



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Cabinet Agenda

5.00 pm

Tuesday, 16 July 2024

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

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

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting.
2. Declarations of Interest.
3. To hear relevant representation (from Members and the General Public) on items on this Cabinet agenda.
4. To approve the Minutes of the meeting of this Cabinet held on Tuesday 11 June 2024 (Pages 5 - 12)
5. Matters Referred to Cabinet –
There are no matters referred back for reconsideration to this meeting
6. Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committee –
There are no issues referred back from the Scrutiny Committees to this Meeting, other than where they have been specifically consulted on an issue and their comments are included in the contents of the relevant report on this agenda.
7. Key Decision - Darlington Council Plan 2024/27 – Report of the Chief Officers Executive. (Pages 13 - 56)
8. Land at Faverdale / Burtree Garden Village 'Cell CH' Feasibility Work –
Report of the Chief Executive.
(Pages 57 - 66)
9. Disabled Facilities Grant 2024/25 – Report of the Group Director of People.
(Pages 67 - 80)

10. Council Plan Performance 2020/23: Quarter Four Performance Report – Report of the Chief Officers Executive.
(Pages 81 - 140)
11. Housing Services Gas and Electrical Safety Policies 2024/29 – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 141 - 168)
12. Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 169 - 184)
13. Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Rent 2023/24 – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 185 - 194)
14. Productivity Plan – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 195 - 204)
15. Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Outturn 2023/24 – Report of the Group Director of Operations and the Group Director of Services.
(Pages 205 - 238)
16. Revenue Outturn 2023/24 – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 239 - 258)
17. Xentrall Shared Services Annual Report 2023/24 – Report of the Group Director of Operations.
(Pages 259 - 268)
18. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which Cabinet appoints.
19. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting.
20. Questions.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

21. To consider the exclusion of the Public and Press :- –
RESOLVED - That, pursuant to Sections 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the ensuing items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in exclusion paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

PART III NOT FOR PUBLICATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Swinhoe', written in a cursive style.

Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Monday, 8 July 2024

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Curry, Harker, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, Dr. Riley, Roche and Wallis

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

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**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE
24 JUNE 2024**

CABINET
Tuesday, 11 June 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Harker (Chair), Curry, McCollom, Porter, Dr. Riley, Roche and Wallis

INVITEES – Councillors Dulston, K Nicholson and Snedker

APOLOGIES – Councillors McEwan

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Holroyd and Mammolotti

C1 TIMINGS OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - That meetings of this Cabinet be held at 5.00 p.m. for the remainder of the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

REASON – To comply with the views of Cabinet.

C2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

In respect of Minute C8 below, Councillors Curry, Porter and Dulston declared pecuniary interests, and Councillors Curry and Porter left the meeting during the consideration of that item.

C3 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.

In respect of Minute C6 below, a representation was made by a Member in attendance at the meeting.

C4 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON TUESDAY 7 MAY 2024

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of Cabinet held on 7 May 2024.

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

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C5 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

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

C6 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A Member in attendance at the meeting addressed Cabinet in respect of a Task and Finish Review Group final report that had been considered by the Adults Scrutiny Committee and raised concerns in respect of the process and requested information on what progress had been made on the recommendations contained within the report, as she had not been kept informed. The Leader of the Council responded thereon.

C7 KEY DECISIONS

There were no key decisions made at the meeting.

C8 RELEASE OF EDUCATION CAPITAL FUNDS

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of People (previously circulated) requesting the release of £184,335 of childcare capital expansion funding, £267,245 of Section 106 funding and £59,000 of High Needs Capital Funding.

The submitted report outlined the background to the receipt of £184,435, as part of the national childcare funding package announced by the Government and the subsequent allocation of that funding in accordance with the criteria, following the submission of a number of bids from a wide range of providers; the background to the receipt of two Section 106 contributions for additional primary places in the West End of Darlington and the proposal to allocate that funding to the Federation of Abbey Schools Academy Trust; and the need to release the High Needs Capital Funding to enable improvements to be made at both Hummersknott Academy and Marchbank Free School to improve specialist facilities for pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

It was reported that all of the projects would be undertaken in line with the Council's Corporate Capital Process Procedures and that all projects would be grant funded with the schools managing the projects.

RESOLVED – (a) That the release of the full allocation of £184,335 of the childcare expansion funding, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the release of £267,245 of Section 106 funding for works at the Federation of Abbey Schools Academy Trust, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(c) That the release of £21,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for EHCP adaptations at Hummersknott Academy, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(d) That the release of £38,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for EHCP adaptations at Marchbank Free School, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

REASON – To release funding which will allow the educational settings to enhance their educational facilities, targeting capital investment in the areas identified as greatest need.

C REPRESENTATION ON OTHER BODIES 2024/25

9

The Leader introduced the report of the Group Director of Operations (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Council's representation on Other Bodies for the 2024/25 Municipal Year to which Cabinet appoints.

RESOLVED – That the appointment to other bodies as detailed below, for the 2024/25 Municipal Year, be approved, namely :-

Name of Body or Organisation	Nomination(s)
Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities	
Rail North Ltd.	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council) (as named substitute for the TVCAM)
Rail North Committee	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
East Coast Mainline Authorities Group	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust – Board of Governors	Councillor Kane
Creative Darlington	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio) (Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee as named substitute)
Crown Street Library Trustee Board	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
Darlington Cares	Councillor McEwan
Darlington Railway Museum Trust	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio)
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio) and Councillor Curry (Cabinet Member with the Adults Portfolio)
Darlington Town Centre Deal Board	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Dr Riley
Darlington Young People's Engagement	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member

and Justice Service Board	with Children and Young People Portfolio) (Councillor Kane as named substitute)
Durham County Pension Fund Committee	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio) and Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Family Help Organisation	Councillors Ali, Crumbie and Kane
Fostering Panel	Councillor Ali
Integrated Care Partnership Tees Valley	Councillor Roche (Chair of Health and Well Being Board) (Councillor Layton as named substitute)
Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve (Associate Member)	Councillor Dillon (Ward Member)
North East Ambulance Service	Councillor Roche (Chair of Health and Well Being Board)
North East Child Poverty Commission	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio)
North East Regional Employers Organisation	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio), Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Vice Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Executive Committee	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio)
North East Strategic Migration Partnership	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio) (Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council as named substitute))
Northern Housing Consortium	Councillor Roche (Cabinet Member with Health and Housing Portfolio)
Northumbrian Regional Flood and Coastal Committee	Councillor Snedker
Poor Moor Fund/Charity	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Economy Portfolio)

RELATE North East	Councillors McCollom and Mahmud
Teesside International Airport Limited - Board	Councillor Garner (to be appointed as Director) (Councillor Haszeldine named substitute Director)
Teesside International Airport Limited - Consultative Committee	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio)
Tees Valley Local Access Forum	Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (Chair of Health and Housing Committee as named substitute)

REASON – To comply with the nominations received from the Political Groups.

C10 DARLINGTON LONG TERM PLAN FOR TOWN FUNDS

The Leader introduced the report of the Chief Executive (previously circulated) updating Cabinet on the recently announced allocation of £20 million from the Government's long-term plan for towns initiative and advising of the subsequent requirement to increase representation on the Towns Fund Board.

The submitted report outlined the background to the allocation and the proposal to increase community representation on the membership of the current Towns Fund Board to ensure it was more inclusive of community and voluntary groups within the Town and to include an additional elected Member, together with a representative of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Particular reference was made at the meeting to liaison with the Tees Valley Combined Authority regarding funding; the reasons behind not opting for two separate boards; how the community representatives were chosen; the funding gap that the Council was facing; the thematic areas of the projects, which were not just Town Centre focused; and to how projects could be supported by the fund. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive responded thereon.

REOLVED – That confirmation of the funding allocation and the proposed changes to the Towns Fund Board, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

REASON – To contribute to the further economic wellbeing and vitality of the Town.

C11 WILKINSON'S BUILDING ACQUISITION AND PROCUREMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Chief Executive (previously circulated) seeking Cabinet's approval, in principle, to the Council entering into an agreement with a developer to bring forward the redevelopment of key town centre sites and also seeking Cabinet's approval to acquire the

long leasehold interest of the land and buildings of the former Wilkinson's Store at East Street.

The submitted report outlined the background to the proposal to engage a development partner who, it was envisaged would work with the Council over a ten to 15 year period to offer a range of development options including residential, mixed use and office led commercial development at three core town centre sites at Kendrew Street, East Street and Commercial Street, plus any additional ones which might be identified in the phased approach.

It was reported that the partner's role would be to oversee the development management process, prepare design work, secure planning permission, place construction building contracts, market and let schemes to occupiers and secure the required funding commitments.

The submitted report also highlighted the proposal to acquire the long leasehold interest of the former Wilkinson's site in East Street which would give the Council full control over 0.54 hectares (1.35 acres) of strategically important development land.

Reference was made at the meeting to the additional pressures and risks that the purchase of the former Wilkinson's site would put on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP); the need to be realistic on what the Council can achieve; a number of other sites that the Council owned within the Town Centre that were still to be developed; the implications of not purchasing the site; the workplace study that had been undertaken; the potential uses of the site when developed; the viability of the site; and implications on the Linear Park. The Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio and the Chief Executive responded thereon.

RESOLVED – (a) That the acquisition of the long leasehold interest of the former Wilkinson's site in East Street by way of acceptance of a lease surrender for a premium sum, as set out in the appendix to the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the Assistant Director Law and Governance be authorised to complete the transaction accordingly.

(c) That approval be given to set aside budget to cover holding costs, as estimated in paragraph 60 of the submitted report.

(d) That the Assistant Director Economic Growth be authorised to approve final holding costs.

(e) That approval, in principle, be given to entering into an agreement with a private sector development partner to bring forward development on several town centre sites, the details of the agreement and the final list of sites to be included, to be presented to Cabinet at a future meeting for approval.

REASON - (a) To secure property for future strategic Town Centre development.

(b) To give the Council control of a prominent town centre site.

C12 SCHEDULE OF TRANSACTIONS

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced a report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to the Schedule of Transactions (also previously circulated).

RESOLVED – That the Schedule of Transactions, as detailed in the appendix to the submitted report, be approved and the transactions be completed on the terms and conditions detailed therein.

REASON – The terms negotiated require approval by Cabinet before binding itself contractually to a transaction.

C13 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY 14 JUNE 2024**

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

DARLINGTON COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2027

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader and all Cabinet Members

Responsible Director -
Chief Officers Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the outcome of the public consultation and a revised Council Plan for approval.

Summary

2. On 5 March 2024 Cabinet agreed to a public consultation on the draft Council Plan. The consultation ran from 6 March to 25 April 2024. Social media promotion reached over 20,000 people, an article on the consultation was included in the One Darlington magazine and members were asked to promote the consultation within their wards. All scrutiny committees considered and supported the draft plan.
3. 315 responses to the survey were received. The summary report of the survey analysis is attached as **Appendix A**. There are some changes to the plan outlined in the main report.
4. Approval is sought on the Council Plan 2024-2027 attached as **Appendix B**. It sets out the long-term ambitions and a vision for Darlington, and priorities for delivery over the life of the plan. Development of the final plan has been informed by the responses to the survey and conversations with stakeholders and residents during the consultation period.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
 - (a) Note and consider the outcome of the consultation (Appendix A)
 - (b) Approve the revised Council Plan 2024-27 (Appendix B)
 - (c) Recommend the plan to full Council for their endorsement

Reason

6. The recommendations are supported as the Council Plan is the strategic document that sets out the Council's long term ambitions for Darlington and shorter-term priorities and actions. Approval of the plan is needed to provide guidance to the organisation, and

clarity for the public and our partners on the Council's strategic priorities.

Chief Officers Executive

Background Papers

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

Lynne Davies Extension: 5070

S17 Crime and Disorder	The Council Plan prioritises the safety of our residents and communities. The Communities Priority identifies key actions that we will deliver in partnership. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome.
Health and Wellbeing	The Council Plan prioritises the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities. The Health and Wellbeing Priority identifies many actions and good health will be an important outcome across the plan. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome improving health and reducing health inequalities.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	The Council Plan prioritises addressing carbon impact and climate change. Addressing climate change is a core principle and will be considered in everything the council does. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome.
Diversity	Addressing inequalities is a core principle within the plan. A desktop Equality Impact Assessment has not identified any significant negative impacts on protected characteristics. The key deliverables referenced in the plan will be progressed through other strategies and plans and will involve separate equality impact assessments where appropriate.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	Whole Population
Budget and Policy Framework	The Council plan will be part of the policy framework and will be the primary strategy against which strategies and plans demonstrate their contribution. Specifically to the Council Plan core principles, vision, ambition, and priorities.
Key Decision	The Council plan is part of the policy framework with Cabinet recommending that Council approve the Council Plan
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.

Council Plan	This is the Council Plan 2024-27 proposed for adoption.
Efficiency	The draft Council Plan prioritises efficient and effective resources as a core principle and will be considered in all council business.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The Council remains committed to ensuring the best outcomes for Looked After Children and contains a number of priority actions that will have a positive impact on this group.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The Council Plan outlines Darlington Borough Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next three years. It gives strategic direction to the Council and Council services, defining priorities, identifying key actions, and shaping delivery.
8. Cabinet approved the draft plan for consultation at the 5 March 2024 meeting and a public consultation ran from 6 March to 25 April 2024. The purpose was to raise awareness of the draft plan and seek views. A survey was developed that could be completed online, and paper copies were made available at the Dolphin Centre, Cockerton Library and Darlington Library. They were also available upon request and via a specific email address.
9. A communications plan was implemented to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage as much feedback as possible. Detailed stakeholder engagement was carried out alongside this. Key elements of this work included:
 - (a) An article in the One Darlington magazine
 - (b) Regular promotion on the Council's social media channels reaching over 20,000 people, including the use of videos
 - (c) Meetings with key stakeholders
 - (d) All Councillors were given the opportunity to be briefed so they could raise awareness of the plan and consultation with their residents and networks
 - (e) Coverage of the plan and consultation in local press: the Northern Echo on 7th March 2024 and Darlington and Stockton Times on 8th March 2024.
10. All scrutiny committees considered the draft plan in their April 2024 meetings, during the consultation period, and supported the plan.
11. 315 responses to the survey were received over the consultation period. Responses were received from every ward in Darlington and every age category aged 84 and under.
12. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the Core Values, all 315 people answered this question:
 - (a) 60% agreed with *Addressing Inequalities*
 - (b) 53% agreed with *Tackling Climate Change*
 - (c) 73% agreed with *Efficient and Effective use of Resources*.
13. 252 people answered the question on their views of the three long term ambitions:
 - (a) *Inclusive and Sustainable Economy*: 64% agreed and 11% disagreed
 - (b) *Living Well and Staying Healthy*: 75% agreed and 7% disagreed
 - (c) *Thriving Places and Connected Communities*: 67% agreed and 10% disagreed

14. 303 people answered the question on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the vision:
 - (a) 46% agreed
 - (b) 24% neither agreed or disagreed
 - (c) 29% disagreed
 - (d) 2% didn't know
15. Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the six priorities in the plan, 269 people answered this question:
 - (a) *Economy*: 81% agreed and 5% disagreed
 - (b) *Homes*: 70% agreed and 17% disagreed
 - (c) *Living Well*: 77% agreed and 8% disagreed
 - (d) *Children and Young People*: 77% agreed and 6% disagreed
 - (e) *Communities*: 77% agreed and 7% disagreed
 - (f) *Environment*: 78% agreed and 10% disagreed.
16. Respondents were asked to identify up to three actions most important to them for each of the six priorities: economy; homes; living well; children and young people; communities and environment. The results are available in Appendix A. Also summarised in the Appendix are answers to the question on what people hope for the future of Darlington. 177 comments were received on this question and grouped into themes.
17. Overall, the plan has been well received, and of the 232 people who responded to the question on how they feel about the plan overall:
 - (a) 44% agreed or strongly agreed with the plan
 - (b) 35% neither agreed nor agreed
 - (c) 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
18. These responses have provided valuable insight, but it should be noted that 315 although a good response is not a representative sample, and so cannot be seen as the view of the overall population. More analysis of the survey is provided at Appendix A.
19. There are some changes in the final plan, key changes below:
 - (a) We have added the word sustainable to the vision, so it now reads: *Darlington is one of the best places to live, learn, work, and invest in the UK with a strong and sustainable economy, healthy thriving communities, and opportunities for all*
 - (b) We have changed the name of Core Values to Core Principles
 - (c) We have changed the name of priority 6 to Local Environment (previously environment), to address comments from the survey and ensure the title reflects the ambition on place-making that includes infrastructure, transport, and culture as well as the natural surroundings

- (d) There is a new action to work effectively with the Darlington Economic Campus to realise the opportunities in the Economy Priority
 - (e) We have added a new section called Our Approach which sets out six core themes: collaboration and partnership working; being data-driven and intelligence-led; embedding core principles in decision-making; delivering through key strategies and plans; modelling our core values in our work and behaviours; and sharing key challenges and celebrating success.
20. As highlighted in the comments in the Council Plan survey there are competing priorities with the need to address inequalities and the impact of climate change at a time of unparalleled financial challenges, and these are recognised.
21. The council plan is attached at Appendix B for Cabinet's consideration and approval. The plan will be illustrated with complementary images and case studies then published on the Darlington Borough Council website following approval.

Financial Implications

22. The Council Plan sets out the vision and long term ambitions for Darlington and will be delivered through the council's key strategies and plans. Any financial implications within these plans will be considered in development and as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget setting processes.

Council Plan 2024-27

Public Consultation on the Draft Plan

Survey Analysis

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DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Overview of the consultation

- The public consultation ran from 6 March to 25 April 2024
- The consultation was promoted in the One Darlington magazine; by the Council social media channels (reaching over 20k people); Cabinet members through their social media; emails to key stakeholders and meetings with residents; discussions in meetings with key stakeholders; and all Councillors were briefed and asked to raise with their residents
- A survey was published alongside the draft plan, there were 315 responses
 - 11 responses were from stakeholders
- There was also discussion at Council scrutiny committees, feedback from organisations in stakeholder meetings and directly to Cabinet members in their meetings and correspondence.

Survey Analysis

- The analysis provides valuable insights into the issues, priorities and actions people feel are important
- 315 people completed the survey
- All respondents answered the first question on core values
 - Thereafter, fewer than 315 answered each
- There are a large number of open text comments and we used PowerBI and Microsoft Excel to analyse the comments
- Comments were grouped into themes and the most common themes are shared in this report.



Response Rate

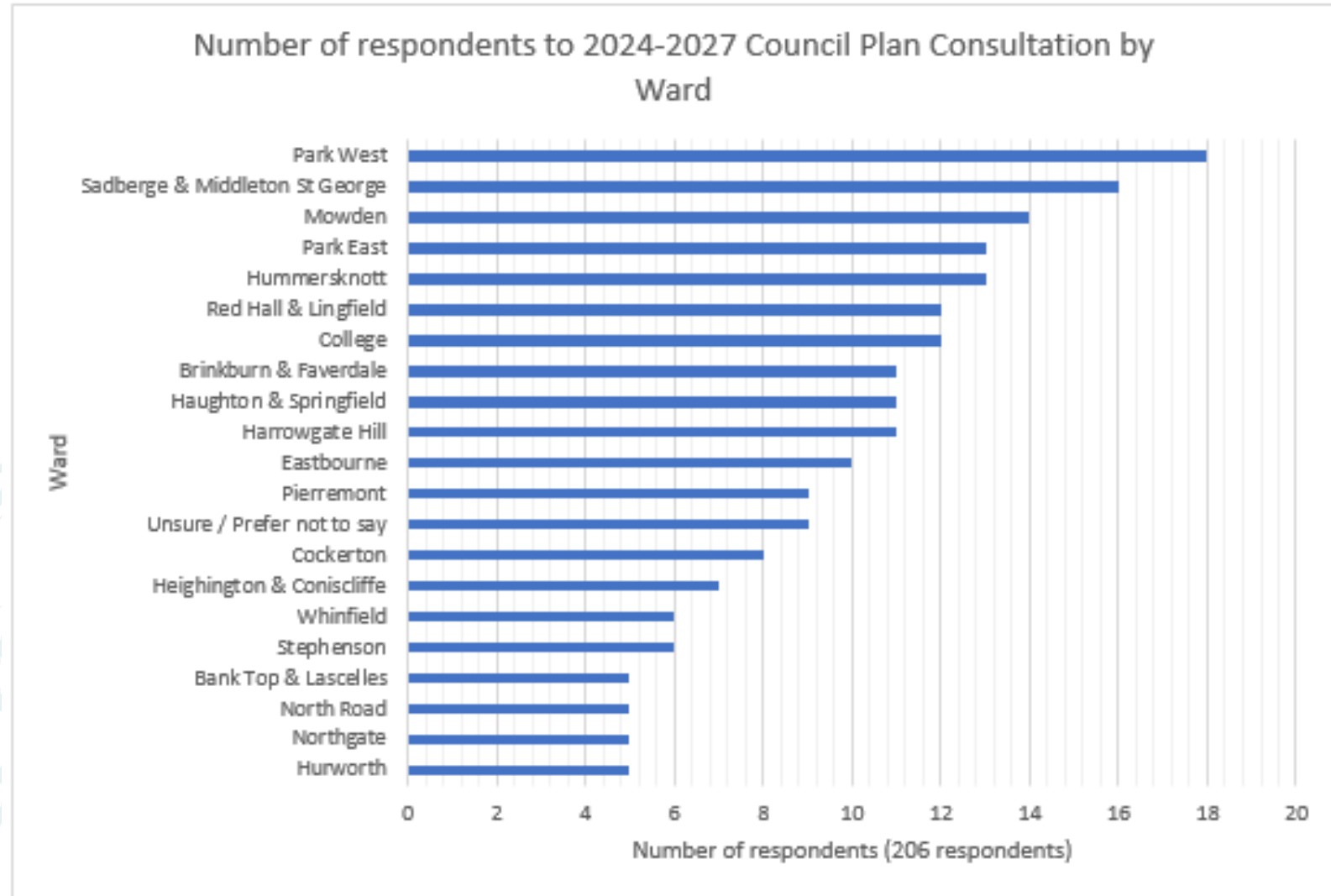
- Five times the number of responses to previous council plan consultation
- 315 responses, all online
- 5% responded on behalf of an organisation (11), 1% on behalf of an individual
- 200/315 answered the question about their sex
 - 51% identified themselves as Female
 - 42% identified themselves as Male
 - 7% preferred not to say their gender
- 11% of 214 people identified as having a disability
- 3 people (1.5%) of 216 people identified in 3 different non-white ethnic groups, white UK 92%, 6.5% prefer not to say



All wards are represented

- 206/315 people told us where they live
- Most responses from Park West, Sadberge & Middleton St George, and Mowden
- Fewest responses from Banktop and Lascelles, North Road, Northgate and Hurworth

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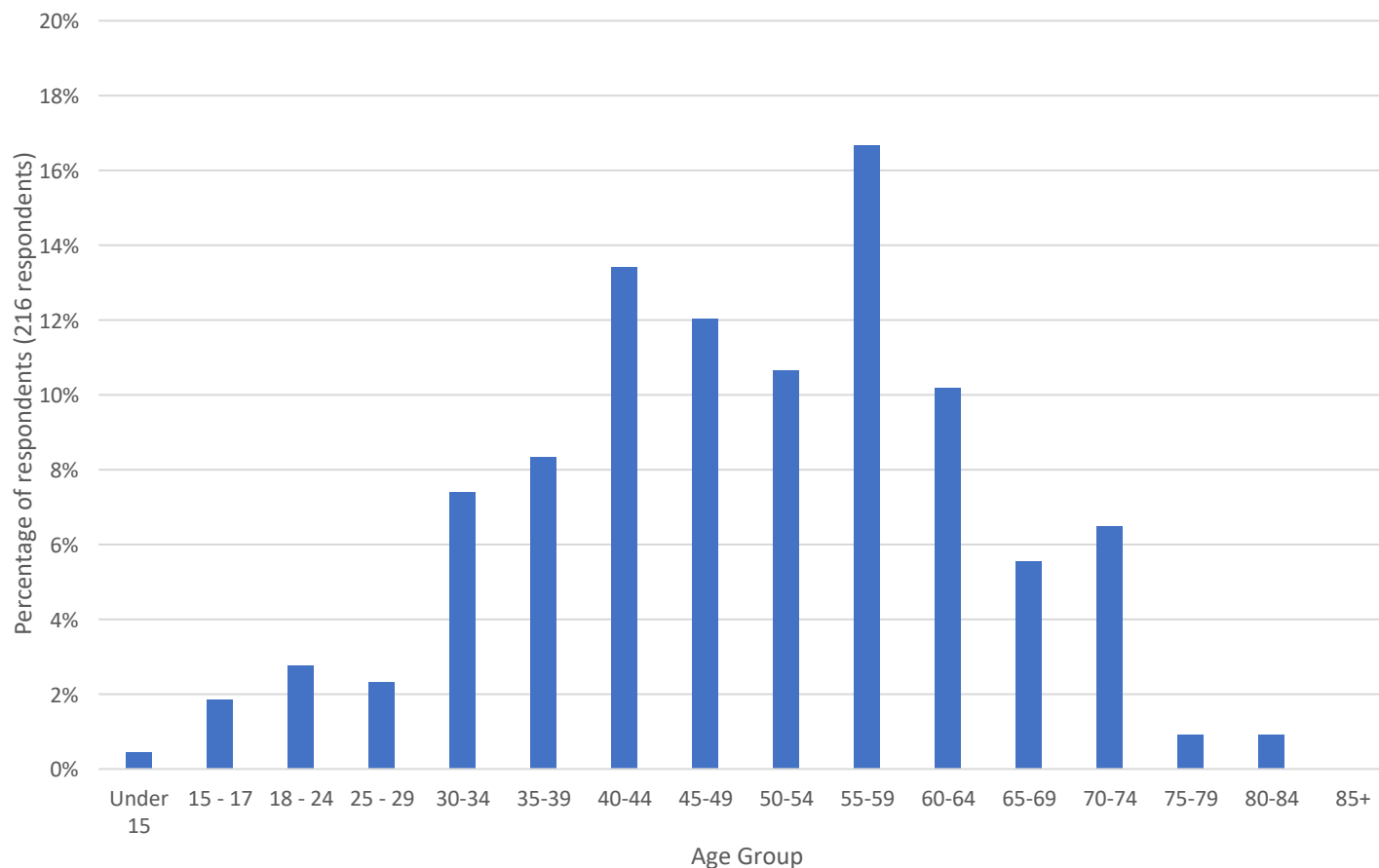


All age groups under 84 years old represented

- 216/315 responded told us their age group
- More people responded from the 55-59 age group than any other
- No respondents in the 85+ age group

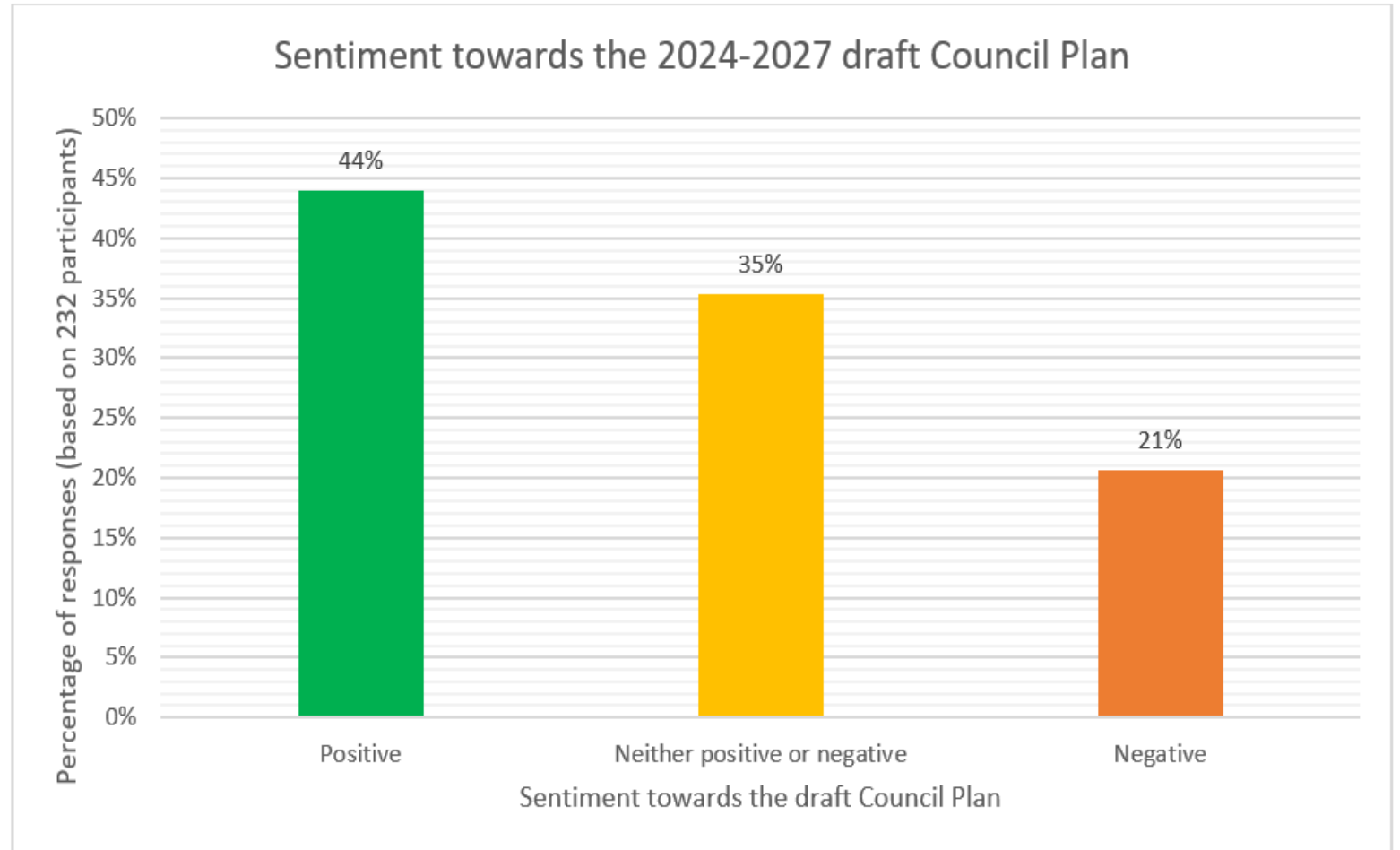
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What age group do you, or the person on whose behalf you are responding, fall into?



More people are satisfied than dissatisfied with the plan

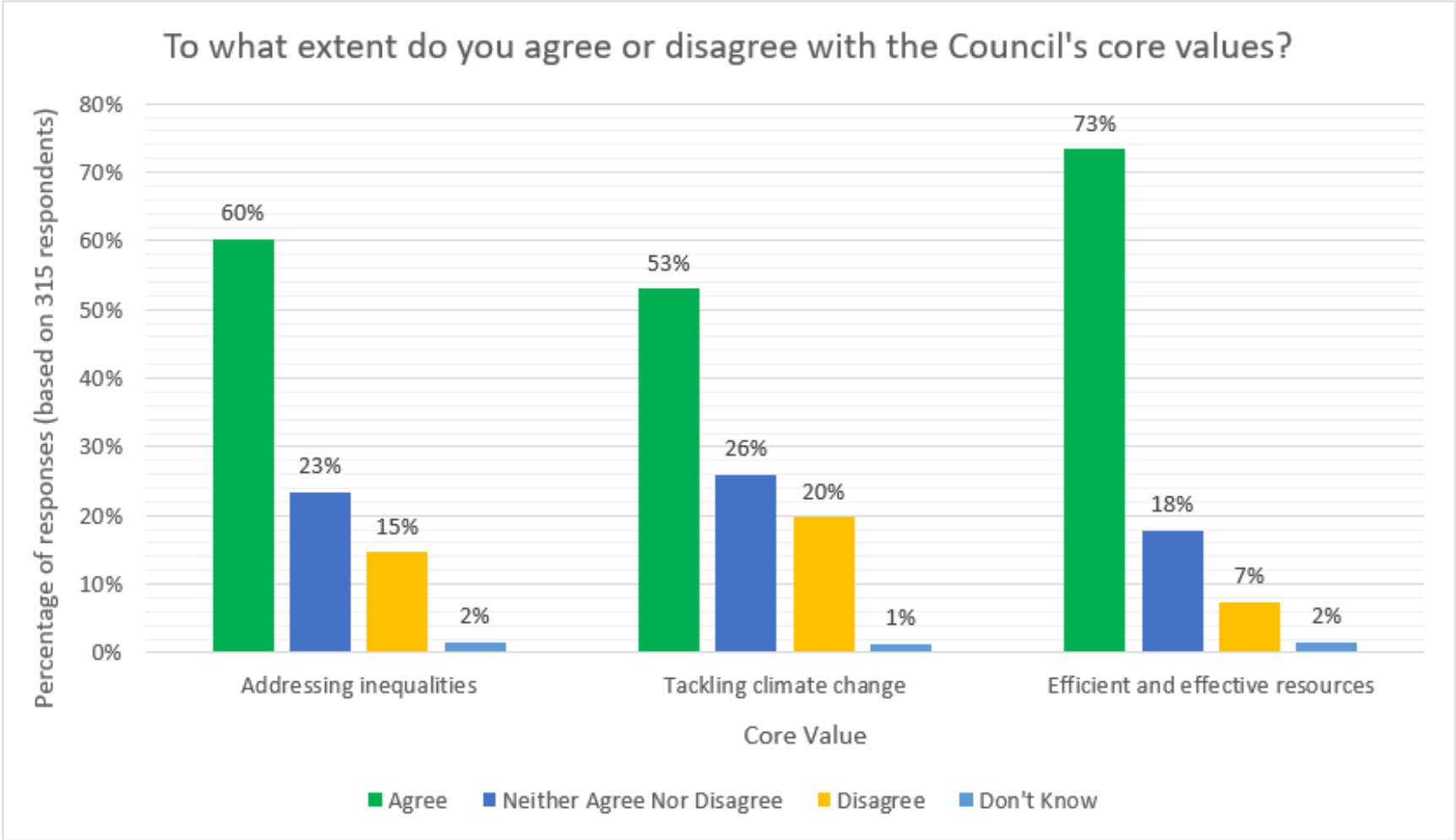
- 232 people responded to this question
- More people were satisfied (44%) than dissatisfied with the plan (combined answers very satisfied and satisfied combined)
- Age groups under 49 were more supportive than the age groups 50 and above
- 30-40% of all age groups were neither satisfied or dissatisfied



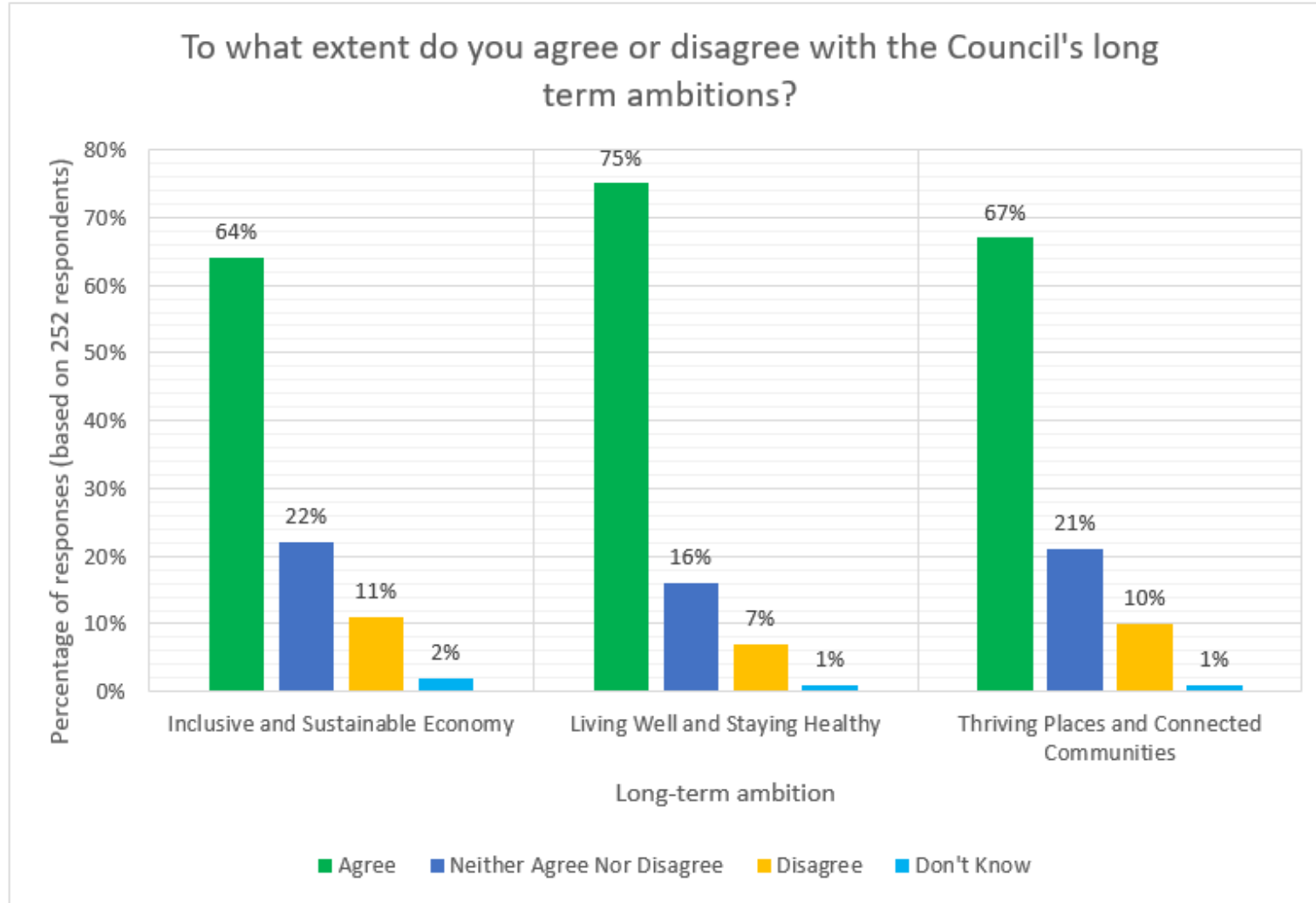
Most support for core value: efficient and effective use of resources

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- 315/315 respondents answered this question
- High levels of support for all three core values
- More people disagreed with climate change
- More females than males supported addressing inequalities and tackling climate change; more males disagreed



More people agreed with Living Well and Staying Healthy

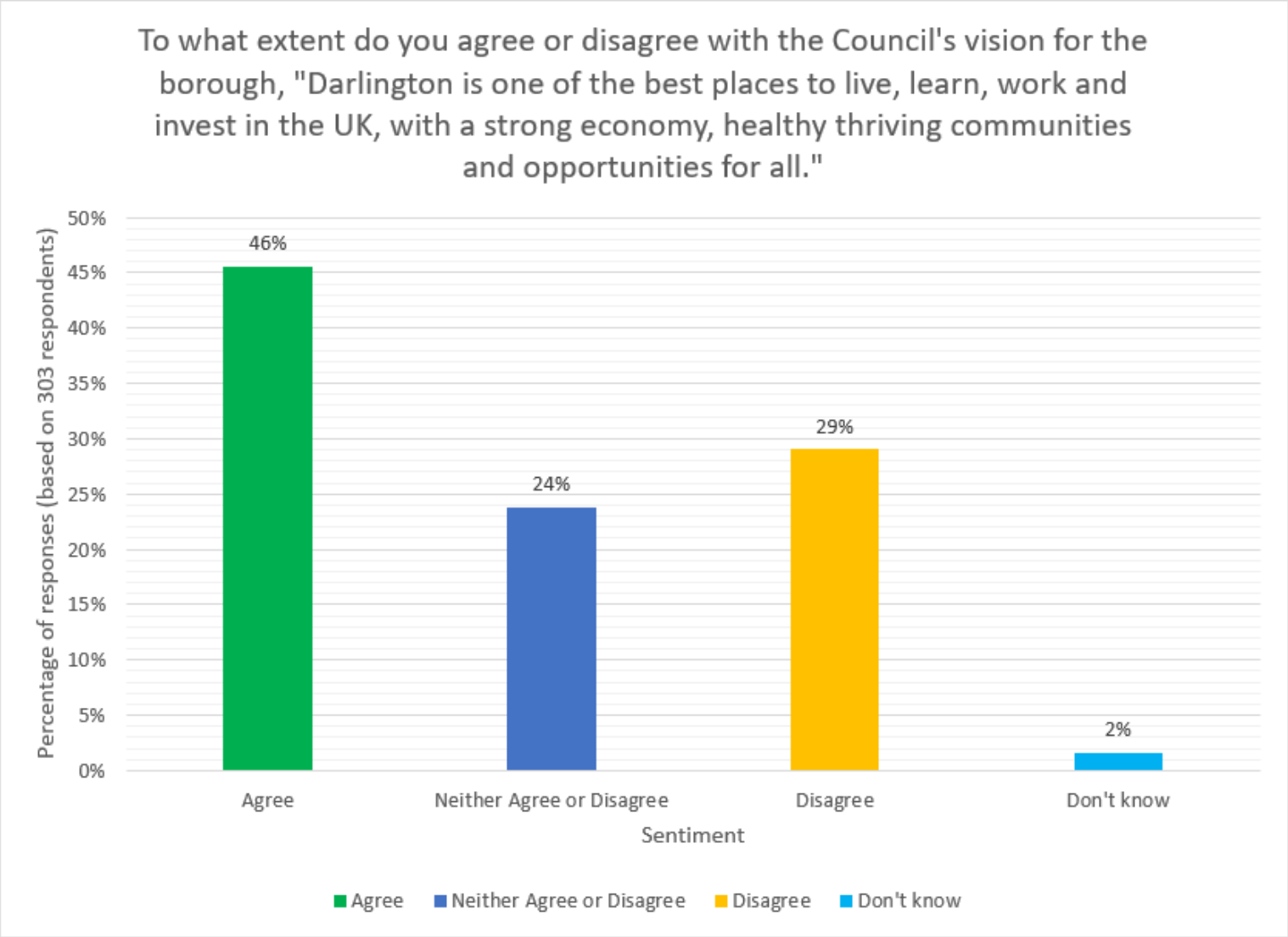


- 252/315 responses
- The majority of people agreed with every ambition
- Living Well and Staying Healthy had the highest level of agreement at 75%



Vision

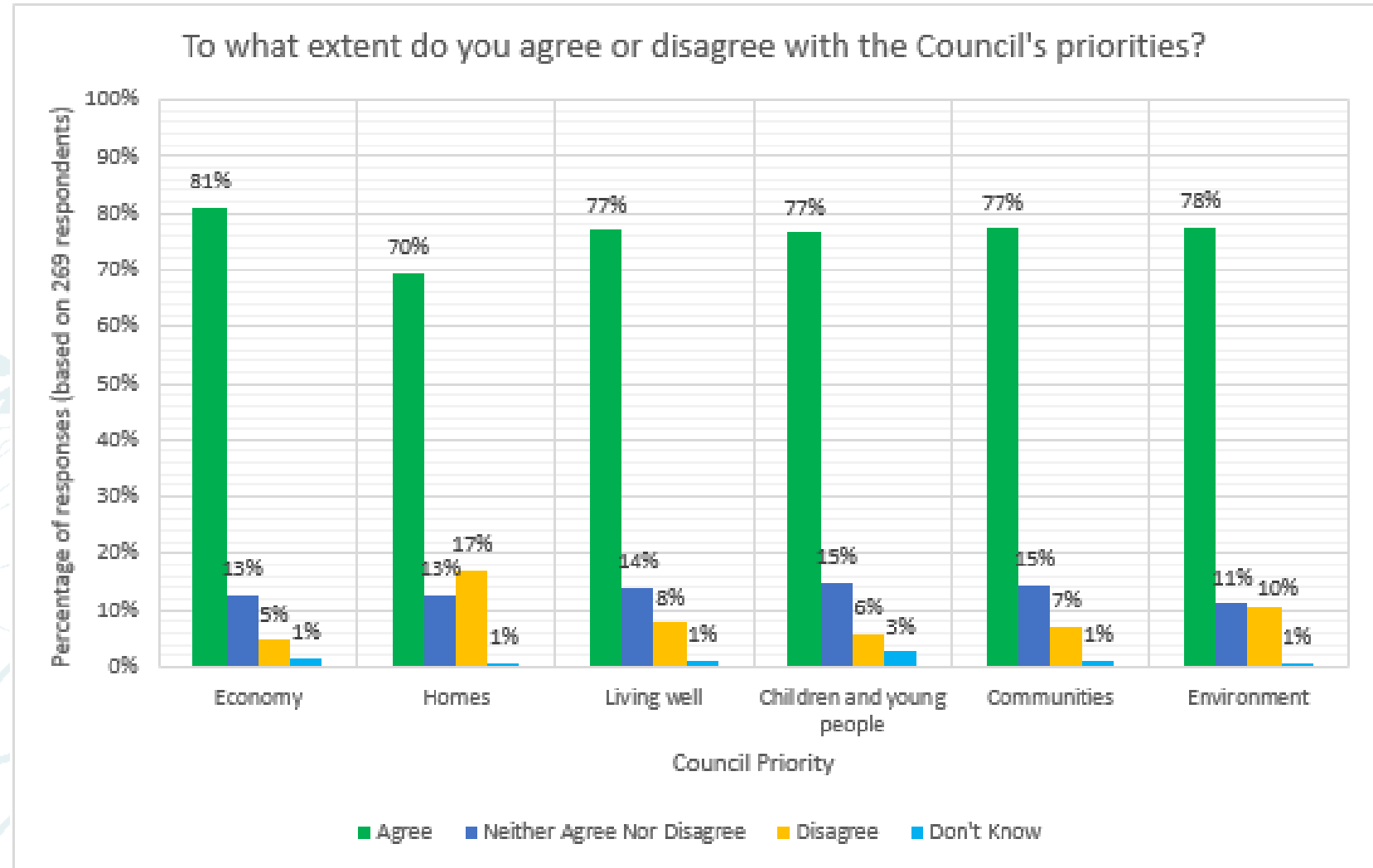
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- More people agreed than disagreed with the vision
- 60% males agreed compared with 46% females
- 40-49 age group agreed the most at 62%

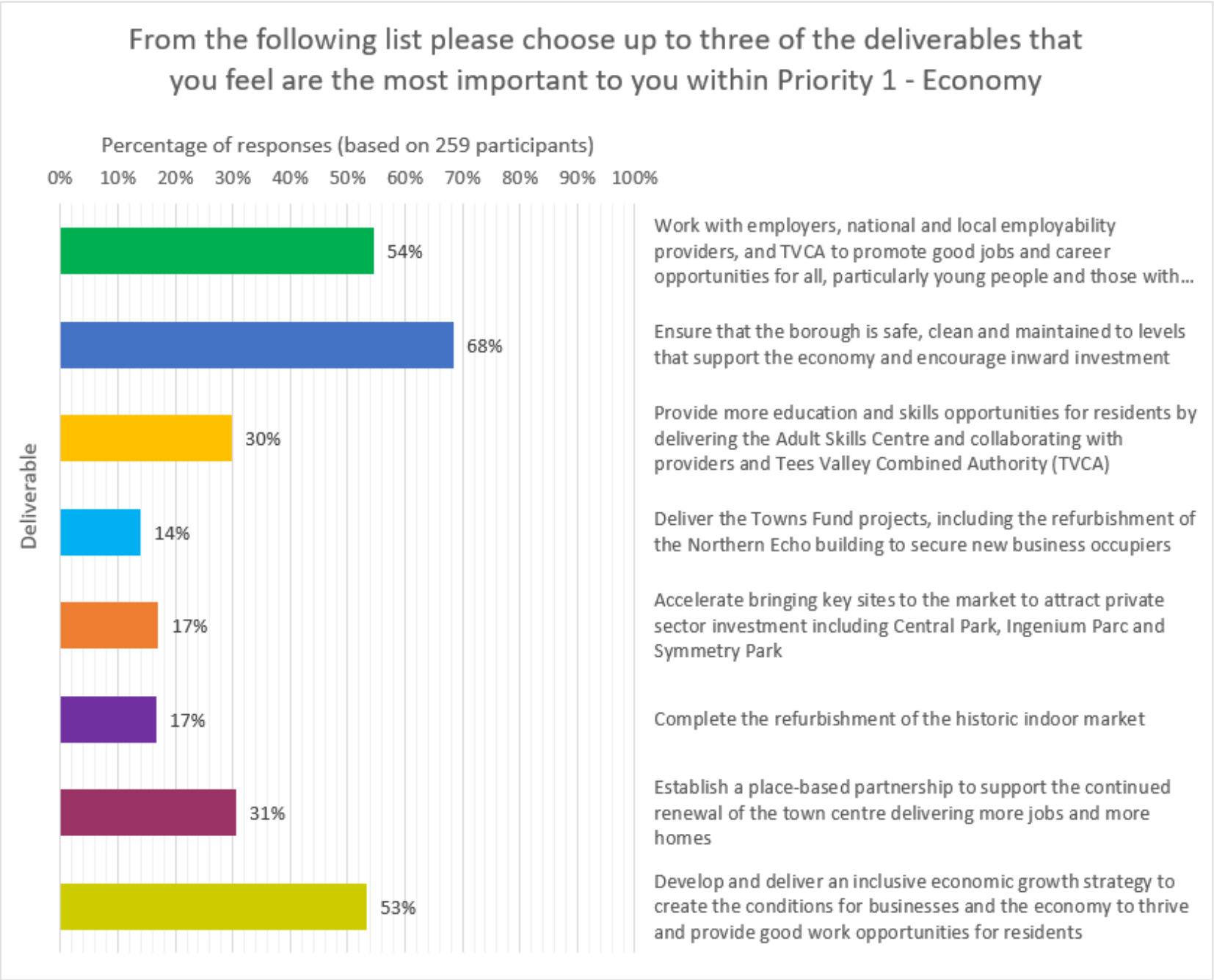
70% or more of respondents agree with each priority

- 269 respondents answered this question
- High level of support for all six priorities
- More people agreed with economy than any other priority, 218 (81% who answered this question)
- More people disagreed with homes than any other priority



Economy

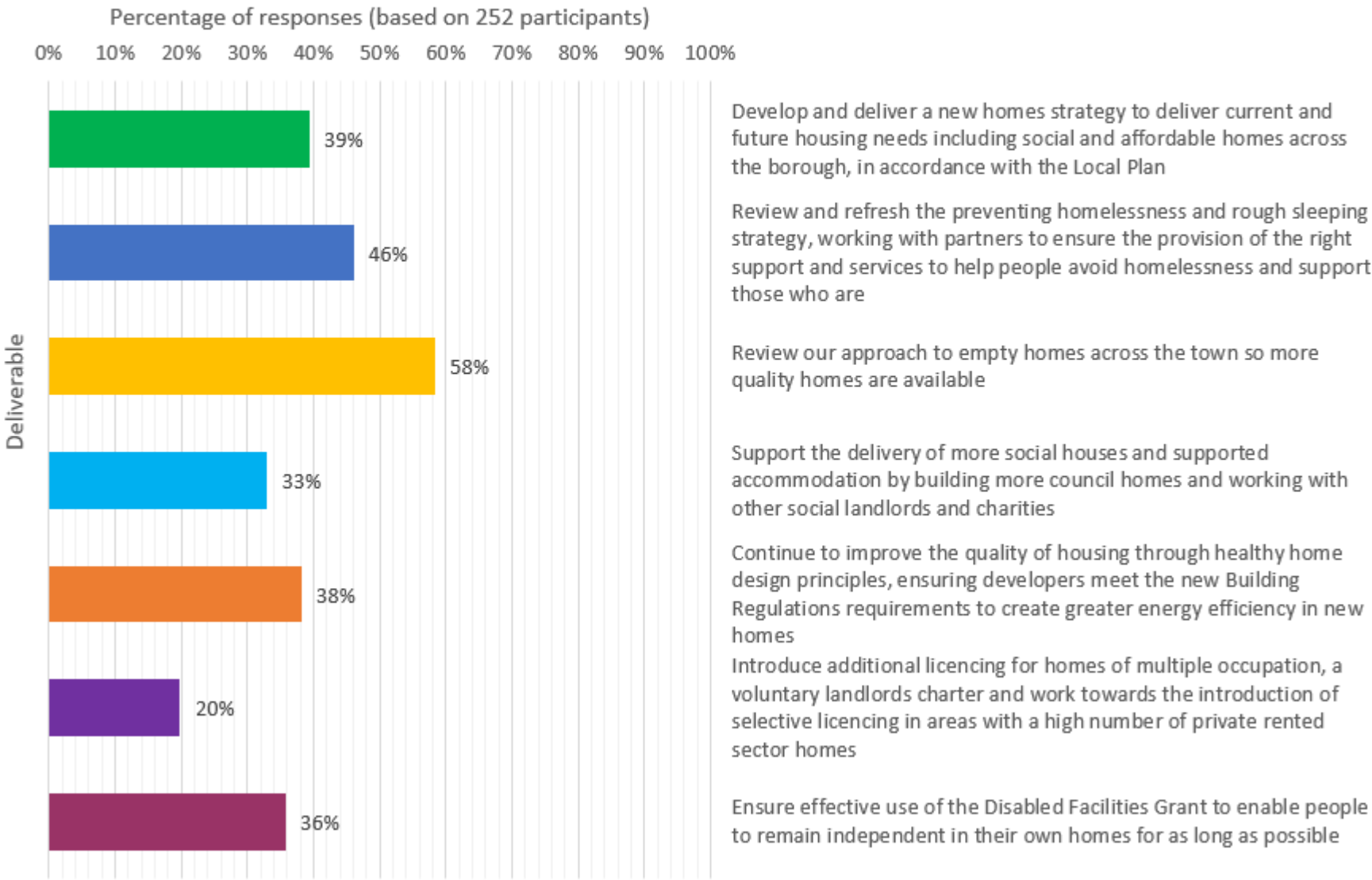
- 259 responses
- Most popular response was to maintain the safety and cleanliness of the borough with 177 (68% of those who answered this question)
- 2nd - working with employers and Tees Valley Combined Authority to promote good jobs and careers
- Close 3rd – develop inclusive growth strategy



Homes

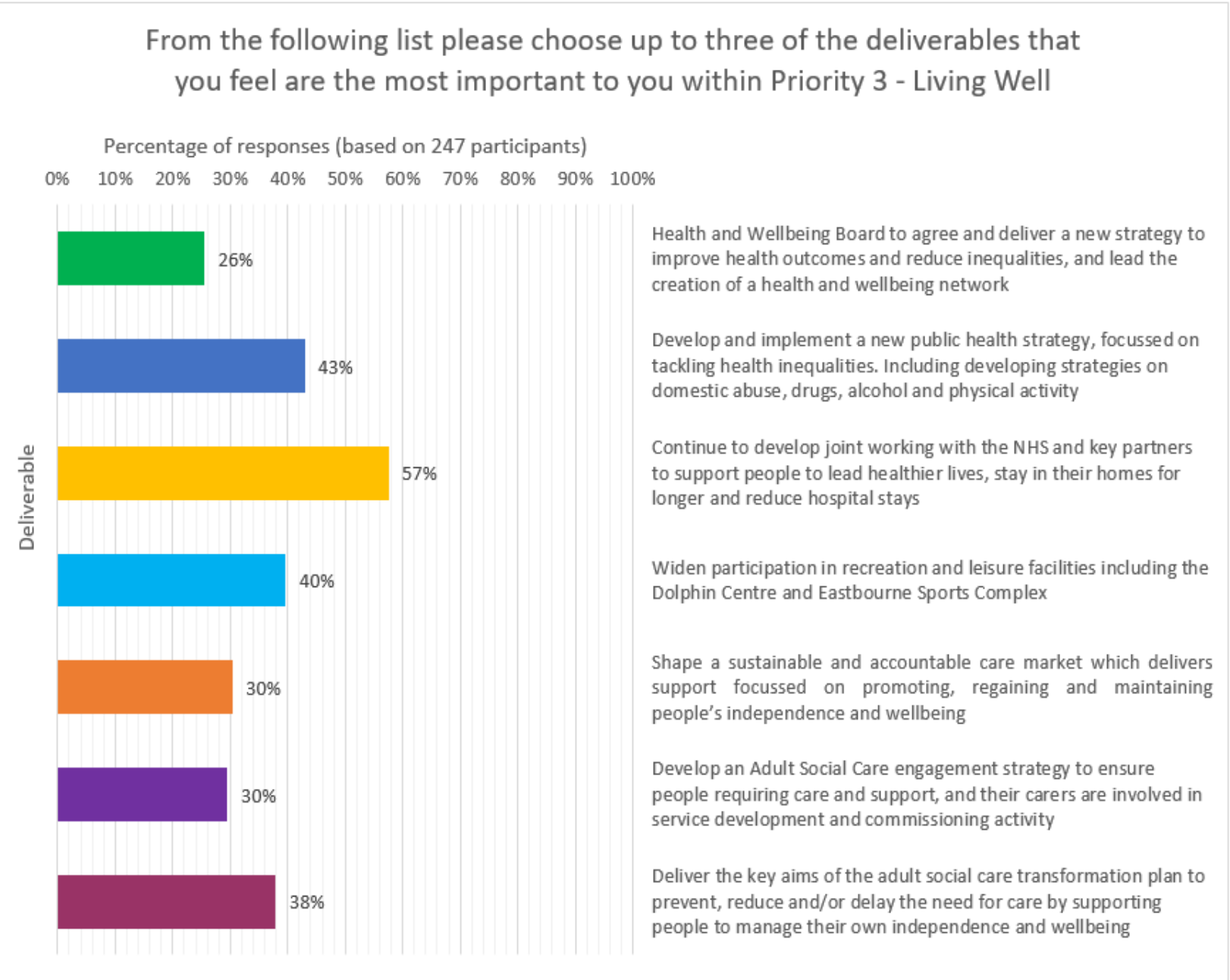
- 252 responses
- Most popular response was reviewing our approach to empty homes
- 2nd - review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy
- 3rd – develop and deliver a new homes strategy

From the following list please choose up to three of the deliverables that you feel are the most important to you within Priority 2 - Homes



Living Well

- 247 responses
- Most popular response is for continuing to develop joint working with the NHS
- 2nd – develop and implement a new public health strategy
- 3rd – widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities



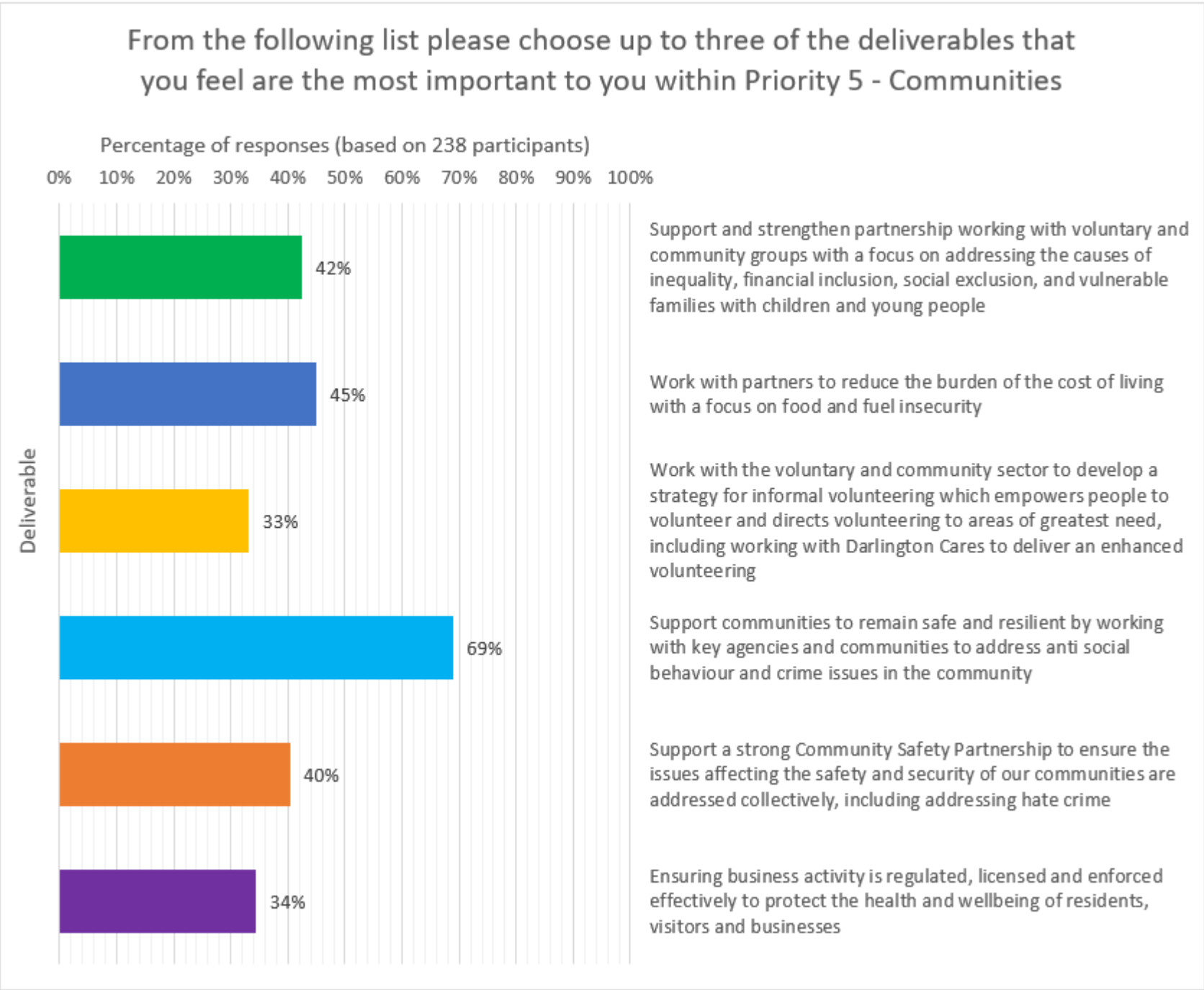
Children and Young People

- 252 responses
- Most popular response was to work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector
- Very close 2nd – work with Department for Education and academy trust sponsor on the free school for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- 3rd – involve children and young people in service development and commissioning



Communities

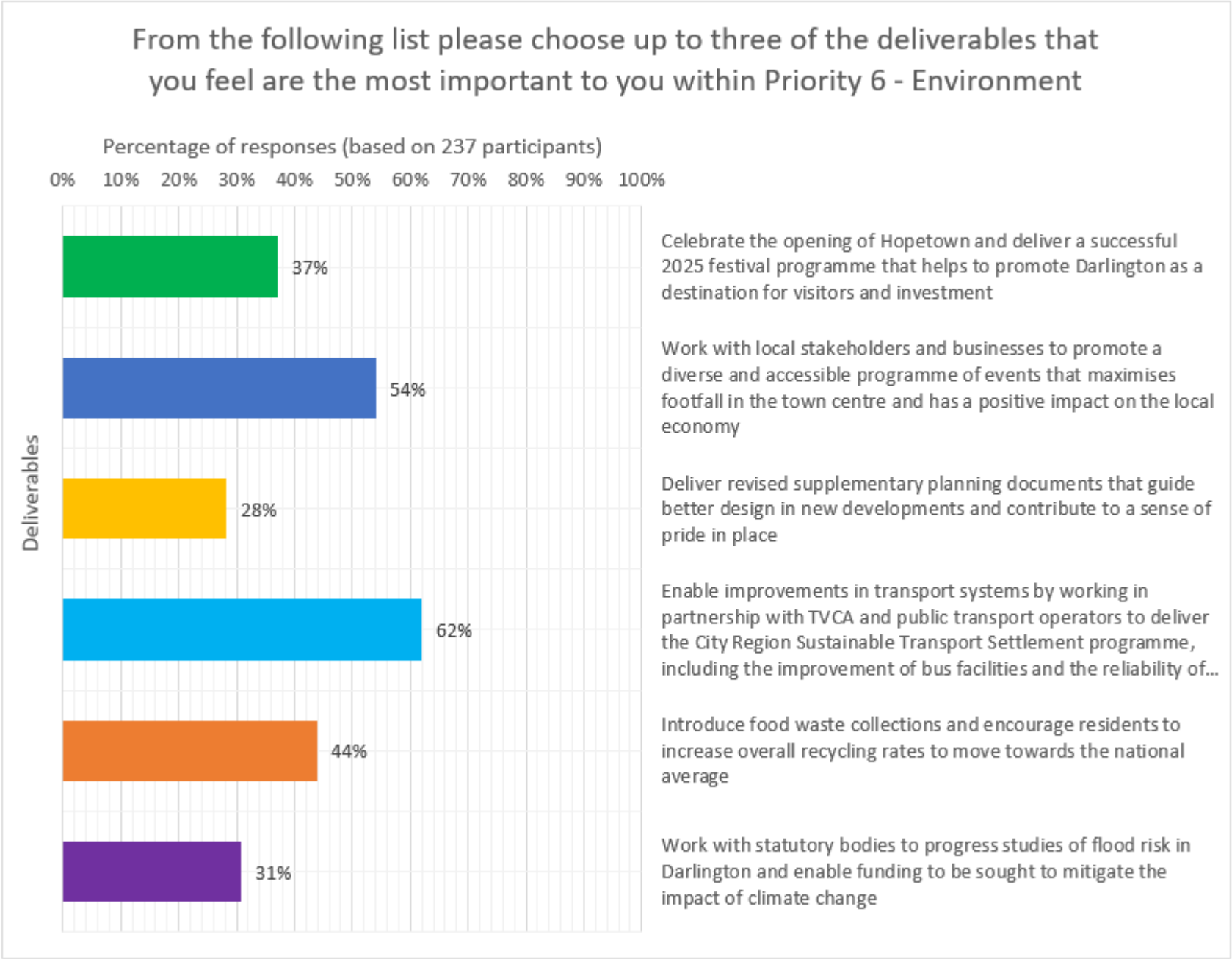
- 238 responses
- Most popular response, by a difference of 24%, was supporting communities to remain safe and resilient
- 2nd - work with partners to reduce the burden of the cost of living with a focus on food and fuel insecurity
- 3rd – partnerships with the Voluntary and Community Sector focussed on causes of inequality, financial inclusion, social exclusion and vulnerable people



Environment

- 237 responses
- Most popular - enable improvements in transport systems working with TVCA and transport operators
- 2nd – diverse and accessible events, bringing footfall and a positive impact on the local economy
- 3rd - introduce food waste collections and encourage residents to increase overall recycling rates

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177 comments on the hope for the future of Darlington survey question

Within the survey participants were asked what their hope was for the future of Darlington. Below is a summary of the responses:

- **Economy:** Range of good quality jobs; Encouraging business growth through investment
- **Environment:** Protect green space, wildlife and biodiversity; sustainable energy; clean
- **Town centre:** more independents, fewer empty shops; thriving market town, festivals
- **Transport:** reliable public transport; improved road infrastructure, fewer potholes and better road surfaces
- **Homes:** affordable; meet resident's needs; reduce impact on green space; services to support growth
- **Children and young people:** improving lives of young people, education and apprenticeship provision; reduce Anti-Social Behaviour
- **Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour :** less in town centre; prioritise tackling crime



Overall Themes and Comments

There were 315 responses to the survey and although same size is too small to be representative of the overall population, they do provide insights on what is important. There were a diverse range of views cross a large number of issues.

The following themes came from the comments sections of the questions and meetings with stakeholders

- Green spaces/impact of new housing
- Road infrastructure, maintenance and potholes
- Valuing nature and biodiversity
- Good jobs and skills
- Town centre – good jobs, empty/lack of variety of shops
- Unaffordability of new homes
- Safe places
- Opportunities for children and young people



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STRUCTURE OF FINAL COUNCIL PLAN

FOREWORD

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- Infographic
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FOREWORD

Our thanks to all who took part in the consultation on our draft plan, took the time to complete our survey and talk to myself and my Cabinet colleagues about what matters to you. We are also pleased to have had responses to our survey from every ward in Darlington.

This plan sets out our long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next few years.

Our Council is focussed on ensuring everyone has the opportunity for a good job, home and social connections - the building blocks of good health. We know Darlington is a great place to live and work. We are committed to making Darlington fairer and greener for everyone, building on opportunities and successes and facing up to the difficult challenges.

Over the previous decade inequalities across our communities have worsened. The inequality in life expectancy between the best and worst areas across Darlington is 10.6 years for women and 13 years for men.. The North East has seen the highest increase in child poverty over much of the previous decade which has restricted the chances for children to flourish. Children born in different areas of our borough have very different life chances. There are many more examples of inequalities that result in not everyone having the same life opportunities. We face long-term challenges which need long-term commitments.

Our ambitions for Darlington are for an inclusive and sustainable economy; people living well and staying healthy; with thriving places and connected communities. This is a long-term vision and the beginning of our journey that we want to make together.

At the plan's heart is our vision to be one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest - with a strong and sustainable economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all. Three core principles will shape everything we do and lead to a better quality of life in the long term. All three are important and require multi-level stakeholder and community action:

Addressing inequalities - Darlington is a wonderful place to live and work and we want opportunities to be accessible to everyone. We will have a long-term focus on understanding and addressing the causes of inequality ensuring our communities are safe and can thrive.

Tackling climate change - the changing climate impacts all our lives now and we know this is particularly important to our younger residents. One of the first things we did when we came to office was bring forward by 10 years the Council's commitment to being carbon neutral to 2040.

Efficient and effective resources - we will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance, and delivering the best services possible with the resources we have for our residents, communities, and businesses.

The Council faces unparalleled financial challenges. Reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 meant the Council's budget was reduced by £46m in real terms, a 36% reduction in budget. After covid, we have seen the cost of living increasing, income

deprivation and poverty rising, high inflation and interest rates, along with a significant increase in demand for adult and children's services consuming over two thirds of our budget.

We face competing priorities – a need to address rising inequalities in our communities, at a time when we face an unparalleled reduction in the Council's budget – and so means we face challenging times.

Our plan sets out six priorities for the Council for the next three years: economy, homes, living well, children and young people, communities and the local environment. We were pleased to see clear support for our ambitions, priorities and core principles in our survey; and receive support and challenge in areas important to you. These insights have informed the development of this plan.

This is an ambitious plan that we cannot deliver alone, it requires collaboration, within the council, and with the voluntary and private sectors, key stakeholders and communities. These are both exciting and challenging times for Darlington, and we are looking forward to delivering for you. If you want to work with us, please get in touch.

[Add signature of the Leader and photo]

INTRODUCTION

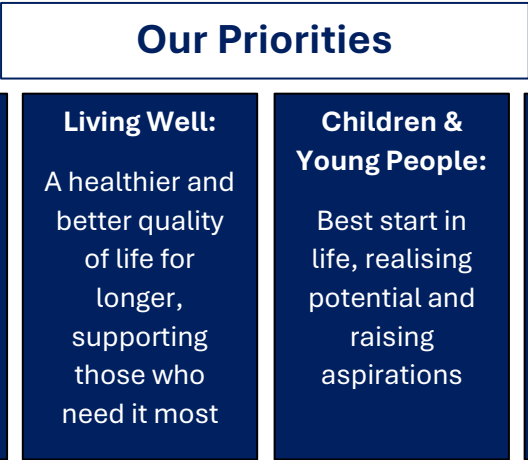
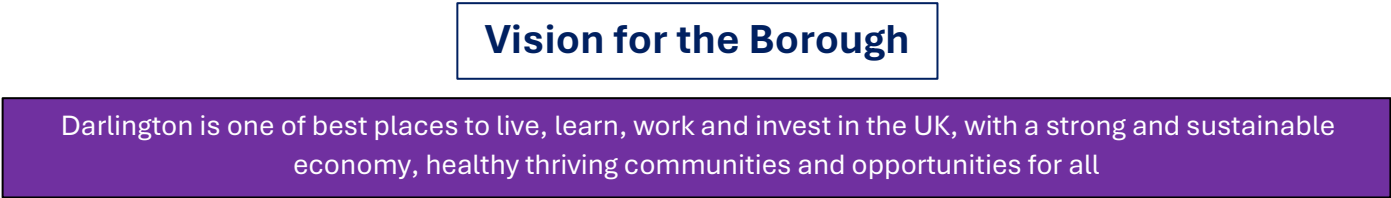
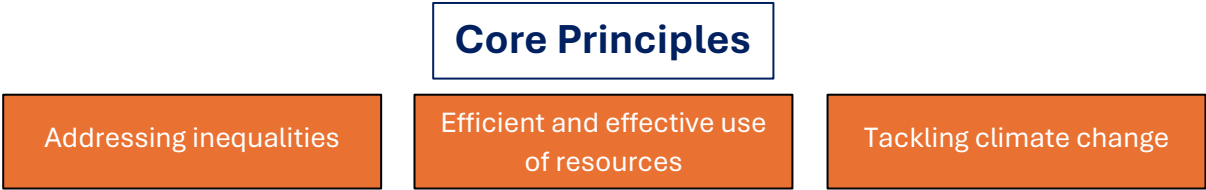
The Council Plan outlines the Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and its priorities for the next three years (2024-2027). It gives strategic direction to the Council and council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery; making clear what we will do and how we will do it.

The plan recognises the fundamental link between health, wellbeing and the economy. It is shaped by the building blocks of good health with a focus on a good job, home and social connections. The plan has six priorities: economy, homes, living well, children and young people, communities, and the local environment.

Six core themes shape our approach: data driven and intelligence led; embed core principles into decision making; deliver through key strategies and plans; model core values in our work and behaviours; collaboration and partnership working to reduce siloed working and deliver greater impact; and share key challenges and celebrate success.

We will demonstrate progress against the deliverables in six-monthly reports to Cabinet which will present the impact of our work, discuss key challenges and celebrate the successes.

OUR PLAN FOR DARLINGTON



CORE PRINCIPLES

We will consider our three core principles in everything we do. They are a long-term commitment to enhancing the well-being of all residents and ensuring the council is able to deliver the greatest impact within available resources.

The scale and complexity of the challenge means the council cannot tackle these issues alone, but being the level of government closest to communities we have an important role to play.

Addressing inequalities

Darlington is a wonderful place to live and work and our economy is resilient and growing, but this is not felt by everybody. The gap between the people and places with the best and worst outcomes is unacceptably high and worsening. There are unacceptably high levels of child poverty and disadvantage, demonstrated by 25% of Darlington's children living in low income families, with the highest ward reaching nearly 47%. We want opportunities to be accessible and to benefit everyone. We will:

- Develop a cross-council approach based on an in-depth understanding of inequalities and their causes, with a focus on local communities experiencing disadvantage
- Ensure all new strategies and plans consider inequalities, starting with the development of an inclusive growth strategy and a review of the health and wellbeing strategy
- Strengthen partnership working with key stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector, with a long-term focus on opportunity and addressing the causes of inequality; and short-term focus on reducing the burden of the cost of living. We will work with communities to understand first-hand the challenges they face.

Tackling climate change

This is about more than reducing carbon emissions. The climate is changing, which has an impact on our lives from the risk of flooding and more extreme weather to health impacts for our most vulnerable residents. We are also all facing increasing energy costs and potential threats to energy security. There is a role for national and local government to invest in our future. We will:

- Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040
- Involve all parts of the council in a cross-council approach to sustainability and climate change
- Work alongside our business community, collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero
- Work with partners, government, public and private sectors and residents for a resilient Darlington so we are able to respond and adapt to change.

Efficient and effective resources

The council is facing unparalleled financial challenges with rising costs and a significant increase in demand for services. We have a responsibility to ensure residents get value for

money for their council tax and that every pound is spent efficiently and effectively. We will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance and delivering the best services possible with the resources we have for our residents, communities, and businesses.

Our people are our best asset and we will lead a culture of collaboration, innovation and creativity, respect, delivery and compassion, whilst maintaining focus on continuous improvement. We will:

- Deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan and positive Value for Money outcome
- Deliver high quality governance and decision making
- Review and refresh the Asset Management Plan and Procurement Strategy
- Build on the Capital Project Management process by introducing an enhanced ICT system to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Review and deliver the workforce strategy
- Maximise income through new joint venture companies, increase levels of business rates by growing the local economy, and maximising grant opportunities
- Explore opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery
- Continue to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE – THREE AMBITIONS

An Inclusive and sustainable economy will have:

- More people of all ages in good work
- Key sectors and sites innovating and growing by creating jobs, attracting more business and investment
- A healthy, productive and vibrant business community
- A business friendly public sector supporting businesses to locate and grow
- Increased skills levels in the local labour market
- Vibrant town and neighbourhood centres providing services, retail and work for all generations
- A growing economy that supports our environment and heritage.

Living well and staying healthy will mean:

- Health outcomes are improved, and inequalities reduced
- Children and young people have the best start in life
- People are supported to be independent
- Homes are affordable, healthy, secure and meet needs
- Households are more financially secure
- Residents live longer, healthier, more productive lives
- People are active and involved.

Thriving places and connected communities will have:

- Climate resilience where places are prepared for change and can adapt, with reduced CO2 emissions
- Access to good services
- Happy, safe and secure communities with improved safety in public spaces
- Cultural, heritage and community assets
- Well-connected people and communities, with links to places within and outside the borough
- Digitally connected residents who are benefitting from opportunities offered online
- Attractive, relevant and welcoming places
- Sustainable and integrated transport across the borough and beyond.

PRIORITIES

ECONOMY - *building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.*

We want Darlington to have a strong economic outlook, with more businesses, good jobs and inward investment; building a strong platform for our ambitions to tackle health inequalities in Darlington. We believe in a fair society where growth benefits everyone and everyone can enjoy the high quality of life that Darlington has to offer. A good education, quality jobs and reliable income should be accessible to all.

Darlington is a great place to work, run a business and invest, and there are many opportunities for the economy to grow further. Business confidence is growing, with many new developments being brought forward by the private sector. But there are people living in poverty who cannot afford the essentials; 25% of children living in Darlington are in relative poverty.

We will work with partners to invest in the conditions needed for the economy to grow and be successful, providing opportunities for more people to benefit. This will include working closely with Darlington Economic Campus to fully realise the investment and confidence in Darlington. Furthermore, we will continue to develop our partnership with Teesside University, Darlington College, CPI and commercial occupiers at Darlington Science Park.

Key Deliverables

1. Develop and deliver an inclusive economic growth strategy to create the conditions for businesses and the economy to thrive and provide good work opportunities for residents
2. Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes
3. Ensure that the Borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment
4. Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes
5. Provide more education and skills opportunities for residents by delivering the Adult Skills Centre and collaborating with providers and TVCA
6. Work with Market Asset Management to deliver improvements to the historic indoor market
7. Accelerate the delivery of key sites to the market to attract private sector investment including Darlington Science Park, Ingenium Parc and Faverdale Business Park
8. Deliver the Towns Fund projects, including the refurbishment of the Northern Echo building to secure new business occupiers
9. Work effectively with Darlington Economic Campus to fully realise the opportunities this investment presents to the town and its communities.

HOMES – *affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents*

Good housing should be affordable, safe, secure and of decent quality. Good housing is important for the health and wellbeing of residents and communities, it revitalises communities and encourages businesses to locate and create jobs.

We want to enhance the quality and availability of housing for our residents focusing on building affordable and social homes to meet demand; improving standards of existing housing; improving the energy efficiency of existing and new housing; and meeting the needs of our population as it changes, particularly our ageing population by supporting independent living.

We want to make sure that we can have a more joined up approach to homes in the borough, both within the Council and with partners in the social housing, charity, housing development and private landlord sectors.

Key Deliverables

1. Review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, working with partners to ensure the provision of the right support and services to help people avoid homelessness and support those who are
2. Review our approach to empty homes across the borough so more quality homes are available
3. Support the delivery of more social houses and supported accommodation by building more council homes and working with other social landlords and charities
4. Develop and deliver a new homes strategy, to address housing need, including ensuring social and affordable homes across the borough, in accordance with the Local Plan
5. Continue to improve the quality of housing, through healthy home design principles and ensuring developers create greater energy efficiency in new homes
6. Continue investment in Council housing to ensure quality and greater energy efficiency
7. Ensure effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant to enable people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible
8. Introduce additional licencing for homes of multiple occupation, a voluntary landlords charter and work towards the introduction of selective licencing in areas with a high number of private rented sector homes.

LIVING WELL – *a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most*

More years in good health leads to more fulfilling lives, and a better standard of living. However, there are inequalities in Darlington across all stages of life which are influenced by broader social factors including education, employment, housing and income. We believe all residents should have the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives.

We want to support residents of every age to live well. This will require significant engagement and collaboration with the NHS, local businesses and third-sector partners. Our council has committed to improving our contact with carers and working to create a network of support for better health and wellbeing outcomes. We will support those who need it most and signpost for access to other provision and support where appropriate; and improve and promote access to activity in our community leisure facilities, to keep people healthy and active.

Key Deliverables

1. Continue to develop joint working with the NHS and key partners to support people to lead healthier lives, stay in their homes for longer and reduce hospital stays
2. Health and Wellbeing Board to agree and deliver a new strategy to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities, and lead the creation of a health and wellbeing network
3. Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities. Including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity
4. Widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities including the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex
5. Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing
6. Shape a sustainable and accountable care market which delivers support focussed on promoting, regaining and maintaining people's independence and wellbeing
7. Develop an Adult Social Care engagement strategy to ensure people requiring care and support, and their carers are involved in service development and commissioning activity.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – *supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations*

Our children and young people are the future of the Borough. It is important that they are supported to be healthy, educated and confident, and live in a stable and supportive environment. We believe that all children should have the opportunity to realise their potential, and to make a positive economic, social and environmental contribution to Darlington.

The Council has a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, ensuring their needs are met and their rights protected. We are seeing more vulnerable children with increasingly complex needs requiring help and support, with a 33% increase in children in our care since pre pandemic levels.

We want to make sure that all children and young people have good access to health, care and education provision. The following actions have been developed to meet needs and enable the best opportunities.

Key Deliverables

1. Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the Council by enabling more children to be placed in Council foster care and, when appropriate, council run residential homes
2. Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington
3. Work with the Department for Education and the successful academy trust sponsor to ensure the free school for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is developed on schedule providing vital additional specialist capacity in Darlington
4. Develop more meaningful services by ensuring children and young people are involved in service development and commissioning activity
5. Widen access of eligible children to the Holiday Activities and Food Programme which focusses on health, wellbeing and raising aspirations
6. Work in partnership with the early years sector and health services to promote school readiness and the delivery of the expansion of funded childcare entitlement
7. Refresh and deliver the Children and Young People's Plan working with services across the council, key stakeholders and children and young people in Darlington
8. Continue the successful management of the Safety Valve plan for the education budget to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, eliminate the historic deficit on funding and deliver a financially sustainable system.

COMMUNITIES – *working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities*

Our communities are the heart of our Borough and play an important role in shaping our health and wellbeing. Safe and engaged communities are healthy places that support good health and the wellbeing of residents; attract business investment and create jobs; enable trust and collaboration; increase participation on activities that support the environment; and improve the overall quality of life for residents.

Our diversity of rural and urban communities and a thriving town centre is central to making Darlington a great place to live and work; but like all places the high cost of living is affecting residents and businesses, and there is crime and anti-social behaviour. When communities feel valued, heard and connected challenges can be more effectively tackled by working together.

We will work with communities and partners to develop multi-agency strategies to deliver action on shared challenges and opportunities that secure a thriving community environment across the Borough. Collective action will be focused on developing a shared understanding of the challenges, working together to bid for more funding and investment into the borough and our communities.

Key Deliverables

1. Support communities to remain safe and resilient by working with key agencies and communities to address anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the community
2. Work with partners to reduce the burden of the cost of living with a focus on food and fuel insecurity
3. Support and strengthen partnership working with voluntary and community groups with a focus on addressing the causes of inequality, financial inclusion, social exclusion, and vulnerable families with children and young people
4. Support a strong Community Safety Partnership to ensure the issues affecting the safety and security of our communities are addressed collectively, including addressing hate crime
5. Ensuring business activity is regulated, licensed and enforced effectively to protect the health and wellbeing of residents, visitors and businesses
6. Work with the voluntary and community sector to develop a strategy for informal volunteering which empowers people to volunteer and directs volunteering to areas of greatest need, including working with Darlington Cares to deliver an enhanced volunteering programme.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – *a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough*

Darlington is a thriving borough known for our railway heritage and our mix of urban and rural communities. We are the transport gateway into the region, with a vibrant family friendly town centre and growing economy. Our town centre is a destination for events and experiences alongside a growing independent retail offer. Our access to nature, parks and green spaces is often recognised as a big contributor to making Darlington a great place to live and work.

Working with TVCA, service operators and residents, the council will deliver good and affordable transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity that enables safe travel, exercise and access to employment and education. Investing in our heritage and culture is important in preserving the identity of our communities, delivering regeneration and economic impact.

Updating our planning documents will ensure that future developments are sustainable and positively impact our local environment. We will also continue to work with residents and other partners to protect and enhance our borough's parks and open spaces. The following key actions are focussed on delivering these core foundations.

Key Deliverables

1. Enable improvements in transport systems by working in partnership with TVCA and public transport operators to deliver the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme and the improvement of bus facilities and reliability of services
2. Work with local stakeholders and businesses to promote a diverse and accessible programme of events that maximises footfall in the town centre and has a positive impact on the local economy
3. Introduce food waste collections and support residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average
4. Celebrate the opening of Hopetown and deliver a successful 2025 festival programme that helps to promote Darlington as a destination for visitors and investment
5. Work with statutory bodies to progress studies of flood risk in Darlington and access funding to mitigate the impact of climate change.
6. Deliver revised supplementary planning documents that guide better design in new developments and contribute to a sense of pride in place.

OUR APPROACH

Collaborate and work in partnership

Working in partnership is a fundamental principle of how we intend to deliver the Council Plan, we will collaborate across services and externally to maximise the impact of our work. We will nurture and enhance our long-term relationships with businesses, voluntary organisations, our communities and other public sector agencies based on trust and mutual respect. We will utilise existing partnership arrangements such as the health and wellbeing board, public sector executive group and the voluntary and community sector engagement group and where needed we will establish new partnership arrangements for example for the new Long-Term Plan for Towns.

Data driven and intelligence led

We will base our strategies, plans and key decisions on key data, intelligence and insights, particularly from engagement with the public and our stakeholders. This will help us meet the needs of our residents, address current issues, target interventions, make timely decisions and plan ahead for future challenges and opportunities. We will develop a comprehensive update of key data and publish the analysis in the Darlington Profile 2025. We will share key data and intelligence with stakeholders and partners to help develop a shared understanding of opportunities and challenges.

Embed core principles in decision making

Our long-term strategic commitment to address inequalities, tackle climate change and ensure efficient and effective use of resources will be embedded in our work across the council, from decision-making to delivery. It will help staff understand how their objectives link with those of the council plan. Key areas of focus will include: requiring Cabinet and Council papers to explain how the relevant core principles are being met and the intended impact; and service plans articulating how core principles relate to the delivery of priority actions.

Deliver through key strategies and plans

The vision and ambitions of the council plan will be delivered through the council's key strategies and plans which will clearly set out the actions they will take to deliver, how they will embed the core principles, and the impact they expect to make on Darlington's residents, economy and communities and how this will be measured. Their development will take a collaborative approach with key services in the Council working together and where appropriate working in partnership with key stakeholders and residents.

Model our core values in our work and behaviours

Council employees have worked together to agree four core values that they model:

- **Respect:** be respectful towards the council, each other as colleagues as well as our community, residents, service users, stakeholders and wider partners
- **Innovation:** be innovative in everything we do and voice improvements to ensure we offer quality services
- **Collaboration:** act collaboratively and ensure collaborations help us to maximise opportunities and achieve success
- **Deliver:** deliver quality services to everyone and strive to always deliver the best we can with the resources available

Share key challenges and celebrate success

We will communicate our challenges and celebrate success across our wide range of services. We will be open in our communication with residents, businesses and stakeholders to ensure they feel informed about the decisions we make and understand why we make them. This will help residents, businesses and stakeholders stay informed and become advocates for Darlington whilst building pride in our collective achievements and building confidence in the future.

PERFORMANCE REPORTING

Progress with the Council Plan will be reported every six months to Cabinet. Both the mid-year and end of year reports will provide a summary of progress against the agreed performance indicators, with the end of year report also including analysis of how the plan is delivering against the key principles and priorities. Using the well-established arrangements, individual scrutiny committees will identify the performance measures most important to them and continue to receive regular reports.

ANNEX 1 – OUR BOROUGH: KEY DATA INFOGRAPHIC

TO BE DESIGNED AND INCLUDED IN THE FINAL COUNCIL PLAN PDF.

ANNEX 2 – SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The Council Plan 2024-27 public consultation took place between 6th March to 25th April 2024. Residents were given the opportunity to have their say on the Council Plan through a survey that was available online and on paper in the Dolphin Centre, Darlington Library and Cockerton Library.

The consultation was promoted in the One Darlington magazine, by the Council social media channels (reaching over 20k people), Cabinet members through their social media, emails to key stakeholders and meetings with residents, agenda items at meetings of key stakeholders and all Councillors were briefed and asked to raise with their residents and networks. A publicly available email address was also provided for both residents and stakeholders to contact the Policy and Strategy team.

The survey had 315 responses with 100% of those online. Every age category aged 84 or younger was represented, of those that answered the question about their sex, 45.5% were male and 54.5% were female; and there were responses from every ward in Darlington.

Key headlines (the % are the proportion of people answering that question):

- All participants answered the core principles question, with clear support for all three. The most supported core principle was efficient and effective use of resources
- The majority of people agreed with every ambition. Living well and staying healthy had the highest support at 75%
- There was clear support for all 6 priorities with 5 priorities receiving 77-81% support. Economy was the priority with the most agreement at 81%

The key themes from the comments:

- Green spaces and the impact of new housing
- Road infrastructure, maintenance and potholes
- Valuing nature and biodiversity
- More good jobs and skills
- Town centre – good jobs, empty/variety of shops
- Unaffordability of new homes
- Safe places
- Opportunities for children and young people

Overall satisfaction towards the Council Plan was positive with 79% of those answering the question being satisfied or neither satisfied/unsatisfied with the plan and 21% dissatisfied.

CABINET
16 JULY 2024

**LAND AT FAVERDALE / BURTREE GARDEN VILLAGE
'CELL CH' FEASIBILITY WORK**

**Responsible Cabinet Members –
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for feasibility funding to engage the services of Esh Homes Limited to help facilitate an early planning application for the Council owned land, site Cell CH shown on the attached plan at **Appendix 1** and to incur the associated costs.

Summary

2. At the meeting of Cabinet on 11 July 2017, the Council's land site Cell CH, circa 14.16 Ha (35 acres) as shown in Appendix 1, was declared surplus to requirements.
3. Planning permission for Phase 1 of the Burtree Garden Village development has now been granted and includes the strategic infrastructure and spine road which will provide the necessary access to open up site Cell CH. The Council land forms part of the Burtree Garden Village but sits outside of Phase 1, see **Appendix 2**
4. The intention is for this site to be brought forward as another potential Joint Venture development and further proposals about this will be brought to Cabinet in due course. To facilitate this development several surveys and pieces of feasibility work will be required to support a detailed residential planning application.
5. The feasibility works will be procured by Esh Homes Limited and the Council in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
6. The anticipated costs of the proposed feasibility works are set out in **Appendix 3** to be considered in **Part III** of the report.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that:

- (a) Cabinet approves the costs identified in Appendix 3 of the report and authorise the release of the funding necessary to enable Esh Homes Ltd and the Council to undertake the feasibility work required to submit a planning application.
- (b) The Assistant Director for Law and Governance be authorised to execute the necessary documents.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (a) To provide a site capable of contributing to the delivery of new Housing and other affordable/social homes to satisfy the Borough's housing need.
- (b) To achieve a capital receipt for the Council and increased Council Tax receipts from new homes.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

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

Jane Sutcliffe-Jones: Extension 5746

S17 Crime and Disorder	The report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	The report has no implications for health and well being
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is potential for any new Building to be easily accessible by sustainable transport modes which will help ensure the carbon footprint of the development is acceptable.
Diversity	No implications
Wards Affected	Brinkburn & Faverdale
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The resolutions in this report will not make changes to the Budget and Policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This will help support facilitating development and economic growth for Darlington
Efficiency	The workload resulting from the recommendations in this report assumes resources at existing levels.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. Planning permission for Phase 1 of the Burtree Garden Village, comprising detail for the Spine Road and outline for the residential cells has recently been granted subject to a Section 106 agreement. As shown at Appendix 2, Cell CH sits outside the Phase 1 boundary however the proposed spine road to be constructed under the approved planning permission will provide the necessary means of access to enable the development of Cell CH.
10. The intention is for this site to be brought forward as another potential Joint Venture development and further proposals about this will be brought to Cabinet in due course.
11. To determine the feasibility of the site for residential development it is now proposed that the Council and Esh Homes Ltd undertake or commission the necessary surveys and investigative works to produce a site layout plan and submit a detailed planning application for circa 220 new homes. The development would be policy compliant, therefore 20% of the build out would be affordable homes. This could be an option for Council Homes.
12. Subject to a positive outcome on feasibility and planning, proposed sale terms of site Cell CH will be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

Financial Implications

13. It is proposed that the feasibility works to be undertaken by Esh Homes Ltd and the Council as set out in the Part III report are to be funded from the Council's Investment Fund and repaid from future capital receipts as the site is developed.

Procurement Implications

14. All procurement activity will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

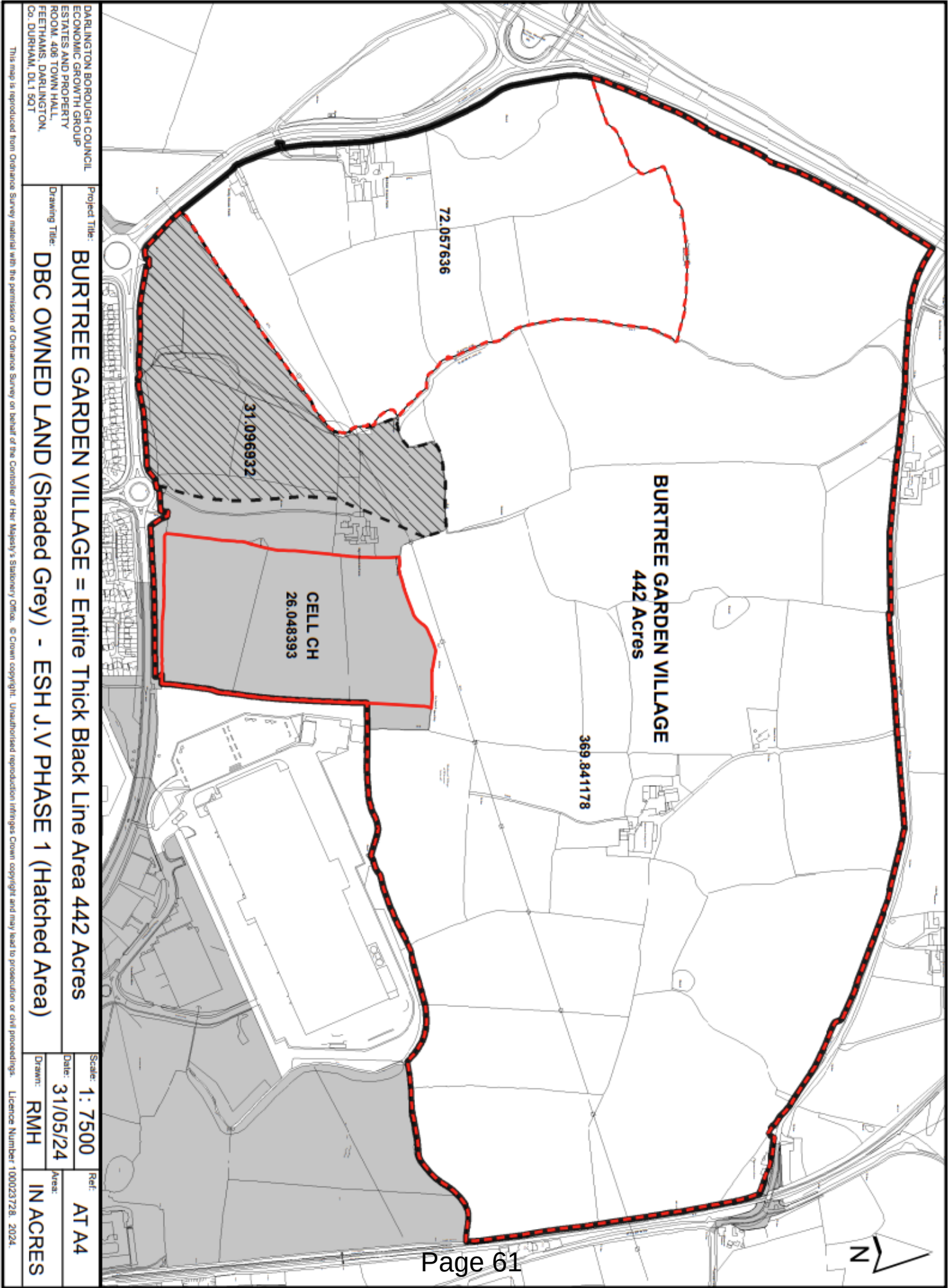
Legal Implications

15. The process must follow the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and comply with all relevant legislation.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

16. The approval of feasibility fees will enable a planning application to be submitted which would align with latest planning and building regulations in respect of carbon impact and climate change.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT 2024/25

Responsible Cabinet Member
Councillor Anne-Marie Curry, Adults Portfolio

Responsible Director
James Stroyan, Group Director of People

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the capital resources available for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) during 2024/25 and to seek members' approval for the release of these resources to be utilised in accordance with Darlington Borough Council Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025.

Summary

2. DFGs assist people to live independently by helping to fund suitable adaptations to their properties. They are means tested and are available to owner-occupiers, tenants of private rented properties and Housing Association tenants.
3. DFGs are governed by housing legislation and have set conditions for payment, within these regulations. The Council has a shared service agreement in place with Durham County Council to provide a Home Improvement Agency service to provide guidance and practical assistance to people who are older, disabled or on low incomes to claim a DFG to repair, improve or adapt their homes. They also provide support to people until the work is completed and the contractor has been paid.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note that the sum of £1,159,844 has been allocated to the Council to use for Disabled Facilities Grant adaptations in 2024 -2025.
 - (b) Release this capital funding to enable it to be allocated in accordance with Darlington Borough Council Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025.

Reason

5. The recommendations are supported to enable the adaptations for those individuals who are eligible to receive a DFG for 2024-25 to proceed.

**James Stroyan,
Group Director of People**

Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Borough Council Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025
- (ii) Home Adaptations for Disabled People - A detailed guide to related legislation, guidance and good practice- Home Adaptations Consortium

Lisa Holdsworth: Extension 5861

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Wellbeing	Adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants will improve the health and well-being of residents of Darlington.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	The installation of more efficient equipment via DFG will reduce energy usage and provide higher levels of thermal comfort for dwellings benefitting from these measures thus reducing carbon emissions.
Diversity	The adaptations provided via Disabled Facilities Grants will improve the accessibility of owner occupied, privately rented and social housing.
Wards Affected	All wards within the Borough of Darlington are affected equally.
Groups Affected	Disabled Facilities Grant applicants living in owner occupied, privately rented and social housing.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend any changes to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision. The Grant is received from NHS England for the sole purpose of providing adaptations for individuals.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this is not an urgent matter.
Council Plan	The provision of DFGs contribute to supporting the most vulnerable in the borough. In particular: • Providing care and support when needed • Working with people to build on their strengths to maximize their potential.
Efficiency	Adaptations enable people to remain independent in their homes for longer and therefore reduce the need for larger packages of support or admission to residential care.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Looked After Children or Care Leavers may also be eligible for a DFG.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

- The purpose of DFG is to fund adaptations to owner-occupiers, tenants of private rented properties and Housing Association tenants to enable people with a disability to remain in their own home and live independently across the Borough. Adaptations can include ramps, stair lifts and suitable heating systems. The DFG, which has run for more than 30 years, became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) in April 2015.
- DFG are national mandatory grants and are available to adults and children with a disability. The maximum grant payable is £30,000 per application and is subject to a statutory means test to determine if the individual is able to contribute to the cost of the

works. Following the approval of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025, means tests are only undertaken for ground floor extensions and garage conversions and continue not to apply to grant applications for disabled children.

8. Under the Councils' Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025 a further grant can also be awarded where significant alterations or extensions are required.
9. Durham County Council Home Improvement Agency is commissioned by Darlington Borough Council to provide support to individuals applying for a DFG. This service includes the completion of the grant application, the seeking of quotes for the necessary works, selection of a suitable contractor, oversight of the works up to completion and payment of the grant. The agency will also support individuals to source charitable funding where the client is required to make a contribution to the costs of the works but is unable to do so.

Financial Implications

10. For 2024-2025 the allocation made to Darlington Borough Council via the Better Care Fund is £1,159,844.
11. Members are required to formally release the monies available to the Council for DFG for 2024-25 as it is a capital resource.

Outcome of Consultation

12. Whilst no formal consultation has taken place with regard to the request to release the capital funding for the DFG to be awarded for 2024-25, consultation did take place in October and November 2022 as part of the development of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025. The release of the capital funding will enable DFG to continue to be made in accordance with the approved policy.

Equalities considerations

13. An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (**Appendix 1**) was carried out in relation to the introduction of the DFG and RRO Policy which was approved by members in 2023. The outcome of this screening was that the introduction of the RRO Policy will not have any adverse effects on people with the protected characteristics and officers did not identify any potential disadvantage to these groups. The policies provide additional support to eligible individuals in the form of grants/ reduced contributions and as such have a positive impact for all recipients.
14. Since the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025 was implemented, the amount of DFG carry forward in 2023-24 has reduced to £610,667.87. This is due to the revised policy being successful in broadening access to DFGs, as intended. The usage of DFGs and the amount of any carry forward going forwards will be kept under review.
15. As the funds which are requested to be released will be used in accordance with the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025, no further EIA is required.

Initial equality impact assessment screening form

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

Directorate:	People
Service Area:	Contracts, Commissioning and Brokerage
Activity being screened:	Updates to the current Disabled Facilities Grant Regulatory Reform Order Policies
Officer(s) carrying out the screening:	Lisa Holdsworth, Elaine Taylor, Sukhdev Dosanjh, Christine Thompson, Helen Watson, Geraldine Earley
What are you proposing to do?	Update the existing DFG and Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) Policies
Why are you proposing this? What are the desired outcomes?	To increase flexibility and maximise the use of the Disabled Facilities Grant
Does the activity involve a significant commitment or removal of resources? Please give details	There is an annual allocation of dedicated funding for Disabled Facilities Grants included within the Better Care Fund. Since 2017 this annual allocation of funding has increased, and a review of the existing DFG and Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) Policies is required to ensure that the use of the grant is maximised.

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

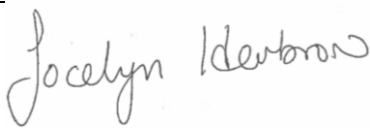
As part of this assessment, please consider the following questions:

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

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

Protected characteristic	Yes	No	Don't know/ Info not available
--------------------------	-----	----	--------------------------------

Age		x	
Disability		x	
Sex (gender)		x	
Race		x	
Sexual Orientation		x	
Religion or belief		x	
Gender reassignment		x	
Pregnancy or maternity		x	
Marriage or civil partnership		x	
Other			
Carer (unpaid family or friend)		x	
Low Income		x	
Rural Location		x	
Does the activity relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g. disabled people's access to public transport)? Please give details.		The updated policies will cover all areas of the Borough equally irrespective of known inequalities etc.	
Will the activity have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.		The activity will not have a significant effect on how other organisations operate. However, there is the potential that by broadening the Council's ability to provide individuals with adaptations to their homes, this may reduce or delay the needs for services commissioned from Adult Social Care.	
Decision (Please tick one option)	EIA not relevant or proportionate:	x	Continue to full EIA:
Reason for Decision		A full EIA is not required as the suggested amendments to the existing DFG and RRO Policies will not have any adverse effects on the above protected characteristics. The suggested updates seek to broaden access to support to eligible individuals, including: widening the support that can accessed via a DFG; waiving the existing means test in some instances to enable more equitable access to the same form of provision, eg stairlifts and also increasing the timeliness in which a DFG can be processed; raising the recovery threshold iro DFG funding. These changes will have a positive impact for all recipients and promote their independence. Feedback received during the consultation process from 25.10.22 – 28.11.22 identified positive impacts from the proposals made,	

	although it was queried what would happen if there was insufficient funding to implement all the proposals? This is not an issue at present, as historically there has been a growing cumulative underspend in the DFG budget with an average carry forward amount of £1,631,811 over the last 4 years and DFG funds can only be spent on items identified in the DFG/RRO policies. It is possible that a reduction in funding levels in the future could impact the range of support that could be offered. This will be kept under review and officers will continue to monitor for any potential negative impacts and, if required, will undertake a full EIA.
Signed (Assistant Director)	
Date	2 December 2022



Equality Impact Assessment Record Form

This form is to be used for recording the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Council activities. It should be used in conjunction with the guidance on carrying out EIA in **Annex 2** of the Equality Scheme. The activities that may be subject to EIA are set out in the guidance.

EIA is particularly important in supporting the Council to make fair decisions. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Using this form will help Council officers to carry out EIA in an effective and transparent way and provide decision-makers with full information on the potential impact of their decisions. EIAs are public documents, accompany reports going to Councillors for decisions and are published with committee papers on our website and are available in hard copy at the relevant meeting.

Title of activity:		
Name of Directorate and Service Area:		
Lead Officer and contact details		
Assistant Director accountable for this EIA		
Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:		

When did the EIA process start?		
--	--	--

Section 2 – The Activity and Supporting Information

Details of the activity (describe briefly - including the main purpose and aims) (e.g. are you starting a new service, changing how you do something, stopping doing something?)
Why is this being proposed? What are the aims? What does the Council hope to achieve by it? (e.g. to save money, meet increased demand, do things more efficiently)
What will change? What will be different for service users/ customers and/ or staff?
What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to the EIA?
Engagement and consultation (What engagement and consultation has been done regarding the proposal and what are the results? What consultation will be needed and how will it be done?)
What impact will this activity have on the Council's budget? (e.g. cost neutral, increased costs or reduced costs? If so, by how much? Explain briefly why this is the case)

Section 3: Assessment

How will the activity affect people with protected characteristics?	No Impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Why will it have this effect? (refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Age				
Disability (Mobility Impairment, Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Long Term Limiting Illness, Multiple Impairments, Other – Specify)				
Sex (Gender)				
Race				
Gender Reassignment				
Sexual Orientation				

Religion or belief				
Pregnancy or maternity				
Marriage or civil partnership				
How will the activity affect people who:	No impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Why will it have this effect? (Refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Live in a rural location?				
Are carers?				
Are on a low income?				

Section 4: Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative Impacts – will the activity affect anyone more because of a combination of protected characteristics? (e.g. older women or young gay men – state what you think the effect might be and why, providing evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)

Are there any other activities of which you are aware which might also impact on the same protected characteristics?

Section 5: Analysis

a) How will the activity help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?

b) How will the activity help to advance equality of opportunity?

c) How will the activity help to foster good relations?

During the engagement/ consultation process were there any suggestions on how to avoid, minimise or mitigate any negative impacts? If so, please give details.

Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

Officer Completing the Form:		
Signed	Name:	
	Date:	
	Job Title:	
Assistant Director:		
Signed	Name:	
	Date:	
	Service:	

Section 7 – Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers

Next Steps to address the anticipated impact (Select one of the following options and explain why this has been chosen – remember we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can access services and work for us)
a. No negative impact on people because of their Protected Characteristics and therefore no major change is needed to the activity (There is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact identified)
b. Negative impact identified – recommend continuing with the activity (Clearly specify the people affected and the impacts, and providing reasons and supporting evidence for the decision to continue. The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. Officers will advise to change the proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or the Council will achieve its aim in another way which will not make things worse for people. There must be compelling reasons for continuing with the proposal which will have the most adverse impacts.)
c. Negative impact identified - adjust the activity in light of the identified impact to avoid, minimise or mitigate the impact (The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. The Council will change the proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or it will achieve the aim in another way which will not make things worse for people)
d. Actual or potential unlawful discrimination – stop and remove the activity (The EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination. It should be stopped.)
Explanation of why the option above has been chosen (Including any advice given by legal services)

If the activity is to be implemented how will you find out how it is affecting people once it is in place? (How will you monitor and review the changes?)

Section 8 – Action Plan and Performance Management

List any actions you need to take which have been identified in this EIA, including post implementation reviews to find out how the outcomes have been achieved in practice and what impacts there have actually been on people with protected characteristics

What is the negative impact?	Actions required to reduce/eliminate the negative impact (if applicable)	Who will lead on action	Target completion date

Performance Management	
Date of the next review of the EIA	
How often will the EIA action plan be reviewed?	
Who will carry out this review?	

CABINET
16 JULY 2024

COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2023: QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader and all Cabinet Members

Responsible Director - Chief Officers Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an overview of performance to the end of the last two quarters of financial year 2023/24.

Summary

2. This is the final report linked to the Council Plan 2020-2023. The report appended to this paper outlines council performance up to the end of quarter four of financial year 2023/24, with this covering report highlighting key issues and successes.
3. A new Council Plan for the period 2024-2027 is to be considered by Council in July 2024. It proposes long term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for the Council, with a focus on addressing inequalities, climate change and efficient use of resources. A performance report will be presented to Cabinet on a six-monthly basis to report progress on a new set of deliverables.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Cabinet consider delivery against performance measures as set out in the performance report in the **Appendix**.

Reason

5. The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the progress in implementing the priorities outlined in the Council Plan 2020-23.

Chief Officers Executive

Background Papers

The Council Plan 2020-2023 – Delivering Success for Darlington.

Lynne Davies : Extension 5070

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

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. This report highlights the current position on key measures for the 2020-2023 Council Plan. Each indicator has been updated with the latest information available at the end of quarter 4 of financial year 2023/24, and the information has been analysed. In some cases the data is collected externally and has not yet been updated so the analysis remains the same as the previous report. The Appendix contains the detail for each indicator.
7. As reported in January 2024, it continues to be a challenging time for residents, communities and businesses with sustained rises in the costs of living affecting everyone, and the greatest impacts on those with the lowest income. This continues to lead to increases in demand for Council services, more complex needs and pressures on workforce and budgets, in particular for the Childrens and Adults services.
8. The performance report highlights positive news:
 - (a) The economy continues to show signs of recovery and growth:
 - (i) The number of people employed (including self-employed) is 53,000 - an increase of 2,000 on the same time 12 months previously.
 - (ii) Unemployment as measured by the claimant count has levelled off at 4.2% for the working age population, this is lower than the North East average at 7.3%.
 - (iii) Darlington hosted major events including Darlington Jobs Fair and STEMfest and progress to develop key economic sites to be investor ready continues to be strong.
 - (b) Tax and rate collection remains high:
 - (i) The percentage of Business Rates collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 99.97% of Business Rates collected, compared to 99.79% in quarter 4 of 2022-23.
 - (ii) The percentage of Council Tax collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 96.39% of Council Tax collected in 2023-24, the highest since 2010/11. This is an increase in collection, compared to 2022-23, which was 96.09%.
 - (c) 89.2% of inspected mainstream schools in Darlington are judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. The annual increase in Ofsted rating was 9.99%.
 - (d) There has been a reduction of children in our care (looked after children) of 6.8% compared to the end of March 2023, with 300 children in our care. This is an improvement from Q1 and Q2 where levels were at their highest peak since measurement of this indicator began.
 - (e) Work continues to keep the borough clean and safe:

- (i) The cleanliness of the Borough in relation to litter identified by the land audit management system has seen an improvement over the last year.
 - (ii) The number of people slightly injured in road traffic collisions has fell significantly when compared to the long-term trend and partnership working to reduce fatal and serious continues to try and drive down these incidents down further.
 - (f) The number of volunteering hours delivered by the corporate membership of Darlington Cares has increased by 50.9% from 6,776 in 2022/23 to 10,277 in 2023/2024.
9. Key challenges highlighted by the report:
- (a) The Council, like all other local authorities, is facing unavoidable financial pressures driven by insufficient funding, rising costs, and increasing demand for services, particularly in adult's and children's social care which accounts for two-thirds of our budget. Following a public consultation the MTFP for 2024-2028 was approved by Council in February 2024, providing a balanced budget until 2025/26.
 - (b) The number of people presenting to the Council's homeless service remains high at 1,393. However, the number of presentations to the Housing Options Service has reduced by 31.9% compared with the previous year. Additional staffing, funded through The Rough Sleeper Initiative, for the Housing Options Team, has enabled a dedicated rough sleeper co-ordinator, navigator, and outreach worker, to be embedded within the team, delivering effective early intervention and prevention.
 - (c) There continues to be an increase in the number of adults and older people (aged 65+) admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care. Capacity in the market continues to be a challenge and the Council is working to address this issue.
 - (d) There has been a drop in housing delivery this year primarily due to the impact of the nutrient neutrality designation affecting the whole of the Tees Valley catchment. Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England Nutrient Neutrality credits scheme which has helped to unlock around 2000 homes.
 - (e) The vibrancy of the High Street is an ongoing concern for all towns and cities. The Town Centre average monthly footfall for 2023/24 has fallen 5.5% to 237,731 from 286,938 (2022/23). Footfall levels vary year on year depending on factors including rising inflation and the cost of living. Investment from the Towns Fund is ongoing to support the High Street, a comprehensive programme of 59 events and animation programmes were delivered throughout the year to attract people to the borough. The Council was also awarded Purple Flag accreditation in January 2024.
10. The data also highlights long term challenges that have not changed since the previous report, for example the public health indicators on healthy life expectancy. The healthy life expectancy for Darlington females and males at birth is lower than their national averages, and the latest data for 2020 shows inequality in life expectancy at birth for males

and females has widened compared to previous years. Work is underway to better understand the causes of this as part of the work with partners to develop a new Health and Wellbeing strategy for the Borough.

The Council Plan 2024-2027

11. Work continues on the development of the new Council Plan which has been out to public consultation and will be presented to Cabinet in July for consideration and approval. It will set out a long-term vision for Darlington and focus on addressing inequalities, climate change and resource efficiency; and key deliverables for action within the reporting period of the Council Plan.
12. It is intended that a performance report will be presented to Cabinet on a six-monthly basis to report progress on a new set of deliverables.

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Darlington Borough Council

Council Plan Performance Management Report

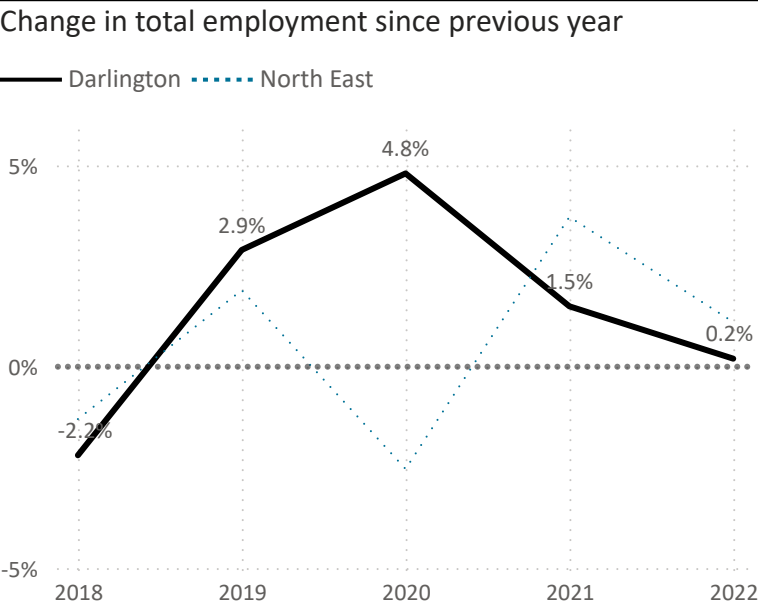
2023/24 Quarter 4

This report outlines council performance up to the end of the second quarter of the 2023/24 financial year.

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

- A high-level update on progress towards the overarching corporate priorities outlined in the beginning of the Council Plan document to highlight areas of strategic significance:
 - Growing Darlington's Economy (pages [2-14](#))
 - Maximising the Potential of our Young People (pages [15-17](#))
 - Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential (pages [18-19](#))
 - Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough (pages [20-22](#))
 - Supported by a Dedicated Workforce (page [23](#))
- Sections on each Cabinet portfolio area highlighting progress against key actions and relevant key performance indicators:
 - Adults (pages [24-26](#))
 - Children and Young People (pages [27-33](#))
 - Economy (pages [34-36](#))
 - Health and Housing (pages [37-42](#))
 - Local Services (pages [43-45](#))
 - Resources (pages [46-49](#))
 - Stronger Communities (pages [50-54](#))

1.1 Delivering - More sustainable well-paid jobs



This measure shows the difference in total employment (both Public and Private) compared to the same point 12 months previously, in order to show the number of jobs created in Darlington within the last year. The number of new employment opportunities shows a slight increase in 2022, although at a slower rate than the regional rate. Over the last three years, the rate of growth in total employment has decreased, and it now stands at 0.2% in Darlington.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

Number of people employed including self-employed

Year	Month	Darlington
2021	June	49,800
	September	49,400
	December	50,100
2022	March	50,200
	June	49,800
	September	50,500
2022	December	51,000
	March	52,300
	June	53,600
2023	September	54,100
	December	53,000

The number of people employed (including self-employed) now stands at 53,000. This is an increase of 2,000 on the same time 12 months previously. The overall trendline demonstrates a gradual increase, as the economy continues to recover and grow from the challenges of the pandemic. Since March 2022, the number of people employed has increased, showing a 6.4% growth. This demonstrates a significant growth in the number of employees and self-employed.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

Number of employees

Year	Month	Darlington
2021	September	44,200
	December	44,900
2022	March	45,200
	June	44,800
	September	44,700
2022	December	45,700
	March	46,000
	June	47,200
2023	September	49,100
	December	47,500

In December 2023, the number of employees in Darlington stood at 47,500, slightly down on the September 2023 figure of 49,100. The number of employees measure does fluctuate significantly quarter on quarter, but the long-term trendline shows the number of employees in Darlington continuing to increase year on year. Between December 2022 and December 2023, the number of employees recorded in Darlington increased by 4%, equating to an additional 1,800 employees.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

1.1 Delivering - More sustainable well-paid jobs

Median weekly all residence based earnings

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2015	402	429	395
2016	437	442	405
2017	416	454	416
2018	415	466	420
2019	440	483	438
2020	428	484	439
2021	502	510	464
2022	480	537	490
2023	531	577	528

Darlington resident median weekly earnings increased by 10.6% to £531 in 2023. This annual increase was greater than both the North East figure (7.7%) and the England figure (7.5%). The weekly median all residence based earnings is now £46 less than the England level and £3 more than the north east level. The long term trend projection for Darlington shows gradual increases.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

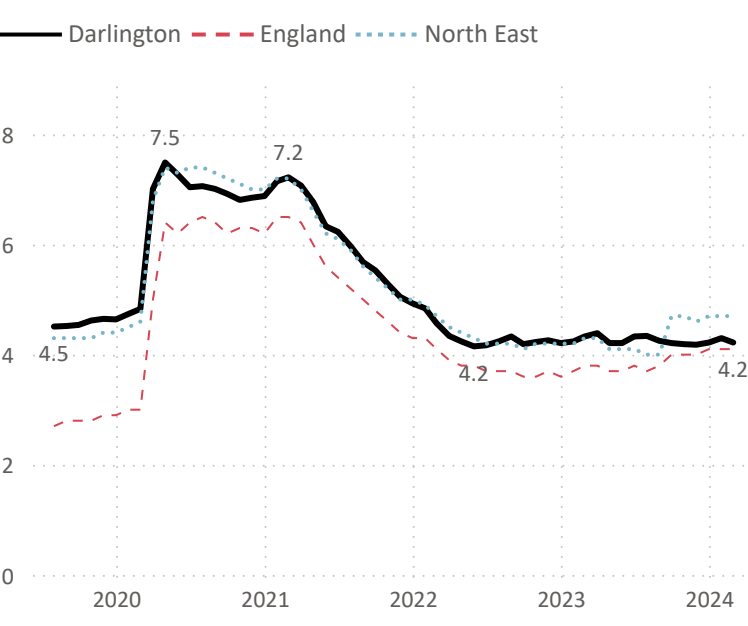
Median weekly full-time employee based earnings

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2015	437	429	395
2016	435	442	403
2017	423	451	417
2018	433	466	418
2019	454	483	438
2020	435	485	436
2021	459	510	459
2022	491	537	481
2023	538	577	519

The Darlington full-time employee weekly based earnings increased between 2022 and 2023 from £491 to £538. This increase of £47 (9.6%) was higher than both the England rate of 7.4% and the North East rate of 7.9%. This has closed the gap between Darlington full-time employee weekly based earnings (£538) and England full-time employee weekly based earnings (£577). In addition, Darlington is now increasing the gap with the North East rate (£519).

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

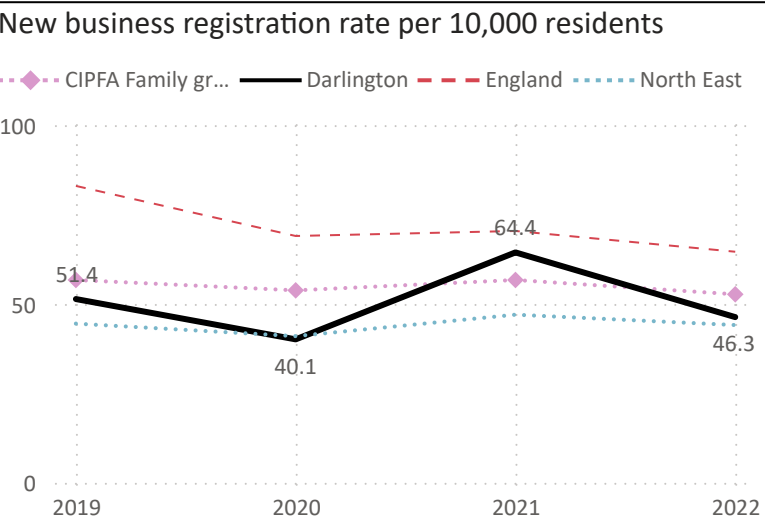
Monthly unemployed claimant count (%)



Since mid-2022 to date, the monthly unemployed claimant count in Darlington has remained relatively static - a trend which is mirrored in national statistics. The claimant count in March 2024 now stands at 4.2% (identical to July 2022). The rate in Darlington (4.2) is marginally higher than the England rate of 4.1%. The overall North East rate however is now at 4.7%, having increased from 4.2% since July 2022.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

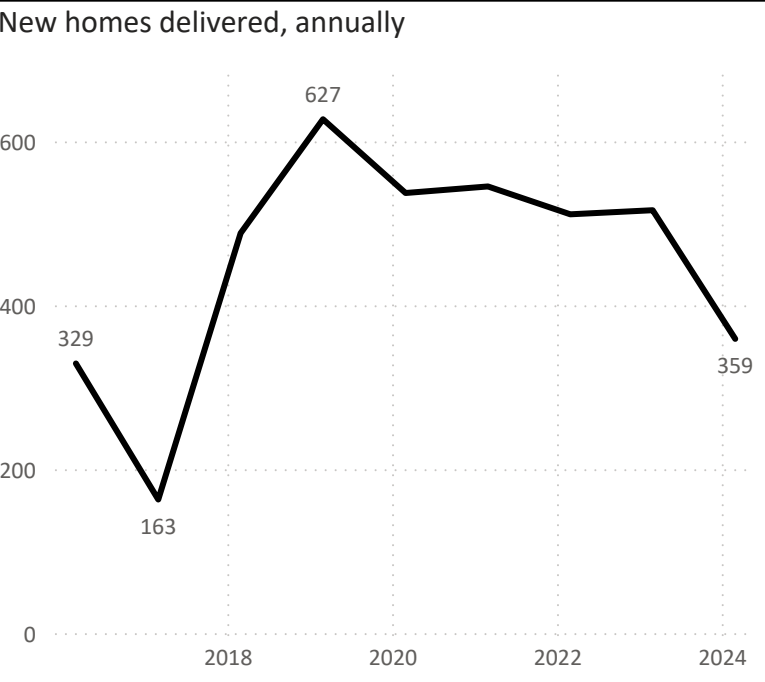
1.2 Delivering - More businesses



New business formation rates have fallen in Darlington since 2018, an overall trend mirrored by both the rates for the North east and England. The data shows figures up to 2022 and are significantly impacted by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, the number of new business registrations per 10,000 residents in Darlington was 46.3, significantly lower than the England rate of 64.6

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

1.3 Delivering - More homes



Housing delivery has seen a drop in the 2023/24 financial year largely due to the delayed 'lag' effect as a result of the Nutrient Neutrality designation affecting the whole Tees Catchment.

Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England Nutrient Neutrality credits scheme. The borough has fared well in the proportion of credits allocated to developments in Darlington helping to unlock around 2000 homes.

Looking at the latest monitoring data on housing starts this lag in delivery may continue for the current financial year 2024/25 but will hopefully recover beyond that with the permissions currently being granted likely to have started building out.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Percentage of complaints about refuse on private land investigated and completed within 42 days (except where there is non-compliance with enforcement action taken)

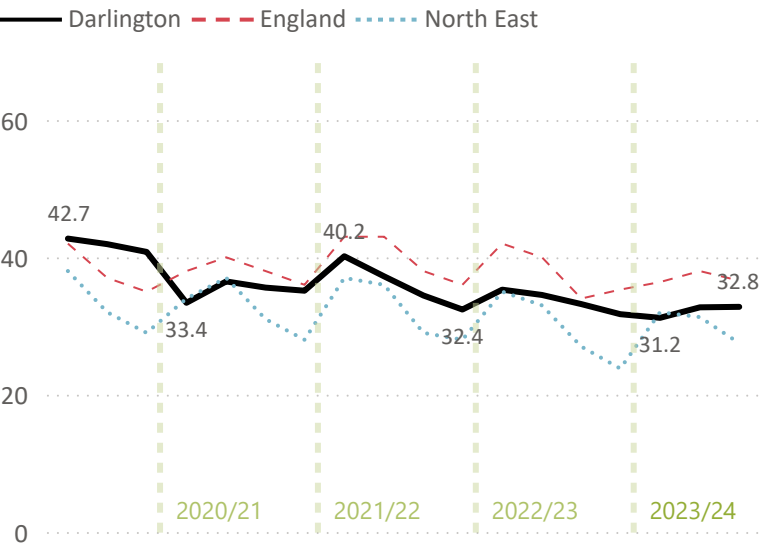
Year	Month	Darlington
2022	June	91.8%
	September	89.9%
	December	91.3%
2023	March	89.8%
	June	94.7%
	September	95.8%
	December	95.4%
2024	March	95.4%

The majority of complaints relate to refuse accumulations in the rear yard and gardens of domestic properties and performance consistently achieves the target. Priority is given by Environmental Health to large accumulations of household refuse that is causing a public health nuisance and attracting rats. The Council has successfully prosecuted a number of individuals who did not comply with legal notices to remove refuse accumulations.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

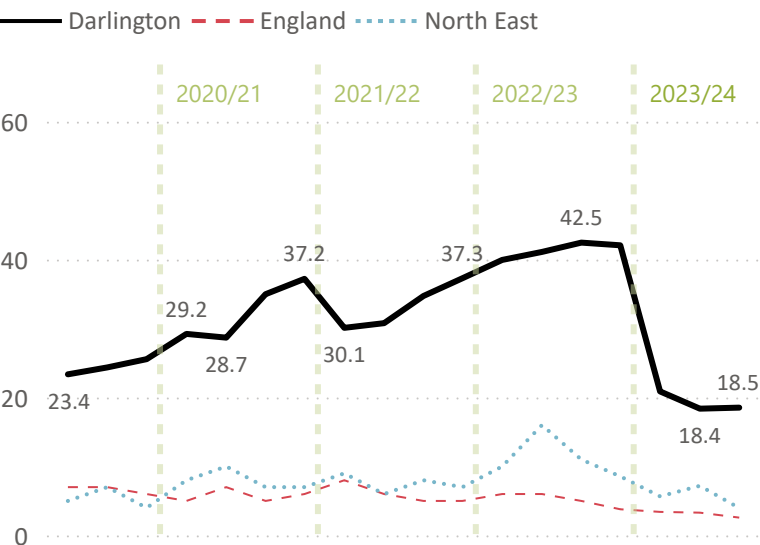
Percentage of household waste that is collected that is either reused, recycled or composted



The data is only up to the end of December 2023 due to lag in verification through the national reporting system. While the amount of waste that is recycled, composted or reused has fallen in recent years, the Council's performance is currently above the North East average. Work continues to be undertaken by Street Scene and communication teams to increase recycling and reduce contamination, and staff are working with the new waste contractor to maximise the amount of material that is recovered from residual waste and sent for recycling.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

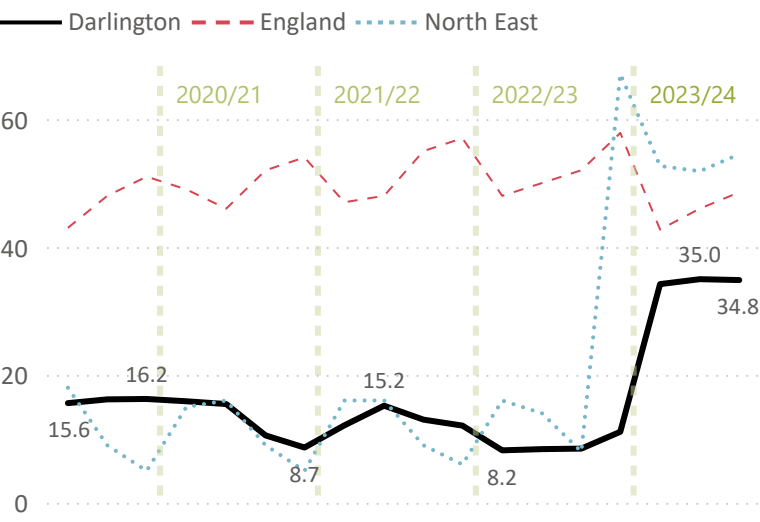
Percentage of overall waste that is collected by the Council that is landfilled



Data is only available up to December 2023 due to the lag in data verification through the national system. The percentage of household waste sent to landfill has fallen significantly in to its lowest level in recent years to only 18.5%. This is as a result of more waste being sent to energy recovery, which is higher up the waste hierarchy, causing less environmental impact than landfill. DBC is above the North East average for landfill, as the majority of other North East Councils have primary contracts with energy recovery facilities.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

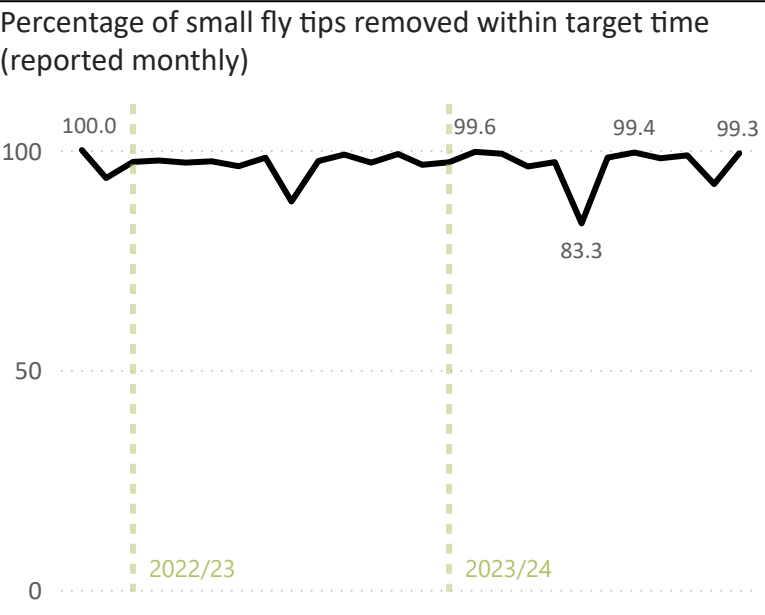
Percentage of overall waste that is collected by the Council that is used for energy recovery



Data is only available up to December 2023 due to the lag in the national verification process. The percentage of household waste sent to energy recovery is significantly up at 35%. The increase is as a result of available markets to accept the material from the Mechanical Biological Treatment process at affordable cost. Ultimately, the more waste after recycling that is sent to energy recovery reduces the amount of waste landfilled. Darlington Borough Council is below the North East average, as in most cases their primary contract is through energy recovery facilities.

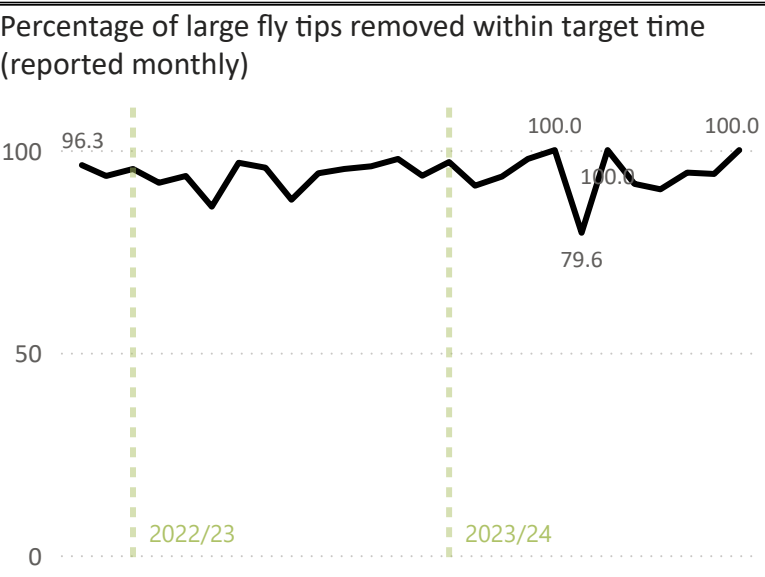
Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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



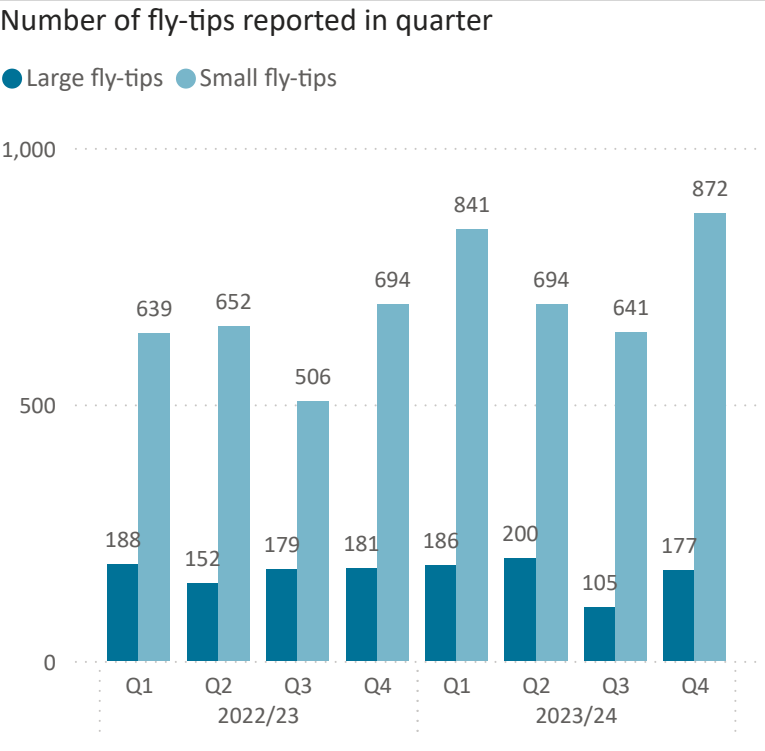
The number of small fly tips reported over the year increased by 557 to 3,048 when compared to 2022/23. The performance of street cleansing teams remains consistently high with the average for 2023/24 of 96.6% of small fly tips removed within their target time, with the majority being collected in under 5 days with a significant number in under 2 days. The reduction in performance in September was as a result of limited resources across the service to inspect and collect fly tips.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services



The number of large fly tips reported over the year fell slightly by 32 to 668 when compared to 2022/23. The performance of street cleansing teams remains consistently high with the average for 2023/24 of 94.2% of large fly tips removed within their target time, larger incidents take longer due to the complexity of the items (e.g. asbestos) that require significant resources. The reduction in performance in September was as a result of limited resources across the service to inspect and collect fly tips.

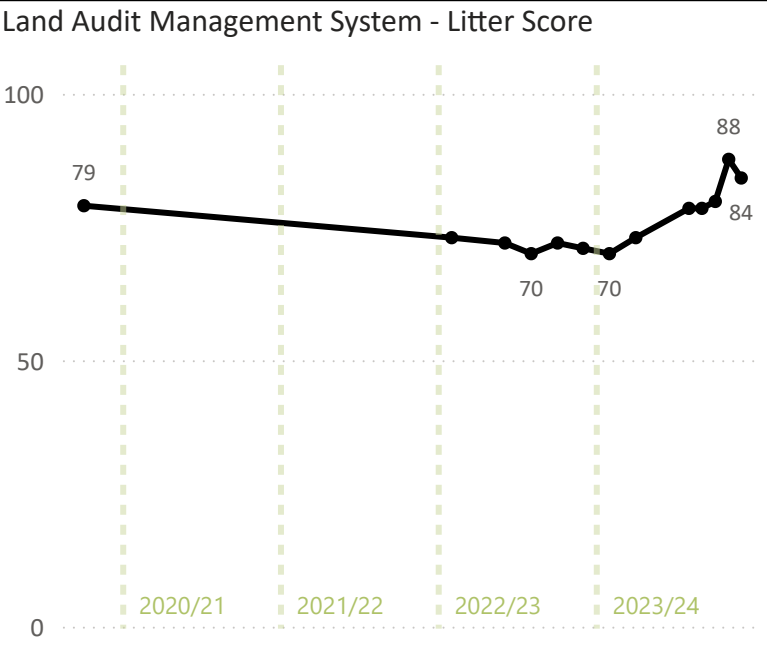
Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services



Number of small fly tips rose in all quarters of 2023/24 when compared to 2022/23. Quarter 1 (Q1) by 202, Q2 by 42, Q3 by 135, and Q4 by 178. On average 96.6% of small fly tips were collected within target of 5 days. Number of large fly tips has fallen in three of the quarters during 2023/24 when compared to 2022/23. Q1 fell by 2, Q2 rose by 202, Q3 fell by 74 and Q4 fell by 4. On average 94.2% of large fly tips were collected within target. A longer time can be required due to the complexity of the collection and requirement for special resources (e.g. asbestos). Increased fly-tipping is due to additional reporting of side waste (classed as fly-tipping) by both Enforcement Officers and Fire Service. Overall, 95.4% are being removed within the time scales irrespective of numbers. Hence, the additional crew afforded to clearing rear lanes is working to keep them clean & tidy.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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



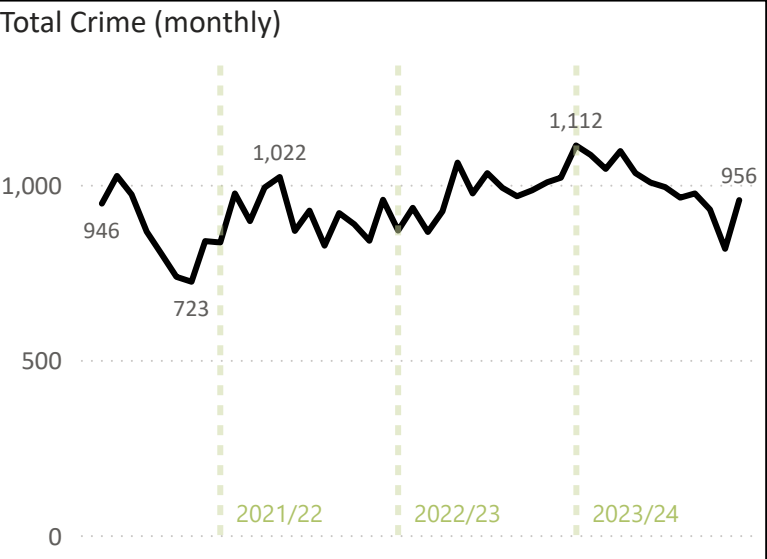
This is a rolling average percentage score of the 40 transects inspected for litter every other month, as defined by the Association For Public Service Excellence Land Audit Management System grading system and covering all wards of the borough.

Refresher training on the grading of cleanliness for inspection staff has taken place over the past year. It has improved the inspection process, resulting in more accurate measurements.

An average of 82 has been recorded over the last five inspections since November 2023. Street Scene has continued to assist with the Civic Enforcement back lane project which incorporates litter picking of the front street as well as the back lane.

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

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

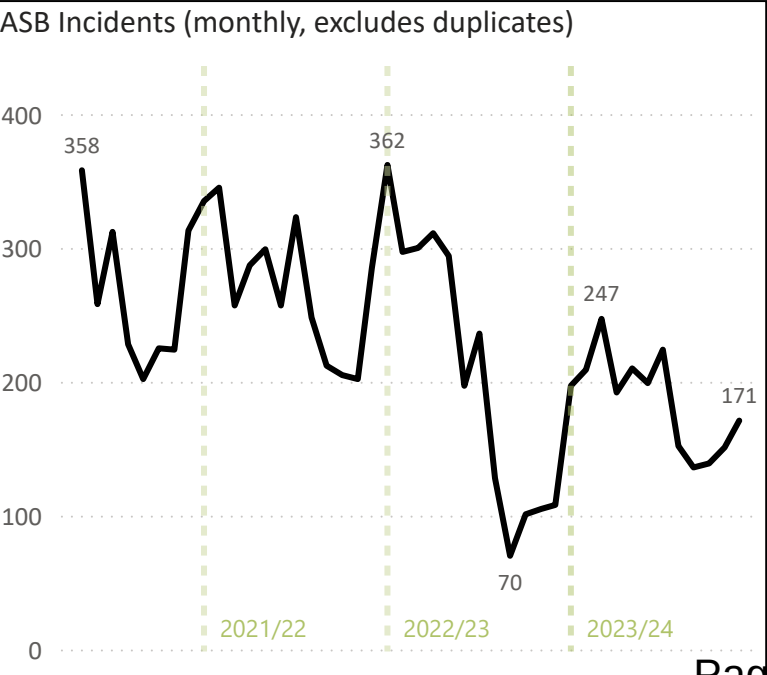


During the 12-month period ending quarter 4 (2023/24) there has been an overall 4% increase in crime when compared with 2022/23.

The crime increase equates to 416 offences, with vehicle crime (82% increase), theft (40% increase), theft of pedal cycle (20% increase) and shoplifting (89% increase) showing notable increases.

The Police, together with partners have responded to the increase through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in the region of 2,500 arrest throughout the year.

[Dave Winstanley: Group Director of Services](#)



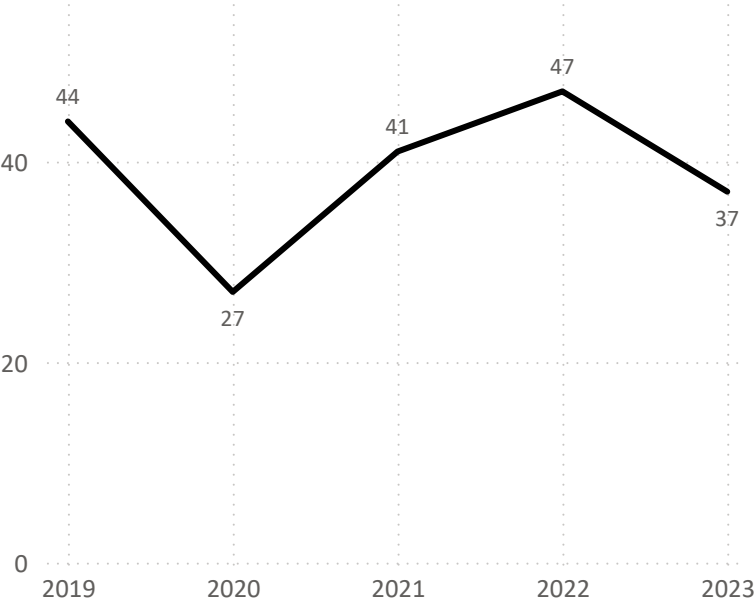
The number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents, 2,246 in 2023/24, has dropped by 263 (10.5%) from that reported for 2022/23. A combination of changed reporting requirements, good partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington has aided this reduction of reports.

Areas showing a current increase include Cockerton East and Haughton North. Partners have increased patrols, targeted offenders and identified individuals who are now subject of further investigation. During this period 48 first warnings, 35 acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA), 13 breach of ABA's and 7 final warnings have been completed. In addition, no further action was taken in 14 cases and 5 young people progressed to criminal proceedings.

[Dave Winstanley: Group Director of Services](#)

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

Number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents (annual)



This is an annual indicator based on the 2023-24 calendar year. The data is collected through Durham Police via the Stats 19 reporting system.

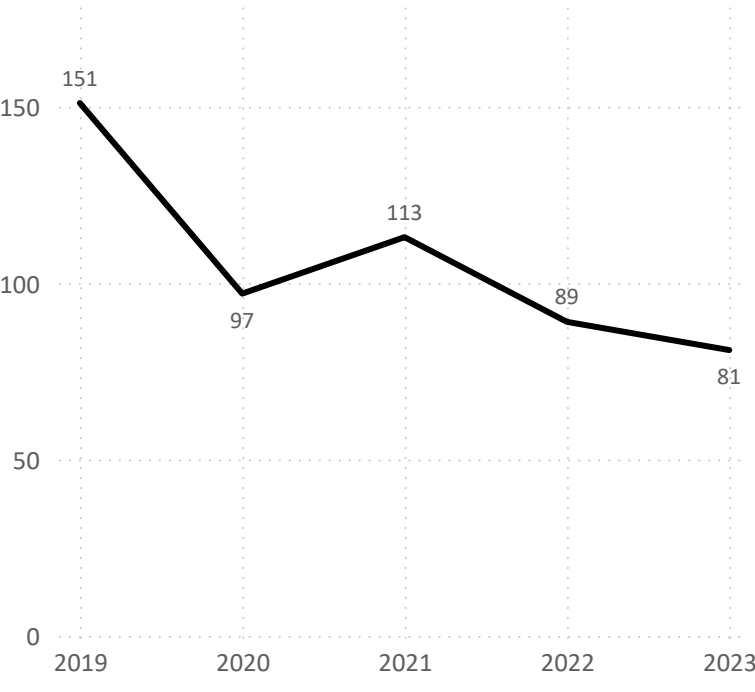
Figures for 2023 show a decrease over 2022 although an increase over 2020-21. However, 2020-21 is a statistical outlier due to the impact of Covid-19 on traffic levels (15% of normal traffic levels at its lowest). Since 2020 traffic levels have recovered to similar volumes to that recorded in 2019 prior to Covid-19.

Figures for 2023 show a decrease based on pre-pandemic traffic data and volumes.

Of the 37 Killed or seriously injured on our roads in 2023, there were 3 fatalities.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

Number of people slightly injured in road traffic accidents (annual)



This is an annual indicator based on the 2023-24 calendar year. The data is collected through Durham Police via the Stats 19 reporting system.

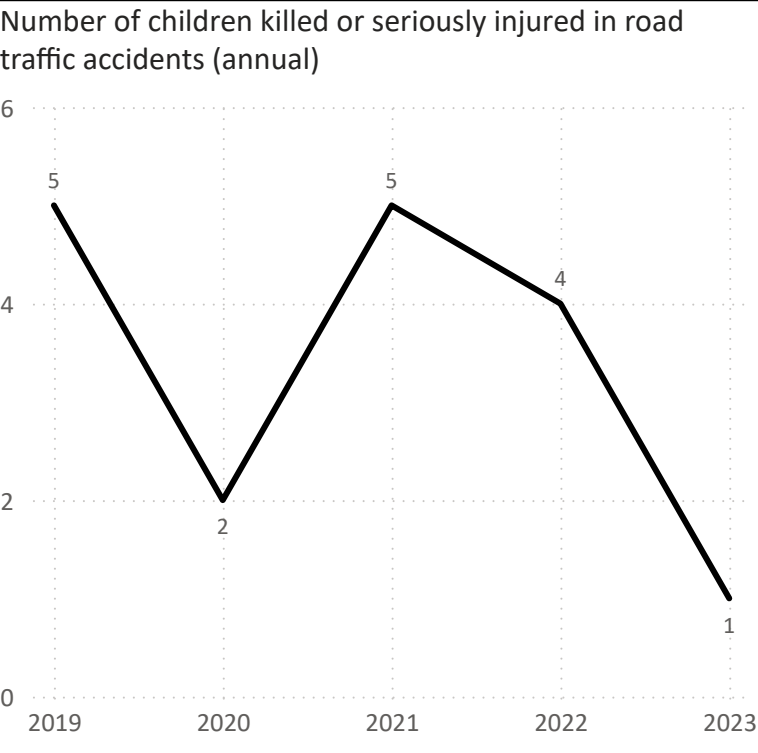
Data for 2023 shows a decrease over 2020-22 despite traffic volumes recovering to similar levels to that recorded in 2019 prior to Covid-19 showing a downward trend since the pandemic.

Based on the years prior to Covid-19, we are still seeing a substantial reduction with accidents halving, and this level is significantly below the baseline.

We continue to invest in road safety education and through our Local Transport Plan, we continue to invest in speed management and casualty reduction schemes.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

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



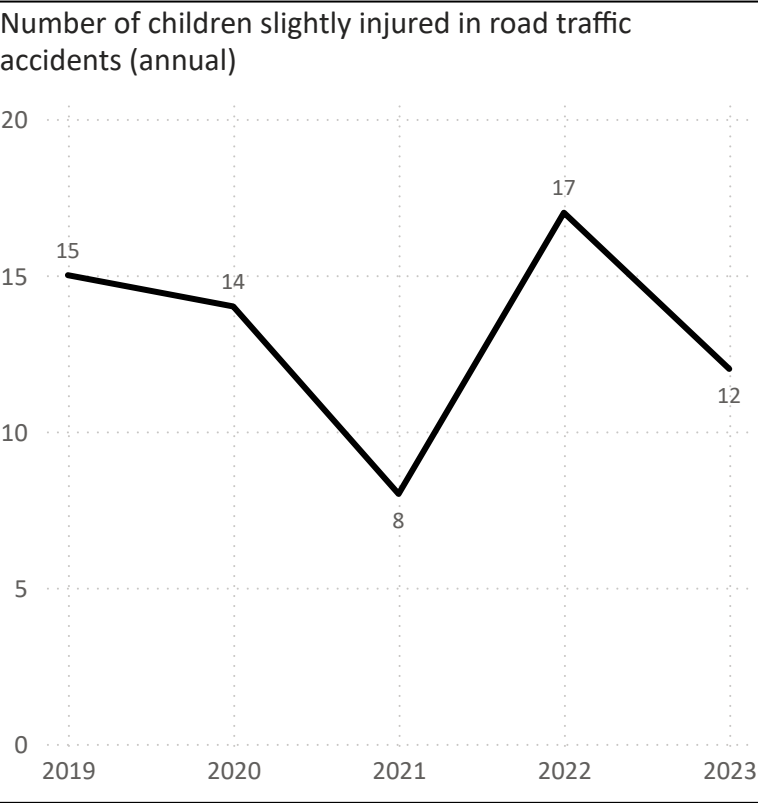
This is an annual indicator based on the 2023-24 calendar year. The data is collected through Durham Police via the Stats 19 reporting system.

Data for 2023 shows a decrease over 2022 despite traffic volumes recovering to similar levels to that recorded in 2019 prior to Covid-19.

Based on the years prior to Covid-19, we are at a lower level which falls below the baseline. There have been no child fatalities since 2013.

Through our Local Transport Plan, we continue to invest in speed management and casualty reduction schemes..

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj



This is an annual indicator based on the 2023-24 calendar year.

Data for 2023 shows decrease over 2021-22 which appears to follow the downward trend before the 2019-20 Covid-19 pandemic. At 12, this is now below the baseline. It should be noted that the long term trend shows significant reductions from the 45 child slight casualties recorded in 2012.

2020-21 is a statistical outlier due to the impact of Covid-19 on traffic levels (15% of normal traffic levels at its lowest). Since 2020 traffic levels have recovered to similar volumes to that recorded in 2019.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

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

Male healthy life expectancy at birth

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2015	61.8	63.4	59.6
2016	61.1	63.3	59.6
2017	60.7	63.4	59.5
2018	60.3	63.4	59.4
2019	58.1	63.4	59.4
2020	59.5	63.1	59.1

The latest data, for 2018-20, shows Darlington’s value of 59.5 years is statistically similar to the North East average of 59.1 years, but statistically worse than the England average of 63.1 years, and fell at a faster rate than elsewhere since 2015-17. This indicator is considered an important summary measure of mortality and morbidity, by showing the years a person can expect to live in good health, rather than with a disability or in poor health. The measure is calculated using contemporary mortality rates and the prevalence of self-reported good health in local areas.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

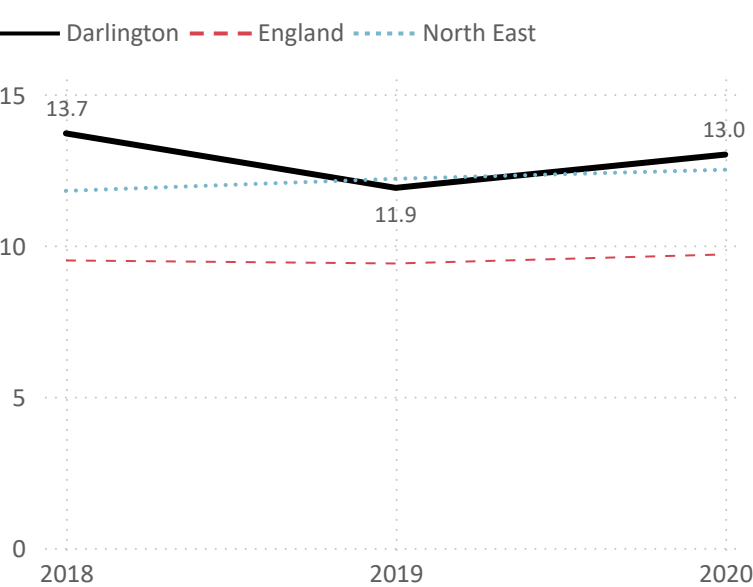
Female healthy life expectancy at birth

Year	Darlington	England	North East
2015	61.4	64.1	60.1
2016	63.4	63.8	60.5
2017	64.3	63.8	60.4
2018	63.3	63.9	59.7
2019	62.2	63.5	59.0
2020	60.6	63.9	59.7

The latest data, for 2018-20, shows Darlington’s value of 60.6 years is statistically similar to the North East average of 59.7 years, but statistically worse than the England average of 63.9 years, and falling at a faster rate than elsewhere. This indicator is considered an important summary measure of mortality and morbidity, by showing the years a person can expect to live in good health, rather than with a disability or in poor health. The measure is calculated using contemporary mortality rates and the prevalence of self-reported good health in local areas.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Inequality in life expectancy at birth (male)

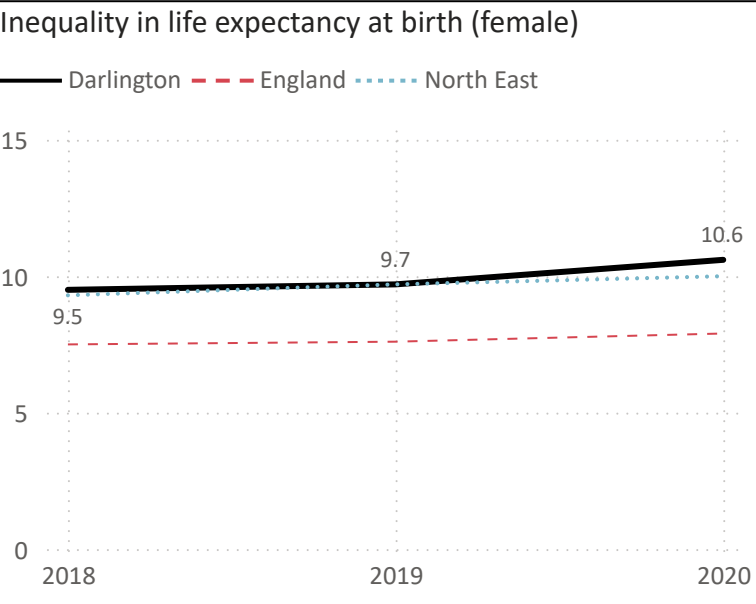


Inequality in life expectancy at birth for males in Darlington has widened in 2020, from 11.9 (2019) to 13.0 years, and is worse than England. Compared to the North East region Darlington is statistically similar to with the North East average.

Life expectancy at birth is a measure of the average number of years a person would expect to live based on contemporary mortality rates. This graph shows that a baby boy born in the most deprived area on average can expect to live 13 years less than a boy born into the least deprived area of Darlington. For England this would be a difference of 9.7 years.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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

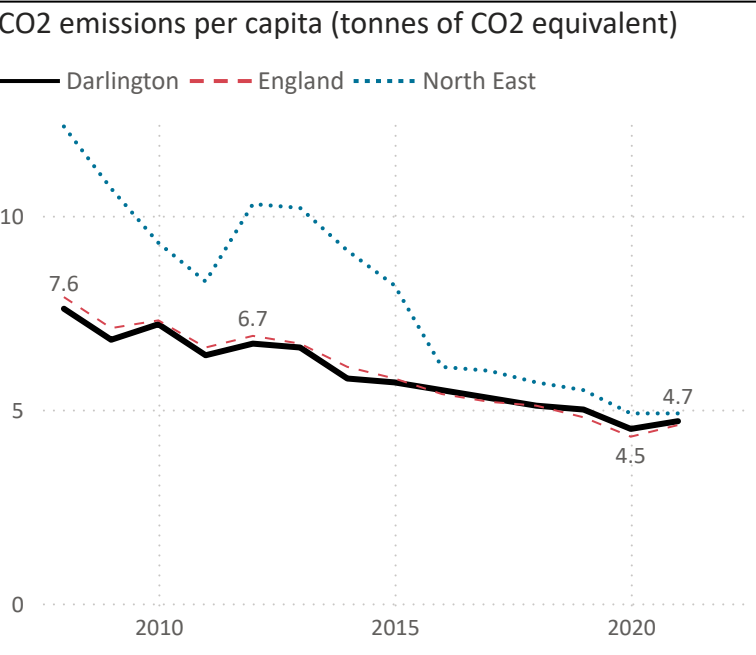


Inequality in life expectancy at birth for females in Darlington widened in 2020, from 9.7 (2019) to 10.6 years, and is statistically worse than England. Compared to the North East region Darlington is statistically similar to the North East average.

Life expectancy at birth is a measure of the average number of years a person would expect to live based on contemporary mortality rates. This graph shows that a baby girl born in the most deprived area on average can expect to live 10.6 years less than a girl born into the least deprived area of Darlington. For England this would be a difference of 7.9 years.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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



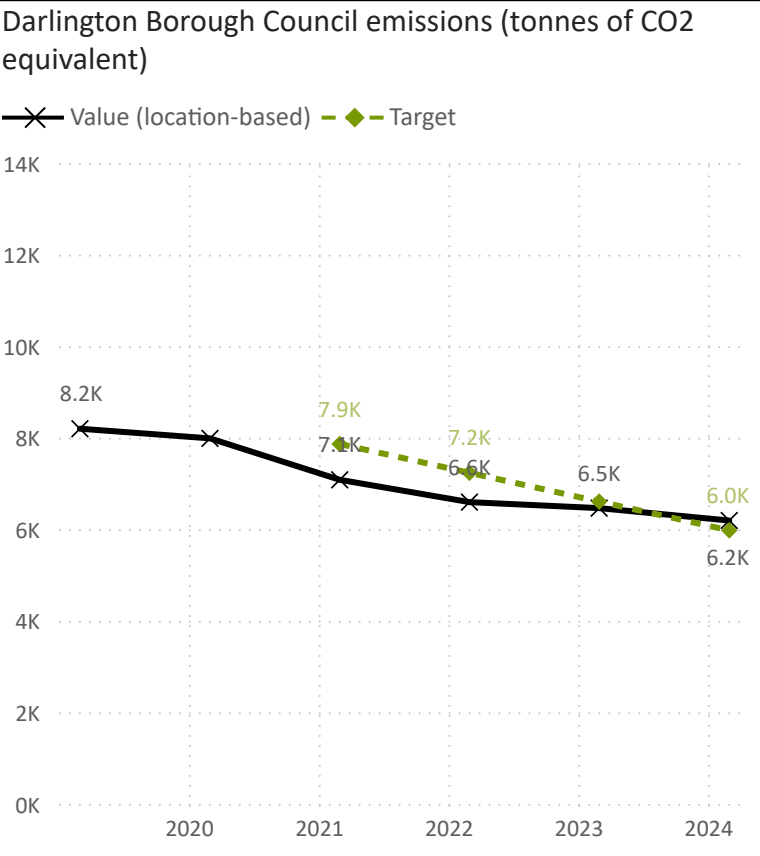
Data for this indicator is published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, two years in arrears. Therefore the latest data is for 2021 and shows a slight upturn in emissions as we started to emerge from COVID lockdowns.

In 2023, Council amended the date for the Council becoming carbon neutral to 2040 and added more emphasis on our role as an influencer.

With this in mind, we are developing actions to work with young people; promoting good practice to local businesses; holding quarterly events at the libraries and encouraging sustainable behaviours at our events and visitor attractions.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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



The overall carbon emissions for the council continue to fall. The year 2023/24 sees us at 6,190 tonnes. This is a 60% decrease from our baseline at 2010/11. We continue to take actions to improve the energy efficiency of our buildings and we have been trialling different methods to reduce emissions from our corporate fleet. This includes increasing the number of electric vehicles and using low carbon fuel to replace diesel in some of our refuse vehicles.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Several large scale planning applications have been approved in the last quarter of 2023/24. Burtree Garden Village was approved in May it is anticipated that the spine road which will connect the north and south of the garden village will commence in October 2024. Prior to this planning decision both Coniscliffe Park and Blackwell Grange were approved with the latter contributing to large scale improvements to Blackwell Country Park.

As a requirement of the Local Plan the developers of Skerningham Garden Village carried out consultation and engagement on the comprehensive masterplan for the area. This has been shared with the Council and officers are reviewing the document to ensure it is compliant with Policy H10 of the Local Plan and the Design Code SPD.

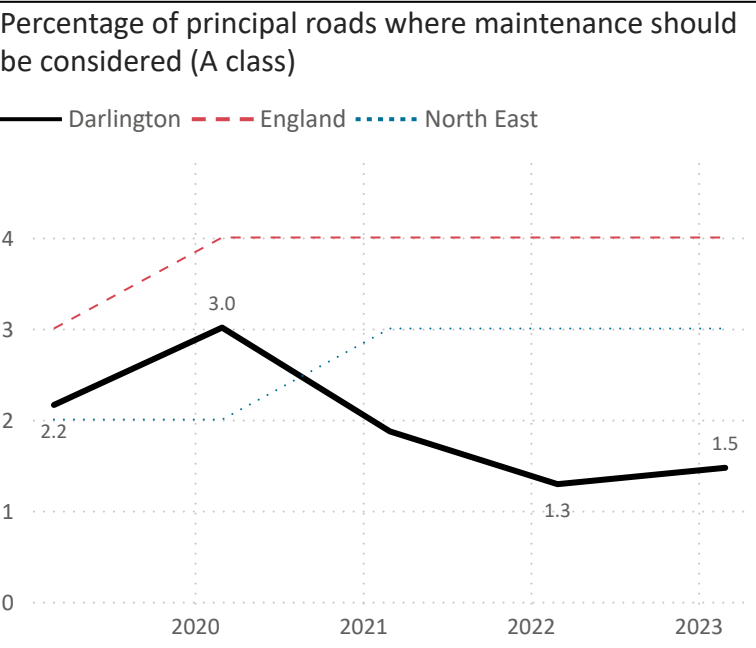
Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

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

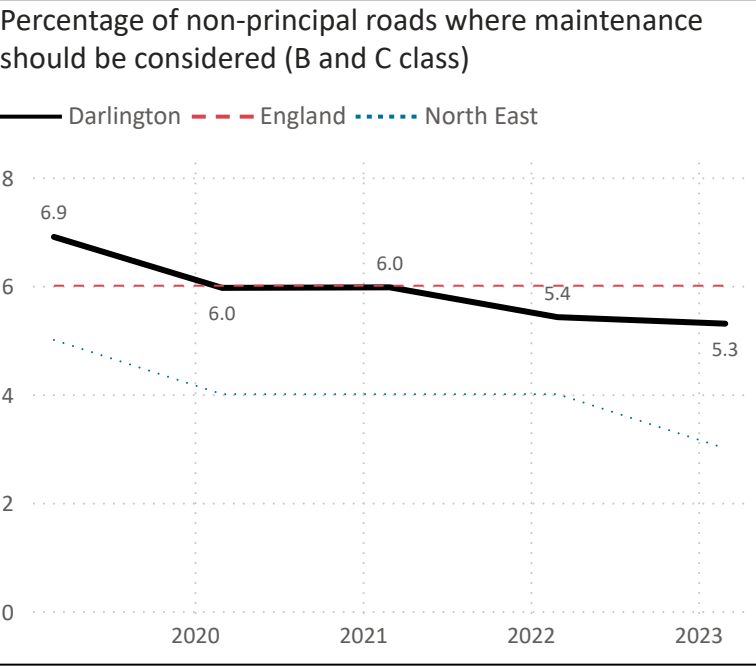
We participate in the National Highways Transportation Survey each year, and the results of this, along with evidence from investigations, statutory testing and surveys, asset management planning, other data sources and Government and local policies inform our investment decisions in our transport infrastructure.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj



The method used to establish the maintenance needs of the highway network has changed from an automated survey using a SCANNER vehicle to a visual Annual Engineering Inspection. The survey provides the Highway Asset Management with treatment selection information to assist with the planning of five-year highways maintenance schemes. The 2023/24 inspection figure is 7.2% of principal roads needing consideration for maintenance. Due to the change in method, this data is not comparable with previous years. Over the past year maintenance was carried out at the following two A Road schemes, Feethams Roundabout and Merrybent, a total road length of 0.6km.

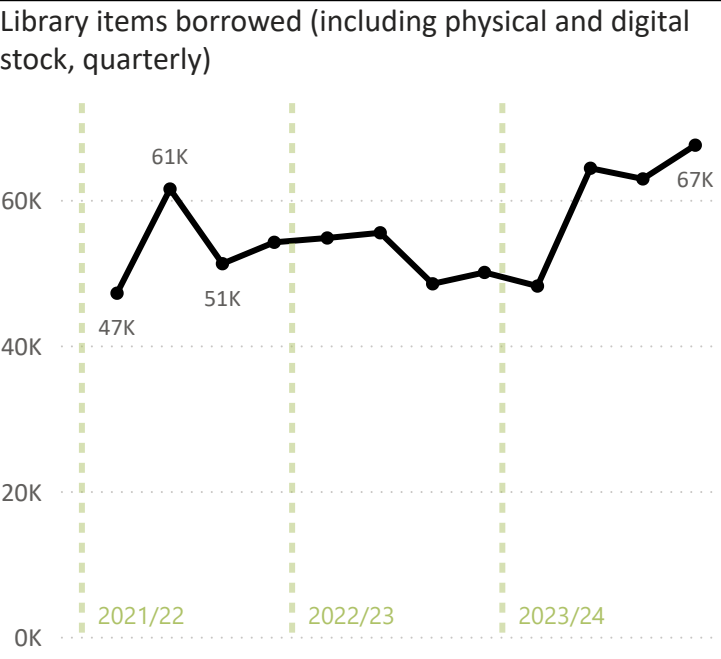
Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj



The method used to establish the maintenance needs of the highway network has changed from an automated survey using a SCANNER vehicle to a visual Annual Engineering Inspection. The survey provides the Highway Asset Management with treatment selection information to assist with the planning of five-year highways maintenance schemes. The 2023/24 inspection figure is 4.7% of non-principal roads needing consideration for maintenance. Over the past year maintenance was carried out on six B & C Road schemes, giving a total road length of 2.3km.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

1.10 Whilst - Valuing our heritage and culture



Darlington Library reopened in September 2023 and the increase in borrowed items has been very positive. The figure for July to September was 64,331, a 33.6% rise from the 48,149 for April to June. The higher level of item borrowing remained for the rest of the year.

The total number of items borrowed for the year was 242,843, a 16.4% rise from 208,702 in 2022/23. Figures include physical books, audio books and digital stock, with 71% of items borrowed from in branch.

Adult and children's fiction are our most borrowed items. When compared with 2019/20, the last year before the library closure for the pandemic and restoration, children's borrowing is at a similar level, adult borrowing has declined and there is a large rise in digital borrowing.

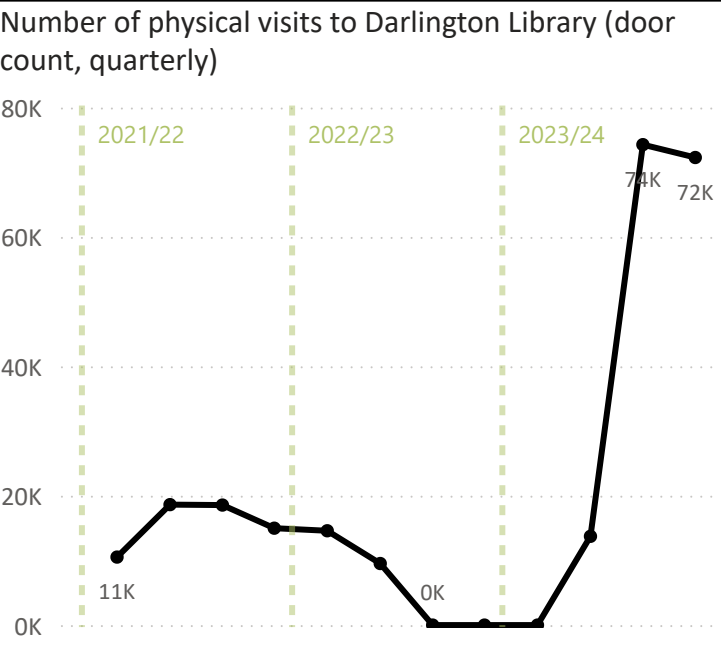
[Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services](#)

Darlington Library footfall has been extremely good with 160,260 through the doors since reopening in September 2023 to March 2024. This compares with 201,562 people during the whole fiscal year of 2019/20, the last year before the library closure for the pandemic and restoration.

The increase in school visits within The Hive brings in many more young people, and the library team are offering a range of activities to encourage differing demographics.

The library feels a more vibrant and welcoming place to be, and we notice a diverse range of customers using the space which is wonderful to see.

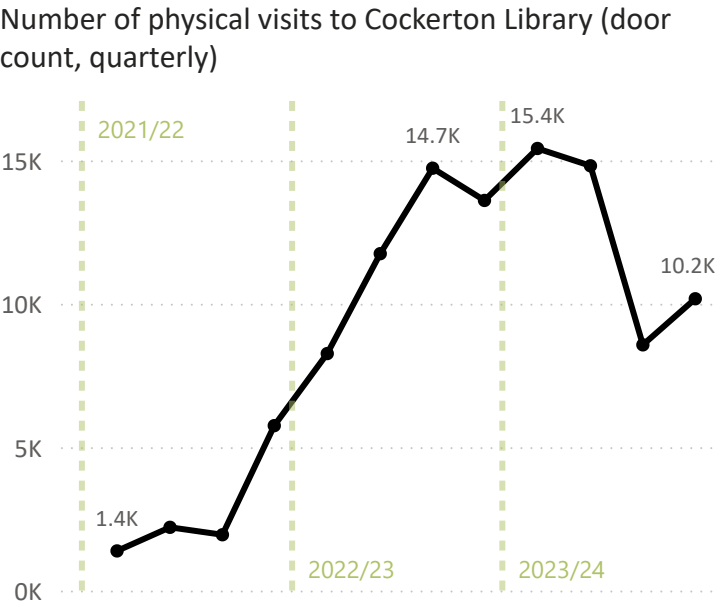
[Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services](#)



Visitor numbers were predictably high whilst Darlington Library was closed for restoration, now both libraries are accessible there is a reduction in those visiting the branch. However, the annual total of visitors remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. (37,250 in 2019/20 compared with 48,961 in 2023/24)

The part-time team at Cockerton Library are providing a varied activity programme which is noticeably increasing footfall and creating a positive and welcoming atmosphere for all ages.

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



2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

2.1 Working with partners to maximise educational achievement

After declining for 3 years in a row, the percentage of 2-year-olds in Darlington benefitting from funded early education in good/outstanding settings increased to 100% in 2020/21. It fell slightly in 2021/22 to 97.0% but was still 1% point above the regional and national comparators. In 2022/23 it is now back at 100%.

Similarly, the percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds in Darlington benefitting from funded early education in good/outstanding settings had increased to 92.9% in 2022/23.

Final Key Stage 2 data confirms that 56% of Darlington pupils are achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, which is lower than the current regional, statistical neighbour and national averages.

The average Attainment 8 score per pupil in Darlington has decreased from 50.7 in 2020/21 to 46.2 in 2022/23. However, this places Darlington performance slightly higher than the regional, statistical neighbour and national averages. In 2022/23, the Darlington score for disadvantaged pupils (33.7) was above our statistical neighbour by 0.3 points and the regional average by 0.2 points.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

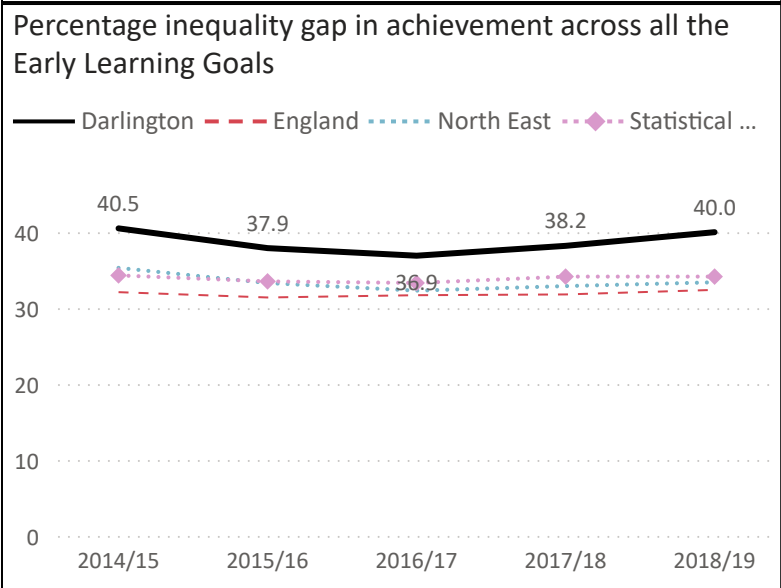
2.2 Working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential

Child development: percentage of children achieving a good level of development at 2-2½ years			
School year	Darlington	England	North East
2017/18	80.9	83.3	85.6
2018/19	91.8	84.1	87.6
2019/20	93.9	83.3	87.4
2020/21	93.9	82.9	87.2
2021/22	95.3	81.1	83.8
2022/23	91.8	79.2	82.7

The percentage of children achieving a good level of development at 2-2½ years, defined as the proportion of children who received a review who were at or above the expected level in all five domains, remains statistically better than the England and the North East averages, at 91.8% in 2022/23.

The Health Visiting service provides surveillance and monitors the development of children with their families during the mandated visits from birth. The service will also provide extra support and/or referral for any child who is perceived to be missing key developmental goals.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health



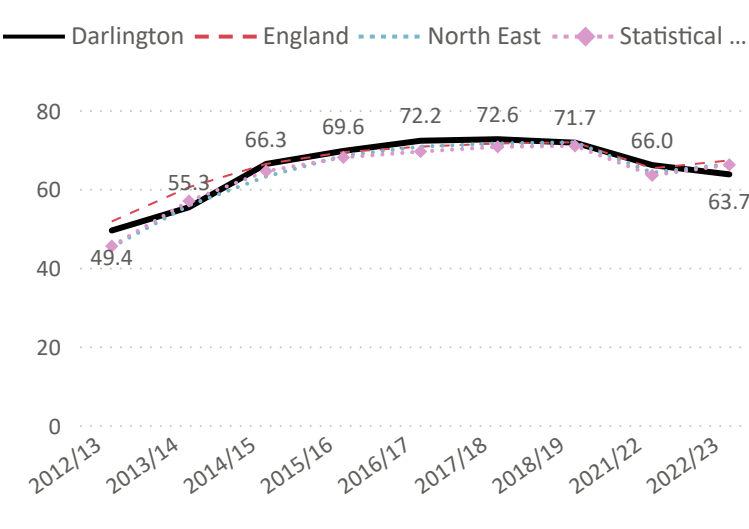
The standard score and percentage inequality gap in achievement across all the Early Learning Goals, based on the latest published available data (2018/19), has widened slightly since 2017/18 (by 1.8%) from that of the regional (by 1.3%), national (by 1.2%) and statistical neighbour (by 1.8%) comparators. This data has not been published by DfE since the start of the pandemic which limits our analytical ability to scrutinise our most recent performance.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

2.2 Working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential

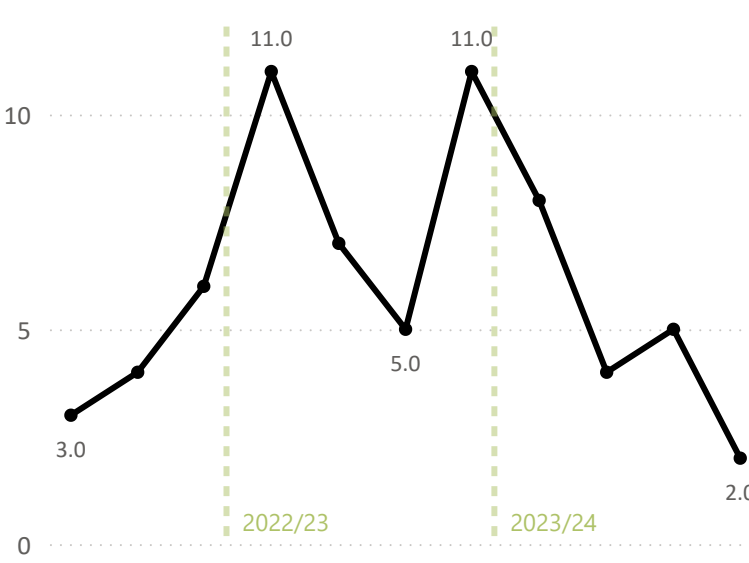
School Readiness: all children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception as a percentage of all eligible children (Early Years Foundation Stage profile)



The 2022/23 results for school readiness with children achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception years has seen a decrease from 66.0% in 2021/22 to 63.7% in 2022/23 (which is the latest published data available). Our 3 benchmarking averages have all seen a rise in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, and as such we are just below the national average (67.2%), those of statistical neighbours (66.1%) and North East local authorities (66.3%).

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

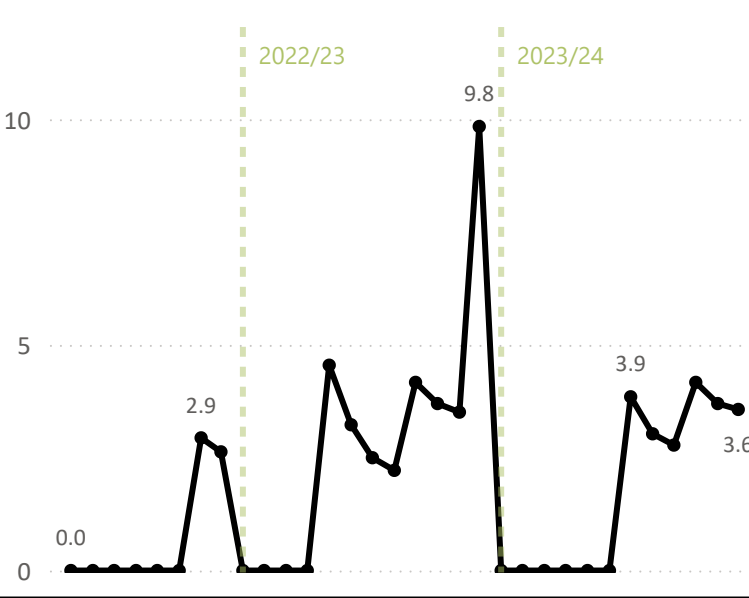
Number of First Time entrants to the Youth Justice System (quarterly)



The number of young people identified as a First Time Entrant being referred to the Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service between April 2023 and March 2024 is 19. This is a reduction when compared with the same period last year which was 34. This is an area that the service are monitoring through our management board and Youth Justice Board (YJB) given the significant increase in 2022/23.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

Percentage of reoffending rate of clients receiving a PCD

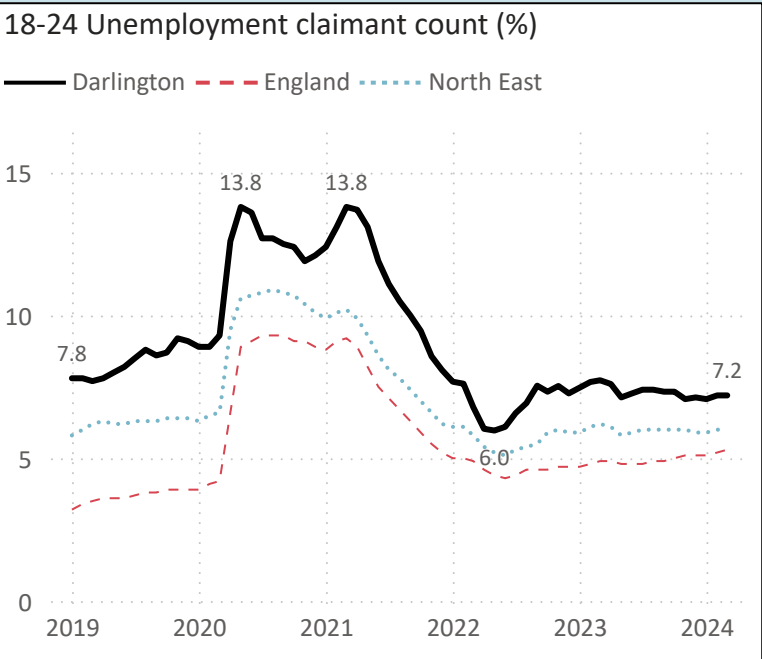


The Young Peoples Engagement & Justice Service (YPEAJS) have had 57 young people (35 Male and 22 Female) referred to the service for diversionary disposals i.e., Pre-Cautions Disposals (56) and Restorative Disposals (1). There has been a 96% success rate in terms of young people not reoffending. Two young people have reoffended, one received a Referral Order for Violence against the Person and the other received a further Pre Cautions Disposal for Violence against the Person and Drug Offences.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

2. MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BY

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



Over the last 12 months, the 18-24 unemployment claimant rate has remained relatively static in Darlington. In March 2024, the rate in Darlington was 7.2%. This figure is higher than the North East rate of 6% and the rate for England at 5.3%. The rate in Darlington is consistently higher than both the regional and national levels, although the rate for England has shown month on month increases throughout 2023, reducing the gap with the Darlington rate.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

3. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO MAXIMISE THEIR POTENTIAL

3.1 Maximising the benefits of a growing economy for all communities

Percentage of workers earning the real living wage			
Year	Darlington	England	North East
2016	81.1	79.5	76.1
2017	77.7	80.5	77.1
2018	78.0	79.9	75.8
2019	77.3	82.4	78.1
2020	75.8	82.8	79.2
2021	79.8	85.2	81.3
2022	82.0	88.7	84.9
2023	85.9	87.7	84.2

The proportion of in-work Darlington residents earning the real living wage, calculated by the Resolution Foundation as being £12 an hour in 2023-24, increased to 85.9% but remained below the England average of 87.7%. The overall trend for Darlington shows gradual improvements in the percentage of workers earning the real living wage or above. In Darlington, less than 1 in 5 workers are now earning less than the Real Living wage.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

3.2 Targeting services where most needed

Darlington BEAT (Benefits Entitlement Action Team) is a service funded by Darlington Borough Council and delivered by Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland. The annual cost for this service is £30k. The 2023 annual report which covers January – December 2023, shows the service supported 249 cases of people residing in Darlington to apply for £1.38m worth of benefits. The service also supported a small number of cases beyond the borough, raising this amount to £1.47m. Wide ranging benefit advice was provided, with the most notable being Pension Credits (£81.9k), Disability Living Allowance (£83.7k), Attendance Allowance (£103.8k), Personal Independence Payment (£870.1k), and Universal Credit (£225.6k).

Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

3.3 Working with partners

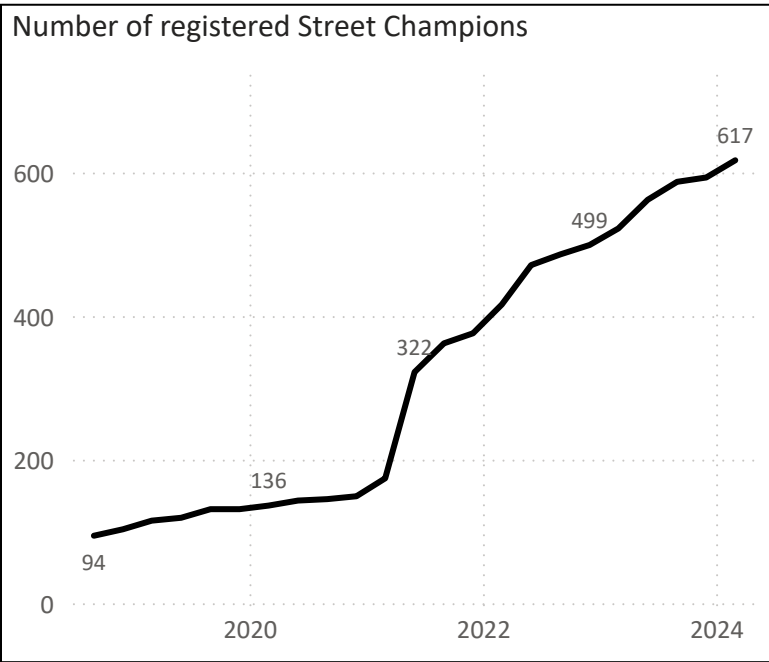
Effective partnership structures have been forged with organisations across public, business and voluntary and community. The Public Sector Executives Group brings the chief officers of the main public sector agencies together; this has been established for the past three years. The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group provides the Council with a means of strategically engaging with the sector. Meanwhile Darlington Cares galvanises and helps focus the business communities support. These forums will provide a means for the Council to carry out early engagement in the development of the Council Plan with meetings being scheduled to fit with the plan's development timetable.

3. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO MAXIMISE THEIR POTENTIAL

3.4 Working with communities

Work is underway in planning the Stronger Communities Awards for 2024. The awards are the premier awards ceremony in Darlington and are now well known and widely respected. Last year's awards attracted 334 nominations, the highest ever. However it is now common to receive around 300. The ceremony itself attracts 440 people and provides an opportunity for those individuals, groups and businesses to be recognised for their extraordinary efforts and achievements. Officers are working hard to maximise the sponsorship income and cut costs to allow it to continue to be affordable whilst still providing a suitably prestigious way of celebrating achievements in the town.

Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

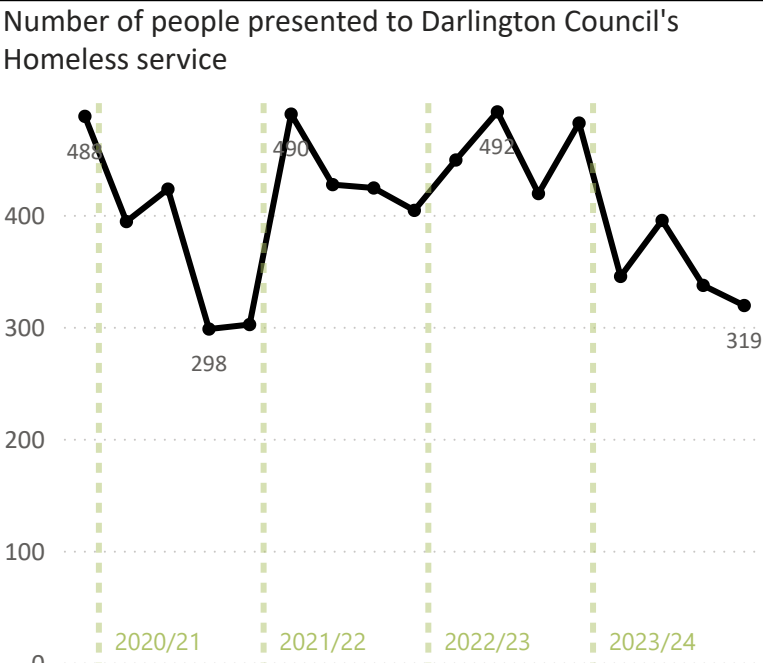


The number of street champions has risen by 95 over the last year to 617. The Keep Britain Tidy Spring and Autumn Clean the Litter Free Durham and Darlington campaigns of 2023 and 2024 have all resulted in new volunteers signing up as Street Champions. These campaigns have encouraged other groups, for example Talking Out The Trash, Haughton Wombles, Eastbourne Hubs and The Denes and The Well, and groups at Sadberge, Heighington and Middleton St George, to set up regular litter picking events throughout the year, which are supported through Street Champions. Some of these groups help improve the mental health / wellbeing for individuals, who had become self-isolated during lock downs.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

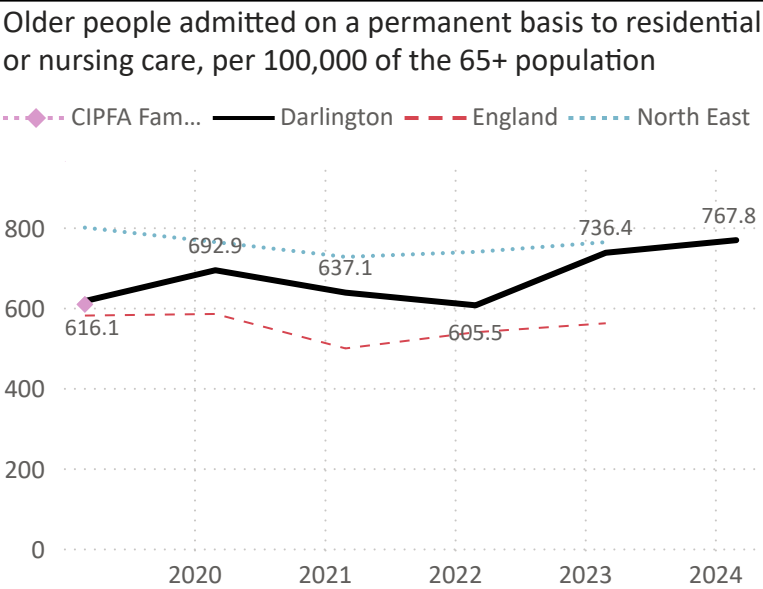
4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

4.1 Providing care and support when needed



The number of presentations to the Housing Options Service has decreased by 31.9%, 1,842 in 22/23 and 1,393 in 23/24. Additional staffing for the Housing Options Team, funded through The Rough Sleeper Initiative, has enabled a dedicated rough sleeper co-ordinator, a navigator, and an outreach worker, to be embedded within the team, delivering effective early intervention and prevention. The early intervention and triage work enables referrals (Duty To Refer) from other organisations to be managed and acted upon in order to plan where applicants can go when released from hospital or prison. For those applicants served with eviction notices in the private rented sector, the team work with landlords and applicants to proactively look for accommodation before their tenancy comes to an end.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues

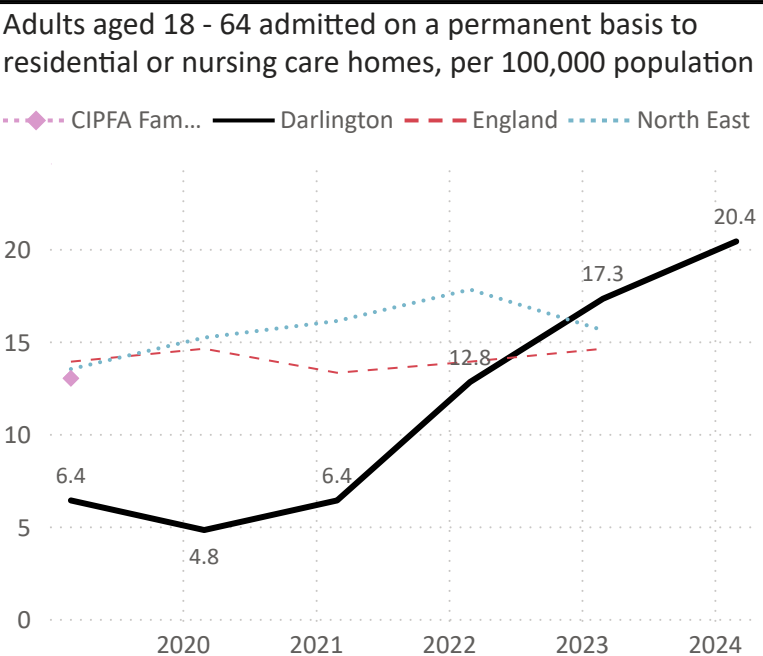


The total number of individuals who moved into permanent residential or nursing care is 171. This is an increase from 164 in 2022-23 and 131 in 2021-22.

Since April, 141 (82%) individuals moved into permanent residential or nursing care straight from an short break stay. The current average length of stay in a short break stay before moving to permanent care is 16 weeks, this is an improvement on the average figure of 19 weeks for 2022-23 and 20 weeks for 2021-22.

Regional benchmarking data show that as it currently stands Darlington has the 6th highest proportion of individuals aged 65+ entering residential / nursing on permanent basis during 2022-23.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care



There have been 13 18–64-year-olds who have entered permanent care since April 2023. 2023-24 has seen the highest number of 18–64-year-olds entering permanent care in the past 6 years. The ages of the 13 individuals are:

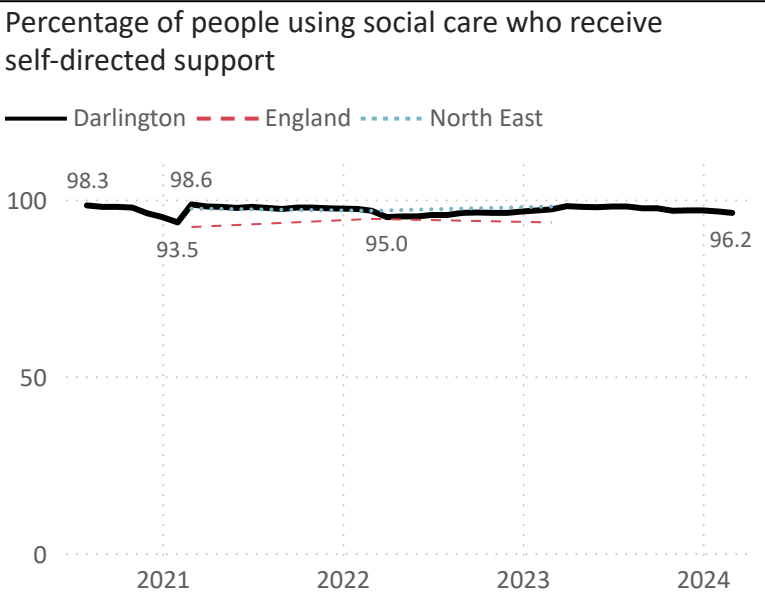
40, 47 (2), 52, 55 (2), 56, 57, 61, 62 (2), 63 (2)

Where a community placement would have been appropriate all options were explored, however due to market capacity it was not possible to find suitable placements. Market development has been a key issue and has been identified as a key objective for development with commissioning colleagues. Operational staff are working with commissioning to address the issue of capacity in the provider market and explore market development.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

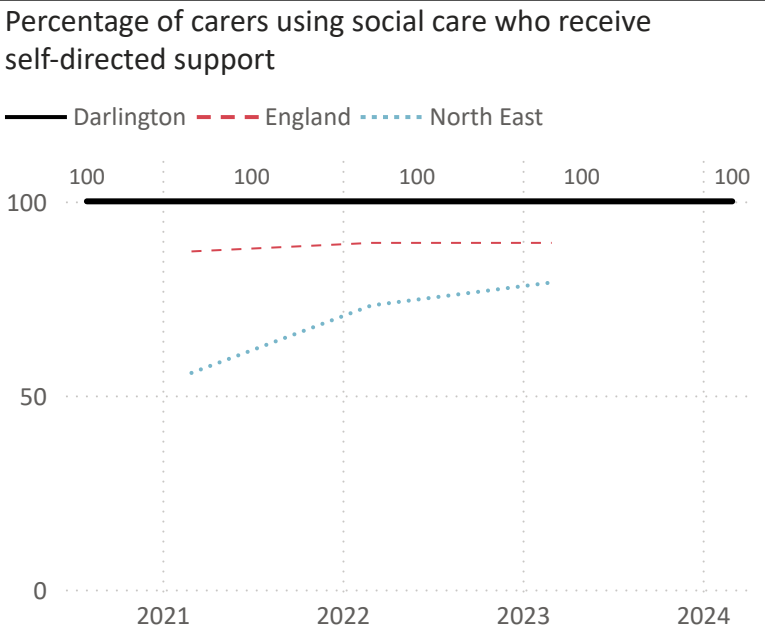
4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

4.1 Providing care and support when needed



As at the end of March 2024, 96.2% of people using social care were receiving self directed support. Darlington typically exceeds both the national and regional averages for this measure, reflecting the strong ethos of the Council’s Adult Social Care team of taking a strengths-based approach to support residents in need. We maximise service users’ choice and control over the services they receive, to ensure these best suit peoples’ particular needs and preferences. The council continue to commission Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) to provide the direct payments support service which promotes people to manage their own personal support budgets.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care



100% of carers using social care received self-directed support. This data, which shows Darlington exceeds both the national and regional average for this metric, reflects how all carers, who are in receipt of a commissioned service, now have a personal budget. This enables them to maximise their independence and choice, to support their wellbeing and ensure they can access the support that best suits their needs. We are working with carers and carers support groups to listen to the needs of carers.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

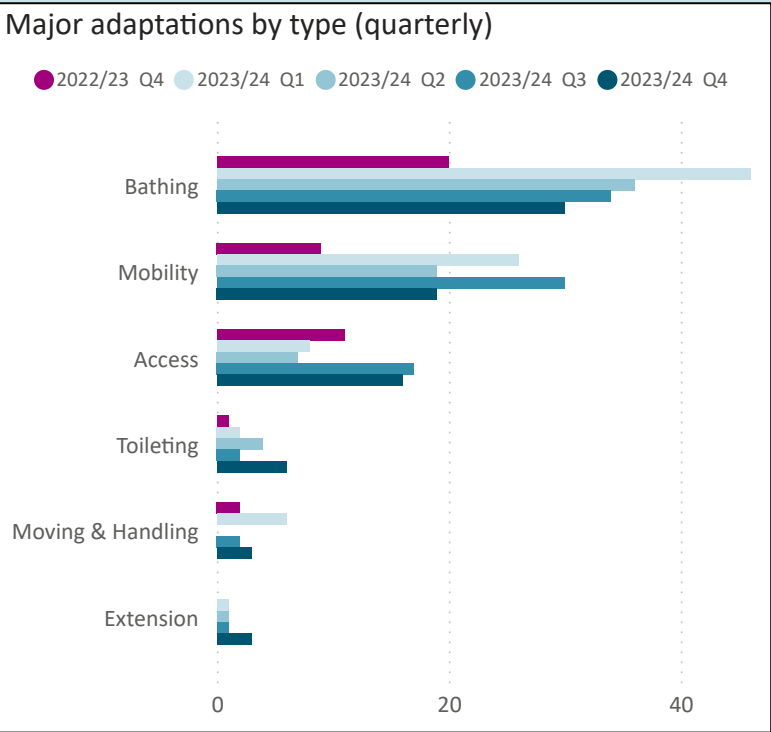
4.2 Working with people to build on their strengths to maximise their potential

We continue to deliver care and support to the most vulnerable adults in the community. As a service we take a 'Strength Based' approach to practice and assessment. This means that we support people to become more resilient in meeting their care needs by developing their networks and personal strengths. We take this approach because it is the right thing to do and it is also consistent with our duty to 'prevent, delay or reduce' the need for formal support. Support plans focus on the abilities of the person, what resources and support they currently have and what they can access in their local community. The teams will encourage the use of aids and adaptations to ensure people remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. We continue to work closely with partners and providers including the NHS to promote and support independence. in 2023/24 81.7% people who use services (who responded to the ASC survey) stated they have control over their daily life

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

4. SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE BOROUGH

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



Of the 202 major works completed during 2023-24, some of which were for client with multiple works, the work was for:

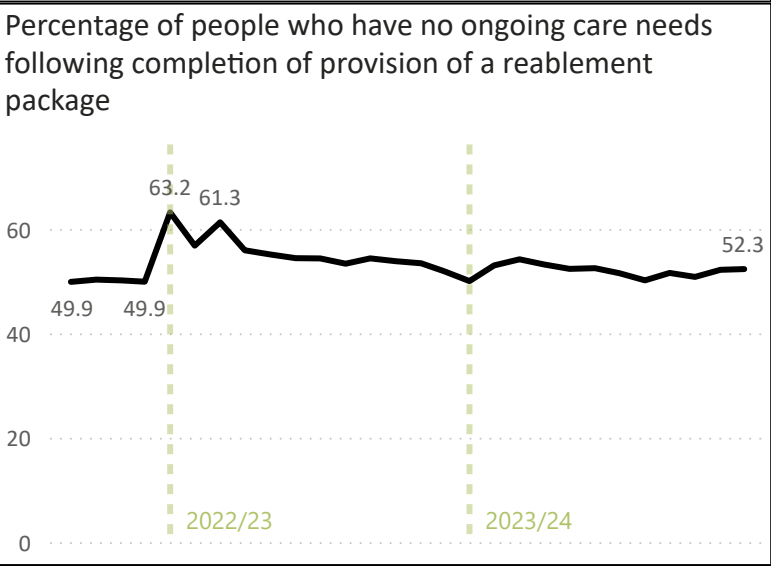
- 128 - level access showers
- 96 – stairlifts
- 35 – ramps

A new contractor (HES) has now been brought onboard, which has resulted in the average time from order to start date falling from 143 days to 84 days.

So far, this financial year HES has completed 17 shower jobs, and a further 9 are approved with contractors already on site or waiting a start date. By bringing this third contractor into price for work the other 2 contractors have been able to reduce the number of cases they have waiting a start date from over 40 days to 13.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Performance for this indicator continues to stay consistent. At the end of 2023-24 it was reported that 29.3% client needs had decreased, 13.8% needs had increased and 4.6% stayed the same. The remaining 52.3% are those who no longer had ongoing care needs.



The number of clients being referred to RIACT as part of a hospital discharge remains consistently high, with an average of 87 hospital discharges being received per month during 2023-24. The total number of hospital discharges for 2023-24 was 1044, compared to 1006 during 2022-23 and 759 in 2021-22.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

4.3 Working with partners

We continue to work with the voluntary sector on a vulnerability strategy. We are working to incorporate this work into the draft Council Plan. The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group is leading on this work. Encouragingly the group is operating well and has helped forge good working relations with the Council. The group has recognised that people frequently become vulnerable as a consequence of transition points such as the death of a partner, illness or loss of employment. The focus now is how to ensure there is sufficient support at these times.

Through the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group a collaboration of Voluntary Sector organisation have opened a town centre resource, Darlington Connect which provides practical support for vulnerable families.

5. SUPPORTED BY

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

The Council's workforce is committed to delivering success for Darlington. We have a proud and dedicated workforce of over 2,000 people, the majority who live in the borough and want Darlington to flourish and grow. The Council provides a vast range of services with approximately 800 roles, therefore it is essential that all staff are motivated, have the right skills and are customer focused to ensure service provision meets the needs of the Council, our businesses and our residents. Our workforce strategy "Working Together to Deliver Success" outlines how we will develop, support and motivate our staff, to meet the priorities of all stakeholders. Priorities within the plan have already been delivered to align to our core values, including flexible/agile working, the wellbeing programme to promote and maintain a healthy and safe workforce, the creation of the Employee Ambassador Group and changing how we undertake staff surveys to capture the staff voice. We have launched the new My Journey process to promote staff development and succession planning. Our workforce strategy runs until 2026, but we are planning ahead to the next strategy to ensure our staff are supported and equipped to deliver in an every changing environment.

Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

A1. Continue to implement initiatives that tackle social isolation

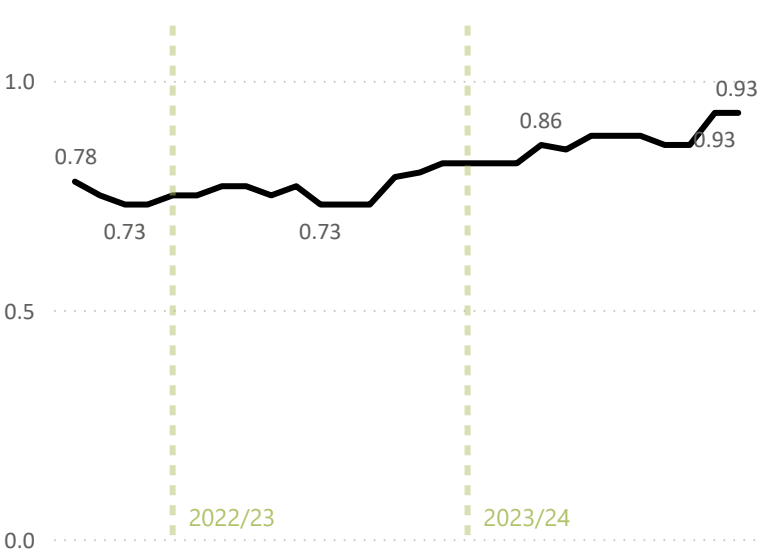
We continue to work with the voluntary sector on a vulnerability strategy which has recognised isolation and loneliness as being a key factor in individuals vulnerability. We are working to incorporate this work into the draft Council Plan. The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group is leading on this work. Encouragingly the group is operating well and has helped forge good working relations with the Council.

Through the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group a collaboration of Voluntary Sector organisation have opened a town centre resource, Darlington Connect which provides practical support for vulnerable families including those experiencing loneliness and isolation.

Christine Shields: Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance & Transformation

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

Adults with mental health needs helped to live at home in receipt of paid support, per 1000 population (monthly)

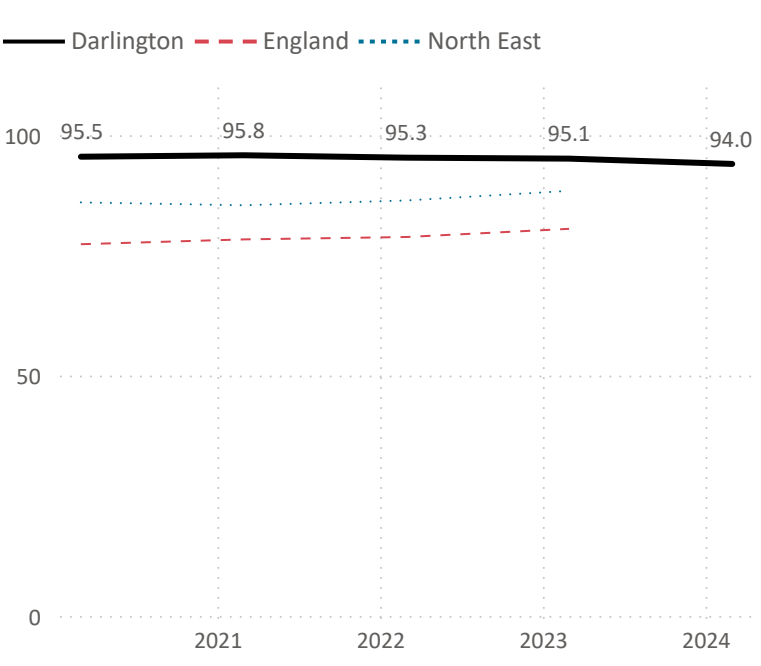


This indicator is primarily focused on supporting adults with mental health needs to remain independent and living in their own home.

The Mental Health team, within Adult Social Care, work closely with the local Trusts and the Primary care Network/GPs to prevent escalation or reduce the need for intervention. They support people, minimise escalation and maintain high levels of wellbeing and support to delay or prevent admission into hospital. We also have several support workers who support rehabilitation, reablement and recovery. This successful working relationship and support system is illustrated in the low number of people with mental health needs requiring long term paid support.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

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



Darlington has one of the highest figures in the North East for individuals living in their own home. This relates to working age individuals with a primary need of learning disability, which equates to 281 of Darlington residents. 264 people (94%) are living in settled accommodation with:

- 119 living in settled mainstream housing with family/friends
- 100 living in supported accommodation
- 25 tenant - local authority, arms length management etc
- 15 tenant - private landlord
- 3 sheltered housing
- 2 owner occupier / shared ownership scheme

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

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

We continue to review and implement the aims of our transformation plan, with the focus for the upcoming year being the review of our systems within Safeguarding, Occupational Therapy, and the Adult Contact Team. We are aiming to provide systems which streamline activity and enable a more responsive pathway for people accessing adult social care services. In addition, we are developing a new care recording system within the Reablement team and enhancing adult social care webpages to support the public to access the information they require easily.

In 2023/24 66.8% of people who used services found it easy to find information about services.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

A4. Promote and increase the use of assistive technology

We have developed a digital strategy for adult social care. This strategy is an ambitious programme. It sets out a vision for digital capabilities that meet the range of needs of our community and workforce. This will support and enable effective service delivery.

Through the use of technology we will support service users to:

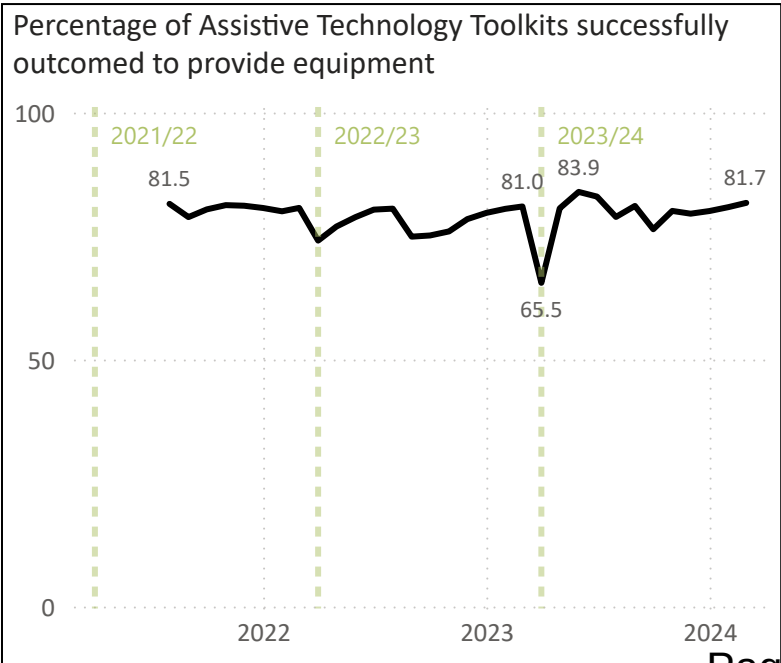
- access to the information they need to make choices about their care and support
- engage with us in a way and at a time that suits them

enable users of Adult Social Care services to have more access and ownership of their records, support staff to have the tools, systems and equipment they need to do their jobs.

We will also improve outcomes for people and allow better co-ordination of care across the NHS and Social Care. Working with teams, services, residents, carers and other organisations we will look at opportunities to; simplify processes, provide greater accessibility through digital tools

we aim to, empower people to do more for themselves through online self-serve, empower and support staff to use digital tools, support and enable care providers to use technology to change the way services are delivered and achieve better outcomes by social care and health working together.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care



We continue to a high uptake of Assistive Technology Toolkit Referrals assigned to Lifeline resulted in equipment being provided.

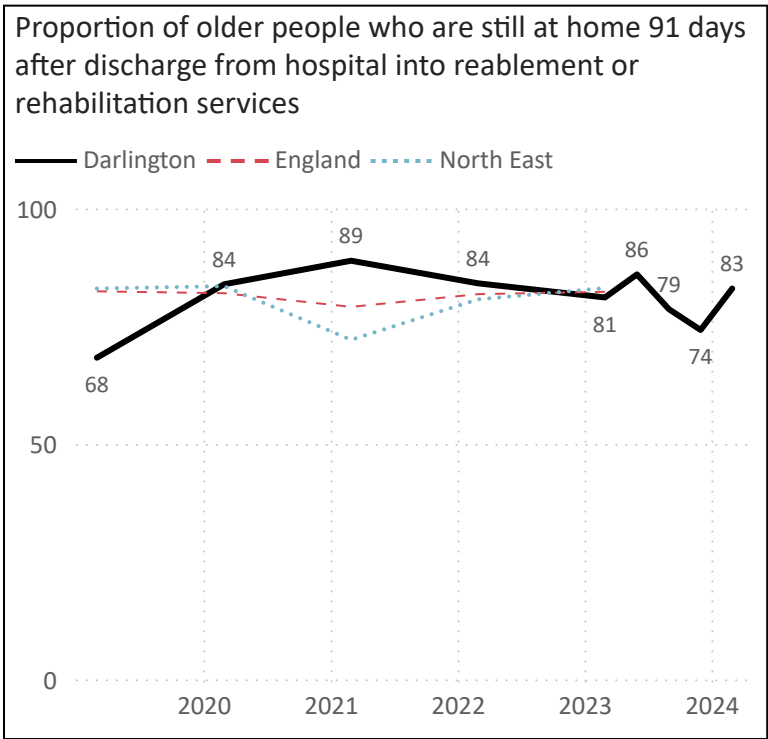
The slight upward trend since the same period last year is indicative of the objective to support people to remain independent in their own homes. Teams continue to promote this offer at the point of referral to adult social care as well as at reviews. Lifeline continues to work closely with the Adults Social Care Team and promotes assistive technology, through attending regular team meetings as well as providing training during the induction of new Adult Social Care staff.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

A5. Maintain significant and strong relationships with the voluntary sector, foundation trust and community nursing to support and promote admission avoidance, discharges from hospital and homecare where required

We continue to build strong and positive relationships with the voluntary sector, partners and providers. We actively participate in the Learning Impairment Network. We meet regularly with the Parent Carers Forum, Darlington Association on Disability (DAD), Age UK, Healthwatch and the Carers Support Service. Our commissioning team work closely with care providers to consider demand, capacity and market development. We have developed a draft engagement strategy to share with people to strengthen our engagement and co-production plans. We work closely with the Director of Place and the ICB, with the development of shared visions and plans. We continue to work with County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) and Tees, Esk & Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), with some co-located teams and social workers present on wards with Darlington Memorial Hospital.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care



This data indicated the service provides to support people to return home following discharge from hospital, through assessment, support planning and short term reablement offer.

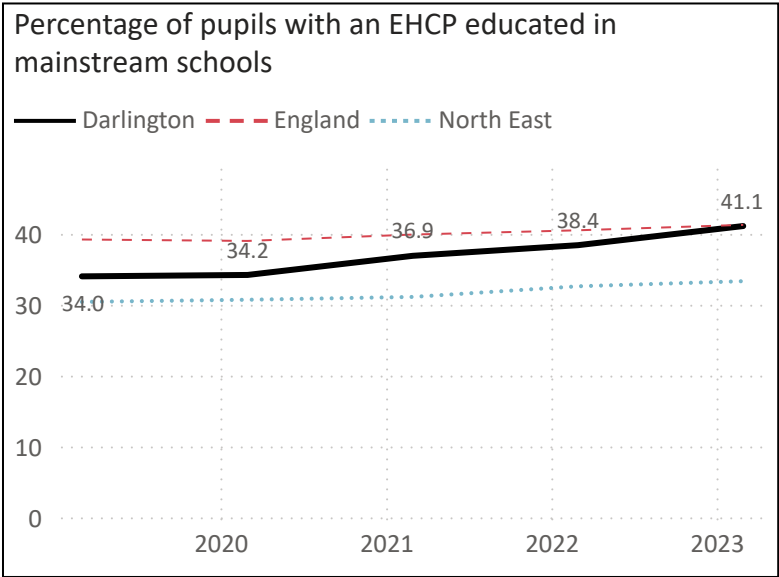
This graph illustrates that at the end of March 2024, the proportion of older people who are still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/rehabilitation services was 83%. Despite an increase in complex cases being discharged from hospital into reablement, Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team (RIACT) have managed to ensure that people are being placed on the correct pathway and appropriate packages are being put in place to support people to stay at home.

Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

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

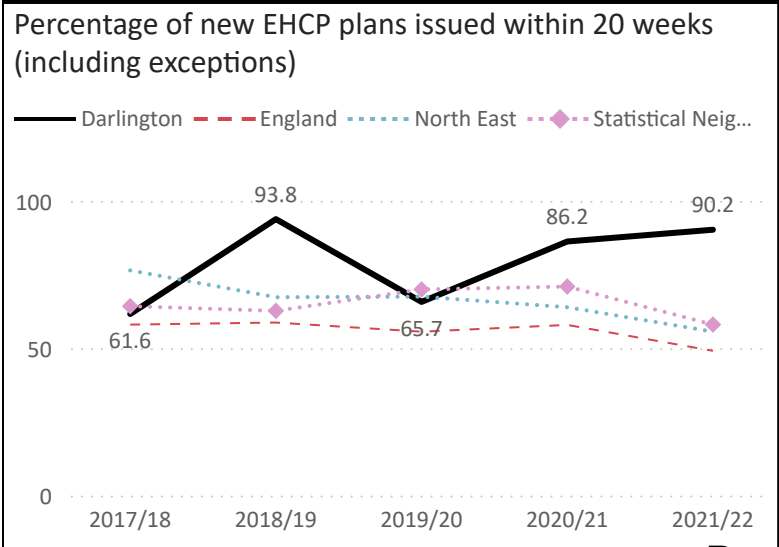
- In 2023 Darlington’s Special Educational Needs (SEN): Support (K) cohort of 159 pupils had an average Attainment 8 score of 34.4. (40th percentile nationally)
- Education Health Care (EHC) Plan cohort's Attainment 8 score has increased by 4.7 from 6.9 in 2021/22 to 11.6 in 2022/23. (75th percentile nationally)
- EHC Plan cohort's Progress 8 score has increased by 0.10 from -1.69 in 2021/22 to -1.59 in 2022/23.
- SEN: Support cohort's English & Maths 5+ percentage has increased by 4.7% from 17.3% in 2021/22 to 22.0% in 2022/23. (42nd percentile nationally)
- SEN: EHC Plan cohort's English & Maths 5+ percentage has increased by 4.1% from 0.0% in 2021/22 to 4.1% in 2022/23. (75th percentile nationally)
- 39% of SEN: Support cohort achieved English & Maths 4+ in 2022/23 (37th percentile nationally)
- Improved Ofsted profile of secondary schools (7 out of 8 schools are good or above) with specific reference to good support for pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) in a number of reports.
- There are some strengths evident in the latest Key Stage 4 performance data - KS4 attainment in 2022/23 shows an average Attainment 8 score per pupil with SEN Support as 34.4 (North East average 31.7, national average 33.2)

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion



The Darlington local area Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Strategy emphasises that children and young people with SEND should, where possible, be educated in their local community with the right support. The data shows increasingly more children with SEND are attending Darlington mainstream schools. The proportion of Darlington pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attending mainstream school settings in the borough has risen from 34.0% in 2019 to 41.1% in 2023. The proportion is now above the regional average of 33.3% and in line with the national average of 41.3%.

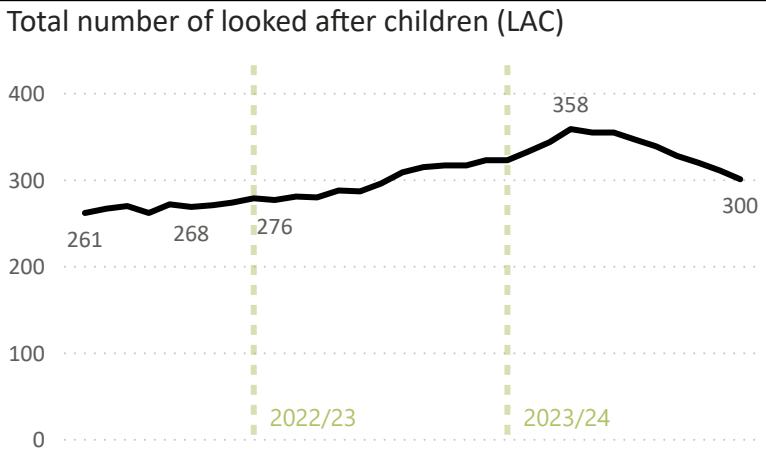
Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion



The percentage of new Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) issued by Darlington within 20 weeks (including exceptions) has been above the national average since 2016. After seeing a decrease in timeliness during 2019/20, we have had a positive increase with our current published data showing 90.2% in 2021/22, compared to regional, statistical neighbour and national averages all seeing a decrease in 2021/22 with of 55.6%, 58.0% and 49.1% respectively.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

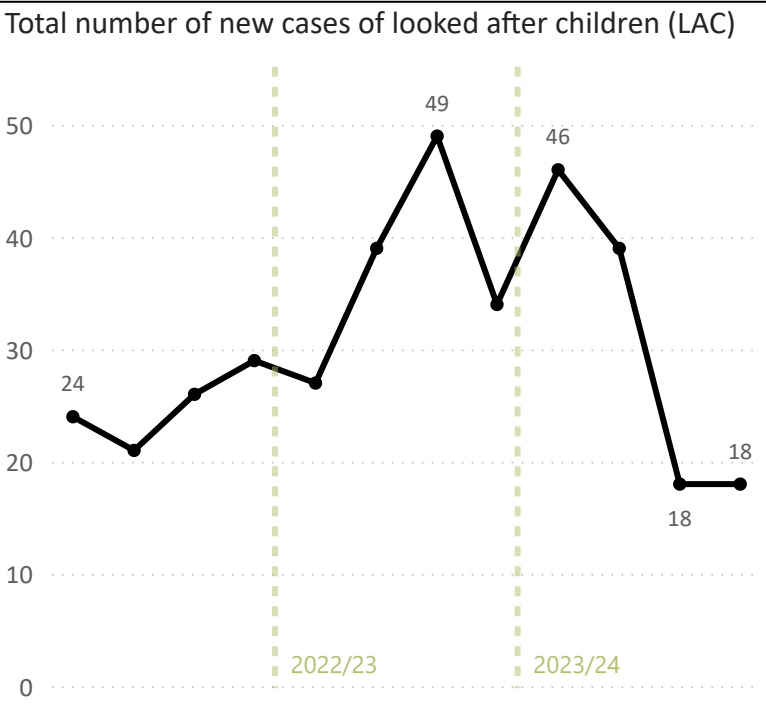
C2. Reduce the need for looked after children placements through effective implementation of the Darlington Strengthening Families programme



300 children are being supported in our care at the end of March 2024, 6.0% of which have come into our care after being accepted by the Home Office as UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child).

This equates to 282 children, excluding UASC, that were in our care at the end of March 2024, a decrease from 305 children in our care at the end of March last year.

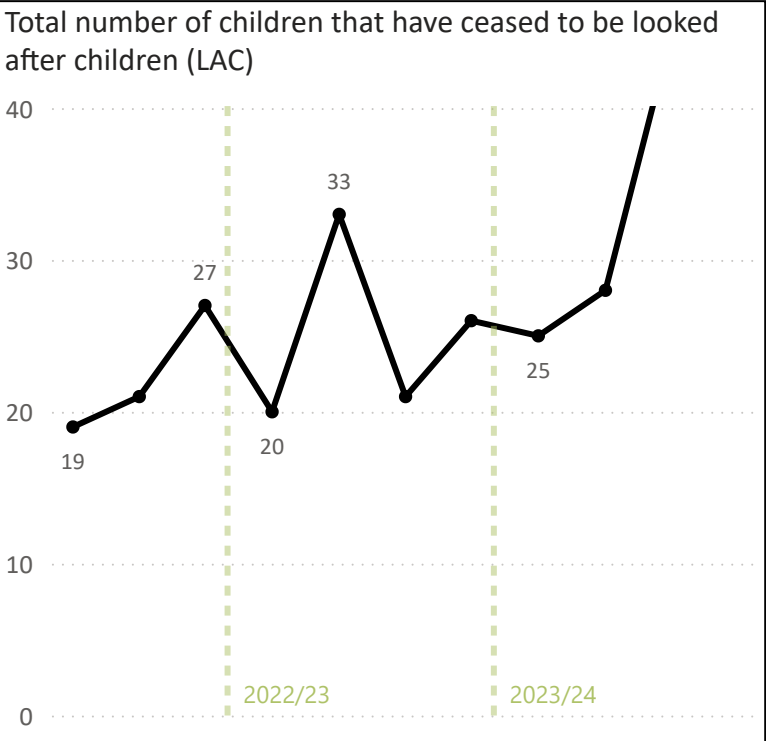
Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services



109 children from 69 families have come into our care since April 2023, a further 12 young people came into care after accepted by the Home Office as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC). This is a decrease when compared with the 131 children who came into care in 2022/23 from 86 families (excluding UASC).

The primary and secondary presenting reasons for the children coming into our care are predominantly due to neglect, domestic violence, parental mental health concerns, physical abuse towards the child and substance misuse of the parent.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services



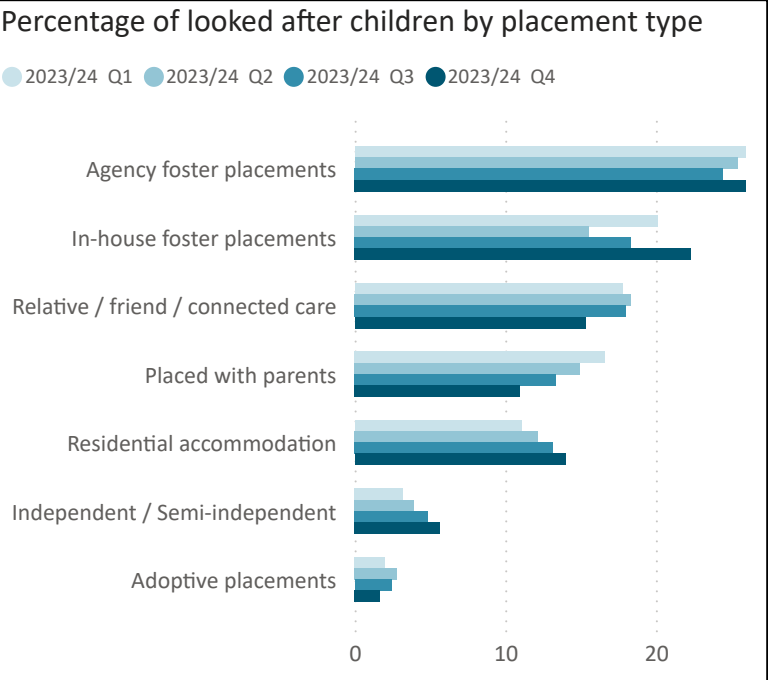
143 children and young people from 112 families have ceased to be in care since April 2023.

- Of the children and young people ceased to be in care this year:
- 42.7% returned home to a parent.
 - 30.1% had a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to a relative.
 - 15.4% due to turning 18 and becoming a care leaver and supported by that service.
 - 8.4% were adopted.
 - 3.5% moved away from Darlington.

This year we have increased the number of children who have been reunified home to a parent compared to 21.0% in 2022/23.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

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



A large proportion of Darlington children in care were in a foster placement (48.3%) at the end of March 2024. 19.3% of children were placed in kinship care with relatives (including temporarily approved), 11.0% were placed with a parent, 19.7% were living in forms of supported residential accommodation and 1.7% were placed for adoption.

All placements are confirmed as appropriate for the child, enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care. The proportion of children placed with a parent or kinship carer has been advancing.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

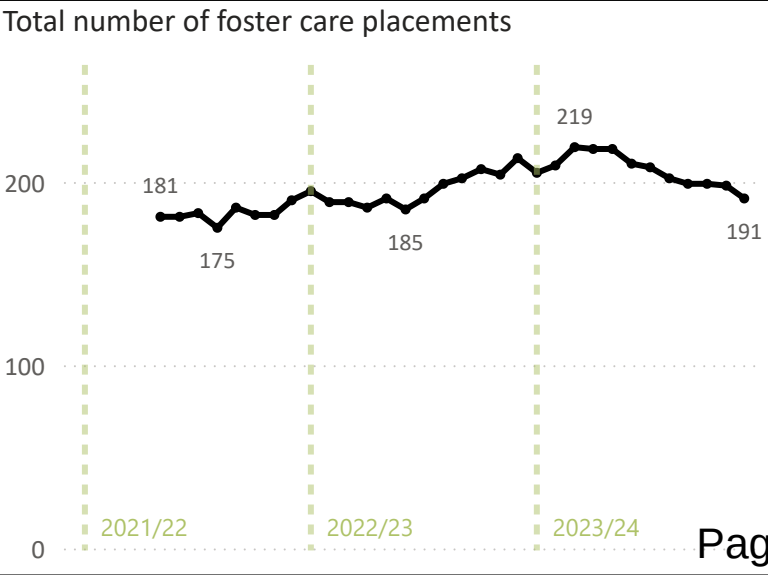
C3. Continue to increase the number of in-house foster carers to reduce the need for independent placements

Total number of approved foster carers

Date	Number
March 2022	56
June 2022	57
September 2022	58
December 2022	55
March 2023	54
June 2023	51
September 2023	50
December 2023	52
March 2024	52

Currently we have 52 approved foster care families with 41 kinship connected carers approved with a further 12 families that have temporary approval to support the children. At the end of March 2024, we had 17 families with an open application / going through the mainstream assessments looking to become an approved foster carer to support Darlington's children in care. Work continues to raise the foster caring profile in Darlington via our website and social media and during 2023/24 we have received 59 new fostering enquiry applications.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services



At the end of March 2024, 191 children and young people were placed with a foster care family. 40.8% of the children were with an agency foster carer, 24.1% were with an in-house foster carer and 31.0% were with an approved kinship connected carer. 35.6% of all foster placements were long-term.

We have seen an increase with children being supported by Darlington foster carers with a corresponding decrease in the use of agency carers.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

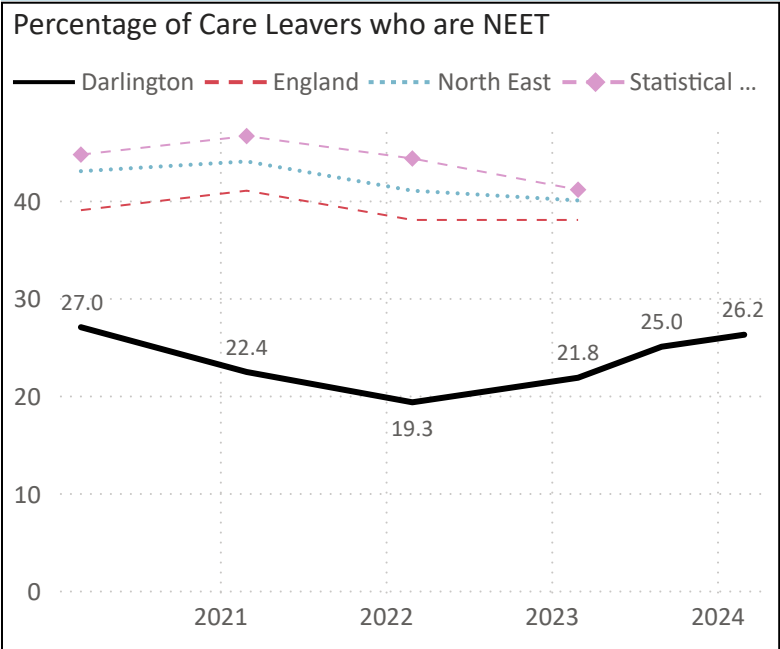
C4. Review in-house residential care and consider the council’s place in providing services

We now have Five fully functional children's homes, which are all registered with Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED). All 5 homes have been inspected by OFSTED and judged as "Good". Further placement sufficiency proposals have been approved at Full Council which will see a further planned expansion of our number of in house children's homes as well as an enhanced foster carer offer to ensure that we maximise the number of high quality in house local placements available for Children in Care.

Analysis has shown that in house provision is both more cost effective and leads to better outcomes for Young People.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

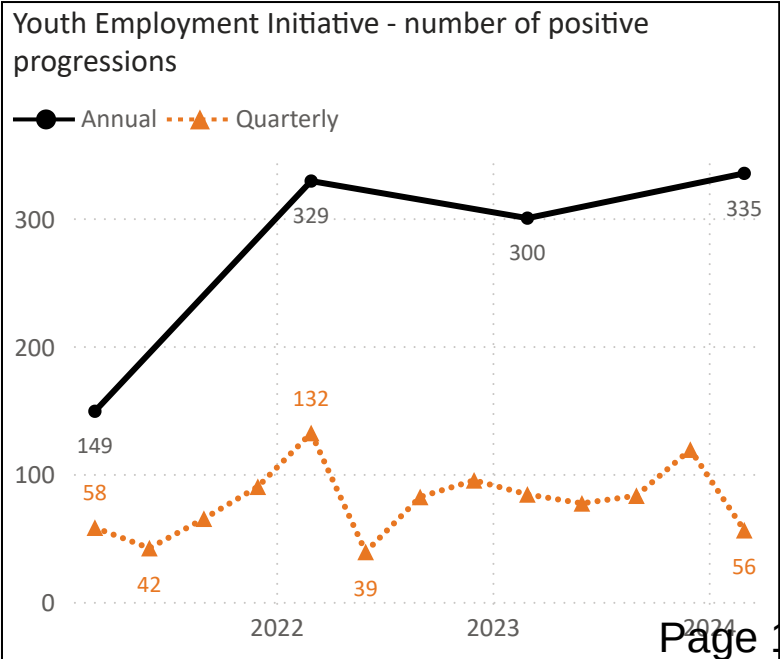
C5. Improve employment opportunities for looked after children and care leavers



The proportion of Darlington care leavers (DfE measure aged 19-21) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the end of March 2024 was 26.2%, which outperformed the most recently available published national and regional averages. This low number of NEET care leavers continues to inspire and is evidence of the commitment our young people give to their personal development. 21.3% of our care leavers are engaged in further education and 52.5% are in employment. There is an excellent relationship with our Learning and Skills officers to understand all school leavers destinations to promote and encourage further learning, training, and/or employment opportunities.

Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

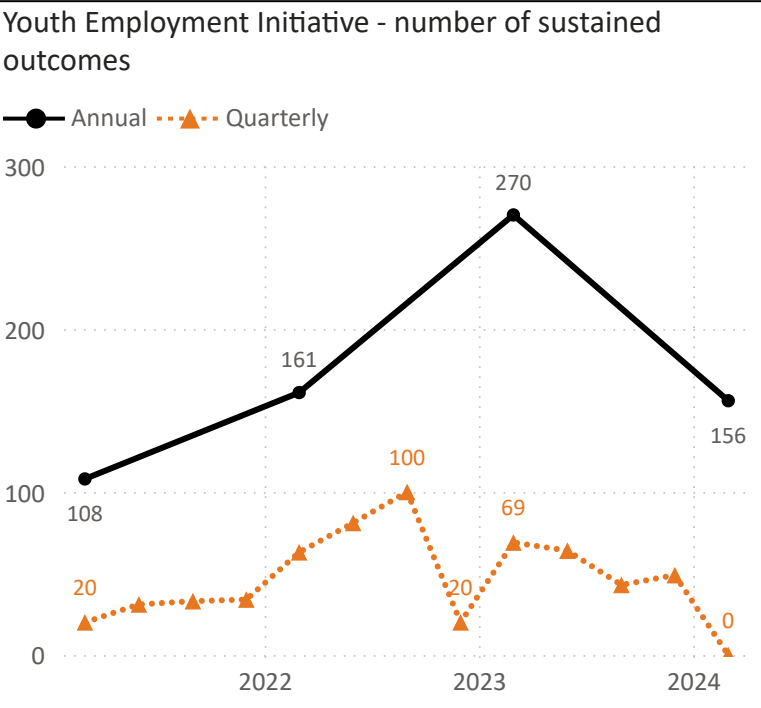
C6. Work with partners to reduce youth and long-term unemployment, by increasing the opportunity for retraining and apprenticeships leading to gainful employment



Darlington YEI was a European funded programme and was delivered across all of Tees Valley running from 2016-2023, to offer employment support to NEETs aged 16-29, with a priority for those aged 16-25. The YEI Programme was delivered by the 5 Tees Valley LA's and 18 other providers and Darlington's performance exceeded other partner in the consortium and with the lowest number of early leavers and with 97.1% moving into employment or full time education.

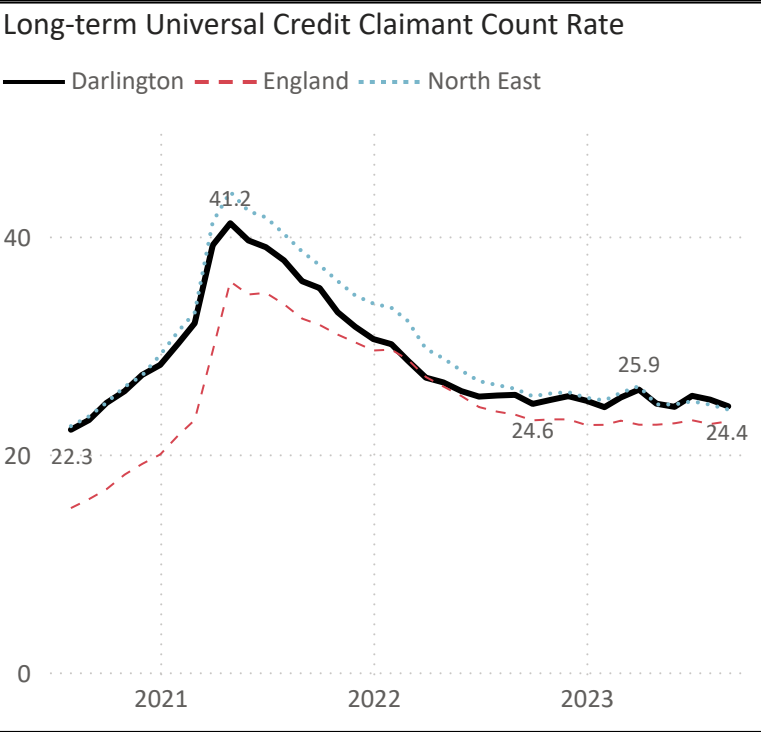
Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

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



Young people using the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) service have seen a consistent progression in education, employment or training over the past 12 months. Sustained outcomes are an important indicator that highlights the determination the young people and YEI service have and is showcased by the year-on-year increase in sustained education, employment or training. At times we are unable to contact some young people at the six-month sustained point or obtain timely evidence from employers, so the true number achieving sustained employment is considered likely to be higher than recorded.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion



The long-term Universal Credit claimant count in Darlington has remained relatively constant since the summer of 2022, after a period of post-covid reduction. The rate in Darlington is now 24.41%, higher than both the North-East (24.11%) and the England rate (23.03%). With the increase in number of employees in Darlington over the last 12 months, this figure shows that long term claimants are not accessing the local job opportunities.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

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

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

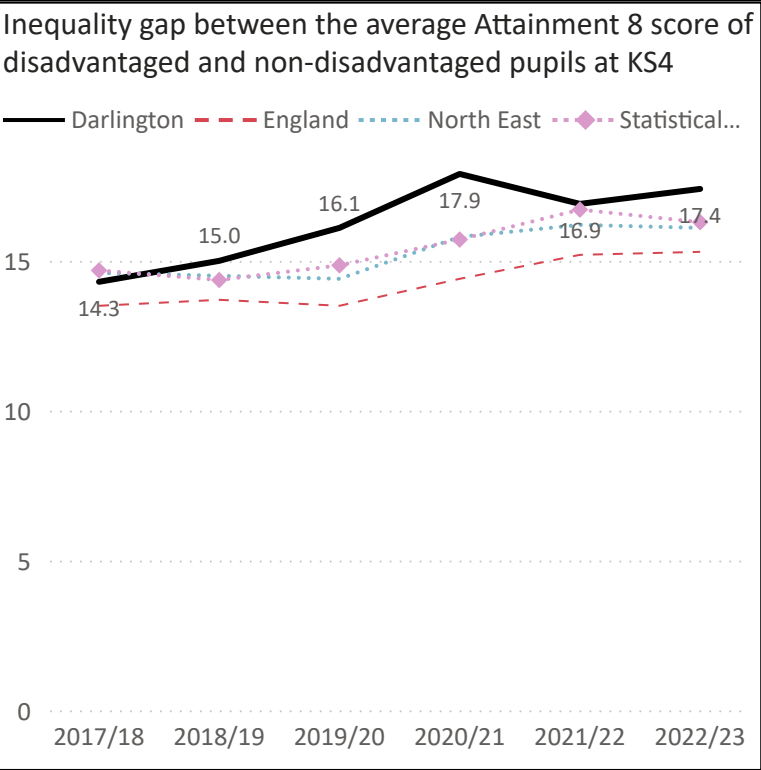
Date	Percentage
March 2022	75.7%
March 2023	81.1%
March 2024	89.2%

The percentage of schools judged good or outstanding by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted):

At the end of March 2024, 89.2% of schools in Darlington had an Ofsted rating of either Good or Outstanding. This is an increase on previous figures from March 2022 (75.7%) and March 2023 (81.1%).

The data provided includes Darlington's mainstream primary and secondary school settings only, excluding nurseries, special schools and the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion



Attainment 8 is a measure of a pupil's average grade across a set of eight subjects. The inequality gap between KS4 Attainment 8 average scores for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils had positively decreased from 17.9 in 2020/21 to 16.9 in 2021/22, then saw a small rise to 17.4 in 2022/23. Although 2022/23 saw a rise, so has our regional (16.1) and statistical neighbours (16.3) and the national comparator (15.3) compared to 2021/22.

Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

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

The new cohort of Year 6 pupils worked with Zest Theatre, an Non Profit Organisation (NPO) specialising in creating work devised by and for young people. Over two workshops the children were encouraged to reflect on their experiences, hopes, and ambitions, and their words were turned into giant artworks which were shared with the wider community on the railings outside of each school. The children’s words were also turned into films, created by Tees Valley Artist of the Year, Andy Berriman – The Children’s Manifesto: My Voice Matters. The banners and films were shared with the local councillors for each school at a special event, and the councillors shared the works on their own social media and websites.

This year’s Cohort of 156 children were from the following schools:
Corporation Road Primary - 48 pupils
Firthmoor Primary - 48 pupils
Northwood Primary - 60 pupils

Later in the term, the children had a trip to 4Motion to try out scootering and BMX riding. To close the year they worked with a cardboard artist to create eco Christmas crackers, had a festive dance session with the DProject, and attended the Hippodrome pantomime.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

The Easter programme was provided over 9 days and was well attended providing a wide variety of both physical and enrichment activities. During Easter 2023, 485 children attended the programme compared to 956 during Easter 2024. Councillor Wallis provided assistance to promote the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme with all ward councillors and a social media push included a digital billboard and a piece in One Darlington magazine to try and increase the reach.

Attendance figures for Easter 2024 were as follows:-

- Overall attendance 2,031
- Total number of individual children 956
- Primary children 729
- Secondary 227
- Of which 170 where children with Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- 888 children were eligible for free school meals

Specialist SEND sessions were provided working alongside SEND charities.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

The overall operation of the indoor market continues to improve with the various street food stalls being fully let and the venue being used for various events which includes the food festival which was a great success in 2024. In addition two new catering operations have opened on the west row of the market building. Due to supplier and contractor issues the opening of the phase 3 redevelopment has been delayed however the newly erected stalls have gained a great deal of interest with potential traders with a new continental deli, high quality florist, jewellery vendor and traditional deli all due to open in May/June 2024.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

The Towns Fund continues to deliver improvements in the town with new businesses opening along Skinnergate and planning application for the redevelopment of 126 Northgate to transform the property into business space being successfully granted in April 2024. submitted. The procurement process for a partner to redesign, redevelopment and manage the Northern Echo Building as high quality office space was completed in early November 2023. Following due diligence contracts have been signed between the Council and the preferred partners Adavo to develop the the building into high quality office space in the upper floors and with an Adult Skills facility on the ground floor. It is anticipated that work will commence in August 2024 and will take 18 months to redevelop. Work will commence on Coniscliffe Road in October 2024 to provide permanent facilities for outdoor seating for the various cafes and bars in the vicinity.

A planning application for the permanent location of Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) has been received. If granted it is anticipated work will commence in October 2024.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Progress to develop key economic sites to be investor ready at Central Park, Ingenium Park and Faverdale continues to be strong.

At Central Park the works are complete and the handover process to our Estates for active marketing and Streetscene teams has commenced.

On Ingenium Parc all remaining landscaping works are now complete. The site has been handed over to Estates for active marketing and Streetscene for the ongoing management of the area.

Demand for plots at Faverdale Business Park continues to remain high and discussions with potential occupiers for the few remaining plots are ongoing which should see the site fully occupied soon.

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

Work has commenced on two sites adjacent to Tornado Way. Between them the two developers , Greenbox and TrtaxSymmetry will deliver over 500,000 sqft of operational and warehouse facilities with a minimum of 250 new job opportunities being made available. Officers are working with possible private sector partners with an aim to develop commercial/employment sites at land in Faverdale. A possible approach would be to explore an option for land sale under an option agreement which will assist in effectively marketing the several potential plots at the site. Further work on the marketing of Ingenium Parc will commence in summer 2024.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

The number of business growth enquiries continues to increase, but the numbers remain lower than pre-pandemic levels, with the main types of enquiries for new business starts ups rather than existing business growth. The main areas of interest from new business start-ups are from the leisure and hospitality sectors, and primarily focussed on town centre locations.

With the expiry of many of the European funded business support programmes during 2023/24, there has been a significant drop-off of opportunities for meaningful engagement with businesses, as the support offer has diminished. It was only in early 2024 that the funding replacement, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, began delivering funded support programmes.

In this business support vacuum, the Business Investment Team have worked to promote the available support services, and where possible, instigated the provision of free support for Darlington businesses, using connections with stakeholders and delivery partners, such as the “Business Growth Masterclass programme” to provide mentoring and coaching support, the Innovation Growth network programme to provide advice and connections for innovation, and business start-up advice and guidance through links with North-East Enterprise Agencies.

Meanwhile, the Business Team have continued to work with indigenous companies to support business growth opportunities, connecting with a number of major employers. These connections have helped support the successful delivery of major events in the town, such as the Darlington Jobs Fair and STEMfest.

The team continue to promote Darlington as a better place for business, regularly showcasing the key opportunities of Ingenium Parc, Darlington Science Park and Faverdale as well as other private sector opportunities.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

E6. Successful adoption of the Local Plan

The Local Plan was successfully adopted in February 2022. Our new Local Plan sets out what the opportunities are for development in the area, and what types of development will and will not be permitted and in which locations. Officers continue to monitor the delivery of sites identified in the Local Plan. Officers have been supporting the progress of both Garden Villages. A planning application for Burtree Garden Village was approved in 2024. Consultation on the masterplan relating to Skerningham Garden Village was completed in early 2024.

Officers are also continuing to review other SPDs relating to conservation and planning obligations.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Housing delivery has seen a drop in the 2023/24 financial year largely due to the delayed 'lag' effect as a result of the Nutrient Neutrality designation affecting the whole Tees Catchment.

Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England Nutrient Neutrality credits scheme. The borough has fared well in the proportion of credits allocated to developments in Darlington helping to unlock around 2000 homes.

Looking at the latest monitoring data on housing starts this lag in delivery may continue for the current financial year 2024/25 but will hopefully recover beyond that with the permissions currently being granted likely to have started building out.

The planning team continues to actively engage with the development industry through hosting 'Developer Forums' these forums are well attended and feedback received is that Darlington remains an attractive area in which the industry is keen to invest.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Following the Council's change to its target date to reach carbon neutral, our climate change strategy and action plan have been revised. A new Climate Change Officer has been recruited to support this work, doubling the capacity of the team. We continue to develop relationships with businesses in Darlington to encourage them to take their own actions towards net zero, and use our communications networks to share information so residents can make their own choices. We are also looking to see how we can better include young people in the way we work to ensure we are hearing their ideas and concerns.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

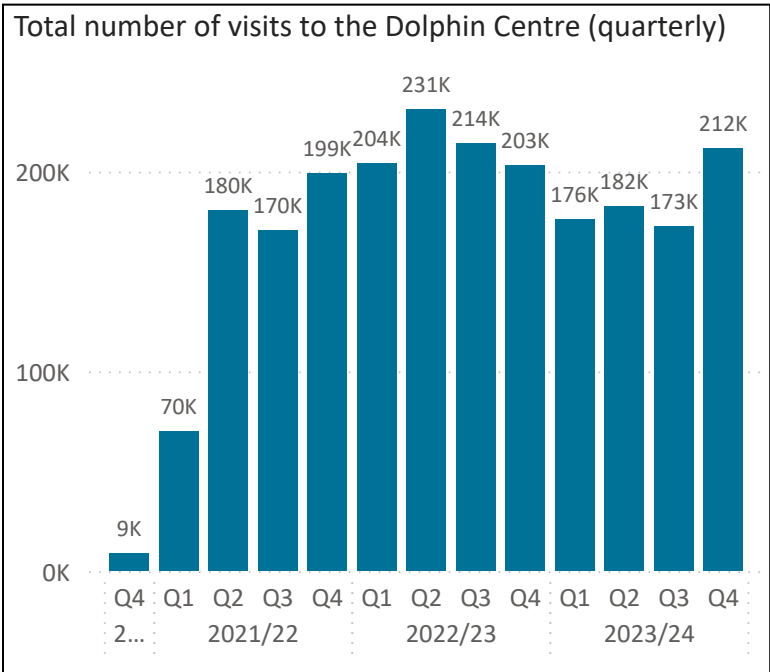
As stated in our previous update, the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) is leading on the delivery of the Darlington Station project. However, Darlington Borough Council continues to provide support where required and attends board level Project meetings with the Tees Valley Combined Authority, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and London North Eastern Railway (LNER).

On the Eastern side work is progressing well with the structure of the new multi storey car park nearing completion. The next stage will be to complete highway alterations on Neasham Road which will start later this year. On the western side the Cattle market temporary car park has been operational since the 26th of April 2023, demolition is complete on the former public house site, and TVCA have secured additional funding from Active Travel England to deliver the Western gateway works. Network Rail are progressing the rail infrastructure works for the new platforms and the improvements within the existing station to link across to the new station building.

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

The Dolphin Centre has experienced high footfall, particularly since the reopening of the main pool in January 2024 following a 12-month refurbishment programme. Memberships are currently sitting at the highest level in the history of the centre with full membership, seniors and students representing the majority. Holiday programmes have seen record performance, including business areas such as bowling and soft play with primary and secondary spend on catering boosting income levels. Currently over 40 clubs are hiring space in the centre bringing a consistent footfall and further opportunity for secondary spend and the events programme has continued to bring in footfall from across the country; including, conferences delivered by government departments, Office for National Statistics and the HM Treasury ball.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services



Visits to the Dolphin Centre were up in Quarter 4 compared to the same quarter in 22-23, demonstrating the impact on footfall with the reopening of the main pool in January 24. Income levels are also reporting a rise with February half term celebrating the highest ever performance levels. Memberships have also hit the highest level in the history of the Dolphin Centre with a clear rise directly after opening the main pool.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

With the end of the Pandemic and the return to business as usual United Kingdom Health Security Agency takes the national lead for monitoring and responding to outbreaks of communicable and non communicable disease in our local communities and provide expert guidance and information in relation to these. As a local authority we discharge our statutory duties and cooperate and participate in the systems and processes put in place by the United Kingdom Health Security Agency. The Director of Public Health has a duty to have assurance that there are appropriate systems and processes in place to protect the health of the population. The Director of Public Health provides a report to Scrutiny on an annual basis outlining the threats and hazards with the current mitigating actions and plans.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

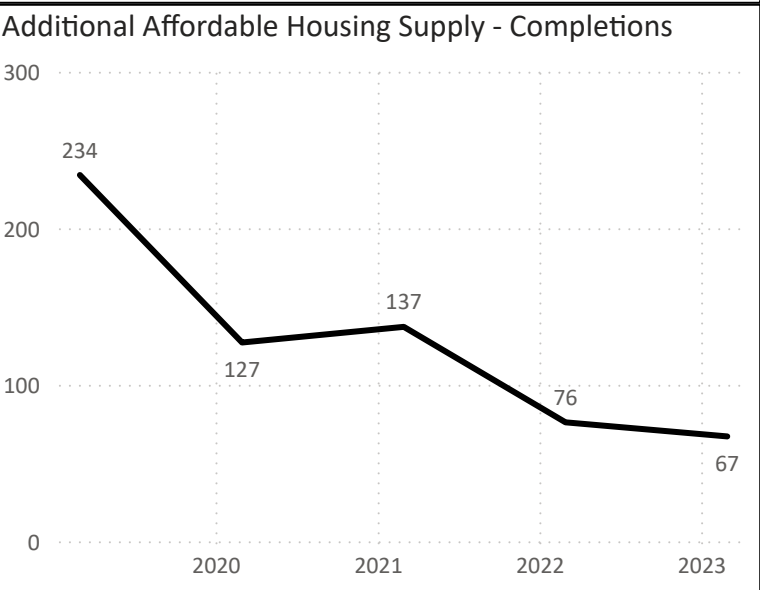
H3. Continue to build new council houses and ensure the existing council housing stock is maintained to a high standard and environmentally friendly

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

Year	Value
2019/20	100.0%
2020/21	100.0%
2021/22	100.0%
2022/23	100.0%
2023/24	100.0%

A stock condition survey was undertaken by an external contractor in 2022-23. This survey confirmed that our properties are of a good standard and continue to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standards and these standards have been met since 2005. This demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to provide excellent quality social housing and reflecting the good work of our Housing teams. The Decent Homes Standard is currently still under review and the outcome should be announced in 2024.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues



This annual figure is obtained from the Government "Live Tables on Affordable Housing Supply". These figures will be published in late 2024 (Expected November/December).

The Council's Housing new build programme was significantly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and then the Nutrient Neutrality announcement, with very few properties completed in 2021/22 and 22/23 (Data is not yet available for 2023/24). However, work concluded on Allington Way phase 3 site, which delivered 55 Council properties in 2022/23. Work is also continuing on Snipe Lane which will see further delivery of affordable council owned units in the near future.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on HRA dwellings

Year	Quarter	Value
2022/23	Q1	96.2%
	Q2	97.3%
	Q3	96.4%
	Q4	95.9%
2023/24	Q1	98.1%
	Q2	98.8%
	Q3	97.2%
	Q4	96.0%

Collection rates have slightly decreased in Q4 2023/24 to 95.9%, this was affected by a double bank holiday and delayed payments hitting accounts.

Over 2040 Council tenants are now in receipt of some element of Universal Credit and have the 5 week wait prior to first payments being received, however average arrears for UC customers remains around 5 weeks average rent.

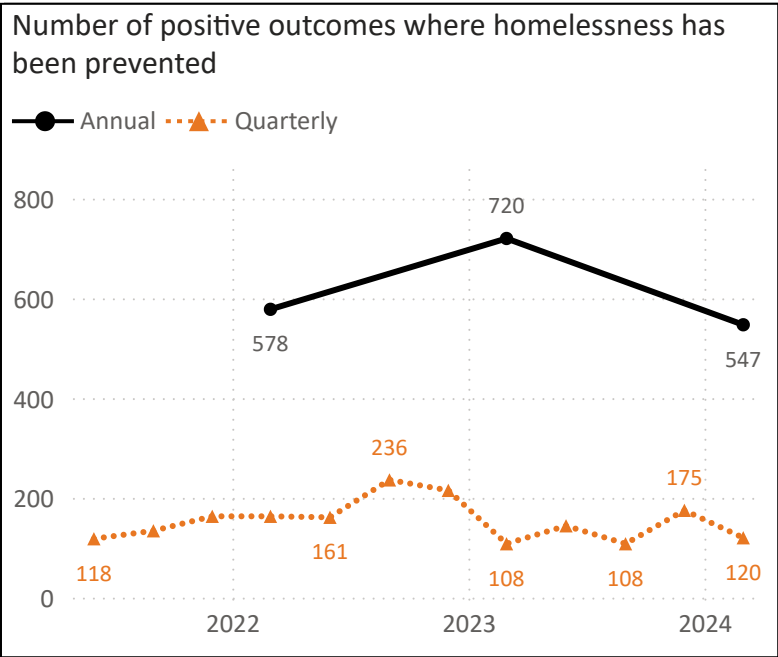
Managed Migration to UC is due to commence in Darlington from spring/summer 2024 and collection rates are expected to be affected as tenants await their payments and move from weekly to monthly payments. The team are planning some joint events with the DWP to support and guide tenants through the period of migration.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues

H5. Review the Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was reviewed by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 28 February 2024. As previously reported, all of the actions within the strategy are complete. However, the Committee also considered the current pressures on our Housing Options service; the number of homeless presentations remains high, with 1,396 in 2023-24. In addition, the need for emergency accommodation continues to increase, with 9,616 days spent in emergency accommodation in 2023-24. This compares with 7,308 days in 2022-23 and 3,697 days for the previous year. However, our approach to dealing with homeless clients is unchanged in that every person matters and can, with the appropriate intervention, move from rough sleeping into long-term, sustainable accommodation. The Committee agreed to develop a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy during 2024, to meet the current challenges, and this will be considered by the Committee in early 2025.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues



There has been a decrease of 446 (24.2%) in the number of presentations to the Housing Options Service, from 1,842 in 22/23 to 1,396 in 23/24. The percentage of positive outcomes remained at 39% for the second year, with the number of positive outcomes decreasing from 720 in 22/23 to 547 in 23/24. There have been changes in the housing market, less private rented accommodation is available and the demands on the social housing waiting lists has increased.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues

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

The Director of public health continues to lead work with key partners and stakeholders on specific programmes and projects including :-

Reviewing and refreshing the local suicide prevention programme including re-establishing a suicide prevention forum and updating and refreshing the suicide prevention plan in light of the latest evidence and guidance.

Continue to roll out the making Every Contact Count (MECC) training to a range of internal and external services and professionals including the voluntary sector using the 'train the trainer' cascade approach. A toolbox of courses and training is available to ensure that those providing MECC in their setting can remain updated and competent.

Continue to undertake the Healthy Lifestyle Survey with 8,400 pupils across schools in Darlington and undertake a new pilot in post 16 settings.

Continue to expand and improve the quality of provision of local substance misuse treatment and recovery services through the utilisation of the drug treatment grant for both adults and young people

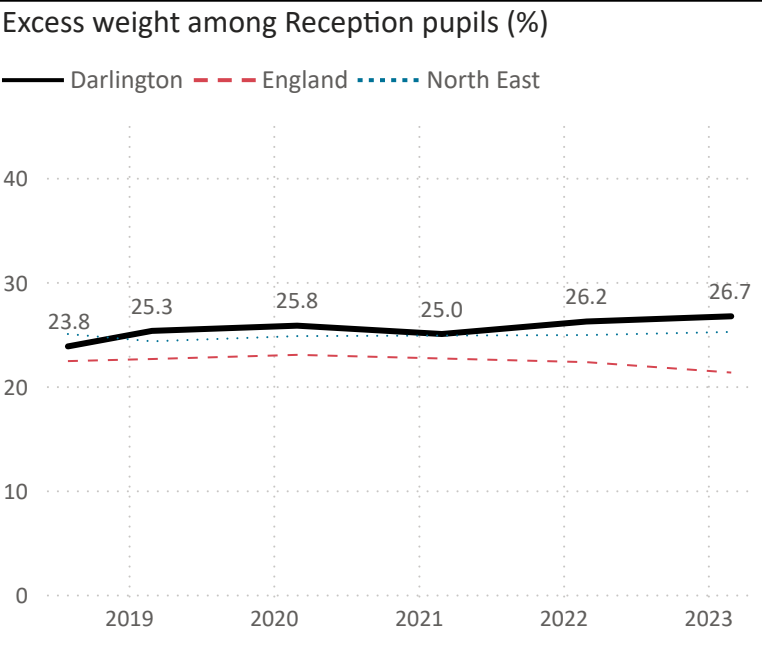
H7. Implement the Darlington Child Healthy Weight Plan with partners

The Darlington Child health Weight Plan continues to deliver on its key objectives including:

- improving the quality of the local food offer through the successful award awards of Healthy Families Catering awards to more food businesses and outlets across the borough
- continue to work with individual schools to support them in achieving the healthy school meals standard including providing specific training
- Continued to support the utilisation of green spaces for physical activity by young people and families through the successful delivery of the holiday activity programme in 16 outdoor spaces
- refreshing and reviewing the children's home food policy to enable them to continue to provide young people in care the highest quality and healthy balanced diet
- Continue to promote and expand the Health Early Years network

Work has commenced working with key stakeholders to provide public health input into the development of a Physical Activity Strategy for Darlington with a report being prepared for Health and Housing Scrutiny later in 2024.

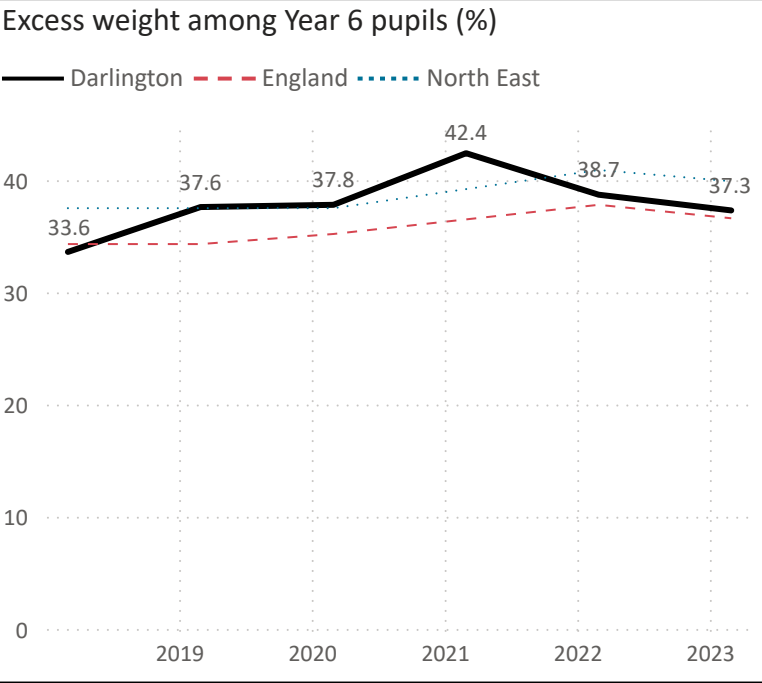
Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health



This data (from 2022/23) shows that that there is no significant change to the trend for Reception prevalence of overweight (including obesity). 26.7% of reception children aged 4-5 years were classified as overweight or obese. Darlington is statistically similar to the North East and statistically worse than England.

The Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan identified evidence-based interventions delivered with partners to address underlying causes of obesity in children and young people. Work includes activity with schools and local commercial food premises to develop a healthy catering standard for a healthy food offer.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health



This data (from 2022/23) shows that 37.3% of year 6 children aged 10-11 years were classified as overweight or obese. Darlington is statistically similar to the North East and England.

The Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan identified evidence-based interventions delivered with partners to address underlying causes of obesity in children and young people. Work includes activity with schools and local commercial food premises to develop a healthy catering standard for a healthy food offer.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

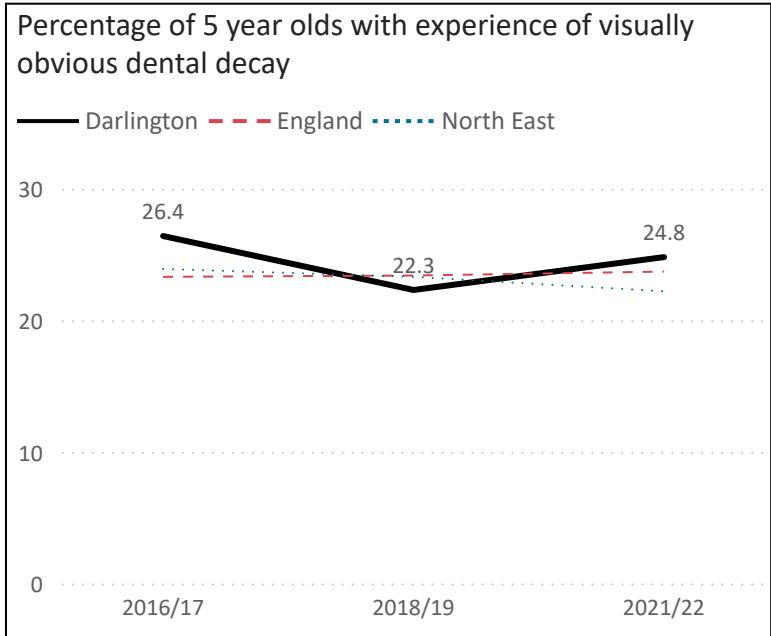
H8. Implement the Darlington Oral Health Plan 2017-2022 with partners

Work continues to refresh the Darlington Oral Health Plan by the Director of Public Health supported by Dental Public Health experts from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities. This will be updated to reflect recent changes in legislation as well as changes in behaviours seen in children and families following the recent pandemic.

The Director of Public Health supported by the specialist Public Health team continue to implement the recommendations of the existing plan including:

- continue to promote and support the toothbrushing scheme in a range of targeted local reception classes and nurseries to re-establish healthy habits in cleaning teeth in young children.
- continue to work with local Tees Valley authorities and OHID Dental Public Health colleagues in the delivery of an Oral Health survey in Darlington to monitor the dental health of school aged children.
- continue to work with colleagues in the NHS and local authorities across the North East to promote the consultation for the Secretary of State for Health proposal for a Community Water Fluoridation Scheme for North East England which will include Darlington.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

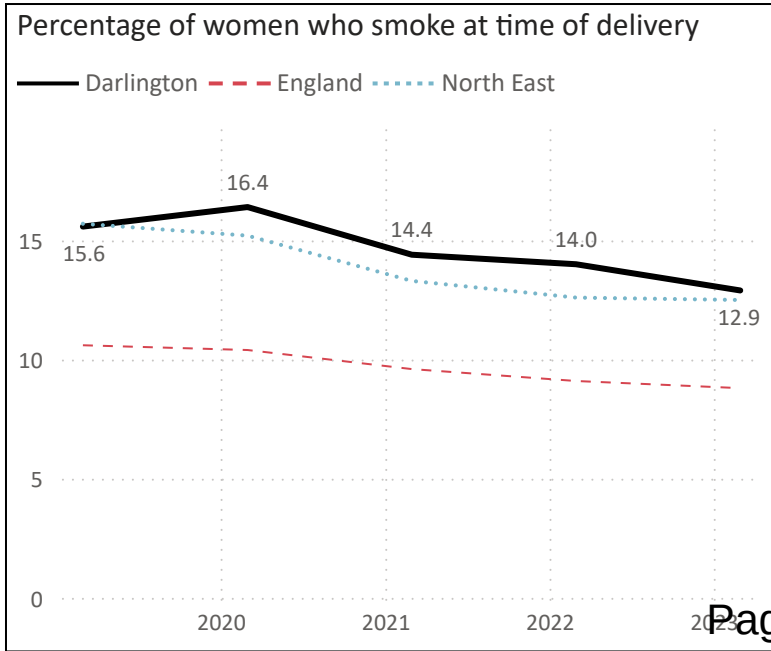


The latest data shows that the the percentage of Darlington 5-year-olds with experience of visually obvious dental decay has increased to 24.8%. This is statistically similar to both the England and North East

It is a preventable cause of avoidable pain and illness in children in Darlington. Dental decay is the most common cause of hospital admissions for 5 to 9 year olds and a significant contribution to the days absent from school. The Childhood Healthy Weight Plan for Darlington includes actions such as reducing sugar and fizzy drinks in settings such as schools and working with families on healthy weaning for babies, to help reduce dietary sources of sugar.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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

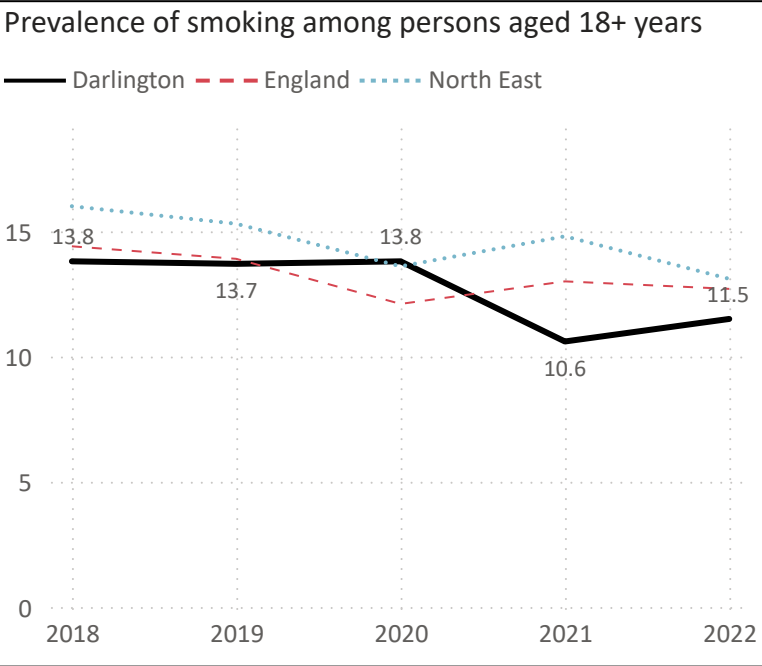


The data (from 2022/23) shows that there is no significant change to the trend for women who smoke at time of delivery. 12.9% of mothers are known to be smokers at time of delivery. Darlington is statistically similar to the North East and statistically worse than England. The gap between Darlington and the North East and England has narrowed since 2020.

The NHS provides stop smoking support through local maternity services. The Local Authority commissions a specialist stop smoking service that supports women to stop smoking before and after being pregnant. The authority works with partners to encourage all residents, including pregnant mothers, to quit smoking at every opportunity.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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



This data (from 2022) shows that 11.5% of persons aged 18+ self-reported themselves as smokers in the Annual Population Survey (APS). This has increased slightly from 2021 but is not statistically significant. Darlington is statistically similar to the North East and England.

The trend over time continues to reduce and it is anticipated that further falls will be recorded in future due to the ongoing impact of measures to reduce smoking in the community such as the raising of the smoking age and funding to increase access to stop smoking interventions.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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

Number of clients receiving a Lifeline service

Year	Quarter	Darlington
2022/23	Q1	3,367
	Q2	3,388
	Q3	3,414
	Q4	3,425
2023/24	Q1	3,480
	Q2	3,457
	Q3	3,493
	Q4	3,528

The figure comparison from Quarters 1-4 in 2022/23 to 2023/24 show a consistent increase in users of the Lifeline Service. In 2024 Q1 and Q4, the data informs us that there was an increase of 100 additional users to the same quarters in the previous year. This could be attributed to the colder months when people are potentially more vulnerable or becoming symptomatic of their health conditions and require additional support so refer in to our service to access this.

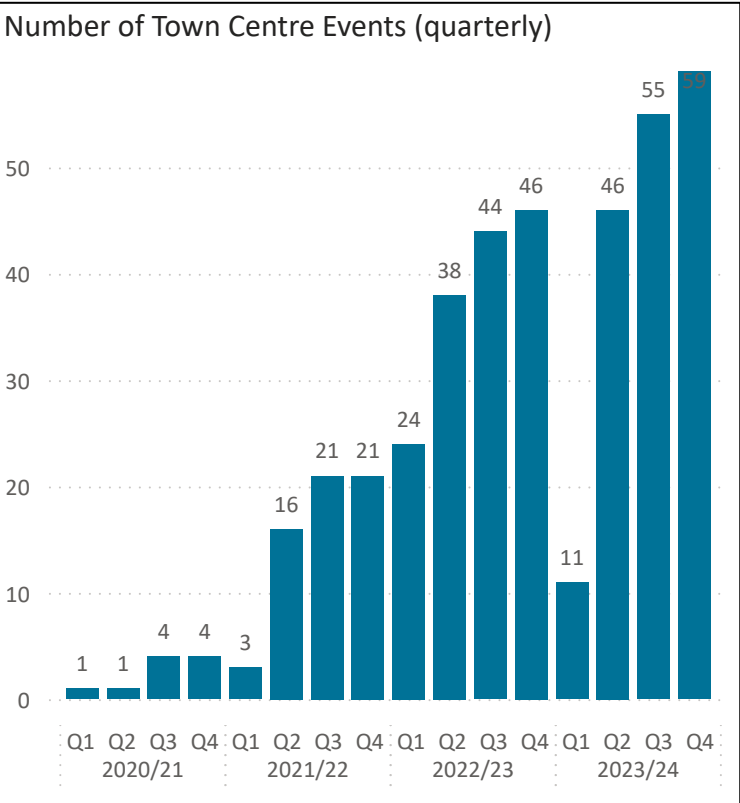
Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues

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

Work continues on developing the exciting Stockton & Darlington Railway 200th (SNDR200) celebrations. The fantastic nine month festival programme developed with partners, will showcase the very first ground breaking journey alongside a range of internationally significant projects, which will shine a spotlight on the history and future of transport. The programme of events will include steam train journeys, exhibitions, visual arts and large scale spectacles. There will be something for everyone, from railway enthusiasts and hobbyists, to students, families and visitors of all ages. The programme will be formally launched on 19th September to local, national and the international media at the Hippodrome.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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



The events season for 2023/24 began with large scale celebrations of the King's Coronation and hosting a live screen for the BBC of Eurovision, in partnership with Tees Valley Combined Authority. Throughout May to September the events team delivered a wide-ranging animation programme including a full Summer Stage programme for the holiday season. Autumn and winter programming saw the addition of Diwali and Chinese New Year celebrations. These new additions attracted new audiences and were very well received. Christmas events continued to attract huge numbers of people, supporting both retail and hospitality venues gaining good press coverage and feedback for Darlington. Restaurant Week in February was very popular with offers and promotions being extended and more locations signing up. Engaging with communities has connected more people, to build stronger events and new relationships.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

Year	Month	Darlington
2022	September	97%
2023	June	100%
	September	91%
	December	52%
2024	March	94%

The regular programme of 33 transects inspected for litter every other month, as defined by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Land Audit Management System grading system to monitor the cleanliness standard recommenced in April this year. The percentage is calculated using the number getting a "pass" rating.

The March figure of 94% gives the average score over the last 12 months is 85%. The reduction in the December figure was due an inaccurate recording of the cleanliness levels.

Refresher training on the grading of cleanliness for inspection staff has taken place within the past year. It has improved the inspection process, resulting in more accurate measurements.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

L3. Finalise plans for Hopetown and initiate implementation of the plans together with partners

The restored Goods Shed, is now the entry point to Hopetown and this restored facility houses a café, shop, and digital media experience.

North Road Station Museum (formerly the Head of Steam), celebrates the past, present and future of rail travel and engineering brilliance with a £3 million investment into a brand new interactive permanent exhibition.

In the Carriage Works, the opening special exhibition is 'Brick Journeys', a tour through the world of transport made entirely from LEGO® bricks. Also within this Grade II listed building is The Stores, where people of all ages can explore Hopetown’s archive and discover artefacts and objects not on permanent display.

The investment in the site and our assets recognises our proud rail heritage and Hopetown Darlington celebrates the innovation and experimentation that put Darlington on the map - and that all starts with play. Children’s imaginations can run free in Wagon Woods, the attraction’s railway-themed immersive outdoor adventure play park, based on a Georgian feat of engineering: The Stockton & Darlington Railway’s Brusselton Incline. Developed in consultation with local primary schools, the play park includes an accessible incline track with interactive features and a companion slide suitable for wheelchair users.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

The refurbishment and restoration of Crown Street Library is now complete with the building reopening to the public in September 2023. The combination of preserving the heritage of the Grade II listed Victorian library and embracing modern elements strikes a harmonious balance, creating a library that is both a window into the past and a vibrant hub of knowledge and culture for the present and future. The restoration work has restored: -

- The original entrance, main entrance and accessible entrance
- The Lending Library, a haven for book enthusiasts and curious readers alike
- Children's Library, a vibrant, magical inclusive space for children and families to come together to experience the joy of reading and story telling
- The Study, which caters to the diverse needs of visitors to study and engage in the service
- The Hive, an inspirational space for exploring, learning and creativity
- The Centre for Local Studies, a space to learn and research the history of Darlington
- The Reminiscence Room, a space to relax and step back in time, designed to inspire nostalgic conversations
- The Hoskins Room, a meeting space
- The Art Gallery, a place to showcase a changing exhibition programme and the Borough's art collection

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

L5. Review and deliver a revised car parking strategy

Following the adoption of the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan and the subsequent approval of the Darlington Transport Plan framework by Cabinet in March 2021, officers have worked to develop the Darlington Transport Plan, Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan and the Darlington Parking Strategy. These plans and strategies were consulted on throughout the summer of 2022 and have now been approved by both Cabinet and Council at meetings in November of 2022. Work is now progressing on implementing the measures identified in the plan. A review of resident parking zones is underway, we are working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to provide on street electric vehicle charging using Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding, Pay by Phone will be expanded to include on-street parking later this year and new parking machines have been ordered which will allow contactless payment as well as cash in on-street locations.

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

The Tees Valley has secured £310m in transport investment between 2022 and 2027 from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). This funding will see the biggest investment in sustainable transport ever seen in the Tees Valley and will assist in delivering climate change objectives across the region. There is strong governance and partnership working in place between Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the local authorities and the national agencies to deliver the programme of improvements. In Darlington, CRSTS is delivering the Darlington Station project, an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators, a programme of interventions on priority bus corridors, further development of walking and cycling routes and installation of electric vehicle charging points throughout Darlington.

In addition, the Tees Valley has been given an indicative allocation of £978m in the second round of CRSTS. We will be working closely with TVCA to develop and deliver the programme which includes a £250m allocation for the Darlington Northern Link Road.

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

L7. Modernise Darlington’s crematorium service

Work has been completed on the modernisation of Darlington's crematorium service. The new cremators have both now been operating since December 2022 and the building has been completed and handed over to bereavement who now operate the bereavement service from west cemetery.

The new Chapel and burial ground extension was completed last year in April 2023. Feedback received has shown that the Chapel has been well received by users, providing a new modern chapel that can facilitate larger gatherings and a crematorium that meets current environmental requirements. The project has also created capacity for further burials in West Cemetery.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

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

Officers have continued to work with the applicants planning agents to address land ownership issues which were delaying the progress of the £25m Jet Centre and Aviation Village. These issues have now been addressed the the planning application is now extant and legal. Officers continue to support the airport in regards to readiness to receive specific cargo. As of yet no future cargo imports of controlled food types e.g. beans from various parts of Africa have yet been agreed. However the current Service Level Agreement between the airport and the council will ensure there is no delay in accepting the import of this type of food goods.

Mark Ladyman: Assistant Director - Economic Growth

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

The MTFP for 2024-28 was approved by Council in February 2024 and provided a balanced budget until 2025/26. Work continues across all service areas to identify efficiencies and additional income to assist with the financial position to contribute towards the delivery of future years budgets.

The year end projected position for 2023/24 at outturn was an improvement on the original estimate of £0.545m, which is an improvement of £1.283m on the Q3 report and therefore an improvement on the 2024-28 MTFP initial estimate.

Service pressures continue, particularly in Children's services due to significant post pandemic demand which has been seen nationwide. All departments continue to review and challenge expenditure to assist with the Council's financial position.

The Council's accounts are scrutinised by our auditors Ernst and Young and continue to deliver a positive value for money outcome.

Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

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

The Council has invested in eight joint ventures to date, to build and sell houses. Three of the joint ventures have completed with all the investment repaid and sales dividends received. All of the remaining joint ventures are progressing well and on target to provide dividends as expected.

The West Park, Out of Borough, Elder Brook Park and Hurworth Gardens joint ventures are all progressing well with strong sales/reservations either on target or above target for the 2024 releases. The establishment of a new joint venture between the Council and Esh Homes at Blackwell Grange was approved by Cabinet in January 2024, with the planned construction of 44 new houses for sale.

Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

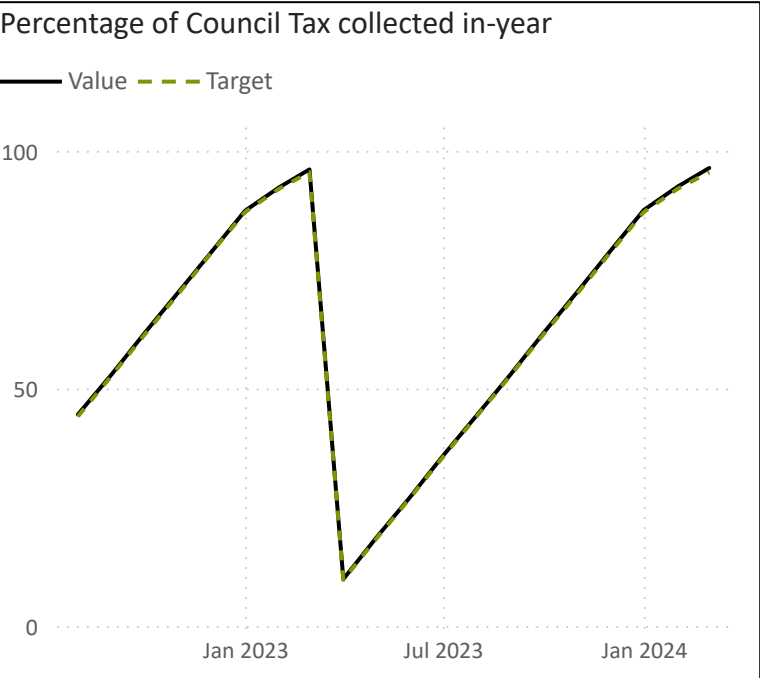
R3. Maximise the council's income from the council's Investment Fund, including further joint venture housing companies

The Investment Fund provision of £50m is being used for joint ventures and economic regeneration initiatives. Returns on joint ventures are forecast to be £7.6 million, with three of the eight schemes completed and the investment repaid and recycled back into the fund.

There are ten current regeneration schemes or joint ventures committed against the £50 million fund totalling £42.65 million, leaving a balance of £7.35 million uncommitted and available for further schemes. Officers from both Finance and the Economic Growth teams are actively looking at schemes, which subject to approval, could utilise the uncommitted fund to provide economic benefit to the Council and the wider borough.

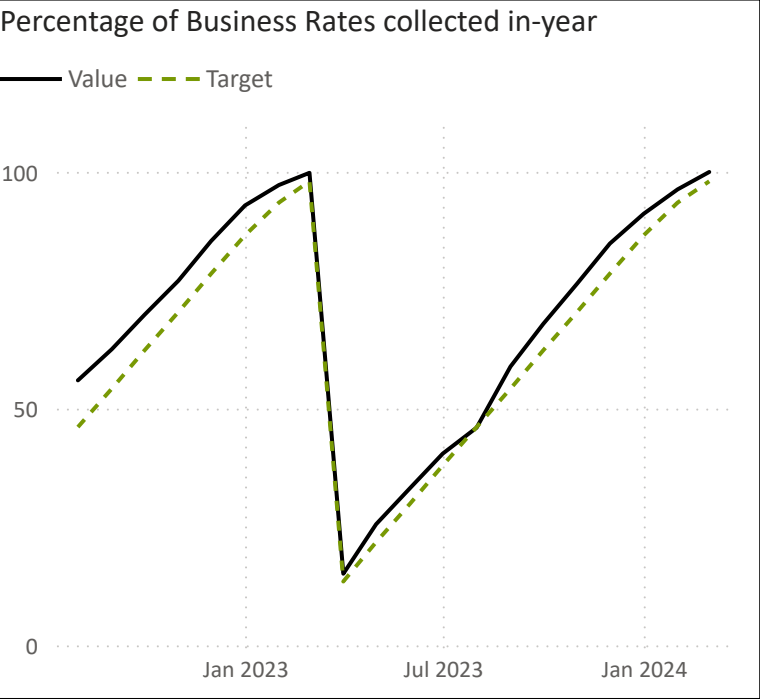
Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

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



The percentage of Council Tax collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 96.39% of Council Tax collected in 2023-24. This is an increase in collection, compared to 2022-23, which was 96.09%. The collection rate of 96.39% for 2023-24 is the highest since 2010-11. The overall amount collected by quarter 4 was £72.5m, compared to £68.4m by quarter 4 in 2022-23.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues



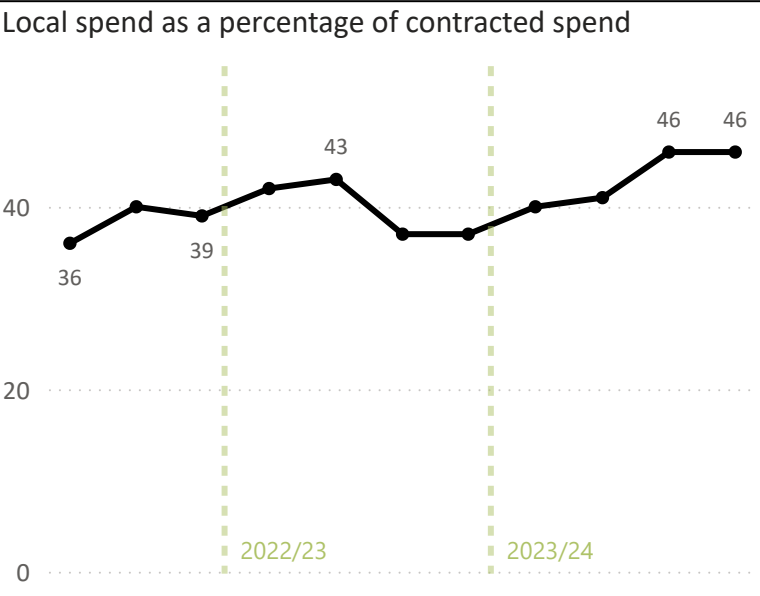
The percentage of Business Rates collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 99.97% of Business Rates collected, compared to 99.79% in quarter 4 of 2022-23. The overall amount collected by quarter 4 was £31.2 million compared to £31.8 million by quarter 4 of 2022-23. There was a national revaluation of business properties with effect from 1 April 2023, which increased the overall amount of rateable values for Darlington by £2.8 million or 3.2%. However, there was also a generous transitional protection scheme in place, which limited the increase payable for those businesses that would have had an increase in their Business Rates in 2023-24. However, despite the revaluation, the overall rateable values for Darlington decreased slightly in 2023-24 from £90.4m to £90.3m. This was due to some backdated adjustments to rateable values following appeals to the Valuation Office and some businesses being taken out of the rating list temporarily due to development works.

Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues

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

In line with the Social Value Act of 2013, the Council requires companies tendering for work from the Council to outline what added social value they would deliver. This forms part of the 'quality' assessments of the bids. To help providers deliver their social value commitments, the Procurement Team have directed suppliers to Darlington Cares. This has recently resulted in three new members joining. Social value through procurement is frequently discussed at the Public Sector Executives Group. For public sector agencies whose geography is wider than Darlington disaggregating what social value benefits apply to Darlington is complicated. However public sector agencies are keen to explore how their roles as 'Anchor Institutions' (a key plank of local wealth building) can benefit Darlington more.

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



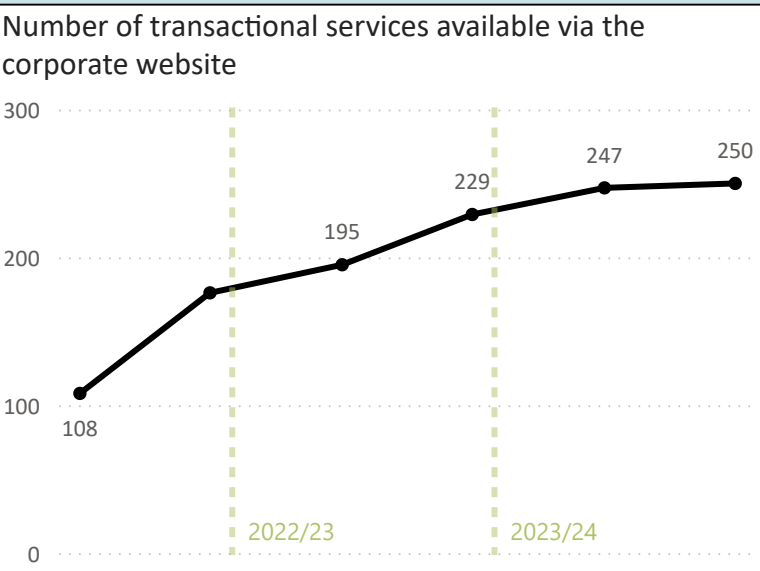
The spend with Darlington-based suppliers has increased in the last 2 quarters from 41% to 46%, an increase of 5%.

In comparison to the same period in 22/23 this is an increase of 9%.

The procurement team continue to engage with the local supply chain, via the e-tendering system, pre-market engagement and social media prior to any new or reoccurring procurement activity.

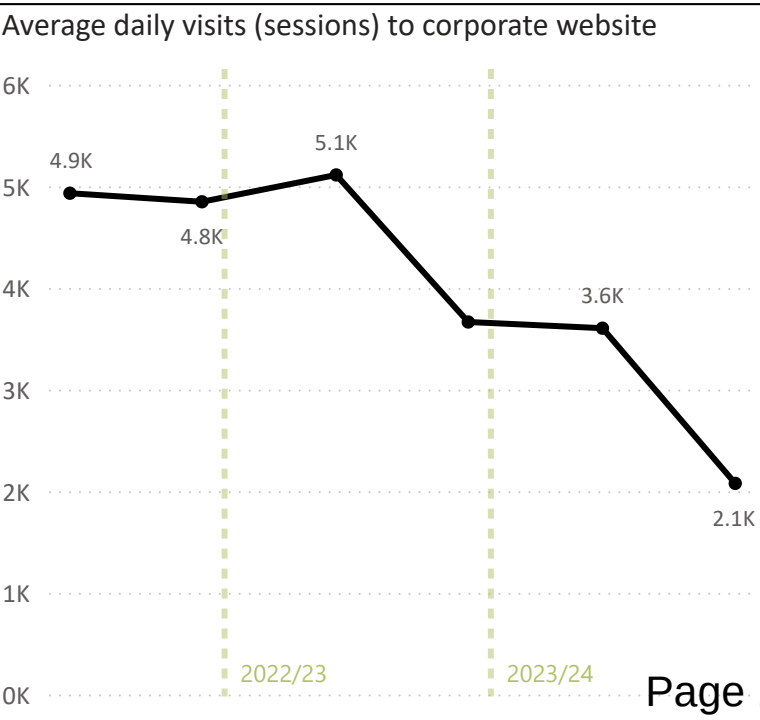
Luke Swinhoe: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

R6. Increasing the availability of council services online



There have been 3 additional Lagan forms added to the site and app in the last reporting period. These were focused around the Street Scene services of reporting broken glass, dead animals and needles. There is now a Lagan upgrade underway, once this is in place a lot of legacy forms which Customer Services use will need to be converted into modern eforms which can then be put online for the public to use as well.

Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications



As noted during the previous reporting period, the cookie acceptance pop-up continues to restrict the website visitor data that we can collect. Compounding this challenge, many web browsers now come with a do not track option set by default so getting reliable statistics in the future will be increasingly difficult. The software used by the Council track web visits (Google Analytics) has recently undergone some significant changes which has further limited our ability to gather reliable data.

Despite these data gathering issues, there has been no indication the corporate website is used any less than previously in the form of customers shifting to other channels of contact.

Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

R7. Review and refresh the council’s workforce strategy

The Council's workforce strategy and plan was agreed in July 2021, with rollout from October 2021. Briefings have taken place to promote the strategy and ensure that the values are embedded into everyday working practices. Monitoring and evaluation has also taken place with updates provided to chief officers and the Joint Consultative Committee.

As part of monitoring, to increase engagement with staff we have created the Employee Ambassador Group, and refined the way we undertake questionnaires to shorter quicker pulse surveys. We have undertaken a number of surveys already and will repeat these through a rolling programme so we can measure changes in results. We have completed the review of our Personal Development Review process and following the successful completion of the pilot, a new process, "My Journey" will be rolled out to all staff this year. My Journey will incorporate and promote our core values as included within the strategy.

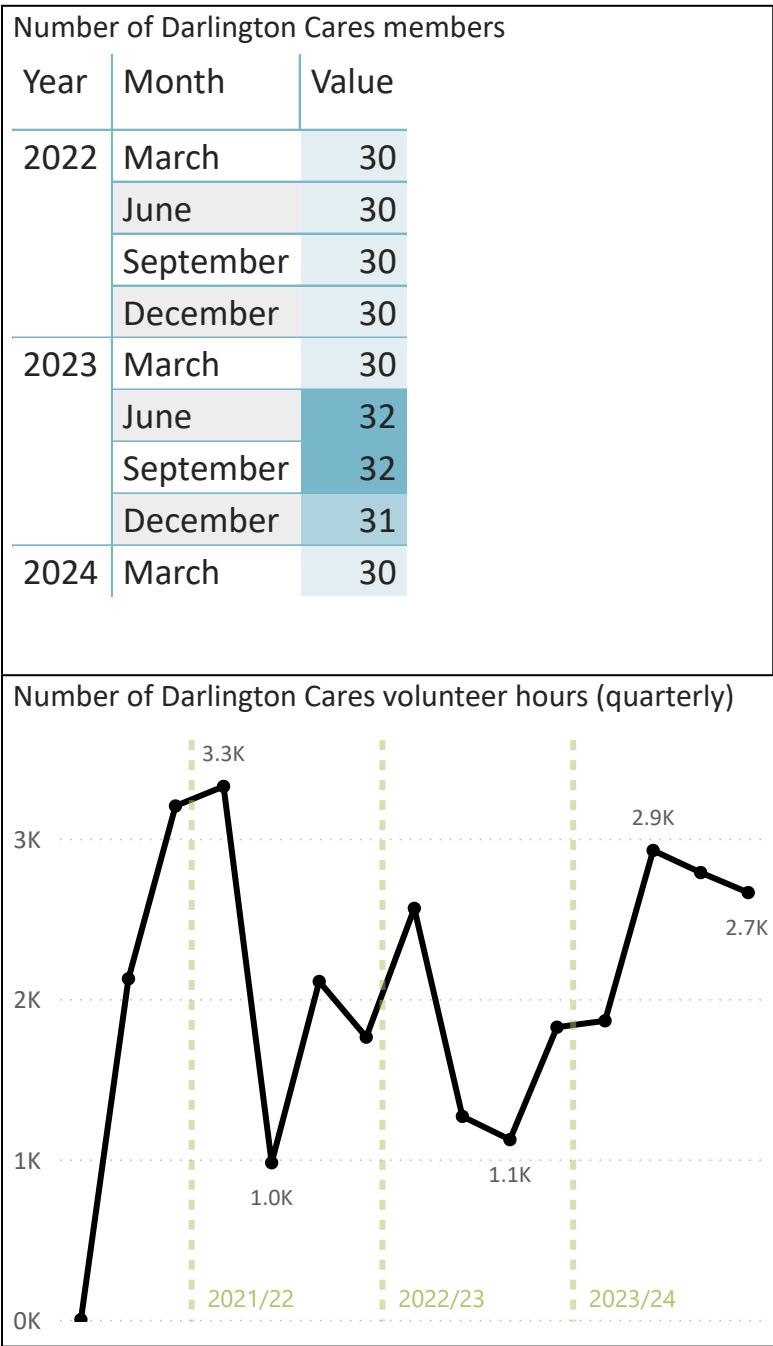
The current strategy is a live document, however it is due for formal review in 2025, therefore we are already considering how the next strategy will be developed to ensure that our workforce have the right tools and support they need to deliver services in an ever changing environment.

[Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources](#)

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

Whilst Darlington Cares continues to help employers deliver their environmental, governance and social commitments through providing resources and volunteering in communities, the recently formed Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership (DEEP) is taking shape and attracting new members. A network and learn event was held at Redde Northgate in March which was attended by the Mayor. It focused on how businesses can move to electric vehicles and a drive for members to Pledge their commitment to changes they intend to make towards net zero has been launched. DEEP is supporting the Council in getting employers views of the Climate Change Risk Assessment it is carrying out.

Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director



Darlington Cares enjoys strong support from its 30 members whose employees provide thousands of hours of volunteering in the environment, education and social justice. Notable recent joiners are Amazon, Redde Northgate and Carvers estate agents. The Procurement team have been directing suppliers to Darlington Cares as a way they can fulfil their social value commitment. Once introduced, suppliers quickly see the benefit and sign up. EE has committed to leading a Community Challenge which will involve numerous employers' volunteers working in the Denes over the summer. The sister project, Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership is attracting a range of different employers.

Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

The number of volunteering hours has increased by 50.9% (3,451) from 6,776 in 2022/23 to 10,227 for 2023/24. Volunteering hours continue to grow after the significant drop off during the pandemic.

The programme of activities delivered under the three areas of focus, environment, education and social justice, attract growing numbers of company volunteers. However, in addition specific initiatives like the great park auction and the forthcoming Community Challenge prove a popular way of attracting more volunteering support. A target of 10,000 hours has been set for 2024.

Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

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

As a new Council Plan is in development, the approach to neighbourhood renewal is under review.

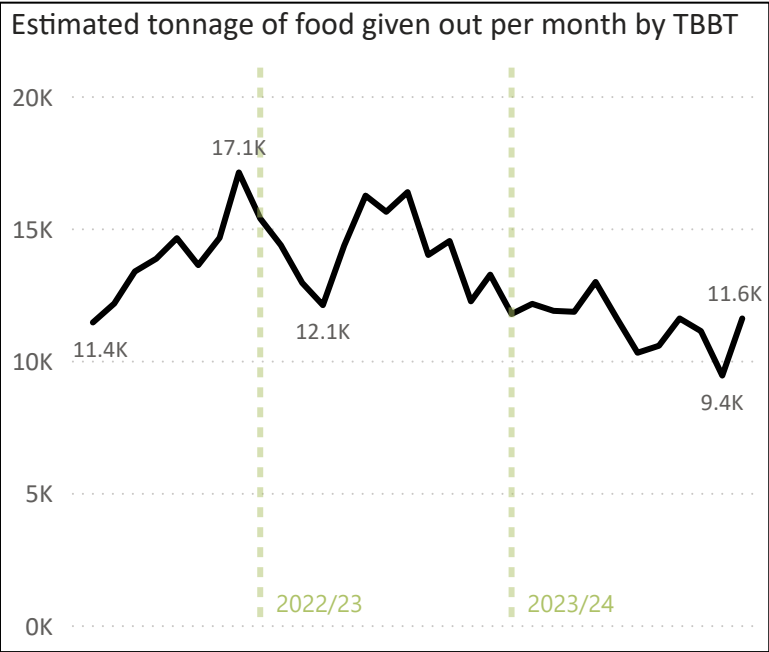
Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

S3. Work with partners to address food instability

The Bread and Butter Thing now hold sessions at nine hubs on a weekly basis across Darlington, a valuable resource for residents struggling with the current cost of living crisis. As last year, The Bread and Butter Thing will be providing social spaces as part of their service. This provides the same type of benefits as 'warm spaces'.

As part of the Household Support Fund programme that the Council is delivering that is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions, The Bread and Butter Thing are providing food to the network of foodbanks operating in Darlington. Demand for Foodbanks has continued to rise whilst there has been a decrease in donations.

Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director



The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) has served 20,223 customers which equates to 137,779 kg of food throughout 2023/24. This weight of food has fallen by 34,567 kg (20.2%), from 171,346kg in 2022/23. There have been some issues with the quality and quantity of the food, resulting in a fall in the number of residents using the scheme.

The council are working closely with TBBT to ensure sustained quality and quantity of food across all 9 hubs, based in identified areas of deprivation. The initiative continues to support families through the current cost of living crisis.

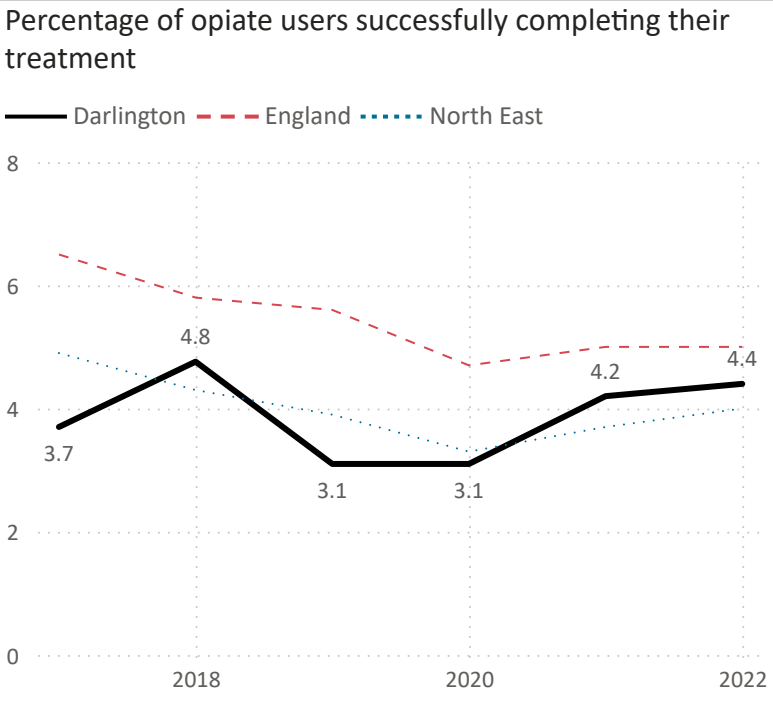
Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

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

The service provides a range of activities around tackling anti-social behaviour, environmental crime, control of dogs, parking enforcement and abandoned vehicles. The service continues to make effective use of legal powers including a range of local intervention programmes for young people, continues to provide increased levels of local high visibility patrols through the Home Office Trailblazer initiative, revised policies and procedures and has introduced a new case management system to manage caseloads effectively. A dedicated Environmental Crime Coordinator continues to engage, educate and, where necessary, enforce environmental crime issues. Good progress has also been achieved in relation to the control of dogs where the service works closely with partners to promote various schemes to secure good and responsible ownership in Darlington. The service continues to promote safer roads and in support has targeted schools, residents parking zones and problem locations to reduce congestion and secure the safety of the public. All activities are coordinated through a threat and risk model which ensures that all resources are effectively deployed throughout the Borough.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

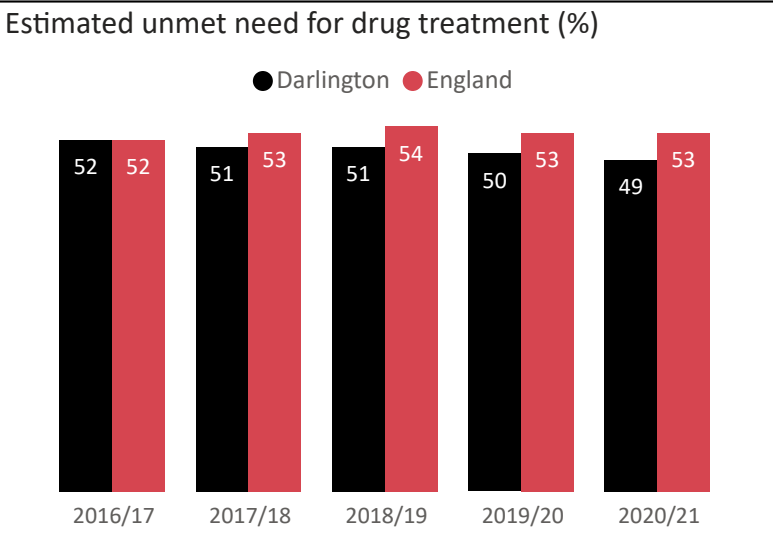
S5. Work with Durham Constabulary and other key partners to improve our collective response to dealing with drug and alcohol issues



This data (from 2022) shows that there is an increasing trend for the proportion of Opiate users who are successfully completing structured drug treatment. This has increased to 4.4% of opiate users for Darlington which is now statistically similar to the North East and England.

This rise reflects the work the provider of substance misuse services in Darlington has undertaken to increase access to treatment and improve the numbers in treatment. They are also implementing evidence based interventions such as optimising prescribing to ensure treatment is optimised and effective.

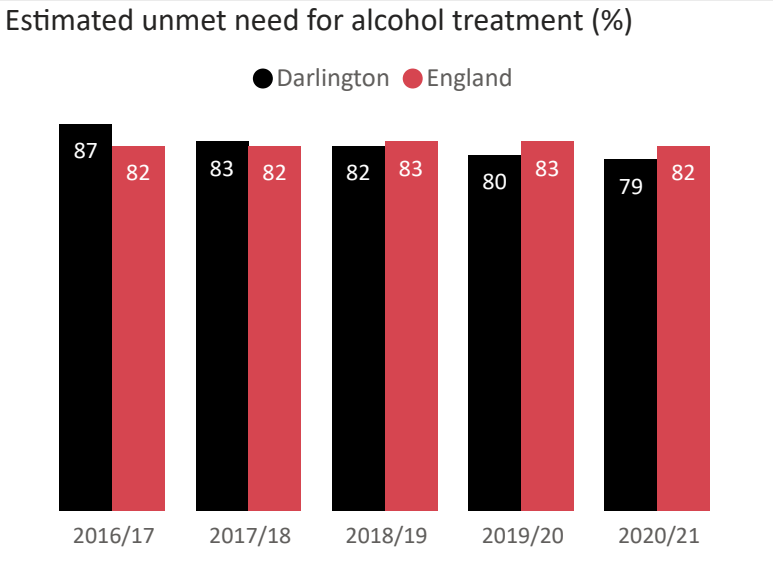
Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health



This indicator describes the estimated proportion of those who are using drugs who are not accessing treatment, at 49% the estimated unmet need in Darlington is lower than the England average.

Work has been continuing with partners across the whole borough to make our local drug treatment services more accessible and reach those using substances who are not in treatment to support them into treatment.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health



This indicator shows the estimated proportions of adults who are hazardous drinkers in need of alcohol treatment that are not in treatment. The latest data shows that this is a lower percentage at 79% compared to the England average of 82%.

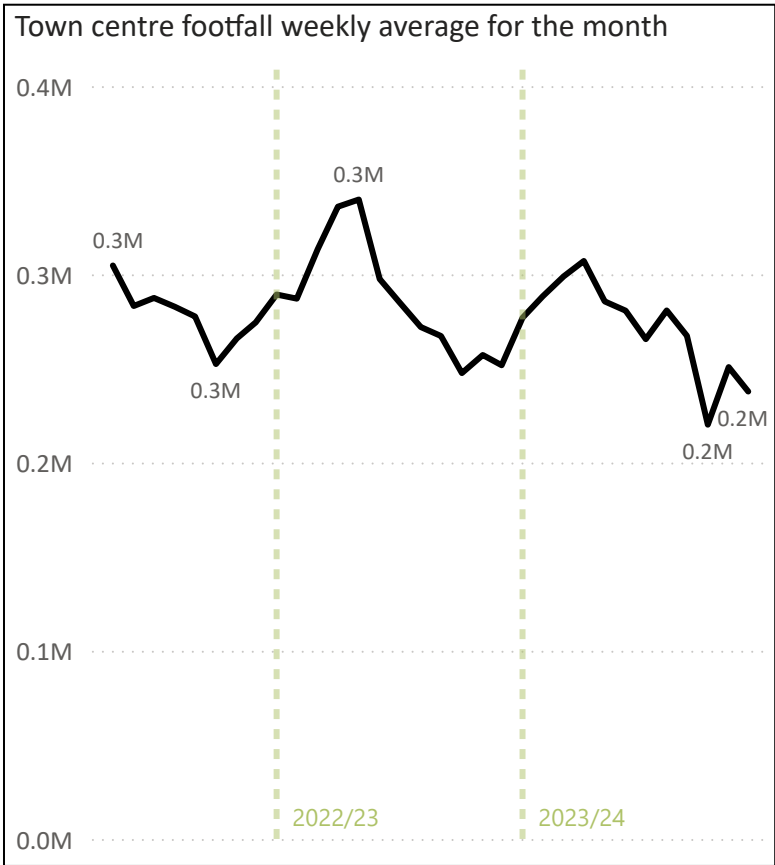
There has been multiagency actions with partners including including the A&E at Darlington Memorial Hospital (DMH) and local GPs to identify those who are hazardous drinking earlier and provide an earlier intervention and referral into local services for support.

Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

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

Number 40 provides a safe space in the night-time economy. There is a newly appointed co-ordinator who manages over 40 volunteers. Number 40 deals with twenty to thirty incidents a weekend and is open between 9pm and 3am. The hub also opens during any Mongay event to provide support to members of the LGBTQ+ community. We now deliver a StreetFriends initiative which involves staff from Number 40 walking the night-time economy area to proactively provide help and assistance to those in need. We have established a network of Taxi Marshalls who work as a member of the multi-agency team to manage the afternoon and night-time economy. DBC Community Safety has delivered various safety measures including licensed premises / traders checks, dedicated police night-time patrols, a self-help facility in the town centre linked to improved CCTV systems, and more recently, the extension of Pubwatch and a revitalised Shopwatch scheme. Key partners also meet weekly to review incidents and introduce measures to promote a safe and vibrant licensed economy. The town centre car parks have achieved reaccreditation of “Park Mark” in recognition of public accessibility and safety, and DBC were awarded Purple Flag accreditation in January 2024.

Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services



S8. Oversee the implementation of the council’s equality policy

Percentage of staff who have completed equality and diversity training

March 2024

76.1%

The total number of current staff (excluding casual staff) who have attended a half day session of training is 1,458. This equates to 76.1% of the current workforce and is a decline from the previous period. The decline is due to the face to face training being paused until Summer 2024 while the trainer is on maternity leave. Alternative arrangements are in place to provide advice and guidance to staff when required during this period.

Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

Percentage of elected members who have completed equality and diversity training

March 2024

78.0%

The face to face training has been paused until Summer 2024 due to the trainer being on maternity leave, but a suite of learning resources has been published on the Intranet as an interim arrangement for members to access. Two members have used the online resources within the reporting period, increasing the number of members who have completed the training to 39.

Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

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

Strong partnership and project teams are in place, developing two studies that will inform and assist future planning, investment and bidding opportunities. Operational meetings occur on a regular basis between the Environment Agency and council officers. The two studies that are taking place are:

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

Queries
Narrative Versions
Data Engine Comments
Current Indicator Queries
Queries from previous report
No queries found from previous report

Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Proj

CABINET
16 JULY 2024

HOUSING SERVICES GAS AND ELECTRICAL SAFETY POLICIES 2024-2029

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio

Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 and the Housing Services Domestic Electrical Safety Policy 2024-2029.

Summary

2. We are committed to ensuring the safety of our tenants, staff, our partners and the wider community who may be affected by gas and electrical installations and appliances, associated flues and pipework in properties that we own or have a responsibility for managing.
3. The Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** and Housing Services Domestic Electrical Safety Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 2** set out our legal obligations in relation to gas and electrical safety, together with the responsibilities for our staff, contractors and our tenants, to ensure they are not put at risk from the effects of gas and electricity.
4. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft policies and they have given their full support.
5. These policies were considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2024, who agreed their onward submission for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Consider the contents of this report.
 - (b) Approve the Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1 and the Housing Services Domestic Electrical Safety Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 2.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) The Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating, and Electrical Safety Policies ensure we have a clear approach to the safety of our tenants, staff, our partners and the wider community, who may be affected by gas and electricity in our Council homes.
- (b) The Regulator of Social Housing's new Consumer Standards from April 2024 places a duty on social housing landlords to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of our tenants in their homes and associated communal areas.
- (c) The adoption of formal gas and electrical safety policies is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

- (i) Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no impact
Health and Wellbeing	Ensuring we have a clear approach to gas and electrical safety in our Council homes will have a positive impact on our tenants' health and well-being
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact
Diversity	There is no impact
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report supports the Council plan to ensure we are able to provide our tenants with good quality housing
Efficiency	There are no implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. We are committed to ensuring the safety of our tenants, staff, our partners and the wider community who may be affected by gas and electrical installations and appliances, associated flues and pipework in properties that we own or have a responsibility for managing.
9. All landlords have a legal responsibility to comply with the relevant gas and electrical safety regulations and approved codes of practice, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive. The Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 and Housing Services Domestic Electrical Safety Policy 2024-2029 set out our legal obligations in relation to gas and electrical safety, together with the responsibilities for our staff, contractors and our tenants, to ensure they are not put at risk from the effects of gas and electricity.
10. The Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1 and Domestic Electrical Safety Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 2 set out the following:
 - (a) The responsibilities of our staff and contractors in undertaking any gas and electrical work in our Council homes and ensuring that all work is undertaken by suitably qualified and trained staff.
 - (b) The responsibilities of our tenants, in relation to any gas and electrical installations and appliances, in accordance with their tenancy agreement, including allowing access to their homes for safety checks and associated work to be undertaken.
 - (c) The legal framework in which all gas and electrical installations, appliances and associated work are governed by.
 - (d) The gas and electrical safety checks, inspections and testing that will be undertaken by Housing Services staff and contractors, to ensure we comply with our statutory duties as landlords.
 - (e) The approach to undertaking any repairs and dealing with any faults or reported hazards.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards

11. The RSH has published new consumer standards from April 2024. These new standards place a duty on social housing landlords to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of our tenants in their homes and associated communal areas.
12. Specifically, the Safety and Quality Standard states:
 - (a) Registered providers must identify and meet all legal requirements that relate to the health and safety of tenants in their homes and communal areas.

- (b) Registered providers must ensure that all required actions arising from legally required health and safety assessments are carried out within appropriate timescales.
 - (c) Registered providers must ensure that the safety of tenants is considered in the design and delivery of landlord services and take reasonable steps to mitigate any identified risks to tenants.
13. Our Housing Services gas and electrical safety policies will help us demonstrate how we will achieve these new standards.

Outcome of Consultation

14. Our Tenants Panel were consulted in May 2024 and overall, the Panel support the proposed Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety, and Housing Services Domestic Electrical Safety Policies.

HOUSING SERVICES

DOMESTIC GAS AND HEATING SAFETY POLICY 2024-2029

Purpose

This Policy applies to all Housing Domestic properties, where we have a responsibility for gas safety, and any heating appliance that could produce carbon monoxide, such as solid fuel fires. This policy covers individual homes and communal areas, where such installations are present. This policy also incorporates items such as boilers, fires, flues (concealed and exposed), chimneys and associated pipework.

The majority of our properties are heated by gas or have a gas installation. We only have a small number of properties with a solid fuel fires. We also have properties installed with Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) and unvented cylinders.

The purpose of this document is to describe how Housing Services meets its requirements for undertaking landlord gas safety checks, as set out by the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 and document G3 Regulations. The Gas Safety Installation and Use Regulations place important duties on landlords of all properties, to ensure that gas appliances and their flues are maintained in a safe condition, annual safety checks are carried out, and records are kept and issued (or in certain cases displayed) to tenants. These duties are in addition to the more general ones that landlords have under the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. All landlords have a legal responsibility to comply with these regulations, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Definitions

- This Policy relates to Darlington Borough Council Housing Services.
- Heating Appliance: For this document a heating appliance is any piece of equipment that can heat air or water.
- HSE – Health and Safety Executive

Responsibilities

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that appropriate management systems are in place to ensure employees and members of the public are not put at risk from the effects of gas or carbon monoxide.

The duties of management, staff and personnel of Housing Services will be clearly communicated and agreed by all parties, to ensure that all persons can undertake their

duties, as stated in this Policy. Communications and feedback detailing agreed responsibilities will be kept and monitored, and this will trigger further training or assistance, as deemed necessary.

Commercial Elements

The Housing portfolio contains commercial items, which are subject to the same Gas Safe and HSE Regulations. However, staff are required to have the relevant qualifications such as, COCN1 ICPN:1, COURT:1, CIGA:1, CDGA:1, TPCP:1, to work on commercial gas appliances.

These include, but are not limited to, gas items within the communal areas of:

- Sheltered Schemes.
- Extra Care Schemes.
- Good Neighbour Schemes, such as community centres.

This also includes commercial boiler systems, which provide heat to the individual flats within some schemes, namely:

- Oban Court
- Rockwell House
- Ted Fletcher Court
- Linden Court
- Dinsdale Court
- Windsor Court
- Rosemary Court.

These works are managed by our internal Corporate Landlord Service, so do not fall under the Duty Holder requirements within this domestic gas policy, as this will be covered under “Commercial Duty Holder” requirements.

The requirement will be on the commercial duty holder to ensure they meet and comply with statutory requirements, including the regulations set out within this policy.

The “Responsible Person” elements, however, do still apply in relation to ensuring completion and compliance.

Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for this Policy and ensuring compliance.

Group Director

The hierarchy of the organisation sets out that the responsibility for the ‘responsible person’, is carried through the Chief Executive Officer and Directors, and on to other managers, who have responsibilities for overall statutory compliance or general building management activities. They will also be responsible for ensuring that adequate physical and financial resources are made available, to enable the objectives of this Policy to be met. It is important that each ‘responsible person’ is aware of their accountability and fulfils their role in a safe and competent manner.

Assistant Director of Housing and Revenues

Gas safety is the responsibility of the appropriate Assistant Director within areas under their management control. This will involve:

- Understanding relevant gas legislation and guidance, including delegating appropriate responsibilities to relevant managers to Duty Holders and delegated Client Responsible Person.
- Ensuring the allocation of resources (financial and staff) to implement the Gas and Heating Safety Policy.

Housing Buildings Manager

The Housing Buildings Manager is the person with operational oversight realigning to the management of the policy and will take the lead in managing day to day activity relating to the policy. They will also plan and allocate resources accordingly for normal management activity. The Housing Buildings Manager will be supported by various qualified staff in undertaking relevant duties but will generally be viewed as the Duty Holder (registration pending). They will ensure that the process is compliant with current legislation, arrange and manage annual reviews or special reviews following any circumstances outlined in the appropriate section below.

Housing Asset and Compliance Manager

The Housing Asset and Compliance Manager is responsible for the operational implementation, delivery of and compliance with this Policy, staff awareness, training, and communication to tenants (generally referred to as the Client 'Responsible Person'). They will also ensure arrangements for the delivery of gas safety awareness training for all appropriate staff and implementing a competency matrix, to ensure that only those with the appropriate level of training are asked to undertake roles where specific training is required.

Gas Manager

The Gas Manager will take day to day responsibility for:

- Implementing the requirements and actions of this Policy.
- Managing operational compliance of any specialist contractors and the works undertaken.
- Validating data and records and ensuring information is updated in a timely manner to report on overall compliance.
- Planning and managing the delivery of programmes of inspections, remedial actions and planned investment works to ensure compliance and improve tenant safety.
- Maintaining a competency matrix, to ensure that only those with the appropriate level of training are asked to undertake roles where specific training is required and ensure that training is delivered and is up to date.
- Providing information and advice on all relevant aspects of safety, to be shared with tenants regarding safe use of equipment.

- Service monitoring and quality audits, to ensure standards are maintained across the different geographical areas, individual operatives, and appliance types.
- They will be supported by various qualified staff in undertaking relevant duties but will generally be viewed as the Manager.

Employees

All Employees, irrespective of their position shall:

- Take responsible care for their work, health and safety and that of other persons who may be adversely affected by gas and heating appliance work, including members of the public, tenants, visitors and contractors.
- Co-operate as appropriate with other staff agencies to ensure compliance with this policy and all other legal requirements.
- Halt works that, in their opinion, may present a serious risk to health and safety.
- Report any concerns that they may have in relation to the management of gas appliance safety.
- Raise any issues immediately that endanger health or safety.
- Report all accidents, incidents and near misses to Line Managers and the Health and Safety team as quickly as possible after the event, to ensure that an investigation is undertaken.
- Undertake any training or qualifications relevant to their roles, or as requested by their manager.

Contractor's Responsibilities

We require contractors to abide by relevant legislation, technical guidance and keep up to date with any amendments. They are also required to comply with the Contractor Code of Conduct and the requirements of this document, when undertaking gas installation works.

We have a responsibility to identify on the Landlord Gas Safety Certificate (LGSR) any defect on tenant-owned appliances and advise the tenant of any remedial actions required. We will service and maintain gas fires which are served by a flue, owned by Housing Services. Any repairs that need to be carried out or the removal of the appliance due to its state of disrepair, will be recharged to tenants. Safety checks to tenant's own gas fires will be carried out in accordance with the Gas (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 ACoP 36(2) guidance note 299.

Work will be undertaken in accordance with the specific requirements set out in the Service Level Agreement or contract. Every opportunity will be taken to involve interested tenants in developing this service.

A landlord gas safety record will be completed in the following situations:

- Where any repair or maintenance is carried out on a gas appliance, gas installations or any gas pipework or flue.
- Where any repair or building work to a chimney or flue that could cause a blockage is undertaken; this may extend to certain roofing repairs.

- Where cavity wall insulation, double glazing, or installation of mechanical ventilation, including an extractor fan, may cause a detrimental effect to the ventilation of an open-flue gas appliance.

The Gas Manager will be informed via Warning Notice when they cap off gas, no matter what the reason.

Installers will notify the Gas Manager, who will notify the “Gas Safe Register” for gas contractors’ registration, of any new installation or exchange of a gas appliance, who in turn will notify Building Control within 30 days, as appropriate.

A specific Code of Conduct, Ethical Standard and range of sustainability and social value initiatives will be developed and included in the relevant contract documentation.

We will aim to remove all solid fuel appliances, where it is appropriate. Where a solid fuel appliance will remain in place, Safety certification will be issued following the service and repair of any solid fuel appliance or appliance serviced capable of creating carbon monoxide.

We will report to HSE any reportable incidents under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR), by providing details of any gas appliance or fitting we consider to be dangerous anywhere where people could die, lose consciousness or require hospital treatment. The danger could be due to design, construction, installation modification or incorrect servicing of that appliance or fitting, that could result in;

- an accidental leakage of gas,
- incomplete combustion of gas, or inadequate removal of products of the combustion of gas.

Fittings that are dangerous solely due to lack of maintenance are not reportable.

The Tenant’s Responsibilities

Under the terms of their Tenancy Agreement, tenants are required to:

- Allow access to their property for maintenance and/or safety checks to be carried out.
- Immediately report any concerns with gas appliances, flues or installation pipework, turning off gas supplies and appliances in hazardous situations and keeping them turned off until checks have been carried out by a competent person.
- Regularly test their carbon monoxide alarms and reporting any problem.
- Not undertake, arrange, or allow work on gas installations in their properties, without consent from Housing Services. When Housing Services consent is given, all work must be carried out by engineers registered with “Gas Safe.”
- Find out their obligations and maintain their appliance in a safe order and good state of repair.
- Operate appliances safely and in accordance with manufacturers’ instructions.

- Not to use any carbon monoxide producing equipment within their home, such as indoor barbeques etc.

We are not responsible for the safety of tenants' cookers, not provided by Housing Services. Where tenants carry out property alterations and improvements, including installing appliances, gas installations or works that may affect the safety of gas installations, appliances, or pipework, authorisation must be sought prior to any works being undertaken. If works are approved, it will be done so on the basis that tenants are informed and are then held responsible for ensuring appropriate safety checks are carried out.

Tenants must supply all relevant certification on completion of the authorised works, as set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

A decision will be made regarding the future maintenance and servicing of any tenant's own installed appliance. If the installation is approved, in most cases it will be maintained and replaced by Housing Services.

No permission will be granted for the opening of fire places in our homes or for the installation of solid fuel heating appliances, including log burners.

Leaseholders and shared owners

Typically, these groups do not fall directly under our responsibility for undertaking annual gas safety checks, as the responsibility for these remain with the leaseholder/shared owner. All new leases issued, require that the leaseholder obtain an annual gas safety check and supply Housing Services with a copy of the gas safety record. The importance of this will be communicated regularly and the leaseholder will be offered the opportunity to buy in to our services provided.

Legal Framework / Relevant Legislation

We will comply with our statutory requirements in respect of gas safety, which extend to, but is not limited by:

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing Act 2004
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Gas Safety (Management) Regulations 1994
- The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015
- Building Regulations where relevant
- Right to Repair Scheme (introduced 1994)
- The Gas Safety (Rights of Entry) Regulations 1996
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)

We will require our staff and contractors to abide by all relevant legislation and technical guidance and keep up to date with any amendments.

We will ensure that any individual undertaking works to a gas supply or appliance, must be registered through the 'Gas Safe Register'. Annual checks will be undertaken, to ensure that all engineers have the appropriate accreditation to work on appliances, in line with the Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) training standards. These checks will also be undertaken if new engineers are appointed.

Key Principles

General

We have responsibilities and obligations as set out below. We will:

- Ensure annual landlord gas safety checks are carried out in line with regulation 36(a) by a Gas Safe registered contractor to maintain its anniversary deadline date.
- Ensure that only contractors/engineers with the relevant qualifications (Gas Safe Registered/HETAS etc.) can work on our gas, oil and solid fuel installations and appliances.
- Ensure where a chimney or flue is serving a heating appliance that could produce carbon monoxide (such as solid fuel or oil fuelled fires) within a property (no matter who is the owner of the appliance), the chimney/flue is 'fit for purpose'.
- Ensure a Landlord Gas Safety Record is carried out at a minimum for each change of tenancy and a copy of the appropriate certification is issued to the incoming tenant, prior to occupation.
- Ensure that any gas appliance, pipework or flue is repaired and maintained to approved standards.
- Ensure all properties are installed with a working carbon monoxide alarm in any room with a fuel burning appliance, and that this is tested as part of the annual gas safety check.
- Procure and manage contractors appropriately.
- Keep detailed computerised information (for at least 2 years) of all Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates and monitor performance, to ensure that we maintain 100% compliance.
- Regularly publicise the risks associated with gas installations and appliances to tenants.
- Reconcile our records on a quarterly basis.
- Issue tenants with a copy of the Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates, within 28 days of it being completed.
- Post a copy of the Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates on a communal noticeboard in a prominent position, at sites where checks relate to communal systems. Include details on how to obtain individual copies if required.

- Provide a copy of the current Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates to new tenants or exchanging tenants.
- Ensure appropriate and regular gas safety awareness training is provided to all relevant staff.
- Employ suitably qualified and competent staff to manage contracts and oversee the works.
- Encourage staff to be alert to the danger signs from gas appliances, as part of their routine duties and visits, and have a clear process for reporting concerns.
- Make provision for a third-party audit process that will provide reports on the performance and carry out sample checks of the quality of on-site work undertaken by operatives and representatives.

Repairs and faults

To control the hazards associated with gas, the gas appliances and installations, we will ensure that we always leave gas appliances and installations in a safe working order and that there is an in-date certification for all relevant properties. Any repair, defect or fault found as part of the gas safety check will be dealt with according to its respective priority. The process for rectifying repairs includes:

- Scheduling repairs according to appropriate timescales and informing tenants of the anticipated date for completion.
- Repairing or making good issues at the time of the landlord gas safety check, where this is appropriate to do so.
- Recording any actions/non-conformities and informing the responsible person.

Any gas appliance that fails a landlord gas safety check and cannot be repaired will be disconnected from the gas supply and replaced in accordance with our replacement timescales.

In the event of a heating appliance needing to be disconnected and resulting in a loss of heating and hot water for the tenant, we will provide alternative temporary heating as a priority.

Repairs and replacements will be carried out in accordance with the timescales set out in our [repairs and maintenance policy](#), including guidelines and manufacturers' recommended instructions, and any relevant legislation such as the Right to Repair Scheme.

All gas boilers will be replaced in accordance with our current investment priorities; we will plan the renewal of gas boilers in line with our Asset Management Strategy renewal cycle. We will consider value for money when deciding to replace or repair appliances and specifying new heating appliances and materials.

We will attend to all faults and repairs according to our stated repairs priorities. We will operate a comprehensive 'out of hours' service to provide emergency repairs 365 days each year.

Lettings and mutual exchange properties

In all cases, properties with a gas installation will be inspected and valid certification issued to the incoming tenant. No property will be let without a valid Landlord Gas Safety check, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates being available.

As properties become void, arrangements will be made to disconnect the gas supply on the outlet side of the meter by either inserting an isolating disc or capping-off the pipework. In addition, any pipework fitted with a bayonet fitting, (a cooker outlet), will be capped or plugged off.

Where there is a change in tenancy through a mutual exchange, we will ensure the landlord gas safety check is carried out on the day that the new tenant moves in.

Access for safety checks and repairs

We will make every effort to arrange a convenient time and date with the tenant for access to complete the works. Appointments will be made, and written notice provided, in accordance with our Access to Homes procedure. In cases where access is denied after re-arranged appointments and following written notifications of potential legal action, we will seek an injunction to gain access. This will be in line with our Tenancy Management Policy.

It is a condition of the Tenancy Agreement that tenants must provide access for a landlord gas safety check. Specific details are set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

Where we need to seek legal intervention to gain access to properties, our preferred first option is the use of court injunctions.

We recognise that in certain cases there may be underlying issues that contribute to access problems, which may relate to a support need, language, or specific tenancy management problem. In these circumstances, we will try to overcome or resolve the cause of the problem and be sensitive to the issue, before pursuing legal action.

The Access to Homes procedure allows opportunities to consider these issues at each relevant stage of the legal process.

Should it not be possible to undertake an annual gas safety check on an appliance that is overdue for its annual service and no gas is available, for instance this could be due to a tenant being in arrears on their gas account, we will cap-off the gas supply to prevent the use of any appliance until the cap is removed. In addition, a safety check/warning notice certificate will be issued stating that the meter is capped. The tenant will be informed to contact us once the debt has been cleared. A warning sticker will be affixed to the appliance and meter, providing a contact telephone number and a record will be kept of any capped services. Where a tenant requires the gas reconnected, providing there is sufficient credit on the meter/account, the tenant can request for the gas supply to be uncapped and an appropriate Landlord Gas Safety check, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificate will be issued. We will immediately advise the Client Responsible Person by way of a 'Turn off notification' which will be held in place until the supplies are reinstated.

In the event that fuel poverty is a demonstrable contributory factor to the arrears on the gas account, we will consider the gifting of temporary electric heaters, so that tenants can heat areas of the home and live as comfortably as possible through the period of financial hardship. We will make a referral to our Tenancy Sustainment team who can give advice and support, as well as signpost to other relevant agencies.

In instances where a live gas supply is present, but where no gas meter is installed (where the meter has been removed and the gas supply capped), a visual check will be undertaken annually of any live gas pipework and a safety check/warning notice certificate will be issued. Any heating appliance fitted will be capped to prevent its use, should a gas meter be subsequently installed without notifying Housing Services. A warning notice will be affixed to all appliances informing tenants of the need to contact us prior to any reconnection of a meter.

Where any repair or maintenance is carried out to a gas appliance, gas installation, gas pipework or flue, an appropriate Gas Safe document/certificate will be recorded on the Housing ICT systems.

In addition to the requirements listed above, and where relevant, Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates may be completed in the following situations:

- Where any repair or building work to a chimney or flue that could cause a blockage is undertaken; this may extend to certain roofing repairs.
- Where cavity wall insulation, double glazing, or installation of mechanical ventilation, including an extractor fan, may cause a detrimental effect to the ventilation of an open-flue gas appliance.

We will notify the 'Gas Safe Register' for gas contractors' registration of any new installation or exchange of a gas appliance. They will in turn notify Building Control, where appropriate.

We will take every opportunity to involve interested tenants in developing this service.

Temporary accommodation

These properties will receive an annual gas safety check with maintenance and repair carried out, as appropriate, and in accordance with standing agreements.

Auditing and review

Quality of work may be assessed in all, or a combination of, the following ways:

- Assessment of a percentage of works by a suitably experienced and qualified officer.
- Assessment by a nominated consultant and/or technology.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance.
- Tenant feedback and satisfaction survey.

Internal auditing arrangements will be required, which include the Gas Manager reviewing all Gas documentation and checking all procedures have been followed.

Documentation

An electronic property database records the heating type present in each property and details dates of previous landlord gas safety records. This database is the definitive information source for annual gas safety checks. This database will be maintained to keep up to date with property changes and new appliance details. Regular reports generated will identify:

- The total number of properties on contract.
- The property addresses with a current valid landlord's gas safety record, which is in date.
- The percentage of properties with a compliant landlord gas safety record.
- The status of each property with the "Access to Homes" procedure, where Landlord Gas Safety checks, servicing and/or other regulatory compliance certificates have expired.

Policy Statement

We are committed to ensuring the safety of our tenants, staff, our partners and the wider community who may be affected by the installation of gas appliances, associated flues and pipework in properties that we own or have a responsibility for managing.

There are risks associated with gas installations and appliances through leaks of natural gas, which is highly flammable and explosive and carbon monoxide, which is toxic and potentially fatal if build-ups occur. This can occur through an appliance burning fossil fuel etc.

The requirements for undertaking the Landlord Gas Safety Record are defined by the current version of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. All landlords have a legal responsibility to comply with these regulations, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

We will ensure we remain Gas Safe Registered in accordance with the requirements of this policy. This will allow for servicing and associated installation works and will cover all aspects of gas repair, including safety inspections. This contract will also extend to all other homes with appliances, with the potential to produce carbon monoxide.

References

The key documents and references are listed in the legal framework section of this document.

Links to other internal policies and procedures

This Policy should be read in conjunction with our Electrical Safety policy, which will cover safety in connection with Air Source Heat Pumps and electrically powered boilers and other heating systems.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with our Health and Safety Policy, which will cover the process for recording, reporting, investigating and analysing accidents, incidents and cases of ill health in relation to gas safety.

Other related documents include:

- Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Housing Management Policy 2022-2026
- Repairs handbook
- Housing Services Damp Mould and Condensation Policy
- Leaseholders Booklet
- Fire Safety Policy for Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation
- Housing Services Tenancy agreement
- Housing Services Void Lettable Standards
- Housing Comments, compliments and complaints procedure
- Customer Engagement Strategy
- Fire and Fire Door Safety
- Housing Services Climate Strategy 2024-2029
- Housing Services Asset Management Strategy (Due 2024)
- Housing Service Standards:
 - Housing Services Information Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Safety & Quality Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Your Neighbourhood & Community Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Rent Account Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Tenant Involvement Service Standards 2024
- “Access to Homes” Procedure
- Carbon Monoxide alarm England regulations 2022 and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Procedure
- Housing Services Vulnerability Policy

HOUSING SERVICES

DOMESTIC ELECTRICAL SAFETY POLICY 2024-2029

Purpose

This Policy sets out specific guidelines on the electrical safety of fixed electrical installations and portable appliances (where applicable) and details the approach and appropriate frequencies of inspection and testing to minimise the risk of fire, damage to property, injury and/or death.

By having this detailed Electrical Safety Policy, Housing Services is able to detail the approach to be adopted throughout the organisation and comply with the law, relevant regulations and adopted best practice.

Definitions

This Policy relates to Darlington Borough Council Housing Services.

Responsibilities

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that appropriate management systems are in place to ensure employees and members of the public are not put at risk from the effects of electricity.

The duties of management, staff and personnel of Housing Services will be clearly communicated and agreed by all parties, to ensure that all persons can undertake their duties as stated in this Policy. Communications and feedback detailing agreed responsibilities will be kept and monitored, and this will trigger further training or assistance as deemed necessary.

Commercial/Construction Elements

The Housing portfolio contains commercial items, which are assigned to Corporate Landlord team. These include, but are not limited to, electrical items within the communal areas of:

- Sheltered Schemes.
- Extra Care Schemes.
- Good Neighbour Schemes, such as community centres.

This also includes carrying out Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) on equipment used within the schemes for use by visitors and tenants, such as bingo machines.

There is also an ongoing new build programme. Whilst the properties remain at construction phase, they remain under the control of the Construction Manager.

Electrical work in these areas, will be carried out under their own registration and 'Duty Holder' responsibilities alongside other commercial building maintenance, so do not fall under the Duty Holder requirements within this domestic electrical policy, as this will be covered under "Commercial Duty Holder" requirements.

The client "Responsible Person" elements, however, do still apply in relation to ensuring completion and compliance.

Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for this Policy and ensuring compliance.

Group Director

The hierarchy of the organisation sets out that the responsibility for the 'responsible person' is carried through the Chief Executive Officer and Directors and on to other managers who have responsibilities for overall statutory compliance or general building management activities. They will also be responsible for ensuring that adequate physical and financial resources are made available, to enable the objectives of this Policy to be met. It is important that each 'responsible person' is aware of their accountability and fulfils their role in a safe and competent manner.

Assistant Director of Housing and Revenues

Electrical safety is the responsibility of the appropriate Assistant Director within areas under their management control. This will involve:

- Understanding relevant electrical legislation and guidance, including delegating appropriate responsibilities to relevant managers.
- Ensuring the allocation of resources (financial and staff) to implement the Electrical Safety Policy

Housing Buildings Manager

The Housing Buildings Manager is the person with operational oversight realigning to the management of the policy and will take the lead in managing day to day activity relating to the policy. They will also plan and allocate resources accordingly for normal management activity. The Housing Buildings Manager will be supported by various qualified staff in undertaking relevant duties but will generally be viewed as the Duty Holder (registration pending). They will ensure that the process is compliant with current legislation, arrange and manage annual reviews or special reviews following any circumstances outlined in the appropriate section below.

Housing Asset and Compliance Manager

The Housing Asset and Compliance Manager is responsible for the operational implementation, delivery of and compliance with this Policy, staff awareness, training, and communication to tenants (generally referred to as the Client 'Responsible Person'). They will also ensure arrangements for the delivery of electrical awareness training for all

appropriate staff and implementing a competency matrix to ensure that only those with the appropriate level of training are asked to undertake roles where specific training is required.

Electrical Manager

The Electrical Manager is the 'technical duty holder' and is generally referred to as the contractor "qualified supervisor – responsible person" and will take day to day responsibility for:

- Implementing the requirements and actions of this policy.
- Managing operational compliance of any specialist contractors and the works undertaken.
- Validating data and records and ensuring information is updated in a timely manner to report on overall compliance.
- Planning and managing the delivery of programmes of inspections, remedial actions, and planned investment works, to ensure compliance and improve tenant safety.
- Maintaining a competency matrix to ensure that only those with the appropriate level of training are asked to undertake roles where specific training is required and ensure that training is delivered and is up to date.
- Providing information and advice on all relevant aspects of safety to be shared with tenants regarding safe use of equipment.
- Service monitoring and quality audits to ensure standards are maintained across the different geographical areas, individual operatives and appliance types.
- Leading as the National Inspection Council Electrical Installation Contractor (NICEIC) Qualifying Supervisor role, such as managing risks, and liaising with suppliers and contractors and any issues that arise.
- They will be supported by various qualified staff in undertaking relevant duties but will generally be viewed as the Manager.

Employees

All employees, irrespective of their position shall:

- Take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of other persons who may be adversely affected by electric work, including members of the public, tenants, visitors and contractors.
- Co-operate, as appropriate, with other staff and agencies to ensure compliance with this policy and all other relevant legal requirements.
- Halt work that, in their opinion, may present a serious risk to health and safety.
- Report any concerns that they may have in relation to the safety of electrical systems and installations.
- Raise any issues immediately that endanger health or safety.
- Report all accidents, incidents and near misses to the Health and Safety as quickly as possible, to ensure that relevant action and investigation is undertaken.
- Undertake any training or qualifications relevant to their roles, or as requested by their manager.

- Only appropriately skilled and competent persons will carry out electrical inspection and testing. A person shall be deemed skilled to carry out the appropriate inspection and testing only if they have sufficient qualifications, knowledge, and experience.

Contractor's Responsibility

- We require our contractors to abide by this policy and any relevant legislation, technical guidance and keep up to date with any amendments. They are also required to comply with the Contractor Code of Conduct and the requirements of this document when undertaking electrical installation works.
- Responsibility to complete the Electrical Installation Report, Domestic Electric Condition Report, Minor Works Certificate and/or any other relevant legislative certification, in accordance with BS7671 Electrical regulations.
- Every opportunity is taken to involve interested tenants in developing this service.
- Installers will notify the NICEIC for registration of any new installation, or notifiable special location installation. They in turn will notify Building Control within 30 days as appropriate. A specific Code of Conduct, Ethical Standard and range of sustainability and social value initiatives will be developed and included in the relevant contract documentation.
- Comply with the Housing Services Access Procedure.
- Except for undertaking unforeseen emergency repairs whilst carrying out the Inspection and Testing regime, no repairs or rectification works will be started without first obtaining the correct authority from an appointed member of Housing Services, namely the Electrical Manager.
- Test equipment will comply with the requirements of BS 7671 and IET Guidance Note 3 – Inspection and Testing, including all amendments.
- Comply with specific requirements for PAT testing. Documentation will be provided in the form of a PAT certificate. In addition to the employees' section, which identifies departures from the requirements of BS 7671 and provides an overall assessment of the suitability of the installation for continued use, all Portable Electrical Appliances will be tested at regular intervals by a portable appliance tester.
- We will ensure that all our homes and communal installations are tested in accordance with the Institute of Engineering Technology (IET) Regulation statutory timescales. We will test and issue certification prior to the re-letting of our properties.

The frequency of inspection and testing will be determined taking into account:

- The type of installation and adequacy of earthing and bonding.
- Suitability of the switchgear and control gear.
- Serviceability of accessories and fittings.
- Type of systems and their condition.
- Extent of any wear and tear, damage, or other deterioration of other parts of the installation and level of misuse (such as vandalism).
- Presence of adequate identification and notices.

- Any change in use of the premises which have led to, or might lead to, deficiencies in the installation.
- EICR observations and recommendations.
- Reveal if any of the electrical circuits or equipment are overloaded.
- Find any potential electrical shock risks and fire hazards in the electrical installation.
- Identify any defective DIY electrical work.
- Highlight any lack of earthing or bonding.
- Tests are also carried out on the electrical installation to check that it is safe.

The assessment section(s) of the report will describe the overall condition as either 'satisfactory', in which case no immediate remedial work is required, or 'unsatisfactory', where remedial work is required to make the installation safe.

Observations and recommendations will include results of the inspection and testing. They will be based on the requirements of the issue of BS 7671 current at the time of the inspection, and not on the requirements of an earlier standard when the installation was constructed. Observation(s) will be provided in an accurate and easily understandable manner.

The summary of the inspection report will give a clear indication of the condition of the electrical installation, considering relevant circumstances. After necessary remedial work has been completed, an appropriate certificate will be issued to confirm that the remedial work has been carried out, in accordance with BS 7671.

New installations will be provided with an Electrical Installation Certificate, complete with a Schedule of Inspections and Test Results. The documents will be suitably completed in compliance with BS 7671, IET.

We will ensure that any electrical test considers relevant items, including:

- Adequacy of earthing and bonding.
- Suitability of the switchgear and control gear, for example, old fuse boxes with double-pole fusing and/or wooden enclosures, which are likely to need replacing.
- Serviceability of accessories and light fittings, for example, older round-pin sockets, sockets mounted on skirting boards, round pattern lighting switches and braided flexible cords connecting ceiling roses to lamp holders, which may require replacement due to unsuitability or deterioration.
- Types of wiring systems and their condition, for example, cables coated in vulcanised rubber insulation (phased out in the 1960s), which may be in poor condition and need replacing.
- Extent of any wear and tear, damage, or other deterioration of other parts of the installation.
- Presence of adequate identification and notices.
- Changes in use of the premises, which have led to, or might lead to, deficiencies in the installation.

Any relevant observation recorded by the electrician in the 'observations and recommendations' section of the report will be accompanied by a recommendation code to indicate the action needed. Further detail on the codes is given below.

- Code C1 – Danger Present (immediate threat to safety, rectified or made safe the same day).
- Code C2 – Potentially Dangerous (urgent remedial action required).
- Code C3 – Improvement Recommended.

Where a real and immediate danger is observed that puts the safety of those using the installation at risk, Code C1 (requires immediate attention) will be given. We will act without delay (usually by phone) to remedy the observed deficiency in the installation. Where the engineer does not receive confirmation immediately to undertake work, they will perform other appropriate action (such as switching off and isolating/disconnecting the affected parts of the installation) to mitigate the danger. The electrician will not wait for the full report to be issued before giving this advice.

Where a Code C1 is given, we will be advised immediately, in writing, that urgent work is necessary to remedy the deficiency. This action is necessary to satisfy the duties imposed on the electrician and others by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.

A Code C2 is an observed deficiency considered to be dangerous at the time of inspection (EICR unsatisfactory/fail), where it would become a real and immediate danger if a fault or other foreseeable event was to occur in the installation or connected equipment. We will be advised that, whilst the safety of those using the installation may not be at immediate risk, remedial action should be taken urgently to improve the safety of the installation.

A Code C3 is used to indicate that, whilst an observed deficiency is not considered to be a source of immediate or potential danger, improvement would contribute to an enhancement of the safety of the electrical installation.

The Tenant's Responsibilities

Under the terms of their Tenancy Agreement, tenants are required to allow access to their property for maintenance and/or safety checks to be carried out. To undertake fixed installation inspection and testing, tenants will be required to grant permission for an electrician to temporarily isolate the electrical supply to the property.

Accordingly, tenants are required to:

- Identify any requirement to save IT software and action this before the start of any electrical operation/isolation.
- Make their own contingency arrangement for the absence of electrical supplies, for example, to fridges/freezers and check for reconnection once the engineer has completed their work.
- Ensure appropriate access and relocation/removal of any obstacles has been done prior to arrival of the engineer.

- Notify us of any repairs required/fault issues in a timely manner.
- Ensure loft spaces are kept empty.

We are not responsible for the safety of tenants' cookers, or fixed or portable electrical appliances, not provided by Housing Services; or installations which have been installed without our prior approval. Where these installations are found to be defective on first inspection, we will explain and terminate the supply and make recommendations for the required rectification works. It will usually be the case that unauthorised installations will be removed, and the tenant recharged for the costs, and this will be explained at the time. Tenants are responsible for any repairs relating to damage they have caused with faulty self-installed appliances and wiring.

Tenants are responsible for portable appliances in their properties that they own. Outgoing tenants should not gift any appliances to the next tenants. Any tenant owned electrical equipment left in a home will be removed and disposed of and a charge made to the outgoing tenant.

Where tenants want to carry out property alterations and improvements, which include additions/alterations to the electrics, they are required to seek authorisation prior to any works being undertaken.

If works are approved, it will be done so on the basis that tenants are informed and are then held responsible for ensuring appropriate safety checks are carried out and all relevant certificates are passed to Housing Services, following the works/installation, as set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

Where works are approved and completed to agreed standards, we will carry out all future annual safety checks. Any defective or unauthorised works needing rectification may incur a recharge. If any installation has been undertaken without our permission, and is found to be defective, the supply may be terminated.

Legal Framework / Relevant Legislation

We are committed to ensuring the safety of tenants and other stakeholders, with regards to electrical installations in domestic properties and buildings owned by the organisation, unless otherwise stated in formal agreements such as leases etc. The following legislation will be complied with, which extend to but is not limited by:

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing Act 2004
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015
- Building Regulations
- Right to Repair Scheme (introduced 1994)
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Electricity at Work Regulations 1989

- Requirements for Electrical Installation IET Wiring Regulations 18th Edition BS7671 (including all amendments)
- IET Guidance Note 3 – Inspection and Testing
- The Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 1994

We will require our staff and contractors to abide by all relevant legislation and technical guidance and keep up to date with any amendments.

Key Principles

General

Tenants in properties, where Electrical Inspection and Testing is to be carried out, will be informed in writing that the electrical installation will require isolation (switching off) and that we are unable to accept responsibility for any loss or damage resulting from this.

We will maintain an asbestos register (covering individual properties and communal areas), which will be provided to contractors.

For new electrical work, where works are notifiable, we will comply with The Building Regulations 2010 (as amended), including Approved Document P - Electrical Safety - Dwellings. This requires electrical installations in dwellings to be designed and installed, so they afford protection against mechanical and thermal damage and do not present electric shock and fire hazards to people.

Fixed Electrical Installations

An electrical installation is made up of all the fixed electrical equipment that is supplied through the electricity meter. It includes the cables that are usually hidden in the fabric of the building (walls and ceilings), accessories (sockets, switches, and light fittings), and the consumer unit (fuse box) that contains all the fuses, circuit-breakers and residual current devices (RCDs).

We will ensure that our electrical installations have:

- Sufficient socket outlets for the number of portable appliances likely to be used, to minimise use of multi-socket adapters and extension leads.
- Covers/barriers in place to prevent contact with live parts.
- RCD protection, where appropriate.
- Satisfactory earthing arrangements.
- Satisfactory bonding for incoming services, for example, gas and water.
- Sufficient circuits to avoid danger and minimise inconvenience in the event of a fault.
- Cables that are correctly selected in relation to their associated fuse or circuit breaker.
- Appropriate fire detection systems (smoke and or heat detection), preferably mains supply.

Frequency of Inspection and Testing

Over time, and with the wear and tear of regular use, the installation will start to deteriorate. Connections can work loose (a potential fire hazard), equipment can be damaged, and building and maintenance work can have an impact on the wiring. The frequency of periodic electrical inspection and testing will be determined considering:

- The type of installation.
- Its use, the extent of wear and tear, and operation and/or level of misuse (such as vandalism)
- the frequency and quality of maintenance.
- The damage and/or deterioration found at the time of the inspection.

IET Guidance Note 3: Inspection and Testing indicates a suggested frequency of 5 years for an EICR for domestic properties in social housing properties. These frequencies will be increased if the history indicates signs of progressive deterioration.

Our housing stock is subject to a Condition Report and Test at the following frequencies:

- Based on best safeguarding approach we have made a business decision to test, inspect and report on all property types every 5 years.
- At change of occupancy, such as a void or mutual exchange, a periodic inspection will be carried out.

Access for Safety Checks and Repairs

We will make every effort to arrange a convenient time and date with the tenant for access to complete the works. Appointments will be made, and written notice provided in accordance with our Access to Homes procedure. In cases where access is denied after re-arranged appointments and following written notifications of potential legal action, we will seek an injunction to gain access. This will be in line with our Tenancy Management Policy.

It is a condition of the Tenancy Agreement that tenants must provide access for landlord safety checks. Specific details are set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

Where we need to seek legal intervention to gain access to properties, our preferred first option is the use of court injunctions.

We recognise that in certain cases there may be underlying issues that contribute to access problems, which may relate to a support need, language, or specific tenancy management problem. In these circumstances, we will try to overcome or resolve the cause of the problem and be sensitive to the issue before pursuing legal action.

The Access to Homes procedure allows opportunity to consider these issues at each relevant stage of the legal process.

Leaseholders and Shared Owners

Typically, these groups do not fall directly under the responsibility of Housing Services for domestic electrical safety inspections, as the responsibility for these remain with the leaseholder/shared owner. The importance of this will be communicated regularly.

Temporary Accommodation

These properties receive the necessary electrical tests and inspections, maintenance, and repairs, as appropriate, and in accordance with other domestic housing properties.

Lettings and Mutual Exchanges

- The electrical installation will be tested and inspected, and a valid certificate issued to the incoming tenant, as part of the sign-up process following a mutual exchange. No property will be let without a satisfactory electrical certificate being available.
- In the case of a mutual exchange, however, time constraints (and power supply issues) may lead to a test having to be carried out as an urgent repair.
- All properties will meet the Housing Services letting standard, prior to let.

Training and Information

We will undertake appropriate and regular electrical safety awareness training for all relevant staff. Suitably qualified or 'competent' staff manage will the electrical works undertaken by Housing Services, in accordance with relevant legislative requirements.

Auditing and Review

Quality of work may be assessed in all, or a combination of, the following ways:

- Assessment of a percentage of works by a suitably experienced and qualified officer.
- Assessment by a nominated consultant and/or technology.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance by the contractor.
- Tenant feedback and satisfaction survey.

Internal auditing arrangements will be required of the contractors, which include the contractor's qualified engineer reviewing all Electrical documentation and checking all procedures have been followed.

Policy Statement

We will ensure that the electrical safety of fixed electrical installations and portable appliances (where applicable) are inspected at appropriate frequencies and maintained to minimise the risk of fire, electrocution, damage to property, injury and/or death.

We recognise the legal obligations in relation to electrical safety and the Electrical Safety Policy demonstrates how we will comply in accordance with current legislation and approved codes of practice.

We will ensure that a compliant and uniform approach is adopted, and the service delivered meets statutory requirements, and is consistent with good practice.

This Policy applies to all Housing properties. The main hazards of electrical systems are:

- Faults which could cause fires.
- Fire or explosion, where electricity could be the source of the ignition.
- All installed electrical equipment and materials are of the correct type and comply with applicable British Standards.
- All parts of the fixed electrical installation are correctly selected and erected.
- No part of the fixed electrical installation is visibly damaged or otherwise defective.
- Recording all electrical checks, inspections and tests including test results, keeping them throughout the working life of an electrical installation.
- In conducting our business, we will meet our health and safety obligations to our staff, tenants, contractors and visitors.

Related Policies and Procedures

This Policy should be read in conjunction with our Health and Safety Policy, which will cover the process for recording, reporting, investigating and analysing of accidents, incidents and cases of ill health in relation to electrical safety.

Other related documents include:

- Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Housing Management Policy 2022-2026
- Repairs handbook
- Housing Services Damp Mould and Condensation Policy
- Leaseholders Booklet
- Fire Safety Policy for Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation
- Housing Services Tenancy agreement
- Housing Services Void Lettable Standards
- Housing Comments, compliments and complaints procedure
- Customer Engagement Strategy
- Fire and Fire Door Safety
- Housing Services Climate Strategy 2024-2029
- Housing Services Asset Management Strategy (Due 2024)
- Housing Service Standards:
 - Housing Services Information Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Safety & Quality Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Your Neighbourhood & Community Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Rent Account Service Standards 2024
 - Housing Services Tenant Involvement Service Standards 2024
- “Access to Homes” Procedure
- Carbon Monoxide alarm England regulations 2022 and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Procedure
- Housing Services Vulnerability Policy

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

HOUSING SERVICES DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio

Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029.

Summary

2. Housing Services recognises the harm domestic abuse can cause within our homes and communities. Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse.
3. The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out our commitment to tackle domestic abuse in our homes and how we will aim to manage and support any cases. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places new duties on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation, when they need it. Housing Services plays an important role in tackling domestic abuse, being well placed to recognise the signs and support victims and survivors.
4. Consultation was undertaken in May 2024 with our Tenants Panel, Public Health, and local domestic abuse charities (Harbour and Family Help), with full support given to the proposed Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy.
5. This policy was considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2024, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Consider the contents of this report.
 - (b) Approve the Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy at Appendix 1.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy ensures we have a clear approach to supporting victims of domestic abuse within our homes.
- (b) The Regulator of Social Housing's new Consumer Standards from April 2024, places a duty on social housing landlords to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.
- (c) The adoption of a formal Domestic Abuse Policy is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

- (i) Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	Housing Services will work with the Police and other agencies to tackle domestic abuse within our Council homes
Health and Wellbeing	Tackling domestic abuse within our Council homes will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of victims and survivors
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact
Diversity	This policy supports the promotion of diversity amongst our Council tenants
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report supports the Council plan to ensure we are able to provide our tenants with good quality, safe housing
Efficiency	There are no implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. Housing Services recognises the harm domestic abuse can cause within our homes and communities. Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse.
9. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places new duties on local authorities to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation, when they need it. Housing Services plays an important role in tackling domestic abuse, being well placed to recognise the signs and support victims and survivors.
10. The Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029 at Appendix 1 sets out the following aims:
 - (a) Ensure that all staff, partner agencies and contractors understand domestic abuse and give a consistent service when offering guidance and support.
 - (b) Support survivors of domestic abuse and ensure that they and their families are provided with the stability and security they need and deserve.
 - (c) Treat all disclosures of abuse seriously and give advice and assistance as a priority.
 - (d) Work with statutory and voluntary organisations to support survivors, and take action against perpetrator's tenancies, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
 - (e) Ensure all staff are trained in line with their roles and responsibilities and are pro-active in looking for indicators of domestic abuse, so that it is identified at the earliest possible opportunity, in every case.
 - (f) Ensure staff understand the role they can play in tackling domestic abuse and to develop a consistent approach across Housing Services.
 - (g) Ensure staff are trained to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse effectively.
 - (h) Act on all reports of domestic abuse and take appropriate action in all cases where an adult or child is identified as being at risk due to domestic abuse.
 - (i) Support survivors to make decisions around their housing needs, whether they wish to remain in their home or move to a new home.
 - (j) Signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse, who recognise and seek to change their behaviour, to agencies, including a Multi-Agency Task and Co-ordination (MATAC) referral, who can offer them support to prevent the abuse reoccurring.
 - (k) Raise awareness of the signs and impacts of domestic abuse to our tenants, staff and contractors, as well as how to report it.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards

11. The RSH has published new consumer standards from April 2024. Under these new standards is a section specifically relating to how social housing landlords are to work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.
12. Specifically, the new standards state:
 - (a) Registered providers must have a policy for how they recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse.
 - (b) Registered providers must co-operate with appropriate local authority departments to support the local authority in meeting its duty to develop a strategy and commission services for victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation.
13. Our Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy will help us demonstrate how we will achieve these new standards.

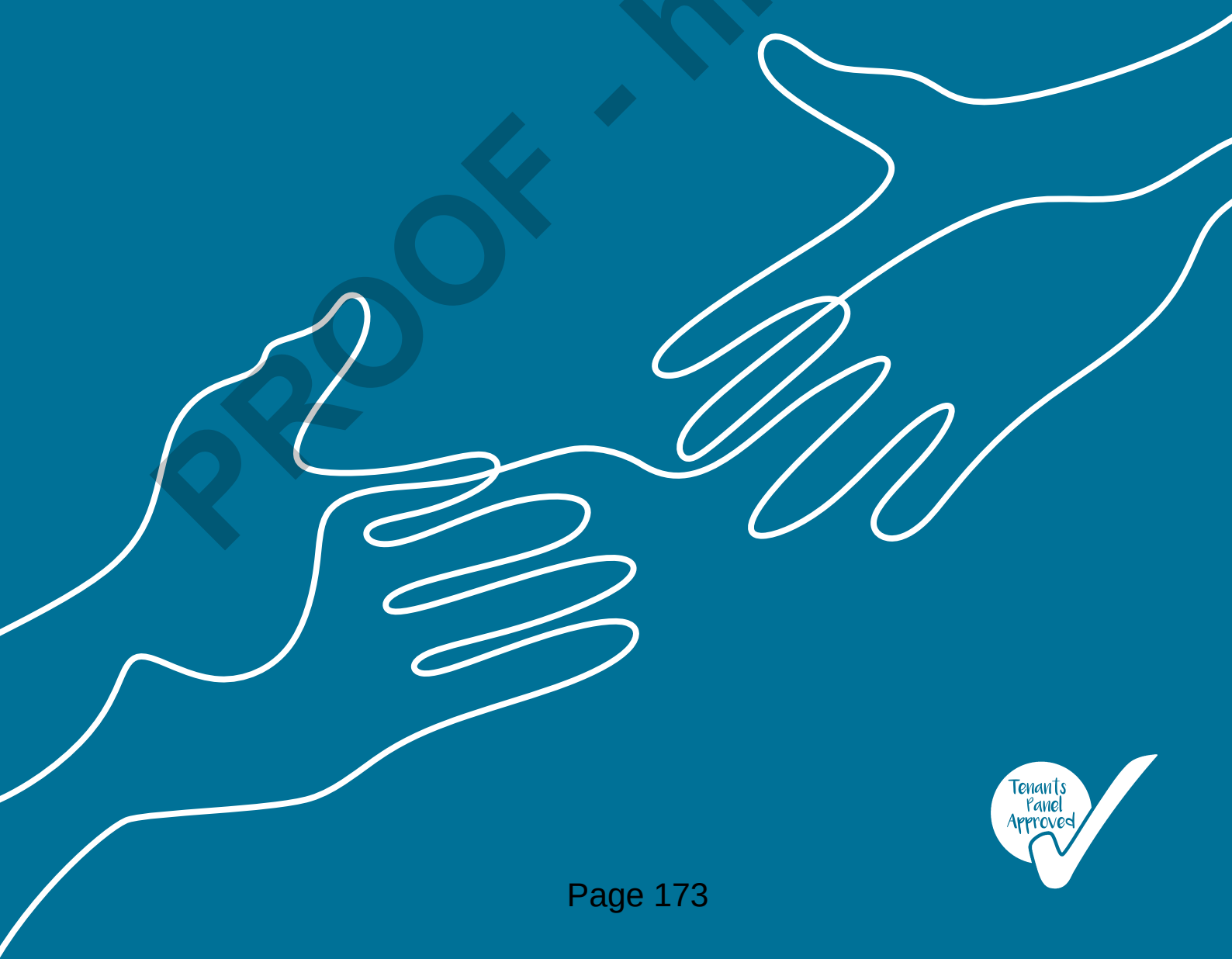
Outcome of Consultation

14. Consultation was undertaken in May 2024 with our Tenants Panel, Public Health, Harbour and Family Help, with full support given to the proposed Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy.



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024 – 2029



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Introduction

Domestic abuse is still a largely hidden crime and happens in all communities, regardless of gender, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage, or civil partnership, pregnancy, or maternity.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.1 million people aged 16 years and over (1.4 million women and 751,000 men) experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2023

Housing Services recognise the harm domestic abuse can cause within our homes and communities. Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse, and this

policy sets out our commitment to help tackle this, and how we will aim to manage and support any cases of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new duties on local authorities across England, to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation when they need it. We play an important role in tackling domestic abuse, being well placed to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, and support victims and survivors. We will work closely with partner agencies such as local domestic abuse services, Police and Social Services, to help tackle and further prevent it.

Definition of Domestic Abuse

In line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, we define domestic abuse as, 'the behaviour of a person towards another person, if they are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive'. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct. Domestic abuse is not exclusively for intimate relationships and can include family, friends, neighbours carers etc.

In line with the Act, we define behaviour as being abusive, if it consists of any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse.
- Violent or threatening behaviour.
- Controlling or coercive behaviour.
- Economic abuse.
- Psychological or emotional abuse.
- Elder abuse.

- Family or intergenerational abuse.
- Female genital mutilation.
- Financial abuse.
- Honour based violence.
- Forced marriage.
- Stalking and harassment

We also class people as being personally connected, if any the following applies:

- They are, or have been, married to each other.
- They are, or have been, civil partners of each other.
- They have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated).
- They have entered into a civil partnership (as under the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004) agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated).

- They are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
- They each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child.
- They are relatives (as under section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996).

We also treat any child (person under 18 years of age) as a victim of domestic abuse if they:

- See or hear, or experience the effect of, the abuse; and

- Are related to the victim or perpetrator.

We class a child as being related to a person if:

- The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- The child and the person are relatives.

Parental relationship means when a person has a parental relationship with a child if:

- The person is a parent of the child, or
- The person has parental responsibility (as per Children's Act 1989) for the child.

Definitions of Abusive Behaviour

Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to:

- acquire, use, or maintain money or other property, or
- obtain goods or services.

Controlling behaviour is acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. We recognise that this could cover issues such as FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), forced marriage, or 'Honour-based' violence.

For additional information on domestic abuse please go to www.familyhelp.org.uk/Information-Support

Policy Scope

This policy is applicable to all Housing Services' current tenants, future tenants, and household members. It sets out how Housing Services will recognise, respond, assist, and support our existing and future tenants and household members that are experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse.

For the purpose of this policy, current, prospective and leasehold residents will be called tenants.

Relevant Legislation

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.
- Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law).
- Police and Justice Act 2006.
- Data Protection Act 2018.
- Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- Serious Crime Act 2015.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Child Safeguarding legislation including Children Act 2004.
- Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Care Act 2014.
- Housing Act 1996.
- Housing Act 1985 & 1988.
- Co. Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024.
- Family Law Act 1996.
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Regulator of Social Housing – Neighbourhood & Community Standard.

Relevant internal policies, processes, and customer standards

- Co. Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024.
- Housing Services Vulnerability Policy 2024-2029.
- Housing Services: Housing Management Policy 2022-2026.
- Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy 2022-2026.
- Housing Services Tenancy Agreement.
- Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure.
- Housing Services Domestic Abuse Customer Standards.
- www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/domestic-abuse/



Aims of the Policy

This policy aims to ensure that tenants who report they are experiencing domestic abuse are taken seriously and managed sensitively, in accordance with their needs. It aims to ensure all colleagues act in a non-judgemental and empathetic manner, which reflects the tenant's best interests and wishes.

Housing Services tenants and household members should not live in fear of violence, abuse or harassment from a partner, former partner, or any member of family.

This policy aims to:

- Ensure that all staff, partner agencies and contractors understand domestic abuse and give a consistent service when offering guidance and support.
- Support survivors of domestic abuse and ensure that they and their families, are provided with the stability and security they need and deserve.
- Treat all disclosure of abuse seriously, and advice and assistance is given as a priority. We will work with statutory and voluntary organisations to support survivors, and to take action against perpetrator's tenancies, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Ensure all staff are trained in line with their roles and responsibilities and are pro-active in looking for indicators of domestic abuse, so that it is identified at the earliest possible opportunity, in every case.
- Ensure staff understand the role they can play in tackling domestic abuse and to develop a consistent approach across Housing Services.
- Ensure all staff are trained to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse effectively.
- Act on all reports of domestic abuse and take appropriate action in all cases, where an adult or child is identified as being at risk due to domestic abuse.
- Support survivors to make decisions around their housing needs, whether they wish to remain in their home or move to a new home.
- Signpost perpetrators of domestic abuse, who recognise and seek to change their behaviour, to agencies, including a Multi-Agency Task and Co-ordination (MATAC) referral who can offer them support to prevent the abuse reoccurring.
- Raise awareness of the signs and impacts of domestic abuse to our tenants, staff and contractors. As well as how to report it.



How will we recognise domestic abuse?

We recognise that each case and incident should be assessed and dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Each situation is different, anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse.

The following are signs that someone may be at risk of domestic abuse and which all Housing Services staff will consider in their interactions with tenants (not exhaustive):

- Changes in a tenant's or their household member's behaviour or appearance.
- Changes in the social behaviour of a tenant or household member, such as no longer spending time with friends or family, cancelling repairs or appointments at short notice, making excuses about not attending planned events within the community.
- Overly defending their partner and their actions, and making excuses for their partner's behaviour.
- A tenant's partner insulting them in front of other people.
- A tenant's partner being extremely jealous or possessive.
- Having unexplained marks or injuries.
- A tenant being depressed or anxious, or their personality changing.
- An increase in complaints from neighbours.
- An increased number of repairs for damage to the property.
- Not answering or returning phone calls.
- Not being able to speak or see Housing staff without their partner being present.
- A sudden change in rent behaviour, such as arrears where there haven't been previously.

We may also be alerted to incidents of domestic abuse through (not exhaustive):

- A direct disclosure from a tenant to a member of Housing Services or through their housing application form.
- Our colleagues in Social Services and Safeguarding.
- The Police or other emergency services.
- Reports from concerned neighbours or family.
- An approach from another landlord or local authority for assistance with re-housing.
- The Sanctuary Scheme.
- An approach to third sector agencies such as Harbour.
- MARAC.
- An approach to our Housing Options team.



How will we support our tenants?

To support our tenants who have or are suffering from domestic abuse, we will:

- Give all victims who are experiencing, or have experienced, domestic abuse access to accurate and appropriate advice about their housing options and signposting around their legal rights and responsibilities.
- Award victims of domestic abuse priority banding on Darlington HomeSearch, to assist them in finding alternative accommodation. (Please see the Housing Services Allocation Policy 2023-2028 for more details).
- Ensure tenants can report domestic abuse to us through a variety of methods, including face to face, social media, through the website or email, the Darlington Home Online digital portal, or telephone.
- Respond to reports as soon as we can, but if someone feels there is an imminent danger, we will always recommend they contact the Police immediately.
- Act on all reports of domestic abuse that we receive and work closely with the tenant affected in decision making. We will also respond to reports from colleagues, contractors, external agencies, or other individuals, but we are mindful of a tenant's consent to share information and will use information we receive sensitively (please note where we do not receive consent to share information but we have a safeguarding concern we may still approach Safeguarding colleagues for advice and guidance).
- Work in partnership on any cases with internal and external departments and agencies, where we receive a report of domestic abuse.
- Work towards preventing and tackling domestic abuse to ensure that everybody can live free from fear, intimidation and violence based on the following principles:
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse should never be made to feel responsible.
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse should not be required to take any action they reasonably feel will place them in greater danger.
 - Those experiencing domestic abuse are best able to assess the danger they are in.
 - The individual's perception of the situation will be of paramount importance.
- Actively engage with the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) processes and other specialist agencies; and recognise partnership working is instrumental towards achieving a resolution. We will share information between agencies, as required, whilst ensuring all data protection protocols are maintained.
- Use the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) Risk Checklist to plan actions and support victims, if this has not been completed by other agencies.
- Recognise that English may not be the first language for some tenants and commit to using translation services, where required.
- Offer to meet victims in an agreed safe location, using the tenant's preferred method of communication and give them an opportunity to choose a colleague of a specific gender, where possible.
- Where emergency accommodation is required, we will offer advice and assistance and work with colleagues in the Housing Options team, to help try to arrange this. For more information see: www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter21-domestic-abuse
- Provide reasonable increased security measures through the Sanctuary Scheme within/around Council owned homes, where required, for example, additional door locks. We sometimes refer to this as 'target hardening'. This may involve working in conjunction with partner agencies.
- Aim to agree and review an action plan with the tenant, that considers any vulnerable members of the household.

- Consider appropriate action against the perpetrator. This could also include, supporting the perpetrator and/or intervention programmes to try and prevent recurrence of abuse, or court action, to regain possession of the property.
- Support and empower individuals to report events to the Police.
- Recognise that cases of domestic abuse can be very sensitive and managing them must be done with care. Colleagues will ensure they only involve other agencies and share information with the tenant concerned when required.
- Raise safeguarding concerns about adults with care and support needs, or child protection concerns.
- Use our Housing ICT systems to ensure information is recorded confidentially, and not disclosed to any other household members without explicit consent. We will ensure that only Housing Services staff have access to the ICT system.
- Meet our statutory and safeguarding requirements in line with existing policies and procedures, where there are safeguarding concerns. In all cases of domestic abuse, colleagues should refer to the Safeguarding policy and take advice from Children's Front Door or Adult Social Care. Any children witnessing domestic abuse would be considered a type of child abuse and safeguarding procedures should be followed. This also applies for any elderly household members, for example, where financial abuse is occurring.
- Ensure that, if any tenant is unhappy about anything related to the policy, or how they have been treated in accordance with the policy, they may complain in line with the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure.
- Promote how tenants can report Domestic Abuse to us through our social media or web pages, through this policy and leaflets and through our tenants magazine, Housing Connect.
- Signpost survivors of domestic abuse to local domestic abuse services for additional support.



Sanctuary Scheme

The Sanctuary Scheme aims to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so, by installing safety equipment into the home. We will work closely with all relevant agencies to support the Sanctuary Scheme and make referrals where appropriate.

The scheme is available to anyone in Darlington at risk of domestic abuse by a perpetrator that does not reside within the home.

How does it work?

- Once the risk is identified, a referral is sent by a professional, such as the Police or Harbour Support Services, to the Crime Prevention Office.
 - A Crime Prevention Officer will visit the property to assess what safety equipment will best support the victims/survivor and their children, to remain safely in the home.
 - The Council arranges for the safety equipment to be installed into the property by the Council's Repairs team(s) who will support residents of the property to understand how the equipment works and how it will be of benefit.
 - Housing Services fund the works and equipment required in Housing owned properties to support tenants and their families to remain safely in their home.
- By reporting the abuse to Police and contacting Darlington's domestic abuse support services (www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/domestic-abuse/). Any professional can make a referral into the scheme, so either the Police or support services can do this.
 - If the victim is already getting support from a professional, the person they are working with will be able to make a referral. It is always advisable that the Police are aware of the abuse.
 - If the person the victim is working with is not aware of the scheme, they can access details from www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/domestic-abuse/.
 - Professionals can request copies of the referral request form by emailing domestic.abuse@darlington.gov.uk

Tenant Involvement

Our tenants are at the heart of what we do, and our Tenants Panel help us to improve our services through scrutiny, challenge and reviewing of policies and procedures.

We will ensure that our Tenants Panel are involved in reviewing this policy, processes and any complaints relating to this policy. We will raise awareness of domestic abuse through internal or external training opportunities for our Tenants Panel.

Implementation & Staff Training

We will ensure effective implementation and advertising of this policy through our website and Housing Connect magazine.

We will ensure appropriate training and support is given to colleagues and that all Housing staff regularly complete the Corporate mandatory training on Domestic Abuse.

We will use both internal and external training resources to ensure staff training is as up to date as possible.

We will carry out training, sharing good practice and case reviews with our staff in team meetings and will ensure support is available for staff through 1:1's and an open-door policy to Team Leaders and Managers.

Equality & Diversity

We are committed to ensuring that we do not discriminate against any of our tenants, and we want to provide excellent service to our tenants. This means that for all our policies and strategies, we will consider any specific issues that might be faced by tenants with vulnerabilities or those in protected groups. We will make reasonable adjustments to our policies to assist our tenants, wherever possible.

We recognise that women and the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse however, we will ensure that we support any individual experiencing domestic abuse; irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, disability, race or ethnicity, sex, religion, social background, or any other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.

Performance and Monitoring

To assist in our continuous improvement, we will use tenant feedback, complaints, and compliments to look for improvements and will involve our Tenants Panel and Council Members in monitoring this.

Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every five years unless business need, regulation or legislation prompts an early review.

Housing Services contact details



01325 405333



housing@darlington.gov.uk



www.darlington.gov.uk/housing



[darlingtonbc](https://twitter.com/darlingtonbc)



facebook.com/DBCHousing

PROOF - hra0101



CABINET
16 JULY 2024

COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND RENT 2023-24

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2023-2024 and to seek approval for the write-off of debts over £500 that are irrecoverable.

Summary

2. The Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2023-2024 has continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate.
3. However, despite the challenges, a total of £135.61 million has been collected in 2023-24, as follows:
 - (a) £74.46 million of Council Tax
 - (b) £31.45 million of Business Rates
 - (c) £29.70 million of Council rents.
4. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £1,538,782 of debts in respect of individual cases exceeding £500 for the financial year 2023-24, where it has become apparent that no further steps can be taken to recover the sums due, as follows:
 - (a) £665,218 of Council Tax
 - (b) £371,994 of Business Rates
 - (c) £106,932 of former Council tenant arrears
 - (d) £80,449 of Housing Benefit overpayments
 - (e) £314,189 of sundry debts.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
 - (a) Consider the contents of the report, and

- (b) Approve the write-off of £1,538,782 for debts over £500, subject to further steps for recovery being taken, wherever possible, if and when contact with the debtor is made.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) The collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents underpins the Council's MTFP.
- (b) The write-off of irrecoverable debts enables the Council's accounts to be maintained in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

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

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	The proposal effects all wards
Groups Affected	The proposal effects all groups within the community
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not represent a change to Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	The proposal does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent item
Council Plan	This report supports the Council plan to maximise income through robust income collection processes
Efficiency	This report does not contain proposals but refers to ongoing initiatives to increase income
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Council Tax

7. During 2023-24, a total of £75.22 million of Council Tax was due, of which £72.52 million was collected (or 96.4%). In addition, £1.88 million of Council Tax arrears relating to previous years was collected in 2023-24. This compares to £68.36 million collected in 2022-23 (or 96.1%) and £1.97 million of Council Tax arrears.
8. The Collection of Council Tax during 2023-2024 has continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, despite the challenges, Council Tax arrears have decreased from £6.46 million in March 2023 to £6.26 million in March 2024.
9. The Council is still expecting to collect the overall target of 99% of Council Tax due for 2023-24. A summary of Council Tax collection from 2012 is given at table 1 below and shows that collection rates remain high, and arrears are well managed.

Table 1: Council Tax collection summary

Year	Council Tax (£,000)				Percentage Collected to date
	Due	Collected	Written-off	Outstanding	
2012-13	41,262	40,891	361	10	99.1%
2013-14	44,662	44,174	481	7	98.9%
2014-15	46,292	45,694	582	16	98.7%
2015-16	47,876	47,200	657	19	98.6%
2016-17	50,239	49,523	688	28	98.6%
2017-18	53,288	52,497	728	63	98.5%
2018-19	57,168	56,348	686	134	98.6%
2019-20	60,097	59,337	489	271	98.7%
2020-21	61,572	60,675	389	508	98.5%
2021-22	67,597	66,040	478	1,079	97.7%
2022-23	70,858	69,105	257	1,496	97.5%
2023-24	75,223	72,516	90	2,617	96.4%

10. However, some of the older outstanding debts have been identified as irrecoverable and approval for write-off is being sought. A total of £665,218 Council Tax debts over £500 have been identified for write-off in 2023-24. This represents 0.88% of the Council Tax due to be collected in 2023-24. Details of the proposed Council Tax debts over £500 to be written-off are given at table 2 below.

Table 2: Proposed Council Tax debts over £500 to be written-off 2023-24

Reason for write-off	Value
Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order	£231,272
No longer financially viable	£199,072
No forwarding address	£100,211
Council Tax Support	£85,015
Deceased	£24,616
Debt over 6 years old	£19,989
Official error	£4,531
Hardship	£512
Total write-off	£665,218

11. Details of the reasons for the write-off of debts are as follows:

- (a) **Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order** – these are debts where the debtor has been made bankrupt, insolvent or is subject to a Debt Relief Order, and there are no assets left to recover the debt.
- (b) **No longer financially viable** – these are debts where all reasonable steps to recover the amounts have been taken, but it is no longer financially viable to proceed further. For example, this could be as a result of information from an Enforcement Agent, advice from Legal Services or the debtor being in prison.
- (c) **No forwarding address** – these are debts where all reasonable steps have been taken to trace the debtor, but their current whereabouts are not known. If contact is made in the future, the debt will become recoverable again.
- (d) **Council Tax Support** – these are debts which cannot be collected by deductions from the debtor's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits because the maximum deductions allowable are already in place and there are no other methods of recovery available.
- (e) **Deceased** – these are debts where the debtor is deceased and there are no assets left in the estate.
- (f) **Debt over 6 years old** – these are debts where all reasonable steps to recover the amounts have been taken, but it is no longer financially viable to proceed further, and the debt is over 6 years old.
- (g) **Official error** – these are debts caused as a result of an error made by the Council or another official organisation, such as the DWP, and the debt is irrecoverable.
- (h) **Hardship** – these are debts to be written-off on hardship grounds.

12. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £256,209 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £500. A summary of the write-offs for 2023-24, including credits written back, is given at table 3 below.

Table 3: Council Tax write-off summary 2023-24

Classification	Value
Debts over £500 written-off	£665,218
Debts under £500 written-off	£256,209
Credits written back*	-£135,509
Debts written-off reversal**	-£32,425
Total net write-off	£753,493

*Credits written back: These are credits where attempts to refund the credit has been unsuccessful. Credits written back can be reversed and refunded if the person makes contact.

**Debts written-off reversal: These are debts previously written-off that have been reversed back to recover following successful contact with the debtor.

Business Rates

13. During 2023-24, a total of £31.17 million of Business rates was due, of which £31.12 million was collected (or 99.8%). This compares to £31.82 million collected in 2022-23 (or 99.8%).
14. As with Council Tax, the collection of Business Rates during 2023-24 continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, despite the challenges, Business Rates arrears (excluding costs) remain at low levels, with £0.80 million of arrears outstanding in March 2024.
15. The Council has already exceeded the collection target of 99% of Business Rates due for 2023-24. A summary of Business Rates collection from 2012 is given at table 4 below and shows that collection rates remain high, and arrears are well managed.

Table 4: Business rates collection summary

Year	Business Rates (£,000)				Percentage Collected to date
	Due	Collected	Written-off	Outstanding	
2012-13	32,344	31,763	573	8	98.2%
2013-14	33,257	32,664	575	18	98.2%
2014-15	33,545	33,110	435	0	98.7%
2015-16	34,063	33,733	330	0	99.0%
2016-17	35,737	35,304	431	2	98.8%
2017-18	33,606	33,226	374	6	98.9%
2018-19	33,784	33,411	347	26	98.9%
2019-20	33,100	32,930	153	17	99.5%
2020-21	18,410	18,339	17	54	99.6%
2021-22	26,568	26,431	33	104	99.5%
2022-23	31,687	31,293	-161	555	98.8%
2023-24	31,167	31,118	42	7	99.8%

16. However, some of the older outstanding debts have been identified as irrecoverable and approval for write-off is being sought. A total of £371,994 Business Rates debts over £500 have been identified for write-off in 2023-24. This represents 1.19% of the Business Rates due to be collected in 2023-24. Details of the proposed Business Rates debts over £500 to be written-off are given at table 5 below.

Table 5: Proposed Business Rates debts over £500 to be written-off 2023-24

Reason for write-off	Value
Bankruptcy	£268,180
No longer financially viable	£79,372
No forwarding address	£19,963
Deceased	£3,234
Debt over 6 years old	£1,245
Total write-off	£371,994

17. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £7,804 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £500. A summary of the write-offs for 2023-24, including credits written back, is given at table 6 below.

Table 6: Business Rates write-off summary 2023-24

Classification	Value
Debts over £500 written-off	£371,994
Debts under £500 written-off	£7,804
Credits written back	-£442,666
Debts written-off reversal	-£5,558
Total net write-off	-£68,426

Council Rents

18. During 2023-24, a total of £29.07 million of Council rent was due and £27.90 million was collected (or 96.0%). In addition, £95,101.19 of former tenant arrears were also collected. The amount of rent arrears has increased from £862,250 in April 2023 to £959,140 in April 2024.
19. Housing Services are committed to help tenants to maintain a tenancy through prevention, support and debt recovery and make all reasonable attempts to recover debts and provide practical advice and assistance to tenants facing difficulties with their rent payments.
20. Recovery action for current tenant rent charges includes letters, home visits, emails, text message and phone calls. Court action is taken to regain possession of the property as a last resort action. However, a supportive stance in relation to rent collection has been taken throughout 2023-24 to assist tenants to maintain their tenancy.
21. Former tenant debts, including rechargeable repairs, may be written-off where recovery is uneconomical to the Council, or the tenant's whereabouts remain unknown for over a

year, despite all reasonable tracing efforts being made. Current tenant arrears are only written-off where the tenant is subject to the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space), Debt Relief Orders, Bankruptcy or Individual Voluntary Arrangements.

22. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £106,932 of former tenant rent arrears over £500, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 0.37% of Council rents due to be collected in 2023-24. Details of the proposed former tenant rent arrears over £500 to be written-off are given at table 7 below.

Table 7: Proposed former tenant rent arrears over £500 to be written-off 2023-24

Reason for write-off	Value
No longer financially viable	£52,293
Deceased	£35,414
No forwarding address	£16,195
Debtor in residential care	£3,030
Total write-off	£106,932

23. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £28,513 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £500. A summary of the write-offs for 2023-24, including credits written back, is given at table 8 below.

Table 8: Former tenant arrears write-off summary 2023-24

Classification	Value
Debts over £500 written-off	£106,932
Debts under £500 written-off	£28,513
Credits written back	-£627
Net write-off	£134,818

Housing Benefit Overpayments

24. During 2023-24, a total of £431,174 Housing Benefit overpayments were identified and £543,542 was collected (or 126.1%). The amount of outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments has therefore reduced from £1.54 million in March 2023 to £1.34 million in March 2024.
25. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £80,449 of Housing Benefit overpayments over £500, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 5.22% of all Housing Benefit overpayments due to be collected in 2023-24. Details of the proposed Housing Benefit overpayments over £500 to be written-off are given at table 9 below.

Table 9: Proposed Housing Benefit overpayments over £500 to be written-off 2023-24

Reason for write-off	Value
No longer financially viable	£20,133
Official error	£17,749
Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order	£15,609
Hardship	£13,696
Deceased	£12,424
No forwarding address	£838
Total write-off	£80,449

26. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £16,985 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £500. A summary of the write-offs for 2023-24 is given at table 10 below.

Table 10: Housing Benefit overpayments write-off summary 2023-24

Classification	Value
Debts over £500 written-off	£80,449
Debts under £500 written-off	£16,985
Total write-off	£97,434

Sundry Debt invoices

27. During 2023-24, a total of £32.027 million of new sundry debts were raised and £30.215 million was collected (or 94.3%). The amount of outstanding sundry debts has therefore increased from £8.901 million in March 2023 to £11.322 million in March 2024.
28. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £314,189 of sundry debts over £500, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 0.98% of all sundry debts due to be collected in 2023-24. Details of the proposed sundry debts over £500 to be written-off are given at table 11 below.

Table 11: Proposed sundry debts over £500 to be written-off 2023-24

Reason for write-off	Value
Deceased	£132,303
No longer financially viable	£181,886
Total write-off	£314,189

30. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £75,469 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £500. A summary of the write-offs for 2023-24 is given at table 12 below.

Table 12: Sundry debts write-off summary 2023-24

Classification	Value
Debts over £500 written-off	£314,189
Debts under £500 written-off	£75,469
Total write-off	£389,658

Financial Implications

31. From April 2013, following the introduction of the Non-Domestic Rates Retention scheme, the Council has become liable for its proportion (49%) of the bad and doubtful debts with the remainder being shared between Central Government (50%) and the Durham and Darlington Fire Authority (1%). This has been allowed for in the Council's accounts. Provision for bad and doubtful Council Tax debt has already been made in the Council's accounts so that the write-offs as recommended have no additional financial impact on the Council.
32. Financial regulations require authorities to make an annual assessment of the extent to which any money owed to the Council is likely to prove irrecoverable and make adequate provision in their accounts. The financial implications of writing-off the proposed former tenant arrears debt has therefore, already been taken into account in the Housing Revenue Account.
33. In respect of Housing Benefit overpayments, the DWP has recognised that in a system as complex as the Housing Benefit scheme, errors will occur. The DWP provide incentives for local authorities to minimise the number of these errors. As a result, local authorities receive subsidy depending on the type of overpayment.
34. Official error overpayments are subsidised at 100%, therefore these overpayments will be fully reimbursed by the DWP. All other eligible overpayments are funded at 40% subsidy, most of which are then successfully recovered. There will be no financial impact on the Council's current revenue budget as provisions have been made in the previous year.
35. For sundry debts, a provision is made in the accounts for bad debts on a monthly basis and reflected in budgets. Debts over one year old are provided for on a 100% basis, so the write-off outlined above will have no adverse effect on the MTFP. Debts of less than one year old may also be provided for and the decision of how much to provide is taken in consultation with the manager responsible for the service.

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

PRODUCTIVITY PLAN 2024/25

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the 2024/25 Productivity Plan for member oversight and endorsement before submission on the 19 July 2024.

Background

2. As part of the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement the Government announced the requirement for all Councils to produce a productivity plan. Subsequently the Minister for Local Government, Simon Hoare MP, wrote to Council Chief Executives outlining what the plans should include noting that Local Government had already done a huge amount in recent years to improve productivity and efficiency and that the plans would help the Government understand what is working well across the country, what the common themes are, whether there are any gaps and what more the government could do to unlock future opportunities.
3. The four questions posed were:
 - (a) How have you transformed the way you design and deliver services to make a better use of resources.
 - (b) How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.
 - (c) Plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.
 - (d) The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.
4. Darlington Draft Plan is attached at **Appendix 1**, must be returned to the Government by 19 July 2024 and subsequently uploaded on the Council's website.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that:-
- (a) Members endorse the Productivity Plan
 - (b) The plan is uploaded onto the council's website.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported in order to fulfil the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities requirements.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

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

Elizabeth Davison : Extension 5403

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications in this report.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to health and wellbeing which this report needs to address.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no 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	This requires an urgent decision as the Council is required to submit the productivity to government by 19 July 2024
Council Plan	The Productivity Plan links to the core principle of Efficient and Effective use of resources in the Council Plan.
Efficiency	The report contains information on how the council has transformed service delivery and future use of technology which lead to efficiency savings contained in the MTFP.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Productivity Plan

2024/25

Introduction

1. Darlington Borough Council continually strives to ensure value for money services for its residents and partners. Being the third smallest Unitary Authority in the country we do not have the luxury of economies of scale some Local Authorities have however the advantage of being small is that we can achieve our ambitions, through being nimble, innovative with the deployment of resources, focused on delivery and harnessing strong partnerships.
2. As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement the government requested that all councils produce a Productivity Plan to be submitted to the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. Whilst this is the first productivity plan, Darlington has always had a focus on efficient and effective use of resources for our residents and communities and has a strong governance framework to achieve this through the Council Plan, setting out our vision, aims and objectives; our four year Medium Term Financial Plan; a strong performance management framework, and external validation and assurance through our auditors and inspection bodies.
3. The Government have asked that the four following questions be considered.

How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources.

4. Darlington has a culture of innovation and transformation and has always strived to make the best use of resources. Following significant reductions (£46m in real terms) in public spending from 2010 to 2019 the council has reduced in size substantially, cutting budgets to match resources and losing 747 members of staff in the process. In 2016 the council undertook a significant deep dive exercise reviewing all service provision and introducing a core offer of statutory services along with a small discretionary service offer of around £5m. Since then, we have maximised the limited resources available continuing to reduce the costs of service provision in the context of rising demand. Despite the reductions Darlington benchmarks well in comparison to its nearest neighbours confirmed by the Office for Local Government (Oflog) and the Chartered Institute for Public Finance (Cipfa) financial resilience indicators.
5. To protect front line service budgets, we have a small management and back office team. The Chief Executive holds a director portfolio for economic growth with the other three directors being twin hatters covering several portfolios. This extends across the whole management team where very few managers have one focused role. This is achievable as we work together as a strong team and do not work in silos or with demarcation lines.
6. An early example of productivity is our partnership with Stockton Borough Council for all transactional Human Resources, Finance, Design and print and ICT strategy and operations. Xentrall was formed back in 2008 and has delivered savings of over £15m, at the same time the quality and performance has improved. Xentrall has subsequently grown providing services for other public sector bodies.
7. More recently the Children's Services sufficiency programme agreed by Council in February 2024 sees a number of initiatives being undertaken to try and stem the rising number of children coming into Council care. It includes additional provision of in-house premises to reduce the number of high cost placements whilst providing a local stable home for children

and an improved foster care offer to encourage more people to become carers.

<https://democracy.darlington.gov.uk/documents/s21061/240215%20O%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Planning%20MTFP%20Appendix%208.pdf>.

Darlington has taken a Strengthening Families approach and worked with the DFE and Leeds City Council with a focus on relational practice and family led solutions to reduce the need for statutory involvement.

8. Across the council a pragmatic approach to agile working has been taken. Long before Covid, social workers and financial assessment staff were using laptops to complete assessments in resident's homes and not have to come back to the office to dock or spend time finding a car parking space, consequently the number of assessments completed increased. This is particularly the case for statutory visits in children's services. We have also made savings by rationalising buildings following this change.
9. In the aftermath of covid we have pushed the technology agenda and were early adopters of Microsoft 365 with teams and hybrid meetings significantly reducing travel time between council offices along with reducing the carbon footprint. Technology has also allowed us to be paper free with all Councillors using laptops saving the reams of paper that used to be produced for committee meetings.
10. We are committed to working closely with NHS colleagues to achieve timely and effective hospital discharges. To maximise our impact in this area, we jointly commissioned an external review of our in house Reablement service. The outcome of the review was a full re-design of our delivery model to reflect 'best in class' working practices. Our discharge performance is now among the best nationally and we are effective in reducing the need for long term support: 91% of people who receive short term support no longer require support or need it at a lower level and, when surveyed, 90% of people who have received a service feel that they have improved. This robust performance has been delivered at a time when demand has increased by 30%.
11. Opportunities have been developed with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) and other Tees Valley Local Authorities to develop more effective partnerships to deliver services more efficiently, especially in transport and regeneration. In transport shared services are being developed in traffic management and public transport facilities to lever in investment and provide improved services. In regeneration, the Council have worked in partnership with TVCA to ensure sites are not only shovel ready for development but in some cases office and incubator space have been provided speculatively to increase inwards investment and the creation of jobs within the Borough. The Council has built two incubator buildings for new start-ups and a Grade A office block which is fully occupied.
12. Further examples of transformation include.
 - Darlington was an early adopter with LED Street lighting reducing our energy consumption by 64%.
 - We have several Joint Venture companies building houses in the borough which helps meet housing demand and delivers a profit for the council which is reinvested into core services.
 - In education, development of parent and professional portals has streamlined the Education Health and Care Plan process.

- Darlington has entered a strategic joint waste management contract with the Tees Valley authorities along with Durham County Council and Newcastle City council to maintain a unified approach, provide residents with value for money and contribute to becoming an exemplar region for clean energy and low carbon use.
 - The Council has facilitated co-location of Council and Police services to form a community hub, where the services work closely together to tackle ASB and crime across the Borough. The Council has levered in additional funding through the Safer Streets Programme
13. Capital resources are limited however we maximise usage for economic growth, energy efficiency and to boost our council housing with an ambitious plan of an additional 1,000 new council homes built over the next ten years. We work closely as part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority and use available funds to transform our built landscape with £35m on a newly refurbished Railway Museum, Hopetown, and the £140m revamp of Darlington east coast mainline train station along with acquiring some key sites for redevelopment and enhancement of the Town centre. Our Town's fund is being utilised for developing key sites and transforming the Town centre increasing premium office space as well as creating a new model. We are investing in our estate to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions with LED light replacement and photo voltaic cell network at our leisure centre.
14. Darlington has a strong governance framework through which resources are managed. Productivity is measured in several ways across the council with services using a range of indicators which are monitored by managers and the leadership team monthly with political oversight through quarterly budget monitoring and half yearly performance reports to Cabinet reviewed by all scrutiny committees. Comparison metrics can be found in the latest performance report <https://democracy.darlington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MIId=2639>
15. For external validation we are proactive with Local Government Association Peer Reviews, the last one being Summer 2022 with a positive outcome, and we use the Oflog and Cipfa resilience index to identify areas for improvement. In addition we have external validation from our Auditors where we consistently receive a positive outcome and value for money judgement, and assurance reviews from Ofsted who rated the council good with some areas outstanding in the last review.

How we plan to take advantage of technology to make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.

16. The council understands that technology and data quality is key to increasing productivity and is constantly looking to improve systems and processes. Ongoing development of corporate ICT systems and related processes are leading to efficiencies across the council and effective use of systems is benefiting many areas such as children's and adult services, street scene, planning, customer services, and leisure services. They are streamlining decision making processes through automation where appropriate, efficiently, and securely managing and processing data, helping council functions to plan and operate more efficiently, and opening up automated ways to support customer services related activities. Our ongoing work with MS365, including Power BI, Co-Pilot, and the exploration of other artificial intelligence related opportunities are intended to bring further productivity improvements to the council in the future.

17. Our Customer Services and digital strategy aims to deliver excellent customer services that are easy to use and provide value for money to residents, where possible we provide digital access to our services including online application, service requests, information and payments which are easy to use and at any time of the day to suit our residents. This not only improves productivity but also provides a better service to our residents. We are of course mindful to avoid digital exclusion.
18. Our Adult social care digital strategy focus is enabling and encouraging those who can use digital and online tools to do so. This makes services available at a time to suit users; provide quick and appropriate channels when we are contacted for advice and support, empower and support staff to use digital tools and support and enable care providers to use technology to change the way services are delivered.
19. An exciting new development is the investigation into a new children's portal which will be a gateway to interacting online for children, young people, their parents, and carers as well as other professionals. Key information gathered will be captured and stored against their records, which will bring efficiencies to the Council's current business processes and improve the evidence of the voice of children, parents, and carers in their own records. Here are a few examples to illustrate
 - Parents and Children contributing towards Early Help assessments, care planning and reviews.
 - Children telling us about their wishes and feelings about key events (e.g. reviews)
 - Young people contributing to their plans (e.g. Care Leavers contributing to Pathway Plans)
 - Foster carers contributing towards information you require to support care planning and/or in helping them to care for your child or young person.
 - Users providing feedback about their experiences of services (e.g. Early Help Interventions, Adoption and Fostering Panels)
 - Prospective carers (e.g. adopters and foster carers) submitting expressions of interest and other recruitment related documentation on-line.
20. Other examples of digital transformation include+: -
 - Introduction of a booking system in our leisure centre and digital kiosks allowing member check in freeing up reception staff and providing a better experience for members. In addition, the introduction of QR codes to order food and beverages will save staff time.
 - Early Years Education system implemented which has reduced off systems processes and increased productivity in areas such as attendance. We will also be going live with the delegation portal in September withing SEN services capturing application and supporting evidence in one place as well as allowing relevant external agencies to add their own data.
 - Netcall, analysis of our customer services call volumes and waiting times – historical information enables us to staff up at key times e.g., council tax billing.
 - Report it App, has been developed allowing residents to raise issues through an App e.g., road repairs. The report goes direct to the service for completion which improves the service for residents as they can report and track responses and action, and it improves efficiency with less calls coming into the contact centre which require handling.

How we plan to reduce wasteful spend within the organisation and systems

21. Following significant funding cuts since 2010 and the subsequent expenditure reductions the council does not have any 'gold plated' spend and there are limited opportunities to reduce this spend further. The budget is allocated to core offer statutory services with a very small amount left for discretionary services.
22. Notwithstanding this we have a culture of innovation and continual improvement across the whole council. This is promoted from day one at staff induction sessions held by the Chief Executive and promoted through our workforce strategy where it is one of our Core values. Our employees are aware of our financial challenges and ideas for improvements are encouraged.
23. Our transformation programme looks across all services areas and is focused on reviewing systems and processes and utilising technology to streamline service provision, income generation through economic growth and visitor attraction investment and collaboration with other public sector bodies and the voluntary sector.
24. We have a strong governance framework in place to ensure transparency and challenge of our expenditure and performance. The MTFP, and Council Plan performance are fully scrutinised and consulted upon before Council approval, and we monitor progress against our plans with regular reports to Scrutiny Committees, Audit and Cabinet. In addition there are gateways for spend approval including the procurement board which reviews spend over £10,000; vacancy authorisation control where any new post must have a business case and be approved by the leadership team; debt levels and overtime reports reviewed and scrutinised by Assistant Directors with debt over £500 requiring Cabinet approval for write off and agency spend reports reviewed by managers on a regular basis.
25. Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) has been noted by the government as an area to review, our spend on EDI is to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality duty and we have one officer of which part of their role is to assist the council with our statutory duties, providing staff and member training, and assisting with equality impact assessments when required. We also have equalities champions who meet on a quarterly basis to discuss any concern or issues that have been raised. Therefore, an excessive amount of time is not spent on these activities.
26. As noted previously we partner with Stockton Council on transactional finance, HR, ICT and print and design where significant savings have been made, and we are currently reviewing with Stockton if there are any further areas which could be shared.

Barriers preventing progress that the government can help to reduce or remove.

27. Funding

- **Annual finance settlements** are not efficient, not knowing what funding you have on a year to year basis does not promote good financial or service planning. Longer term settlements and indications on referendum levels are essential.
- **One off grant funding** is often announced without any consultation with councils who are left on the back foot trying to respond to resident's queries without an indication of the amount they will receive or timescales. In addition, adequate time is rarely given to plan a

fully effective scheme. e.g., the numerous energy grant distributions and the recent round of household support fund.

- **Bidding for one off grants.** There can be significant cost in drawing a bid together which is abortive if the bid is not successful. Subsequently if a bid is successful the monitoring and reporting that is required again takes considerable time and effort and feels excessive particularly for small grants. In addition, many of these bidding opportunities come with very short deadlines for submission and there is not capacity in a small organisation to get the bid completed (we staff for the troughs not the peaks) meaning bids are hurried require consultants to be used which is not an efficient or effective use of resources. These bidding wars are not conducive to providing value for money.
- **Ring fenced grants** are not helpful. Councils know what is needed in their areas and should be permitted to allocate resources in the best interests of their communities.
- **Adult Social Care.** The current funding model need to be reformed, funding does not match those areas with highest deprivation and need. The social care precept places the burden of social care funding on the local tax payer

28. Legislation and Governance

- **Timely and accurate provision of information** is key to being productive when delivering new legislative requirements. For example, the requirement to design and deliver a new waste collection service from April 2026, but without the details of the revenue funding to be provided. It has been announced that highway maintenance spending will increase but we have not been told by how much and when it will increase past the current year, making the planning and procurement of repairs for next year extremely challenging.
- **Remote Councillor meetings** were allowed during Covid. This was helpful for residents and members who cannot get to in person meetings and should be reinstated.
- **Audit** – there have been significant delays in external audit, we appreciate the issues auditors have had with staffing and changes in audit requirements, but this has put pressure on internal teams who have needed to re do work for the audit sometimes multiple times e.g., going concern. Differing audit firms are taking different approaches, this is not helpful, auditors appointed through the PSAA process should take the same line regarding audit completions.
- **Provider monopolies.** The children's social care market is broken and there is some blatant profiteering in provider markets. Placement costs are out of control with the markets making demanding with councils having limited bargaining power particularly when under a court order. Regulation is needed. In the same vein the cost of corporate ICT systems is high, and suppliers have control over the industry, we are in the hands of the suppliers when it comes to upgrade and licenses costs which increase significantly.
- **Inspection regimes.** Whilst good governance and external audit is essential the external inspection regime does require significant resource to manage and is costly. There can be over regulation in this area and this year another two inspection regimes have been introduced. The preparation for inspection, administration burden pre, during and post inspections and post inspection reporting takes limited resources away from front line services. The balance is not right and needs to be reviewed.
- **Legal notices** must be published in local newspapers – given the readership they should be changed with the requirement for publication to be online on the website.

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT & CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING
OUTTURN 2023/24

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Dave Winstanley, Group Director of Services
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides:
 - (a) Information on delivery of the Council's Capital Programme, the financial outturn position as at 31 March 2024 and the proposed financing of the 2023/24 capital expenditure.
 - (b) An update on the status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council.
2. It also seeks approval for a number of changes to the programme.

Summary

3. Significant enhancements have been made to the Council's assets in three major programme areas of schools, housing and transport, mostly using external funding, as well as several other largescale schemes in the Borough. These investments are delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically, to Council services. Refurbishment of council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel have been achieved and are detailed within the report.
4. Capital expenditure in 2023/24 totalled £60.084m. Since the last revision of the Capital Medium Term Financial plan further refinements to estimates have occurred as part of the ongoing management of the programme and these are included in the recommendations below, all revisions can be contained within existing programmes.

5. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work. The current project position statement (PPS) shows there are 27 live projects currently being managed by the Council with an overall project outturn value of £158.405m. The majority of projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.
6. The projects are managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by consultants sourced via an open/OJEU tender process.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note the delivery and financial outturn of the 2023/24 Capital Programme.
 - (b) Note projected capital expenditure and resources.
 - (c) Approve the adjustments to resources as detailed in paragraph 30.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The recommendations are supported to enable Members to note the progress of the 2023/24 Capital Programme and to allow the capital expenditure to be fully financed.
 - (b) To inform Cabinet of the status of construction projects.
 - (c) To maintain effective management of resources.

Dave Winstanley
Group Director of Services

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27
- (ii) Project Position Statement March 2024

Brian Robson : Extension 6608
Steve Wake : Extension 5424

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no issues relating to health and wellbeing which this report needs to address.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	There are no specific implications for diversity
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	The proposals do not affect any particular groups within the community
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	The report does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
Council Plan	The Capital Programme referred to in the report supports delivery of the Council plan.
Efficiency	The recommendations support the effective and efficient use of resources.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

2023/24 Capital Spend and Resources

Information and Analysis

9. **Appendix 1** is for information and lists all live construction projects and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues.
10. The Capital outturn for 2023/24 totalled £60.084m compared to £62.566m in 2022/23. **Appendix 2** analyses the 2023/24 capital spend by department, the proposed financing of the overall approved programme and corporate resources to be carried forward into 2024/25. The total of resources already approved to finance the outstanding capital programme including part finished projects is £180.949m (including £4.045m referenced in the report) therefore £120.865m will be carried forward into 2024/25 to fund completion. The spend summary shows the amount available to be utilised in future years to help finance the capital programme.
11. **Appendix 3** summarises the total approved departmental capital budgets of £336.008m, along with spend to date of £215.143m and the projected outturn position which is lower than budget at £314.955m.

12. The proposed financing of the 2023/24 expenditure is:

	2023/24
Capital Expenditure	£M
Financing of Capital Expenditure	60.084
<i>Corporate resources</i>	
Corporate Unsupported Capital Expenditure (Borrowing)	10.436
Capital Receipts	2.491
<i>Externally funded</i>	
Capital Grants	36.996
Capital Contributions	0.261
<i>Departmental and Other Resources</i>	
HRA - Capital Receipts	0.000
HRA - Revenue Contribution	8.003
Departmental - Borrowing for Leasable Assets	0.169
Departmental - Unsupported Borrowing	0.560
Departmental – Revenue Contribution	1.168
Total Capital Financing	60.084

Project Position Statement

13. Project management procedures require the production by project managers of a Project Position Statement (PPS) for all projects over £75,000. This report brings together the pertinent data from the current PPS with financial information from the Financial Management System (FMS) and approvals by Cabinet.
14. The Project Position Statement (Appendix 1) details the current live construction projects, up to the end of March 2024, by delivery area, and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues. The statement excludes any completed projects or those on hold.
15. The overview of live construction projects is as follows:

	Projects	Current Approved Budget	Projected Outturn	Variance	Variance (Value)
		£ / p	£ / p	%	£ / p
Chief Executive & Economic Growth	14	44,255,210	44,225,401	(0.1)	(29,809)
Operations	3	41,037,222	41,476,030	1.1	438,808
People	1	1,124,000	1,124,000	0.0	0
Services	9	70,908,939	71,579,082	0.9	670,143
TOTAL	27	157,325,371	158,404,513		1,079,142

16. The table shown above includes a column for current approved budget. In certain cases this budget figure may be different from the original approved budget. This could be as a result of variances identified during construction or other variables not known at the initiation stage. The original budget and all subsequent changes have been reported to and approved by Cabinet.

17. The live projects are at the following stages:

Department	Brief	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	Total
Chief Executive & Economic Growth	0	0	2	4	6	2	14
Operations	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
People	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Services	0	0	0	3	1	5	9
TOTAL	0	1	2	8	9	7	27

18. **Control Point 1 (CP1) – Start Up:** is used to define the position of a project at its conception stage.

- (a) **Control Point 2 (CP2) – Initiate:** defines a project at feasibility stage and will likely include a desktop assessment of a project and the use of informed estimates.
- (b) **Control Point 3 (CP3) – Define:** the point that the project is progressed to RIBA Stage F, i.e. detailed design.
- (c) **Control Point 4 (CP4) – Construction Phase:** is the stage at which work begins on the project, i.e. for a construction project on site through to build completion.
- (d) **Control Point 5 (CP5) – Evaluate:** is the stage post completion of the project at which time the project is reviewed, and lessons learned are discussed in order that they can be taken to the next or similar projects.

19. The status on live projects is as follows:

Department	Red	Blue	Green
Chief Executive & Economic Growth	1	13	0
Operations	1	1	1
People	0	1	0
Services	3	6	0
TOTAL	5	21	1

- (a) Green and red colour coding are used to identify projects that have variances which are:
 - (i) More than £5,000, if the variance is also more than 5% of the approved budget for the project, or
 - (ii) More than £50,000 regardless of the percentage variance
- (b) Projects that are within these margins are symbolised with blue coding.
- (c) In addition to cost, the same colour codes are used to indicate similar levels of variances in time and quality/outputs/outcomes.

20. Current projects with red coding are as follows:

Project	Reason for Variance	Action
Skinnergate Re-development, Commercial & Housing	A delay was encountered following the production of a revised design to satisfy concerns raised by English Heritage at the planning application stage. It has also been impacted by Nutrient Neutrality further delaying the start on site date.	The Party Wall process has been protracted and impacted on the anticipated commencement date. It is now being completed to allow phase 1 demolition works to commence in May/June 2024.
Darlington Station Demolitions	This project has been delayed as compensation amounts with two interests are still to be agreed.	The Council continues to negotiate with two interests who are yet to agree a compensation amount. This process could continue until 2027.
Crown Street Library Refurbishment	Delays and additional costs have been encountered from the withdrawal of the originally appointed roofing contractor.	The scheme is now complete, and the outturn report is included at Appendix 6.
Sherborne Close Phase 2	Following the introduction of nutrient Mitigation requirements in line with changes in national Planning Legislation, the project needed to be paused. This delay resulted in the construction design also becoming subject to revised Building Regulations (post June 23). These factors plus considerable inflation over the period 2022 to late 2023 resulted in the project costs increasing significantly.	The project team are currently undertaking a tender exercise with the construction tender cost due to be confirmed in Spring 2024.
Railway Heritage Quarter	See paragraphs 21-23.	See paragraphs 21-23.

21. The Hopetown (Railway Heritage Quarter) project budget in the PPS shows a revised budget of £37,088,350. This adjustment is to reflect additional funding secured from a variety of sources. The majority of the increase being from additional grant from National Lottery Heritage Fund and sponsor funding to provide additionality to the project, with some funding added from carried forward monies. Approval is sought in paragraph 30 to revise the budget and release the funding.

22. The project is coming towards the end of the construction phase. There are a number of matters where there remains a financial risk and an amount has been included in the forecast should they materialise. There also remains a significant amount of money in the forecast that is in dispute, and this will need resolving post project, but from a prudent financial management perspective the financial risk has been included in the forecast at this stage. Depending on the financial outcome of the remaining risks and disputed sums, the current forecast is between £603k within budget and £363k over budget. The PPS is reporting the worst-case scenario at this stage given the uncertainty on risk and dispute outcome. The worst-case scenario represents a 0.9% potential overspend on the revised project budget.
23. As with all projects over £1m a report will be produced on the final outturn when the outcome of the risk and disputes will be known.
24. In line with the Council's Financial Procedure rules any scheme with an outturn value of in excess of a £1m must be reported to Cabinet. In accordance with the agreed procedure the Central Park South Landscaping Project and Crown Street Library Project have been reviewed (CP5) and the results and final outturn are shown in **Appendices 5 and 6**.
25. If approved, Central Park South Landscaping and Crown Street Library will be removed from the live PPS listing in Appendix 1.

Reconciliation of Project Position Statement to Capital Programme

26. The table shown below reconciles the differences between the Capital Programme (CP) and the Project Position Statement (PPS). Differences occur because the Project Position Statement includes all construction projects over £75,000 in value funded from Capital and Revenue sources. Spending within the Capital Programme is not always of a construction nature, can be of any value and excludes Revenue funded schemes.

	Value £m
Live Projects from Project Position	158.405
Schemes closed or on hold within CP but awaiting PPS post project review.	30.480
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Housing Repairs & Maintenance	9.890
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Highways Maintenance	10.055
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Childrens Services School Maintenance	0.140
Non construction excluded from PPS	12.533
Capital Investment fund excluded from PPS	41.443
Projects under 75k excluded from PPS	2.477
Capital Schemes not yet integrated into PPS reporting	28.508
Included in PPS & CMR	0
Funding not yet allocated	21.024
Capital Programme	314.955

27. The table below shows the split of the approved capital programme of £328.085m, between the different service areas and the various categories of spend. When compared to the table above it shows that there is a projected £13.130m underspend on the approved capital programme.

	Construction				Non construction	Capital investment fund	Housing New Build - not yet allocated	Total
	Live Schemes 75k & Over	Annualised Schemes	Completed Schemes awaiting review	Live Schemes under 75k				
Area	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing	47.753	23.924	0.627	0.033	1.455	0.000	15.673	89.465
Economic Growth	41.706	0.079	7.453	0.274	6.816	40.181	3.476	99.985
Highways/Transport	65.314	9.941	14.873	1.601	1.741	1.877	1.512	96.859
Leisure & Culture	30.105	0.000	2.618	0.245	0.000	0.000	0.000	32.968
Education	1.124	0.140	4.283	0.273	0.079	0.000	0.290	6.189
Adult Social Care	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071
Other	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	2.548	0.000	0.000	2.548
Total	186.002	34.084	29.854	2.426	12.710	42.058	20.951	328.085

Capital Programme

28. The following major areas of work have been undertaken in 2023/24:

- (a) Children, Families and Learning
 - (i) A programme of planning maintenance was undertaken across the local authority maintained schools.
 - (ii) A complete re-roof of Whinfield Primary was undertaken which was completed in April 2024.

(b) Housing

- (i) Adaptations – A Major refurbishment to two lifts at Branksome Hall Drive were carried out. Various minor adaptations were carried out to 131 properties across various areas.
- (ii) Heating Replacement - The upgrade of heating systems including 'A' rated Combi boilers, radiators and heating controls and the progressing of Electric to gas central heating replacement programme including the installation of new gas services and pipelines. Work was carried out to 240 properties.
- (iii) Structural Repairs – Ongoing structural monitoring continues and as a result, structural works to lintels, canopies and wall tie replacements were carried out to 24 properties in Hundens Lane. Structural balcony Repairs - Sherbourne, Mount Pleasant, Stockmoor close, Heatherwood Grove.
- (iv) Repairs before Painting – 1295 (555 Houses, 207 blocks of flats, four schemes – just over 1000 “properties”) properties had joinery repair works as part of the cyclical external painting programme in Skerne Park, Park Place, Inverary, Wesley Court, (urban wards = Whinfield, Park West/East, Central & Stephenson).
- (v) Roofing – Responsive replacements were carried out to 12 properties and parapet wall removal to six flats within various areas of Darlington. Planned replacement works were delayed during 22/23 and will be carried out alongside the 23/24 programme(PDF) 63 Roofing / Repointing.
- (vi) Garages – No planned works carried out 23/24, funds slipped to 24/25 to allow demolition of blocks to be completed.
- (vii) External Works –
 - (1) Various properties across the Borough have had fencing replacements works completed.
 - (2) 168 properties were identified by responsive inspections and required some fencing replacing.
- (viii) Pavement Crossings – three properties had pavement crossings installed in their properties across the borough.
- (ix) Replacement Door Programme – 96 properties were identified by responsive inspections and required replacement doors.
- (x) 178 Properties in Banktop and Lascelles areas were upgraded as part of our planned programme.
- (xi) Communal Works & Door Entry Systems –

- (1) Lascelles estate – 15 Blocks of flats had replacement communal door entry systems.
 - (2) Works to external vehicle gates were carried out at Rockwell House and Roxby Court.
 - (3) All blocks of flats now connected to the cloud based system, including schemes. All tenants issued new fobs. Certain blocks now hard linked (Katherine / Havelock EG).
 - (4) Two sliding door upgrades at Windsor / Rosemary.
- (xii) Internal planned maintenance – 240 properties have been completed this year due to Labour constraints within Building Services.
- (xiii) Windows – We completed a programme to upgrade 1000 single glazed properties to Double Glazing. In some streets old double glazing was also replaced to complete whole streets with upgrades.
- (xiv) Energy Efficiency works - Enabling work begun under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding Wave 2.1 (SHDFw2.1) stream. This will enable us to complete energy improvement works to 130 properties, which includes External Wall Insulation. (PDF) DG / Solar / EWI & Cavity Wall – 28 Properties (LAD 1).
- (c) Transport
- (i) Darlington Borough Council continues to deliver capital schemes as part of the action plans associated with the Darlington Transport Plan, Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy (2022 – 2030). The objectives of the Darlington Transport Plan, are to:
- (1) Reduce transport's impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing.
 - (2) Improve safety for all road users.
 - (3) Connect people with job and training opportunities and link communities.
 - (4) Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre; and
 - (5) Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.
- (ii) Capital investment funding to progress and deliver DBC transport related improvement schemes are funded through the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS), which consolidates funding from previous allocations of the Highways Maintenance Block, Pothole Fund and Integrated

Transport Block. CRSTS funding spent on delivering a programme of maintenance schemes and transport improvement schemes, including:

- (1) Borough-wide patching and resurfacing schemes.
- (2) Reconstruction of A67 Merrybent (Phase 3).
- (3) Design and delivery of Safe Routes to School schemes.
- (4) Implementation of dropped and raised kerbs to improve access for all.
- (5) Reconstruction of Neasham Road (Phase 2).
- (6) Reconstruction of Clifton Road Back Lane.

29. Paragraph 30 shows the movements in the Capital Programme since the approval of the 2023/24 Capital MTFP, some of which have not yet been approved by Members but are included in the figures at Appendix 1.

30. Adjustment to resources requested by departments:

Adjustments needing approval release.

Department	Scheme	Value £	Reason for adjustment	Resource type adjusted
Services	Car Park & Biodiversity Enhancement MSG Community Centre	£115,435	S106 Funding	Release
Services	Maintenance Works at Harrogate Hill & Bensham Park Play Areas	£6,100	S106 Funding	Release
Services	Drainage works at Teesside Airport pitches	£15,408	S106 - Land at Lancaster House - 16/00396/OUT	Release
Operations	TVCA – Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1 Grant	£276,323	TVCA - SHDF Wave 1 Grant	Release
Operations	Skinnergate	£1,515,000	Homes England and Commercial/IGF funding	Release
Services	Railway Heritage Quarter	£1,948,350	Additional funding secured for the project as outlined in the report.	Release
TOTAL		£3,876,616		

31. **Appendix 4** details the general fund capital receipts and corporate resources received and brought forward from previous years. These amount to £7.778m of which £2.491m has been utilised to finance capital expenditure as well as £0.223m of earmarked receipts to fund slippage, leaving a balance of £5.064m to carry forward into future years.

Conclusion

32. The total capital expenditure incurred during 2023/24 was £60.084m. Overall a significant programme is being delivered with a wide variety of capital improvements undertaken throughout the Borough during 2023/24.

Outcome of Consultation

33. There has been no consultation in the preparation of this report.

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Project	CP1 Start Up	CP2 Initiate	CP3 Design	CP4 Delivery	CP5 Review	Status Symbol	Status	Client Dept	Delivery Dept	Internal Project Sponsor	Internal Project Manager	Cost Centre	Feasibility Budget	Original Approved Budget	Increase To Initial Approved Budget	Current Approved Budget	Project Expected Out Turn Cost	Variance (%)	Variance (value)	Original Planned Project Completion Date	Revised Approved Project Completion Date	Anticipated Project Completion Date	Schedule Variation (Days)	CDM Notifiable Project	Principal Designer	Previous Plan Progress	Plan Progress	Budget Progress Report	Issue Status Report
Yards Phase 2							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Mark Ladyman	Mike Bowron	R0180	£0	£800,000	£739,000	£1,539,000	£1,548,311	6%	£9,311	31-Mar-23	29-Mar-25	29-Mar-25	0	Y	Lee Darvill	Works to the current tranche of properties is being completed. A new list has been agreed through the Programme Manager to be part of the exit works which still include some shop frontage works as well as wall murals and street works. There are being programmed in.	Consultation and detailed designs are being formulated for the new properties identified to complete the project. Existing works are being completed and the new works are being programmed in.	To address the additional properties identified within the project, the Yards Towns Fund Programme Manager agreed an additional £160,000. To date £1041,612 has been spent with an additional £506,699 committed. There is a £40,000 contingency built into the project.	The budget is being put under pressure because of the costs associated with having an ever-growing project that is dependant upon the businesses remaining committed to their initial, agreed specifications. Changes to live projects increases the contractor costs so creates time and financial challenges.
Whinfield School Roof Replacement							Live	People	People	Tony Murphy	Julia McCabe	E1907	£0	£1,124,000	£0	£1,124,000	£1,124,000	%	£0	22-Sep-23	29-Feb-24	08-Mar-24	8	Y	Y	Main contract works forecast to be certified as practically complete (exc. snagging) 01/03/2024. Snagging, cabin lift & reinstatement forecast to be complete by 15/03/2024 Delays in this period: * Material delivery delays * Inclement weather – 3 days. Accumulative delay - 103 days	Contract works complete. Remaining snagging to be completed during the school Easter break (2-12th April).		Subject to completion of snagging works post project review scheduled for 17/04/2024.
Skinnergate Re-development Commercial & Housing							Live	Services	Services	Anthony Sandys	Brian Robson	H6748	£0	£4,950,000	£1,515,000	£6,465,000	£6,465,000	%	£0		31-May-25	31-May-25	0	Y	Andrew Burnfrey	A temporary works design to support the method statement for the partial demolition works required to No.12 has been finalised and issued to our Party Wall Surveyor to reach an agreement through the Party Wall Act process	A temporary works design to support the method statement for the partial demolition works required to No.12 has been finalised and issued. Phase 1 demolition works are due to commence in May.		Initial surveys undertaken, which reveal major loss of structure to heritage building and adjacent property. 2. Historic England opposition to designs are now addressed but significant delays have ensued.
Sherborne Close Phase 2							Live	Operations	Operations	Anthony Sandys	Ben Waldie	H6749	£0	£2,375,962	£374,057	£2,750,019	£3,622,733	32%	£872,714	08-Mar-23	05-Jul-25	05-Jul-25	162	Y	Lee Darvill	Re-tender exercise delayed due to procurement & supply chain time frames. Start on site May 24 now likely.	Retender exercise due to conclude Spring 24.	Awaiting re-tender return to assess against estimated figure £3,622,733.00	Awaiting returned tender from Building Services & supply chain now spring 24. Public Right of Way to be reviewed before works recommencing.
Railway Heritage Quarter							Live	Services	Services	Ian Thompson	Brian Robson	R0155	£210,000	£20,000,000	£17,088,350	£37,088,350	£37,451,515	0.90%	£363,165	30-Sep-24		30-Sep-24	0	Y	Space Architects	Works on the 1861 shed, Goods Shed and Head of Steam are ongoing. The new entrance works from McNay Street are progressing well and the car park has now commenced with site clearance works	Works on the Carriageworks, Goods Shed and Head of Steam are ongoing. The new entrance works from McNay Street are nearly complete and the car park construction is ongoing. The play area installation has commenced and is progressing well. Some challenges to the budget are being worked thorough and additional funding is being gained.	Please see main report for detail on budget adjustment.	Some financial risks have been identified in the quarter as we are moving towards closure of the project and an issue that is being disputed has materialised that has a potential financial risk. Please see main report for more detail.
Neasham Rd							Live	Operations	Operations	Anthony Sandys	Ben Waldie	H6745	£0	£31,069,000	£1,008,203	£32,077,203	£31,643,297	-1%	-\$433,906	02-May-25		02-May-25	0	Y	Lee Darvill	First handover delayed until July 24. Revised programme submitted to client for approval.	Project working toward July 24 handover for first of Phase 1 properties & access roads. Phase 2 substructure progressing on programme	Project still within approved budget. Client to develop play area design against allocated £125k project budget+ £25k Housing Services investment.	Proposals to utilise existing Neasham Road footpath for bus stop provision. Works ongoing in coordination with Homes by ESH who are now developing Plot C
Innovation Central							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Anthony Hewitt	Joanne Wood	R0157	£50,000	£500,000	£7,837,854	£8,337,854	£8,337,854	%	£0	31-Dec-21	31-Aug-22	31-Aug-22	0	Y	Napper Architects	The installation of the mast was complete in September 2023 and the telephone operator has confirmed testing is nearing completion.	The mast is now operational. Deed of Covenant and BREEAM certificate is awaited. The project closure will be undertaken June/July 2024.		
Ingenium Parc Masterplan + Infrastructure							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Anthony Hewitt	Joanne Wood	R0144	£0	£611,500	£4,265,593	£4,877,093	£4,877,093	%	£0	31-Aug-18	23-Dec-22	31-Jul-24	577	Y	Y	All the planting works are now complete. Handover to Estates is imminent. Removal of the heras fencing and Semi-Permanent new barrier fencing has commenced and is due for completion in March 2024.	Removal of all the Heras and semi-permanent new fencing was completed by 1st March 2024. This completes the project.		End of the drainage defect is due 24th July 2024 and the project closure can commence after this date.
Eastbourne Sports Pitches & Drainage							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Ian Thompson	Rebecca Robson	L0154	£0	£1,610,000	£941,843	£2,551,843	£2,551,843	%	£0	31-Jul-23	30-Apr-24	30-Apr-24	241	Y	SPACE	NPG made the final connection on the 16/02/24 and the site is now live. Building Control have visited site and are unable to sign off the works having picked up some works that were not completed as per the drawings. The contractor has been asked to undertake these works as soon as possible. The items listed below are still outstanding as of the 01/03/24. 1. Swale regrading as per the design. 2. Gate and footpath installation to the pumping station. 3. Electric vehicle white lining. 4. CCTV pad, column and camera installation / connection. 5. Changing accommodation shower connections. 6. Installation of external emergency lighting – (additional item to the contract) 7. All commissioning, issuing of certificates and the handing over of the O&M's / H&S files	Building Control have visited site in February and were unable to sign off the works due to some works not completed as per the drawings. These have now all been done and the contractor has been asked to arrange the sign off meeting for Mid-April to get final sign off.	Draft final account to be agreed between project QSand Building Services	Lesson Learnt and CP5 to be done all works have been completed and files received.
Darlington Station Enabling Works							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Anthony Hewitt	Ben Waldie	R0181	£0	£2,015,190	£295,807	£2,310,997	£2,310,997	%	£0	28-Mar-23		28-Mar-23	0	Y	Graeme Smith Fairhursts	Project completed. Lease agreed & car park accepted for use by LNER 26/4/23.	Project completed. Lease agreed & car park accepted for use by LNER 26/4/23. Lessons Learnt report submitted	Financial close reached with TVCA for construction budget of £1,884,582.	Perimeter boundary scaffolding support to remain in situ until decommissioning.
Darlington Station Demolitions							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Dave Winstanley	Julia McCabe	R0165	£1,322,940	£1,322,940	£0	£1,322,940	£1,322,940	%	£0	01-Mar-23		01-Apr-24	365	Y	A & N Consultants	GATEWAY WEST: Pensbury/Victoria road: Despite agreement to the detail in the documentation, delays by the adjacent property owner's surveyor signing the draft award means that the final award documentation is not being issued until 29/02/2024. This will start a 14 day opportunity for neighbouring property owner to raise formal issue to the award. The Principal Designer reviewed the PCI and determined no change is required to the document therefore it is issued to TVCA. TVCA have not authorised any further work on this demolition. 1-4 Park Lane & 1 Waverley Terrace (single property): TVCA have authorised pre demo expenditure. Bioclean & disconnections are complete. Phase 2 of party wall structural survey took place 12th Feb and a report issued 28/02/2024 including drawings of the existing building and elevation. Further surveys are required (drain and ground investigation) to allow a structural calculation assessment to be undertaken on the party wall to confirm if any remedial/strengthening works is required & the party wall design to be prepared.	GATEWAY WEST: Pensbury/Victoria road: Pre-construction Information provided to TVCA. TVCA will be commissioning the demolition. 1-4 Park Lane & 1 Waverley Terrace (single property): All disconnections and biocleans complete. PCI complete (as far as practicable) and transferred to TVCA. Site investigations to support party wall design to be carried out w/c 15/04/24. DBC & TVCA are meeting fortnightly to review progress and transfer of information.		
Darlington Station CPO & Acquisitions							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Dave Winstanley	Julia McCabe	R0170	£0	£8,077,262	-\$655,650	£7,421,612	£7,421,612	%	£0	21-Sep-22		21-Sep-22	0	N	N/A	Property 1. Strategy agreed with TVCA & Calderbank letter (legally binding offer) to be made to the claimant. The letter has been drafted by Sanderson Weatherall with advice from Ward Hadaway and agreed with DBC. As of 29/02/24 the offer letter is with TVCA Legal. Once TVCA has confirmed they are happy with the letter and the method of the Council to secure the required funds from TVCA is agreed, the letter will be issued by DBC as Acquiring Authority under the CPO. Property 2. Still awaiting evidence from former owner's surveyor. Sanderson Weatherall continue to chase.	Two compensations yet to be settled. Property 1. Calderbank letter (legally binding offer) to be made to the claimant with acceptance deadline of c/w 22/04/24. Property 2. Still awaiting evidence from former owner's surveyor. Sanderson Weatherall continue to chase.		The Council continues to negotiate with the two interests who are yet to agree a compensation amount. This process could continue until c. 2027.
Crown Street Library Refurbishment							Live	Services	Services	Ian Thompson	Ian Stewart	L0148	£0	£3,281,436	£141,500	£3,422,936	£3,729,914	9%	£306,978	09-Feb-23	01-Sep-23	01-Sep-23	0	Y	Andrew Burnfrey	No change. Snagging ongoing so Lessons Learnt process pushed back to March 2024.	Project closed down with the lessons learnt report now completed. The project will be removed from the PPS following this reporting period.		Works completed
Corporate CCTV Replacement							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Ian Thompson	Mike Bowron	L0156	£0	£513,500	£37,371	£550,871	£550,871	%	£0	31-Aug-23	24-Nov-23	05-Dec-23	12	Y	Paul Branch	Final documentation being completed so that the project can be closed	CP5 and Closure will be completed May 2024		Works completed
Civic Theatre Refurbishment & Theatre Hullabaloo							Live	Services	Services	Ian Thompson	Brian Robson	L0115	£50,000	£50,000	£16,019,000	£16,069,000	£16,069,000	%	£0	01-Aug-13	06-Nov-17	06-Nov-17	0	Y	Todd Milburn	Works Complete. Following some remedial works on the Parkgate Elevation Demolition works now complete, perimeter fencing to be installed defects certificate has now been issued.	Works Complete. Following some remedial works on the Parkgate Elevation Demolition works now complete, perimeter fencing to be installed defects certificate has now been issued.		

Project	CP1 Start Up	CP2 Initiate	CP3 Design	CP4 Delivery	CP5 Review	Status Symbol	Status	Client Dept	Delivery Dept	Internal Project Sponsor	Internal Project Manager	Cost Centre	Feasibility Budget	Original Approved Budget	Increase To Initial Approved Budget	Current Approved Budget	Project Expected Out Turn Cost	Variance (%)	Variance (value)	Original Planned Project Completion Date	Revised Approved Project Completion Date	Anticipated Project Completion Date	Schedule Variation (Days)	CDM Notifiable Project	Principal Designer	Previous Plan Progress	Plan Progress	Budget Progress Report	Issue Status Report
Central Park Mound Removal & Transformation							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Dave Winstanley	Michael Bowron	R0172	£2,350,000	£2,650,000	£250,000	£2,900,000	£2,900,000	%	£0	31-Mar-22	30-Apr-24	30-Apr-24	0	Y	WDC	Snagging has been completed. The Art features are now installed. The agreement for the mast removal north of the CPI building is being arranged through the Estates team who will take responsibility for the site. The promotional display boards are being progressed for installation.	CP5 and Closure will be completed May 2024		Works to the Mast removal and remediation of the land is being addressed through the Estates team.
156 Northgate							Live	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Mark Ladyman	Joanne Wood	R0194	£0	£1,000,000	£0	£1,000,000	£1,000,000	%	£0	31/08/2024	31/03/2025	31/03/2025	0	Y	Y	Planning was submitted on 17th November 2023. Decision overdue.	Full planning and listed building approval was received on 20th March 2024. Expression of interest was issued via the NEPO portal for external contractors and we have received 7 companies interested. Tender documentation is presently being collated and it is expected that it will be issued for tender in May 2024.		
A68 Woodland Road Outram Street Duke Street							Live	Services	Services	Andy Casey	Ben Waldie	TP240	£0	£460,000	£2,153,631	£2,613,631	£2,613,631	%	£0	31/03/2022	17/10/2023	17/10/2023	0	Y	Noel Walecki	CP5/lessons learnt to be prepared following financial close with TVCA	CP5/lessons learnt submitted.	Scheme financial close reached with funder TVCA.	No issues to report.
Conisciffe Road							Live	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Mark Ladyman	Michael Bowron	R0193	£0	£500,000	£0	£500,000	£500,000	%	£0	01/03/2024	01/03/2025	01/03/2025	0	Yes	Noel Walecki	Face to Face consultation is currently being carried out to advise key Stakeholders / Users of the revised proposals. This is a requirement for the Planning process. The Planning Application will be submitted following this Mid April 2024.	Project Control Point Document no 2 has been agreed and signed off. Finalised Design is being completed in preparation for the revised Planning Application to be submitted and the next Control Point (no 3) to be completed	As the project has been considerably reduced since the first iteration The Control Point 2(CP2) document reflects the current agreed available budget of circa £500K plus the identified aborted costs.	The reduced scheme is being prepared and an amended Planning submission will follow; however the scope and primary objectives will still be achieved and previous neighbour concerns are being mitigated as far as possible.
Dolphin Centre - Pool Repairs							Live	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Ian Thompson	Ben Waldie	D0191	£0	£220,000	£1,635,000	£1,855,000	£1,855,000	%	£0	14/09/2023	18/05/2024	18/05/2024	0	Y	Michael Johnson	Toddler Pool design developed and proposals for floor finishes to be issued to client for approval. Concrete repairs underway to Phase 2.	Toddler Pool structural repairs commenced. Waterproofing & retiling to showers on going.	Budget updated to £1.85m covering all 3 phases of essential works.	Designers risk assessment updated to cover Toddler Pool splash areas. Hippo Leisure working options to minimise running within revised layout. Negotiations ongoing with Steel Line to resolve concerns over quality of installations to main pool.
Dolphin Centre M and E Refurb							Live	Services	Services	Lisa Soderman	Ben Waldie	D0197	£230,000	£2,200,000	£0	£2,200,000	£2,200,000	%	£0	01/10/2025	01/12/2025	01/12/2025	0	Y	A & N Consultants Andrea Nicholls	Bill of Quants prepared for full scheme, in readiness for both phase 1 & 2 tender.	Procurement proposals being developed. Design work underway to progress Sport England funded improvements & potential investment opportunities	Scheme approved budget £2,220,000.00. Sport England confirmation received of 2 intervention funding- photovoltaic cells to roof footprint & replacement Combined Heat/Power boiler.	Cabinet approval received to tender both phases as a single scheme, to gain value for money.
Feethams House							Live	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Chief Exec's & Economic Growth	Ian Williams	Jenny Dixon & Jane Sutcliffe Project/ Richard Storey PM- building delivery	D0161	£246,000	£8,500,000	£0	£8,500,000	£8,460,880	%	-£39,120	30/07/2019	31/05/2020	15/05/2020	-16	Yes	Tim Rainford (Nappers)	Awaiting £1m closure report.	The CP5 is to be drafted and the full project closure process is anticipated to be completed in May 2025	currently 39k underspend.	
Haughton Road - Tornado Way							Live	Services	Services	Andy Casey	Noel Walecki	TP722	£0	£1,539,433	£38,888	£1,578,321	£1,578,321	%	£0	31/03/2020		31/07/2021	487	N	Noel Walecki	Closure report required	Closure report required	Budget comprises £1,367,433 NPIF + £172,000 LTP match funding.	
Home Upgrade Grant							Live	Operations	Operations	Graham Hall	Christine Booth	H6755 supported by 16063	£0	£6,210,000	£0	£6,210,000	£6,210,000	%	£0	31/05/2025		31/05/2025	0	Y	TBA	2023-2024 Costs, £76,849.39 Hartlepool Borough Council (Consortium member, Project Support), £31,500 Hartlepower (Customer Engagement), £15,000 Stockton Borough Council (Consortium member, Project Support)		£1,117,800 upfront funding received for 2023-24 for HUG2. £331,800 being capital funding. The remainder will be drawn down on approval during the project during batch submissions.	Contracts being negotiated with - Esh for measure delivery and management of works - Storm Tempest for Retrofit Co-ordination. Assessment and Design. Direct Award for works up to £175,000 value. - Retrofit Coordinators for Retrofit Co-ordination, Assessment and Design. Direct Award for works up to £175,000 value.
Victoria Road Access to Station							Live	Services	Services	Andy Casey	Noel Walecki	TP818	£0	£1,146,701	£0	£1,146,701	£1,146,701	%	£0	31/03/2020	31/07/2022	31/07/2022	0	Y	Noel Walecki	Awaiting closure report before cost centre can be closed and removed from PPS. Head of Capital Projects to chase. No further progress.	Awaiting closure report before cost centre can be closed and removed from PPS.	Funding is £675,000 LGF + £300,000 LTP. Additional LTP funding of £171,701 supplied to cover increased costs.	Contact and responses from the property owners at Victoria continues to be an issue for this project. Either no contact is made or re contact following personal or letter drop is not happening with many of the properties, despite extensive effort by the Towns Fund Liaison Officer. This will continue to be monitored and the Towns Fund Programme Manager will be kept informed.
Victoria Road Facade Improvements							Live	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Chief Execs & Economic Growth	Mark Ladyman	Mike Bowron	R0188	£30,000	£588,000	£0	£588,000	£588,000	%	£0	31/03/2024	31/03/2025	31/03/2025	0	Y	Lee Darvil	DBC Building Services have programmed the start of the works to commence Mid March 2024. This will include the initial properties previously identified. Further property owners and occupiers are being consulted and design approvals are being chased.	Initial works have commenced on site with localised pointing and render removal as well as further investigate works around tiling.	£51,993.86 spent so far.	Other properties are being brought forward to try to compensate for any slippage.
Walking Cycling Route MSG Yarm Road Mill Lane							Live	Services	Services	Andy Casey	Noel Walecki	TP241	£0	£325,000	£0	£325,000	£325,000	%	£0	31/03/2022	31/03/2025	31/03/2025	0	Y	Noel Walecki	Currently in for planning permission. There is a small area of flooding which we are investigating. Programmed to commence in September 24 (subject to planning)	Currently in for planning permission. There is a small area of flooding which we are investigating. Programmed to commence in September 24 (subject to planning)	LTP (£180,000) plus Section 106 developer contributions (£155,000)	
Total													Sum of Feasibility Project Budget	Sum of Original Approved Budget	Sum of Increase To OAB	Sum of Current Approved Budget	Sum of Project Expected Outturn Cost		Sum of Variance Value										
Total													£4,488,940	£103,639,924	£53,685,447	£157,325,371	£158,404,913		£1,079,142										

Capital 2023-24 Spend Summary - Financing by Department

Line		GF Corporate Resources £M	HRA Capital Receipts £M	Supported Borrowing £M	HRA Revenue Contribution £M	Departmental Borrowing £M	Revenue Contribution £M	Capital Contributions £M	Capital Grants £M	Total £M
	Capital Expenditure									
1	People	0.835	-	-	-	-	0.060	-	2.149	3.044
2	Chief Executive & Economic Growth	1.223	-	-	-	-	-	0.115	3.060	4.398
3	Operations	6.626	-	-	8.003	-	-	-	5.753	20.382
4	Services	4.243	-	-	-	0.560	1.108	0.146	26.034	32.091
5	Department Total	12.927	-	-	8.003	0.560	1.168	0.261	36.996	59.915
6	Prudential Borrowing - Leasable Assets (not budgeted)	-	-	-	-	0.169	-	-	-	0.169
	Total Capital Expenditure	12.927	-	-	8.003	0.729	1.168	0.261	36.996	60.084
	Resources									
7	Approved	60.930	0.303	-	24.301	12.140	5.226	1.629	72.376	176.904
8	Recommended additional approvals							0.136	3.740	3.876
9	Leasable Assets					0.169				0.169
10										
11	Total Resources	60.930	0.303	-	24.301	12.309	5.226	1.765	76.116	180.949
12	Approved / (Unapproved) Resources C/F (Line 11 - 7)	48.003	0.303	-	16.298	11.580	4.058	1.504	39.120	120.865

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Capital Programme Summary								
	A	B	C	D		E	F	G
	Budget 2023/24	Spend as at 31/03/23	Resources Available 2023/24	Spend 2023/24		Expected Outturn	Variance	Resources c/fwd to 2024/25 (before para. 25 adj.) £M
Department	£M	£M	£M	£M		£M	£M	
			(A - B)				(E - A)	(C - D)
Chief Executive & Economic Growth	92.046	61.497	30.549	4.398		84.748	(7.298)	26.150
Operations	114.165	28.317	85.848	20.382		99.082	(15.083)	65.466
People	8.807	4.151	4.656	3.044		8.839	0.032	1.612
Services	120.990	61.264	59.726	32.090		122.286	1.296	27.636
Totals Excluding Leasable assets	336.008	155.229	180.779	59.914		314.955	(21.053)	120.865
Prudential Borrowing Leasable Assets	0.169	-	0.169	0.169		-		-
Total Capital Expenditure 2021/22	336.178	155.229	180.949	60.084		314.955	(21.053)	120.865

Total spend 215.143

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General Fund Capital Receipts & Corporate Resources		
Line No	Sites	2023/24 £M's
1	Brought Forward from 2022/23	4.689
	Sales Completed	
2	Faverdale	0.432
	63 Glebe Road	0.012
	Neasham Road Cell C	1.677
	North Cemetery House	0.075
	Former Eastbourne School land - transfer to IN2 Programme	-0.041
	Land at Blackwell	0.903
	Release of covenant land at rear of 47 Coleridge Gardens	0.017
	Miscellaneous receipts	0.003
	Purchase 1 Littlebeck Drive	0.004
	Contemporary Yarm Surrender Premium 11/12 Horsemarket	0.008
	Total	7.778

Capital Receipt Analysis		
3	Brought Forward from 2022/23	4.689
4	Receipts received in 2023/24	3.089
		7.778
5	Less receipts used to finance expenditure	(2.491)
6	Less earmarked receipts	(0.223)
7	Capital Receipts carried forward to 2024/25	5.064

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FINAL OUTTURN REPORT CENTRAL PARK SOUTH LANDSCAPING PROJECT

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

Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To report the lessons learned from the project and the final outturn in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules.

Summary

2. Central Park (South) lies between John Dixon Lane and Yarm Road, with the main East Coast railway line to the west and Hundens Lane housing estate to the east.
3. The site consists of approximately 5.88 Ha of previously brownfield land, of which a significant proportion has already been given over to business development in the form of DBC's Business Central and Innovation Central properties and the privately-owned CPI property. The area formed part of the initial DBC Masterplan from 2013, which identified it as an Enterprise Zone.
4. The aim of the project was to decontaminate and clear the previously rail industry site to create developable, serviced plots for future use as clean commercial, office and/or incubation space, set within a high-quality business park setting. £2,900,000 was invested in the Central Park Landscaping works.
5. This project quickly followed the construction of Innovation Central, and together completed two outstanding, priority projects on Central Park.
6. Para 43 of the Financial Procedure Rules requires that the final outturn of all schemes with a value in excess of £1 million be reported to Cabinet.
7. The report reviews the actual cost, timeliness and quality including lessons learned; to ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that Members note the final outcome of the Project.

Reasons

9. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To comply with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
- (b) To ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Background Papers

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

Author: Mike Bowron

S17 Crime and Disorder	No direct impacts
Health and Well Being	No direct impacts
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No direct impacts
Diversity	No direct impacts
Wards Affected	This project is in the Stephenson ward.
Groups Affected	
Budget and Policy Framework	No direct impacts
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
Council Plan	One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. This project contributes towards creating opportunities for businesses and jobs; and creating a place that will thrive economically and socially.
Efficiency	No direct impacts
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

10. Central Park (South) lies between John Dixon Lane and Yarm Road, with the main East Coast railway line to the west and Hundens Lane housing estate to the east.
11. Central Park South consists of approximately 5.88 Ha of previously brownfield land, of which a significant proportion has already been given over to business development in the form of DBC's Business Central and Innovation Central properties and the privately-owned

CPI property. The area formed part of the initial DBC Masterplan from 2013, which identified it as an Enterprise Zone.

12. The aim of the project was to decontaminate and clear the previously rail industry site to create developable, serviced plots for future use as clean commercial, office and/or incubation space, set within a high-quality business park setting.
13. It was necessary to carry out detailed site investigations to both identify any accessible material, which needed to be removed and to inform a document of the site's make up for future developers. This was carried out through the use of specialist consultants.
14. The Council was successful in securing £3.65m of grant funding through the Getting Building Fund (GTF) administered through Tees Valley Unlimited. £2.9m of the GTF monies was allocated to this project.
15. The pre-construction budget for the project was £479,000; with the total project cost being £2,899,721. It was originally due for completion in March 2022, but the main project works were completed in March 2023.
16. The project was designed by Gradon Architecture and works were delivered by Willmott Dixon Construction.
17. Para 43 of the Financial Procedure Rules requires that the final outturn of all schemes with a value in excess of £1 million be reported to Cabinet.
18. The report reviews the actual cost, timeliness and quality including lessons learned to ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Cost

19. The table below summarises the project budget and final outturn:

Original Approved Budget	Revised Approved Budget	Project Outturn	Variance	Variance (%)
£2,650,000	£2,900,000	£2,899,721	£279	0%

20. The increased costs were attributable to a rise in the costs of the new roads and infrastructure, additional contamination removal fees and remediation works on the site. The additional funding was from central government grant in the form of Building Better funding.
21. The increase also reflected the industry-wide impact of COVID on working practices, supply chains and material cost increases.

Quality

22. In terms of quality the project met all standards laid out in Planning and Building Regulations.

Time

23. The table below summarises the project timeline:

Original Planned Project Completion Date (CP1)	Revised Approved Project Completion Date	Actual Completion Date	Schedule Variation (days)
31 March 2022	31 March 2023	31 March 2023	0

24. The revised project completion date was attributed to post COVID conditions and uncertainty around the use of the site by Treasury North, which after consideration, is to be built on another site in Darlington TC.

Lessons Learned

25. The Asset Management and Capital Programme Review Board (AM&CPRB or AMG) has specific roles defined in the Council's Constitution. The Board shall maintain a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management.

26. The key findings and lessons learned from this project are summarised below:

- (a) Works carried out during the first covid restrictions slowed progress due to working requirements, particularly during site establishment. The team now have a better understanding of how to mitigate these risks should any similar restrictions be reintroduced.
- (b) Improvements in the design process and sequencing of works could be made. This will be addressed in future through project management process and oversight of the project board.
- (c) The time taken to resolve contractor's technical queries (TQ's) put pressure on the programme. Timelines for responding to TQ's to be established and agreed pre-start.
- (d) Financial management during the scheme was thorough and this demonstrates the need to regularly question and monitor cost information.

Procurement

27. The Construction Delivery agreement was through a Procurement Hub Framework. The main contractor was Willmott Dixon Construction.

Contract Management

28. In terms of contract management, the main contract was delivered in accordance with NEC4 Form of Contract 2017

Health & Safety

29. The Principal Designer role for the scheme was delivered via Fairhurst Consulting and the services were provided by Graeme Smith. There were no reportable accidents during the development.

Risk Log

30. The risk log for the scheme was regularly reviewed and risk which could be transferred onto the Principal Contractor were included within the main construction contract.

Communications

31. The communications strategy for the scheme was developed through the Central Park Board to regularly highlight risk and/or opportunity in each phase of the project in a timely manner.

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FINAL OUTTURN REPORT CROWN STREET LIBRARY

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

Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To report the lessons learned from the Crown Street Library Refurbishment Project and the final outturn in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules.

Summary

2. Following consideration of whether to vacate the Crown Street library as a proposed cost-savings exercise, Cabinet took the decision in January 2019 that the Council should instead retain and enhance the existing facility. An alternative option – to operate a smaller facility within the Dolphin Centre was rejected.
3. The project entailed firstly repairing the fabric and decoration of the building; roof, M&E and windows as well as full redecoration whilst being sympathetic to the heritage of the Crown Street building; and secondly improving the customer experience by providing much improved facilities for accessing literature and creative activities, improved IT, creating a much-improved children's zone, improving access, and modernising the overall "visitor experience".
4. Para 43 of the Financial Procedure Rules requires that the final outturn of all schemes with a value in excess of £1 million be reported to Cabinet.
5. The report reviews the actual cost, timeliness and quality including lessons learned; to ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Members note the final outturn of the Project.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) To comply with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
- (b) To ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Background Papers

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

Ian Stewart: Extension 6634

S17 Crime and Disorder	No direct impacts
Health and Well Being	Improved social and educational facility
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	
Diversity	
Wards Affected	The project is in Park East ward but benefits the entire borough.
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
Council Plan	One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. Improved and accessible education resources for children and adults
Efficiency	
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. The Council was required to review expenditure on its assets and services in response to its ongoing, challenging financial position. Accordingly the operation of a relatively costly service within an older building requiring a complex range of repair and refurbishment works was investigated.
9. With strong local support, it was decided that to downsize the service, for example, to move it to the Dolphin Centre was inappropriate for the town's main library (one of only two in Darlington).
10. The decision was made to upgrade the library by improving its connectivity, provide a range of activity and learning rooms and in particular create a high-quality children's reading area. The aim was to establish the library as a key public asset, fit for the 21st Century, for all of the community to use and to be free and accessible to all. It furthermore secured the future of a landmark building in the town.

11. Initial surveys revealed the building had a number of areas requiring attention, with the complex roof being of particular concern. In addition it required decorating throughout and improved access and fire controls to improve its safety.
12. As the building was further surveyed costs increased from the initial estimates as the roof repair costs in particular mounted and the scaffolding solution to safely access and work on it were defined. The project became considerably more challenging due to the restrictions arising from COVID working practices and related supply chain shortages and rising costs.
13. A specialist libraries internal design company, Design Concept, were engaged to design the children's area and improve the overall internal space. SPACE Architectures were also employed to develop the design and the works were taken forward with DBC Building Services acting as main contractor.
14. The anticipated project cost, once an initial design had been developed, was £3.281m. On completion the full cost was calculated to be £3.730m. Over half of the increase related to the scaffolding and roof works (exacerbated by the COVID impact).
15. The works were completed shortly before a week of launch events in October 2023. The public response was very positive with significantly greater numbers attending the library.
16. An application was submitted to the Constructing Excellence North East (CENE) Awards (Conservation and Regeneration Section). The project made the shortlist and was highly commended for its quality of work.
17. Para 43 of the Financial Procedure Rules requires that the final outturn of all schemes with a value in excess of £1 million be reported to Cabinet.
18. The report reviews the actual cost, timeliness and quality including lessons learned to ensure a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management processes.

Cost

19. The table below summarises the project budget and final outturn.:

Original Approved Budget	Revised Approved Budget	Project Outturn	Variance	Variance (%)
£3,281,436	£3,422,936	£3,729,914	£306,978	9%

20. The increase to the final project costs, take into account significant increases to the scaffold and roof repair costs, additional COVID 19 delay delivery costs and increases to materials and labour that arose during and following the COVID epidemic.

Quality

21. The project met all standards laid out in the appropriate Building Regulations and in the Planning and Listed Building Consent requirements. The building was shortlisted for the CENE Awards in recognition of its quality.

Time

22. The table below summarises the project timeline:

Original Planned Project Completion Date (CP1)	Revised Approved Project Completion Date	Actual Completion Date	Schedule Variation (days)
9 February 2023	1 September 2023	1 September 2023	0

23. The revised project completion date was primarily a result of (i) COVID delays and (ii) roof delays as a result of having to time works to meet bat legislation and the fact that the complex roof works took longer than anticipated, exacerbated by a major sub-contractor going bust shortly before works were about to commence.

Lessons Learned

24. The Asset Management and Capital Programme Review Board (AM&CPRB or AMG) has specific roles defined in the Council's Constitution. The Board shall maintain a continuous review of capital planning, management and reporting, with regard to best practice, experience and opportunities for improving the Council's capital and asset management.
25. The key findings and lessons learned from this project are summarised below:
- (a) Works carried out during the first COVID restrictions slowed progress due to the onerous working requirements. The team gained a better understanding of requirements as they progressed and should comparable restrictions come into force again, there should be a better understanding of how to mitigate them.
 - (b) The library roof cost and duration of works were considerably greater than first estimates indicated. More in-depth surveying could have benefitted the budgeting and programming of this element given its complex nature, but it would not likely have fully mitigated them.
 - (c) Holding public drop-in consultation sessions and providing regular PR on progress improved public participation in the design and informed DBC of local priorities. It likely also reduced potential criticism of the disturbance to the service during construction.
 - (d) Use of a specialist library interior designer yielded excellent results and the Council received considerable praise for the quality of the internal fit-out (especially the children's zone.) This demonstrates the values in employing specialist designers in certain circumstances.

Procurement

26. It was agreed by Cabinet in January 2019 that works be managed by the authority's Building Services section. A number of subconsultants and subcontractors were employed to design and deliver the works.

Contract Management

27. The main contract was delivered in the spirit of the JCT Standard Form of Contract 2011.

Health & Safety

28. For the construction phase, the Principal Designer role for the scheme was delivered by Andrew Bumfrey of SPACE Architecture. No reportable accidents were recorded during the construction phase.

Risk Log

29. The risk log for the scheme was regularly reviewed and risks which could be transferred onto the Principal Contractor were included within the main construction contract. The risk log was fully closed down prior to the end of the project.

Communications

30. The communications strategy for the project was managed by Community Services. A wide range of consultation and profile-raising activities were maintained throughout the project and a week of launch events were held in October 2023, which were well attended and led to greater use of the building.

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CABINET
16 JULY 2024

REVENUE OUTTURN 2023/24

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the 2023/24 revenue outturn position (subject to Audit), to allow Members to consider the results in light of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and also to consider the Housing Revenue Account outturn.

Summary

2. This is the final revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2023/24. The year-end projection shows an overall improvement in the 2023/24 financial position of £0.545m. This is a £1.283m improvement on the 2024/25 MTFP projected opening balance.
3. Details of variances from the original budget along with changes since the quarter 3 projected position are contained within the main report.
4. There are a number of carry forward requests detailed in paragraphs 17 – 19, which will assist with projected slippage and pressures in the coming year.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) The revenue outturn for 2023/24 be noted.
 - (b) The carry forward of resources referred to in paragraphs 17 - 19 be noted and approved.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To continue effective management of resources.

(b) To continue to deliver services to agreed levels

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

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

Brett Nielsen : Extension 5403

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications in this report.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to health and wellbeing which this report needs to address.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no 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 Council Plan, but this report does not contain new proposals.
Efficiency	The report contains updated information regarding efficiency savings contained in the MTFP.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. This is the final revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2023/24 and provides the 2023/24 revenue outturn position as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.
8. Overall, the projected General Fund reserves position at 31 March 2024 is £17.667m, which is an improvement of £0.545m on the planned balances in the 2023-27 MTFP. This improvement relates to £0.485m underspend in the Council's 2022/23 financial results, £1.059m projected Group overspends in the 2023/24 financial year and a £1.119m improvement in corporate resources.

Departmental Resources

9. Departmental resource projections are summarised in **Appendix 2** and detailed in **Appendices 2(a) to 2(e)**.
10. The **People Group** outturn position is an overspend of £2.458m, after carry forward requests of £0.186m. This is an improvement of £1.294m on the position reported at Q3. The main changes to the previously reported position are detailed below:
 - (a) **Children's Services** are projecting an overspend of £4.394m, an improvement of £0.263m on Q3. The main changes since Q3 include the following:
 - (i) Adoption and Placements have overspent by £4.419m, a decrease of £0.188m from the Q3 report. This is mainly due to a reduction of six residential placements with part-year savings of £0.092m, lower charges for one complex case of £0.115m, offset by increases in Special Guardianship Orders.
 - (ii) Assessment and Care Planning and First Response Services have overspent by £0.082m which is an increase from the Q3 report of £0.106m. This is due to the use of agency workers to cover vacant posts and to meet increased demand in assessments.
 - (iii) Disabled Children has underspent by £0.076m, an improvement from the last report of £0.124m. This is due to a reduction of day care provision taken up by families and various staffing and running costs savings in the social work team and in-house provision.
 - (iv) Youth Offending Services has underspent by £0.055m, an improvement of £0.055m from Q3 mainly due to grant income and running cost savings.
 - (b) **Development and Commissioning** budgets have underspent by £0.366m after carry forward requests of £0.128m, which is an improvement of £0.216m on quarter 3. This is mainly due to Integrated Care Board (ICB) funding received of £0.130m and changes in demand for services, vacancies and running cost savings across the whole division.

(c) **Education Services** budget is on target to be balanced, after carry forward requests of £0.058m, a decrease of £0.045m on the position reported at Q3. The main changes since Q3 are as follows,

- (i) Transport Services has underspent by an additional £0.237m due to staffing and route savings. This follows a reduction in out of area SEND placements in line with Council's Safety Valve action plan.
- (ii) The Education division is overspent by £0.294m after a carry forward request for SEND services (see paragraph 18I). The overspend includes a transfer of funds into an Academisation earmarked reserve, to cover future costs of school academy transfers. This has been funded by the savings in the Transport Unit.

(d) **Adult Social Care and Health** outturn position is an underspend of £1.528m, an improvement of £0.892m on Q3. The main changes since Q3 include the following:

- (i) The External Purchase of Care budget has improved by £1.022m on the position reported at Q3 as follows,
 - (1) £0.522m reduced expenditure. Mainly due to the recovery of direct payment contingencies, changes in direct payment care activity of £0.303m and a reduction in Home Care activity of £0.194m.
 - (2) £0.500m increased income due to additional one-off grant income and contributions for care.
- (ii) The bad debt provision has increased by £0.100m for non-payment of client charges. Additional resources are being employed to chase the payment of debt.

11. The **Services Group** is projecting an underspend of £1.986m after carry forward requests of £0.344m, an improvement of £0.848m on the reported position at Q3. The headline areas are detailed below:

(a) **Capital Projects, Transport and Highways Planning** the overall underspend is £0.898m after carry forward requests of £0.154m, this is an improvement of £0.272m from Q3. The main elements of this movement are broken down into:

- (i) Concessionary Fares and Sustainable Transport, following the year-end reconciliation of the concessionary fare scheme by TVCA, the service was refunded £0.103m.
- (ii) Building Design Services and Capital Projects, the income from fees performed better than originally projected due to a strong programme of works at £0.162m.

(b) **Community Services** is overspent by £0.414m after carry forward requests of £0.103m, an increase of £0.070m from Q3.

- (i) Cemeteries and Crematorium, the overall the position has worsened by £0.127m. Income has fallen further below target because of increased choice of facilities in the area and services nationally.
 - (ii) Leisure Services has improved by £0.164m due to a strong performance over the final quarter following the re-opening of the main pool and the positive impact this has had on various income streams. Leisure memberships have experienced significant growth as well as the increase in secondary spend within the catering service.
 - (iii) The Waste Disposal overspend increased by a further £0.059m as tonnages associated with the Household Waste Recycling Centre (tip), fly-tipping, street cleaning and bulky lane collections remained at slightly elevated levels compared to previous years.
 - (c) **Community Safety** is underspent by £0.699m after carry forward requests of £0.017m, an improvement of £0.047m Q3 position. This is mainly due to Car Parking and Enforcement which improved by a further £0.054m as income levels continue to perform better than expected following the end of the free parking offer.
 - (d) **Building Services** underspend increased by £0.100m following the release of some historical retentions on completed projects as well as good performance on the building services programme.
 - (e) **Corporate Landlord** underspent by £0.497m after carry forward requests of £0.070m, an improvement of £0.497m from the Q3 position. The improvement is mainly in utility costs including:
 - (i) A reconciliation process carried out by NEPO in quarter 4 resulted in a refund on electricity costs of £0.064m.
 - (ii) Throughout the year a prudent position was taken on the cost of gas due to some uncertainty in figures. The final position saw an improvement on projected costs of £0.145m.
 - (iii) A review of the cost of the data centre housed in Town Hall resulted in additional income contributions of £0.163m, covering both 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.
 - (iv) Changed energy usage at Bishopsgate House has resulted in an improvement on projections of £0.074m.
12. The **Operations Group** overall budget outturn position is an overspend of £0.501m after carry forward requests of £0.309m. This is a decline of £0.589m on the position reported at Q3. The main changes to the previously reported position are as follows:
- (a) **Resources** has underspent by £0.321m, after carry forward requests of £0.125m, an improvement of £0.106m on Q3. There has been additional savings identified across all service areas including additional staff vacancies, reduced running costs and

additional grant income. The reported increase in external audit fees noted at Q3 are now confirmed and have been allocated to corporate management budgets in the Law and Governance division.

- (b) **Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications** division has underspent by £0.011m after carry forward requests of £0.184m, a decline of £0.048m from Q3. After the carry forward, this change is mainly due to part year staffing vacancies and running costs of savings.
 - (c) **Law and Governance** has overspent by £0.630m, an increase from the Q3 reported position of £0.482m. This is mainly due to additional legal costs of £0.254m for children's services and £0.072m for adults services. These costs reflect the demand for services and the increased complexity of cases within Children's services. As noted above the final increase in the cost of external audit fees of £0.169m has been allocated to the Corporate Management budget which has increased the cost of Democratic Services.
 - (d) **Xentrall Services ICT** has overspent by £0.122m. This is due to increased prices of Infrastructure and additional ICT equipment requirements across the Council.
 - (e) **Housing and Revenues** overspent by £0.109m, an increase of £0.056m on the Q3 position. This is due to a £0.155m loss of council tax subsidy income, offset by £0.100m additional income received for the recovery of legal costs and additional Northumbrian Water Ltd (NWL) commission income.
13. The **Chief Executive and Economy Group** underspent by £0.086m after carry forward requests of £0.063m, an improvement of £0.060m from the position reported at Q3 and is detailed below:
- (a) **Darlington Partnerships** overspent by a further £0.051m mainly from continuing to support the Youth Employment CIC Digital Hub.
 - (b) **Property Management and Estates** underspent by £0.146m because of strong estate officer fee recovery from capital projects.
14. The School balances and allocations are shown in **Appendix 2(f)**.

Council Wide and Corporately Managed Resources

15. The Council Wide and Corporately Managed Resources budgets have a projected outturn underspend of a £1.119m after a carry forward requests (including in year service rebases), which is a decline of £0.306m on the position at Q3 report. After the carry forward request (see paragraph 18h) the movement of £0.106m is mainly due to a reduction in additional income received of £0.135m and an increase in Apprenticeship Levy costs of £0.055m, however these increases have been offset by procurement rebate income movement of £0.084m.

Carry Forward Requests

16. There are a number of carry forward requests to 2024/25 amounting to £1.142m from departments and corporate budgets as detailed below. The requests are categorised into three areas: slippage, assisting in achieving the council plan ambitions and budget pressures. Approval is requested to carry these amounts forward into the new financial year.
17. **Slippage** – There is £0.321m of slippage on planned projects across the Council in the following areas:
 - (a) £0.100m **Highways** – The wet winter weather in early 2024 and delays in receiving new condition modelling software has seen planned works on road lining schemes and core test sampling slip into 2024/25.
 - (b) £0.042m **Dolphin Centre** – Delays in the purchase and implementation of equipment and unused funding available from the wellbeing scheme are requested to be carried forward to allow equipment to be purchased and the wellbeing scheme to continue into 2024/25.
 - (c) £0.021m **Street Scene and Waste Management** – It was previously agreed to fund a storage solution at the depot for equipment and supplies used by Street Scene. Following further assessments of the garage the cost of the solution has increased by £0.013m to allow implementation to be completed in 2024/25. Essential work to install a concrete base at the HWRC of £0.08m is also requested.
 - (d) £0.070m **Corporate Landlord** – To allow remodelling of the Town Hall to be carried out as part of the relocation of services from Central House Annex.
 - (e) £0.058m **Communications and Engagement** - To be used to enhance several core campaigns including, increasing the number of foster carers, encouraging people to recycle more, various activities to help tackle anti-social behaviour, climate change, encouraging benefit take up, and promoting Darlington as a visitor destination.
 - (f) £0.030m **Human Resources** - Training, to further develop our managers and support development needs coming out of My Journey reviews. In addition, we are also in the process of delivering quality conversations development supported initially by an external provider.
18. **Assist in achieving the council plan ambitions.** The following £0.761m of carry forwards all meet the criteria described above and are as follows:
 - (a) £0.040m **Street Scene** – To continue the trial use of HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) fuel in Street Scene's waste collection fleet.
 - (b) £0.030m **Highways** - Permits scheme, essential upgrades of the Aurora software and purchase of handhelds is needed to ensure the efficient delivery of the permit scheme.

- (c) £0.012m **Highways** - To support programmes of cycle training and pedestrian training in 2024/25.
- (d) £0.012m **Flood and Water Act** – Following the cessation of the contract with Stockton Council and the appointment of a new Flood and Water officer, work is required to be carried out to support schemes and projects in 2024/25. This will fund the Council's contribution to ongoing drainage studies in partnership with Northumbrian Water Group and the Environment Agency to assess the risk of flood in Darlington and identify any potential schemes that may need to be developed to manage that risk.
- (e) £0.017m **Community Safety** – Carry forward of funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver community safety activities/projects aligned to the outcome and objectives of the Safer Streets programme.
- (f) £0.029m **Consolidated Budget** – To fund specialist advice and activity and support the delivery/development of economic growth projects and schemes in 2024/25.
- (g) £0.018m **Climate Change** – Due to a vacancy during the year a small underspend was generated within the climate change team. It is requested that this underspend is carried forward to support the climate change aims of the council.
- (h) £0.200m **Council Wide** – Project management costs. As part of the ongoing financial challenges facing the council, many work streams have been identified to review for efficiencies. The council has limited resources to undertake the necessary work required to bring forward these possible efficiencies, therefore additional project management support will be needed in the short term to deliver transformation projects within the council.
- (i) £0.035m **Finance** – The Finance team administer the payments of free nursery entitlement to providers across Darlington, through a manual system using Excel spreadsheets. With the increases in entitlement this is becoming more of an administrative burden on the team and would require additional resource, therefore an ICT system based solution is proposed to automate the process, which will streamline the process and help with capacity.
- (j) £0.126m **Systems** – The Systems team has limited resources to undertake all identified efficiency developments proposed across the council. The use of Microsoft 365 has provided many efficiency savings across the council to date, however many service areas have as yet not fully moved across to the full use of the package. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also another area the council is exploring to deliver efficiency savings. It is proposed to recruit a temporary post for 18 months (£0.076m) to facilitate the roll out of Microsoft 365 within the council and to provide additional resources to develop AI with the aim of increasing productivity across the council. In addition ongoing work to clear and digitise records within Central House will require a scanning solution with temporary resources required, therefore £0.050m is proposed to be rolled forward to facilitate this.
- (k) £0.128m **Commissioning** – The Commission Team is a small team and currently has additional service demands to review services and to ensure sufficiency and effectiveness of market provision. In addition a number of large service contracts are

currently being recommissioned including Home Care and Residential care in Adults services. Funding is requested to be carried forward from 2023/24 underspends to provide additional short term capacity within the Commissioning Team to allow delivery of all requirements.

- (l) £0.058m **Education** – To fund a one year SEND officer post to provide additional capacity with the SEN Team to deal with the current increased demand for Education, Health, Care Plans.
- (m) £0.056m **Council Wide/Darlington Partnership** – Cost of Living Fund, to provide support to those in need in the community who are impacted by the increased cost of living. Funding allocated in the 2023/24 MTFP has been used to assist people in need of support during the year, however as the fund was a finite resource and there are ongoing needs in the community, funding is being stretched across years to provide support where it is needed the most.

19. **Pressures** - there is £0.060m of pressures identified as follows:

- (a) £0.060m **Xentrall (D&S Partnership)** – Additional systems costs to move the Agresso (Unit 4) Financial Management system into the cloud based solution. The current Agresso system will cease to be supported therefore the Council will need to move to the new host. This one-off cost is Darlington's share of the total cost across both councils hosted by Xentrall.

Housing Revenue Account

20. HRA projections are shown in **Appendix 3** with an overall projected balanced budget. There has been an improvement in the working balance of £4.953m from the Q3 projection which is primarily due to a reduction in the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay of £4.606m due to slippage of capital schemes into the new financial year.

21. Additional movement in the working balance are detailed as follows:

- (a) There has been an improvement in Sundry rents of £0.099m due to an adjustment in the recovery of VAT.
- (b) Management costs have increased by £0.182m due to increased external audit fees and increased support service recharges.
- (c) There has been an increase in repairs and maintenance costs of £0.207m, due to inflationary price increases and additional works being carried out.
- (d) Capital financing costs have decreased by £0.506m which is lower financing costs required due to slippage on new build housing schemes.

Conclusion

22. The Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2023/24 are £17.667m, an improvement of £0.545m on the initial 2023-27 MTFP position. This improvement in

reserves includes a brought forward amount of £0.485m from 2022/23, £1.059m of departmental overspends and a net underspend of £1.119m in corporate resources.

23. The £17.667m of projected reserves, is an improvement of £1.283m on the initial estimated 2024/25 -2027/28 MTFP opening balance of £16.384m.

Outcome of Consultation

24. No external consultation has been carried out in preparing this report.

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2023/24**Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2024**

	2023-27
	MTFP
	(Feb 2023)
Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) :-	£000
MTFP Planned Opening Balance 01/04/2023	23,397
Approved net contribution from balances	(6,275)
Planned Closing Balance 31/03/2024	17,122
Increase in opening balance from 2022-23 results	485
Projected corporate underspends / (overspends) :-	
Council Wide	(116)
Financing Costs	0
Joint Venture - Investment Return	0
Contingencies	93
Additional Income Received	190
Services Group Rebase	700
People Group Rebase	500
Unallocated Grant Income	302
Pay Award 2023/24	(550)
Projected General Fund Reserve (excluding Departmental)	at 18,726
31st March 2024	
Planned Balance at 31st March 2024	17,122
Improvement	1,604

Departmental projected year-end balances

	Improvement / (decline)
	compared with 2023-27 MTFP
	£000
People Group	(2,458)
Services Group	1,986
Operations Group	(501)
Chief Executive & Economy	(86)
TOTAL	(1,059)

Summary Comparison with :-

	2023-27
	MTFP
	£000
Corporate Resources - increase in opening balance from 22/23 results	485
Corporate Resources - additional in-year Improvement/(Decline)	(81)
Quarter 1 Budget Rebase	1,200
Departmental - Improvement / (Decline)	(1,059)
Improvement / (Decline) compared with MTFP	545
Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2024	17,667

GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2023/24

	Budget				Expenditure		
	Original 2023/24	Approved Adjustments	Approved C/fwds	Amended Approved Budget	Outturn	C/fwds to approve	Variance
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Departmental Resources							
People Group	75,356	2,257	(887)	76,726	78,998	186	2,458
Services Group	27,129	1,944	(1,424)	27,649	25,319	344	(1,986)
Operations Group	12,996	1,305	(311)	13,990	14,182	309	501
Chief Executive & Economy	1,535	321	(340)	1,516	1,539	63	86
Total Departmental Resources	117,016	5,827	(2,962)	119,881	120,038	902	1,059
Corporate Resources							
Council Wide	1,359	(1,316)	0	43	(81)	240	116
Financing Costs	3,477	0	0	3,477	3,477	0	0
Joint Venture - Investment Return	(1,816)	0	0	(1,816)	(1,816)	0	0
Additional Income Received	0	0		0	(190)	0	(190)
Contingencies Budget							
Apprentice Levy	202	0	0	202	257	0	55
Pension Fund Triennial Valuation	(439)	439	0	0	0	0	0
Youth Employment Initiative	168	0	0	168	20	0	(148)
Mid Year Savings							
Services Group Rebase	0	700		700	0	0	(700)
People Group Rebase	0	500		500	0	0	(500)
Total Corporate Resources	2,951	323	0	3,274	1,667	240	(1,367)
Net Expenditure	119,967	6,150	(2,962)	123,155	121,705	1,142	(308)
Contributions To / (From) Reserves							
Planned Contribution to General Fund Reserves (MTFP)	(8,640)	0		(8,640)	(8,640)	0	0
Departmental Brought Forwards from 2022/23	0	(4,961)		(4,961)	(4,961)	0	0
Already approved Carry Forwards	0	0	2,962	2,962	2,962	0	0
Unallocated Grant Income	0	0	0	0	(302)	0	(302)
Pay Award 2023/24	0	(550)	0	(550)	0	0	550
ASC ILF 2023/24	0	(639)	0	(639)	(639)	0	0
General Fund Total	111,327	0	0	111,327	110,125	1,142	(60)

Note: Appendix 1 shows an increase in reserves of £0.378m brought forward from 2022/23

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Council Wide</u>							
Corporate Running Costs	4	0	3	(81)	0	(81)	(84)
Cost of Living Fund	100	(61)	40	0	40	40	0
Project Management Costs	0	0	0	0	200	200	200
Pay Award	1,255	(1,255)	0	0	0	0	0
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	1,359	(1,316)	43	(81)	240	159	116

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24								
	Budget				Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>People Group</u>								
Group Director of People	712	(110)	0	602	670	0	670	68
<u>Adults & Children Services</u>								
Transformation & Performance	748	130	(134)	744	663	0	663	(81)
Business Support	1,572	53	0	1,625	1,596	0	1,596	(29)
	2,320	183	(134)	2,369	2,259	0	2,259	(110)
<u>Children's Services</u>								
Children's Services Management & Other Services	662	1	0	663	687	0	687	24
Assessment Care Planning & LAC	5,719	(1,327)	0	4,392	5,060	0	5,060	668
First Response & Early Help	3,833	139	0	3,972	3,386	0	3,386	(586)
Youth Offending/ASB	339	(26)	0	313	258	0	258	(55)
Adoption & Placements	15,359	1,430	0	16,789	21,208	0	21,208	4,419
Disabled Children	1,230	8	0	1,238	1,162	0	1,162	(76)
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	138	1	0	139	139	0	139	0
	27,280	226	0	27,506	31,900	0	31,900	4,394
<u>Development & Commissioning</u>								
Commissioning	2,352	192	(295)	2,249	1,790	128	1,918	(331)
Voluntary Sector	294	40	0	334	299	0	299	(35)
	2,646	232	(295)	2,583	2,089	128	2,217	(366)
<u>Education</u>								
Education	423	73	(16)	480	716	58	774	294
Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport Unit	3,091	44	0	3,135	2,841	0	2,841	(294)
	3,514	117	(16)	3,615	3,557	58	3,615	0
<u>Public Health</u>								
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Adult Social Care & Health</u>								
External Purchase of Care	32,072	1,351	(442)	32,981	31,279	0	31,279	(1,702)
Intake & Enablement	677	42	0	719	719	0	719	0
Older People Long Term Condition	1,604	12	0	1,616	1,627	0	1,627	11
Physical Disability Long Term Condition	15	0	0	15	0	0	0	(15)
Learning Disability Long Term Condition	2,034	54	0	2,088	2,139	0	2,139	51
Mental Health Long Term Condition	1,218	19	0	1,237	1,223	0	1,223	(14)
Service Development & Integration	1,070	(7)	0	1,063	1,203	0	1,203	140
Workforce Development	194	138	0	332	333	0	333	1
	38,884	1,609	(442)	40,051	38,523	0	38,523	(1,528)
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	75,356	2,257	(887)	76,726	78,998	186	79,184	2,458

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24

	<i>Budget</i>				<i>Expenditure</i>			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Services Group</u>								
Group Director of Services	174	2	0	176	174	0	174	(2)
<u>Capital Projects, Transport & Highways</u>								
<u>Planning</u>								
AD Transport & Capital Projects	136	(1)	0	135	121	0	121	(14)
Building Design Services	54	0	0	54	(73)	0	(73)	(127)
Capital Projects	352	58	(66)	344	309	0	309	(35)
Car Parking R&M	583	0	0	583	506	0	506	(77)
Concessionary Fares	2774	17	(50)	2,741	2,052	0	2,052	(689)
Flood & Water Act	89	160	(190)	59	47	12	59	0
Highways	4777	(46)	(82)	4,649	4,600	82	4,682	33
Highways - DLO	-478	36	0	(442)	(495)	60	(435)	7
Investment & Funding	17	542	(405)	154	154	0	154	0
Sustainable Transport	42	135	(98)	79	83	0	83	4
	8,346	901	(891)	8,356	7,304	154	7,458	(898)
<u>Community Services</u>								
AD Community Services	150	(1)	0	149	108	0	108	(41)
Allotments	16	0	0	16	20	0	20	4
Building Cleaning - DLO	206	38	0	244	267	0	267	23
Cemeteries & Crematorium	(974)	12	0	(962)	(378)	0	(378)	584
Dolphin Centre	919	151	(8)	1,062	663	42	705	(357)
Eastbourne Complex	24	6	0	30	67	0	67	37
Emergency Planning	103	0	0	103	87	0	87	(16)
Head of Steam	291	5	0	296	338	0	338	42
Hippodrome	221	117	(46)	292	368	0	368	76
Indoor Bowling Centre	19	12	(12)	19	12	0	12	(7)
Libraries	898	27	0	925	994	0	994	69
Move More	48	4	0	52	52	0	52	0
Outdoor Events	567	(18)	0	549	549	0	549	0
School Meals - DLO	78	4	0	82	68	0	68	(14)
Culture and Heritage Fund	119	5	(2)	122	123	0	123	1
Street Scene	6,048	289	(101)	6,236	6,009	53	6,062	(174)
Transport Unit - Fleet Management	155	57	0	212	210	0	210	(2)
Waste Management	3,606	75	0	3,681	3,882	8	3,890	209
Winter Maintenance	583	42	0	625	605	0	605	(20)
	13,077	825	(169)	13,733	14,044	103	14,147	414

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24

	Budget				Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Services Group</u>								
<u>Community Safety</u>								
CCTV	264	15	0	279	330	0	330	51
Community Safety	732	112	(93)	751	736	17	753	2
General Licensing	7	3	0	10	10	0	10	0
Parking	(1,672)	34	0	(1,638)	(2,363)	0	(2,363)	(725)
Parking Enforcement	13	(34)	0	(21)	(47)	0	(47)	(26)
Private Sector Housing	107	28	(27)	108	102	0	102	(6)
Stray Dogs	50	1	0	51	55	0	55	4
Taxi Licensing	41	22	(8)	55	56	0	56	1
Trading Standards	258	0	0	258	258	0	258	0
	(200)	181	(128)	(147)	(863)	17	(846)	(699)
<u>Building Services</u>								
Construction - DLO	(344)	50	0	(294)	(492)	0	(492)	(198)
Other - DLO	16	45	0	61	0	0	0	(61)
	(328)	95	0	(233)	(492)	0	(492)	(259)
<u>Corporate Landlord</u>								
Corporate Landlord	5,821	(60)	(236)	5,525	4,958	70	5,028	(497)
<u>General Support Services</u>								
Works Property & Other	114	0	0	114	73	0	73	(41)
<u>Joint Levies & Boards</u>								
Environment Agency Levy	125	0	0	125	121	0	121	(4)
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	27,129	1,944	(1,424)	27,649	25,319	344	25,663	(1,986)

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24

	Budget				Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Operations Group</u>								
Group Director of Operations	130	2	0	132	114	0	114	(18)
<u>Resources</u>								
AD Resources	115	2	0	117	116	0	116	(1)
Financial Services	1,526	156	(30)	1,652	1,334	35	1,369	(283)
Financial Assessments & Protection	279	44	(35)	288	282	0	282	(6)
Xentrall (D&S Partnership)	1,830	146	0	1,976	2,107	60	2,167	191
Human Resources	686	167	(99)	754	523	30	553	(201)
Health & Safety	193	(25)	0	168	147	0	147	(21)
	4,629	490	(164)	4,955	4,509	125	4,634	(321)
<u>Head of Strategy Performance & Communications</u>								
Communications & Engagement	987	230	(74)	1,143	924	58	982	(161)
Systems	1,007	238	(73)	1,172	1,196	126	1,322	150
	1,994	468	(147)	2,315	2,120	184	2,304	(11)
<u>Law & Governance</u>								
AD Law & Governance	131	4	0	135	134	0	134	(1)
Complaints & FOI	297	3	0	300	416	0	416	116
Democratic Services	1,316	26	0	1,342	1,435	0	1,435	93
Registrars	(23)	8	0	(15)	23	0	23	38
Administration	595	51	0	646	567	0	567	(79)
Legal Services	1,669	(18)	0	1,651	2,066	0	2,066	415
Procurement	183	(11)	0	172	174	0	174	2
Coroners	278	0	0	278	324	0	324	46
	4,446	63	0	4,509	5,139	0	5,139	630
<u>Xentrall Shared Services</u>								
ICT	810	270	0	1,080	1,202	0	1,202	122
	810	270	0	1,080	1,202	0	1,202	122
<u>Building Services</u>								
Maintenance - DLO	(616)	(26)	0	(642)	(652)	0	(652)	(10)
	(616)	(26)	0	(642)	(652)	0	(652)	(10)
<u>Housing & Revenues</u>								
Local Taxation	488	(9)	0	479	369	0	369	(110)
Rent Rebates / Rent Allowances / Council Tax	(132)	0	0	(132)	(143)	0	(143)	(11)
Housing Benefits Administration	413	37	0	450	632	0	632	182
Customer Services	329	9	0	338	389	0	389	51
Homelessness	349	1	0	350	357	0	357	7
Service, Strategy & Regulation and General	156	0	0	156	146	0	146	(10)
	1,603	38	0	1,641	1,750	0	1,750	109
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	12,996	1,305	(311)	13,990	14,182	309	14,491	501

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2023/24

	Budget				Expenditure			
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to March £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	(Under)/ Over Spend £000
<u>Chief Executive & Economy</u>								
<u>Chief Executive</u>								
Chief Executive	209	(1)	0	208	213	0	213	5
Darlington Partnership	74	20	0	94	148	16	164	70
	283	19	0	302	361	16	377	75
<u>AD Economic Growth</u>								
AD - Economic Growth	149	(1)	0	148	148	0	148	0
Building Control	168	2	0	170	179	0	179	9
Consolidated Budgets	146	116	(119)	143	114	29	143	0
Development Management	23	10	0	33	331	0	331	298
Economy	269	44	(58)	255	268	0	268	13
Environmental Health	334	20	0	354	290	0	290	(64)
Place Strategy	645	23	(103)	565	448	18	466	(99)
Property Management & Estates	(482)	88	(60)	(454)	(600)	0	(600)	(146)
	1,252	302	(340)	1,214	1,178	47	1,225	11
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	1,535	321	(340)	1,516	1,539	63	1,602	86

BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2023/24

SCHOOLS PROJECTED BALANCES 2023/24					
School Name	Opening Balance at 1st April 2023	Formula Budget Allocation*	Total Available	Closing Balance at 31st March 2024	Projected Closing Balance as proportion of Formula Budget Allocation
Primary	£000	£000	£000	£000	%
Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools	(12)	948	936	34	4%
Rise Carr College, Clifton House & Eldon House	305	1,846	2,151	289	16%
Red Hall Primary	221	1,434	1,655	239	17%
Whinfield Primary	416	2,332	2,748	468	20%
Harrowgate Hill Primary	146	2,717	2,863	43	2%
Primary Total	1,076	9,277	10,353	1,073	

*Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools/Rise Carr College original budget. Actual allocation based on attendance.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2023/24

	<i>Budget</i>				
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Outturn £000	(Under)/ Over Spend £000
<u>Housing Revenue Account</u>					
<u>Income</u>					
Rents Of Dwellings (Gross)	(21,964)	0	(21,964)	(21,798)	166
Sundry Rents (Including Garages & Shops)	(422)	0	(422)	(527)	(105)
Charges For Services & Facilities	(3,654)	0	(3,654)	(3,900)	(246)
Contribution towards expenditure	(928)	0	(928)	(1,076)	(148)
Interest Receivable	(6)	0	(6)	(526)	(520)
Total Income	(26,974)	0	(26,974)	(27,827)	(853)
<u>Expenditure</u>					
Operational	4,441	0	4,441	4,526	85
Service Charges	3,654	0	3,654	3,900	246
Maintenance	5,539	0	5,539	5,797	258
Capital Financing Costs	3,447	0	3,447	2,941	(506)
Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	12,609	0	12,609	8,003	(4,606)
Increase in Bad Debt Provision	250	0	250	156	(94)
In year contribution to/(from) balances	(2,966)	0	(2,966)	2,504	5,470
Total Expenditure	26,974	0	26,974	27,827	853
(Surplus)/Deficit	0	0	0	0	0

HRA Balances	£000
Opening balance 01/04/2023	23,467
Contribution to/(from) balances	2,504
Closing balance	25,971

CABINET
16 JULY 2024

XENTRALL SHARED SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Mandy Porter
Resources Portfolio

Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This annual report allows Cabinet Members to review the progress and performance of Xentrall Shared Services, the Stockton and Darlington partnership.

Summary

2. Xentrall Shared Services, the Darlington and Stockton partnership, was established in May 2008 and is now in its seventeenth year. The Xentrall services are:
 - (a) ICT (strategy and operations)
 - (b) Transactional HR (payroll, pensions, recruitment, sickness absence)
 - (c) Transactional Finance (creditors, debtors, banking, schools finance)
 - (d) Design & Print (professional buyer, in-house design and print)
3. The original business case identified a number of efficiencies and benefits to be delivered resulting in initial savings of £7.4m over the original ten-year period of the partnership. The successful partnership arrangement has delivered all these plus additional efficiencies and benefits and significant additional savings as reported to Members over previous years. At the same time the quality and performance of services have not been compromised but improved, with both customer and staff satisfaction increasing over the life of the partnership.
4. This is a significant achievement for a public/public partnership, and it compares very well to other private sector partnerships many of which have failed over the same period or been brought back in-house and for a variety of reasons. Both Councils have benefited both financially and through a continued programme of service improvements brought throughout the lifetime of the partnership.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet note the report and acknowledge the continuing success of Xentrall over the sixteen years since it was formed.

Reason

6. The recommendation is supported to allow Members to receive information about the progress of the partnership.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

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

Ian Miles/Ian Coxon: 01642 527019

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder issues in this report
Health and Well Being	There are no health and wellbeing issues in this report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	There are no diversity issues in this report
Wards Affected	The issues in this report apply to all wards
Groups Affected	No particular groups are affected by this report
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not propose changes to the budget or 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 activities highlighted in the report assist all service areas achieve the ambitions of the Council Plan.
Efficiency	The partnership delivers significant savings for the council which are built into the approved medium-term financial plan.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

7. Xentrall Shared Services, the Darlington and Stockton partnership, was established in May 2008 and is now in its seventeenth year. The Xentrall services are:
 - (a) ICT (strategy and operations)
 - (b) Transactional HR (payroll, pensions, recruitment, sickness absence)
 - (c) Transactional Finance (creditors, debtors, banking, schools finance)
 - (d) Design & Print (professional buyer, in-house design and print)
8. The original business case identified a number of efficiencies and benefits to be delivered resulting in initial savings of £7.4m over the original ten-year period of the partnership. The successful partnership arrangement has delivered all these plus additional efficiencies and benefits and significant additional savings as reported to Members over previous years. At the same time the quality and performance of services have not been compromised but improved, with both customer and staff satisfaction increasing over the life of the partnership.
9. This is a significant achievement for a public/public partnership and it compares very well to other private sector partnerships many of which have failed over the same period or been brought back in-house and for a variety of reasons. Both Councils have benefited both financially and through a continued programme of service improvements brought throughout the lifetime of the partnership.

Value for Money and Performance

10. Since the formation of the partnership in 2008, the financial situation in both Councils has changed significantly as a result of reductions in local government funding and more recently with high levels of inflation. Throughout, Xentrall has continued to support both Councils in achieving a balanced Medium-Term Financial Plan. This has mainly been achieved through staff savings resulting from more efficient ways of working across the four service areas, as well as cost reductions arising from partnership joint procurement.
11. To accompany previous cost reduction exercises, all of the Xentrall services used to take part in national benchmarking schemes to ensure that service quality was not compromised and to confirm that a balanced approach was used to measure improvements and success. At that time these comparators confirmed the low cost of the services provided by Xentrall. As reported previously, during the pandemic these activities were paused and now post-pandemic the national programmes have ceased. In the absence of this comparator, Xentrall services continue to monitor service performance and remain alert to any new benchmarking programmes, should they arise.
12. Xentrall is also subject to various internal and external audit regimes which also confirm the good performance and governance of its services. Forty-two of the Xentrall control checks undertaken by the Council's Internal Audit team during the year have achieved a green assessment. In addition, the Xentrall ICT service successfully achieved recertification in both Information Security Management and Quality Management System ISO standards and also was recertified for continued access to the Government's Public Services Network (PSN).

Customer Satisfaction

13. As part of Xentrall's balanced scorecard approach to performance management, partnership-wide customer satisfaction surveys have generally been undertaken every two years, and these involve canvassing service users and managers across both Councils. In addition, each of the Xentrall services seeks customer feedback and satisfaction levels as part of their daily service operations, e.g. an ICT call closure, or the take-on of a new academy's payroll.

Succession Planning

14. As reported, the previous year (2022/23) was a very significant year in terms of changes to the Xentrall Management Team. The retirement of the Finance Manager, the HR Manager, and the ICT Projects & Applications Manager, together with the ICT Strategy & Operations Manager moving on, could have been a significant risk to the partnership. Eighteen months on I am pleased to report that the new managers in these posts have settled in very well and are driving their respective services forward whilst effectively managing the daily challenges of such critical services, together with planning future service and team developments. This transition has gone very well indeed.
15. Change never stops however, and this sixteenth annual report sees the retirement of Ian Miles from head of Xentrall as he enters his fortieth year in public service. Handover plans are in place and next year's annual report will be authored by Ian Coxon, who has stepped into the role from June 2024. Ian is an Assistant Director at Stockton who previously worked alongside Ian Miles at this same level when Xentrall was formed and developed in its first eight years (2008-2016) and knows the area well. A smooth transition has taken place between both Ian's and the Xentrall management team.

2023/24 Opportunities Taken & External Business Retained

16. Xentrall continues to explore new opportunities for external business as and when these arise, which is in-line with the partnership's objective of tactically growing the business. 2023/24 saw some movement on academies as they join multi-academy trusts (six gains and ten losses). Work is already underway for the take-on of new academies in 2024/25 which will counter these reductions. We are also mid-way in our two-year agreement with Stockton maintained schools for the bursary service and work will commence in the summer to draft a new SLA for April 2025. Other existing customers who were retained include:
- (a) All Xentrall services to the Tees Valley Combined Authority
 - (b) Finance and HR services to the South Tees Development Corporation
 - (c) ICT services and finance system to Tees Active Leisure Ltd
 - (d) ICT services to the North East Purchasing Authority (NEPO)
 - (e) ICT hosting services to Northumberland County Council
 - (f) ICT services to Theatre Hullabaloo in Darlington

- (g) Payroll services for 133 academy payroll groups and Finance services to ten academies/trusts and Tees Active
- (h) Payroll to North Yorkshire Citizens Advice & Law Centre
- (i) Payroll to nine Middlesbrough and five Redcar & Cleveland schools
- (j) Payroll and Employer Support to Direct Payment Clients at Stockton
- (k) Bursary service to Stockton schools

17. Xentrall generated external annual income of over £1m continues to form a significant part of the overall Xentrall financial model and thereby reduce the Xentrall funding required by both Authorities.

2023/24 Stockton & Darlington Achievements

18. As well as providing essential services to our external customers and generating income, Xentrall continue to be a critical element in the continued effective functioning of both Councils. A snapshot of some of the Xentrall activities and achievements is shown below.

Xentrall HR

- (a) Maintained service delivery to over 150 individual payrolls encompassing more than 16,000 staff.
- (b) Processed the annual pay award for all employee groups at very short notice, with thousands of back-pay calculations needed.
- (c) Year-end processing completed successfully within the required deadlines.
- (d) Produced major reports required by the Office of National Statistics for both Councils and also support with School Workforce Census, Social Work England and Gender Pay Gap reporting.
- (e) Migration of the HR/Payroll System from on-premise to a cloud-based version and then the development of interactive reporting and user-access apps including; HR Power BI Dashboards, MyPayPro and the MyHR App.
- (f) Introduction of the MyHR App to both Councils and all our academy customers, allowing employees to access MyHR from their own mobile devices with no requirement for PC access or a Council device. This easier access provides employees the ability to update and check their profiles, check payslips, submit hours claims and managers the ability to authorise requests and input sickness wherever they are. Darlington employees and managers are also able to book and authorise holidays and some types of overtime payments are also managed via MyHR.

- (g) Roll out and completion of 'My Team Changes', allowing managers the ability to complete leaver forms directly into the MyHR system, thereby reducing administration.
- (h) Upgrades were undertaken to the HR/Payroll System to keep up to date with all statutory requirements.
- (i) Worked with both Councils on Employer NI savings for apprentices.
- (j) Implemented the use of document storage for Darlington and continue to support Stockton with their migration of HR data into Teams.
- (k) Working with North Yorkshire Pensions on the build of an iConnect report, which will improve data and remove the need for leaver forms.
- (l) Again, with the support from ICT, HR made progress on pension year end data files, to improve the accuracy of pension data, calculations and remove some of the manual work required in year-end processes.

Xentrall Design & Print

19. 2023/2024 has seen Design & Print continue to support all service areas across both Councils and probably all high-profile campaigns. This whilst managing challenging increases in costs in materials and services. From such a large and wide-ranging variety of projects completed during the year, a selection is as follows:
- (a) Support materials in preparation for the celebration of His Majesty the King's Coronation.
 - (b) Preparations for elections across both Councils (Local, Police Crime Commissioner, Tees Valley Mayor).
 - (c) Support of Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Stockton.
 - (d) Darlington Hippodrome Theatre supporting marketing, promotional, signage and exhibition materials including the 'What's on' brochure, digital adverts and large-scale displays and promotions.
 - (e) Development of Powering Our Future brand for wider rollout at Stockton.
 - (f) HOPETOWN DARLINGTON, supported the project and wider team across a vast variety of promotions, adverts, displays, and signage along with brand guidance and implementation for interpretation boards and merchandise.
 - (g) Support for both Council's Events Teams by producing materials for the likes of SIRF (Stockton International Riverside Festival) and Stockton Sparkles, along with Darlington's Summer Show and the Darlington 10k.
 - (h) In Living Memory Exhibitions throughout Stockton and Preston Hall Museum.

- (i) Darlington Crown Street Library signage, marketing and packs for reopening of the historical library.
- (j) Leisure Services work for Dolphin Centre to support all areas of marketing, promotions and signage including the likes of Pool Reopening, Gym Membership promotions and Café Bistro offers.
- (k) Stockton Town Centre Development sites - Yarm Town Hall, Thornaby Phoenix House, Stockton Castlegate and Town Hall, Preston Hall and Museum and Norton High Street.
- (l) Darlington Town Centre promotions for accreditations such as Northumbria in Bloom, alongside wider generic campaigns with the likes of Welcome to Darlington (promoted around the town and in the train station) and material used at the Great Yorkshire Show.
- (m) Darlington Jobs Fair including the promotional material, directional signage, give-aways and the Jobs Newspaper.
- (n) Many other regular/daily tasks are completed by the service outside of these projects and these would include the likes of daily post for Stockton and volume Print for Post for Darlington. Adult Social Care surveys for both Councils, Stockton Annual Council Tax Main Bill printing and daily benefit notification letters, P45's, P60's and Payslips, Rent Statements, Landlord or Garage statements, re-directional/large volume copier work and Stockton Meeting Agenda copying and Darlington Garden Waste.
- (o) Design & Print has also worked closely with NEPO (North-East Purchasing Organisation) as key advisor for the national framework for Print Production and Cut Size Paper contracts.

Xentrall Finance

- (a) Incorporation of duties from Stockton Cashiers (Banking/Creditors) as a result of the closure of the cashiers service.
- (b) PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) accreditation for both Councils for banking.
- (c) Expansion of Lingfield and Swift Academies, increasing Xentrall income.
- (d) Successfully completing year-end processing to required deadlines.
- (e) Successfully implementing system changes and reconciliations on Business World On (aka Agresso Finance System).
- (f) Improved performance in Creditors for invoice registering, with higher volumes and lower staffing levels.
- (g) Begun preparations and supplier negotiations in relation to the future migration of the on-premise finance system (BWO/Agresso) to a cloud-hosted model.

Xentrall Schools Finance

- (a) Continued to provide a well-regarded bursary service to our maintained Stockton schools, assisting Head Teachers in times when funding is often tight due to falling pupil numbers, combined with pressures around pay awards and utility costs. The service provides quality budget, budgetary control and forward planning materials to Stockton schools in order that they remain financially solvent.
- (b) Assisting Stockton schools in the lead-up to academisation.

Xentrall ICT

- (a) Successful ISO & PSN certifications as mentioned above.
- (b) Completed the migration of corporate data from on-premise folders to Microsoft Teams Cloud for both Councils, paving the way for greater collaboration.
- (c) The refresh of 300 laptops maintaining high levels of availability and reliability across the Darlington and Stockton ICT estate. Also enabling teams that previously had no access to corporate technology through projects such as the 50 new devices for the Stockton Schools Catering Service.
- (d) Migrated the Microsoft Licence from E3 to E5 to take advantage of benefits such as enhanced security features, Power Bi reporting and anti-virus tools.
- (e) Preparing the ICT that supports the PCC and Tees Valley Mayoral elections.
- (f) Increased the security of laptops with the deployment an improved anti-virus solution as part of our E5 subscription above.
- (g) Further underpinning the approach to flexible working by completing the move away from the traditional/fixed Cisco Telephony solution to Teams voice and video calls.
- (h) Commenced a programme of improvement for network provision across both Councils and an approach for the avoidance of future refresh costs.
- (i) Design and delivery of the Dunedin House ICT infrastructure (Stockton's new main offices). This is the first Council building to be Wi-Fi by default. It also integrates building management systems and introducing Teams Rooms as a collaborative meeting space solution.
- (j) The design and build of a new backup ICT datacentre in Dunedin House which reduces the overall carbon footprint.
- (k) Refresh of the firewall Infrastructure both Darlington and Stockton data centres, increasing performance and paving the way for an upgrade to our Internet connections.
- (l) Introduction of the new customer service desk system (FreshService) improving customer service and reporting. The system encompasses call management, asset management and workflow so will improve processes such as starters and leavers and licence management.

- (m) Introduction of new Internet connections (10x the current speed) whilst delivering a financial saving against the existing contract.
- (n) Implementing a new virtual server platform, which underpins all the 300+ Council systems we support. The platform spans both data centres increasing availability and reliability.

20. All Xentrall services support organisation-wide and service-based projects in both Councils through using technology and systems to improve all aspects of service provision and the delivery of efficiencies. ICT alone have completed eighteen service-based projects across Darlington and Stockton during 2023/24. These have been wide and varied and have included many upgrades and enhancements to systems.

Looking Forward to 2024/25 Onwards

21. As can be seen from the above, despite the wider environmental challenges faced by the partnership, Xentrall continues to perform very well and deliver developmental projects alongside its day-to-day services to both Councils and external customers. The additional pressure of inflation continues to be a concern, particularly at renewal points in contracts, although despite this, in some ICT cases additional value has been gained.

22. Looking forward, activities will include:

- (a) Xentrall overall will continue to assist with both Council's approaches to agile and flexible methods of working and promote and exploit the various technologies we have to support this.
- (b) HR will continue to work with both Councils and academy customers in the exploitation of the HR/Payroll system and the MyHR employee app. Development continues on interactive dashboard reporting to assist in workforce management and planning. Legislative changes will continue to be applied to the system in a timely manner, as will the application of any pay-awards as and when agreed.
- (c) ICT will be redesigning aspects of the network, including work on a full refresh of the wide area network across the Darlington and Stockton eighty-six sites. This new design will also deliver savings over the life of the contract. ICT will also be reviewing and enhancing security in relation to cloud data backups and implementing a new incident response support arrangement, both of which will reduce the impact of any security breach, should one occur. Further exploitation of the new ICT service desk system is also planned by the team.
- (d) Design & Print will continue to support both Councils, working closely with their respective Communications Teams and other services to ensure they all receive the solutions they need. The service is looking to reduce the number of prints produced on the copier fleet at both Councils and are developing a web-portal to allow staff to send documents directly to the print room for a more cost-effective production.

- (e) Finance have a number of projects planned or underway which include; implementing improved secure payment options, achieving the higher level 4 certification for PCI-DSS payments and a banking contract renewal towards the end of the year, but the main activity will be the contract negotiation and associated project for the migration of the main finance system (BWO/Agresso) to a cloud-hosted service which will take place in 2025.

23. In 2024/25 both Councils are now working on a programme to assess future partnering opportunities which may result in addition services being provided within the successful Xentrall public-public partnership model. This potentially could be a new chapter for Xentrall and an opportunity to build on and widen its success.

24. In addition to the above programme and as with previous years, the continual service improvement mentality within Xentrall will be applied to leverage any further service improvements and/or savings for both Councils where possible. Outside of this programme, Xentrall will continue to assess new business opportunities, should these arise as this approach aligns with the Xentrall business model of tactically growing the business, which in turn helps to support both Council's Medium-Term Financial Plans.