



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Agenda

11.00 am

Thursday, 18 January 2024

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

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

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Medium Term Financial Plan - To consider a response to Cabinet on the Plan taking into account the views of this Council's Scrutiny Committees :- –
  - a) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee – Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024
  - b) Adults Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024
  - c) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee – Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024  
(Pages 3 - 8)
4. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting –
  - (a) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee – 11 January 2024
    - (i) Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2024
    - (ii) Stronger Communities Fund – Report of the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities

(b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 15 January 2024

- (i) Minutes of the Special meeting held on 15 January 2024
- (ii) Children's Social Care in Darlington, Ensuring Placement Sufficiency and Enabling Creative Alternatives – Report of the Assistant Director of Children's Services

**REASON FOR URGENCY** – To enable a full consideration of MTFP responses from the Council's Scrutiny Committees prior to consideration by Cabinet.

(Pages 9 - 38)



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

**Wednesday, 10 January 2024**

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

**Membership**

Councillors Baker, Coe, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray, Mrs Scott, Allen, Crumbie, Johnson and Layton

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Michael Conway, Mayoral and Democratic 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 E-mail: [michael.conway@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:michael.conway@darlington.gov.uk) or telephone 01325 4056309

## ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4 January 2024

**PRESENT** – Councillors Coe, Dillon (Chair), Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Baker

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Keir, Porter

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Michael Conway (Mayoral and Democratic Officer) and Cheryl Williams (Programmes and Performance Manager)

### ER73 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr McGill declared an interest as a Trustee and non-remunerated Director of FirstStop Darlington.

### ER75 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Assistant Director Resources presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, agreed for consultation on 5 December 2023 with the consultation period running until 22 January 2024.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the report had been published the Council has received the draft financial settlement for 2024/25 and an update was provided to Members highlighting the key points

- (a) The settlement is for 2024/25 only.
- (b) The Services Grant has reduced by approximately £800,000.
- (c) The New Home Bonus has been continued for 2024/25, we will receive approximately £400,000.
- (d) A number of figures are still to be confirmed, but at this point it is estimated that resources will decrease by approximately £250,000 for 2024/25 and further in future years if the New Homes Bonus ends.

The Assistant Director Resources clarified that the Local Government Finance Settlement which was received on 18 December 2023 and that staff have been interpreting and incorporating figures and that all settlement details will be included in the updated version of the MTFP which will go Cabinet and Council in February. Some Members expressed the view that more time was required to consider the MTFP in view of the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement and could not form a view on the MTFP until this was known.

We raised questions regarding the reduction in the Services Grant, officers clarified that this

decrease was expected following further information received after the MTFP was published, but the decrease was more than expected. The Services Grant had reduced in previous years.

A further question was raised as to whether fundamental changes in strategy will be required in the longer term if more budget pressures arise. Officers responded that the budget is built using the best knowledge available at this time taking into account service demands and these have been included in the MTFP, however further pressures or savings would impact on the plan.

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

The question was asked whether the impact of council tax arrangements for empty properties is being included in the report and it was confirmed that it is and any changes will be included in the final version of the report.

A further question was raised as to whether the commitment to invest in play areas was still being honoured. Officers confirmed that commitment is still funded, as it was included in the 2023/24 MTFP, this was not included in appendix 7 as works have begun.

Members also raised the question as to whether any reduction in staff numbers may occur in 2024/25. Officers confirmed that any savings currently in the report are achieved through natural turnover however future years cannot be predicted at this time.

Members raised the point that this report is not the final report that will be presented to Cabinet, it was confirmed that this is due to new information (such as the Local Government Finance Settlement) which will be included in the final MTFP, but officers strive to provide Scrutiny Committees with the most up-to-date version possible at the time of meeting.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be noted and that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

(b) That the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee is that it could not support the MTFP in its current form until fully appraised of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

## **ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 9 January 2024

**PRESENT** – Councillors Crumbie (Chair), Anderson, Layton, Mammolotti, M Nicholson, Renton, Storr and Toms.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Donoghue and Tostevin.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Curry.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Joss Harbron (Assistant Director - Adult Social Care), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Mark Harrison (Public Health Consultant), Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer).

### **AD22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### **AD24 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 - 2027/28**

The Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report (previously circulated), which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report stated that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. It was reported that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2024/25.

Discussion ensued on the costs associated with children transitioning to Adults Services and the arrangements in place to plan for transitions; the work being undertaken to promote Discretionary Housing Payments, and how best to maximise receipt of this funding to ensure that there is no underspend; the percentage of the Adult Social Care budget spent on statutory services and how this funding is utilised; whether a cost benefit analysis has been undertaken in terms of commissioned services and the scope for the development of an in-house solution (Care Cooperative); the assumptions made around the continuation of the Social Care Grant; the purpose of the £71,000 of non-allocated, non-construction funding attributed to Adult Social Care within the submitted report; the need for greater funding for

Mental Health services; and the proposed reduced increase in Council Tax for future years.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the work being undertaken on behalf of the Adults Portfolio Holder on proposals for a Care Cooperative be presented to a future meeting of this Committee in the next financial year.

(b) That the report be noted, and that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, in order to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

## HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3 January 2024

**PRESENT** – Councillors Crudass, Dillon, Holroyd, Johnson, Mahmud, Pease and Mrs Scott

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Baker, Layton and Mammolotti,

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Roche

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing), Ken Ross (Public Health Principal), Michael Conway (Mayoral and Democratic Officer) and Cheryl Williams (Programmes and Performance Manager)

### HH24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### HH27 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Members received the report of the Assistant Director Resources presenting the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, agreed for consultation on 5 December 2023 with the consultation period running until 22 January 2024.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the report had been published the Council has received the draft financial settlement for 2024/25 and an update was provided to Members highlighting the key points

- (a) The settlement is for 2024/25 only.
- (b) The Services Grant has reduced by approximately £800,000.
- (c) The New Home Bonus has been continued for 2024/25, we will receive approximately £400,000.
- (d) A number of figures are still to be confirmed, but at this point it is estimated that resources will decrease by approximately £250,000 for 2024/25 and further in future years if the New Homes Bonus ends.

A discussion was raised with regards to the Local Government Finance Settlement. Members stated that they had not had sight of this prior to the meeting. Officers clarified that the draft settlement was received on 18 December 2023 and that staff have been working through and interpreting the figures and that all settlement details will be included in an updated version of the MTFP. Some Members expressed the view that more time was required to consider the MTFP in view of the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement and could not form a view on the MTFP until this was known.

A comment was made that questioned why the construction of energy efficient homes was not above the minimum regulations.

Members raised questions which included whether the Public Health Grant remains at a similar level as in the past, officers confirmed that the indicative allocation has an increase of just over £100,000. The Public Health Principal welcomed this increase but highlighted to members how some of that increase had to be spent on very specific things such as funding the NHS pay award in public health services provided by the NHS and for delivering new public health duties and responsibilities that have been placed on local authorities recently.

A question was asked relating to “intersectional issues”; if the council tackle issues early before they can cause increased spending at a later date specifically relating to maintaining and improving the health of the residents. Officers clarified that the Public Health grant invests in programmes across the authority to contribute to delivering on key Public Health outcomes and objectives and provided examples of programmes that are in place to tackle childhood obesity, weight management, exercise referral, school swimming as well work undertaken by Environmental Health colleagues such as eatery inspections.

A further question was asked as to the charges for hire of leisure spaces with Leisure colleagues confirming that charges for spaces are calculated at an hourly rate.

Members questioned why some charges are proposed to increase and some are not and the reasons for this. Officers clarified that some charges are nationally set and in other areas managers keep sustainability in mind and as such are conscious that increased charges could result in a reduction in demand and a net decrease in income. A question was raised concerning why car parking charges were not proposed to be increased and an additional point was added from members that charges from parking could be better utilised to improve parking enforcement.

**RESOLVED –**

- (a) Members noted the report and agreed that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.
- (b) That the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee, as expressed by Councillor Mrs. Scott on behalf of the Conservative Group is that they would not support the MTFP in its current form until fully appraised of the Local Government Finance Settlement.



## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 January 2024

**PRESENT** – Councillors McGill (Chair), Cossins, Garner, Keir, Mahmud, M Nicholson and Snedker.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Coe, Mrs Culley and Walters.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors McCollom, Dr. Riley and Robinson.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Richard Starrs (Heritage Action Zone Project Manager), Niccy Hallifax (Bicentennial Festival Director), Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer).

### **CLS21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### **CLS23 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 - 2027/8**

The Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report (previously circulated), which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report stated that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. It was reported that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2024/25.

Discussion ensued on the potential for greater working in partnership to reduce costs, with the partnership between Darlington Borough Council, Leeds City Council and the Department for Education in 2019 to develop Strengthening Families being cited. There was an acknowledgement that there were some costs over which there was no control, with the increase in Children Looked After being provided as the example. Members also explored the reasons around the reduction in income from the services provided by the crematorium, and sought clarification on the overall year-on-year savings within the MTFP.

Members requested more information in relation to the costs around the provision of the Council's statutory and non-statutory services, and explored whether there were any further savings to be achieved in terms of how the Council provided its statutory functions. A question was also asked as to what the minimum cost would be to dispense the Council's statutory services.

Members recognised that there would be further savings to be made in 2025/26, and urged Officers to start the process of identifying savings earlier, however received assurances that the process of identifying savings was an ongoing piece of work throughout the year. The associated costs of applying for additional funding was also highlighted, and balanced alongside the costs associated with any failed bids for grants or funding.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be noted, and that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, in order to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

(b) That the minority view of this Scrutiny Committee is that it could not support the MTFP in its current form until fully appraised of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**11 JANUARY 2024**

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**STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To review the spend, to date, against the Stronger Communities fund and to consider and make a recommendation as whether the scheme should continue in the next financial year.

**Summary**

2. As Members will be aware, Cabinet, at its meeting held on 7 February 2023, agreed to the continuation of the Stronger Communities Fund into the 2023/24 financial year as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24. The fund enables Councillors to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities.
3. Each Councillor has been allocated £1,000 with the aim of :-
  - (a) supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and well being outcomes;
  - (b) investing in environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.
4. This report sets out the spend against the £50,000, to date, together with information on what has been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis (**Appendix 1**). It should be noted that all of the funding must be given to the grant recipient by 31 March 2024. Some Members have not, as yet, allocated any funding.
5. Subject to approval of the continuation of the fund into the next financial year, any funding not spent by a particular Member may be carried forward for utilisation in the next financial year, however, their individual budget will remain at £1,000.

**Recommendation**

6. Members are requested to :-
  - (a) note the current spend against the £50,000
  - (b) consider the progress of the scheme, review the outcomes and forward a view to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on whether the scheme should continue in the 2024/25 financial year

**Councillor Dr Amanda Riley  
Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Background Papers**

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

Shirley Wright: Extension 5998

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|--|---|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | There are no specific crime and disorder implications in this report.   |
| Health and Well Being                            | There are no issues relating to health and well being which this report needs to address.   |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | There are no specific carbon impact issues in this report.  |
| Diversity  | The report does not contain any proposals that impact on diversity issues.  |
| Wards Affected                                   | All wards are affected.   |
| Groups Affected                                  | No specific groups are particularly affected.   |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.   |
| Key Decision                                     | The report does not require a key decision.   |
| Urgent Decision                                  | The report does not require an urgent decision.   |
| Council Plan                                     | The subject matter of the report, the Councils financial standing and financial management, is critical to delivery of the SCS, but this report does not contain new proposals. |
| Efficiency                                       | The report contains updated information regarding efficiency savings contained in the MTFP.   |
| Impact of Looked After Children and Care Leavers | This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers  |

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. As part of the approved Medium Term Financial Plan each Councillor has been allocated £1,000 with the aim of :-
  - (a) supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes;
  - (b) investing in environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.
- 8 Each Member was required to enter into an agreement with the Council regarding the use of the funds which, amongst other things, stipulated that :-
  - (a) the process of awarding grants is open and transparent
  - (b) grants are made without prejudice or favour
  - (c) the funds will not be used for Members' personal or political gain
  - (d) Members will be responsible for ensuring as far as possible that the grant has been used for the purpose that it was provided
- 9 Councillors can, if they wish, pool their budget with other Councillors within their Wards and more widely across the Borough, the only limitation on beneficiaries of the grant is that they must be Darlington residents.
- 10 Any funding that remains after 31 March 2024 would be reclaimed by the Council.
- 11 This report has been written mid-year to allow an early assessment of its value to be included in considerations around the MTFP.

### Spend To Date

- 12 There has been a wide variation in take up of the fund. Some members have made good use of the fund whilst others have, to date, not utilised any. Appendix 1 sets out the spend, to date, against the £50,000, together with information on what has been delivered in Wards on an individual Councillor basis.

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Stronger Communities Fund  
Grant Information

| Ward                              | Councillor        | Signed Agreement | Recipient - Name of Group             | Purpose of Grant   | Date Grant Awarded | Amount Allocated (£) | Amount Remaining (£) | Agreement letter Returned | CU Account empty         | Receipt Recd |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Bank Top and Lascelles            | Andrew Anderson   | Y                | 700 Club                              | Towards Christmas Shop and Meal  | 11-Aug-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 11/08/23                  |                          | 11/09/23     |
| Bank Top and Lascelles            | Helen Crumbie     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Bank Top and Lascelles            | David Ray         | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Brinkburn and Faverdale           | Rebecca Baker     |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Brinkburn and Faverdale           | David Beckett     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Brinkburn and Faverdale           | Scott Durham      |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Cockerton                         | Jan Cossins       | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Cockerton                         | Jim Garner        | Y                | Cockerton Business Club               | To support a young peoples activity programme (in partnership with CBG and Cockerton Band and Institute) |                    | 300.00               |                      | 10/12/23                  |                          | Email rec'd  |
|                                   |                   |                  |                                       | To support the Christmas decorations and activities around the 'village' this year                       |                    | 300.00               |                      | 10/12/23                  |                          | Email rec'd  |
|                                   |                   |                  |                                       | St Mary's Food Bank  |                    | 400.00               |                      |                           | 400 not allocated as yet |              |
| Cockerton                         | Neil Johnson      | Y                | Cockerton Business Club               | To support Christmas activites in Cockerton  | 12-Dec-2023        | 300.00               |                      | 12/12/23                  | 14/12/2023               |              |
| College                           | Bryony Holroyd    | Y                | Queen Elizabeth Drama Group           | To assit with lighting equipment   | 12-May-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 12/08/23                  |                          |              |
| College                           | Matthew Snedker   | Y                | Queen Elizabeth College               | Towards a Christmas Community Event  | 12-Dec-2023        | 250.00               |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Eastbourne                        | Joe Dillon        | Y                | Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve | To install 6 stone boulders to be utilised for seating around the nature reserve                         | 31-Aug-2023        | 370.32               |                      | Y                         |                          |              |
| Eastbourne                        | Jonathan Dulston  | Y                | Bravehearts                           | To support Christmas concert in Darlington   | 27-Nov-2023        | 500.00               |                      |                           |                          | 28/11/2023   |
| Eastbourne                        | Kevin Nicholson   | Y                | Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve | To support the running costs and improvements to the Nature Reserve                                      | 12-May-2023        | 100.00               |                      | 12/08/23                  |                          |              |
| Harrowgate Hill                   | Roz Henderson     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Harrowgate Hill                   | Richard Lawley    | Y                | Whessoe Parish Council                | To support xmas and summer fayre   | 11-Sep-2023        | 445.00               |                      | 11/09/23                  |                          | 13/11/2-23   |
| Harrowgate Hill                   | Anna-Maria Toms   |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Haughton and Springfield          | Chris McEwan      |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Haughton and Springfield          | Dawn Storr        |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Haughton and Springfield          | Nick Wallis       |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Heighington and Coniscliffe       | Paul Crudass      | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Heighington and Coniscliffe       | Gerald Lee        | Y                | Heighington Parish Council            | To purchase new play area equipment  | 10-Mar-2023        | 1000.00              |                      | 03/102023                 | Y                        | E-mail Rec'd |
| Hummersknott                      | Kate Mammolotti   | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Hummersknott                      | Thomas Robinson   | Y                | Stanhope Players                      | Towards equipment and costumes for the production of 12th night  | 23-Nov-2023        | 250.00               |                      | 21/11/23                  |                          |              |
| Hurworth                          | Lorraine Tostevin |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Hurworth                          | Paul Walters      | Y                | Hurworth Scout Group                  | To contribute to a new scout hut   |                    | 500.00               |                      | 10/02/23                  |                          | E-mail Rec'd |
|                                   |                   |                  | Hurworth Albion Junior Football Club  | Towards the purchase/replacement of equipment  |                    | 300.00               |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Mowden                            | Pauline Culley    |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Mowden                            | Alan Marshall     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| North Road                        | Hilary Allen      |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| North Road                        | James Coe         |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| North Road                        | Anne-Marie Curry  |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Northgate                         | Sajna Ali         | Y                | Focussed Fitness                      | Towards runnig costs of commuity gym project and replacement equipment                                   | 15-Dec-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 18/12/2023                |                          | 19/12/2023   |
|                                   |                   |                  | Babuls Restaurant                     | Towards 8th Feed the Need Christmas Dinner   | 21-Dec-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 21/12/2023                | Y                        |              |
| Northgate                         | Sonia Kane        | Y                | Focussed Fitness                      | Toards runnig costs of commuity gym project and replacement equipment                                    | 15-Dec-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 18/12/2023                |                          | 19/12/2023   |
| Park East                         | Libby McCollom    |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Park East                         | Michael Nicholson | Y                | St Columbas Church                    | Christmas Concert. Costs towards the Band  | 28-Nov-2023        | 100.00               |                      | 28/11/2023                |                          | E-mail rec'd |
|                                   |                   |                  | GOLD                                  | Christmas Party  | 28-Nov-2023        | 150.00               |                      | 29/11/2023                |                          | 19/12/2023   |
|                                   |                   |                  | Skerne Park Youth and Community Cen   | Towards a bus trip for local residents   | 28-Nov-2023        | 200.00               |                      | 12/11/23                  |                          |              |
| Park East                         | Matthew Roche     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Park West                         | Bob Donoghue      | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Park West                         | Heather Scott     |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Pierremont                        | Stephen Harker    |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Pierremont                        | Mary Layton       |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Pierremont                        | James McGill      |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Red Hall and Lingfield            | Mandy Porter      | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Red Hall and Lingfield            | Dr Amanda Riley   | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Sadberge and Middleton St. George | Deborah Laing     |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Sadberge and Middleton St. George | Colin Pease       | Y                | St George's Academy                   | To provide a School Garden at St George's Academy  | 12-Oct-2023        | 500.00               |                      | 10/12/23                  |                          | Email Rec'd  |
| Sadberge and Middleton St. George | Yvonne Renton     | Y                |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Stephenson                        | Ian Haszeldine    | Y                | Gurney Pease                          | Enhancing Learning oppotunities for pupils   |                    | 200.00               |                      |                           |                          |              |
|                                   |                   |                  | Wesley Court Community Centre         | Towards the Christmas Social Event   |                    | 100.00               |                      | 18/12/2023                |                          |              |
| Stephenson                        | Mohammad Mahmud   | Y                | Gurney Pease                          | Enhancing learning opportunities for pupils  |                    | 200.00               |                      |                           |                          |              |
|                                   |                   |                  | Wesley Court Community Centre         | Towards the Christmas Social Event   |                    | 100.00               |                      | 18/12/2023                |                          |              |
| Whinfield                         | Jamie Bartch      |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |
| Whinfield                         | Andy Keir         |                  |                                       |  |                    |                      |                      |                           |                          |              |

Total Spent 9065.32  
Grant Allocation Remaining 40934.68

£400 allocated £29.68 ret'd

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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 15 January 2024

**PRESENT** – Councillors Layton (Chair), Ali, Crudass, Dillon, Renton, Storr and Toms.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Allen and Johnson, John Armitage and Sally Hudson.

**ABSENT** – Councillor Durham, Carly Stonier, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Wallis.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion), Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

### **CYP37 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 - 2027/28**

The Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report (previously circulated), which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report stated that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. It was reported that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.

A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 13 December 2023 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2024/25.

Discussion ensued on whether the costings and savings identified in the report entitled 'Children's Social Care in Darlington – Ensuring Placement Sufficiency and Enabling Creative Alternatives' had been incorporated within the MTFP; the level of detail provided to Members and the format of the submitted report; the proposed invest to save proposals outlined; and the impact of school non-attendance on budgets.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That, should any further savings be identified, this Committee feels that priority should be given to SEND provision, and the further development of creative alternatives and in house proposals to reduce the dependence on costly external placements.

(b) That the report be noted, and that the Chair of this meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the

Minutes of this Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, in order to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, scheduled to be held on 18 January 2024.

**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IN DARLINGTON**  
**ENSURING PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY AND ENABLING CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider a series of proposals to reduce dependence on costly external placements, and to support and improve placement sufficiency for children and young people in Darlington.

**Summary**

2. Attached at **Appendix 1** is the Placement Sufficiency Report which has been approved by Cabinet.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that The Children and Young People Scrutiny note and comment on the Placement Sufficiency proposals which will progress to Council within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process.

**Reasons**

4. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons: -
  - (a) The current overreliance on externally provided children's social care placements is unsustainable.
  - (b) The Council needs to diversify the range of directly provided children's social care services in order to meet the needs of Darlington children and improve placement stability.
  - (c) The proposals have a positive impact on the MTFP.

**Chris Bell**  
**Assistant Director of Children's Services**

**Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Chris Bell : Extension 5852

|  |   |
|--|---|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | There are no implications for Crime and Disorder arising from these proposals.  |
| Health and Wellbeing                             | There are positive impacts for the health and wellbeing of Darlington children and young people arising from these proposals. |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | There are no implications for Carbon Impact and Climate Change arising from these proposals.                                  |
| Diversity  | There are positive impacts for the health and wellbeing of Darlington children and young people arising from these proposals. |
| Wards Affected                                   | The proposals are need led for all Darlington children and young people.  |
| Groups Affected                                  | Children and young people are positively impacted.  |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | The proposals will be incorporated into and have a positive impact on the draft MTFP for 24/25 – 27/28                        |
| Key Decision                                     | This is not a key decision  |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision  |
| Council Plan                                     | These proposals will contribute positively to the Council Plan  |
| Efficiency                                       | These proposals would make us more efficient  |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | These proposals will have a significant benefit for Looked After Children and Care Leavers                                    |

CABINET  
5 DECEMBER 2023

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**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IN DARLINGTON  
ENSURING PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY AND ENABLING CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –  
Councillor Nick Wallis, Children and Young People Portfolio**

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

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To outline a series of proposals to reduce dependence on costly external placements, and to support and improve placement sufficiency for children and young people in Darlington.

**Summary**

2. Sourcing placements for looked after children is at crisis point nationally with an increasing reliance on high-cost unregulated emergency placements or expensive residential care due to a lack of more appropriate placements. This issue has been compounded in Darlington by increases in our looked after population and the mandated National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
3. The increased number of children cared for by Darlington Borough Council, coupled with a lack of placement sufficiency has resulted in a significant increase in placement expenditure along with a reduction in placement stability for children and young people looked after by Darlington Borough Council.
4. A range of responses to these challenges have already been implemented which includes a panel to provide the needed peer challenge and ensure when a decision is made to make a child looked after, it is after all other options have been exhausted. There is a strong focus on discharging Care Orders where children are living with parents.
5. These measures on their own cannot effectively meet the scale of the pressure. Darlington do not have the in-house sufficiency to meet the diverse needs of children downstream and our baseline support offer benchmarks negatively in the region in terms of core support.

6. A number of service critical proposals have been developed in response (summarised in **Appendix 1**) which comprise the enhancement and growth of:
  - (a) The DBC foster care service.
  - (b) DBC directly provided children's residential care services.
7. The proposals avoid an overreliance on high-cost external placements and support the growth of step down and transition to adulthood provision in response to increase demand.

### **Recommendation**

8. It is recommended that Cabinet consider the report and support the proposals, and progress to Council within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process.

### **Reasons**

9. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons: -
  - (a) The current overreliance on externally provided children's social care placements is unsustainable.
  - (b) The Council needs to diversify the range of directly provided children's social care services in order to meet the needs of Darlington children and improve placement stability.
  - (c) The proposals have a positive impact on the MTFP.

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

### **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Chris Bell : Extension 5852

|  |   |
|--|---|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | There are no implications for Crime and Disorder arising from these proposals.  |
| Health and Wellbeing                             | There are positive impacts for the health and wellbeing of Darlington children and young people arising from these proposals. |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | There are no implications for Carbon Impact and Climate Change arising from these proposals.                                  |
| Diversity  | There are positive impacts for the health and wellbeing of Darlington children and young people arising from these proposals. |
| Wards Affected                                   | The proposals are need led for all Darlington children and young people.  |
| Groups Affected                                  | Children and young people are positively impacted.  |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | The proposals will be incorporated into and have a positive impact on the draft MTFP for 24/25 – 27/28                        |
| Key Decision                                     | This is not a key decision  |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision  |
| Council Plan                                     | These proposals will contribute positively to the Council Plan  |
| Efficiency                                       | These proposals would make us more efficient  |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | These proposals will have a significant benefit for Looked After Children and Care Leavers                                    |

## MAIN REPORT

### Background

10. As at the 31 March 2023 there were 136 young people in an external placement arrangement. The costs associated with external placements are significantly higher than our internal costs:
  - (a) There is a £532 per week difference (equivalent to £27,738 per placement per annum) between Darlington Borough Council foster carer and Independent Foster Agency (IFA), which will be exacerbated by a pending Consumer Price Index (CPI) award due to IFA providers in April 2024 which will see the IFA placements cost rise further.
  - (b) On average it is £773 per week cheaper to place a young person in an in-house home versus placing within the independent sector for a residential placement (equivalent to £40,304 per child per annum).
11. Having placements directly provided by the Council also has a key benefit for the young person as the level of placement stability tends to be higher and reduces the need for an out of area placement, based on placement availability alone. Placement stability has been on a declining trajectory and the council's overreliance on external

placements is one of the compounding factors. This is further exacerbated by the extreme demand for foster care and residential placements outstripping supply which is enabling external providers to be extremely selective as to which children are offered placements.

## **Proposal Summary**

12. A number of service critical proposals have been developed in response which comprise the enhancement and growth of the DBC foster care service (Proposals 1-8). There are a number of very specific proposals to ensure the DBC foster service is viable, attractive (and can effectively reduce the number of carers leaving to go to more costly independent providers) with improved retention rates.
13. The proposals will seek to retain the current cohort of 59 Darlington Borough Council foster carers and incrementally grow the foster service by 5 carers in first year and 10 carers in subsequent years. The proposals are outlined below (correspondingly RAG rated) along with their costings.

### **Red RAG rated foster care proposals.**

#### **Proposal 1:**

##### **Uplift the age-related payments**

Age related payments are paid towards the direct costs incurred from caring for a child and are received by foster carers, special guardianship carers, and child arrangement carers. The proposal is to increase age related payments by £10 per child per week – costing £180,671 in year 1. This would mean carers are being paid over the minimum set by the government.

##### **Risk of not proceeding**

Carers deregister or move to another Council or IFA in which case Darlington would not only lose the foster carers, but also have to correspondingly increase the payments for the new care arrangement. Foster carers would have less money for the direct care of the children in their care without this uplift.

##### **Likelihood**

High. There are instances where this has occurred already with a significant number of foster carers stating that it is their intent should an improved foster care offer not be made. However, it is felt on balance, should a commitment to proceed with the professional fee increase be made that an uplift to the age-related payment would not have as significant a prioritisation as this proposal does have a scope of carers broader than just foster carers.

##### **Risk of proceeding**

There is a risk that payments to existing foster carers are increased and there is no increase in the number of new DBC foster carers or improvement in the retention of existing carers.

##### **Likelihood**



Low. Whilst this remains a risk it is felt to be low as the primary rationale for prospective carers in not coming to foster for Darlington Borough Council or continuing to foster for Darlington Borough Council is payment rates.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

This proposal is broader than just foster carers. Should the remaining foster care specific proposals be agreed, this proposal could be removed due to its encompassment of a broader caring group which isn't experiencing the same stability risks as the in house foster service.

**Proposal 2:**

**Restructure the professional fees** that are paid to in-house foster carers to be more competitive – cost £138,171 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Carers deregister or move to another Council or IFA to care and there continues to be no incentive for carers to care for more complex children.

**Likelihood**

Exceptionally high. There are instances where this has occurred already with a significant number of foster carers stating that is their intent should an improved foster care offer not be made. We currently have one foster carer considering transferring to DBC from an IFA, but only if an improved offer is made. There is another DBC foster carer moving to a bordering Council foster service due to the better financial offer they would receive. A Council in the Tees Valley has significantly improved their fees after losing 21 sets of carers to IFAs in 2022 and has already seen a positive change in enquiries since the new rates were put in place. On this basis uplifting the professional fees is considered to be one of highest priorities in the foster carer proposals.

**Risk of proceeding**

There is a risk that payments to existing carers are increased and there is no corresponding increase in the number of new DBC foster Carers or improvement in the retention of existing carers.

**Likelihood**

Whilst this remains a risk, the likelihood is felt to be low as the primary rationale for prospective carers in not coming to foster for Darlington Borough Council is payment rates of which the professional fee represents the most significant payment. There is a low risk that the IFAs will correspondingly increase their foster agency fees which would negate the benefit of the improved offer for Darlington Borough Council foster carers. The majority of IFAs operating in the Northeast are in a contractual arrangement with all 12 North East councils for a period up at least to 2025 and up to 2028, with pre-set pricing and the provision for annual inflationary uplifts. Other neighbouring councils who have vastly enhanced their foster carer offer and payments have seen positive benefits and did not experience a corresponding fee increase by the IFAs.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

The professional fee uplift is considered to be one of the most critical components of the revised foster care offer. Uplifting the rates is essential to stabilise the fostering service and reduce the risk of carers being lost to other Councils and IFAs. Even with the uplifted rates accounted for Darlington will benchmark in a mid-position against other local authority rates. However, it is felt that the specific component parts of the enhanced offer including, but not limited to; a council tax financial contribution and enhanced professional fees will be significant in incentivising new foster carers.

The payment structure for proposal 2 is shown in the table below.

| <b>Current payment arrangement</b> | <b>Proposed payment</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Band A £100pw                      | Band A removed.   |
| Band B £125pw                      | New Band 1 (Paid to new foster carers) £175pw for the first child and £100pw for subsequent children  |
| Band C £200pw                      | New Band 2 (Paid to experienced carers who have successfully completed the training and development standards and are able to care for children with diverse needs) £275pw for the first child and £200pw for subsequent children           |
|                                    | New Band 3 (Paid to experienced carers caring for children with more complex needs, who require a very specific form of care) £375pw for the first child (very complex care needs) £300pw for subsequent children (very complex care needs) |
|                                    | Discretionary additional £100pw for exceptionally challenging to place young people where the only alternative would be bespoke high cost residential.  |

**Amber RAG rated fostering proposals.****Proposal 3:**

**Provide a financial contribution towards Council Tax** of up to £1,500 for people who are foster carers for Darlington Borough Council. Cost £88,500 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Financial viability is becoming a key determiner for foster carers; a Tees Valley council has council tax support to this value in place for their foster carers (as part of a package of enhancements) and have successfully managed to grow their in house foster service and reduce their previous over reliance on IFAs. This is something only Councils can offer and shows the value we place on our foster carers.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. This financial contribution offer is key to having a firm council commitment to incentive individuals to continue to foster for Darlington Borough Council and an effective incentivisation for new foster carers.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be low, given the continued control the council will have over the payments.

**Likelihood**

It reinforces the Councils commitment to being a direct provider of foster care services and the invaluable role which foster carers play in the care of Darlington children.

Payments will only be made to active DBC Foster Carers on a rolling monthly basis valued at £125 per month via the existing foster care payment run and therefore payments would cease if a carer is no longer fostering for Darlington Borough Council.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

A lower council tax financial contribution could be offered, however, £1,500 is already a rate in place by a subregional Council and would remain a factor in drawing foster carers to other localities. A value of £1,500 reinforces the very significant contribution Darlington Borough Council fosters care make to the care arrangements for Darlington children.

**Proposal 4:**

**Give DBC foster carers the option of taking 14 days paid respite**, which is in line with what is offered in the independent sector – cost £50,822 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Paid respite is a consistent offer in both the IFAs, and neighbouring Councils foster care offers. Benchmarking has identified Darlington as a key outlier in not having this arrangement which also risks an increase in carer burn out and placement instability. Foster carers do not receive any payment when they take a break, and this stops people progressing to be foster carers.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. Without the provision of paid respite, it will continue to be a factor in making it more attractive to foster for other Councils or IFAs.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be low, carers will be given the option as to whether this is something they would wish to be in place for their care arrangement. There is a risk that if all carers wish to have this arrangement that it would take a period of time to implement across all carers whilst new respite arrangements were developed.

**Likelihood**

Should a significant volume of foster carers wish to receive 14 days respite it will require a period of time to implement. The volume will be unknown until the offer is made and officers will work closely with any requesting foster carers in the implementation of this arrangement.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

A lower number of paid respite days could be offered; however, 14 days is the minimum offered by all IFAs and therefore would continue to be risk a factor in drawing carers to foster for other councils or independent providers. A lower than 14 day paid respite period would also increase the risk of carer burn out.

**Proposal 5:**

**Increase the mileage rate paid to foster carers** from 39p per mile to 45p per mile, in line with the HMRC rates - cost £3,000 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Transport logistics are a key barrier in co-ordinating viable placements, mileage at HMRC rates are already in place with some regional Councils. Darlington's current mileage rate falls well below the HMRC rate. It is much more cost effective to pay for mileage than source alternative transport and costs are only incurred when transport is provided. Having an effective, reliable, and flexible transport arrangement for foster carer placements is essential to supporting school attendance and court ordered family contact time.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high without an increase in mileage rate there is no incentive for carers who can directly transport to do so as the reimbursement rate has not kept pace with the costs incurred.

**Risk of proceeding**

Payments will only be made where a foster carer has undertaken journeys as a direct result of undertaking their foster role.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be low. Mileage costs will only be paid where transport has been a direct requirement of the fostering role.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

HMRC is the accepted standard rate for mileage costs incurred through professional activity and therefore it wouldn't be possible to scale down from the current proposal.

**Proposal 6:**

**Develop a refer a friend scheme** to pay £250 upon completion of assessment and a further £250 upon the first placement for any foster carer who recommends a friend to foster for Darlington Borough Council - cost £1,500 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

It is well known that the most effective form of foster carer recruitment is word of mouth. Costs would only be incurred when carers are fully registered with DBC and as a one-off payment when the first placement is made. North Yorkshire are currently offering £500 welcome payments to new foster carers.

**Likelihood**

It is highly likely that without a refer a friend scheme there is little incentive for existing carers to support the DBC foster care recruitment through word of mouth.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be low, costs will only be incurred when foster carers are recruited and once a placement is made.

**Likelihood**

It would be very unlikely that a new foster carer incentivisation arrangement for existing foster carers does not have a positive impact.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

The above rates are aligned with the offers in place from other fostering providers to support service growth, to reduce further would negate any benefit.

**Green RAG rated fostering proposals.****Proposal 7:**

**Introduce an appreciation payment of £250** to our foster carers to be paid every 5 years – cost £12,750 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Overall costs are very low, and it is an effective way of reinforcing the value of DBC foster carers on an periodic basis. It also acts a further incentive mechanism for carers to remain as Darlington Borough Council foster carers.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. Appreciation payments are a positive enhancement to the offer, to continue to keep momentum with foster carers, but not as critical to ensure service stability as some of the higher priority rated foster care proposals.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be very low. Costs will be fixed and only be incurred on a 5 yearly cycle.

**Likelihood**

Appreciation payments form part of key message of the ongoing value the council places on the contribution of foster carers.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

The time period for the appreciation payment could be extended for example every 7 years, however, given the nominal cost it would have little material gain.

**Proposal 8:**

**Offer an on-call fee of £30 per bank holiday and weekend** to our foster carers to improve placement accessibility in an emergency – cost £5,400 in year 1.

**Risk of not proceeding**

There will continue to be no incentive for carers to give up their time and be restricted in their leisure pursuits to be on call for emergency need. This in turn impacts the resilience of the foster care service in times of urgent need, not having an on-call fee is out of kilter with neighbouring Councils foster carer offer.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. It will continue to be the case that should a fair acknowledgement via a financial payment not be made to reflect the personal life restrictions from being on call. The rationale for this being rag rated green was due to the fact that it was a separate component to the critical measures to ensure the viability of the DBC foster care service.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be low, cost will only be incurred when a small group of foster cares are on-call. The is risk is the on-call payment does not attract a sufficient group of foster carers to have a viable and robust on call rota, the risk of this occurring will be higher however, if no payment is offered.

**Likelihood**

Offering an on call fee is unlikely to not attract a small group of on call foster carers.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

No scaling opportunities have identified given the comparatively nominal rate the on-call fee has been proposed at.

14. Further service critical proposals have been developed in response which comprise the enhancement and growth of the DBC provided residential services to avoid an overreliance on high-cost external placements and support the growth of step down and transition to adulthood provision in response to increase demand. These proposals are outlined below along with their costings.

**All residential service proposals are RAG rated Red.**

**Proposal 9:**

**Increasing the number of taster flats for Care Leavers-** in response to increased demand as an effective mechanism to support the throughput from external placements. Cost year 1 - £43,774.

**Risk of not proceeding**

The existing taster flat capacity is insufficient for the volume of placement need.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. Taster flats are Ofsted regulated (for 16/17-year-old Care Leavers and Looked After Children) and are critical in supporting preparation for adulthood, they also act as very cost-effective mechanism for stepping children down from external residential care. Without expansion young people will continue to remain in high-cost external placements unnecessarily.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be Low, the taster flats are rented by Children's Services, a number from Darlington Borough Council Housing Services and the remainder from local Housing Associations. All rents are set at affordable rent levels. The longest notice period to exit an accommodation arrangement is 3 months. The greatest risk in proceeding will be

securing the required volume of properties owing to the current housing stock pressures which are particularly acute for small affordable rental properties.

**Likelihood**

A small number of potential properties have already been identified at affordable rent levels which could be used for this purpose.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

The number of taster flats are expected to double through this proposal (an additional 7). A lower number of taster flats could be secured, however, that would impact young people's care plans and be more costly as it will reduce throughput and step-down opportunities from higher cost placements.

**Proposal 10:**

**Expansion of Cedars to 7 days a week** – Cedars is an Ofsted registered 3 bed residential service providing in-reach, outreach, and overnight provision (both in the form of planned short breaks and (where required) regulated emergency accommodation provision). Cedars is constrained by currently only operating on a weekend which has resulted in missed opportunities for young people to be supported. The total cost of this in year 1 is £240,531.

**Risk of not proceeding**

Is felt to be high. Cedars is a regulated service and already very effectively demonstrating positive cost avoidance impact, not being available as a 7-day service is constraining service effectiveness and opportunities have been missed for young people and their families to be supported.

**Likelihood**

Without moving to a 7-day provision service impact will be constrained and during the days when there is a need, but the service isn't operational alternative external care will need to be sourced in an emergency which will be very significantly higher cost than Cedars. This scenario is already being experienced, where an urgent external care expenditure could have been avoided if Cedars had been available during the week, this external care could only be secured weekly cost of £11k per week.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be low. Due to the diversity of the needs of children, it may be the case that a child's needs are so specific they cannot be met via Cedars. It may also be unsafe or inappropriate to provide care to certain children together and therefore a level of more costly external bespoke care provision will continue to be required from time to time for certain children. Depending on the level of alternative care required Cedars could move from cost saving towards cost neutral. The service staffing will be aligned with need and usage requirements.

**Likelihood**

Based on demand levels and care requirements over previous years it is not considered to be a likely scenario that Cedars operating 7 days doesn't have a demonstrable positive impact on care planning and the volume of urgent cost care requirements.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

Should the expansion to 7 days not have the evidential impact expected, the service could revert to weekend operating only or be decommissioned (this is considered exceptionally unlikely given the positive benefit from the current weekend operation).

**Proposal 11:**

**Repurpose of Gilling Children's Home Building**—: As part of the incremental replacement of DBC children's homes to new build accommodation. The existing Gilling children's home (staff and children) will move to a more spacious new build accommodation, envisaged to take place summer 2024. This will leave the current Ofsted registered Gilling building vacant. DBC becoming a larger direct provider is key to the current overreliance on external placements and the strategic approach being pursued by local authorities across the country and in particular in the NE region. The proposal is to repurpose the Gilling building in response to an identified gap in provision for younger children who have a care plan of stepping down to foster care or home and will include additional therapeutic input and support. Cost in year 1 is £642,768.

**Risk of not proceeding:**

Darlington will not have the diversification in their directly provided children's home to meet the needs of our children. This repurpose will provide a care arrangement in an area where we are presently solely reliant on independent providers. The building is well established in the community and there are no capital investment requirements. External children's homes are not as invested in readying children for step down to foster care and without this we will see more children in long term residential care. Given the increase in younger children entering residential care (now from the age of 7) this will be a significant future pressure with current placement costs for a single child at £351k per annum for a period potentially of up to 10 years.

**Likelihood**

Is felt to be high. If Gilling isn't re-purposed our reliance on the independent sector for high-cost placements for children who could in time be stepped down from residential care will not reduce. Children's social care will also lose a well-established asset which could not be easily re-provided at a future point due to the community consultation aspects of the planning process and pressures on accommodation provision.

**Risk of proceeding**

Is felt to be Low, the house in which the residential care service is provided from is well settled in the community and owned by the Council. The staffing for the home would be able to be deployed to other service delivery pressures across children's social care in the unlikely event that the home was under occupied.

**Likelihood**

There has been a consistent need from younger Darlington children for a step-down residential care home and therefore underutilisation is unlikely.

**Proposal rescaling opportunities**

Should the remodelling of Gilling building not have the evidential and positive sufficiency impact expected, the service could be repurposed or decommissioned.

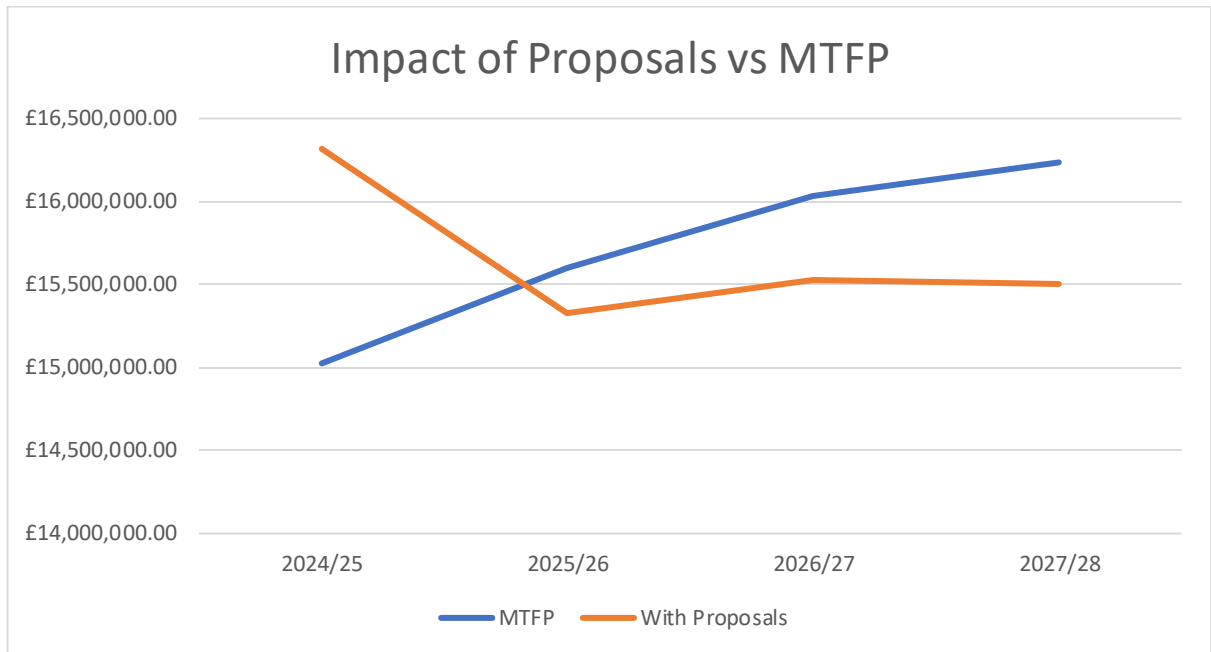


15. A summary of the proposals can be seen in the table at **Appendix 1**









### **Financial Implications**




16. The impact for these proposals on the MTFP is outlined in the table and chart below:

| Impact on the Draft MTFP            | Cost             |                  |                  |                  | Cost Avoidance   |                    |                    |                    | Potential Financial Benefit |                  |                  |                  |  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--|
|                                     | 2024/25          | 2025/26          | 2026/27          | 2027/28          | 2024/25          | 2025/26            | 2026/27            | 2027/28            | 2024/25                     | 2025/26          | 2026/27          | 2027/28          |  |
|                                     | £                | £                | £                | £                | £                | £                  | £                  | £                  | £                           | £                | £                | £                |  |
| <b>Inhouse Fostering</b>            |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Uplift foster payments              | 180,671          | 186,091          | 189,813          | 193,610          |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Restructure Professional Fees       | 138,171          | 138,171          | 138,171          | 138,171          |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Council Tax exemption               | 88,500           | 88,500           | 88,500           | 88,500           |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| 14 days respite                     | 50,822           | 50,822           | 50,822           | 50,822           | (115,490)        | (346,470)          | (577,450)          | (808,430)          | 365,324                     | 127,014          | (100,244)        | (327,427)        |  |
| Mileage                             | 3,000            | 3,000            | 3,000            | 3,000            |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Refer a friend                      | 750              | 750              | 750              | 750              |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Refer a friend passed assessment    | 750              | 750              | 750              | 750              |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Appreciation payment                | 12,750           | 0                | 0                | 0                |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| On Call fee                         | 5,400            | 5,400            | 5,400            | 5,400            |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| <b>Subtotal In House Fostering</b>  | <b>480,814</b>   | <b>473,484</b>   | <b>477,206</b>   | <b>481,003</b>   | <b>(115,490)</b> | <b>(346,470)</b>   | <b>(577,450)</b>   | <b>(808,430)</b>   | <b>365,324</b>              | <b>127,014</b>   | <b>(100,244)</b> | <b>(327,427)</b> |  |
| <b>Inhouse Residential</b>          |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |                    |                             |                  |                  |                  |  |
| Taster Flats                        | 43,774           | 39,164           | 40,184           | 41,235           | 0                | (63,796)           | (66,118)           | (68,458)           | 43,774                      | (24,632)         | (25,934)         | (27,223)         |  |
| Cedars                              | 240,531          | 250,896          | 261,945          | 273,565          | 0                | (486,204)          | (483,882)          | (481,542)          | 240,531                     | (235,308)        | (221,937)        | (207,977)        |  |
| Gilling Crescent                    | 642,768          | 684,199          | 703,927          | 724,232          | 0                | (821,705)          | (862,791)          | (897,303)          | 642,768                     | (137,506)        | (158,864)        | (173,071)        |  |
| <b>Subtotal Inhouse Residential</b> | <b>927,073</b>   | <b>974,259</b>   | <b>1,006,056</b> | <b>1,039,032</b> | <b>0</b>         | <b>(1,371,705)</b> | <b>(1,412,791)</b> | <b>(1,447,303)</b> | <b>927,073</b>              | <b>(397,446)</b> | <b>(406,735)</b> | <b>(408,271)</b> |  |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>1,407,887</b> | <b>1,447,743</b> | <b>1,483,262</b> | <b>1,520,035</b> | <b>(115,490)</b> | <b>(1,718,175)</b> | <b>(1,990,241)</b> | <b>(2,255,733)</b> | <b>1,292,397</b>            | <b>(270,432)</b> | <b>(506,979)</b> | <b>(735,698)</b> |  |



17. In 2024/25 we would anticipate an additional cost pressure of £1,292,397 as a result of these proposals. In 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 we would anticipate costs savings of £270,432, £506,979 and £735,698 respectively. This assessment has been made on the impact when set against the draft MTFP for 2024/25 – 2027/28 and is based on current and projected children. The in-house fostering investment is expected to see a growth of 35 new DBC foster carers in the period 2024/25 to 2027/28.

| Proposal  | RAG rating  | Risk of not proceeding   | Likelihood         | Risk of proceeding  | Likelihood | Cost (year 1) |
|---|---|--|--------------------|---|------------|---------------|
| <b>Foster Carer proposals</b>                               |   |  |                    |   |            |               |
| 1. Uplift the age-related payments                          |    | Carers deregister/ move to another Council   | High               | No increase in new foster carers  | Low        | £180,671      |
| 2. Restructure the professional fees                        |    | Carers deregister/ move to another Council   | Exceptionally high | No increase in new foster carers  | Low        | £138,171      |
| 3. Provide a Council Tax financial contribution             |    | Financial viability will continue to be a determiner for carers/Council commitment not as evident                          | High               | Limited given the council control over the payments paid in monthly instalments   | Low        | £88,500       |
| 4. Give foster carers option to take 14 days paid respite   |    | Carers move to other areas, burn out and placement instability   | High               | If all carers wish to have this arrangement that it would take a period of time to implement                                      | Low        | £50,822       |
| 5. Increase the mileage rate paid to foster carers          |    | It is much more cost effective to pay for mileage than source alternative transport  | High               | Payments will only be made where a foster carer has undertaken journeys as a direct result of undertaking their foster role       | Low        | £3,000        |
| 6. Develop a refer a friend scheme                          |    | No incentive for word-of-mouth recruitment   | High               | Costs only incurred when foster carers are recruited and once a placement is made   | Low        | £1,500        |
| 7. Introduce an appreciation payment of £250                |  | Carers do not feel appreciated on an ongoing basis   | High               | Overall cost is low and costs will be fixed and only be incurred on a 5 yearly cycle.   | Low        | £12,750       |
| 8. Offer an on-call fee of £30 per bank holiday and weekend |  | No incentive for carers to give up their time and be restricted in their leisure pursuits to be on call for emergency need | High               | The is risk is the on-call payment does not attract a sufficient group of foster carers to have a viable and robust on call rota. | Low        | £5,400        |

| Proposal  | RAG rating  | Risk of not proceeding  | Likelihood | Risk of proceeding  | Likelihood | Cost (year 1) |
|---|---|---|------------|---|------------|---------------|
| <b>Residential Service proposals</b>                      |   |   |            |   |            |               |
| 9. Increasing the number of taster flats for Care Leavers |  | The existing taster flat capacity is insufficient for the volume of placement need.   | High       | Affordable rent properties with short exit provisions.  | Low        | £43,774       |
| 10. Expansion of Cedars to 7 days a week                  |  | Service impact will be constrained by restricted opening times, resulting in a higher volume of high cost urgent care being required. | High       | Children will not always be able to be matched together and therefore a reduced level of higher cost care will still be required.                                     | Low        | £240,531      |
| 11. Repurpose of Gilling Children's Home Building         |  | Darlington will continue to not have the diversification in their directly provided children's home to meet the needs of our children | High       | The staffing for the home would be deployed to other service delivery pressures across children's social care in the unlikely event that the home was under occupied. | Low        | £642,768      |

**RAG rating key**

Red 

Amber 

Green 

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