



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 16 May 2024

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

Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.

1. Introductions / Attendance at Meeting.
2. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Council held on 21 March 2024 (Pages 5 - 8)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given):-
 - (a) The Public; (Pages 9 - 12)
 - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
8. Cabinet Reports.
 - (a) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council (Pages 13 - 16)
 - (b) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 17 - 20)

- (c) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 21 - 24)
 - (d) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 25 - 34)
 - (e) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 35 - 40)
 - (f) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 41 - 46)
 - (g) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 47 - 50)
 - (h) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 51 - 56)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 57 - 58)
 - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 59 - 60)
 - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 61 - 64)
 - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 65 - 68)
 - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 69 - 72)
10. Membership Changes - To consider any membership changes to Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies.



Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Wednesday, 8 May 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 or Telephone 01325 405805

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COUNCIL

Thursday, 21 March 2024

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

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, Coe, Donoghue, Lee, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Pease and Renton.

70 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2024 AND 15 FEBRUARY 2024**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Council held on 25 January 2024 and 15 February 2024.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of this Council held on 25 January 2024 and 15 February 2024, be approved as correct records.

71 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

72 **SEALING.**

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

73 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Death in Service – The Mayor reported on the Death in Service of Kay Gamble on 11th March 2024. The Mayor advised Members that Kay was employed in the Transport Planning Team, was a valued member of the team, and referred to her years of local government service.

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

Councillor Renton – The Mayor announced that Councillor Renton had given birth to a baby boy on Tuesday, 19 March 2024.

RESOLVED – That the best wishes of the Council be conveyed to Councillor Renton on the birth of her son.

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

(1) **THE PUBLIC;**

There were no questions, with notice, submitted from Members of the Public.

(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.

75 COUNCIL REPORTS.

(1) CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL

The Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to endorse the recommendation of the Appraisal Sub-Group in respect of the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal.

The submitted report stated that the Appraisal Sub-Group had met on Wednesday, 6 March 2024, and had given consideration to the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal in accordance with the previously agreed process. It was noted that this was the third appraisal for the Chief Executive, and that he presented a statement reviewing the priorities he had been working on since the last appraisal in December 2022.

RESOLVED – That it be noted that the Appraisal Sub-Group had met to consider the Chief Executive's Appraisal for 2023/24, and that it was agreed that the Chief Executive would 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 - To enable the appraisal to be confirmed.

76 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.

77 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.

78 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 the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults, and that the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People, be appointed to the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership; and
- (b) That Councillor McEwan replace Councillor Wallis on the Tees Valley Combined Authority – Education, Employment and Skills Partnership Board.

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Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 16 May 2024

Item No. 6 (a) - Questions submitted on Notice from Members of the Public			
Question No.	Questioner	Respondent	Question
1.	Michael Walker	Councillor Dr. RILEY	<i>'The Community Security Trust (CST), which monitors anti-Jewish abuse and attacks and also provides security for UK Jewish communities, revealed data showing a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents compared with the same period in 2022. I understand that the council has free of charge training days to help the council and local schools to become inclusive for people who identify as LGBT, thus hopefully putting an end to homophobic and transphobic behaviour. Can you tell me if the council runs any such programmes which seek to educate not only children but also adults and members of the council about anti-semitism and what support the council provides for Jewish people who are experiencing an unprecedented level of hatred?'</i>
2.	Nigel BODDY	Councillor HARKER	<i>'I have just visited Stockton Market. There were many stalls . The two hour free parking in Stockton might have had something to do with the success of this market. The stalls cost just £25 and the first four weeks are free as an introductory offer. If Darlington is unable to match these trading conditions I see little prospect of Darlington's market continuing. I note with interest Taylors the butchers of Skinnergate had a mobile shop van on Stockton Market. As I walked back to my car I visited Skinnergate cycles in Stockton, which was once to be found in Skinnergate in Darlington. Can I ask please what approaches (if any) have been made by Darlington's Economic Development Officer to stall holders on Stockton Market and to Skinnergate Cycles to ask about trading conditions in Darlington? Specifically have they been asked, what might induce the stallholders of Stockton Market to trade here? What might induce retailers, who once traded here, to trade here again?'</i>
3.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor WALLIS	<i>Q1 Last month, local authorities were gifted The Cass Review's Final Report. It examined the NHS Gender Identity Development Service, GIDS. It was published after almost 20 years of staff, parents ex-patients trying to raise the alarm about the diagnostic and treatment protocol and the 2020 Care Quality Commission inspection which deemed the service unsafe. Many of the now vindicated whistleblowers, journalists and concerned citizens had been told the issues was too sensitive, were</i>

		<p><i>accused of stoking up hatred and division, and even of “denying the existence of trans people”.</i></p> <p><i><u>The Government, and Labour Party, has accepted all of the recommendations, eg:</u></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Children are to be diagnosed holistically so co-morbidities of other mental health conditions or neurodiversity (eg anorexia and autism); adverse childhood experiences; or just potentially growing up to be same sex or bisexual attraction [1] etc are routinely assessed and investigated [2] rather than a rigid 'gender affirmation only' approach.</i> <i>2. Puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones will no longer be routinely prescribed. Their evidence base has 'shaky foundations'. Neither their clinical effectiveness in alleviating children's distress and the side effects they cause are certain.</i> <i>3. Accurate data collection and diligent following up on the outcomes of all patients will be carried out. Circa 9,000 children passed through its doors in its 35 years. Unfortunately, whether they are happy and healthy, if their feelings of distress have desisted, if they've de-transitioned or are unhappy & unwell is unknown. It is likely that ~60 children from Darlington have been patients of GIDs.</i> <p><i>The review is obviously relevant to every service for children and young adults - ‘Although the focus of the Review is on support from point of entry to the NHS, no individual journey begins at the front door of the NHS, rather in the child’s home, family and school environment. The importance of what happens in school cannot be underestimated; this applies to all aspects of children’s health and well being.’ 12.6 [3]</i></p> <p><i>It highlighted that a range of public services, not just the NHS, had, on ‘hearing’ that 'a child was gender-distressed' effectively funnelled them through to GIDS, leading to the rapid growth in numbers [4]; a change to referrals instead being populated predominantly by teenage girls; and lengthy waiting times. An 'unconditional gender affirmation approach' by services meant all the children arriving at GIDS had been socially transitioned. Moreover, the report found that, compared with the general population, children referred to gender services had higher rates of neglect;</i></p>
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			<p><i>physical, sexual or emotional abuse; parental mental illness or substance abuse; exposure to domestic violence; and loss of a parent through death or abandonment - all children who one could anticipate might be under the direct care of local authority services.</i></p> <p><i>Please could Cllr Wallis explain how parents and residents can be confident that the council will not be following the 'social justice model' [5], and detail the lessons Darlington Council has taken from the whole of the Cass Review to put into place (via policies and practices) for all staff, councillors, and contractors to a) work in a culture of exercising genuine professional curiosity; b) be able to respond holistically in supporting children who appear to be distressed about their 'gender'; and so that c) the school and services to clinic pipe-line will be firmly closed?</i></p> <p><i>Notes: [1] One study cited, 89% of girl & 81% of boys would have been same sex or bi sexually attracted - they were gender non-conforming; [2] Only 2.5% of children had 'no other issues'; [3] https://cass.independent-review.uk/home/publications/final-report/ [emphasis added]; [4] In 2009, the NHS's gender identity development service (GIDS) saw fewer than 50 children a year. Since then, demand has increased a hundredfold, with more than 5,000 seeking help in 2021-22. [5] Identified as being one of the factors that meant the review was so difficult to conduct -page 20 Cass Final report.</i></p>
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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

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

Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme

2. Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has been successful in its application to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas round 2 bidding competition. £7.8m has been secured from the Department for Transport, with bus operators contributing a further £22.2m.
3. The project will see the roll-out of 62 electric zero emission buses and associated charging infrastructure. These are split between Arriva and Stagecoach and there will be coverage across the following services:-
 - (a) Stagecoach will run 40 single decker buses on routes 36, 37 and 38 out of their Stockton depot. 20 chargers will be installed at their Stockton depot.
 - (b) Arriva will run seven single decker buses on service 63 out of their Redcar depot. Four chargers will be installed at their Redcar depot.
 - (c) Arriva will run 15 single decker buses on service 2 out of their Darlington depot. Eight chargers will be installed at their Darlington depot.
4. The deployment date is still to be confirmed, but it is anticipated to be by the end of 2025.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund

5. TVCA has been successful in its £6.5m bid into the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure fund. The focus of the fund is on increasing at scale low powered, on street electric vehicle charging infrastructure to support residents who do not have off street parking.
6. TVCA is working collaboratively with each local authority on the next stages of the process.

Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant

7. TVCA has secured £2.5m from the Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant, the second highest allocation of any authority in the country. The funding will be used to upgrade traffic signal systems, replacing unreliable and obsolete equipment to improve reliability and link to investment in new traffic management systems. The funding will be apportioned equally between each of the five local authorities and TVCA is working with all local authorities to agree which traffic signals will be replaced.

Darlington Station

8. Good progress continues to be made on the Darlington Station project. Cladding work is continuing for the car park and new concourse, with the concrete pouring of the final ground floor slab and associated ramps due for completion imminently. Internal and external blockwork has commenced, along with the first electrical installations. Preparatory work has commenced for the short stay car park/interchange area.
9. On the eastern side, Network Rail has completed the platform 1 hoarding and installation of the temporary ticket office. Automatic ticket gates have been relocated and partial hoarding to platform 4 installed. Work continues at Smithfield Road bridge to prepare for the new track, which is expected to continue until the end of June 2024.
10. On the western gateway preparatory work is continuing. In March 2024, TVCA received confirmation that it has secured £1.3m of Active Travel England funding through a competitive process, which will enable them to deliver the full planning approved scheme. It is anticipated that the remaining demolition will be completed by the end of 2024, with the associated highways works completed by Summer 2025 with the final programme subject to confirmation on the appointment of a contractor.

East Coast Mainline Timetable

11. A major new timetable for the East Coast Mainline, also covering other services in the Tees Valley / North-East, has been in development by the rail industry for some time with the expectation that it would be implemented in December 2024. An announcement on the current position regarding the new timetable is expected soon and I will provide further updates in due course.

Climate Change

12. The successful Zero Emissions bus application will see an investment of £30m in zero emissions bus fleet across the Tees Valley and the £2.5m investment in new traffic signals equipment will ensure the most efficient LED units are utilised saving on electricity usage.

Tees Valley Combined Authority

13. On the 15 April I attended a briefing session about work being undertaken to address the 28 recommendations that were made as a result of the Independent Review of The South Tee Development Corporation and Teesworks. A number of briefing sessions have been convened for Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee members of the Combined Authority with further planned. Work on responses to the recommendations has been ongoing by the statutory officers of the combined authority. Meetings have also been convened with statutory officers from the constituent councils to facilitate wider input. This will result in a number of changes of approach including amendments to the constitution of the Combined Authority.

External Meetings and Engagement

14. I have attended a range of external meetings and engagements, and some of these are as follows:

- (a) I attended the count night for our Member of Youth Parliament. There were 4 fantastic candidates: Stephen Adenuga, Charlie Cela, Jack James, and Jack Parvin. Each had spent the last several weeks campaigning, promoting their manifestos to young people across Darlington. Over 4,400 votes were cast in the election. Stephen was the successful candidate – congratulations.
- (b) Darlington Cares held an event to conclude and celebrate all the volunteering hours that were donated in the preceding year in some of our parks. Thanks are due to many volunteers from Darlington Economic Campus, Redde Northgate, Cummins Inc and EE.
- (c) From the world of health, I've had catch up meetings with TEWV (Brent Kilmurray – Chief Executive, Dave Jennings – Chair, Patrick Scott – Managing Director of Durham and Tees Valley), and NEAS Chief Executive Helen Ray.
- (d) Rachel Bacon our new Chief Constable, and Dean Haythornthwaite, returning Chief Inspector.
- (e) The Darlington Towns Board for a regular progress meeting.
- (f) At the request of Rail North, Minister Huw Merriman MP met with Leaders across the North of England to discuss the December 2024 railway timetable.
- (g) Along with Ian Williams and Anthony Sandys I met with Paul Bilbao, Head of Asylum Support Contracts and Finance at the Home Office
- (h) I attended the most recent Citizenship Ceremony to welcome our newest British citizens. As ever, the new citizens came from many different countries across the globe.
- (i) And, finally, I attended the Mayor's Ball. This was a fantastic event, with people attending from many different communities and organisations of Darlington.

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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 1,167 requests for service in Quarter 4 2023/2024. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	156
(b) Licensing	95
(c) Noise	198
(d) Planning Enquiries	60
(e) Refuse	92
(f) Pest	200
(g) Personal searches	197

Climate Change

3. We are coming towards the end of the hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) trial with the fleet management team. To date, swapping diesel for HVO in our refuse trucks has saved more than 132 tonnes CO₂. The issue going forward is the cost difference between HVO and diesel, so we are working with the team to look at other alternatives.
4. We have worked with the library team to set up a seed swap library in Central Library. The first staffed session on 22nd March was very successful with lots of residents coming in and swapping their own seeds for different ones.
5. We have also set up meetings with the Northeast and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub, to look at what support they can offer us. The Climate Change Officer will be looking for potential projects with teams and taking those to the Hub for their help in finding funding.

Development Management

6. The application for the New Treasury Building is now with the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. We have already had a meeting with the applicants to discuss further detail regarding the appearance of the building. These discussions have been productive and are ongoing.
7. Further work is ongoing following the Outline Approvals for housing recently Granted at Coniscliffe Park. Discussions are being had with the developers with regard to the further involvement nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission.

8. 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.

Building Control

9. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
10. Changes to the Building Regulations, responsibilities and operating procedures are ongoing. The changes and additional requirements/roles/responsibilities are putting stress on the resources available.
11. Surveyors are registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and are still in progress with their competence validation. Processes are in place for the required BSR surveying supervision to ensure the service and surveyors remain legal under the Building Safety Act in the interim.
12. Development of methodology for retrieving and reporting Building Control KPI's to the Building Safety Regulator is underway. ICT are assisting in this. Development processes have been hindered by the late submission of detailed guidance from the BSR.
13. Dangerous structures: British Steel – Whessoe Road retaining wall. Monitoring is ongoing by British Steel and their engineers. No other major DS issues/occurrences elsewhere.

Town Fund

14. Delivery onsite continues along 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, including on Coniscliffe Road.
15. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
16. The proposals for the re-development of number 156 Northgate have now received Planning approval and EOI interest from prospective contractors have been received.
17. The funding for the redevelopment of the former Northern Echo building, within the town centre, has been secured. Following a procurement process we have appointed Adavo as our preferred partner to design, build and operate the building. We are finalising contract and lease arrangements with some emergency work already commenced. It is anticipated that structural work will commence in July following gaining the necessary statutory notices. It is anticipated that the work will be completed in March 2026.
18. A feasibility study for the Edward Pease House continues to be progressed.
19. The design of several property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and have now commenced.

20. As part of the budget speech in March 2024 it was announced that Darlington had been selected as part of the second tranche of the Long-term Plan for Towns. The funding will amount to £20m over 10-year period 25% revenue 75% capital. The emphasis of the fund is on focussing upon the development of interventions through community groups with an aim of developing community, civic and social fabric for an area. Work has commenced in engaging with community groups and a review of the current Town Board to reflect the overall ambition of an increase in community representation. A future cabinet report detailing the fund and the required governance arrangements will be presented in due course.

Business Investment

21. The number of business investment enquiries continues, with the main area of interest from the hospitality sectors.
22. The Business Investment Team have successfully led the delivery of the following events:
- (a) Darlington Jobs Fair – 8 February 2024
 - (b) STEMfest Tees Valley – 6/7 March 2024
 - (c) Kings Award Information Event 12- March 2024
23. The roll out of UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support activities continues, with support now in place for:
- (a) Delivering Net Zero
 - (b) Digital Transformation
 - (c) Securing Financial Investment
 - (d) Smarter Adoption of digital technology
 - (e) Creative & Visitor Economy Development
 - (f) 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.

24. Officers from the Business Investment Team are attending the UK Real Estate and Inward Investment Festival in Leeds. This 3-day event brings together the public sector with Government, investors, funders, developers, and housebuilders. The event gathers key players, influencers and decision makers within the investment and real estate markets to highlight investment and development opportunities, whilst connecting and facilitating new relationships to drive economic growth through development and regeneration.
25. Plans are now in development for an autumn Jobs Fair on 2 October 2024.

Estates

26. Work continues to progress well on the restoration of the Blackwell Parkland including the pond, railings and perimeter walls and will continue throughout 2024. Sites works on the proposed residential site at Blackwell are also progressing well.

Planning Policy

Burtree Garden Village

27. Discussions are on-going to agree a Masterplan for the area prior to the application being considered by the Planning Committee

Skerningham Garden Village

28. Developers have carried out a consultation exercise on the Masterplan for the area and will be communicating the responses to any people/organisations that participated in the near future.

Homes Strategy

29. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy, and we are currently in a period of engagement with stakeholders prior to the presentation of a draft for consideration and wider consultation.

Housing Delivery

30. The completions for the financial year 2023/24 was 359 with 397 starts, this shows a downturn from previous years which was expected due to the impact of Nutrient Neutrality. Completions and starts have increased in the last quarter of the year.

Biodiversity Net Gain

31. The statutory requirement for 10% Biodiversity Net Gain was introduced for minor development (apart from exemptions) on 2 April, this joins the requirement for major developments which was introduced in February.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

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

Operational Services

2. The waiting list for the Adult Contact Team continues to be reviewed and risk assessed weekly to ensure there is robust oversight. The waiting list currently stands at 65 with no high priority people waiting.
3. The OT waiting lists remains at 163, all those waiting are low priority, with 53 requiring minor level adaptations that are DBC housing stock resulting in ongoing work to consider individual approaches to support these people. Recruitment to the team has been successful and the new staff will be in post during April and May. Cases are prioritised based on need and risk.
4. The Sensory waiting list is currently at 35. Successful recruitment has taken place to support capacity within the team with the aim of reducing the waiting list across the upcoming months.
5. In addition, there are waiting lists for Blue Badge applications awaiting OT assessment, with 68 are over the 30-day turnaround target (as per our policy). We have had 752 applications since 1 April 2023. Blue Badge applications for 2023/2024 significantly increased since a change of criteria broadening eligibility in April 2023. This backlog is also impacted by the legacy from Covid and staff turnover. A task and finish group is reviewing the Policy to look to streamline the process and will update Cabinet on recommendations in due course.
6. The Darlington Commitment to Carers Strategy was launched on 17 April 2024. ASC have been part of this working group and have developed an action plan in response to the areas highlighted with in the strategy.
7. The Assistant Director has regular updates with the Carers Resource Service with some recent positive feedback that the Hospital Discharge Project is going well, fully supported via RIACT along with hospital staff. The Hospital Discharge Project aims to work on the wards with families of people preparing for discharge. There is an offer of support, advice and guidance for the families (carers).
8. The Social Workers are accessing the wards, promoting the service, and have arranged presentations within the community hospitals. An example of positive feedback from the Carers Support Service in relation to ASC is: "I raised a safeguarding (adults) and the team were fantastic, felt very supported and was kept updated and we worked together to put a good plan in place".

9. Between June and October 2023 Adult Social Care commissioned Healthwatch to undertake a study into the experiences of people, and their unpaid carers who access services from DBC Adult Social Care. The study will be published on the Healthwatch website with a link via the ASC website pages.
10. The completion of this commissioned study by Healthwatch has been a helpful opportunity for DBC to seek valuable feedback from those accessing our services, via an independent third party. That being said, the final number of those engaging with the study was markedly low meaning this is not necessarily representative of all of those accessing DBC services.
11. Key themes included:
 - (a) Most participants responded positively that workers took the time to get to know them as a person including their culture and beliefs, what was important to them, and their views and wishes.
 - (b) Most participants said their worker gave them relevant information or advice in a way that was suitable for them, or put them in touch with people who could, and felt supported to understand their choices and options. Most felt involved in developing their support plan and exploring how their needs could be met.
 - (c) Most participants felt that they understood what would happen next such as a review timeline, further contact, interventions, case closed or offer of a carers assessment.
 - (d) Concerns regarding getting in contact with or getting a response from DBC when they had a concern was a consistent theme from respondents. Further feedback related to not being kept up to date, not having what was happening fully explained to them and long delays in responses.
 - (e) Further feedback was that a step-by-step approach to the assessment rather than rushing through it would be more beneficial.
 - (f) Most people were not aware of the on line offer of undertaking an online self-assessment.
12. Various elements of learning have been taken away in terms of how the study was conducted, and what could be done differently in the future to support more meaningful and robust findings. For example, it not always being clear if participants feedback was related to DBC, or provider services.
13. It is recognised that this was a first attempt by DBC to seek feedback in this way, and that the learning gained throughout the process has been invaluable and would be utilised if repeated.
14. Since the commissioning of the study by Healthwatch various other new initiatives have been introduced such as:
 - (a) Case File Audits have been reintroduced, ensuring there is sufficient and robust oversight and challenge of the quality of social work practice. Further, auditors make

contact with people to seek their direct feedback alongside reviewing the case file and meeting with the allocated worker.

- (b) A process for capturing the feedback of people on our case file management system at various key points in their journey through our system has been introduced. This means that peoples feedback will be routinely captured in real time, allowing a responsive and engaging approach to our work with them.
- (c) A review of the online offer and webpages is being undertaken to develop how we improve the information, advice and guidance available to people through the DBC website.

15. Response to Healthwatch to be featured in the published report:

'Darlington Borough Council would like to thank Healthwatch for undertaking this study, and detailed report into the experiences of people and their unpaid carers, who have engaged with us, as well as those who gave their time to contribute and share their feedback.

It is recognised that such a small sample will only provide us with a snapshot as to people's experiences, and following a time of significant pressure as we emerge from the pandemic and increasing demand for support. However, as a service, it is vital that we hear the voices of those we support, and who access our services to understand their experiences, what we do well, and how we can improve. The report highlights a number of areas where we are doing well, but also areas where we can improve, which we will commit to doing so.

Since the completion of this study, we have implemented various measures to support the continued improvement of our service and the experience of those engaging with us, as well as identifying further opportunities for improvement within our ongoing transformation plan.

- 16. It was Autism Awareness Week beginning 1 April. We ensured there was a visible presence on social media to provide an opportunity to increase the publics knowledge of Autism.
- 17. ASC with Tees and Esk Wear Valley Foundation Trust (TEWV) and the Integrated Care Board are working together to produce an updated response to the National Autism Strategy 2021-2026. This will be shared in due course.

Commissioning and Contracts

- 18. The Commissioning and Contracts Team is making good progress in its contract re-procurement programme. The objective of the programme is to ensure that our strength-based and outcome- focused approach continues to be at forefront of care provision in Darlington. The revised arrangements will also support the Council in meeting its Care Act (2014) statutory duty of ensuring market oversight and shaping duties that there is a sufficient and diverse range of care and support services available.
- 19. To date the work has included: a relet of the Older Persons and Older Persons with Mental Health Residential Care contract which will commence on 1 April 2024; the Home Care and Supported Living contract which will become operational on 1 November 2024, and Working Age Adults residential care contracts which will become operational on 1 October 2024. Full-service reviews have been conducted in partnership with care

providers and adult services operational colleagues in order to develop refreshed Service Specifications.

Climate Change

20. Teams continue to work towards the aims of the ASC climate change action plan, ensuring climate change is on team meetings, and championing ways of reducing energy consumption.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

21. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 27 February. The group was provided with an overview of safeguarding roles within the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and their multi-agency approach to safeguarding, the group welcomed the connectivity and is positive that representatives will join Partnership Groups.
22. The group received a presentation following a number of cases of self-neglect which have featured in learning reviews undertaken by the Partnership. The Partnership recognised there were a number of specific actions to take forward from a multi-agency perspective. A Task and Finish group has been established to take forward key pieces of work which will support practitioners working with individuals who self-neglect. The Partnership has developed a briefing document on self-neglect. A learning lessons review is ongoing and
23. The Director of Public Health provided an overview on their plan to strengthen partnership working on the domestic abuse agenda to help prevent, support and tackle those who cause harm. It will begin by strengthening representation on the Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) to enable local intelligence to be fed in.

Councillor Anne-Marie Curry
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

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) remains stable in terms of staffing, it is performing consistently well. Refresher work has been carried out with CIAT and this has focused on the using of the Professor Thorpe Model when contacts from professionals are received into the service. The work that has been carried out in this refresher training has contributed to a reduction in referrals to social care and the outcome to contacts are more appropriate and a more proportionate level. The team are ensuring that they consider all potential outcomes of universal, external early help and help from our Building Stronger Families Team in order for the most appropriate level of service for the individual needs of the family to be provided.
3. Following a change in Police staffing which led to a restructure for the Police in terms of their work as partners in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the Children's Front Door management team visited Newton Aycliffe MASH to develop new working relationships. The visit provided an opportunity to feedback on deep dive work that has been completed around the high level of police contacts that receive 'no further action', findings are that whilst there are some Police contacts that were unnecessary to share with the Children's Front Door, these were minimal and the main issue is that the outcome recorded being 'no further action' doesn't always reflect the work carried out. The Performance Team are working with CIAT to ensure that outcomes that would have been deemed as 'no further action' but where work with the family has been carried out or there has been signposting to other services will be captured in the performance reporting.
4. There is a sharp focus on building stronger relationships with partners and partnership meetings have offered for partners to spend time with the team at the Children's Front Door. This offer has been taken up by some in Education and the visits have been successful and helped partners in Education understand the nature of the Children's Front Door and the way in which it works.
5. During January 2024 there has been a reduction in missing episodes. There was only one Return Home Interview not carried out, this was due to the young person's mental health being poor at that time and it was not appropriate to pursue this.
6. Child exploitation continues to be a priority for the service. Abuse and crime in relation to this area of safeguarding work is discussed via the Missing and Exploited Multi Agency Meeting held fortnightly (known as the MEG). This meeting enables plans to be built and action taken to increase the safety of children and young people, as well as disrupt crime.

The Child Exploitation Matrix is now populated onto the Liquid Logic electronic system, this will assist practitioners in building into their work the need to continually assess risk to a child or young person when exploitation is suspected or known.

Building Stronger Families Service

7. Targeted groups continue to be successful. Staff from the Building Stronger Families Team have recently delivered a pre-birth programme for a cohort of school age teenagers who are going to be parents. The group was very well attended, and the evaluation of the group is underway but already it's known that parents have learnt a lot about caring for a baby, the impact of lifestyle choices, risk, and prioritising baby's needs, so that they have the best basis to build their parenting skills on. From this group they can continue to be supported through the family hubs and have been invited to attend future baby groups once their babies have arrived. Both parents attended the group, with a significantly high number of fathers being able to confidently access this group.
8. The number of Early Help Assessments initiated remains high and this is placing pressure on the service, staff are working efficiently to ensure that families get the support they need, and there is a focus on trying to reduce the number of re-referrals in the future by ensuring there is appropriate step-down at the conclusion of any work with families. When work with Building Stronger Families ends the family are able to access a number of groups giving longer term support through the family hub model.
9. The Early Help Assessment is currently under review, to ensure that it is more concise and family friendly. The aim is to produce a more succinct and family friendly assessment, it will be less intimidating for the family to read, and they will work through a programme with the team around the family that reflects everyone's voices, and a final plan that supports the family to sustain the progress that they have made.
10. Families Together is a parenting programme aimed to support the learning of parents and their children. The model is that whilst parents work together in a group to learn about parenting strategies, and why children might behave in a way to communicate their needs to their parents and carers, the children are also working in group with a focus on therapeutic activities, and emotional regulation support. This is another group that is very well attended by fathers, and the evaluations are showing positive results for the whole family.
11. I am attending meetings of the HEY network, where Early Years professionals (including nurseries, Health Visitors, social work and education practitioners) share best practice across Darlington. We are considering how to pool resources; share visions and goals; feed into the healthy weight plans for Darlington; provide networking opportunities for collaborative working; and how we can together best reach our target population in terms of messaging and resources.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)

12. An application has been made for further grant funding via Immediate Justice monies, this is to build the current 0.5 post of Victim Liaison Office to a full-time post.

13. There is a new mandatory assessment launched from 1 April 2024, this is for use with Pre-Caution disposals, Youth Cautions and Youth Conditional Cautions, this assessment is designed to be more relational and is underpinned by the YJS's child first principles.
14. The reparation team are working towards the development of new reparation projects including work with veterans and sheltered over 50's accommodation and a gardening project at a local cemetery promoting pro-social identity, community connection as well as restorative justice.
15. I attend the Darlington Young People's Engagement and Justice Service Management Board. At our meeting on 18th April, we considered the Government's termination of the Turnaround Programme in March 2025. Turnaround has been a youth early intervention programme, enabling Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) to intervene earlier and improve outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system. Here in Darlington, through Turnaround, we have contacted 139 families; without this provision we could have only contacted 10. No research or justification has been given for the ending of this programme, and the decision is deeply disappointing.
16. At time of going to print, there is a plan in place to maintain the funding of 2 of the 3 members of staff that are currently funded via Turnaround. This means that for 24/25 Turnaround is funding 3 x FT Workers and the plan for 25/26 is that 2 of these members of staff will remain in their posts to continue to carry out this vital work that has brought about good outcomes for our young people and their families. I will provide Council with further information when I have it.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

17. As of 27 March 2024, the five assessment and safeguarding teams have 631 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. Since February 2024 outcome meetings are now held with partner agencies and the family to agree the closure or step down to ensure all parties are clear about the outcome and any further targeted work with the family. These have to date been received positively by all involved. Outcome letters are also sent to the family and copied to partner agencies.
18. As of 27 March 2024, the A&S teams have 164 children open for assessment, 330 children supported under Child in Need, 147 children on Child Protection plans and 60 children in our care.
19. The number of care proceedings where we are concluding on a supervision order is increasing (currently 31 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.
20. In the three months to the end of January the Assessment and Safeguarding teams brought 21 children into our care, four of which were UASC. In the same three-month period 46 children open to the Assessment and Safeguarding teams/CWD and Looked After Through Care team, ceased to be children in our care. Three of these children were

adopted, 19 children were rehabilitated home, 18 children remained living with extended family via either a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order.

21. Significant effort to reduce overdue assessments in locality teams continues and this is now a targeted piece of work with one locality team. Service Manager oversight continues to be in place around caseloads, workflows and timeliness of work being completed to ensure that positive progress is maintained.
22. The Locality model of working within the Assessment and Safeguarding teams has been in place since December 2022 and continues to function well. The Team Managers have developed links with their local Secondary schools. The demands on the teams are constantly reviewed and boundaries adjusted accordingly. This has led to equity of referral numbers and a workload balance across the teams.
23. Our Children with Disabilities team are supporting 92 children and young people; 28 of these children are supported under Child in Need, and a further 51 under Child in Need review (to maintain and review existing packages of care). The team have six children open for assessment and seven children who are in our care. There are no children subject to child protection plans in CWD.
24. 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. Four children have been supported to successfully transition to Adult Social Care from between November 2023 and January 2024.
25. An ongoing scoping exercise is in place to broaden the scope for preparation for an adult pathway for the wider SEND population and the Team Manager for Children with Disabilities is now supporting and attending SEN transition meetings for children who are not open to Children's Social Care.
26. Fifty-three pieces of Social Care advice have been completed for children going through the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process who do not have a Social Worker. The Team Manager or Advanced Practitioner attend fortnightly Multi Agency Provision Panel (MAPP) as the Social Care representative within the EHCP process.

Looked After and Care Leaver information

27. As of 29 February 2024, there are 310 children who are looked after. This is a reduction from 321 in January 2024 and 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.
28. There are 128 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. These events are organised daily during Holiday periods such as walks, and other free activities are organised.
29. We have been successful in obtaining funding for three new projects; Family Finding, Mentoring and a Safe Space youth provision. Family finding is supported by three

additional Lifelong Links workers two of which are now in post who are supporting 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.

30. The mentoring programme offers the opportunity for care experienced adults to become mentors for younger children in care. We have successfully recruited 15 care experienced young people to become Mentors and their training is currently underway.
31. 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. This continues to be held every Monday evening.
32. 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 initiative continues to grow month on month. Some comments from workers feedback about the young people are "growing into himself and is happy" "House Proud and in work "Rings for help when needs it".
33. Together with my Cabinet colleague Cllr. Matthew Roche, I am undertaking a piece of work to consider the welfare of asylum-seeking children, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, in the Borough. I have met with representatives of Darlington schools and a local educational charity, and further meetings are planned.

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

34. Up to the end of February 2024, we have 51 fostering households with five active enquiries which the service is awaiting an application. We had four foster carers at stage one of the recruitment process which includes initial checks and references and one carer in stage two which is the full fostering assessment with a view to progressing to panel. Two carers were awaiting fostering panel for approval.
35. Fostering with Northeast is a regional pilot whereby carers contact a central hub to make their initial enquiry. Up until the end of February 2024, we have received eight enquiries via the hub, six have been generated through internal recruitment and two via the hub. I am working with fellow Children's Services Portfolio leads across the Northeast to determine how the hub can best deliver for looked after children here in Darlington. I have also attended a listening session with foster carers since the last meeting of Council, and it was good to hear how well received our new package of financial and other support for foster carers is being received.
36. We launched our second Mockingbird constellation on 15th March 2024, which is where several fostering families are supported by a hub carer who has a spare bedroom. Both Cllr. Hilary Allen and I attended, and it was great to chat with our dedicated foster carers and some of the young people they look after. Mockingbird enables a wider fostering family network where they can have support from each other informally and via sleepovers. Within constellation one we are supporting seven sets of carers with 15 children and second constellation we will support six sets of carers with 10 children.
37. 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.

38. Fostering Care Fortnight is The Fostering Network's annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and show how Foster Care transforms lives. I have recorded a video message in support of the initiative and met with some of our brilliant foster carers and the children they look after in Gladstone Street.
39. The campaign will take place from 13-26 May 2024. This year's theme is Fostering Moments, celebrating the moments that define fostering journeys, big and small. We have several events planned to include podcasts and pictures of staff and carers which will be released via social media. We will hold a celebration event for our carers, promotion via "One Darlington", social media channels and local press all highlighting the angle of increased investment in our carer offer and promoting fostering with Darlington.
40. Our supported accommodation applications are in process with Ofsted to ensure we abide by the new regulations which came into effect in October 2023. There has been a slight delay to registration due to the resignation received from our previous Fostering and Supported Lodging team manager as well as recruitment to a new team manager who is in the process of registering with Ofsted.

Homes for our Children

41. Cedars, Lancaster Close and Harewood Hill Lodge children's Home were all inspected by Ofsted and graded 'Good'. This is a huge achievement for the team with Cedars as a brand-new provision and Lancaster opening as a new build home. Cedars offers emergency care and short breaks for children on the edge of becoming looked after. Lancaster staff and young people moved from Eldon Street which was previously graded requires improvement.
42. My visits to our children's homes, where I meet with young people and the staff that care for them, continue to underline for me the dedication and professionalism that characterise our residential provision.
43. Our three mainstream children's homes are at full occupancy. Cedars offers short break and emergency provision to young people Monday to Friday with outreach work provided outside of these operation hours.
44. We continue to expand out taster flat provision and currently we have 12 flats. This is supporting young people to transition to independence with support. They are utilised by our Staying Close project.
45. Harewood Lodge continues to offer short breaks to children with a disability. Occupancy internally is 72% supporting 23 children/young people. Nine nights are utilised by children from other Local Authorities. With support from commissioning colleagues, we have contacted regional authorities to advise of capacity.

Youth Unemployment

46. The Darlington 18–24-year-old claimant count has risen from 7.1% (535 young people) in December 2023 to 7.2% (540 young people) in February 2024. In comparison the North-East average has increased by 0.1% to 6.0%, and the national average risen by 0.2% to 5.2%.
47. The February 2024 figures (December 2023 in brackets) for the Tees Valley are as follows:
- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| a) Hartlepool | 8.9% (9.0%) |
| b) Redcar and Cleveland | 8.7% (8.3%) |
| c) Middlesbrough | 7.8% (7.6%) |
| d) Stockton -on-Tees | 7.7% (7.5%) |
| e) Darlington | 7.2% (7.0%) |

Education

48. Marchbank Special School was recently inspected by Ofsted and was judged to be “Good.” Inspectors recognised that children thrive at Marchbank; the nurturing environment helps pupils to feel safe and ready to learn and there is a relentless ambition for all pupils to achieve success. The school’s approach to developing pupils’ personal development is impressive and pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps.
49. The percentage of Darlington children offered one of their top three school choices has climbed to the highest level for three years. Friday 1 March was secondary offer day when year 6 children and up and down the country learned which secondary school they will attend for the 2024/2025 academic year.
50. This year, there were 1,143 Darlington families who applied for a secondary place for their child by the application deadline of 31 October, an increase of 4% since 2022. Of those, 96% have been offered a place at their first-choice school. A further 3.3% have been offered a place at another of their school choices, meaning over 99% have been offered a place at one of their top three preferred schools.

Children’s Commissioning and Contracts

51. A programme of onsite quality monitoring visits is underway across in borough externally commissioned children’s residential care, supported accommodation and foster care placements. The quality monitoring visits incorporate a review of; core policies, operating procedures, staff recruitment practice and training, a review of the child’s individual support plan with a specific focus on evidencing how individualised positive outcomes are being achieved. Several children have given direct feedback on their care arrangements as part of the monitoring visits which has formed an integral part of the quality assessment. To date services have evidenced a high quality of care resulting in positive outcomes and progression for the young people.
52. Darlington Borough Council have led on a collaborative commissioning and procurement exercise with Middlesbrough Borough Council and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council in relation to SEND Mediation Services. Mediation arrangements are specifically linked to decisions made about education, health and social care needs assessments and plans of a

young person with an Education Health and Care Plan. The Council must appoint in impartial and independent provider to ensure an impartial process is adhered to in respect of process. The new provider is Mediate Legal and are a firm based in Liverpool. The contract commenced on 8 January 2024 and to date, service implementation and engagement has been positive.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

53. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners met on 13 March and discussed the key provisions outlined in the new Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance. Partners highlighted having a joint child and adult partnership has been a real strength and recognise it needs to consider the aspirations of the children's guidance and agreed whatever changes are made need to reflect what is needed for Darlington.
54. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 27 February. The group was provided with an overview of safeguarding roles within the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and their multi-agency approach to safeguarding, the group welcomed the connectivity and is positive that representatives will join Partnership Groups.
55. The group was provided with an overview of the findings from the Family H Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review undertaken by the Partnership. Work is ongoing to take forward the actions identified to respond to the recommendations. A number of resources have been developed to share the learning from the review and have been published on the Partnership website.
56. The Director of Public Health provided an overview on their plan to strengthen partnership working on the domestic abuse agenda to help prevent, support and tackle those who cause harm. It will begin by strengthening representation on the Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) to enable local intelligence to be fed in.

Darlington Commitment to Carers

57. On 17th April, together with the Leader and Cllr. Anne-Marie Curry, I attended the launch of Darlington Commitment to Carers. I am really pleased that it contains a detailed section relating to young carers, and I will be liaising closely with the recently-commissioned Family Action's Young Carers Darlington team. They are working with young carers (5-25), and their families, to provide support where needed. The service ensures that children and young people are protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to thrive and enjoy positive childhoods, to achieve their full potential.
58. Family Action support young carers through a wide-range of activities, from initial assessments to one-to-one sessions, from fun activities to Carer Breaks, and through ensuring that they keep the Young Carer at the heart of all we do. I will keep Council and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee updated on progress with the new service, and delivery against the Commitment to Carers Plan.

New Youth MP for Darlington

59. Together with the Mayor, the Leader, and Cllr. Curry, I was delighted to attend the declaration for Darlington's Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) on 25th March. Stephen Adenuga was elected as MYP for 2024 - 26, with Jack James as Deputy MYP. I had previously attended hustings at Longfield Secondary School, and was really impressed with the manifestos of all four candidates. I will be meeting with Stephen, Jack and their team regularly to ensure that the Council is listening and responding to the voices of the Borough's children and young people.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Children and Young People Portfolio

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

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. The Public Health team has received confirmation of the local stop smoking services and support grant allocation for 2024 to 2025. The conditions attached to the additional funding require that the grant is ringfenced and used to:
 - (a) Invest in enhancing local authority commissioned stop smoking services and support, in addition to and while maintaining existing spend on these services and support from the public health grant.
 - (b) Build capacity to deliver expanded local stop smoking services and support.
 - (c) Build demand for local stop smoking services and support.
 - (d) Deliver increases in the number of people setting a quit date and 4 week quit outcomes.
3. The Council has been successful in its bid to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities for funding to implement the 'swap to stop' scheme. The funding will be used to support quit attempts amongst people over the age of 18 years, who will be able to access free vapes as part of their quit attempt, as well as receive individualised targeted support from our Stop Smoking Service.
4. The Public Health team have received confirmation of the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment & Recovery Grant (SSMTR Grant) allocation for 2024-2025, which represents the third year of grant funding from the Department of Health & Social Care revenue funding allocated in the 21/22 Spending Review Settlement. The funding is managed by the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) and is provided pursuant to section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 to support delivery against the national Drug Strategy 'From Harm to Hope'.
5. Darlington's local action plan has been developed and agreed with OHID and will contribute to each of the expected national targets and outcomes set out in the Drug Strategy. Detail within the plan includes: -
 - (a) Establishing a joint process for reviewing both non-fatal overdoses and drug/alcohol related deaths; this will also inform the offer of enhanced support to the most vulnerable and at-risk individuals.

- (b) Development of effective pathways into and out of treatment services, particularly for those using opiates and/or crack.
 - (c) Expanding the availability of Naloxone across Darlington.
 - (d) Developing a range of increased rehabilitation opportunities including greater numbers accessing Residential Rehabilitation.
 - (e) Ensuring adequate capacity within the treatment system to ensure caseloads remain manageable and workers have capacity to effectively support people.
 - (f) Developing a comprehensive Recovery Offer.
 - (g) Developing a comprehensive young person's offer.
 - (h) Ensuring the input from lived experience at every stage, including peer led interventions.
6. With support from the Association of Directors of Public Health North East and sustainable food partnerships, the North East has been selected to be the regional partner for Good Food Local over the next three years. Good Food Local is a project run by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, with funding from Impact on Urban Health. The project includes a regional benchmarking programme to encourage local authorities to make commitments to good food. The submission on behalf of Darlington Borough council was made on 28th March 2024.
7. The Health and Care Act 2022 provides powers for the Secretary of State to introduce, vary and terminate community water fluoridation schemes. As set out in the national plan for NHS dentistry services in England there is a long-term ambition to systemically bring water fluoridation to more of the country and a consultation on expanding community water fluoridation schemes across the Northeast of England was announced by government on 25th March, with the consultation period closing at 11:59pm on 17th June 2024. Further information is available [here](#).

Health and Wellbeing Board

8. A series of thematic workshops have been planned to support the further development of the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy and Plan. The agreed framework of the Strategy is:
- (a) Children and Young People: Best Start in Life
 - (b) Staying Healthy and Living well
 - (c) Healthy Places
 - (d) Healthy Ways of Working
9. The thematic workshops will provide an opportunity for members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and partners to further develop the detail of the plan and agree key priorities and actions, informed by local need.

Housing Services

Universal Credit

10. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has now commenced the managed migration of Housing Benefit to Universal Credit, which will affect approximately 700 of our Council tenants.
11. Since Universal Credit was introduced, people have been naturally moving over from legacy benefits, including Housing Benefit paid by the Council, when they have a change in their circumstances, such as starting or ending work. However, as we now enter the final phase of this process, any working aged people still claiming Housing Benefit will be moved to Universal Credit during 2024-25. These will be people who have not had any changes in their circumstances, including those with disabilities and long-term medical conditions.
12. The DWP will initially write to everyone affected, inviting an on-line claim for Universal Credit. Detailed guidance and additional funding has been provided to the Council to help support affected residents with this process.
13. Our Housing Services Tenancy Sustainment Team are well prepared for the managed migration process and will be running some roadshows with the DWP during 2024-25 to raise awareness of the change with our tenants. Individual support will also be provided to those tenants who need additional help with applying for Universal Credit and the team will ensure that no-one loses any financial support with help for paying their rent.

Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

14. I am delighted that Housing Services, in partnership with Humankind charity, has successfully bid for £770,000 of Government funding from the SHAP programme, which aims to create additional housing for young adults aged 18 to 24, who are at risk of homelessness.
15. The SHAP funding will enable the purchase and refurbishment of twelve one-bedroom self-contained flats, close to the town centre. Humankind will also deliver Housing Related Support to the people in the flats, helping them gain the skills to manage and sustain tenancies and provide opportunities for move on to permanent homes. This is exactly the kind of partnership working we want to develop further, to support homelessness prevention.

Electrical Safety

16. I am extremely pleased that our Housing Services Building Maintenance Team were recently shortlisted as finalists for the Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP) awards for 2024, under the category of Electrical Contractor of the Year.
17. The nomination recognised the work our Housing Services team had undertaken over the past year to improve electrical safety compliance in our Council homes. This included improvements to our IT systems, recruiting additional resources, improvements to our internal processes to ensure electrical safety checks are booked in with our tenants at the

earliest opportunity, and improving communications with our tenants through social media to raise awareness of the importance of electrical safety in their homes.

Lifeline Services

18. During 2023-24, our Lifeline Services team answered 10,264 emergency calls, from the 3,528 elderly and vulnerable residents who rely on this service to live independently in their homes. Of those calls, 553 required emergency services to attend; all other calls were resolved by Lifeline.
19. In relation to the digital upgrade process, 3 of our sheltered schemes were upgraded to digital equipment in 2023-24, affecting 129 residents. 75% of all equipment has now been switched over to digital, leaving the remaining 25% to be completed in 2024-25.

Rent Collection

20. During 2023-24, our Housing Services Income Team collected over £27.9m in rent and service charges, which was an increase of 6.7% from the previous year. The team worked exceptionally hard to engage with customers, often collaboratively with tenancy management, Adult Social Care and external support agencies. This has ensured early intervention and as a result, the number of evictions carried out due to rent arrears has reduced from 15 in 2022-23 to 11 in 2023-24.
21. In addition, our Tenancy Sustainment Team secured over £48,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments for our tenants in 2023-24, which is used to top-up payments of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. Additionally, they also applied through the Northumbrian Water Social Tariff Scheme on behalf of those tenants on a low income and secured over £267,000 in funding.

Dolphin Centre

22. I am delighted that the Council has been awarded just over half a million pounds from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund to undertake energy saving improvements. New plant machinery and solar energy panels will help improve the Dolphin Centre's carbon footprint and reduce costs.
23. The reopening of the main pool has seen a rise in memberships in line with the highest recorded levels in the centre's history, with over 2,200 current members. This follows the record-breaking levels reported in the previous half-term holiday period, across all holiday activities.
24. The water education programme is successfully sitting at 87% capacity full. The last 12 months have seen a real commitment from the centre in maintaining water education throughout the pool closure, ensuring the closure did not impact children's water education.

Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital Project

25. Eastbourne Sports Complex capital project is nearing completion. The UK TrackMark standard athletics track, and additional stadia artificial grass pitch opened in September

2023 as part of a phased opening programme, with new changing facilities provided in May 2024. The new artificial grass pitch is undergoing a stadium accreditation inspection which will allow teams to be able to play up to step 5 on the national league pyramid. The new investment has seen an additional 50,000 visits since September 2023. The official opening took place on Tuesday 7 May 2024 and all Members were invited to attend the event.

Key Meetings

26. Cllr Harker, Cllr Layton and I have met with the North East Ambulance Service and Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust, in order to bolster our partnership working with the NHS. We heard from Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust about their continued improvement journey. We took actions away, such as connecting our climate change officers with the North East Ambulance Service to share learning and information regarding more environmentally friendly vehicles.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now on site:
 - (a) Unclassified (Unc) Swaledale Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.275km)
 - (b) A67 Coniscliffe Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.440km)
 - (c) Unc Barmpton Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.810km)
3. The following Highway Maintenance schemes are due to start:
 - (a) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (18 sites)
 - (b) A167 Croft Road (Tees View) Carriageway Remedials (0.050km)
 - (c) Unc Riverside Way: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.310km)
4. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now complete:
 - (a) C71 Houghton Bank, Heighington: Drainage Repairs / Carriageway Reconstruction (0.188km)
 - (b) C182 Thompson Street East: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.183km)
 - (c) B6279 Tornado Way / McMullen Road Junction: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.447km)

Rail Education Programme

5. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership recruited a Rail Education Officer in September 2023 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 ten schools in total, four in Darlington – Red Hall Primary, Firthmoor Primary, St Bede’s RC Primary and St John’s CE Academy. To date 1,687 pupils have received the training, of which 672 are Darlington students. The programme will be extended to St George’s Academy in April.

Bus Services

6. Connect Tees Valley (public transport information service) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. We are working with TVCA to ensure that the design is accessible and meets the needs of as many bus users as possible.
7. TVCA have confirmed that they will fund service 16 (Mowden to town centre) from August 2024 when the current DBC contract expires until March 2025. This will bring service 16 into line with all other secured services in Darlington and across the Tees Valley and be part of TVCA’s role as the Local Transport Authority. The current funding for some

supported bus services across the Tees Valley is provided to TVCA by Government. The funding beyond March 2025 has not yet been confirmed by Government.

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

8. A consultation has been completed on a scheme to introduce a 20mph zone on Abbey Road and Cleveland Terrace covering the frontage of Abbey Infant and Junior School. Whilst there is general support for the proposals, we are currently working through consultee responses. Subject to traffic regulation orders we are aiming to deliver the scheme towards the end of the financial year.
9. A scheme for St. Augustine's Primary School was consulted on but there was no consensus amongst local residents, therefore Officers are investigating alternative options.
10. A scheme for St. Bede Primary School on Thompson Street East is being finalised and will be consulted on at the end of May.
11. A scheme for Hurworth Comprehensive has been consulted on and is programmed to be delivered during the summer holidays.
12. An Initial scheme design for Longfield School has begun.
13. Feasibility work is about to begin for a scheme at Mowden Junior School.

Hopetown Darlington

14. The Hopetown Darlington development is progressing at speed with the construction of the bespoke play area, Wagon Woods, and the installation of the exciting and engaging interpretation in North Road Station Museum.
15. Throughout March and April, recruitment has been undertaken for 50 roles for the site; including, positions in catering, retail, admissions, housekeeping, finance and administration, learning and technical roles.

Darlington Hippodrome

16. The theatre has secured a whole series of week-long shows from London's West End for the Autumn 2024 season. The shows include: The Mouse Trap, Sister Act, An Inspector Calls, Ghost and Cluedo. This will be the most highly anticipated theatre season in Darlington since the 2016/17 restoration programme.

Libraries

Augmented Reality

17. After securing funding from LibraryOn, a new self-led tour has been introduced at Darlington Library. The tour includes augmented reality, which displays areas of the library throughout the past, including an image from 1885.
18. Augmented reality has also been incorporated into the large wall mural within The Hive, which allows the user to view Locomotion Number 1 on their device as an enlarged 3D

model. This, alongside Darlington's Fowler Plough and an augmented reality car engine, aims to increase enthusiasm for STEM activity and make it more accessible to all.

Crossing The Tees Book Festival

19. The festival celebrated local writers with an award ceremony at Darlington Library on Monday 22 April. The festival is organised by libraries in Darlington, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool and takes place annually in June.

World Book Night

20. World Book Night was celebrated on Wednesday 23 April, with an author event and visits to Morrisons on North Road, to increase promotion of the digital library, which includes newspapers, magazines, digital and audio books.

Local History Month

21. Throughout May, Darlington Library is hosting events at both libraries, including an exciting art exhibition in the gallery, a Musical Memories event, open days and talks. A range of interesting displays can also be viewed in the Centre for Local Studies.

Cockerton Library

22. Cockerton Library is growing audiences by offering a range of after school activities, including photography workshops, Sing A Story, arts and crafts and games and logic puzzles.

Creative Darlington

23. The 'Place, People & Living Memory' exhibition at Darlington Library in February and March 2024 received Heritage & Culture Fund budget support alongside £29,400 project funding from Arts Council England in 2023/24. It considered the work of female campaigners and artists, including Elizabeth Pease, Josephine Butler and Jo Spence, contained a photo essay, painting, print, photography, textiles and a number of video works. An events programme which included talks from exhibiting artists and exhibition curator Phil Gatenby and MIMA learning curator, Claire Pounder, accompanied the exhibition and attracted 100 plus attendees, including students from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College Foundation Course in Art & Design and 'A' level courses. The exhibition attracted 1,661 visits.
24. Creative Darlington has worked with the Director of the Stockton & Darlington Railway Bicentenary Festival 2025 to submit an Expression of Interest to apply for Major Projects support of £750,000 from Arts Council England for aspects of the programme. Arts Council England advised on 4 March 2024 that this could proceed to a full application. Creative Darlington supported the submission by Stockton Borough Council of a Major Projects proposal to Arts Council England on 27 March 2024 by Stockton Borough Council, alongside colleagues from Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Stockton Borough Council and other parties. The Arts Council England funding decision is expected in summer 2024.

25. The 'Now, Then' exhibition at Darlington Library, which ran from Tuesday 2 April to Thursday 2 May, included illustrations and poems created by Lizzie Lovejoy as part of the 'Your Library Story' creative programme supported by Arts Council England. The artist engaged with 62 people through Darlo Draws drop-in sessions at Darlington Library and at other locations in Darlington, including The Friends Community Hub and Meeting House on Skinnergate. The exhibition also included works by five artists selected from responses to a call out.
26. 'Now, Then' has been followed by 'Photography With or Without A Camera or Rules', an exhibition on the evolution of photography from cyanotypes to digital, which opened on Saturday 4 May and will run until Thursday 13 June. Both exhibitions are part of Darlington's Local History Month programme, with support from the Council's Heritage and Culture Fund budget.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

27. On Wednesday 24 April, Northumbria in Bloom judges were welcomed for their Spring visit to Darlington, which was an opportunity to showcase the improvements that have taken place, including: installation of multiple shop fronts, planters and signs.
28. As the events programme begins to build up for the summer, the Continental Markets returned during the Easter school holidays, following a successful trial in October 2023.
29. A new motor sports display event was organised by Darlington and District Motor Club with vehicles from a variety of motorsports in the town centre Saturday 27 April.
30. The Town Centre Team continue to programme high street social events to network with town centre businesses. The events have been well received by those attending, whilst also supporting a town centre venue.
31. Working with British Cycling, the Events Team are finalising arrangements to accommodate a circuit event to the town centre on Friday 21 June. This spectacular sporting competition will see hundreds of professional cyclists competing against each other around the town centre.

Environmental Services

32. The Garden Waste Collection Service resumed collections on Tuesday 2 April and will continue throughout the year to December for subscribers of the service.

Climate Change

33. Working with the sustainability and climate change lead, Darlington Library has opened a Seed Library, offering the public a safe space to exchange seeds and gather useful knowledge for planting. This will lead to less wastage of seeds and hopefully encourage more people to become growers.
34. The Town Centre Team are organising an Eco Fair to be held on Saturday 8 June. To complement the event, free water refilling locations and recycling collection point

information is being collated to add to the Council's sustainability web pages.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

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

Customer Services

2. During 2023-24, our Customer Services team received 56,854 telephone calls from customers for a range of services, including Street Scene, Parking, Environmental Health and Planning. Our Revenues and Benefits team received 38,415 calls and Housing Services received 63,163 calls.
3. In total, 207,917 calls were received by all Council services in 2023-24. In March 91.41% of calls were answered, with an average waiting time of 1 minute and 43 seconds, which is within our Customer Standards of 5 minutes.
4. In addition, there were 16,466 visitors to our Customer Services Centre, including 1,332 booked appointments, 734 customers who accessed our free to use PCs and 4,511 customers used our scan stations, enabling those people to easily provide supporting documentation for benefit claims, Housing applications, bus passes and Blue Badge parking permits.

Revenues and Benefits

5. During 2023-24, our Revenues and Benefits team collected over £106m in Council Tax and Business Rates. In-year collection of Council Tax was 96.39%, our best performance since 2010-11 and in-year collection of Business Rates was 99.97%, which is our best ever performance.
6. The team also continue to perform exceptionally well in the recovery of long-standing debts to the Council, including the following recent cases, which also demonstrate the supportive role that the team undertake in establishing entitlement to benefits:
 - (a) A local resident owed over £5,400 in unpaid Council Tax. Numerous attempts had been made to contact the resident without success. However, following an evening visit to the resident, officers were able to award backdated amounts for single person discount and Council Tax Support, reducing the arrears to £1,500 and an arrangement has been agreed to clear this amount.
 - (b) A local resident owed over £3,700 in unpaid Council Tax. Despite numerous visits to the property, contact could not be made with the resident. Further investigative work took place and a business address was obtained. A successful visit to the business

resulted in a payment arrangement being agreed and the full amount of the arrears were repaid by March 2024.

- (c) A local resident owed over £3,000 in unpaid Council Tax. Following a charging order being obtained, the property was subsequently sold and full payment was received.
 - (d) A local resident owed over £3,900 in overpaid Housing Benefit. A payment arrangement was set up but payments were irregular and the team had to make constant prompts and reminders. However, the last instalment was made in March 2024, repaying the debt in full.
 - (e) A local business owner owed over £2,100 in unpaid Council Tax for an empty property above their business. Proceedings were commenced to obtain a charging order on the property, but the full amount was repaid in February 2024.
7. Our Revenues and Benefits recovery team have also been proactive in identifying unclaimed discounts and Council Tax Support for residents in arrears with their Council Tax and on low incomes. During 2023-24, a total of £229,296 in unclaimed Council Tax Support was identified and awarded, reducing the amount of Council Tax owed and establishing repayment agreements to clear any remaining debt.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

8. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
- (a) The Darlington Railway Station scheme, which is now being managed by TVCA, the external cladding to the car park and new station building is now being installed. Additional Funding has been secured by TVCA for the transport interchange & public realm works at the top of Victoria Road.
 - (b) The Hopetown Darlington project continues on-site with refurbishment works to the former Head of Steam, Goods Shed and Carriageworks buildings and the construction of the new car park is well underway. The entrance works to the Goods Shed directly off McNay Street are nearing completion and now provide a new access to North Road Railway station.
 - (c) Further investment is underway at the Dolphin Centre to undertake mechanical and electrical works including energy efficiency elements that will reduce the operating costs and the carbon footprint.
 - (d) Site work is nearing completion at Whinfield School and on the first phase at the Neasham Road housing scheme.
 - (e) A planning application has been submitted for refurbishment works to No.156 Northgate and a determination is expected shortly.
 - (f) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.

- (g) 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 2024

9. The Police and Crime Commissioner and Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Elections took place on Thursday 2 May 2024. The Elections Act 2022 introduced a number of changes for the elections including the ‘first past the post’ voting system and changes to the postal voting handling rules. The changes to the postal voting handling rules required electors to complete a form when handing postal votes at the Town Hall or at a polling station and limiting the number of postal votes that can be handed in to five plus their own. Restrictions on the handling of postal votes by political campaigners were also introduced.
10. These were the second elections whereby electors were required to show photo ID at a polling station before they could be issued with a ballot paper. The Electoral Commission again launched a national publicity campaign to remind electors of the requirement to show photo ID to vote at a polling station and informing them that should they not have an accepted form of photo ID, they could apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) from their local council. The national campaign was supplemented by local publicity, which included information being included in the One Darlington magazine, billboard and on Poll Cards.

Elections Act 2022

11. The Elections Act 2022 removes the rights of some EU citizens to vote and stand as a candidate at elections from 7 May 2024. The changes apply to local elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. EU citizens where the UK Government has negotiated agreements with EU Member States to allow its citizens living in the UK to vote in return for the same right for UK citizens living in that country, will still be able to vote and stand in elections. Other EU Citizens who were living in the UK before end of the EU Withdrawal Agreement implementation period (up until 1 January 2021) will also still be able to vote and stand in elections. All EU citizens currently on the register will be reviewed by 31 January 2025 and any that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be deleted from the Register of Electors following the review process.

Climate Change

12. The works on the Dolphin Centre include LED lighting, photovoltaics and combined heating and power that will reduce the operating costs and carbon footprint of the building.

Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio

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**COUNCIL
16 MAY 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:

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

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

Darlington	YTD March 2023	YTD March 2024	% increase/decrease
Crime	11632	12048	+4%
ASB	2509	2244	-11%

3. The crime increase equates to 416 offences, with vehicle crime, theft, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing 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.
4. ASB has reduced by 265 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, good partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
5. Areas showing a current increase in ASB include Cockerton East 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.
6. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends - Darlington Town Centre

Darlington Town Centre	YTD March 2023	YTD March 2024	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1441	1496	+3.8%
ASB	216	188	-13%

7. Shoplifting, theft and damage account for a significant amount of town centre crime. Shopwatch was re-launched on 18 October 2023 and participation continues to grow with over 150 members involved in the crime reduction initiative.
8. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand offenders.

9. 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.
10. ASB has reduced by 28 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, good partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.

Funding and Initiatives

11. Since last full Council the following outcomes were recorded in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB):
 - (a) 8 young people received first warnings for ASB
 - (b) 2 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
 - (c) 3 young people breached their agreements – a parent/guardian will now receive a letter advising the breach has occurred and this will be recorded on the Council's system
 - (d) 13 youths have been identified by Police as being involved in ASB and are now awaiting an interview and potential intervention activity
12. Also in this period 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 court prosecutions
 - (b) 1 community protection notice
 - (c) 3 community protection warnings
 - (d) 8 "open file" investigations
 - (e) 1 final warning
13. During the whole of 2023/2024 the actions in relation to youth crime and ASB remain strong with intervention and engagement key to deterring those on the cusp of criminality.
 - (a) 48 First Warnings were given
 - (b) 7 Final Warnings were given
 - (c) 35 Anti-Social Behaviour Agreements signed
 - (d) 13 Anti-Social Behaviour Agreements breached

- (e) 99 Young people from 104 have been deterred from entering the criminal justice process. However, five young people have not been deterred and they have entered the criminal justice process. Diverting 99 young people equates to a saving of £936,000¹ as well as improving their life chances.
14. Funding has been secured (£120,000) via the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner Commissioning process which will allow for Future Pathways, based at Eastbourne Community Centre, to provide 'youth intervention' work, designed around a full family approach, to those young people across the Town who need support. This will also include arranged activities during school holiday periods.

Operational Updates

15. Operation Stallion targeted the sale and supply of counterfeit watches in Darlington. Guilty pleas have been entered to all ten charges under the Trade Marks Act 1994. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for 24 June 2024.
16. Operation Nightstar is targeted at the supply of illegal cigarettes and vapes that have impacts on health, the economy, safety and child exploitation. This multi-agency operation led jointly by Darlington Trading Standards and Durham Constabulary has seen the following outcomes:
- (a) Action taken against 28 problem traders.
 - (b) 5,204 Illegal vapes with a value of £75k have been removed from retail sale.
 - (c) 19,624 Packets of illegal cigarettes and 64.45 kg of hand-rolling tobacco have been seized with a value of £259k.
 - (d) Illegal goods worth more than £355k have been removed from the streets of Darlington. Two vehicles used in this illegal supply have been seized and crushed.
 - (e) Four premises have been closed by the Courts for periods ranging from two to six months. Investigations will continue and there will be further actions in due course.
17. Trading Standards are actively supporting the National Scambusters team and have been able to return money to two elderly victims of fraudulent mail scams. Upon returning this money Trading Standards have been able to offer advice on how these types of frauds work and how to avoid further victimisation.
18. Further action is being undertaken on the Begging and Rough Sleeping issues in the town. Community Safety staff are taking part in a multi-team initiative to conduct early morning weekly sweeps intended to engage vulnerable people sleeping/begging outside. A 'tasking and co-ordination' processes seeks to focus upon repeat and prominent offenders and officers from various services continue to offer support to those who need it, whilst trying to tackle problem beggars.

¹ Costs have been taken from 'The cost of a cohort of young offenders to the criminal justice system' published June 2011 by the National Audit Office.

19. Number Forty was open on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 March 2024 to celebrate International Women's Day and to promote Number Forty (recruit volunteers and encourage use of the venue). Ten new volunteers have enrolled to assist Number 40 following several community engagement campaigns in recent weeks. Funding secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Serious Violence Fund will allow for 'StreetFriends' to be routinely deployed within the Town Centre area during opening times. The initiative will begin later this month and will provide on-street support to those enjoying the Night-Time Economy (NTE).
20. A successful prosecution of an unlicensed dog breeder resulted in that person being banned from keeping dogs. This case was linked to two other unlicensed dog breeders who were successfully prosecuted last year. Two further (unconnected) prosecutions are pending court summonses.
21. A series of events have taken place to raise awareness in relation to hate crime and terrorism:
 - (a) A representative of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) attended the Darlington UNITY meeting on 17 April 2024 and presented information on Hate Crime and how the CPS deal with it.
 - (b) A joint visit with the Police Cohesion Unit was made to Hurworth House school (Special Educational Needs) to deliver age-appropriate awareness sessions to five classes about 'online risk' around terrorism.
 - (c) 'Face to face' PREVENT awareness training sessions to approximately 40 individuals including 10 counsellors working for ARCUS (Darlington based LGBTQ+ counselling provider), 15 teachers in Longfield Academy and 16 members of 'listening post' (Darlington churches listening and mentoring scheme).

Climate Change

22. In the last six months, Take Me Taxis (formally 1AB) have increased the number of emission free vehicles from 1 to 6, and the number of hybrid vehicles has risen from 14 to 36.

Darlington Cares

23. A celebration event was held on 27 March for the Darlington Cares volunteer who carried out work in Darlington Parks last year.
24. Staff from Darlington Economic Campus, Redde Northgate, Cummins, and EE have been working hard since they pledged more than 3,600 volunteering hours to help the local environment last year.
25. Working with the friends groups, volunteers have helped make improvements to the Denes, Stanhope Park, Eastbourne Park and Fryers Field.
26. Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership, the sister initiative of Darlington Cares held the latest in its series of 'network and learn' events at Redde Northgate. The focus of

the event was electric vehicles. After a presentation and discussion on the practicalities of organisations switching to electric vehicle fleets, there was an opportunity to test drive a range of vehicles.

Voluntary and Community Sector

27. A meeting of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group was held on Thursday 18 April.
28. The Assistant Director for Economic Development attended and gave a present on the Long Term Plan for Towns fund which Darlington is to receive.
29. The aim of the fund is to regenerate towns over the next decade. Towns will identify the measures that matter most to local people. The fund has three investment themes: safety and security, transport and connectivity, high streets, heritage and regeneration.
30. He emphasised that initiative was to be community led and the group would have the opportunity to provide representation on the Board.
31. The group also discussed the extension to the DWP Household Support Fund. As in previous rounds the local voluntary sector organisations would play a major role in its delivery.

Councillor Dr Amanda Riley
Stronger Communities Portfolio

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Social Care Reform - Update

2. Members were advised that there was no further update in relation to Darlington subsequent to the last meeting, however we were informed that Adult Services at Durham County Council had now received their inspection date from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which will be in May 2024, and that Adult Services at Northumberland County Council and Gateshead Council had been contacted by the CQC for their self-assessment, with an inspection anticipated in September/October 2024.

Council Plan 2024-27 – Draft for Consultation

3. The Committee received the draft Council Plan for consideration, and heard that that the Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and the priorities the Council sought to deliver over the forthcoming three years (2024-2027). We were informed that the Plan gave strategic direction to the Council, defined priorities and shaped delivery, whilst providing clarity to residents, businesses and stakeholders on the Council's values, what the Council identified as important and what the Council would do. In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Adults Services outlined the key aims for the 'Living Well' priority within the Plan.
4. Members entered into discussion on the plans and strategies that underpin the Council Plan, and we were keen that any such plans and strategies relevant to this Scrutiny Committee would be presented to us at an appropriate stage. We also wanted to further understand what performance measures were being drafted to enable Scrutiny to effectively examine the work being undertaken to achieve the priorities identified within the Council Plan.
5. More specifically, Members of the Committee wanted to see more work undertaken to analyse the provider market and high cost care packages, and we were interested to learn more about the support being offered around mental health. More generally, we sought clarification on how the consultation had been publicised more widely, and requested greater focus on improving the lives of the elderly and encouraging healthier lifestyles, both in terms of diet and physical wellbeing.

Adult Social Care during the Covid Pandemic Task and Finish Review – Final Report

6. The final report of the Review of Adult Social Care during the Covid Pandemic Task and Finish Group, which had been established by this Scrutiny Committee on 20 April 2021, was presented to the Committee. The Task and Finish Group had been established to

ascertain how Adult Social Care services had coped during the Covid pandemic, discover how service users and their families felt about the services provided and identify any changes needed in relation to future waves of coronavirus and associated restrictions or lockdowns, or any other future disease outbreak response.

7. Councillor Holroyd, who chaired the Task and Finish Group, attended this meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and provided a detailed presentation which outlined the work of the Task and Finish Group, highlighting the methodology of the work undertaken, a summary of the findings, and the recommendations of the Group.

Councillor Helen Crumbie
Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee

**COUNCIL
21 MARCH 2024**

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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.

Council Plan 2024-27 – Draft for Consultation

2. We received a report which introduced the draft Council Plan to Members of this Scrutiny Committee. The report stated that the Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and the priorities the Council sought to deliver over the forthcoming three years (2024-2027), and it was stated that the Plan gave strategic direction to the Council, defined priorities and shaped delivery, whilst providing clarity to residents, businesses and stakeholders on the Council's values, what the Council identified as important and what the Council would do. In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People outlined the key aims for the 'Children and Young People' priority within the Plan.
3. The Committee entered into discussion on the scope of the consultation and the stakeholders whom the Council had engaged with, the proposed expansion of in-house placements, and the performance measures by which the success of the Plan would be assessed. There was a general consensus across the Committee that the eight key aims focused on the correct areas.

Performance Indicators Quarter Three 2023/24

4. The Committee received an update on performance against key performance indicators as at Quarter 3 (October 2023 to December 2023), in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. Both the areas where Children's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve were highlighted.
5. Members were keen to understand the reasons for the increase in Children in Care placements within the previous twelve months, and learn more about the relationship between foster parents and children. It was noted that there was a need for more foster parents.
6. The increase in workload for the Building Stronger Families Team, and the support provided by the Early Help Team was examined, and Members examined the staffing challenges in terms of the completion of Children's and Families Assessments, and the agency offer available to support this challenge.
7. Members noted the increase in the need for early support and the specific areas where need was greatest, and there was an acknowledgement of the need for the continual monitoring of assessments, casework and supervisions.

Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education

8. We received a report which summarised the current and future guidance from the Department for Education on relationships and sex education. The report provided an overview of the statutory guidance which related to relationships and sex education that schools were obliged to implement, and also covered the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children.
9. Members entered into discussion on the work being done to establish what is being delivered in schools, however it was highlighted that subject delivery was a matter for schools themselves, which were required to follow the National Curriculum and national guidance, and it was not a matter for the local authority. It was clarified to the Committee that, should anyone have questions relating to the delivery of the National Curriculum, these should be addressed to the academy or school in the first instance.
10. Discussion ensued on the national consultation on the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children published by the Government, and the response submitted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Questions were raised in relation to the content of the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) training offer provided to schools by the Council, and Members heard that this was an offer, and it was not mandatory for academies and schools to take the Council up on this offer.
11. Particular focus was made to transgender policies within schools, and whether the Council had a role in developing such policies, and we received clarification that, whilst many policies may appear very similar in content, it was a matter for schools to develop their own policies. The Committee heard concerns as regard the NHS signposting children and young people to Kooth, an online mental wellbeing community, in relation to gender identity. Members were informed that this would be a matter for the NHS and that Officers were not aware of any concerns.

Councillor Hilary Allen

Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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.

Tree and Woodland Strategy

2. The Committee received a report which contained updates on the delivery of the strategy, the proposed actions for 2024/25 and revised approach to risk management and climate declaration.
3. We were informed that the strategy covered issues such as: How the Council manages trees that they own, how the Council protected trees on private land and laid out an action plan for the next five years
4. Some highlights of the work completed so far include the planting of 37,571 trees since 2022 and eight successful funding applications since 2021 totalling £533,975.94.
5. Members discussed how the Council managed trees on land that is not owned by them, officers explained that the landowners were responsible for the management of those trees. Tree Preservation Orders were discussed by the Committee and at what stage is planning permission required.
6. Members queried the total numbers of trees in the borough the Council is responsible for and how tree inspections can be carried out due to the vast amount.
7. Members discussed the Ash Dieback disease, if there were any issues of this in the borough and the risk assessments in place for this. Members queried the risk assessments around the root lifting in roads and if this hazard had been identified for wheelchair users.
8. We noted the content of the report and the proposed action plan for 2024/25.

CCTV Camera Replacement Programme

9. We received a report to update the Committee on the Camera Replacement Programme. The report stated that the review of the CCTV was completed in May 2021 to determine whether the public space CCTV system in Darlington was fit for purpose and met operational requirements.
10. We were informed that the review established that the newer Internet Protocol (IP) cameras installed in the town centre produced high equality images and met operational requirements, however, the images from the legacy analogue cameras were a low resolution and compared poorly to the IP Cameras.

11. The review concluded that the analogue cameras should be replaced with the new technology and a delivery programme was agreed.
12. We were reminded that Darlington Borough Council operates a Public Space CCTV system throughout the Borough which primarily supports the objectives of keeping the Borough safe. The benefits of this service include: cameras acting as a crime deterrent, providing peace of mind for residents and providing the police with information and evidence.
13. The report stated that through the Home Office Safer Streets 2 Fund, the Council was awarded £230,400 to introduce 17 additional cameras in and around Darlington Town Centre. This also included £54,510 of match funding by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner.
14. Members discussed how the CCTV Replacement Programme had been funded and how the location of mobile CCTV cameras was decided.
15. Members wanted to understand whether facial recognition is in use in Darlington, officers advised that this is something in the future that could be looked at. Members also wanted to understand if there were any risk assessments in place if a cyber-attack was to take place.
16. We noted the contents of this report.

Private Sector Housing

17. The Committee received a report which provided the Committee with an update on the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Service Area update.
18. We were informed of the strategy's three core aims: Aim 1: Decent quality homes in the private rented sector, Aim 2: Enable growth in the private rented sector and Aim 3: Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington.
19. During the presentation we were informed that that 10.45% of households in Darlington are rented from the local authority, 5.76% are rented from a housing association and that the majority of rented homes, at 18.47%, are from the private rented sector.
20. The report outlined a service area update on the Private Sector Housing, this included the national legislative changes to management of the Private rented sector, The increased demand and duties on the service area and the number of projects which contributed towards the aims of the strategy.
21. Members questioned the process for inspections on Private Rented Properties, and how landlords respond to the inspections, we were informed that the private rented sector team are mainly a reactive service, due to limited staff numbers. Members wanted to understand how empty properties are required to allow the network to move around, and the taxation on empty properties for private landlords.
22. We noted the contents of the report.

Council Plan

23. The Committee received the draft Council Plan to consider the long-term ambitions for Darlington, as well as the priorities of the Council to deliver and the strategic direction to the Council. We were informed that the draft plan aims to give clarity to residents, businesses and stakeholders on the Council's values.
24. We were notified that the draft plan was open for consultation until the 25 April to seek views from residents, businesses, charities and other key stakeholders. Once finalised the plan will go to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption.
25. We were informed of the draft Council Plan's three core values of addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient and effective use of resources. We were informed of the six priorities which show equal importance: Economy, Homes, Living Well, Children and Young People, Communities and Environment.
26. Discussion took place on how the new Council Plan will feature a collaborative approach with a Cabinet Member leading each priority, core values and working with relevant portfolio leads to deliver.
27. Councillors McCollom and Dr Riley explained the priorities within the Local Services and Stronger Communities Portfolio areas.
28. Members appreciated how the cross-portfolio approach will lead to better outcomes but wanted to see more measurable targets developed. Members discussed and gave comment and raised concerns around specific parts of the plan.
29. Members wanted to know how many responses had been received from the public, officers explained there has been 199 responses yet and how this is an improvement compared to previous consultations.

Councillor James McGill
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Darlington Towns Fund

2. We welcomed the Town's Fund Programme Manager who provided a report to update us with the progress and the current position of the Town's Fund Programme within Darlington.
3. We were informed that the submission of the Town Investment Plan to Government in July 2020 secured a £22.3M Town Deal allocation in October 2020 with another £1M Forward Funding has provided a total £23.3M capital and revenue Towns Fund for Darlington. Victoria Road, Northgate Gateways, and the Town Centre were the three key areas of focus.
4. It was highlighted that to date the Council had received £18,851,251 Capital Funding from the Government towards projects to revitalise and improve the town, along with £438,965 revenue to fund programme development. It was also mentioned that the remainder of the fund will be provided within 2024/25.
5. We were informed of the fundings notable success to date; T-Levels facility, Skinnergate and The Yards, Hopetown visitor attraction in Northgate, the acquisition of properties and land to enable further intervention projects including the Northern Echo Building, 156 Northgate, the land at Garden Street and a property forming part of the historic Edward Pease House in Northgate.
6. It was highlighted that the Towns Board will continue to review and manage the Towns Fund projects, as part of the budget statement in March 2024, it was announced that Darlington would be included in the second tranche of places to benefit from funding, from the Long-Term Plan for Towns. We were informed that the fund was aimed at developing interventions which are initiated through grass roots involvement and focussed on projects driven by the community.
7. We were informed that £20m allocation is to be spent over a 10- year period, 25% revenue and 75% capital. The three main themes are High Street and Town Centre, Local Connectivity, Safety and Security.
8. Members discussed the funding around the properties in Northgate including Northgate House and Edward Pease House. Members scrutinised the timescale on purchasing the Northgate Property and what position the Council is in for an offer to be accepted. Members wanted to understand the difference between the valuation price of the building and the asking price from the current owners.

9. Discussion ensued around the concerns for the Northgate area with regard to the new Hopetown attraction, members wanted to understand the Town Boards input on this. We discussed the Long-term plan for the Towns Fund and how much is left to spend over this financial year and the deadline for this.
10. We noted the update on the Towns Fund.

Council Plan

11. We received the draft Council Plan to consider the long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities of the Council to deliver over the next three years, the strategic direction to the Council, Council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery. We were also informed that the draft plan would give clarity to residents, businesses, and stakeholders on the Councils values, what is important and what they will do.
12. We were notified that the draft plan has been opened for consultation until the 25 April, to seek views from residents, businesses, charities and key stakeholders. Once finalised the plan will go to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption.
13. We were advised of the draft Council Plan three core values, addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient and effective use of resources. We were informed of the six priorities which show equal importance: Economy, Homes, Living Well, Children and Young People, Communities and Environment.
14. The political accountability was stated for the priorities and core values for the draft plan, how it will be collaborative with a Cabinet Member leading each priority, core values and working with relevant portfolio leads to deliver.
15. Councillor Mandy Porter explained the priorities regarding the Economy and Resources areas, this included the Medium-Term Financial Plan, Governance Practices, Capital Projects, Employees, Key sites in Businesses and Investments and Digital Assets.
16. Members wanted to know how many responses had been received from the public, officers explained there has been 161 responses yet and how this is an improvement compared to previous consultations.
17. Members mentioned how the draft Council Plan would solve the current problems and how they would be addressed going forward. Members wanted to understand if the draft plan is included in the current budget.
18. Members expressed the appreciation around the core values of the draft Council Plan, they also expressed the concerns around the wording and format of the plan.
19. Members wanted to understand the impact of the draft Council Plan would have on Climate Change, and how the draft plan would tackle this issue.
20. We noted the draft Council Plan and will share with networks to encourage people to complete the survey.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

CAMHS Update

2. We welcomed the General Manager, Children and Young People's Services, Durham and Tees Valley who provided members with a presentation to provide an annual update on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for Darlington.
3. The presentation covered areas including the current framework for planning and delivering mental health services, the current clinical transformation model and pathways through the service along with details such as average wait times and the different services offered. Key pressure areas were highlighted along with plans to receive further funding in the near future to assist with these pressures.
4. Questions were raised that included details on staff shortages in the service with information provided that CAMHS currently has a 50% vacancy rate for medics with lack of applicants being the cause of this. A further question was asked regarding addressing parents of children requiring the mental health services with the response that this is a large part of the care offer with specialist staff available to speak to parents to offer support and help stimulate parental cooperation.
5. Discussions were held regarding quality of data with members being informed that the service is currently transitioning to a new patient record system alongside the manual capture of data where needed to ensure data integrity. Further discussion surrounded the average wait time of 463 days for neurodevelopmental assessment due to referral demand outpacing capacity following a 300% increase in referrals compared to pre-pandemic levels and members were provided with details of contact that is maintained with patients during this period.
6. Members noted the content of the presentation with a further update to be arranged in 12 months' time.

Community Mental Health Transformation

7. We welcomed the Associate Director of Partnerships and Strategy - Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, who provided a presentation to highlight the core aims of community transformation, the current vision for the future alongside projected impact of care and an update on the recently opened Darlington Connect outlet in Darlington town centre.

8. Members expressed the notable progress of the service, in particular praising the increased access to talking therapies for residents and the reduction in waiting times from 6 months to 28 days.
9. Discussion was held as to whether the Darlington Connect outlet could be better publicised with confirmation that a celebration event is being planned along with press releases and members suggested that promotion in Council publications would also be useful. Further points included members of the public presenting at Darlington Connect with unrelated issues with confirmation provided that such individuals are signposted to the correct services.
10. We noted the content of the report, the positive work being undertaken and look forward to a further update in 12 months.

Council Plan 2024-2027

11. We welcomed the Strategy and Policy Manager and the portfolio holder for Health and Housing who presented the Council Plan 2024-2027 and its intent to provide strategic direction to the Council - and council services - defining core values, priorities and shaping delivery in the coming years with public consultation on the draft plan being open until 25 April 2024.
12. Members were informed that the core values outlined in the document, if met in decision making, will ensure positive progress towards overall goals and from which strategies will be produced such as the New Homes Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Plan.
13. Discussion was held with regards to the presentation of the document with a member expressing that they feel a more effective layout would be to present the core values within the first pages for increased visibility particularly to the public who view the document. A further member noted that they welcome the plan's focus on inequalities with Housing's emphasis being to provide quality housing together with an effective homelessness strategy.
14. We noted the content of the report and Council Plan and members were encouraged to share the plan with their networks and to complete the survey before 25 April 2024.

Housing Services Asset Management Strategy

15. We welcomed the Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues who presented the report that sets out how Housing Services will ensure the efficient and effective management of our homes, as a core requirement of meeting our landlord services function. We were informed that the Tenants' Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and they have given their full support to the proposals and key aims of the strategy. It was also highlighted that a review of the strategy will be organised once new decent homes standards are released.
16. A member raised discussion that it would be beneficial to potential tenants if they were provided with a breakdown of predicted bill costs when considering their choice of housing. Officers took this on board and informed members that a stock condition survey

will be carried out on all council properties that will also include validation of energy efficiency certificates.

17. We considered the report and support its onward submission to Cabinet.

Housing Services Vulnerability Policy

18. The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues presented the Housing Services Vulnerability Policy which ensures that we meet the diverse needs of our tenants, through the need to provide adaptable services, which takes our tenants, and their household's needs into account, whilst ensuring we meet regulatory and legal requirements. The report sets out our aims, including how we will record any of our tenant's vulnerabilities on Council systems and how we will use this information in the way we provide our services, the decisions we make and how we refer to other statutory and external organisations. The Tenants' Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and have given their full support.
19. Members were in agreement that it is useful to be aware of tenants' vulnerabilities and to provide appropriate responses to this. A discussion was held regarding the varying degrees of vulnerability with the suggestion that checks be performed at regular intervals to ensure that information remains correct in cases of temporary vulnerability. Officers confirmed that new residents are asked if any vulnerabilities are present and checks are carried out on a 6-monthly basis for any changes in status.
20. We considered the report and support its onward submission to Cabinet.

Work Programme 2023/24

21. 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.
22. A member recommended that an update be provided to this scrutiny committee on the Air Quality Strategy in the production of the new work programme 2024/25

Councillor Mary Layton
Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee

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