the Council. Over recent years, production and distribution costs have significantly increased and it has been necessary to review the model. From April 2024 the current distribution model will continue, but the number of editions per year will reduce from six to four. To help offset costs further, we will introduce the opportunity for commercial organisations to advertise in the magazine, details of which are currently being developed.

**Councillor Mandy Porter**  
**Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio**

**COUNCIL  
25 JANUARY 2024**

**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Stronger Communities Portfolio:-

**Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

2. Across the Borough the figures are as follows:

Darlington	YTD NOVEMBER 2022	YTD NOVEMBER 2023	% increase/decrease
Crime	7654	8382	+10%
ASB	2113	1640	-22%

3. The crime increase equates to 728 offences, with vehicle crime, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing notable increases. This could be attributed to the ‘cost of living’ crisis. The Police, together with other support agencies, have responded to the increase through various activities including crime prevention campaigns, dedicated patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in a significant number of arrests.
4. ASB has decreased by 473 reports. This is believed to be a result of continued partnership work and the Trailblazer’s project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
5. Within the town centre the figures are as follows:

Darlington Town Centre	YTD NOVEMBER 2022	YTD NOVEMBER 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	974	977	+0.3%
ASB	186	123	-34%

6. Shoplifting and theft account for a significant amount of town centre crime. Shopwatch was re-launched on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and participation continues to grow with 150 people and over 100 stores involved in the crime reduction initiative.
7. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand three prolific offenders. The current detection rate in Darlington is 41% in comparison with the Force at 23% and Durham City at 14%.
8. The ‘whatsapp group’ facilitated Shopwatch allows members to communicate ‘prevention’ messages to each other, with intelligence being exchanged daily.

## **Funding and Initiatives**

9. The Home Office Trailblazer ASB Hotspot Patrol continues to cover eight areas in Darlington with increased engagement and patrols to reduce ASB.
10. The following anti-social behaviour outcomes were recorded in the period of reporting (1 October 2023 - 13 December 2023):-
  - (a) 11 first warnings issued to young people involved in anti-social behaviour.
  - (b) 8 acceptable behaviour agreements issued to young people involved in anti-social behaviour.
  - (c) 12 breaches of anti-social behaviour warnings / agreements resulting in further action.
11. The application for Home Office Safer Street has secured approval. Safer Streets Round 5 will focus on: -
  - (a) Neighbourhood Crime and ASB in Darlington Park East / Banktop. (Defensible barriers to prevent motorcycle nuisance, deployable CCTV cameras, and the purchase and installation of crime prevention equipment).
  - (b) The bid also focuses upon Rural Crime in Darlington West Villages / Middleton St George (Employment of two Rural Crime Co-Ordinators, a real time Intelligence Officer, Crime Prevention equipment including two 'Drones' which will improve aerial surveillance and improved specifications of two vehicles for use in a rural setting).
12. The Violence Prevention Fund has recently been launched by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to encourage organisations to bid for funds which:-
  - (a) Support those aged 18 and under involved or at risk of being drawn into Serious Violence.
  - (b) Reduce Alcohol-related violence in the Night-Time Economy.
  - (c) Support for aged 18-35 already involved in Serious Violence, with a focus on males.
  - (d) Reduce Domestic Abuse related violence with a knife or sharp instrument (repeat DA perpetrators and victims).
13. Partners are currently working on a series of proposals which will be developed and submitted by Friday 12th January 2024.

## **Operational Updates**

14. In January I invited all Members to a briefing on the work of Community Safety team, the aim being to give an overview of the service, invite questions and queries to assist Members in their ward matters and offer the opportunity for further sessions that Members would find useful.
15. The Trading Standards team under Operation Cece (illegal tobacco), Operation Joseph (illegal vapes) and Operation Nightstar (child sexual exploitation in relation to the supply of vapes and cigarettes to children) have responded to incoming complaints and intelligence and have put together several disruption days which have resulted in large seizures of illegal goods removing them from the supply chain.

16. Counterfeit goods including Apple watches, headphones and cases together with various toys have been seized from street sellers, Cornmill Centre stall holders, and retail stores by Trading Standards. Investigations continue.
17. Trading Standards continues to engage with Darlington Farmers Auction Mart and has visited several farmers to advise on welfare concerns and responded to queries.
18. The new XL Bully dog breed legislation has come into effect and an action plan was developed with media attending recent awareness sessions. All intelligence in relation to current Darlington XL Bully owners is being collated under Operation Citroen. Darlington has shared the work undertaken with regional colleagues to assist the roll-out of the new legislation.
19. The Licensing team coordinated an action plan addressing the risks associated serious violence in the Evening and Night Time Economy (ENTE) on the run-up to the festive period involving key stakeholders. This combines preventative measures along with proactive targeted operations. This action plan will also form the basis of a longer-term strategy to reduce the risk of violence in the ENTE.
20. The Private Sector Housing Team are carrying out an increased number of property inspections, the majority of service requests are dealt with informally by providing advice to either the occupiers or landlords. In November 2023, two emergency prohibition orders were served under the Housing Act 2004, to protect the occupiers against severely hazardous living conditions.
21. The last few months have seen higher levels of rainfall than normal. There have been issues with rural roads, mainly due to the amount of water coming off the already saturated fields, the ditches and drainage have struggled to cope. Working with the highways team and Councillor McCollom each of these areas will be revisited once its dry enough to do so to carry out a full survey at each location and make sure the drainage system in place is working as it should be. We will also be looking to improve any of these areas if possible.
22. The highways team have also identified ditches on private land which have not been maintained by the landowner so we will be writing to them to remind them of their obligations.

### **Resilient Communities & Engagement**

23. PREVENT is the national safeguarding programme aimed at supporting people who are risk of radicalisation. At a National Prevent Seminar it was announced that a revised Prevent training package will be released in Spring 2024 and an independent 'standards and compliance unit' will be established to oversee the Prevent process in 2024. Updates will be brought to Members as more information becomes available.
24. The Home Office Prevent Adviser for the North-East Region, delivered a training session to Designated Safeguarding Leads from Darlington schools.

25. An initial meeting of the North Road / Northgate 'Crime Reduction Partnership' will be held end of January / beginning of February 2024. Relevant ward Cllrs and community representatives will be invited to attend.
26. A Crown Prosecution Service representative will be attending the UNITY group meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024 to explain their role in relation to hate crime.

### **Community Engagement**

27. Trading Standards attended a Barclays Fraud & Scams event held at Barclays Bank, High Row, Darlington engaging with customers and offering advice and guidance.
28. Trading Standards have issued information in press releases warning the public how to avoid inadvertently purchasing counterfeit goods.

### **Climate Change – Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 Flex**

29. In September 2023, the Private Sector Housing Team published a revised Statement of Intent for the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) following the introduction of the Great British Insulation Scheme.
30. The Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 Flex are household referral mechanisms within ECO wider schemes, which enable Local Authorities to widen the eligibility criteria. This allows participating local authorities to include households they consider to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income, and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home, who may not qualify for the schemes via the standard eligibility criteria.
31. Under this scheme, in 2023 the team issued 23 declarations to enable energy efficiency works to be carried out in privately owned and privately rented properties. These works have generally improved the Energy Performance Certificate rating by two bands.

### **Equality and Inclusion**

32. The Hate Crime survey has been adapted to go out via Survey Monkey (as well as other media) and will be launched in January 2024.
33. Number Forty has extended its footprint in the Town by committing to open during the recently re-vitalised Mongay nights; to be held every second Monday of the month. The opening night was 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 with a commitment to open throughout 2024 to support all LGBTQAI+ events and members of those diverse communities.
34. Inclusion and fairness are a vital part of making sure Darlington Borough Council works for everyone. I am delighted to launch an updated version of the Council's Equality Policy, and to re-emphasise the importance of these values. The updated policy was published on the Darlington Borough Council website in December 2023. With this refresh of the policy we aim to build on the work we have done to embed the principles of equality in our work, and to strive harder to make sure that no one in Darlington is put at a disadvantage because of where, what or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.



35. Questions related to single sex services, with a particular focus on toilets have been raised at recent council meetings. The Council has been asked to be clear on its position, and to apply consistency across all of its services. This is a complex matter through which people have different views, and legislation is not clear. The Council recognises this is an important matter for some people, is currently considering options, and will need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders before a clear position can be established. Research is already underway but the main focus of this work will take place during late spring and early summer when more resources can be made available to carry out sufficient levels of engagement.

### **Darlington Cares**

36. Darlington Cares has taken over the administration of a newly formed business lead body, Darlington Employers' Environmental Partnership (DEEP).

37. The group held its first steering group meeting on 30 November at which it appointed Rob Macdiarmid, Head of ESG for Redde Northgate as chair and Darlington Building Society's Chief Risk Officer, David Bews, as vice-chair. Mr Macdiarmid was appointed as Head of Property Sustainability at the Government's Cabinet Office in 2019 before becoming Director of Sustainability at Countryside Partnerships, then joining Redde Northgate last February.

38. Other local companies and organisations involved so far are: EE, North Star Housing, BHP Law, Newlands Group, County Durham Community Foundation, Darlington Borough Council, Teesside University, Serco, and JBA Engineering.

39. The objectives of the partnership are:

- (a) Demonstrate an ambition to reduce environmental impact and transition towards net zero
- (b) Share knowledge practice and to learn from each other
- (c) Link with local, regional and national initiatives
- (d) Celebrate achievement
- (e) Monitor progress against pledges / commitments
- (f) Publicise and grow momentum, showcasing the role Darlington based businesses can play in enabling a just transition to net zero across the UK and further afield.

40. A key focus of the group is supporting smaller businesses that can't afford specialist roles, by helping them access expertise and a body of knowledge to help them progress their plans faster.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

41. The collaboration of voluntary and community sector organisations which are delivering access to support services through the town centre base, Darlington Connect continue to

successfully deliver the Household Support Grant. Demand for this support has been particularly high and it is likely that resources will be depleted in advance of the end of the contract period, at 31 March 2024. No indication from DWP has been given about any further round of the fund but in previous years extensions have been announced later in the financial year.

42. Local voluntary sector agencies have submitted proposals for use of part of the Cost-of-Living budget allocation which are currently being reviewed and negotiated with them.

**Councillor Dr Amanda Riley**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Adults Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 - 2027/28**

2. The Committee received a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.
3. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. We were informed that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.
4. We entered into discussion on the costs associated with children transitioning to Adults Services and the arrangements in place to plan for transitions, and the work being undertaken to promote Discretionary Housing Payments, and how we could best to maximise receipt of this funding to ensure that there is no underspend. Members were interested to know the percentage of the Adult Social Care budget spent on statutory services and how the funding is utilised, and whether a cost benefit analysis has been undertaken in terms of commissioned services and the scope for the development of an in-house solution (Care Cooperative).
5. We sought clarification around the assumptions made around the continuation of the Social Care Grant, and enquired on the purpose of the £71,000 of non-allocated, non-construction funding attributed to Adult Social Care within the submitted report. There was agreement that there was a need for greater funding for Mental Health services, and Members questioned the proposed reduced increase in Council Tax outlined for future years.

**Social Care Reforms - Update**

6. We received an update on the reforms to Adult Social Care, and were informed that since the previous update the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection ratings for the five Local Authority pilot areas had been published.

7. We were informed that the CQC had now updated their guidance on how they will assess local authorities, as required by the Health and Care Act 2022. Members heard that the CQC would be starting assessments from January 2024 onwards, with assessments being undertaken in cohorts of 20 authorities every three months, which would enable the CQC to assess all authorities within two years.
8. It was also highlighted that the proposed reforms to the Mental Health Act 2022 had been delayed and would not be enacted prior to the next UK Parliamentary (General) Election.
9. The Committee were keen to learn how much notice the CQC would provide ahead of an inspection, and welcomed the proactive approach adopted by this authority in terms of readiness for inspection.

### **Substance Misuse Service Update: Support Treatment and Recovery in Darlington Through Empowering (STRIDE)**

10. Members received a report from the Interim Director of Public Health which provided the Committee with an update on the current performance, provision and composition of STRIDE specialist substance misuse treatment and recovery services delivered within Darlington.
11. Following the publication of the National Drugs Strategy, 'From Harm to Hope', in December 2021, the Government had published guidance for local delivery partners in May 2022, which outlined the recommended steps that local areas should take to help deliver the three main priorities of the Strategy - breaking drug supply chains, delivering a world-class treatment and recovery system, and achieving a generational shift in the demand for drugs. It was reported that to support the improvements described in the National Drug Strategy, three years of additional ring-fenced funding for treatment and recovery had been allocated to local areas as the Supplemental Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (SSMTRG) from 2022 until 2025.
12. Members were notified that this increased funding had enabled a step change in increasing both clinical and non-clinical treatment capacity, and had also supported the provision of a comprehensive recovery offer and greater capacity for both drugs and alcohol detoxification, planned for 2024.
13. Members were pleased that, whilst progress on numbers in treatment had been slower than expected, primarily due to recruitment, training and the retention of an expanded workforce, performance in Darlington had improved from the baseline and was consistent with progress both regionally and nationally.
14. Discussion ensued on the period of time that services were commissioned for, the historic lack of rehabilitation provision within the community and acknowledgement of the programmes currently delivered. Recognition was given to the potential for dual referrals and diagnosis within mental health services, and Members enquired about the training required in care homes to support staff in assisting residents with addictions. The balance between engaging people in services with the right to decide not to access services was explored, and Members were keen to learn more about the services available to those with a gambling addiction.

**Councillor Helen Crumbie**  
**Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council the following are the main areas of work the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2023/24**

2. We received a report which provided Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators for Quarter 2 (July 2023 to September 2023), in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group on 2 July 2021, and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee Chair. The report highlighted where Children's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve. It was also outlined that where indicators are reported annually, quarterly updates will not be available.
3. Discussion focused on the indicators in relation to Children in Care who had been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2023, and the basis for the target of 10%.

**Darlington Children's Services – Self-Assessment 2023**

4. The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report which provided the Committee with the Annual Self-Assessment for Children's Services. It was highlighted the self-assessment is not a statutory requirement, however is developed with input from Ofsted, and that the self-assessment is used as part of Ofsted's ILACS Annual Engagement Meeting and plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work.
5. We noted that the number of Children in Care had risen, and expressed concerns in relation to the impact that this would have on service provision, with assurances provided that the agency market could be utilised, if necessary. Discussion also ensued on the number of children who were placed in care with no SEND diagnosis, but who subsequently left care with a SEND diagnosis, and whether there was a need to record 'missed diagnosis', however it was suggested that there could be a number of factors that would have an impact and that it would be difficult to quantify.

**SEND Resource Base Remodelling at Heathfield Primary School**

6. The Committee received a report which provided an overview of the work being undertaken to remodel the existing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) resource base at Heathfield Primary School.

7. We were informed that the resource base at Heathfield Primary School, which is part of Lingfield Academy Trust, had been in its current configuration for a number of years, and that Academy Trust had worked in partnership with Darlington Borough Council to explore how the resource base could be re-modelled to be more reflective of, and responsive to, the needs of Darlington children and young people with SEND, effective from September 2024.
8. We heard that the re-modelling would see the base change to have a primary remit of support for communication and interaction needs which was aligned with the presenting need of Darlington children and young people with SEND, and that the base would be incrementally filled over a three-year period supporting children from Reception to Year 2. It was highlighted that the re-modelling proposal fell within the Department for Education (DfE)'s significant change process for academies, and therefore required a period of open consultation, following which a business case could be submitted to DfE for review and determination.
9. Concern was expressed by the Committee as to whether children at Northwood Primary School would still be able to access provision at Heathfield Primary School, and Members were reassured that they would and that there would be no impact on provision.

#### **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022-23 and Child Protection Conference Chair Annual Report 2022-23**

10. We received an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to Children who are Looked After and Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans, together with the Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer for 2022/23, and the Child Protection Conference Chair for 2022/23.
11. It was highlighted that for the period April 2022 to March 2023, due to the roll-out of the Agile Working programme and post-Covid-19 working arrangements across agencies, formal meetings, which in previous years would have been face to face, had been conducted using virtual platforms, and that this applied to all Child Protection Conferences and Child Looked After Reviews.
12. Members of the Committee entered into discussion on the tracking of families between areas, how child participation in Children Looked After Reviews worked, and how children contributed, and the desire not to ask children to relive previous bad experiences.

#### **Young People SEND Engagement**

13. The Committee received an overview of how Council services engage with young people in relation to the issues relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The report outlined the various activities undertaken to ensure that young people with SEND were able to co-produce plans affecting them and contribute to wider strategic work.



14. The Committee were keen to receive more detail on the wider engagement opportunities that existed for young people, both provided by the Council and external partners, and sought more information in this area at a future meeting.

### **Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2022/23**

15. Louise Addison, Deputy Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley (ATV), presented the Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) Annual Report 2022/23, and outlined the work that had been undertaken across the Tees Valley during 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.
16. We heard that the year had been one of building on partnerships and existing practice to strengthen and improve adoption in the Tees Valley. It was pleasing to know that work had continued with the five partner local authorities to continue to strengthen early twin track care planning for adoption. Ms. Addison highlighted the increased offer to families, and the preparation undertaken for ATV's own Ofsted inspection.
17. We also received information on two key projects, the Pan Regional Early Permanence Project and the Pan Regional Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service. Focus centred on the funding received from the Integrated Care Board, and whether this was something that could be repeatedly accessed on an annual basis, or whether it was a one-off payment.
18. We extended our thanks to Louise for attending the meeting and also for the work of the ATV.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022-23**

19. Ann Baxter, Independent Chair of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership, attended the meeting to outline the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period 2022/23, and answer Members questions thereon.
20. We were informed that Local Safeguarding Partnerships are required to produce an Annual Report to account for the Partnerships achievements over the previous year and make an assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area. The Annual Report summarised and reflected on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information, to outline the progress made and to illustrate the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements across Darlington, and highlighted that the year continued to be shaped by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national safeguarding context had been an evolving landscape as services continued to adapt, many organisations facing national recruitment challenges.
21. We heard that there had been significant organisational change during the year with the introduction nationally of Integrated Care Boards and a new iteration of Working Together to Safeguard Children, along with the implementation of Local Authority Adult Regulatory inspections.

22. We entered into discussion on the introduction of the Integrated Care Boards, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with the reorganisation, and thanked Ann for the work of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28**

23. We received a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.
24. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. We were informed that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.
25. Discussion ensued on whether the costings and savings identified in the report entitled 'Children's Social Care in Darlington – Ensuring Placement Sufficiency and Enabling Creative Alternatives' had been incorporated within the MTFP, the level of detail provided to Members and the format of the report received, the proposed invest to save proposals outlined, and the impact of school non-attendance on budgets.

### **Children's Social Care in Darlington – Ensuring Placement Sufficiency and Enabling Creative Alternatives**

26. The Committee received a report to enable Members to consider a series of proposals to reduce dependence on costly external placements and to support and improve placement sufficiency for children and young people in Darlington. The report referenced a report that had been submitted to Cabinet on 5 December 2023, and invited Members to comment on, and note, the proposals.
27. Members entered into discussion on the improved fostering offer, and the expansion of the Cedars to a seven days per week offer.

**Councillor Mary Layton**  
**Vice Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**  
**On behalf of**  
**Councillor Hilary Allen**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25-2027/28**

2. The Committee received a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28 and give any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.
3. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation. Members were informed that a special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, would consider the view of all Scrutiny Committees. We were informed that that Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.
4. Members also explored the reasons around the reduction in income from the services provided by the crematorium and sought clarification on the overall year-on-year savings within the MTFP.
5. There was a discussion around the costs relating to the provision of the Council's statutory and non-statutory services. Members question's explored whether there were any further savings to be achieved in terms of how the Council provided its statutory functions.
6. The Committee recognised the need for further savings to be made in 2025/26, and urged Officers to start the process of identifying savings as early as possible, to allow time for meaningful consultations to take place. Members received assurances that the process of identifying savings was an ongoing piece of work throughout the year and that relevant papers would be brought to the Committee when they were available.
7. The associated costs of applying for additional funding was also highlighted, and balanced alongside the costs associated with any failed bids for grants or funding.

**2025 Celebrations**

8. The Bicentennial Festival Director provided the Committee with a presentation on the plans in place for the 2025 events which will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The presentation covered the aims of the festival ('S&DR200'), which included aims on developing both national and international partnerships, a focus on a youth driven approach, and a celebration of community achievements.

9. The Festival Director informed Members that there would be a number of workshops and programmes that would target cultural and heritage enthusiasts, families, multi-generational groups and otherwise hard to reach socio-economic groups. Members were informed that there would be a substantial education and learning programme.
10. It was pleasing to note that there was already interest in the Festival in Germany, France, the USA, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.
11. We heard that S&DR200 would be a nine-month celebratory festival, from March 2025 to November 2025, and that there would also be activity throughout 2024 in the lead up to the festival period. We were pleased to learn that the festival would include experiences utilising museums and libraries in Darlington and that there would be a three-day celebration in September 2025 around the inaugural journey.

### **Heritage Action Zone**

12. The Heritage Action Zone Project Manager provided the Committee with a presentation on the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Members were advised that Heritage Action Zones were historic places that had the potential to become focal points for regeneration, areas with untapped potential, rich in industrial, rural, cultural or faith heritage, or areas that may be undervalued and underused, or under significant pressure.
13. The Committee was informed of the aims of the S&DR Heritage Action Zone 2018-2023, with the progress against the agreed programme outputs developed in 2018 being reported on. The progress made against the overarching HAZ programme was also highlighted. It was pleasing to see the amount of work that had been undertaken.
14. The Committee entered into discussion on the work that could be undertaken to protect the Arnold Road bridge and we were keen to learn more around how the promotion of Hopetown would be woven into the communications for the S&DR200 Festival. We were also keen to ensure that there was sufficient funding available to cover the S&DR200 Festival and related activity.
15. Members held an interesting discussion around the future intentions in relation to linking the entire length of the original S&DR line, however, were disappointed to note two key gaps for which funding has yet to be secured.

### **Performance Indicators Quarter 2 – 2023/24**

16. The Committee welcomed a report which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2023/24, as at the end of September 2023 (Quarter 2). As Members will be aware, performance information is provided in line with an indicator set and Scrutiny Committee distribution agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. This Committee receive 35 indicators, of which 25 are reported six monthly.
17. 24 of the 25 indicators reported had Quarter 2 data which could be compared with Quarter 2 data from 2022/23. We were informed that when taking into consideration what is best performance for each indicator 12 of the 24 indicators had increased when

compared to the same period as last year, and 12 of the 24 indicators had decreased when compared to the same period as last year.

18. Members entered into discussion on the income streams for Hullabaloo theatre and the challenge around using the space following the Covid pandemic. Members were informed that it was anticipated that the theatre space would be utilised more over the upcoming 12 month period.
19. Clarification was sought in relation to the Street Champions performance indicators, as the indicator shows number of Street Champions who were signed up to the scheme not those who were regularly active within their communities.
20. The Committee also examined the response times in relation to fly-tipping. Members were informed that and the services and resources required to meet the additional housing developments in the Borough.
21. A useful discussion was also held around the value of the Performance Indicators used, and whether there was any value in refreshing the Performance Indicators submitted to this Scrutiny Committee.

### **Stronger Communities Fund**

22. A report was submitted which presented Members with information on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund to date, and invited the Committee to give consideration as to whether the scheme should continue in the following financial year.
23. It was noted that the fund enabled Councillors to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities.
24. The report set out the spend against the £50,000, to date, together with information on what has been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis. It was noted that all of the funding must be given to the grant recipient by 31 March 2024, and that some Members had not yet allocated the full amount of available funding.
25. The Committee held a positive discussion on the merits of the Fund and how best that the scheme could be utilised to ensure that it provided the greatest impact for residents within the restraints of the proposed MTFP.
26. Members explored options around the allocation of one central fund compared to the existing format where each Councillor was allocated a grant to support individuals and groups, or enhance local areas to the benefit of the local community.

**Councillor James McGill**  
**Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Medium Term Financial Plan**

2. We received the report of the Assistant Director Resources presenting the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, agreed for consultation on 5 December 2023 with the consultation period running until 22 January 2024.
3. A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the report had been published the Council has received the draft financial settlement for 2024/25 and an update was provided to Members highlighting the key points
  - (a) The settlement is for 2024/25 only.
  - (b) The Services Grant has reduced by approximately £800,000.
  - (c) The New Home Bonus has been continued for 2024/25, we will receive approximately £400,000.
  - (d) A number of figures are still to be confirmed, but at this point it is estimated that resources will decrease by approximately £250,000 for 2024/25 and further in future years if the New Homes Bonus ends.
4. The Assistant Director Resources clarified that the Local Government Finance Settlement which was received on 18 December 2023 and that staff have been interpreting and incorporating figures and that all settlement details will be included in the updated version of the MTFP which will go Cabinet and Council in February. Some Members expressed the view that more time was required to consider the MTFP in view of the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement and could not form a view on the MTFP until this was known.
5. We raised questions regarding the reduction in the Services Grant, officers clarified that this decrease was expected following further information received after the MTFP was published, but the decrease was more than expected. The Services Grant had reduced in previous years.
6. A further question was raised as to whether fundamental changes in strategy will be required in the longer term if more budget pressures arise. Officers responded that the budget is built using the best knowledge available at this time taking into account service demands and these have been included in the MTFP, however further pressures or savings would impact on the plan.

Members also asked the question regarding the impact of interest rate fluctuations on future budgets. Officers confirmed that the main impact of interest rates is on contracts that have allowance built in for interest rate changes and particularly for borrowing and investments. Staff manage the borrowing and investments through the Treasury Management always consider interest rates in decisions.

7. The question was asked whether the impact of council tax arrangements for empty properties is being included in the report and it was confirmed that it is and any changes will be included in the final version of the report.  
A further question was raised as to whether the commitment to invest in play areas was still being honoured. Officers confirmed that commitment is still funded, as it was included in the 2023/24 MTFP, this was not included in appendix 7 as works have begun. Members also raised the question as to whether any reduction in staff numbers may occur in 2024/25. Officers confirmed that any savings currently in the report are achieved through natural turnover however future years cannot be predicted at this time.
8. Members raised the point that this report is not the final report that will be presented to Cabinet, it was confirmed that this is due to new information (such as the Local Government Finance Settlement) which will be included in the final MTFP, but officers strive to provide Scrutiny Committees with the most up-to-date version possible at the time of meeting.
9. Members agreed that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

### **Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-29**

10. We welcomed the Programmes and Performance Manager - Housing and Revenues who delivered a presentation on Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-29 to be considered before approval by Cabinet on 9 January 2024 with progress of the strategy to be reviewed on an annual basis.
11. We were provided with information in support of the Government's target of achieving net zero carbon by 2050 including the challenges faced by Housing staff and the strategies in place to handle these and to meet the Government targets of achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C for all our council homes by 2030. Members received an explanation of the "Fabric First" approach being utilised, in which the service's goal is to maximise efficiency in the use of all materials (e.g., insulation, windows and doors) in carrying out works on council properties with the average spend on each property between £26,707 to £31,410.
12. It was reported that positive progress is being made overall and that the benefits to residents include better quality insulation resulting in shorter periods with heating on and double-glazing keeping heat in resulting in positive feedback from tenants.
13. Members raised the question as to whether work is also carried out on private housing where possible. Officers clarified that where funding opportunities are available they will



work with the Private Sector Housing team with joint funding bids. We also asked as to whether payments are made from the housing revenue account, and it was confirmed that this is the case but only in relation to Council housing.

14. Members raised the question as to whether emissions from occupied council properties count towards net carbon zero goals. Officers stated that they would need to confirm this however that it would be difficult to regulate tenants' energy usage.
15. We acknowledged the quality of presentation and information provided and support the report's onward submission to cabinet and to review progress on an annual basis.

#### **Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2024-29**

16. We welcomed the Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues to present the report prior to its onward submission to 9 January 2024 Cabinet. Members were informed that the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policy is a scheme which aims to provide residents who receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, with additional financial assistance with their rental costs. The operation of the scheme is at the Council's discretion and funding is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with any leftover funding returned at the end of each grant period.
17. Members asked questions which included the time periods that funds are granted to tenants, we were informed that the policy is designed for short-term assistance, generally lasting six months and twelve in certain cases. We asked the question as to why the entire grant has not been spent in this period and officers clarified that a balancing act is required in order to make the funding last for the full period however in previous years where housing benefit was more prevalent it was far easier to identify shortfall and those requiring aid as opposed to the current system of Universal Credit. However, officers also highlighted that the goal is always to issue the full amount of funding where possible in each period.
18. Discussion was held as to the promotion of the scheme and we were informed that promotion is mainly handled by the local authority and citizens advice bureau rather than the DWP and members suggested that the scheme could be advertised in One Darlington in the future.
19. We considered the report and supported the report's onward submission to Cabinet.

#### **Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy 2024-29**

20. We welcomed the Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues to present the report prior to its onward submission to 9 January 2024 Cabinet.
21. Members were informed that Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides the Council with discretionary powers to reduce a person's Business Rates liability in cases of hardship. In addition, section 69 of the Localism Act 2011 amends the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to allow Councils the discretion to award discretionary relief to all types of businesses.

Section 13a (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 provides the Council with discretionary powers to reduce a person's Council Tax liability to such an extent as we think fit.

22. It was highlighted that the Council does not receive a grant towards these payments which are taken from the Council's collection fund.
23. We considered the report and supported the report's onward submission to cabinet.

### **Council Tax and Business Rates Recovery Strategy 2024-29**

24. We welcomed the Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues to present the report prior to its onward submission to 9 January 2024 Cabinet.
25. Members were informed that the strategy sets out how the Council will use its discretionary and statutory powers to facilitate payments, recover debts and maintain a firm but fair approach to collection and recovery. The collection of Council Tax and Business Rates is a high priority for the Council and is the main revenue source for the funding of key Council services and the overall goal is to recover debts in the most efficient manner for the Council.
26. Members asked questions which included what proportion of debts are unrecoverable and were informed that we have a 1% bad-debt provision however most debt agencies recognise council tax as a primary debt for payment. A further question was asked with regards to council tax collection rates appearing to be lower than expected and this was explained to be as a result of in-progress recovery and those on long-standing payment arrangements.
27. We raised the question as to the driving factors behind the production of the report. Officers confirmed that the decision was made due to various factors which included the high number of Freedom of Information requests received, the council's desire for transparency and also the opportunity to consolidate a lot of information that is already present (e.g. on the council website) into a single format. It was also asked if it will be evident if the strategy has an effect on recovery. Officers stated that it would be difficult at any time to determine the trends for non-payments however the team are proven to be very effective in identifying cases requiring attention and providing help and support to aid recovery actions. It was also highlighted that statistical results are also present in performance indicator reports if future analysis is required.
28. Members took the opportunity to acknowledge the high standard of work carried out by the recovery department and acknowledge the impact on recovery post-COVID.
29. We considered the report and supported the report's onward submission to Cabinet.

### **Work Programme**

30. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.
31. A Member highlighted that the Revised Climate Change Strategy (9 January 2024 Cabinet) had not been suggested for presentation at this Scrutiny Committee prior to submission to Cabinet. This will be addressed for future meetings.

**Councillor Joe Dillion**  
**Vice Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**  
**On behalf of**  
**Councillor Rebecca Baker**  
**Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Primary Medical Care and General Practice Access in Darlington**

2. We welcomed a representative from the Commissioning Lead – Primary Care (North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board) who delivered a presentation and provided an update to Members on general practice in Darlington with an accompanying dataset. The presentation included clear definitions of general practice, the variances in operations and contracts and regulation of practices as well as the role of the Primary Care Network (PCN) in Darlington.
3. Funding and expenditure for GP practices was explained with a summary of the Quality and Outcomes Framework Scheme (QOF), a points-based scheme that provides funding to support aspiration to and achievement of a range of quality standards, by rewarding practices for the volume and quality of care delivered to their patients.
4. Members were provided with a breakdown of the general practice workforce in Darlington, and it was highlighted that a strong focus is placed on ensuring that patients are seen by the staff member with the most effective skillset to deal with their issue in order to maximise efficiency.
5. Demand for general practice appointments was also covered along with the types of appointments now available to residents, namely face-to-face, phone and online appointments. The responses from the most recent patient survey have been received and are expected to be published in July 2024, however, responses from the 1,300 from Darlington show an above level of satisfaction with the service.
6. Questions were raised by Members and included highlighting variances in full time and full-time equivalent staff between practices for which we were informed that practices always aim to reasonably meet the needs of their patients with staff trained and specialised where possible to accommodate needs. Further questions included clarifying criteria for patients' registration at a practice and we were informed that patients can register and change practices where needed and only in the case of a "closed list" would a practice be unable to take further registrations.
7. We raised discussions regarding the availability of Saturday appointments and Members agreed that this could be more effectively publicised and promoted by practices. NHS colleagues stated that the availability of Saturday appointments is included in newsletters however Members' comments will be raised with their colleagues.

8. A further discussion was held with regards to patients who do not attend (DNA) their appointments without cancelling. Members noted that the numbers of DNA appointments are disappointingly high and asked if penalties are present for this – NHS colleagues acknowledged the numbers and highlighted that reminder text messages before and after (DNA) appointments, that practices promote the importance of properly cancelling unrequired appointments and highlighted that where possible practices are more inclined to try and resolve issues and have patients attend future appointments.
9. Members raised points of note to NHS colleagues which included improving online access as timeouts and navigation can be an issue and also clarifying the different types of treatment and appointments between primary and secondary care.
10. Further points of note included that improved phone services are being implemented in Darlington with all Darlington practices now operating with cloud-based telephony. Additional patient surveys are in production with an aim to gather the most relevant and actionable data from patients.
11. We noted the high quality of the presentation and data provided and NHS colleagues informed members that any additional data can be provided if any should request this.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

12. We received the report of the Assistant Director Resources presenting the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, agreed for consultation on 5 December 2023 with the consultation period running until 22 January 2024.
13. A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the report had been published the Council has received the draft financial settlement for 2024/25 and an update was provided to Members highlighting the key points
  - (a) The settlement is for 2024/25 only.
  - (b) The Services Grant has reduced by approximately £800,000.
  - (c) The New Home Bonus has been continued for 2024/25, we will receive approximately £400,000.
  - (d) A number of figures are still to be confirmed, but at this point it is estimated that resources will decrease by approximately £250,000 for 2024/25 and further in future years if the New Homes Bonus ends.
14. A discussion was raised with regards to the Local Government Finance Settlement. Members stated that they had not had sight of this prior to the meeting. Officers clarified that the draft settlement was received on 18 December 2023 and that staff have been working through and interpreting the figures and that all settlement details will be included in an updated version of the MTFP. Some Members expressed the view that more time was required to consider the MTFP in view of the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement and could not form a view on the MTFP until this was known.

15. A comment was made that questioned why the construction of energy efficient homes was not above the minimum regulations.
16. We raised questions which included whether the Public Health Grant remains at a similar level as in the past, officers confirmed that the indicative allocation has an increase of just over £100,000. The Public Health Principal welcomed this increase but highlighted to members how some of that increase had to be spent on very specific things such as funding the NHS pay award in public health services provided by the NHS and for delivering new public health duties and responsibilities that have been placed on local authorities recently.
17. A further question related to “intersectional issues”; if the council tackle issues early before they can cause increased spending at a later date specifically relating to maintaining and improving the health of the residents. Officers clarified that the Public Health grant invests in programmes across the authority to contribute to delivering on key Public Health outcomes and objectives and provided examples of programmes that are in place to tackle childhood obesity, weight management, exercise referral, school swimming as well work undertaken by Environmental Health colleagues such as eatery inspections.
18. A further question was asked as to the charges for hire of leisure spaces with Leisure colleagues confirming that charges for spaces are calculated at an hourly rate.
19. Members questioned why some charges are proposed to increase and some are not and the reasons for this. Officers clarified that some charges are nationally set and in other areas managers keep sustainability in mind and as such are conscious that increased charges could result in a reduction in demand and a net decrease in income. A question was raised concerning why car parking charges were not proposed to be increased and an additional point was added from members that charges from parking could be better utilised to improve parking enforcement.
20. Members agreed that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

### **Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-29**

21. We welcomed the Programmes & Performance Manager - Housing and Revenues who delivered a presentation on Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-29 to be considered before approval by Cabinet on 9 January 2024 with progress of the strategy to be reviewed on an annual basis.
22. We were provided with information in support of the Government’s target of achieving net zero carbon by 2050 including the challenges faced by Housing staff and the strategies in place to handle these and to meet the Government targets of achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C for all our council homes by 2030. Members received an explanation of the “Fabric First” approach being utilised, in which the service’s goal is to maximise efficiency in the use of all materials (e.g., insulation,

windows and doors) in carrying out works on council properties with the average spend on each property between £26,707 to £31,410.

23. It was reported that positive progress is being made overall and that the benefits to residents include better quality insulation resulting in shorter periods with heating on and double-glazing keeping heat in resulting in positive feedback from tenants.
24. Members asked questions including enquiring as to the longevity and practicality of external insulation for which officers confirmed that external wall insulation has a thirty year lifespan however owners must avoid drilling through or otherwise breaking through panels.
25. We also asked as to whether home ventilation work is carried out alongside other work, and it was confirmed that certain ventilation work is carried out before or at the same time as carrying out other upgrades. A further question related to whether solar panels are installed on new-builds and if not does this affect costs if installed later. Officers answered that solar panels are not included on new-builds by default due to their higher energy efficiency however costs for installation remain similar if installed during or after building.
26. Discussions were held confirming the length of provider contracts at twenty years. And further points including the effect of the strategy on the capital programme for which officers confirmed that increased internal climate change spend can enable application for greater grants.
27. We acknowledged the quality of presentation and information provided and support the report's onward submission to cabinet and to review progress on an annual basis.

#### **Performance Indicators (Leisure Indicators) - Quarter 2 2023/24**

28. We welcomed the Head of Leisure who presented performance indicators for the following areas – Dolphin Centre visitor numbers, school pupils in the Sports Development Programme and number of individuals participating in the Community Sports Development Programme.
29. It was reported that Dolphin Centre visitor numbers have shown a decrease which is attributed to the closure of the main pool due to upgrade works. However, it is noted that other services available at the Dolphin Centre have performed extremely well.
30. The number of school pupils participating in the Sports Development Programme has decreased, however this is attributed to capital project works at Eastbourne Sports Complex which has limited the scope of hostable events.
31. We were informed that the number of individuals participating in the Community Sports Development Programme has increased. Numbers at the Holiday Activity Project remaining consistent with previous years while experiencing improved drop-off rates.
32. We noted the positive figures and expressed thanks for the efforts of all Leisure staff for their contributions to this.



### **Work Programme 2023/24**

33. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

**Councillor Neil Johnson**  
**Vice Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**  
**O.B.O.**  
**Councillor Mary Layton**  
**Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**

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