



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 21 March 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 Meetings of this Council held on 25 January 2024 and 15 February 2024 (Pages 5 - 18)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given from):-
  - (a) The Public; (Pages 19 - 20)
  - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
  - (a) Chief Executive's Appraisal – Report of the Assistant Director, Resources (Pages 21 - 24)
8. Cabinet Reports.
  - (a) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 25 - 28)

- (b) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 29 - 34)
  - (c) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 35 - 38)
  - (d) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 39 - 44)
  - (e) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 45 - 48)
  - (f) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 49 - 54)
  - (g) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 55 - 58)
  - (h) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 59 - 64)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 65 - 66)
  - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 67 - 68)
  - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 69 - 70)
  - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 71 - 74)
  - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 75 - 78)
10. Membership Changes - To consider any membership changes to Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies.



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

**Wednesday, 13 March 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

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## COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 January 2024

**PRESENT** – The Mayor, Councillors 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, Roche, Mrs Scott, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Ali, Allen and Robinson.

### 50 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2023**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 30 November 2023.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 30 November 2023, be approved as a correct record.

### 51 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

Non-Pecuniary interests were recorded for Councillors Dulston, Durham, Harker, Keir, Laing, McCollom, McGill, Porter and Storr, in relation to Minute 57 (c) below, as Members who served on the Management Committee of a community association / organisation, school governing body, parish council or charity or similar body, or who were employed by such a body.

(**NOTE:** The Monitoring Officer issued a general dispensation under Section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011, with reference to paragraphs (c) and (e)).

### 52 **SEALING.**

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

### 53 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

**Holocaust Memorial Day 2024** – The Mayor acknowledged Holocaust Memorial Day, which was due to take place on Saturday, 27th January 2024, and would mark the 79th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Mayor informed Members that this important anniversary had been commemorated in Darlington at memorial service at the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, held on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, and which had been organised by the Celebrating Communities group.

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

**(1) THE PUBLIC;**

There were two 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.

**55 COUNCIL REPORTS.**

**(1) COUNCIL TAX CALCULATION OF TAX BASE 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) to determine the Council's tax base for 2024/25.

The submitted report stated that, 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 had to decide its tax base by 31 January in the year preceding that for which the tax base applies.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the report for the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2024/25 be approved.

(b) That the tax base for the Council of 35,300.8 and the individual tax base for the parishes, as set out in Appendix 2 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASON** - To comply with statutory requirements, enabling the Council Tax for 2024/25 to be set by Council in February 2024.

**(2) MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES REVIEW**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members to give consideration to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel appointed by the Council in relation to the adoption of a new Scheme of Members' Allowances.

The submitted report stated that the Independent Remuneration Panel had produced a report with recommendations in accordance with the Council's terms of reference for the Panel, and that the report covered a wide range of issues and the Panel's reasoning for its recommendations.

It was noted that the Panel had recommended that no changes 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. The submitted report advised that Members could accept the Panel's recommendations in full, or part, or reject them.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the recommendations be accepted in full with effect from 1 April 2024;

and

(b) That the new Members' Allowances Scheme, as appended at Appendix 2 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASON** - To implement a new Members' Allowances Scheme with effect from 1 April 2024.

**(3) REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS 2023**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members 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.

The submitted report stated that the Representation of the People Act 1983 required that local authorities conduct reviews of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations within their local authority area, and that the next compulsory review was due to commence within a sixteen-month period beginning on 1 October 2023. It was stated that at the July 2023 Council meeting a timetable for the next compulsory review had been agreed.

The submitted report set out the process that the review undertook and recommended a small number of changes to the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations that had been used in past elections.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the consultation responses received be noted.

(b) That 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, be approved, 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)).

- (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) That the publication of the proposals for Polling Places, as set out in Appendix D of the submitted report, be authorised.

**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.

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

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) which sought approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and to provide a mid-yearly review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities.

The submitted report stated that the mandatory Prudential Code, which governs Council borrowing, required Council approval of controls, called Prudential Indicators, relating to capital spending and borrowing. It was reported that the Prudential Indicators were set in three statutory annual reports to Council, and the submitted report followed the Council's approval in February 2023 of the 2023/24 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy.

The submitted report highlighted that the key objectives of the three annual reports were to ensure that governance of the large amounts of public money under the Council's Treasury Management activities complied with legislation and met the high standards set out in the codes of practice, to ensure that borrowing was affordable, and to report performance of the key activities of borrowing and investments.

The submitted report also outlined revisions to the Prudential Indicators in terms of a reduction to Operational Boundary to £148.025M, and the Authorised Limit to £245.331M to



allow for any additional cashflow requirement.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the revised Prudential Indicators and limits in Tables 1 to 6, 8, 10 and 12 to 17 of the submitted report be examined.

(b) That the Treasury Management Budget (Financing Costs) projected outturn, shown in Table 11, be noted.

(c) That the updated Prudential Indicators be approved.

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

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

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

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

## **57 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.

## **58 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.

## **59 NOTICE OF MOTION**

### **(1) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DURHAM AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR BARTCH**

The following Motion was moved 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.'

### **The Motion was Lost.**

## **60 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 Kane replace Councillor Dillon on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee;
- (b) That Councillor Beckett replace Councillor Dillon on the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee; and
- (c) That Councillor Curry replace Councillor Allen on the Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education (SACRE).

## COUNCIL

Thursday, 15 February 2024

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

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Allen, Bartch, Henderson, Laing, Lee, M Nicholson, Robinson and Mrs Scott.

### 61 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### 62 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

**Death of Former-Mayor and Former-Councillor Roderick Crichlow (Francis)** - The Mayor reported on the death of Former-Mayor and Former-Councillor Roderick Crichlow (formerly Francis), who had recently passed away, and in doing so referred to Former-Councillor Crichlow's years of service.

As a mark of respect, Members stood and observed a short silence in memory of their former colleague.

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

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

There was one question, with notice, from a Member of the Public, who 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.

### 64 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)**

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to seek approval for a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, including setting a budget and Council Tax increase for 2024/25, and also the approval of a 2024/25 to 2027/28 Capital Programme.

The submitted report stated the Council faced unparalleled financial challenges which stemmed from reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 where the Council's budget was reduced by £46m in real terms, a 36% reduction in budget. This financial

position has been further compounded in the aftermath of covid and the current economic climate, the cost of living is increasing, and income deprivation and poverty rising.

The submitted report stated that the Council had previously met the challenges faced head on through value for money service delivery, shared services, economic growth, and strong financial management and had utilised built up reserves to continue to provide vital services for the residents of Darlington, however it was noted that the additional demands and inflationary increases were putting an unprecedented pressure on affordability and that the Council's reserves would be significantly reduced by the end of 2025/26. It was stated that unless additional Government funding was forthcoming the Council would need to undertake a fundamental review over the course of 2024 to decide what and how services will be delivered in the coming years.

It was reported that the Council had received its Local Government Finance Settlement on 5 February 2024, and which confirmed funding allocations for one year only and the Council Tax referendum limits of 3% for Council Tax and 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept. It was stated that as part of the settlement reference was made to the development and sharing of productivity plans which would require local authorities to set out how they intended to improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure.

The submitted report stated that future years funding beyond this period had not been confirmed and that the consequence of this was that the 2024/25 – 2027/28 MTFP had an eye to future years but did not seek to presume what the future would look like, and aimed to ensure that the Council could set a legal budget in 2024/25 and continue to provide our core offer level of services to the residents of Darlington.

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on the recommendation was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

**For the Motion** – The Mayor; Councillors Ali, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Coe, Crumbie, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, Porter, Ray, Dr. Riley, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms and Wallis (29)

**Against the Motion** – Councillors Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K. Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Tostevin and Walters (12)

**Abstentions** – None (0)

Motion Carried.

**RESOLVED** - That

- (a) The responses and comments received to the consultation be noted.
- (b) That the Revenue MTFP as set out in **Appendix 6** and the Capital Programme as set out in **Appendix 7**, be approved, including the following:

- (i) A Council Tax increase of 2.99% plus a 2% Adult Social Care Precept to help fund social care for 2024/25.
  - (ii) The Schedule of Charges as set out in **Appendix 3**.
  - (iii) Funding for Children’s Services to address the dependence on expensive external provision and improve placement sufficiency for children and young people in Darlington as noted in the report and detailed in **Appendix 8**.
- (c) That a delegation for Cabinet to vary the Revenue Budget for 2024/25 by up to £0.5m without further Council approval, be approved.
- (d) That a delegation for Cabinet to vary the Capital Budget for 2024/25 by up to £0.5m without further Council approval, be approved.

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

- (b) To enable the Council to continue to plan services and finances over the medium term.
- (c) To ensure decisions can be made in a timely manner.
- (d) To reduce the pressures on the MTFP in the medium term.
- (e) To ensure investment in our assets is maintained.

## **65 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX FOR 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to setting this Council’s Council Tax for 2024/2025, which was required to be set before 11th March 2024.

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on the recommendation was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

**For the Motion** – The Mayor; Councillors Ali, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Coe, Crumbie, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, Porter, Ray, Dr. Riley, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms and Wallis (29)

**Against the Motion** – Councillors Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K. Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Tostevin and Walters (12)

**Abstentions** – None (0)

Motion Carried.

**RESOLVED** – That:

- (a) The following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2024/25 in accordance with

sections 31 to 36 of the Act and relevant regulations:-

- |        |   |              |
|--------|---|--------------|
| (i)    | the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils, which is its expenditure   | £269,703,858 |
| (ii)   | the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act, which is its income  | £203,603,000 |
| (iii)  | the amount by which (i) exceeds (ii) calculated by the Council for the year in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax Requirement   | £66,100,858  |
| (iv)   | The amount at item 5(iii) above, divided by the council tax base in paragraph 13 below, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts)   | £1,872.50    |
| (v)    | the aggregate of all special items (Parish Precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act as in the attached <b>Appendix 1</b>   | £228,858     |
| (vi)   | the amount at 5(iv) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 5(v) above by the amount at paragraph 13 below, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept relates | £1,866.02    |
| (vii)  | That the basic council tax for 2024/25 calculated for dwellings in those areas that have parish precepts be as set out in Appendix 1, column 5  |              |
| (viii) | That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Act, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in <b>Appendix 2</b> as the amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings   |              |

- (b) It be noted that for the year 2024/25 The Office of the Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner has stated the following amounts in the precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Act, for each of the categories of dwellings shown :-

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p

Police Authority	178.83	208.63	238.44	268.24	327.85	387.46	447.07	536.48
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- (c) It be noted that for the year 2024/25 County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service has stated the following amounts in the precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Act, for each of the categories of dwellings shown: -

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p	£ p
Fire Authority	78.75	91.87	105.00	118.12	144.37	170.62	196.87	236.24

- (d) The Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Act hereby sets the amounts set out in **Appendix 3** as the amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings.

**REASON** - To set the Council Tax for the Council’s area in accordance with statutory requirements.

## 66 DARLINGTON CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the Council’s Capital Strategy for 2024/25.

The submitted report stated that the production of a Capital Strategy was a requirement for Councils following the publication of the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities 2021. It was reported that the Strategy provided an overview of how capital expenditure and financing plans are decided upon, and provided a framework for the development, management and monitoring of the Council’s capital investment plans. The submitted report stated that the Strategy also highlighted the resource streams available in terms of funding to the Council and the risk management approach taken.

The submitted report stated that the Strategy maintained a strong and current link to the Council’s priorities and to its key strategy documents such as the Treasury Management Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan and the Council Plan.

**RESOLVED** – That the Capital Strategy for 2024/25, as appended at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASONS** - (a) To provide a framework for capital investments.

(b) To ensure the Council adopts the Prudential Code for Capital Finance 2021.

(c) To enable the Council to invest in its assets.

## 67 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - MTFP 2024-25 TO 2027-28

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to proposals for the revenue budget, capital programme, rent levels and service charges for the Council’s Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2024/25, in the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan to 2027/28, and the 30 year

Business Plan, following consultation with Council tenants.

The submitted report stated that the Council was the largest provider of social housing in the borough, providing 5,278 homes to local residents, and outlined the ambitious programme to build new Council houses in Darlington. It was reported that the new build Council housing programme was funded through capital receipts from right to buy sales, grant funding from Homes England and through estimated borrowing of £13.5m.

The submitted report set out the key decisions for the HRA for 2024-25, which included proposed revenue expenditure of £31.783m, and a proposed capital programme of £27.270m.

It was stated that Councils had the discretion to increase rents each year by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%, which means for 2024-25 Members had the option to increase rents by up to 7.7%. Members were reminded that a 5% rent increase was agreed in February 2023 for the current financial year, and although rents could have been increased by 7%, the 5% increase was in recognition of the ongoing economic pressures facing tenants.

Taking into account the current economic pressures facing tenants and balancing this with the increased costs of maintaining and improving our housing and the need to deliver the Council's ambitious capital and energy efficiency programmes, it was determined that an increase of 6.7% was to be recommended, or an average of £5.54 each week. It was also recommended to increase service charges by an appropriate inflationary amount.

Following a request by five Members, a Named Vote was called for, and there appeared:-

**For the Motion** – The Mayor; Councillors Ali, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Coe, Crumbie, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, Porter, Ray, Dr. Riley, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms and Wallis (29)

**Against the Motion** – Councillors Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K. Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Tostevin and Walters (12)

**Abstentions** – None (0)

Motion Carried.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That an average weekly rent increase of 6.7% for 2024-25 be implemented giving an average social rent of £83.98 and affordable rent of £94.17.

(b) That garage rents and service charges are increased, as shown in Table 6 of the submitted report.

(c) That the revenue budget, at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved.

(d) That the Housing Business Plan at Appendix 2 of the submitted report, be agreed.

(e) That the Capital programme at Appendix 3 of the submitted report, be approved.



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

## **68 PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) which requested that Council adopt the Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2024/25 to 2026/27 relating to capital expenditure and Treasury Management activity, a policy statement relating to the Minimum Revenue Provision, and the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy for 2024/25.

The submitted report outlined the Council's Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 – 2026/27, and set out the expected treasury operations for this period. It was stated that the report fulfilled key legislative and guidance requirements.

The information contained within the submitted report regarding the Council's expenditure plans, treasury management and prudential borrowing activities indicated that they were within the statutory framework and consistent with the relevant codes of practice, prudent, affordable and sustainable, and an integral part of the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the Prudential Indicators and limits for 2024/25 to 2026/27, as summarised in Tables 1 and 2 of the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement (paragraphs 36-43 of the submitted report) be approved.

(c) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27, as summarised in paragraphs 47 to 80 of the submitted report, be approved.

(d) That the Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25, as contained in paragraphs 89 to 113 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASONS** - (a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) guidance on investments.

(b) To comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003.

(c) To approve a framework for officers to work within when making investment decisions.

## **69 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting approval of the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2024/2025 in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and Local Government Transparency Code 2014.

The submitted report stated that the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to agree a written Pay Policy on an annual basis and publish specific information relating to the Council's highest and lowest paid employees.

**RESOLVED** – That the proposed Pay Policy 2024/25, as detailed at Appendix A of the submitted report, be approved, and arrangements be made to publish the Policy on the Council's internet for public access.

**REASON** – To enable the Council to comply with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

**Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 21 March 2024**

**Item No. 6 (a) - Questions submitted on Notice from Members of the Public**

**There were no Questions submitted on Notice from Members of the Public for this meeting.**

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**COUNCIL  
21 MARCH 2024**

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## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader of the Council**

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To endorse the recommendation of the Appraisal Sub-Group in respect of the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal.

#### **Summary**

2. The Appraisal Sub-Group met on Wednesday 6 March 2024 to consider the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal in accordance with the previously agreed process.
3. This was the third appraisal for the Chief Executive, and he presented a statement reviewing the priorities he had been working on since the last appraisal in December 2022.
4. In considering his report, the Group appreciated and thanked Chief Executive for the work undertaken since his last appraisal.
5. The Appraisal Sub-Group agreed the Chief Executive's priorities for the next year and this report outlines the recommendation of the Group.

#### **Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that the following recommendation of the Appraisal Sub-Group be endorsed by Council :-

That in respect of the Chief Executive's Appraisal, it is recommended that Council note that the Appraisal Sub-Group has met to consider the Chief Executive's Appraisal for 2023/24 and has agreed that the Chief Executive will focus on the following key themes for the year ahead, namely :-

- (i) the budget position and financial challenges,
- (ii) implementation of the Council Plan,
- (iii) explore further partnering opportunities with organisations,
- (iv) continue to promote and deliver economic growth opportunities,
- (v) further develop the Council's culture, performance and staffing.

**Reason**

7. The recommendation is supported to enable the appraisal to be confirmed.

**Brett Nielsen**  
**Assistant Director Resources**

**Background Papers**

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

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues in relation to Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no issues in relation to Health and Wellbeing.
Sustainability	There are no issues in relation to Sustainability
Diversity	There are no issues relating to Diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	None.
Groups Affected	None.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not affect the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Council Plan	The report contributes to the Council Plan in a number of ways through Officer involvement in contributing to the delivery of the Plan.
Efficiency	This report does not have any direct impact on efficiency.
Impact on Looked After Children	This report does not have any direct impact on efficiency

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The Appraisal Sub-Group (a subsidiary body of the Human Resources Committee) undertakes an annual appraisal with the Chief Executive and reports its recommendations to the Council.
9. The Sub-Group met on 6 March 2024, to undertake the appraisal at which it reviewed the Chief Executive's self-assessment of the previous year and the achievements made, and agreed the objectives for the coming financial year 2024/25.
10. In reviewing the previous year the sub group thanked the Chief Executive for all the positive work and achievements in the period.
11. The Sub-Group made the following recommendation to Council :-

That in respect of the Chief Executive's Appraisal, it is recommended that Council note that the Appraisal Sub-Group has met to consider the Chief Executive's Appraisal for 2023/24 and has agreed that the Chief Executive will focus on the following key themes for the year ahead, namely :-

- (i) the budget position and financial challenges,
- (ii) implementation of the Council Plan,
- (iii) explore further partnering opportunities with organisations,
- (iv) continue to promote and deliver economic growth opportunities,
- (v) further develop the Council's culture, performance and staffing.

### Conclusion

12. The Chief Executive's appraisal has been undertaken by the Appraisal Sub-Group of the Human Resources Committee. As this is a Committee constituted by Council, Council is required to endorse the recommendation of the Sub-Group.

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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**

Darlington Station

2. Good progress continues to be made on the Darlington Station project. On Neasham Road, where the new station building and multi storey car park is being built, blockwork and cladding installation has commenced.
3. Also, on the eastern side Network Rail have established their site compound and been carrying out enabling work on the rail infrastructure. In mid-February hoardings started to be installed within the existing station to enable works to commence to demolish the 1960's retail units and begin to create space for the stairwells and lifts to access the new footbridge, which will connect the existing station to the new platforms and station building.
4. On the Western Gateway preparatory work is continuing to put in place the necessary agreements, carry out surveys and design work ahead of the demolition of the two remaining properties (1-4 Park Lane and 1 Waverley Terrace) which were acquired for the project.

Transport Investment Programme

5. In January, TVCA Cabinet unanimously approved a £1bn investment programme which comprises 26 new projects aligned to the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan. This decision will enable development work to commence on the programme.
6. Key projects specific to Darlington, include:-
  - (a) £250m allocation to the Darlington Northern Link Road
  - (b) £60m allocation for investment in digital transport technology across Tees Valley
  - (c) £20m allocation for the introduction of autonomous public transport vehicles
  - (d) £5m allocation for developing a proposal that gives more local control over the Tees Valley rail network
  - (e) £40m allocation for infrastructure upgrades to enable the introduction of new train services between Darlington <-> Hartlepool
  - (f) £20m allocation for the redevelopment of Teesside Airport Station
  - (g) £35m allocation to support the growth of rail freight across Tees Valley
  - (h) £45m allocation to support access to employment, education and training by investing in bus / active travel infrastructure

- (i) £10m allocation to help overcome barriers to employment experienced by people across Tees Valley

### Bus Service Improvement Plan

7. Following the Arriva service withdrawals and the introduction of a number of subsidised services from summer 2023 initially to March 2024, these have now been re-procured and will operate through to March 2025. In Darlington this includes:-
  - (a) Service 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, one of the identified priorities was to make improvements to bus shelters and improve the at-stop timetable information. It is planned that from April 2024 a new timetable template will be launched and installed.

### **Climate Change**

9. The Climate Change Working Group meeting for February was deferred because the Climate Change Team attended the APSE Energy conference on 28 and 29 February, along with the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Chair of the Working Group.
10. Contact has been made with the new Tees Valley Project Manager in the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub. The Hub is there to help the Council find resources for net zero projects. A meeting has been arranged for the Tees Valley Project Manager to meet with officers and discuss potential projects.

### **External Meetings and Engagement**

11. I have attended a range of external meetings and engagements:
  - (a) NE Chamber of Commerce Event: I gave an update on the Council budget, and the wider context of LA budgets in general; an update on DBC major projects, and impact on the local economy. This was concluded with a Q&A.
  - (b) I attended Transport for the North annual conference on 5 February. A number of notable speakers – Combined Authority Mayors (Steve Rotherham, Andy Burnham, Tracy Brabin), Huw Merriman MP (Minister of State for Rail and HS2). The consequences of the cancellation of HS2 was a hot topic; there was general consensus – cross party – that the North will be the poorer for its cancellation. The need to transform the bus industry was discussed – with insights from a range of interested parties.

- (c) I attended the Transport for the North Board meetings 8 February and 20 March.
- (d) Rail North Committee on 21 February. The main discussion related to ongoing performance issues with some Train Operating Companies.
- (e) I met with Tom Nutt, Chair of the Town Twinning Association, to discuss their plans for the 2025 celebrations.
- (f) Darlington Town Deal Board on 27 February. The board received and discussed updates on progress of projects.
- (g) I visited STEMFest Tees Valley on 7 March. This was the first occasion that this event had been held in Tees Valley. It was a fantastic 2-day event; the first was for primary school children, followed by secondary school age. It was a wonderful opportunity for school aged young people children to see some of the many exciting STEM careers available locally.
- (h) TVCA Cabinet met on 15 March.

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

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1,034 requests for service in Quarter 3 2023/2024. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	112
(b) Licensing	103
(c) Noise	194
(d) Planning Enquiries	73
(e) Refuse	59
(f) Pest	164
(g) Personal searches	154
3. Officers from the Commercial Team of Environmental Health have been carrying out food hygiene inspections as part of their normal work. It has been noted that in some elements of the food business sector, notably in takeaways there has been a marked reduction in standards post Covid. As a result of this there has been a number of premises whose Food Hygiene Rating has been reduced due to a lack of compliance with relevant food hygiene legislation. Additionally, there has been the following enforcement action:
  - (a) Thai Lemon 149 Northgate was formally closed due to a significant rodent infestation. The Food Hygiene Rating was reduced to 0, however the premises has not re-opened and the owner has vacated the premises.
  - (b) Curry Express 2 High Northgate was voluntarily closed due to a lack of hot water and a failure to meet hygiene standards. It reopened shortly afterwards following remedial work and the Food Hygiene Rating reduced to 1.
  - (c) Shawarma Time 151 Northgate was voluntarily closed due to a lack of hot water and a failure to meet hygiene standards. The Food Hygiene Rating was reduced to 0, however the premises has not re-opened and the owner has vacated the premises.
4. Environmental Health continue to work with the Environment Agency regarding the odour in and around Darlington found to be coming from the landfill site at Aycliffe Quarry. This site is authorised by an environmental permit issued by the Environment Agency.

## **Climate Change**

5. We have received and accepted an invitation from Defra to take part in a local authority pilot for the adaptation reporting power granted to the Secretary of State by the Climate Change Act 2008.
6. We have begun work to undertake a risk assessment of the Borough's preparedness for climate change. This must be completed and our response to Defra submitted before the end of the year.
7. We are busy planning this year's Eco Fair, which will be in the Market Square and around the town on Saturday 8 June.

## **Building Control**

8. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
9. In the last six months major changes to the Building Regulations, responsibilities and operating procedures, have been introduced by the Building Safety Regulator under the umbrella of the HSE for the Building Control function. Already experienced and fully qualified surveyors are now required to prove competency every four years with a professional competence audit check every two years. Surveyors are registered now with the Building Safety Regulator in line with changes to legal requirements under the Building Act 1984 and Building Safety Act 2022, to allow the service to continue from 1 April 2024. The Building Safety Regulator will now be the effective auditors of the Building Control service. Extensive procedural internal planning is in progress to align Building Control KPI's and recording of those KPI's back to the Building Safety Regulator. These changes and additional requirements/roles/responsibilities are putting further stress on the resources available.
10. Regarding Dangerous structures:
  - (a) Working together with Environmental Health, further improvements have been made by the owners to upgrade the security fencing to Northgate House.
  - (b) British Steel – Whessoe Road retaining wall. Recent structural surveys have been made by the engineers Billingham George & Partners on behalf of British Steel as to the current condition of the wall. Remediation has been recommended. Monitoring is ongoing by British Steel and their engineers.

## **Development Management**

11. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development are currently increasing. Most reports continue to be solved at officer level. All more significant cases where there are ongoing investigations are updated confidentially at Planning Committee on a Monthly basis.

12. Planning permission has recently been Granted for large scale housing development at Coniscliffe Park, after a significant pause awaiting confirmation on Nutrient Neutrality and strategic highway issues.
13. Further significant housing development has also been granted planning permission on Land at Blackwell and on land opposite the former Fighting Cocks at Middleton St George.

### **Business Investment**

14. The number of business investment enquiries remains constant, with the main area of interests from the hospitality, and leisure sectors. There has also been new enquiries for large footprint (>50,000 sq.ft) warehouse/manufacturing space.
15. The roll out of UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support activities has continued with the launch of the Tees Valley Supply Chain delivered by RTC North. The scheme offers support to help Tees Valley businesses diversify and grow by engaging in supply chain opportunities. 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.
16. More than 1500 people were welcomed to Darlington Jobs Fair, at the Dolphin Centre on the 8 February 2024. The free event was hosted by Darlington Borough Council and coincided with National Apprenticeship Week. Attracting both public sector organisations and private businesses from industries including healthcare, life science construction, engineering, professional services, manufacturing, retail, transport and logistics, the jobs fair boasted a wealth of opportunities, including local apprenticeships, for people of all ages, interests, and backgrounds.
17. Children from over 20 local schools were welcomed to the renowned STEMFest exhibition, which seeks to inspire and encourage young people to pursue careers in industries including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Hosted in Darlington for the first time, this annual festival gives attendees the chance to take part in a series of fun-filled, hands-on activities relating to different STEM careers, while helping them to make real world connections between what they are learning in the classroom and the work environment. Over 40 local STEM businesses supported the two-day event, which was sponsored by Cummins.

### **Estates**

18. Work has commenced on the re-development of Blackwell Parkland with restoration of the pond commencing in mid-February. Further works to the historic Parkland will continue throughout 2024.
19. Negotiations with Homes England on the infrastructure development agreement for Burtree Garden Village are continuing. If planning consent is obtained for the site work for the development of circa. 700 new homes will commence in late 2024 with the Council responsible for the building of circa 240 new homes.

## **Town Fund**

20. Delivery onsite continues on Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements completed to a significant number of properties and to the public realm. Public realm proposals are being developed alongside this.
21. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
22. 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.
23. A feasibility options study for the Edward Pease House is being progressed.
24. The design of a number of property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and will be commencing onsite early in 2024.

## **Planning Policy**

25. The Local Development Scheme (LDS) was approved by Cabinet on 6 March. The LDS is a timetable of development plan documents that the Council will prepare over the next 3 years. It is a Statutory Requirement that the Council publish a LDS and send a copy to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The LDS states we will prepare a Climate Change Development Plan Document and an update to the Design Supplementary Document.

## **Nutrient Neutrality**

26. On Friday 26 January 2024 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) designated the Tees Catchment under the Water Industry Act (1991) as a sensitive catchment area for nitrogen. It has been designated due to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast habitat site being in a poor condition due to nitrogen pollution.
27. In the Tees Catchment, water companies now have a duty to ensure specified wastewater treatment works, including Stressholme and Aycliffe, are upgraded by 1 April 2030. Stressholme is located to the south of Darlington and Aycliffe serves some settlements in the northern part of the Borough.
28. This means, as a Local Planning Authority, when we are considering planning applications for development draining via a sewer to Stressholme or Aycliffe wastewater treatment works we are now required to assume that these upgrades will have been completed by 1 April 2030. This will be done by taking the upgrades in to account when calculating the nitrogen generated by a development proposed. To help with this Natural England has published an updated Nutrient Budget Calculator for the Tees Catchment that applicants will now be required to use.
29. The duty to upgrade wastewater treatment work should reduce the amount of nutrient mitigation that developers will be expected to provide by transferring some of the requirement to reduce nitrogen pollution to sewerage undertakers. However, any additional nitrogen pollution generated by a development proposal will still need to be mitigated and it be demonstrated that it is nutrient neutral.



## **Biodiversity Net Gain**

30. On 12 February 2024 the statutory requirement for 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as required by the Environment Act 2021, came into force for major applications. This means that all major applications submitted after that date have to prove they are showing a 10% BNG. This will come into force for other applications in April (There are exemptions including householder applications).

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

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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****Capacity and Demand**

2. The number of people on the ACT Waiting List has decreased significantly to 72 from the same period last year where the total number was 163. This has been achieved by increasing staffing capacity in the team, alongside the addition of some agency staff, to support in reducing the numbers. Numbers on the OT Waiting List continue to be higher (141) than the same period last year, work continues to return these figures to what they were during the second half of 2022-23, with appointments to additional OT and OT technician posts.
3. Hospital discharges continue to be higher than the previous two years. Between April and November 2023-24 there were 682 hospital discharges compared to 643 in 2022-23 and 495 in 2021-22. The teams have social workers based within the Darlington Memorial hospital which supports multi-disciplinary working and improves communication. The teams continue to manage this demand, with minimal delays in discharge.
4. We are seeing an increase in the complexity of people requiring support following a hospital stay impacting on the number of individuals being discharged into short break stays. As of 8 January 2024, RIACT (Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team) had 16 individuals currently in Short Break Stays (SBS), 10 of which were due to hospital discharges. The 16 who were in SBS as of 8 January 2024, in comparison to six during the same period last year and 10 during the same period in 2021-22. With this increase in the level of complexity, we have seen the number of SBS which have progressed to permanent residential / nursing care increase to 24 (year to date) during 2023-24, compared to 13 during the same period last year and 16 during 2021-22. We will continue to work with people and carers to support people to return home after a hospital stay but recognise that for some residential or nursing care is appropriate.
5. Just over half of all carers aged 65+ who have an active assessment or support plan live at home with the person(s) they care for. The biggest age group of carers caring for people who live at home with them is the 65–74-year-olds (46). Currently there are 20 carers aged 65+ who are caring for relatives with Learning Disability as their primary care need, with 10 of these aged between 75 and 88. We are working with these carers to ensure plans are in place to support the person they care for to transition into independent living.

6. The Safeguarding Team are part of a panel which involves the Police and Housing colleagues whose task is to try and prevent cases of 'cuckooing' occurring across the region. Cuckooing is the practice of taking over the home of a vulnerable person in order to establish a base for illegal drug dealing, typically as part of a county lines operation.

The Safeguarding Team is also part of the Rough Sleeping Panel, looking at the issues surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping.

These are areas we need to be aware of and understand if there are escalating concerns. We will update further in due course.

7. During October, 52.6% of contacts from new clients who requested an Assessment were dealt with at the front door. This means the Adult Contact team is performing well in advising and directing people to alternative support and/or preventing increased need. However, we are seeing that by the end of 2023 there were 1240 people accessing long term support, this is compared to 1050 at the same period during 2022 which demonstrates that complexity and demand for support is increasing.
8. The Adult Learning Disability team have seen an improvement in the completion of assessments compared to the same period last year. Compared to the same period last year the average number of days to complete an assessment has fallen from 40 to 38 days, whilst length of time to complete a review has fallen from 40 to 18 days. The team also are working closely with both children's and education teams to support young adults' preparation for adulthood. These assessments usually take longer and are more complex. Therefore, the improvement in completion times is a positive move ensuring we are responsive to requests for support.
9. We are seeing a positive impact of the changes to the Disabled Facility Grant guidance and the policy adopted by Council last year. During Quarter 3, 20 Disabled Facility Grants had been completed, of which half of the people require no further involvement from Adult Services and are therefore maintaining their independence.

Out of the 20 DFGs completed in Quarter 3 the following adaptations took place:

- Stairlift – 8
- Level access shower – 4
- Access – 4
- Level access shower and stairlift – 3
- Stairlift and access – 1

The average age of those service users receiving a DFG adaptation was 71, with the youngest being 47 and the oldest 89.

### **Staffing**

10. Staff turnover has fallen to 6.3% compared to 17.8% during the same period last year.

## Service User Feedback

11. We have recently had a return through the National Adult Social Care Outcome Framework where Darlington was ranked in the top 12 nationally for a number of indicators relating to service user quality of life. These areas will be scrutinised by the Care Quality Commission when they quality assure/inspect our services so it positive to note this performance.

### Title Ranking

ASCOF 1A – Quality of life of people who use services	10th
ASCOF 3A – Proportion of people who use services who report having control over their daily lives	3rd
ASCOF 3D – Proportion of people who use services who find it easy to find information about services	9th
ASCOF 1C(1b) – Proportion of carers using social care who receive self-directed support	1 <sup>st</sup> (joint with a number of other LAs)
ASCOF 4a – Proportion of people who use services who feel safe	11th
ASCOF 5a – Proportion of people who use services who reported that they had as much social contact as they would like	5th

12. Client feedback in both Occupational Therapy and RIACT show that the majority of individuals are satisfied with the services offered to them.
13. A full and comprehensive performance report for all ASCOF indicators for the full year will be available to members in due course and a sample of indicators was noted at the Scrutiny Committee in the February meeting.

## Commissioning and Contracts

14. The team are currently refreshing the Adult Social Care Market Position Statement (MPS) and Commissioning Strategy. This document summarises supply and demand in a local authority area, and signals business opportunities within the care market. It indicates how Darlington fulfils its Care Act (2014) market shaping duties. This will be a key strategy going forward as it will outline how the Council will ensure that there will be sufficient care and support services to meet local need Darlington. The team is consulting with partners (including the NHS and voluntary sector), care and support providers, and operational services colleagues. The final draft of the document will be completed by the end of March.

## **Climate Change**

15. Teams continue to work towards the action plan agreed with Senior Leadership Team. All teams have shown a commitment to reducing their carbon footprint through team discussions and personal practice, e.g., car sharing, reduction in use of paper, reducing waste and developing champion roles across the teams.

## **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

16. An Adult Learning Lessons Review, following a fatal house fire is ongoing. Keith Wanley has been appointed as the Independent Author to lead the review. The purpose of the review is to understand how agencies worked together to identify key learning to promote across the partnership to improve practice. Keith is currently reviewing information provided by each partner agency involved which will support him in writing the review report. The final report will be published in due course.
17. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group 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**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Children's Front Door**

2. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) form part of the Children's Front Door and are the social care element of help and protection at the first point of contact.
3. During November contacts received into the Front Door remained high, there was also an increase in contacts received where children are already open to social care. Of these contacts, 88.3% were completed within 24 hours with only 0.9% are completed in over three working days. Of note all immediate safeguarding contacts are referred to social care without delay and all within two hours. Of the contacts received 13.9% had an outcome of 'referrals to social care'.
4. Development work around partnership working is a focus for the Front Door in 2024/25. Ensuring that every possible option is explored in relation to what help a family might need is something that will be fully considered alongside the options of a referral to Building Stronger Families or social care. Through this development work the options of help and support from Universal services, and also help via an external lead professional will become a natural outcome for more families.
5. We continue to work closely with our Police colleagues and recently their representation has relocated into the Durham Mash building. This has been a move that Police have worked with us on and in these early stages there has been no interruption to operational matters.
6. The survey monkey has provided excellent feedback for the Children's Initial Advice Team during November 2023:
  - (a) 92.8% 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) 92.8% of callers felt that the call would have a positive impact on the child, young person or family.
7. In terms of children who go missing and might be/or are at risk of exploitation, during November there was a reduction in missing episodes. 100% of Return Home Interviews were offered to our young people, not all young people choose to engage but 76.2% of interviews offered were completed within 48 hours.

### **Building Stronger Families Service**

8. The drop-in sessions at Daisy Chain which is a service that supports autistic and neurodivergent children, young people and adults are going well. Building Stronger Families staff attend these sessions and have been able to offer help via Building Stronger Families and some families have agreed to an Early Help Assessment to try to understand the behaviour and explore the root cause before the children are placed on the neurodevelopmental pathway. The staff are also able to give advice and guidance about de-escalation of extreme behaviours, which families report to be finding helpful.
9. Targeted groups continue to develop from the Children's Centres, and across the whole town, with good attendance from children and families at the Families Together group based at McNay Street. This particular 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. Alongside this parent led group, 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 a baby group to be delivered from Mount Pleasant School; this will be 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, this serves to help parents build confidence with sharing books, stories and songs with their babies. Speech and language is something that the Headteacher has identified as an issue for some of the children entering the school nursery at age 2. The hope is to develop something similar from Skerne Park the following year, to ensure that programmes reach across the whole town, and are inclusive for all.
11. The Building Stronger Families 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 (YPEJS)**

12. In 2022/23 the YPEJS saw an increase in First Time Entrants into the youth justice system, rising from 19 in 2021/22 to 34 in 2022/23. Year to date this is levelling out, however via the YPEJS Management Board exploration of this is taking place with some key lines of enquiry around police referral types and impact of unmet need being considered.
13. With support from the Police & Crime Commissioner the service has employed an additional 0.5 Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) and from April this year the VLO has worked with 68 victims of youth crime and has engaged in 98 activity sessions, 30 assessment meetings, two interactions from the victim at Referral Order Panels and three Restorative face to face meetings. The service has delivered 520 hours of reparation.



14. On 15 February 2024 the service will commence their seventh year of the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. The cohorts this year include a group of young people who have been a victim of youth crime, a group of young people from Rise Carr College and a group of young people who have been referred as a result of being involved in ASB/low level crime.

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

15. As of 7 February, the five assessment and safeguarding teams have 680 children open to them. Caseloads across the teams are becoming more equitable due to alterations to the locality boundaries and continued efforts to ensure that families are stepped down or closed in a timely manner.
16. As of 7 February, the A&S teams have 162 children open for assessment, 271 children supported under Child in Need, 150 children on Child Protection plans and 64 children in our care.
17. The number of care proceedings where we are concluding on a supervision order is increasing (currently 35 children). A review process has been agreed with our IRO team and all of these children are now being reviewed in line with the new legal framework. This is contributing to reductions in numbers of Children in Care.
18. In the three months to the end of January the assessment and safeguarding teams brought 17 children into our care. In the same three-month period 36 children open to the assessment and safeguarding teams, and two children open to Children with Disabilities, ceased to be children in our care. Three of these children were adopted.
19. Significant efforts to reduce overdue assessments in locality teams continues. Service Managers oversight continues to be in place around caseloads, workflows and timeliness of work being completed to ensure that positive progress is maintained.
20. 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.
21. Our Children with Disabilities team are supporting 85 children and young people; 24 of these children are supported under Child in Need, and a further 49 under Child in Need review (to maintain and review existing packages of care). The team have one child open for assessment and eight children who are in our care.
22. 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.

### **Looked After and Care Leaver information**

23. As of 30 January 2024, there are 321 children who are looked after. This is a reduction from 346 in October 2023 when last reported. This is due to focused work across all services to ensure when children become looked after, all other support has been considered. Monthly tracking meetings are held to reduce delay for children and ensure these are progressed.
24. There are 136 care leavers currently being supported by the team aged 18-25. We keep in touch with all our care leavers and there are regular opportunities for them to come together for activities and support.
25. We have been successful in obtaining funding for three new projects; Family Finding, Mentoring and a Safe Space youth provision. Family finding will be supported by three additional Lifelong Links workers who support children and young people to establish a network of support as well as support from a dedicated life story social worker and a therapeutic worker.
26. The mentoring programme offers the opportunity for care experienced adults to become mentors for younger children in care. We had a launch coffee morning for this and the advert is now live for care leavers to apply. We have a care leaver and foster carer as part of the project group for both of these projects.
27. Safe space is a youth provision ran by the team for children in our care. It is a mix of social activities and focused activities aimed at reducing loneliness, anti-social behaviour and supporting children's emotional health.
28. Staying Close remains a significant strength. We have been able to support 22 young people as part of this pilot, funded by the DfE. This month we saw one young person become a new parent and due to the support offered to him through Staying Close he has been able to keep the baby in his care with support.

### **Fostering and Supported Lodgings**

29. We currently have 49 fostering households and at the end of November we had eight foster carers at stage 1 of the recruitment process which includes initial checks and references and five carers in stage 2 which is the full fostering assessment with a view to progressing to panel. As part of this we have two sets of carers who are transferring from an IFA and one carer from another Local Authority. The carers are progressing through the assessment subject to our new offer being agreed in February 2024.
30. Fostering with Northeast is a regional pilot whereby carers contact a central hub to make their initial enquiry. We have received seven enquiries via the hub, five have been generated through internal recruitment and two via the hub.
31. We are in the process of establishing a second mockingbird constellation which is where several fostering families are supported by a hub carer who has a spare bedroom. This enables a wider fostering family network where they can have support from each other informally and via sleepovers.

32. We have a plan for recruitment and marketing activity across the summer. This includes being part of the marquee in Darlington town centre, sponsoring a 'feelings bear' to have a bear for fostering which will enable fostering to be promoted across Darlington and marketing of our new offer if approved.
33. Our supported accommodation applications are in process with Ofsted to ensure we abide by the new regulations which came into effect in October 2023.

### **Homes for our Children**

34. Cedars Children's Home were inspected by Ofsted and graded 'Good'. This is a huge achievement for the team as a brand-new provision. Cedars offers emergency care and short breaks for children on the edge of becoming looked after. The team are providing outreach support alongside this to support all children active to a social worker.
35. Our other three mainstream children's homes are at full occupancy. One of our young people has raised funds for charity at Christmas to buy presents for children who otherwise may not receive one. She raised funds from the local community and purchased and wrapped these presents herself. She then did the Boxing Day dip for charity.
36. We continue to expand out taster flat provision and currently we have nine flats. This is supporting young people to transition to independence with support. They are utilised by our Staying Close project.
37. Harewood Lodge continues to offer short breaks to children with a disability. Occupancy internally is between 50% and 60% and we are utilising beds for other Local Authorities to generate income.

### **Childcare Entitlement**

38. The first phase of the expansion begins in April 2024 with the introduction of a 15-hour entitlement for working parents of 2-year-olds. Providers across the sector (schools, private and voluntary providers, and childminders) were surveyed and a provider event held in the Dolphin Centre in November to assess the appetite of providers to be involved in the new entitlement and their capacity.
39. The Council portal used by parents to apply for eligibility codes has been updated by the systems team to reflect the new entitlement. The hourly rates to be paid to providers in 2024-25 were agreed at Schools Forum on 16 January. Providers will now be in a position to consider what places they can offer going forward. An assessment of capacity for the September extension, when a 15-hour entitlement for working parents of children from 9 months will be introduced, will be conducted shortly.
40. Darlington is ahead of many local authorities in updating software for eligibility codes and issuing hourly rates to providers. This will help both parents and providers in the weeks ahead.

## Youth Unemployment

41. The Darlington 18–24-year-old claimant count has fallen from 7.3% (550 young people) in October 2023 to 7.0% (525 young people) in December 2023. In comparison the North-East average has fallen by 0.1% to 5.9%, and the national average risen by 0.1% to 5.0%.
42. The December 2023 figures (October 2023 in brackets) for the Tees Valley are as follows:
- |                          |             |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| (a) Hartlepool           | 9.0% (9.5%) |
| (b) Redcar and Cleveland | 8.3% (8.5%) |
| (c) Middlesbrough        | 7.7% (8.2%) |
| (d) Stockton -on-Tees    | 7.4% (7.7%) |
| (e) Darlington           | 7.0% (7.3%) |

## Children’s Commissioning and Contracts

43. A procurement exercise has been undertaken to secure a provider for the delivery of the joint health and social care commissioned Young Carers support service effective from 1 April 2024. The successful contractor was Family Action. Family Action have been working closely with service commissioners to ensure the existing service mobilises seamlessly. Family Action are a charitable provider and are well established in the delivery of a number of positively impactful young carers support services across the country. As part of the Service Specification requirements, Family Action will be progressing the service delivery in Darlington in line with the priorities of Darlington Young Carers and their families and will be a proactive member of the Carer’s Strategy Steering Group.

## Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

44. Working Together to Safeguarding Children Statutory Guidance has been revised and was published in December 2023. The guidance sets out substantive changes to strengthen multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements to work together to safeguard and protect children locally. The Partnership will be focussing on how it intends to implement the changes over the coming months.
45. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group 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**  
**21 MARCH 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**

2. I welcomed Mrs Lorraine Hughes, our incoming Director of Public Health at the beginning of this month. I am sure members will join me in welcoming Lorraine. I am sure members will also join me in thanking Miriam Davidson, our outgoing Interim Director Public Health, for her excellent service, as well as wishing her well in retirement.
3. The Darlington Healthy Early Years (HEY) catering award is an award for nurseries and childminders in Darlington, as part of the implementation of the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan. The award involves achieving core criteria, including policies and procedures about the preparation and serving of healthy balanced meals and snacks for preschool children and communicating with parents about the food that their children eat. Once successful they are awarded a certificate and a logo that they can use to demonstrate their commitment to the production and promotion of healthy and balanced meals and snack for preschool children in their care.
4. The award has been developed and delivered in partnership with Environmental Health and the Childcare Development team, currently four nurseries and four childminders have been successful in achieving this award.
5. I attended an event where key stakeholders and service providers who work in partnership to deliver the substance misuse treatment and recovery services in Darlington came together to showcase collaborative working to engage and support Darlington residents who are using substances and require specialist support throughout their recovery journey. We highlighted the need for collaborative working, to ensure that we are giving the residents of Darlington the best chance of getting into treatment/recovery services and every opportunity to improve their health outcomes.
6. The Leader and I visited Darlington Memorial Hospital, we met with the Chief Executive and visited Maternity and the Emergency Department Services. We were provided with assurances that Maternity services are improving.

### **Health and Well Being Board**

7. At the meeting on 14 March, the Board will participate in a demonstration of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and will receive updates on ICB changes, the Better Care

Fund, the development of the Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Darlington Safeguarding Annual Report.

## **Housing Services**

### **Housing Service Standards**

8. Our Housing Services team has recently put together a series of service standards, in collaboration with our Tenants Panel, setting out the level of service our tenants and other customers can expect from our Housing Services team. The standards include areas such as Safety and Quality, Complaints, Tenant Involvement, Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Allocations.
9. These new standards will ensure a consistency of service and that we meet the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing. Some feedback surveys are planned in 2024-25 to understand how well we are doing against our standards and what we need to improve on, and the outcomes of these will be reported to our Tenants Panel.
10. Details of our Housing Service Standards can be found on our website at:  
<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies/>

### **Estate Inspections**

11. The first estate inspections for 2024 commenced from January and a timetable for the year has been created to confirm the dates the inspections are taking place and on which estate.
12. The inspections are attended by a member of the Housing Services team and representatives of other organisations and agencies who also work within the area. Residents and Councillors are welcome to join to walk around the estates. It's a great way for residents to be involved and have their say and to highlight any issues within the area, such as fly tipping, untidy gardens and litter. Action can then be taken by the Housing Services team to address any issues that are identified.
13. The dates and times for the inspections are publicised on the Housing Services social media page and the Darlington Borough Council website.

### **Lifeline Service**

14. Our Lifeline Services team are progressing with the upgrade of equipment to meet the Government's digital upgrade of telephony services by 2025. Over 3,500 Darlington residents rely on the Lifeline Service to continue to live safely and independently in their own homes.
15. The following work is currently being undertaken:
  - (a) 69 Housing schemes require a digital upgrade to the warden call, door entry and smoke protection systems. In 2022-23, we upgraded 3 of these schemes. In 2023-24, we have placed an order for a further 3 warden call systems and 38 digital communicators that will ensure there is hybrid digital connectivity at the other

schemes, as we work through our upgrade program.

- (b) Darlington's CCTV office required an upgrade to its analogue infrastructure and relocation of Lifeline's Disaster recovery site. In 2022-23, orders were placed for ISDN lines to enable CCTV to become a hybrid version of digital and continue to answer Lifeline's digital alarm calls, post migration. Additional resilience has been created with disaster recovery servers being installed at Bayheath House in Stockton, as a contingency to cope with any digital disruption or power outages.
- (c) Our Jontek/Answerlink database required an upgrade to a digitally enabled platform. Jontek is a dual functioning database and calls handling platform that is currently operating on an analogue format. Since 2023, we have been managing a project to upgrade the system to a web-based version capable of handling digital calls from the upgraded Lifeline/Telecare equipment.
- (d) 1,320 Lifeline clients required the digital upgrade of their box, pendant and Telecare. To date, we have transferred 954 of our customer's equipment from the traditional analogue system to the new IP ready dispersed/telecare range with a remaining 366 to complete by the switchover deadline in December 2025.

### **Dolphin Centre**

- 16. The Dolphin Centre's main pool opened on Friday 26 January following a 12-month closure for essential repair and has been welcoming customers back in great numbers. The toddler pool and new features, along with the remaining facilities, will be available for customers to enjoy in Summer 2024.
- 17. Half-term celebrated the reintroduction of the main pool, with families visiting to use the pool and diving boards from across Darlington and the northeast. The Centre's facilities including bowling, soft play and the Bistro have been extremely busy over this period.
- 18. The first phase of the hub online is now complete: a platform to improve the customer digital journey in making bookings online. Phase 2 has commenced, where portals will allow customers to check in for bookable facilities. This represents the first step in improvements for customers' online experience.

### **Haughton Matters Project**

- 19. Since January over 350 attendances have been recorded throughout the Health in Haughton Matters Project. A committee has been formed consisting of local residents and participants to be the driving force of the programme. This has been a contributing factor in the increase in attendances, supporting community-based consultation to offer activities that local residents want to engage with.
- 20. The Darlington Move More Team have started a programme of inclusive activities, following consultation workshops with partners at the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy workshops. Sessions have included walking, multi activity, relaxation sessions at Foundations, Lakeside Lodge and Richard Court and the Weight Goals Project at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The sessions have been exceptionally well attended and

further activities are planned in the near future.

### **Eastbourne Sports Complex Athletics Events**

21. Following the re-investment of Eastbourne Sports Complex Athletics Track, the track is now UK Athletics Track Mark accredited and can host regional athletics events again. The North Yorkshire South Durham track events will return to the site in June and August 2024, following a six-year absence, with the aim of attracting further events following the events in the summer.

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



**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Highway Maintenance Programme**

2. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
  - (a) C71 Houghton Bank, Heighington: Drainage Repairs/Carriageway Reconstruction (0.188 km)
  - (b) C182 Thompson Street East: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.183 km)
3. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
  - (a) B6279 Tornado Way/McMullen Road Junction: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.447 km)
  - (b) Unc Swaledale Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.275 km)
  - (c) A67 Coniscliffe Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.440 km)
  - (d) Unc Barmpton Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.810 km)
4. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
  - (a) There were no schemes completed in this period.
5. Work continues to maintain our extensive highway asset which consists of 557 km of roads and drainage, 631 km of footways and cycle routes, 16,000 highway lighting assets, 315 bridges and other structure, 67 traffic signal junctions and over 16,000 signs, bollards and fences.
6. Prolonged and exceptional levels of rainfall over the winter have had a significant impact on road conditions with 1,457 potholes repaired in December and January compared to 909 in the same period in the previous year. Potholes remain a national issue on with similar experiences being seen across the entire country.

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

7. TVCA and Local Authorities are developing initial concepts on a pipeline of programmes and schemes for the Department for Transport's City Region Sustainable Transport settlement (CRSTS).
8. In January, TVCA Cabinet approved proposals for Round Two of the CRSTS.
9. 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 (SRTS) consultation at Hurworth Comprehensive School and St Augustine's Primary School, with design changes in progress for the latter which will be consulted on in April 2024. This will require further consultation once complete.
  - (b) Consultation has taken place on the Abbey Juniors and Infants SRTS scheme, on Abbey Road and Cleveland Avenue. Officers are currently reviewing the consultation responses.
  - (c) Officers have reviewed the current town centre cycle parking provision with a view to enabling parking to be safer and ensuring that supply is adequate and appropriate for use. Options for improvement have been costed and will be installed in the coming months.
  - (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**

10. The Connect team 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 and the removal and replacement of Connect branding with new TVCA branding. TVCA are currently consulting with local authorities on the new design. We have stressed the need to include a consultation process with visually impaired and other disabled passenger groups before any changes are made.
11. Agreement has been reached across the Tees Valley to adopt a new Clear Channel bus shelter contract that will see all bus shelters in Darlington refurbished or replaced if they are life expired. Clear Channel will recruit four new members of staff who will be dedicated to working in the Tees Valley. This new team will work with the Councils to devise and deliver a programme of shelter renewal and refurbishment across the Tees Valley. This will include the renewal of our town centre bus shelters.

## **Rail Education Programme**

12. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership recruited a Rail Education Officer in September 2023 on a fixed-term, two-year, part-time contract to deliver a programme of rail safety and confidence sessions in schools within a 1.5-mile corridor of the Bishop Line, between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. The programme is funded by the rail industry and since sessions began in schools in November the programme has been delivered in seven schools (one in Darlington – Red Hall Primary) and trained 1,068 pupils (164 Darlington students). Bookings for 2024 so far include four Darlington schools – St Bede’s RC Primary, St George’s CE Academy, St John’s CE Academy and Firthmoor Primary.

## **Hopetown Darlington**

13. Hopetown Darlington and the Stockton & Darlington Railway Partnership engaged with approximately 1,500 visitors at Darlington’s Jobs Fair in February to promote both the £35 million visitor attraction and the upcoming roles that will be available both front of house and behind the scenes, as well as promoting the apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities with the Stockton & Darlington Railway Partnership. Feedback from visitors was overwhelmingly positive with praise for the investment into Darlington, excitement for such a large attraction and eagerness to join the team.
14. Filming of the characters for Hopetown Darlington’s immersive experience ‘Experiment!’ was completed in February. The characters of Georgie and Stephen take visitors on a vivid immersion into passenger rail travel from 1825 to the present day (and the future), and the extraordinary impact it had across societies and cultures around the world.

## **Darlington Hippodrome – A Place For Everyone Fund**

15. The Hippodrome’s ‘A Place For Everyone’ Fund opens up the theatre to audiences, practitioners and performers, regardless of social, physical or economic barriers.
16. In 2023, the total expenditure was £24,018. Donations are made up of customer donations, bucket collections, Friends of Darlington Hippodrome subscriptions and legacy donations.
17. 50 percent of the budget supported the cost of tickets, opening up access to theatre performances for schools, community groups and refugee groups, young people from the looked after sector, care leavers and groups with access needs.
18. 29 percent of the budget supported us to deliver community events and projects such as the free Mini Mela open day (hosted by Gem Arts) and the free Curious Takeover (hosted by Curious Arts).
19. The final 21 percent of the budget supported transport costs for schools and groups attending shows, bursaries for the Hippodrome’s youth dance and youth theatre programme, the weekly warm space, essential companion tickets, research and development/space in kind for local artists, the In2 Projects and support for local charities.
20. An infographic is currently being designed to celebrate and publicise the support the fund has provided to our community in 2023.

## **Libraries**

### **BookFest**

21. Darlington's book festival for children, 'BookFest' returned in March to coincide with World Book Day, following a break during the Covid pandemic and the restoration of the Library. The week-long extravaganza of events included a tea party with Alice and The Mad Hatter, creative writing with Madam Dragon, and family friendly music gigs. All activities were free of charge, with the aim of engaging families in creative, cultural and literary activity.
22. Schools in Darlington received free author experiences and creative writing workshops as part of BookFest, including schools with a significantly higher proportion of children accessing free school meals.

### **Free Books for Children**

23. To further support families who are economically disadvantaged, Darlington Library is one of five pilot authorities to trial gifting free World Book Day books to children. The vouchers are usually exchanged at bookstores, which can pressure families to "buy" and is a barrier to them accessing their free book. It is thought that by offering them from libraries more children will receive their book and become engaged in reading for enjoyment.

### **Visitors to Crown Steet Library**

24. In January, the library welcomed a record number of visitors: 29,534. This is the highest number of visitors to date, based on records dating from 2017. Customers continue to visit the library to view the new spaces and features, borrow stock, with a significant number also utilising 'The Study' space within the building. Attendees of the children's sessions have also increased, following removal of the potentially prohibitive booking system.
25. A significant number of visitors to the 'The Hive' are children and young people accessing the workshop area as part of the library's school offer. Coding, animation, creative and digital design, use of 3D printers, Cricut and laser cutters are supporting schools to enhance their STEAM offer, and workshops using the library's Virtual Reality Headsets are proving to be invaluable, immersing children in exciting learning experiences.

### **Creative Darlington**

26. Young musicians from Durham Music's ensembles worked with musicians from the Hallé Orchestra to create and rehearse a new piece of music which was performed at Darlington Hippodrome. The performance took place on the evening of Saturday 10 February to a large and appreciative audience. Since 2016/17, the Council's Heritage and Culture Fund budget has supported ongoing work led by Orchestras Live, involving Durham Music Service and Darlington Hippodrome, offering pupils from participating schools in Darlington (both primary and secondary) opportunities to work alongside different orchestras performing at Darlington Hippodrome.

27. The Place, People & Living Memory, exploring and celebrating the work of female artists and/or campaigners, including Darlington's Elizabeth Pease, opened in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library on 2 February 2024 and is on display until 25 March 2024. Over 400 people have visited the exhibition to date, which is backed by Arts Council England Project Funding, and accompanied by a series of events. The opening evening of Thursday 8 February featured a talk on Elizabeth Pease by Chris Lloyd and attracted 50 plus people, with gallery tours, talks from the exhibition curator, Phil Gatenby, the artists involved, and a MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art) curator.
28. Cabinet of Curiosity Studio led three workshops at Darlington Library from Saturday 27 January to Saturday 10 February and have contributed to a small display in the Local Studies section, which is currently on display. Additional free, family friendly drop-in activities were also offered at the Friends Community Hub between Wednesday 21 February and Saturday 24 February 2024 as part of their Arts Council England Project, 'Grow Your Own Creativity programme'.

### **Town Centre Partnership and Events**

29. Darlington hosted the first Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) Regional Network Meeting in March, welcoming managers from across the region to the town centre, in addition to round table activities.
30. Officers attended a presentation to understand and learn about the potential opportunities from filmmaking, as one of 12 local authorities who have signed up to be part of North East Screen's Filming Friendly Charter. The Charter aims to encourage more filming in the region as this will have a positive impact on jobs and economic development. The presentation discussed what support Darlington could provide to location managers, with a further meeting planned to connect local suppliers with the industry.
31. Chinese New Year celebrations took place on Saturday 10 February for the Year of the Dragon; a cultural event added into the programme with support from the town centre Chinese restaurants and bubble tea shops. Dragons and lions paraded and performed in the town centre, dance workshops were held in the Dolphin Centre and storytelling and craft activities in the library. The event was programmed to help support movement of visitors around the town and incorporated feedback received from families who have expressed a wish to engage with different activities.
32. 'Superhero Saturday' is new for 2024, with meet and greet characters, encouraging movement and footfall around the town centre. This format has been well received by both businesses and visitors. The events team aim to add this element of exploration throughout the calendar to encourage visitors to extend the duration of their visits to the town centre.
33. The summer animation and events programme has been created and a 2024 events leaflet has been printed to be distributed across the region. Leaflets are available to pick up in a variety of town centre locations and will be in leaflet racks distributed via a company across South Durham, Tees Valley and North Yorkshire. Promotion has also taken place online and events have been featured in Living Magazine.

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

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Council Tax Single Person Discount Review**

2. Our Revenues and Benefits team has recently completed the annual review of Council Tax Single Person Discounts. Currently, there are over 19,900 people in Darlington receiving a 25% Single Person Discount for their Council Tax at an annual cost of £8.4 million. NEC Software Solutions UK (NEC), who are contracted to undertake our review, undertook a data matching exercise of 12,919 discounts and canvassed 2,537 people.
3. As a result of the exercise, 417 discounts were cancelled at an estimated annual saving of £136,625. The review cost £6,986 (NEC are only paid for the discounts they cancel), and therefore, offers very good value for money for the Council.

**Revenues and Benefits Debt Collection**

4. 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 £3,800 in unpaid Council Tax and had moved abroad. As the person owned the property, we applied for a charging order to secure the debt against the property. Following contact with the owner, the debt was paid in full.
  - (b) A local resident owed over £7,700 in unpaid Council Tax. Despite numerous calls and visits, contact could not be made with the debtor. However, following some investigative work by the team, his employer was traced and an attachment of earnings order has been put in place. The debt is currently being paid at £300 each month.
  - (c) A local resident owed over £4,100 in unpaid Council Tax. Again, following some investigative work by the team, his employer was traced and an attachment of earnings order has been put in place. The debt is currently being paid at £1,700 each month.
  - (d) A local resident owed over £3,900 in overpaid Housing Benefits. Following a direct earnings attachment served on the employer in 2020, the debt has now been repaid in full.

- (e) A local resident owed over £9,000 in unpaid Council Tax. Following commencement of bankruptcy proceedings, the debt was repaid in full.

### **Customer Services**

- 5. Our Customer Services team are currently in the process of introducing a “call back” feature in our NetCall telephony system, which is being trialled by Housing Services.
- 6. The principle of the call back feature is that when a customer calls and the wait time to speak to an advisor is over 3 minutes, the system will automatically offer the customer the option of a call back. If the customer selects this option, the call is ended, but the system holds their place in the queue. Once it is their turn, the system automatically makes a call back to the customer and they are put through directly to an advisor.
- 7. From the advisor’s perspective, they will see no difference or any additional work, as the system automatically arranges the call back. For customers, it avoids them having to wait on the telephone and reduces the cost of the phone call. Early signs are encouraging with reduced levels of abandoned calls, and reduced waiting times. If the trial proves successful, the feature will be rolled out to other Council services in the next few months.

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

- 8. The Council’s capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered:
  - (a) On the Bank Top Railway Station scheme which is being delivered by Tees Valley Combined Authority, the steel frame and floors for the new car park are now complete and roof works are ongoing.
  - (b) The Hopetown Darlington project continues on-site with refurbishment works to the former Head of Steam, Goods Shed and Carriageworks buildings. Construction of the new car park is now underway. The entrance works to the Goods Shed directly off McNay Street are nearing completion and should re-provide a more direct pedestrian route back to the station for first week in March.
  - (c) Site work is ongoing at Eastbourne Sports Complex, Dolphin Centre, Whinfield school and at the Neasham Road housing scheme.
  - (d) A planning application has been submitted for refurbishment works to No. 156 Northgate and a determination is expected shortly.
  - (e) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
  - (f) There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.



## **Police and Crime Commissioner and Tees Valley Combined Authority Elections – Thursday 2 May 2022**

9. Preparations for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral (TVCAM) Elections are underway, with polling taking place on Thursday 2 May 2024. It is intended that the Notices of Election will be published on 22 March for the PCC Election and 19 March for the TVCAM Election, which marks the formal start of the pre-election period when additional care is required to ensure that the political neutrality of local authorities is maintained. These are the second elections whereby voters will be required to show Voter Authority to be able to vote and the first time these elections will be using the new postal vote handling rules and 'first past the post' voting system.

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

10. Following changes to a number of polling districts as part of the review of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023 the Register of Electors was republished on 1 February 2024. The revised polling places will be used for the elections taking place on Thursday 2 May 2024 and all future elections.

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

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**COUNCIL  
21 MARCH 2024**

**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

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

**All Member Portfolio Briefing**

2. The first all Member portfolio briefing took place on Tuesday 23 January 2024 and this covered the services with Community Safety. An overview of the service areas was provide and Members were invited to suggest areas where they would like further information on areas to assist with their community role. Future briefings are being scheduled to focus on the Members suggestions.

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

3. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington:

Darlington	YTD January 2023	YTD January 2024	% increase/decrease
Crime	9605	10284	+7%
ASB	2296	1920	-16%

4. The crime increase equates to 679 offences, with vehicle crime, theft, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing notable increases. The Police, together with partners have responded to the increase through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in a significant number of arrests.
5. ASB has reduced by 376 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, continued partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
6. Areas showing a current increase in ASB include Cockerton East, Hummersknott and Haughton North. Partners have increased patrols in these areas, targeted offenders and identified several individuals who are now subject of further investigation and intervention by the relevant services.

7. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends - Darlington Town Centre

Darlington Town Centre	YTD January 2023	YTD January 2024	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1193	1232	+3.3%
ASB	200	146	-27%

8. 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 over 150 members involved in the crime reduction initiative.
9. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand offenders.
10. The 'whatsapp group' allows Shopwatch members to communicate 'prevention' messages to each other, with intelligence being exchanged daily. The system has added advantages in relation to the identification and location of Missing People and those who resort to begging in the town centre.
11. ASB has reduced by 54 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, continued partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.

**Call Handling – Police**

12. Call handling and response times by the Police have been a concern expressed by Members and the public and I have visited the centre and raised concerns directly with the Police and Police and Crime Commissioner. In terms of actions taken to improve this:
  - (a) Members receive monthly bulletins from the Darlington Neighbourhood Policing Inspector regarding Police Call Handling Performance.
  - (b) Over the last year the force has recruited an extra 29 call handlers and six switchboard staff to work in the Force Control Room, alongside a new switchboard triage system.
  - (c) Nine further call handlers are currently going through training and will join the Force Control Room later this month.
  - (d) There has been a significant investment in the Force Control Room.
  - (e) Durham Constabulary are also in the process of moving towards the Single Online Home website, which will allow members of the public to submit some queries and applications online, freeing up more Control Room staff to deal with 101 and 999 calls.
13. The actions have resulted in non-emergency calls being answered, on average, within 51 seconds. This marks a reduction of 81 per cent compared with March last year. Calls made to 999 have also showed a significant improvement.

**Funding and Initiatives**

14. The Home Office Trailblazer ASB Hotspot Patrol continues to cover eight areas in Darlington with increased engagement and patrols to reduce ASB. The areas include Park East, Stephenson, North Road, Northgate, Red Hall and Lingfield, Cockerton, Haughton and

Springfield and Bank Top and Lascelles.

15. During the reporting period the incidents of ASB were associated with nuisance around dwellings (9), incidents at the Hippodrome, DL1, Darlington Indoor Market and other commercial / retail premises in the town centre area. The outcomes were that:
  - (a) 2 young people received warnings in relation to reported anti-social behaviour,
  - (b) 5 received acceptable behaviour agreements, action has been taken against one young person for breach of proceedings.
  - (c) 17 young people are currently awaiting interview and potential intervention activity involving the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service.
  
16. Officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes resulting in the following actions that aims to improve behaviour and encourage responsible waste management :
  - (a) 4 pending prosecutions,
  - (b) 2 fixed penalty notices,
  - (c) 1 community protection notice,
  - (d) 6 community protection warnings
  - (e) 13 "open file" investigations.
  
17. The application for Home Office Safer Streets has secured approval. Safer Streets Round 5 will focus on Neighbourhood Crime and ASB in Darlington Park East / Banktop and Rural Crime in Darlington West Villages / Middleton St George. The project is in the initial stages of commencement and provision has been approved for:
  - (a) the employment of two Rural Crime Co-ordinators, commenced 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024
  - (b) An Intelligence Officer, to commence April 2024
  - (c) Crime Prevention equipment including two 'Drones' which will improve aerial surveillance and improved specifications of two vehicles for use in a rural setting.
  
18. The Violence Prevention Fund has recently been launched by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner. Darlington's successful bids amount to £257,123 and include initiatives around stalking and harassment intervention, tackling domestic related abuse, supporting Number 40 and trauma informed care.
  
19. A UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid has been successful and secured £520,000 over the next two years. The range of initiatives includes the provision of community safety posts, parking officers, street cleaners, taxi marshals, the refurbishment of street furniture, marketing campaigns and extended opening of Number 40 to support members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

### **Operational Updates**

20. The Community safety team continue to deliver a range of activity, some notable priorities and highlights include:

- (a) Engagement with the Home Office Alcohol Related Crime and Homicide (ARCH) Taskforce to work alongside police in a national study to develop initiatives that will minimise alcohol related violence in the night-time economy.
- (b) Co-ordinating an approach for the XL Bully ban. Protocols have been developed between the local authority and Police working with key stakeholders to safeguard communities and staff, whilst ensuring animal welfare standards are maintained. The latest meeting Dog Watch focused on the XL Bully ban, local campaigns, dog exercise areas and future priorities for the group.
- (c) The sale and supply of illegal vaping products, as well as the sale and supply of vaping products to under-age children, are priorities for enforcement working in partnership with other law enforcement agencies.
- (d) Further analysis has also been completed to identify the correlation between Begging and Rough Sleeping. Representatives of the group have recently consulted HM Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) to promote greater awareness and understanding of the problem and joint multi-agency sweeps of the town have commenced.
- (e) Darlington has been awarded Purple Flag reaccreditation in recognition of its commitment to creating a dynamic, secure, and vibrant evening and night-time economy. This prestigious award highlights Darlington's blend of entertainment, dining, and culture, all while ensuring the safety and well-being of residents and visitors in the evening and night-time economy.

### **Resilient Communities and Engagement**

- 21. A drop-in session involving Council officers, Durham Constabulary Police Cohesion Unit and Darlington Neighbourhood Policing Team was held at North Lodge on Friday 26 January 2024. The event was scheduled to coincide with the end of prayers in the Mosque and promoted to the Muslim community as an opportunity to engage with Police and DBC about issues or concerns linked to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. One member of the public attended.
- 22. Staff promoted Number 40 as a volunteering opportunity at the Darlington Jobs Fair held on 8 February 2024.

### **Climate Change**

- 23. The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 commenced on 1 October 2023. The project is being led by Darlington Borough Council and aims to improve 300 properties across the Tees Valley over the next two years under a partnership name of Home Energy Efficiency Tees Valley (HEET). There are currently 50 properties across the region being assessed for delivery.
- 24. The scheme will improve the energy efficiency of residential properties delivering measures such as solar panels and energy efficient heating such as air source heat pumps.

## **Equality and Inclusion**

25. Number Forty has extended its footprint in the Town by opening during Mongay nights. The opening occurs every second Monday of the month and provides support to LGBTQAI+ events and members of those diverse communities.

## **Darlington Cares**

26. In 2023, through the employees of its members, Darlington Cares delivered 7,879 hours of volunteering across its three areas of focus, environment and social justice. It also increased its membership by 5 to 27.
27. There has been a significant amount of activity supporting the Council's tree planting ambition whilst the Great Park Auction has resulted in thousands of hours of volunteering devoted to Darlington's parks. An event will be held on March 20<sup>th</sup> at the Hulaballoo to celebrate the achievements of the employers that took part.
28. Darlington Cares has also supported the Council in coordinating the volunteers at the Uniform Exchange Scheme which last year had 4393 customers and gave out 12,337 items of uniform.

## **Voluntary and Community Sector**

29. A collaboration of voluntary sector organisations has been delivering a range of supports for the Council under the Household Support Fund provided by the DWP. The objective of The Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs. Management Information returns submitted to the end of December 2023 indicate that, by the end of the financial year, voluntary sector providers will have fully deployed the £1,827,708 allocated to Darlington and the targets set out in the delivery plan will be met. A fuller report will be provided at the end of the financial year.

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

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Care Homes in Executive Strategy Measures / Arrangements**

2. We received an update from the Service Manager, Safeguarding and ACT, on Care Homes in Executive Strategy Measures. Members were advised on the Executive Strategy process, the specific providers and services that had come out of Executive Strategy, the current providers and services within Executive Strategy, and the preventative steps being taken.
3. The Committee entered into discussion on the staffing levels in care homes and the arrangements in place to ensure that appropriate levels are maintained. We were keen to learn more about staff training, whether training logs could be requested, who is able to access this training, the training available for unpaid carers and how unpaid carers can access this. Members also acknowledged the upskilling and collaborative work that had been undertaken throughout this period.
4. We also examined the financial implications of those residents of Darlington who are presently residing in homes in another authority area, whether there was any financial redress from those authorities taking places in the Darlington area, and enquired whether Darlington Borough Council could reserve block placements with its providers to safeguard placements for Darlington residents.

**Performance Indicators Quarter 2 – 2023/2024**

5. The Committee received a report which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2023/24. The performance information provided was in line with an indicator set and Scrutiny Committee distribution agreed by the Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently agreed by Scrutiny Committee Chairs.
6. Members were advised that the indicators were aligned with key priorities and the majority are used to monitor the Council Plan. Twelve indicators are reported to this committee, ten on a six-monthly basis and two on an annual basis.
7. Eight of the twelve indicators were reported on at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24, of which two indicators were showing performance better than the same period as of last year. Two indicators demonstrated that performance had declined in comparison to the same period as last year, however, it was noted that these were still being monitored and managed. One indicator remained the same as last year, and three indicators were not comparable and would be reviewed at a point in time.

8. Concerns were expressed as to whether the information provided indicated that residents were being discharged from hospital too soon, and discussion ensued on the conflicting national and local pressures involved. Members noted the increase in younger adults (aged 18-64) presenting with increased complex needs, and ascertained whether this was an ongoing trend.
9. Members scrutinised the support available for families and unpaid carers looking after people within a domiciliary setting, and Members were keen that the Carers Strategy was shared with carers. Discussion ensued on why Darlington has the third highest proportion of people using social care services, and the reasons around this.

#### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership – Annual Report**

10. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, provided a report to enable the Committee to receive and comment upon the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period of 2022/23. It was highlighted that Local Safeguarding Partnerships are required to produce an Annual Report to account for that Partnership's achievements over the previous year and assess the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area. The report received summarised and reflected on the work of the Partnership over the 2022/23 period.
11. Unfortunately, the Chair of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership was unable to attend the meeting and so Members agreed to forward any questions on the report to the Chair accordingly.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**School Transport and the Associated Services**

2. We received a report from the Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, which provided Members an update on the current arrangements for the Council's Home to School Transport Policy and outlined the changes made in recent statutory guidance. The report highlighted that Darlington Borough Council has a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport in certain circumstances.
3. Discussion ensued on the different budgets involved in the provision of the service and the sharing of information on the recent changes with appropriate staff. We were also keen to understand how information regarding the policy and the recent changes was communicated to parents.
4. Members raised questions in relation to the number of children that transport was provided for, the average cost per pupil, and whether any checks were undertaken to ascertain whether parents had the wherewithal to transport their own children accordingly. The transport provision for those receiving specialist provision elsewhere was analysed, with Members questioning whether it might be more efficient to provide specialist provision within the Borough.
5. Members also requested greater clarity around the timetable, consultation and decision-making in relation to the policy, and expressed a desire for the policy to come back to Scrutiny prior to the final decision being made.

**Childcare Sufficiency Review 2023-24**

6. The Committee received a report to inform Members of the findings of the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Review. The report set out the Department for Education's Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities required that a Local Authority must 'secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 or up to 18 for disabled children' and that should report annually to elected Council Members on how they are meeting this duty.
7. It was highlighted that the Darlington Childcare Market is made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units, and that the pandemic has made the childcare market more complex and less predictable.

8. It was pleasing to note that indicators show that there has been sufficient overall capacity to meet demand throughout the period of this review, nevertheless, any unmet demand will need to be continually monitored to ensure that parents are able to access training and work in the coming months and years.
9. The Committee entered into discussion on the limitations to provision, and whether any limitations were related to infrastructure, resources or staffing. Members were keen to hear the feedback received from providers in relation to the National Childcare Expansion Programme, and it was pleasing to note that providers appreciated the Council's early action and surety around funding, and that there was no sense of undue alarm in relation to April's phased changes, however Members heard that there was not the same confidence in relation to future tranches of the programme.
10. We discussed the potential for expansion of the Council's own maintained nurseries, and the funding streams available to meet the cost of any future expansion. Members further explored the additional demands around recruitment, which included additional Government funding and the piloting of a retention and recruitment scheme, which included a bursary scheme with an incentive payment for those qualifying or returning to the sector. Members were keen to understand any contingency arrangements should childcare provided by extended family, such as grandparents, reduce.

**Councillor Hilary Allen**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Draft Minutes of the Meeting of The Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Committee**

2. The Committee received Draft Minutes of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Committee, which was held on 23 January 2024, Councillor McCollom spoke to the minutes.
3. Members discussed issues raised in the minutes which were not covered in later agenda items, this included taxi replacement payments which is provided when the last bus has been cancelled and that costs can be reimbursed. The Committee were concerned that this has not been widely promoted.

**Public Sector Executives Group**

4. We received a report which informed members about the work of the Public Sector Executive Group (PSEG).
5. Scrutiny heard that the PSEG was formed as one of the arrangements to replace the Darlington Partnership, following agreement by Council on 15 July. The group includes senior officers from key public sector bodies, the key of aims and memberships of the group.
6. The Committee were provided with details of recent activities of the group, including the announcement of the change in administration at the council and that there is a new Council Plan currently in development.
7. Members were informed that the group will consider the forthcoming Health and Wellbeing Plan, which will support the Council Plan and the Forward Plan of the Integrated Care Board.
8. We recognised how the PSEG is funded, how the PSEG is viable and the partnership working of the group.

**Local Transport Plan**

9. The Committee received a report providing members with an annual update on the delivery of the Darlington Transport Plan, which outlined the delivery, performance, and public satisfaction in 2023/24 as well as information on the 2024/25 programme.

10. Members were informed that Tees Valley Region funding includes £310m City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) programme and £6.851m Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which will deliver improvements to the bus services. The report also stated that there has been good progress on the development and delivery of the Transport Capital Programme.
11. Officers also reported that in 2022/23 a new Transport Strategy for the borough was introduced, this included the council adopting a Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy. A progress report on the schemes delivered in 2023/24, and the proposed programme of schemes 2024/25, was detailed in the report.
12. It was reported to members that planning work on Phase 2 of the Faverdale/West Park to town centre cycle route was ongoing after the recent completion of Phase 1.
13. Reference was also made to the second round of CRSTS for the Tees Valley Region. Funding of £978m will cover the period of 2027/28 to 2031/32, an additional minimum £100.1m of highways maintenance will also be available for the Tees Valley between 2023/24-2033/34.
14. Members discussed pothole funding and the Portfolio Holder confirmed that just over £12m of annual repairs are required to keep roads in their present state and current government funding is only around a quarter of this amount.
15. We reviewed the electric charging vehicles and the parking spaces for them, Members raised concerns around the lack of disabled spaces to charge these vehicles and the provision of on-street chargers.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Inclusive Growth Strategy for Darlington**

2. We welcomed the Business Growth and Investment Manager who provided us with a presentation to outline the intended approach to develop and build an evidence base in order to create a framework for future long-term sustainable inclusive economic growth that will complement the emerging economic ambitions and priorities of the new Council Plan
3. We were informed that the Council's current strategy predates COVID and the cost-of-living crisis and the intention is to now establish a long-term sustainable plan for economic growth in Darlington. It was highlighted that the initial phases of this would require a review of current data followed by the gathering of fresh evidence including scoping work to accurately shape and inform the development of the strategy.
4. It was highlighted that Darlington has a large business base employing 58,000 people, a job density higher than the UK average with the highest business start-up rate in the Tees Valley however business death rates in Darlington are also the highest in the Tees Valley showing an acute difference to other authorities that the strategy intends to investigate.
5. We were provided with population information for Darlington which included 2,700 residents currently receiving Universal Credit with unemployment rates currently remaining static while jobs and opportunities are available however it was highlighted that certain areas / communities are not receiving benefit of these opportunities as much as others which the strategy aims to address.
6. Questions included as to how up to date the data is with reassurance given that all data used is most up-to-date available. The impact of recently improved school performance was also queried with clarification given that the effects of this will take time to be represented in data.
7. A member asked for a clear definition of "inclusive growth" with the response that this does not only translate to the creation of jobs and investment but the assurance that fair access to opportunities is present with the goal that rewards and benefits can be felt by all residents with sustainability being a major focus.
8. Discussion was held around blockers regarding inclusive growth with a member stressing the importance of identifying these, officers confirmed that next steps will involve establishing base-level feedback through interaction with individuals to create a picture of what can be achieved with available resources for the greatest benefit.

9. A member asked if it is possible to generate a breakdown of business deaths by sector which officers would need to generate outside of the meeting as well as a breakdown of residents with no relevant qualifications. It was asked if successful models used in other areas such as Preston are being used as precedents and it was confirmed that officers are taking note of proven success stories used in other localities in the production of the strategy.
10. We agreed to endorse the approach and goals outlined to create the Inclusive Growth Strategy.

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

11. The Assistant Director Resources presented the performance data around key performance indicators for 2023/24 quarter 2. Members were asked to note the current position regarding the 22 indicators presented.
12. Members asked questions regarding staff sickness levels and officers confirmed that sickness levels were lower during the COVID period and then increased following the pandemic but have fallen this year. The sickness management strategy is used by management with support from HR to reduce sickness levels alongside wellbeing initiatives for example flu vaccinations which have been positive amongst staff. A member also asked if data can be provided in future regarding numbers of full-time staff no longer working in the Town Centre.
13. Further questions included if the collection periods of Council Tax have an impact on cash flow and it was confirmed that collecting payments over 10 months enable the Council to collect money quicker and is a well-established method however all residents have the right to pay over 12 months should they wish.
14. We raised the question if climate change data can be added to future indicators with officers stating that this would be possible if specific indicator topics are requested.
15. We noted the performance information provided and were assured that any relevant queries can be raised with appropriate officers.

### **Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 3**

16. We welcomed the Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects who presented a summary of the latest capital resource and commitment position as well as an update on the current status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 6 February 2024. We were informed that there are currently 41 live projects with 6 projects experiencing delays for which reason were provided.
17. We asked questions which included any current issues regarding Skinnergate projects with officers providing assurance that all required documentation has now been submitted. A member also asked for clarification whether the Railway Heritage Quarter is causing any variation on presented expenditure with officers confirming that this has no impact.



18. Discussion was held regarding the work being undertaken relating to the OneGym access road and car park with confirmation that work started 8 January 2024 and is predicted to be completed in June 2024.
19. We noted the current position of capital projects and projected capital expenditure and resources and endorsed onward submission to 6 February 2024 Cabinet.

#### **Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24**

20. We welcomed the Assistant Director Resources who presented a forecast of the 2023/24 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 6 February 2024. Projected under / overspends were reported for individual service groups with the latest projections showing an overall decline of £0.738m on the 2023-27 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), however this is an improvement of £0.381m on the Quarter 2 projection.
21. It was highlighted that the most prominent variance stems from the significant demand in Children's Services, with a 33% increase in children-in-care compared to pre-pandemic levels, it was stressed that this is a national issue. However we were informed that Darlington's overspend in Children's Services has been offset by an underspend in Adults Services.
22. Members asked questions which included if lobbying central government is a possibility to acquire more funding with officers confirming that discussions have taken place with the local M.P. who is taking up this issue. The question was also asked as to the average housing maintenance cost of each property. A further question was presented with regards to fly-tipping and if collection costs are too high with officers confirming that they are aware of this issue and are taking steps to remedy this.
23. We noted the forecast revenue outturn 2023/24 and endorsed onward submission to 6 February 2024 Cabinet.

#### **Work Programme**

24. 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.
25. Members requested updates on the Towns Fund and current town centre footfall and its cause / impacts for the next meeting of this committee 11 April 2024.

**Councillor Rebecca Baker**  
**Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 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.

**Breast Symptomatic Services Update**

2. We welcomed the Integrated Care Board – Director of Place (Darlington) who gave members a presentation covering current clinical services strategy including diagnostic and treatment services.
3. We received information on the current numbers of patients in the Darlington catchment area, current screening services offered including fixed and mobile sites, and were provided with differentiations between screening and symptomatic services. Post COVID recovery on both screening and symptomatic services was highlighted with screening services recovery from lockdown's backlog being a point of note along with symptomatic services' referrals increasing as normal service provision recommenced.
4. Challenges to the service were covered with workforce pressure remaining the greatest of these, on this point we were informed that additional staff are being trained in order to free-up consultant capacity in order to maintain quality of treatment.
5. Members wished to express that the numbers of screening uptake in Darlington is very encouraging and suggest that continual promotion of the importance of screening is vital. Officers agreed and highlighted the dichotomy that the high quality of service offered can adversely affect screening uptake due to less of the population being personally affected by breast cancer. A member questioned if residents who do not attend screening are repeatedly invited, and it was confirmed that they are however tackling fear and apprehension of attending screening remains a continual focus.
6. A member noted Darlington's positive performance in service uptake in comparison to surrounding localities and asked the possible reason for this. Officers stated that exact reasons are not clear however population makeup and the presence of a popular and well-used hospital in Darlington Memorial Hospital are suspected contributing factors.
7. Discussion was held with regards to cultural barriers that may prevent attending screening with officers confirming that women's health hubs aim for increased engagement to help target underrepresented individuals. Members questioned if individuals in susceptible families are being tested and that those who require screening are not being missed with officers confirming that every attempt is made to arrange services for those individuals.
8. We noted the content of the presentation and the quality of information provided.

## **Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Update**

9. The Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues attended and presented the proposed update to this strategy that was previously approved by Cabinet in July 2019 with an update provided to this Scrutiny Committee in December 2022. We were informed that all actions in the current strategy have been completed and the development of a fresh strategy is now proposed with the considerations now present in the post-COVID period.
10. We were informed that the production of the updated strategy is intended to help manage an increase in demand for services to prevent rough sleeping. A major contributor to this was the lifting of the ban on no-fault evictions following the COVID period.
11. It was reported that a main ongoing challenge is sourcing accommodation for those with complex needs and those who have lost previous accommodation due to their own behaviour. With further challenges including the increase in presentations and demand for emergency accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.
12. It was highlighted that a key project for the strategy is to create a scoping document in order to present key pressures and to develop themes for work moving forward. It is also important to establish who will be involved in the production of the strategy and it is proposed that this is at least comprised of a blend of council departments, voluntary sector and social housing providers.
13. Discussions included members highlighting the importance of working with partners in the production of the strategy with a member highlighting that those involved in hospital and prison discharges would have insight that may be valuable in the production of the strategy. The quality of accommodation provided was also discussed with a consensus that secure and good standards of accommodation play an important role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of those housed and in order to break the cycle of individuals repeatedly presenting as homeless.
14. A further discussion was held with regards to individuals with military service presenting as homeless. Officers confirmed that those who have served are a priority and that efforts are made to identify these individuals, it was also clarified that such people can be directed to the Town Hall to speak to Housing Options who will assist.
15. We raised questions which included the most common circumstances of presentations and officers confirmed that due to the nature of homelessness there are always a number of transient presentations but also that more Darlington residents are presenting as homeless as current accommodation arrangements break down alongside more individuals coming through the asylum service which is showing an increase for all authorities in the North East with a member also adding that those being released from prison are also a common source for presentations.
16. A member queried what the most common accommodation required is and if there is scope for housing families. It was confirmed that most accommodation is 1 or 2 bedroom as this is the most common requirement however larger properties are currently under construction at the Neasham Road development but that turnover for families is generally a lot lower than that of individuals.

17. We considered the content of the report and agreed to the development of a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-30.

### **Darlington Better Care Fund Update**

18. We welcomed the Head of Service - Commissioning, Performance and Transformation who provided an update on the Darlington Better Care Fund (BCF) 2023/25 Programme informing members of the next steps across the programme. We were informed the tight timeframes for submission, with guidelines being received in late December 2023 and that final submission was made in early February 2024.
19. We were informed that the underlying vision for the BCF over 2023-25 is to support people to live healthy, independent and dignified lives, through joining up health, social care and housing services seamlessly around the person. This vision is underpinned by the two core BCF objectives: to enable people to stay well, safe and independent at home for longer and to provide the right care in the right place at the right time.
20. A member raised the point that many activities specified in the submission relate to later-in-life individuals with the opinion that the prevention of unnecessary admissions would be more feasible if activities commenced earlier in people's lives. Officers acknowledged this and that there was an element of the funding allocated to prevention of admissions. However they also informed members that funding is required to be assigned to areas under greatest stress which consisted to facilitation of discharge with the post-COVID period showing greater strain than in previous years.
21. A member also expressed that they felt it would be beneficial for the report to clearly highlight that it is a Quarter 3 update and that a summary of changes from its previous presentation at the committee meeting would be beneficial and aid members in navigating the report more effectively. Officers acknowledged this for future presentations.
22. We noted the submission, the reporting requirements of the programme and agreed for a report to be presented at a future meeting to detail the outcome of the ongoing review of BCF Schemes.

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

23. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2017/18 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

**Councillor Mary Layton**  
**Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**

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