



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Cabinet Agenda

5.00 pm

Tuesday, 8 October 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 meeting of this Cabinet held on 10 September 2024. (Pages 3 - 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 Decisions
  - (a) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2025/29 –  
Report of the Group Director of People.  
(Pages 13 - 30)
  - (b) Offset Strategy –

Report of the Chief Executive.  
(Pages 31 - 44)

8. Schedule of Transactions –  
Report of the Chief Executive.  
(Pages 45 - 48)
9. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which Cabinet appoints.
10. 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.
11. Questions.

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

12. 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### **PART III NOT FOR PUBLICATION**



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

**Monday, 30 September 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](mailto:Lynne.Wood@darlington.gov.uk) or telephone 01325 405803).

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE  
MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**CABINET**

Tuesday, 10 September 2024

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

**INVITEES** – Councillors Dulston and Snedker

**C31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C32 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

**C33 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 16 JULY 2024.**

**Submitted** – the Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this held on 16 July 2024.

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

**REASON** – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

**C34 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET**

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

**C35 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

**C36 KEY DECISIONS:-**

There were no key decisions considered at this meeting.

**C37 PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON DRAFT APPRAISAL FOR THE NORTHGATE CONSERVATION AREA INCLUDING PROPOSED BOUNDARY EXTENSION**

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to going out for public consultation with the new draft appraisal (also previously circulated) for the Northgate

## Conservation Area.

The submitted report outlined the background to the Northgate Conservation Area; the justification for writing a new appraisal for the conservation area including proposals to extend the boundary significantly; the contents of the document; the proposed consultation process; and stated that the conservation area had been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010.

Particular references were made to the proposed draft character appraisal that was produced, but not finalised, by Land Use Consultants (LUC) on behalf of the Council; the Northgate Urban Design Framework and Masterplan that was also produced by LUC for a large part of the Conservation Area which now formed the strategic direction / vision for regeneration under the Towns Fund Scheme; and to the Conservation Area Assessments – Route of the former Stockton & Darlington Railway undertaken by Durham County Council.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the public consultation on the new draft appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area, be authorised.

(b) That the draft document be publicised for a period of at least six weeks, to allow members of the public and other stakeholders sufficient time to submit comments.

(c) That the draft document be amended and finalised in the light of comments received during the public consultation period.

(d) That the finalised conservation area appraisal be submitted to Members for adoption; this will be subject to another cabinet report.

**REASONS** – (a) The Northgate Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of international significance due to its structures and associations directly linked to the birth/early years of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. Despite its high importance, it has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010.

(b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is next year. There will be many events in Darlington and elsewhere to celebrate the birth of the modern railway. The Council is currently making significant investments in preparation for the 2025 celebrations including the redevelopment of the railway heritage quarter (Hopetown) inside the Northgate Conservation Area.

(c) The bicentennial of the S&DR is also being promoted by Historic England, the government's statutory adviser on the historic environment. They have provided financial assistance and other support for the Northgate Conservation Area.

(d) The present appraisal of the Northgate Conservation Area was adopted in January 2007. It is now deemed inadequate and out of date.

(e) The new draft appraisal picks up some of the 'unfinished' work carried out recently by Durham County Council and Land Use Consultants. It provides a detailed record and analysis of the Northgate Conservation Area which will be of interest to the public and other stakeholders, as well as some of the Council's staff (e.g. planning officers).

(f) The proposed boundary extension areas often relate to development that was influenced by S&DR. The draft appraisal will draw attention to locally important heritage assets to further public understanding and inform decision making.

(g) The draft appraisal also includes suggestions to improve the condition of the conservation area so that it may eventually be removed from the Heritage at Risk register.

### **C38 REVISIONS TO THE COUNCIL'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

The Leader introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive Officer requesting that consideration be given to a revised Senior Management Structure for the Council (also previously circulated).

The submitted report outlined the current senior management structure; presented a revised senior structure which responded to the recently announced retirement of the Chief Executive Officer and forthcoming planned retirements of the Assistant Director of Community Services and the Assistant Director of Economic Growth; amendments to the Group Director titles; and outlined the HR and financial implications of the proposals.

Particular reference was made at the meeting to the financial position of the Council; the additional cost of the restructure; the additional pressures on the Council's resources; whether there was a need for a Chief Executive without a portfolio; the job that will face the successful applicant; the need to retain staff; and the need for all Local Authorities to receive adequate funding. The Leader responded thereon.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the Senior Management Structure, as set out in Appendix A of the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That a report be taken to Council to approve the proposed post of Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection.

(c) That the Assistant Director Law and Governance be delegated to make any consequential changes to the Constitution that are needed.

**REASON** - To amend the Council's structure.

### **C39 CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS**

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive updating Cabinet on progress towards the Council's net zero target.

The submitted report stated that the Climate Emergency Declaration had been re-affirmed; the Council's carbon neutral target had been brought forward to 2040; further aims to increase engagement with residents and businesses had been included with the intention of reducing wider borough emissions; a further commitment to the Council's emission reduction trajectory had been amended to 40 per cent reduction every five years; outlined the current progress against those targets; and stated that of the 109 actions reporting at the end of 2022/23, 91 were on track and 5 had been completed.

Particular reference was made, to a project to develop guidance for local authorities to report to Defra on adaptation progress which the Council took part in in 2023 and to a subsequent trial for local authorities to report to the Secretary of State under the Climate Change Act's Adaptation Reporting Power, which the Council was also taking part in.

References were made at the meeting to the need to be more creative; the level of support the Council needed to meet its targets; the importance of messaging; the role of the Council as an enabler; the opportunity to save money; how those savings would be re-invested; and to the planting of trees. The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio responded thereon.

**RESOLVED** - That the report be noted.

**REASON** – Due to the increasing public pressure to act on climate change, the Council will run the risk of significant damage to its reputation if it does not deliver on its stated commitment to dealing with the Council's contribution to climate change.

#### **C40 AIR QUALITY STRATEGY 2024/29**

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to the Air Quality Strategy 2024/29 (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that due to changes in national policy the Council was now required to produce an Air Quality Strategy for the Borough; the strategy aimed to improve air quality, raise the profile and importance of air quality and provide information about local air quality; outlined the vision, aims and key priorities going forward; and stated that the strategy would contribute to the Council's commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

Particular references were made to the six aims contained within the Strategy and to the work that had been done to date in relation to each aim and future actions going forward.

Reference was made at the meeting to woodburning and to the fact that road transport was the biggest polluter.

**RESOLVED** - That the Air Quality Strategy 2024/29, as appended to the submitted report, be adopted.

**REASONS** - (a) The Strategy demonstrates a commitment to improving air quality within the Borough.

(b) The Strategy includes objectives and actions aimed at reducing emissions which will have positive effects on public health.

#### **C41 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE SCHEDULE OF CHARGES 2024/25**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Group Director of Services requesting that consideration be given to a

proposed amendment to the Schedule of Charges 2024/25, prior to consideration by Council on 26 September 2024.

The submitted report stated that the fees and charges associated with Highway Agreement charges between the Council and developers had been reviewed; a number of amendments had been proposed to the Schedule of Charges; outlined the rationale and reasons for the proposed changes; and stated that the increases proposed were based on the cost of providing the services and took account of inflation and market conditions and were anticipated to support the provision of those services.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the changes to the Schedule of Charges, as set out in Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be agreed.

(b) That the report be forwarded to Council for a decision.

**RASON** - To support the financial costs of providing the services.

#### **C42 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INVESTMENT FUND**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Group Director of Operations updating Cabinet on progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.

The submitted report stated that in November 2016 the Council established an Investment Fund to be used for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the low returns on investment; the fund provision of £50m was being utilised as envisaged facilitating wide economic benefits as well as a direct impact on the Council's financial position; the £50m fund had a commitment against it of £36.43m leaving a balance of £13.57m uncommitted; the Investment Fund had been used for 16 schemes to date, six of which had been recycled back into the fund; and that returns on JV's were anticipated to be over £7.5m.

Particular reference was made at the meeting to the whether it was the intention to bring back the Indoor Market back under the control of the Council and, should this happen, what would the implications be on the repayment of the loan. The Cabinet Members with the Resources Portfolio and the Economy Portfolio responded thereon.

**RESOLVED** - That the use of the Investment Fund and the returns achieved through the joint venture vehicles, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

**REASONS** – (a) To keep Cabinet informed of progress made on opportunities undertaken and investment returns.

(b) To increase development opportunities and income for the Council

#### **C43 REGULATORY INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA)**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of Operations (previously circulated) informing and updating Members on issues

relevant to the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000; developments that have taken place since the last report to Cabinet in March 2023 (Minute C116/Mar/24 refers); and requesting that consideration be given to the RIPA Policy (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that the RIPA Act 2000 enabled local authorities to carry out certain types of surveillance activity as long as specified procedures were followed; the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) was the main legislation governing the acquisition of communications data; the information obtained could be relied upon in court proceedings providing RIPA and IPA was complied with; and that no RIPA directed surveillance applications or IPA communications data applications had been authorised since the last report to Cabinet.

It was reported that Paragraph 4.47 of the Home Office, Covert Surveillance and Property Interference, Revised Code of Practice, August 2018, required each local authority to set the RIPA Policy at least once a year. The had last been reviewed in September 2022 (Minute C184/Sep/22 refers).

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the issues raised, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That the Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Policy, as appended to the submitted report, be approved.

(c) That further reports on the use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) and associated issues, be submitted to future meetings of Cabinet.

**REASONS** – (a) In order to ensure that the Council complies with the legal obligations under RIPA, IPA and national guidance.

(b) As stated in the Home Office Code of Practice, the RIPA Policy should be approved by Members on an annual basis.

(c) To help in giving transparency about the use of RIPA and IPA in the Council.

#### **C44 COMPLAINTS MADE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN AND THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE**

The Leader introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive providing an update of the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) since the preparation of the previous report to Cabinet on 5 December 2023 (Minute C78/Dec/23 refers); providing the Annual Review Letter (also previous circulated); and requesting that consideration be given to the frequency the information is provided to Members.

The submitted report set out in abbreviated form the decisions reached by the LGSCO and the HOS between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and outlined the actions taken as a result of those complaints.



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

(b) That the revised frequency of the reports to be Cabinet, as detailed in the submitted report, be agreed.

**REASONS** – It is important that Members are aware of the outcome of complaints made to the LGSCO and the HOS in respect of the Council’s activities.

**C45 COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2023/24**

The Leader introduced the report (previously circulating) of the Chief Officers Executive providing Cabinet with the 2023/24 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports for Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health (all also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that in 2023/24 a total number of 746 complaints had been received, an increase from 709 in 2022/23 and 629 in 2020/21, but lower than the pre-pandemic levels of 838 in 2019/20; 231 compliments had been received, an increase from 202 in 2022/23 and 217 in 2021/22 although a decrease from 309 in 2020/21 and 292 in 2019/20; and 77 comments had been received, a decrease from 112 in 2022/23, 127 in 2021/22, 178 in 2020/21 and 168 in 2019/20.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the content of the Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports, all as appended the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That the further recommendations, as detailed in the Corporate, Children Social Care and Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports, as appended to the submitted report, be endorsed.

**REASONS** - (a) To make Cabinet aware of the number and nature of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council and the organisational learning.

(b) To ensure the Council was:

- (i) complying with the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006;
- (ii) complying with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code;
- (iii) complying with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code;
- (iv) complying with the Council’s Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; and

- (v) to improve satisfaction with complaints handling.

#### **C46 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - QUARTER 1 2024/25**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Group Director of Services and the Group Director of Operations providing a summary of the latest Capital resource and commitment position, to inform monitoring of the affordability and funding of the Council's capital programme; an update on the current status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council; and requesting that consideration be given to a number of changes to the programme.

The submitted report stated that the projected outturn of the current Capital Programme was £330.867m against an approved programme of £331.530m; the investment was delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and services; the programme, including commitments, remained affordable within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28; the Council had 26 live projects, with an overall projected outturn value of £157.308m, the majority of which were running to time, cost and quality expectations, but were being monitored given the current pressures on resources in the construction sector nationally; and that the projects were managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by Consultants source via an open/OJEU tender process.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the status position on construction projects, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That the projected capital expenditure and resources, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(c) That the adjustments to resources, as detailed in paragraph 21 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASONS** - (a) To inform Cabinet of the current status of construction projects.

(b) To make Cabinet aware of the latest financial position of the Council.

(c) To maintain effective management of resources.

#### **C47 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 - QUARTER 1**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of Operations (previously circulated) providing an early forecast of the 2024/25 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.

The submitted report stated that it was the first revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2024/25 and that the latest projections showed an overall decline of £1.376m on the 2024/28 Medium Term Financial Plan, which was due to £2.542m of departmental pressures and a reserves contribution of £0.155m, offset by £1.321m of additional balances

following the 2023/24 outturn.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the forecast revenue outturn for 2024/25, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That further regular reports be made to monitor progress and take prompt action if necessary.

**REASONS** - (a) To continue effective management of resources.

(b) To continue to deliver services to agreed levels.

#### **C48 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND OUTTURN PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2023/24**

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Group Director of Operations providing important information regarding the regulation and management of the Council's borrowing, investments and cash-flow; treasury activity for 2023/24; and seeking approval of the Prudential Indicator results for 2023/24 in accordance with the Prudential Code.

It was reported that the financial year 2023/24 was yet another unprecedented year with regard to treasury management due to a number of issues including the continuing conflict in Ukraine; events in the Middle East; inflation taking time to recover; the cost of borrowing continuing to rise steadily throughout the early part of the year; and that although the returns for cash investments had increased to higher interest rates they still remained below the cost of borrowing. The Council had complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements.

The submitted report summarised the capital expenditure and financing for 2023/24; the Council's overall borrowing need; the Treasury position as at 31 March 2024; prudential indicators and compliance issues; the economic background for 2023/24 treasury management activity during 2023/24; investment position; and performance and risk benchmarking.

It was also reported that the Council's treasury management activity during 2023/24 had been carried out in accordance with the Council policy and within legal limits; financing costs had been reduced during the year; and a saving of £0.735m had been achieved from the original Medium-Term Financial Plan.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the outturn 2023/24 Prudential Indicators, as detailed within the submitted report and in Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2023/24, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(c) That the report be forwarded to Council, in order for the 2023/24 Prudential Indicators to be noted.

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

(b) To inform Members of the Performance of the Treasury Management function.

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

**C49 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.**

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Dr Riley replace Councillor McEwan as this Council’s representative on Darlington Cares.

**REASON** – To enable a change to the Council’s representation on Darlington Cares.

**DECISIONS DATED –  
FRIDAY 13 SEPTMEBER 2024**

**CABINET  
8 OCTOBER 2024**

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## **SEND STRATEGY 2025-2029**

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

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. The purpose of this report is to present the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025-2029. It details the key elements of the Strategy and the planned implementation with partners.

#### **Summary**

2. The SEND Strategy establishes our strategic approach to the delivery of SEND services for children and young people in Darlington, ensuring the offer is coordinated and responsive to the needs of our community. The strategy sets out our shared local area vision, principles, and priorities to ensure that partners across the Darlington local area are working together effectively to identify, assess and meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from birth to the age of 25. The SEND Strategy has been coproduced with partners across the borough, and is fundamental to implementing partners responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014. It reflects the ambitions and priorities of the Council Plan and other key strategic documents.

#### **Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that Cabinet approves a public consultation may commence to seek views on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy attached at **Appendix 1**.

#### **Reasons**

4. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) The strategy is produced in the context of the statutory requirements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 together with the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice that was issued alongside the 2014 Act. These provisions include the duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision

made in its area for children and young people who have special educational needs or a disability and made outside its area for children and young people for whom it is responsible who have special educational needs or who have a disability (section 27 of the 2014 Act).

- (b) Approval of the SEND Strategy contributes to the fulfilment by the Council of these obligations.

**James Stroyan,  
Group Director of People**

### Background Papers

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

Tony Murphy: Extension 5637

Council Plan	The strategy supports the commitments for children and young people-supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations
Addressing inequalities	This strategy sets out our local plan for addressing inequalities faced by young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and ensuring that they can receive access to high quality educational provision and outcomes.
Tackling Climate Change	The effective delivery of this strategy will support the council's Climate Change priorities.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The strategy supports the commitments in the council's Safety Valve Agreement to ensure efficient use of the Designated School Grant High Needs Block
Health and Wellbeing	Health lifestyles of children and young people is a key component of the SEND strategy
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific elements of the strategy which address crime and disorder
Wards Affected	All wards are affected
Groups Affected	Children, young people families and key stakeholders
Budget and Policy Framework	2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The effective delivery of the strategy will positively benefit looked after children and care leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

5. Darlington Council and its partners, including parents, schools, colleges, health and the voluntary sector, are ambitious for all children and young people and are committed to supporting them to achieve their best outcomes. For children and young people with special educational needs aged 0-25, this requires partners, to work together to ensure that there is high quality, integrated and inclusive education, and support that is flexible and responsive.
6. The SEND Strategy provides the framework for partners to work together to achieve the vision and outcomes for SEND in Darlington. The draft strategy has been extensively co-produced with children and young people, the Darlington Parent Carer Forum and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). In addition, professionals from the council and education providers have contributed to the development of the strategy. The voices of children and young people have been central to developing both the strategic objectives and outcomes in the strategy.
7. An extensive engagement exercise has been undertaken with young people. Officers have met with over 70 young people in early years, primary, secondary, Further education and specialist settings to ensure that young people's priorities have shaped the development of the strategy. The overarching themes included in the strategy have largely come directly from these discussions. In developing this strategy, what is important to children and young people and what they want to do and achieve in their lives now, and in the future, has been considered.
8. The Darlington Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025– 2029 describes the partners' collective vision and aspirations for children and young people with special educational needs and provides a framework for partners to collaborate to deliver shared priorities for the next four years and sets out how they will be implemented.
9. During the period of the Strategy there will be further changes to meet children's needs going forward, the context will evolve as the new government's priorities become clearer and the landscape of schools and providers will develop. The Strategy therefore needs to have sufficient flexibility to ensure that different or emerging issues can be incorporated.
10. Darlington has experienced an increase in the number of pupils with SEND, particularly those with EHCPs. There has been a 13.5% rise in requests for assessment compared to this same period in Dec 2022. The largest growth is in the under-fives and post 16/18 age groups. This growth mirrors the regional picture. All the local specialist provision is at capacity. The Council is working productively with local partners and national government to expand specialist capacity in Darlington and maintain a positive financial position through the implementation of the Safety Valve agreement to address the historic deficit on the High Needs Block.
11. The vision for SEND is ambitious and aspirational, it stretches beyond the boundaries of the Local Authority to all partners and children and young people with SEND, with or without an EHCP.

12. The implementation of the SEND Strategy will be guided by the following principles:

- (a) Maximising the potential of a continuum of local provision in Darlington for children, young people and young adults from 0 to 25 years of age.
- (b) Further developing partnerships with health, other agencies and parents/carers to ensure effective collaboration to meet the needs of children, young people and young adults.
- (c) Developing an integrated approach in the development and delivery of personalised provision, that includes joint decision-making processes between education, social care and health.
- (d) Prioritising early assessment of need and ensuring timely intervention and support.
- (e) Every provider, school, college or other setting, in Darlington to have good or outstanding provision for children, young people and young adults with additional needs and have access to high quality professional development and support.
- (f) Using all data available effectively to identify issues to inform the strategy and monitor its effectiveness over time.
- (g) Including parents/carers and young people's voice in the development of the strategy.
- (h) Ensuring that current and future SEND Reforms are an integral element of the SEND Strategy and progress towards implementation is monitored by appropriate bodies.

13. Five key areas, building on the preparation for adulthood outcomes as outlined in the Code of Practice 2015 were used as headings in the consultation and form the framework for this strategy. This approach will encourage a more effective pathway into adulthood and enable young people to build on life skills and support their aspirations:

- (a) Being as healthy as possible;
- (b) Having good education, training and opportunities;
- (c) Family, Friends and Relationships;
- (d) Into Adulthood towards independence;
- (e) Darlington - our town, community and environment.

### **Financial Implications**

14. The Council is delivering the outcomes outlined in the Safety Valve Agreement with the Department for Education to address the historic deficit on the Dedicated School Grant High Needs Block. Based on current projections the Council is on track to achieve a £0 DSG deficit by the end of the agreement, but this is subject to any increased demand pressures in the future.

### **Legal Implications**

15. The Council also has duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 to make special educational provision for children and young people whose needs cannot reasonably be



met from the resources normally available to schools and post-16 institutions. The Council has additional statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide education for pupils needing alternative education and under the Children and Families Act 2014 to meet the needs of pupils and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs. Approval of the SEND Strategy contributes to the fulfilment by the Council of these obligations

### **Carbon Impact and Climate Change**

16. The effective delivery of this strategy will support the council's Climate Change priorities. Specifically, by reducing the need to access specialist provision through the continued development of early intervention models. Specialist out of area provision often requires significantly longer travel to school.

### **Equalities considerations**

17. Children and young people with SEND often experience inequalities of access and outcomes across the country. Each of the key priorities aims to address the inequalities experienced by children, young people and families. The core work, in strengthening mainstream provision will enhance the principles of inclusion and providing nurturing environments for all, regardless of their needs

### **Consultation**

18. Initial consultation on this strategy took place with a range of partners through 2024. The SEND Strategy has been co-produced with key stakeholders including children and young people and parents/ carers. Plans are in place to start a conversation with the wider population, this will include further conversation with parents, carers, children, and young people and stakeholders about how best they can be supported to achieve the co-produced vision and outcomes. The consultation process will use a combination of electronic and online consultation and engagement events

### **Outcome of Consultation**

19. A 60-day public consultation is planned. Following analysis of the consultation responses a final version of the strategy will be brought to a future cabinet for decision.

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Darlington Local Area Partnership  
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities  
**SEND Strategy**  
2025-2029



Consultation  
Document

This refreshed Darlington local Area SEND Strategy sets the Local Area’s priorities for the next 4 years.

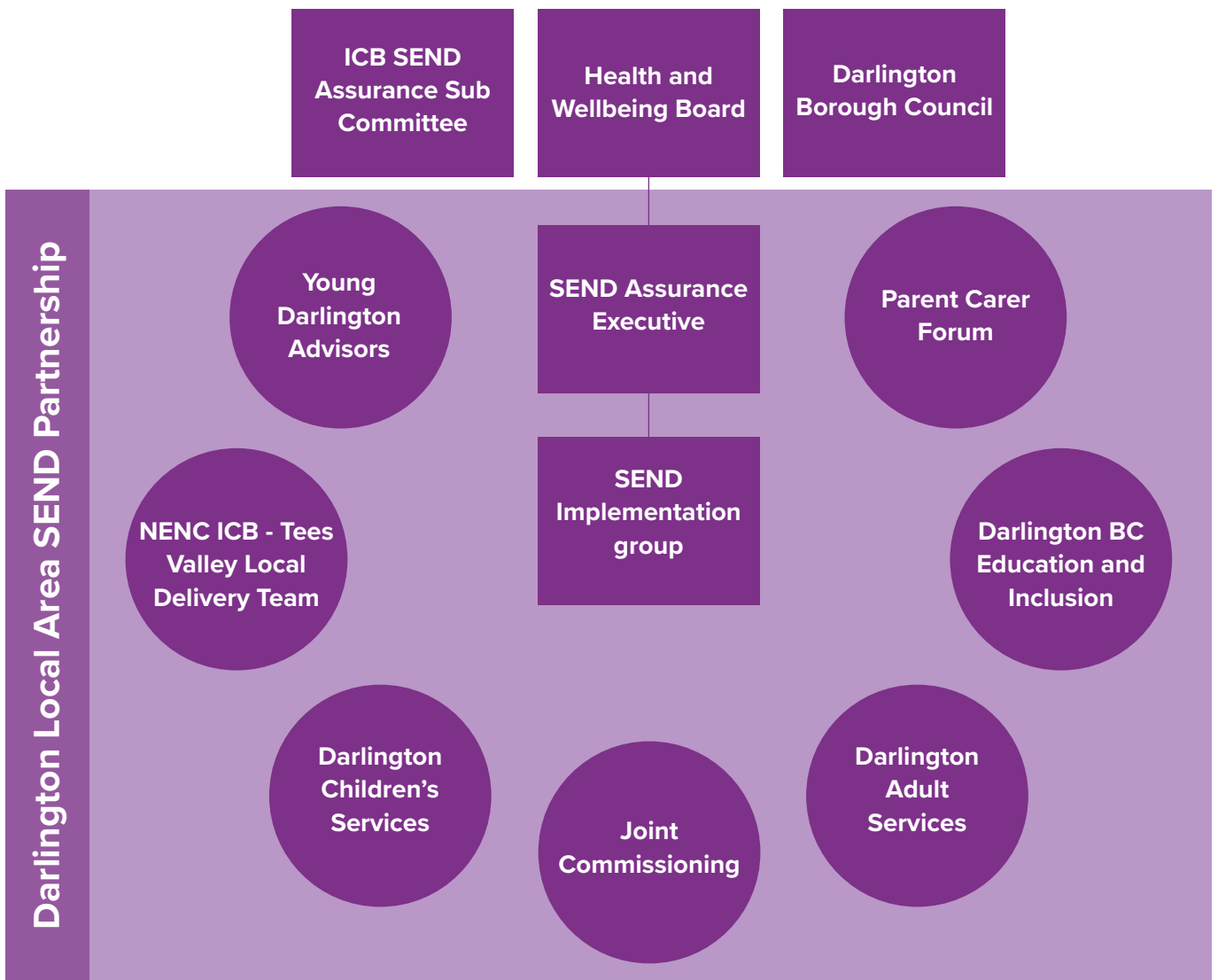
In Darlington we are committed to working in partnership across our local area to coordinate support, care and learning for SEND children, young people, and their families, so they are able to fulfil their ambitions and to thrive.

The Strategy builds on existing good practice and addressing those areas where services need to be strengthened. This includes:

- improved access to and experience of therapeutic, mental health, and physical health services;
- supporting more children and young people to attend an inclusive setting or school in Darlington where needs are met earlier; and
- broadening access to a wide range of short breaks and local community activities.

We are proud of the quality of the schools and early years provision in Darlington: we know our schools and settings work hard to deliver good outcomes for children and young people. We know however, that we need to work hard to improve some areas of our services and that we need to improve our communication with children, young people, parents and carers to improve our understanding of their experiences and to involve them more closely in the design and delivery of the services which support them.

## Local governance



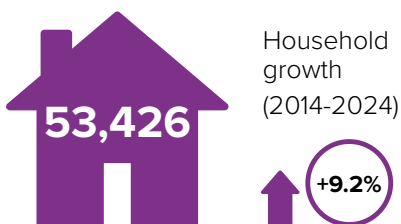
# Darlington context

## General

### Population



Number of households



## Economy



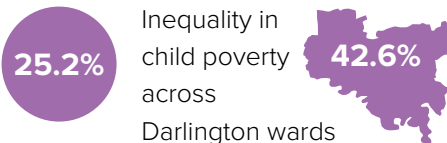
**£530.50**  
Median weekly full time earnings for residents

**85.9%**  
Workers earning the living wage

Economically active residents



Child poverty in Darlington



## People

### EHC Plans



**80.6%**  
of EHC assessments completed in 20 week period

Data March 2024



**16436**  
pupils on Darlington schools roll

**80.7%** with no identified special education needs

**13.9%** identified with special education needs

**5.4%** pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan

## Place

**32** villages and hamlets surrounding a historic town centre



**16** Parks

**10** Nature Reserves

**2** Rivers

**4** train stations Darlington, North Road, Dinsdale and Teesside Airport



Teesside International Airport



## National and local drivers

This strategy is informed by related key national documents such as the Children and Families Act (2014), SEND Code of Practice (2015), National Autism Strategy (2021), the National Disability Strategy (2021) and the NHS Long Term Plan.

It is consistent with the values and ambitions outlined in the Darlington Council Plan 2024-2027.

## Co-producing the strategy

Darlington's Local Area SEND partnership has developed this strategy for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) through co-production. It has been co-created by children and young people; parents and carers; and those who work with them across the partnership. The following set of priorities has been shaped into a clear set of actions the shared thoughts, words and phrases of children, young people, parents and carers (via the Darlington Parent Carer Forum), and strategic partners.

The priorities directly respond to the ambitions for children and young people in Darlington identified through a series of events and consultations undertaken in the last year, involving children and young people, their parents and carers, and those who support young people. Five key areas, building on the preparation for adulthood outcomes were used as headings in the consultation and form the framework for this strategy. It was agreed that this approach will encourage a more effective pathway into adulthood and enable children and young people to build on life skills and support their aspirations.

The voice of children and young people has been clear. This is their borough. They want their voices to be heard in shaping the future of Darlington.



# Strategy framework

The strategy framework sets the Local Area's priorities for the next 4 years.

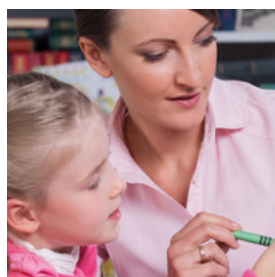
It is set out across the five key areas

## Five key areas

- 1. Being as healthy as possible
- 2. Having good education, training and opportunities
- 3. Family, friends and relationships.
- 4. Into adulthood towards independence
- 5. Darlington - our town, community and environment

Each Key area is presented across the following four headings:

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parents and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The Difference this will make
This is a summary of what Children and Young people said was most important to them when thinking about each key area.	This is a summary of what Parents and carers said was most important to them when thinking about each key area.	This is an expression of the commitments that the Local Area Partnership has made to children and young people with SEND in Darlington.	This sets out the difference the strategy looks to deliver for children and young people, parents and carers.



## Being as healthy as possible

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parent and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The difference this will make
<p>Having good mental health is important: Being able to talk to people who listen, understand and support you helps.</p> <p>To be healthy It's important to have a balanced diet, healthy eating habits and to drink lots of water - not focusing purely on fruit and vegetables but having a mix of everything, as well as a good nights sleep.</p> <p>Exercise in whatever way suits you best is good for your mental and physical health e.g. the gym, walking, sporting clubs, dancing, swimming.</p> <p>Not focusing on unrealistic health expectations from media.</p>	<p>Maintaining positive mental health and physical health is important.</p> <p>Effective and timely access to mental &amp; physical health support.</p> <p>Having suitable education provision is important in ensuring good physical and mental health.</p> <p>It can be difficult to maintain a healthy diet, particularly where sensory needs impact this.</p> <p>Communication between health and education services needs to be improved.</p> <p>More inclusive opportunities for exercise and social inclusion are needed.</p> <p>Independence in respect of healthy lifestyle choices.</p>	<p>We will improve inclusive opportunities to be active in Darlington.</p> <p>We will support community organisations and community facilities to be more inclusive of children and young people.</p> <p>We will effectively manage waiting lists for health appointments especially access to mental health services.</p> <p>We will ensure the new public health strategy is fully inclusive of children and young people with SEND.</p>	<p>I will know when, where and how to access support if I am physically or emotionally unwell.</p> <p>I will be able to access support and advice in a timely way.</p> <p>I will be able to make a healthy meal or snack.</p> <p>I will be able to choose from and access a range of activities either independently or with support to help keep me as active as possible.</p> <p>People supporting me will talk to each other and work with me and my family/carers to plan my support together.</p>



## Having good education, training and opportunities

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parent and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The difference this will make
<p>'Need to be learning about real life issues, so we can know how to handle them when it happens.'</p> <p>Prefer practical/'fun' learning.</p> <p>More extra-curricular learning e.g. clubs, groups, after school activities.</p> <p>More support to help me plan my future: qualifications, further and higher education, advice and guidance on accessing different jobs (childcare, police, army, beauty therapist YouTuber, robotics etc).</p> <p>More volunteer/work experience opportunities needed from a younger age.</p> <p>No Bullying, including online.</p>	<p>Suitable education in a suitable school environment.</p> <p>To feel included, respected, valued and safe while at school.</p> <p>Availability and accessibility of information in relation to SEND support, improved and consistent SEND offer in schools and training / upskilling of school staff in respect of SEND.</p> <p>Skills for independence to be included consistently in education.</p> <p>Ensuring early identification of needs that are met flexibly, effectively and consistently through thorough and coordinated planning to prevent emerging needs escalating including for emotional, social &amp; mental health needs.</p> <p>Choice and flexibility regarding appropriate, supported and fulfilling education and employment opportunities.</p>	<p>We will launch an Inclusion Charter across all Darlington education settings.</p> <p>We will work with education settings to address barriers to attendance for children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>We will work with education settings to include developing skills for independence as part of their offer.</p> <p>We will develop and implement a multi-agency strategy for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) to support children and young people, families and educational settings.</p> <p>We will make sure that Preparation for Adulthood is central to all Education, Health and Care Plans and individual SEN plans.</p>	<p>I will feel safe, happy and valued in my nursery, school or college.</p> <p>I will go to my local nursery, school or college and my teachers will know how to support me to achieve my goals.</p> <p>I will enjoy my early years, school or college setting and will have good attendance.</p> <p>I will be able to achieve good qualifications to help me get a good job or higher education.</p> <p>I will know where and how to access information on jobs, courses and volunteering opportunities.</p> <p>I will be confident that I have the skills I need to move on to the next phase in my journey to adulthood.</p>

## Family, friends and relationships

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parent and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The difference this will make
<p>Love, care and support.</p> <p>Recognising that families are all different. Being loved and cared for as well as stability, security, trust and safety are important.</p> <p>Stability, security, trust, safety, communication, listening.</p> <p>Making friends is important.</p> <p>Healthy relationships are important e.g. friendships, family, school.</p> <p>Being provided for e.g. food, Wi-Fi, pocket money, shelter.</p> <p>Independence support.</p>	<p>Positive relationships with friends and family.</p> <p>To develop reciprocal relationships/ lasting friendships.</p> <p>Support to develop confidence and self-acceptance.</p> <p>Child/young person's voice is listened to.</p>	<p>We will support schools, education providers and health services to offer education on healthy relationships.</p> <p>We will work as a partnership to support individuals and families to greater empowerment.</p> <p>We will make sure that there is a range of high quality local short break opportunities available for eligible children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>We will hold regular events for Parents and Carers to discuss current SEND issues with local area Leaders. We will find a way to expand this to a children and young person's opportunity.</p> <p>We will listen to, and support, children and young people with SEND to raise their aspirations and achieve their ambitions.</p>	<p>I will know what a healthy relationship is and know how to manage my relationships with different groups of people.</p> <p>I will be able to access places and activities in the community where I can make and maintain friendships.</p> <p>We will be involved in more local decision making.</p> <p>My family/carers will be supported to support me achieve my dreams.</p> <p>We will be more aware of what is, and what isn't, happening in Darlington.</p> <p>I will have a better choice of short breaks available locally.</p>

## Into adulthood towards independence

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parent and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The difference this will make
<p>More support with independence from an earlier age.</p> <p>Help with transitions.</p> <p>More support with taxes, budgeting and finances.</p> <p>More work opportunities for under 18's.</p> <p>Life skills - knowing how to move into adulthood.</p> <p>Being able to do things on your own (not relying on anyone), walking to school yourself, cooking own meals, doing laundry yourself.</p>	<p>Improved preparing for adulthood support from an earlier age learning skills for managing finances, transport/travel training opportunities, support to develop confidence and self-acceptance.</p> <p>Choice and flexibility regarding appropriate, supported and fulfilling education and employment opportunities.</p> <p>Increase/improvements in the local post 16 offer.</p> <p>To be as independent as possible.</p> <p>That young people are appropriately supported to become active and contributing members of society.</p> <p>That young people's voices continue to be heard and listened to.</p> <p>Supported opportunities in respect of independent living skills including safe and appropriately supported housing options.</p>	<p>We will make sure that there are clear pathways into adulthood that have been co-produced.</p> <p>We will make sure good quality information and guidance is available for individuals, and their families, as they move from childhood to adulthood. This will include advice on:- finance; benefits; adult services in the NHS and Darlington BC; getting a job; getting a place to live; and adult rights and independence.</p> <p>We will make sure there are clear pathways into employment and opportunities for all.</p> <p>We will make sure that local housing and independent living opportunities are available for those who meet the relevant eligibility criteria.</p> <p>We will work with local +16 education setting to provide better life skills training.</p>	<p>I will know how to manage money and take care of myself.</p> <p>I feel confident to travel safely wherever I want to go.</p> <p>My views are listened too, I will be able to make decisions about the support I need.</p> <p>I will be able to choose where I live, who I live with and will feel supported to live as independently as possible.</p> <p>I will have better support towards work and if I have a job.</p>

## Darlington - our town, community and environment

What Children and Young People said is important to them	What Parent and Carers said is important to them	What we will do	The difference this will make
<p>Having a variety of activities that they enjoy. The Dolphin Centre, parks and sports are popular and they enjoy activities such as bowling, shopping, gaming and funfairs as well as groups like Scouts, Brownies &amp; Rainbows.</p> <p>They would like to see less crime and a calmer, cleaner environment with more nature spaces, more play areas with green spaces and more events for teenagers.</p> <p>More youth centres and a wider variety of shops/centres e.g. comic shops, gaming centres, youth centres</p> <p>Safer &amp; better public transport with buses that run after 6pm</p> <p>Less potholes</p>	<p>Increased social &amp; leisure opportunities for those with similar interests including for those with the highest need</p> <p>Safe and inclusive meeting spaces/ places to check in within the community.</p> <p>Increased understanding and acceptance from the whole community with inclusive community opportunities for all ages.</p> <p>To feel valued and to have a sense of belonging and involvement in the community.</p>	<p>We will create and develop a new Local Offer for Darlington. Making sure it is the main information and communication point for SEND locally</p> <p>We will work with local clubs and organisations to support children and young people with SEND to be included in activities and opportunities available across Darlington.</p> <p>We will make sure that community safety works on inclusion of children and young people with SEND, including looking a safe spaces in the local community.</p> <p>We will make sure children and young people with SEND are involved in service development and commissioning activity</p> <p>We will work with local transport providers to make sure public transport is more inclusive and welcoming</p>	<p>I will be able to choose from a variety of activities in Darlington that interest me</p> <p>I know that staff in youth clubs, leisure centres and shops will understand me and know how to communicate with me</p> <p>I can make friends at Inclusive Youth events across Darlington</p> <p>I will feel safer when I am out and about in Darlington</p> <p>I will be asked for my views and be able to change and shape services and facilities in Darlington for me</p> <p>I will be able and supported to use public transport in Darlington</p>



## How will we know we have made a difference?

This Strategy will be underpinned by a detailed delivery plan created from the commitments we have made in this strategy.

We will measure impact through performance data gathered across schools, the local authority and the NHS. We will measure this against national and/or local data wherever possible.

The voices of children, young people and parents and carers will be captured through feedback received as part of the quality assurance and review process of both EHC plans and SEN support planning in Schools.

An annual survey and/or engagement sessions in schools and settings will provide the opportunity to gather evidence of impact on the experiences of children and young people.

We will work closely with Darlington Parent Carer Forum, and others, to ensure the voice of parents and carers is heard and understood.

The strategy and plan will be delivered through the SEND Implementation Group and monitored by the SEND Assurance Executive with updates submitted regularly to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

An annual report to the Health & Wellbeing Board will outline our collective achievements as well as any challenges encountered and joint solutions developed which will be publicly available.

## Darlington Local Area Partnership

Through these commitments the Local Area SEND partnership looks to offer opportunities for children and young people with SEND to thrive and become active and valued members of the Darlington community.



**CABINET  
8 OCTOBER 2024**

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## **OFFSET STRATEGY**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

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

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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To gain Cabinet approval for the Council to pursue choices available for offsetting our residual emissions.

### **Summary**

2. Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040. Actions have been drawn up with teams across the Council with the aim of reducing our emissions as far as possible.
3. However, we will not be able to reduce our emissions to zero, without impacting our ability to deliver services to residents and businesses. This means that there will be residual emissions that will need to be offset for the Council to be able to report it as carbon neutral.
4. Our agreed trajectory requires a 40% reduction in carbon emissions every five years. If we continue to reduce emissions in line with our trajectory, by 2040 we will have approximately 1000 tonnes of carbon each year remaining that will need to be offset.
5. There are several mechanisms by which this can be done, and these are set out in the attached Offsetting Strategy (see **Appendix A**). These include technical solutions, using our own land, or purchasing credits elsewhere.
6. We need to determine the best value for money for the Council.
7. Purchased offset credits, in most cases, will not benefit Darlington at all as they are generally used to fund projects abroad.

## Recommendation

8. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the options set out in the “way forward” section detailed in Appendix A.

## Reason

9. The recommendation is supported by the following reason – the offsetting strategy sets out potential options for the way forward.

**Ian Williams**  
**Chief Executive**

## Background Papers

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

Margaret Enstone : Extension 6229

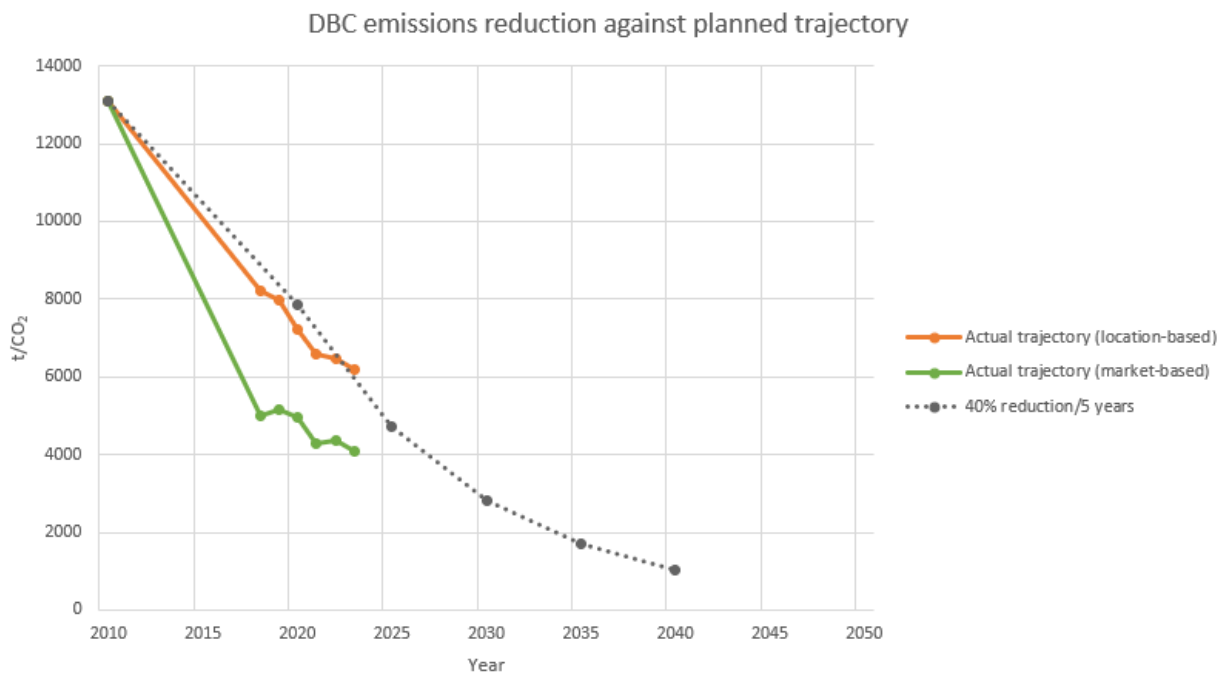
Council Plan	Climate change is one of the key principals in the Council Plan. Depending on which option is chosen to offset our residual emissions, there may be benefits to the economy and other areas of the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. Our offsetting strategy will not negatively impact on any resident.
Tackling Climate Change	This strategy sets out how we propose to deal with our residual emissions so that we can meet our carbon neutral ambitions.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Depending on the choice made by Cabinet, there may be an impact on officer time when developing offsetting projects. There will be budget implications of either project development or purchasing offset credits. For projects we would, as usual, search for grant or private sector funding.
Health and Wellbeing	According to the WHO, climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. There will be no detrimental health impacts resulting from this strategy.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no expected impact on Crime and Disorder in Darlington.
Wards Affected	Depending on the solutions chosen to manage our residual emissions, there may be projects within particular wards.
Groups Affected	There will be no impact on any particular group of people.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council’s policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
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

10. Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council’s carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040. Further aims to increase engagement with residents and businesses were included with the intention of reducing wider borough emissions. A further commitment to monitor the Council’s supply chain emissions was also added.
11. Actions have been drawn up with teams across the Council with the aim of reducing our emissions as far as possible.
12. However, we will not be able to reduce our emissions to zero, without impacting our ability to deliver services to residents and businesses.
13. This means that there will be residual emissions that will need to be offset in order for the Council to be able to report it is carbon neutral.
14. Our agreed trajectory requires a 40% reduction in carbon emissions every five years.



15. We report emissions as recommended by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and show both location-based emissions, which use the average grid emissions that reflect the energy that we are using and market-based emissions, which consider the zero carbon tariff that we have chosen.
16. The emissions we report are made up of the energy use in council buildings (not including council homes as we do not control how residents use the energy); business mileage; fleet emissions, and streetlighting and signs.

17. In past years, we have benefitted from a favourable conversion factor, converting kWh of electricity to carbon emissions. However, 2023/24 saw a greater proportion of natural gas used to generate electricity, so our electricity emissions (using the average grid emissions) are higher than last year.
18. That aside, we are around where we should be at this point.
19. If we continue to reduce emissions in line with our trajectory, by 2040 we will have approximately 1000 tonnes of carbon each year remaining; these are our residual emissions and the amount of carbon that will need to be offset.
20. There are a number of mechanisms by which this can be done, and these are set out in the attached Offsetting Strategy (see Appendix A).
21. Some of these involve using our own land. However, we also need to use our land to meet our statutory biodiversity net gain requirements. We cannot use the same projects for both BNG and carbon offsetting. This is known as “stacking” and is currently not permitted.
22. Therefore, we need to determine the best value for money for the Council. BNG credits are likely to bring in more money for the Council (or save us money in avoided costs if we use our land for BNG for our own developments) than, currently, we would be spending on offset credits if we chose that option instead.
23. However, purchased offset credits, in most cases, will not benefit Darlington at all as they are generally used to fund projects abroad.
24. Our Climate Change Strategy states that we will make every effort to make sure that any offsetting we do benefits Darlington, or at least the region.
25. Cabinet, therefore, needs to determine how it wants to deal with our residual emissions.

### **Financial Implications**

26. The financial implications are not fully known at this stage and will depend on the options for offset the Council wishes to adopt as the need arises, the following paragraphs highlight some of the considerations that will need to be considered. A costed analysis will be undertaken of options before each offset is undertaken
27. If a decision is made to purchase offset credits, we will have to procure a broker to purchase these. Currently, we cannot be exact as costs vary with projects, but we estimate approximately £10-50/tonne, which would equate to £10,000-£50,000 per annum in perpetuity.
28. Other offsetting projects would need to be costed and would need external verification at cost.
29. Potentially, there could be opportunities for us to sell offset credits, which would enable us to create income.

30. Biodiversity Net Gain credits are considerably more expensive; therefore, we need to ensure that land is available for those. As credits cannot be stacked, possibilities for multiple projects on the same land would be required.

### **Legal Implications**

31. All contracts must comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and relevant legislation.

### **HR Implications**

32. The report does not affect the terms and conditions of any staff or change their duties.

### **Estates and Property Advice**

33. Depending on options chosen, this may affect the Council's land holdings or involve a lease, or license or transfer or purchase of land.

### **Procurement Advice**

34. All Procurement activity will be compliant with the Council's contract Procedure Rules and the Public contracts Regulations 2015/The Procurement Act 2023.

### **Carbon Impact and Climate Change**

35. We will reduce our emissions as far as possible. There will, however, be residual emissions that we will need to offset to be able to report that the Council is carbon neutral.

### **Equalities Considerations**

36. Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. Our climate change strategy acknowledges this. The choices the Council makes to offset residual emissions will not impact any group disproportionately.

### **Consultation**

37. We have carried out internal consultation with relevant teams to pull together this strategy.

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## Offsetting Darlington Borough Council's residual emissions

### Introduction

In 2019, Darlington Borough Council (DBC) declared a Climate Emergency and committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Acknowledging the critical importance of this issue, the Council reaffirmed its commitment in 2023 and accelerated the target date for achieving carbon neutrality, bringing it forward to 2040.

Following the release of our Climate Change Strategy in 2020, the Cabinet approved a comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan in 2021, encompassing 198 specific actions. Both the Strategy and Action Plan are being continuously reviewed to align with the new target.

Darlington Borough Council is fully dedicated to reducing its carbon emissions. However, it is important to recognize that achieving net zero solely through reductions in energy consumption is not feasible. All Council activities, even when conducted sustainably, will inevitably generate some level of emissions.

Therefore, there will always be a gap between the emissions reductions achievable through direct actions and our goal of net zero emissions. The approach to bridging this gap is through "**Carbon Offsetting**".

This document outlines the available options for carbon offsetting, examines the implications of each option, and provides recommendations for the way forward.

### Trajectory options

We report our progress annually through two metrics (see Fig 1). The blue line represents the carbon emissions from our activities, reflecting the average emissions of the energy grid each year. The green line illustrates the emissions based on the electricity tariff selected by the Council, which in this case is a zero-emission tariff. As the national grid becomes progressively cleaner, the gap between these two lines will narrow.

Aligned with the new target date, we have adjusted our planned trajectory to achieve a 40% reduction in emissions every 5 years. This trajectory will leave the residual emissions of approximately 1,000 tonnes by 2040, which will need to be offset every year.

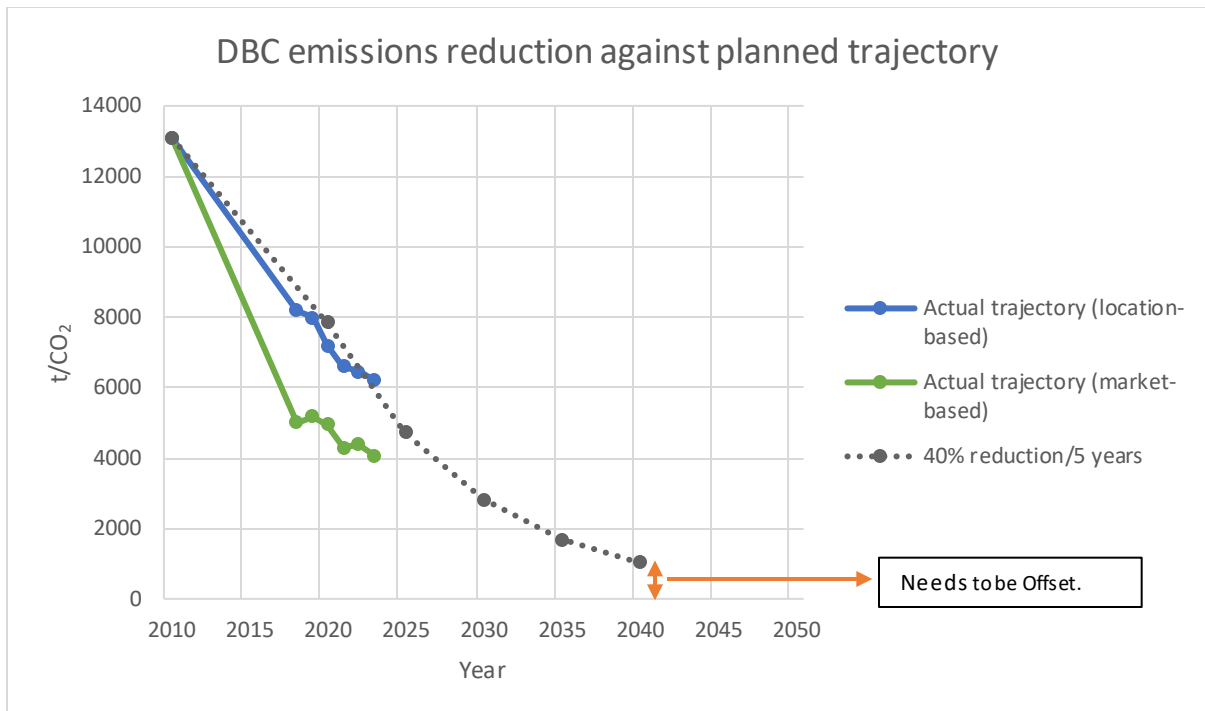


Figure 1: Darlington Borough Council emissions progress.

### What is Carbon Offsetting?

Carbon offsetting is a way of compensating for a carbon footprint. This is done through projects that remove or avoid the equivalent amount of greenhouse gas emissions.



#### Carbon Emissions Avoidance

*Avoidance projects prevent the release of emissions into the atmosphere in the first place.*

Examples include renewable energy projects, avoiding damage to ecosystems, changes to agricultural practices that retain already stored carbon.



#### Carbon Emissions Removal

*Removal projects absorb or pull carbon out of the atmosphere.*

Examples include nature-based solutions like afforestation and reforestation, soil carbon enhancement, ecosystem restoration. Also included in this category are engineered carbon capture and storage.

### Basic Principles for Carbon Offsetting Strategy

In alignment with the basic principles outlined in The Oxford Principles for Net Zero Aligned Carbon Offsetting, a document released by the University of Oxford in September 2020, DBC’s strategy for achieving net-zero will incorporate the following guidelines through carbon offsets:



1. Our primary focus will be on reducing our own emissions, thereby minimizing the necessity for offsets as much as possible.
2. Where offsetting is inevitable, we will ensure the high quality of our carbon offsets by using offsets that are verifiable, accurately accounted for, and adhere to key quality aspects such as single counting, permanence, and additionality, while avoiding the risks of overestimation, leakage, and negative unintended consequences for people and the environment.
3. We will maintain transparency in our overall climate change and carbon offset strategies by disclosing current emissions, accounting practices, net-zero targets, and the types of offsets we use. Additionally, we will regularly update our offsetting strategy as best practices evolve, acknowledging that emissions previously considered hard to reduce may become easier to address due to advancements in technology, decreasing costs, or new incentives.

### Understanding Quality of Carbon Offsets

To ensure our carbon offsetting projects contribute effectively to achieving our net-zero target, it is crucial to first understand what constitutes a high-quality carbon offset. A high-quality carbon offset delivers long-lasting, quantifiable carbon emissions avoidance or carbon emissions removal, supported by robust estimation methodologies, and regular monitoring and reporting to ensure accuracy. Below are the key aspects that determine the quality of carbon offsetting projects, as well as the challenges we must overcome on our journey to net-zero through carbon offsetting:

Quality Aspect	Description	Example
Credibility and Verification	Governance is required to ensure that our offset projects are genuine. This means that the approach and methodology for the design, development, and ongoing management of our offset projects need to be checked and verified by a carbon standard through an independent third-party, to ensure the method is credible.	e.g. Verification of offsets through Carbon standards like <i>Verified Carbon Standard by Verra, Gold Standard, Puro.Earth, the UK Woodland Carbon Code</i> etc. can be used for verification of offsets.
Single counting	A crucial aspect of carbon offset trading is single counting, ensuring that the carbon benefit is claimed only once. Double counting occurs when multiple entities	e.g. A REGO certificate certifies the renewable origin of electricity generated from eligible renewable energy sources. Once

	claim the same carbon credit, undermining the offset project's impact. The aforementioned carbon standards typically maintain their own carbon registries—online systems that track carbon credits issued to project developers and purchased by buyers—ensuring single counting for verified projects. Double counting has been a notable criticism of some past projects.	a REGO certificate is used by an electricity supplier or consumer to claim that their electricity supply is renewable, it is "retired" and cannot be reused or double-counted. This ensures that the renewable electricity attribute associated with the certificate is not claimed by multiple parties.
Permanence	Permanence refers to the durability of the carbon benefit from our offset projects, considering the risk of reversal. It is typically used as a quality measure for projects involving carbon storage, as the risk of benefit reversal is much lower in projects without storage, such as emissions reductions or avoidance projects like renewable energy. This is a particular challenge for international projects in developing countries and a key advantage of local projects, which can be more easily managed and monitored.	e.g. Trees planted in Africa must still be present there ten years later for the offset to be considered permanent.
Additionality	Offsets must be additional. This means that if a project would have proceeded without the funding from offset money, it cannot legitimately claim to have offset carbon. Additionality can be complex and is often a motivating factor for international projects in developing countries, where additionality is more apparent.	e.g. The local government in a developing country does not have the financial resources to build the wind farm, and there are no other investors willing to fund it. Without the money from carbon offset credits, this wind farm would not be built. When an organisation purchases carbon credits from this wind farm project, their funding enables the construction of the wind farm. Because the project would not have occurred without the carbon offset funding, it is considered additional.
Avoiding overestimation	Accurately quantifying the carbon benefit of an offset project is crucial. Rigorous initial estimates during development and continuous measurement and monitoring are essential to verify the accuracy of claims regarding emissions avoided or carbon removed. Transparency about our methodology for impact estimation, as well as the mechanisms for measurement and monitoring, is imperative throughout the project's lifespan. If verified under a carbon standard, these processes would form part of the verification procedure.	e.g. A solar energy project accurately measures the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources using calibrated meters. Independent auditors verify the project's calculations through above-mentioned carbon standards, to avoid over estimation.



Avoiding Leakage	This pertains to projects that appear to reduce carbon emissions on the surface but actually result in higher emissions elsewhere.	e.g. Planting trees on peatlands could lead to the degradation of peat, thereby increasing emissions rather than reducing them.
Avoiding Negative Consequences	Offsets must be implemented in a manner that avoids any unintended negative consequences. It is essential to ensure that offset projects enhance rather than undermine the social and ecological resilience of landscapes.	e.g. Nature-based offsetting initiatives should safeguard against potential adverse effects such as loss of livelihood for farmers and indigenous communities dependent on forest resources, displacement of agricultural land, infringement upon local community land rights, reduced biodiversity in monoculture tree plantations, and negative impacts on ecosystems like grasslands and peatlands where tree planting could disrupt hydrological and nutrient cycles.

### General Categorisation of Carbon Offset Projects

Taking into account the previously mentioned quality aspects of carbon offsets and in accordance with The Oxford Principles for Net Zero Aligned Carbon Offsetting, offset projects can generally be categorized into the following five types:

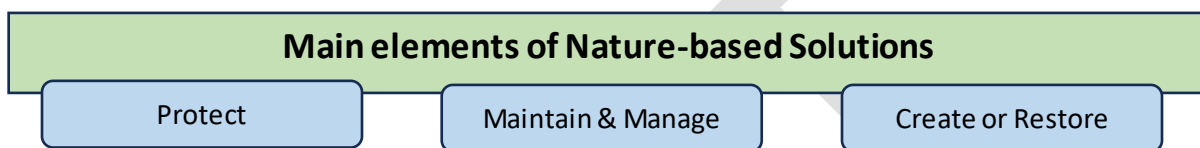
<b>1</b>	<b>Emissions avoidance without storage</b>
<b>Example</b>	Renewable Energy Projects.
<b>2</b>	<b>Emissions avoidance with short-lived storage*</b>
<b>Example</b>	Avoided damage to ecosystems, changes to agricultural practices that retain already stored carbon.
<b>3</b>	<b>Emissions avoidance with long-lived storage*</b>
<b>Example</b>	Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) on fossil fuel power plants and on industrial facilities.
<b>4</b>	<b>Carbon removal with short-lived storage*</b>
<b>Example</b>	Afforestation and Reforestation, Soil Carbon Enhancement, Ecosystem Restoration.
<b>5</b>	<b>Carbon removal with long-lived storage*</b>
<b>Example</b>	Direct Air Carbon Capture and Storage (DACCS), Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS).
*	Short-lived storage means “in the order of decades” & Long-lived storage means “in the order of centuries to millennia”.

Offsetting & Insetting

It is important to understand that offsetting schemes within a local council area are sometimes referred to as 'insetting.' These might include nature-based solutions on their own land or activities within their local authority boundary. Insetting offers a local authority the opportunity to reduce emissions within its own value/supply chain and locality, rather than through international emissions reduction programmes.

Understanding elements of Nature based Solutions:

As a landowner, DBC could implement nature-based carbon absorption and sequestration projects within its Estate. Before proceeding further, it is essential to keep in mind the three main elements of nature-based solutions which will be explained later in the strategy:



Potential Offset Projects – Council Specific

Given our resources, the extent of our operations, and the need for offset measures, we aim to offset our remaining approximately 1000 tonnes of carbon emissions by 2040 using the previously mentioned Category 1, Category 2, and Category 4 projects.

Category 1:

**Emissions Avoidance without storage**

***a- New land-based renewable energy facilities***

An example of this would be wind or solar generation with a direct wire connection to a business. These projects can include a power purchase agreement, offering lower bills for the business and guaranteed income for the Council. Additionally, installing solar PV on council owned buildings where the tenant is responsible for paying the bill, the carbon reduction can be counted as an offset.

***b- Exporting energy to Grid***

If the Council occupies the building or it pays the electricity bill (as is the case with some communal areas) then the Council has already benefited from reduced electricity usage from the grid so this cannot be included as an offset. However, generating renewable energy and exporting it to the grid can be used for offsetting. A potential solar farm project in council owned farmland that can export the electricity into the grid might present a good opportunity for one of council's carbon offset project.

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Category 2:

**Emissions  
Avoidance  
with short-  
lived storage**

***Nature-based solutions - Protecting the existing landscapes***

Darlington has 16 parks, and 10 nature reserves that stretch right across the town. It is crucial to protect these landscapes to prevent deforestation, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss. By avoiding the conversion of ecosystems, we prevent the release of carbon into the atmosphere and maintain their ability to sequester carbon. Protection can also provide significant near-term climate mitigation, as ecosystems rapidly lose carbon when disturbed, such as during forest harvesting or the tilling of grasslands for crops. In many cases, it can take decades to centuries for the carbon to recover. Improved agricultural practices to reverse land degradation and preventing the clearing of forests for new agricultural lands are also vital components of protecting landscapes.

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Category 4:

**Carbon  
Removal with  
short-lived  
storage**

***a- Nature-based solutions – Maintaining & Managing***

Enhancing management practices on farmed land can lower emissions and boost carbon sequestration. This may involve collaborating with tenant farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices. For instance, council-owned land taken out of farming could be used for carbon absorption projects, requiring a plan for soil management and tree planting. Improved fertilizer application to reduce NOx emissions could also be included.

The Council has planted over 20,000 trees in Darlington as part of the Tree and Woodland Strategy 2021-2031. However, these areas need at least 15 years of management before CO2 absorption becomes significant, along with ongoing efforts to maintain adequate levels of absorption and storage for the offset claims.

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***b- Nature-based solutions – Creating or Restoring***

Creating and restoring carbon sinks like wildflower meadows, grasslands, and freshwater habitats is crucial for carbon sequestration. We must seize opportunities to meet both Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and offsetting targets. BNG improves the natural environment through development and land management, but the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) prohibits using the same activity for both BNG and carbon offset credits unless further enhancement is achieved. This practice, known as "stacking," is only allowed when further enhancement beyond the initial carbon sequestration is achieved.

Planting more trees on council-owned farmland can convert it into woodland, aiding CO2 removal. Additionally, such projects can serve as offsite nutrient mitigation to support developments, including Council-owned ones, to achieve nutrient neutrality. This land use change from active agriculture to woodland must be maintained permanently.

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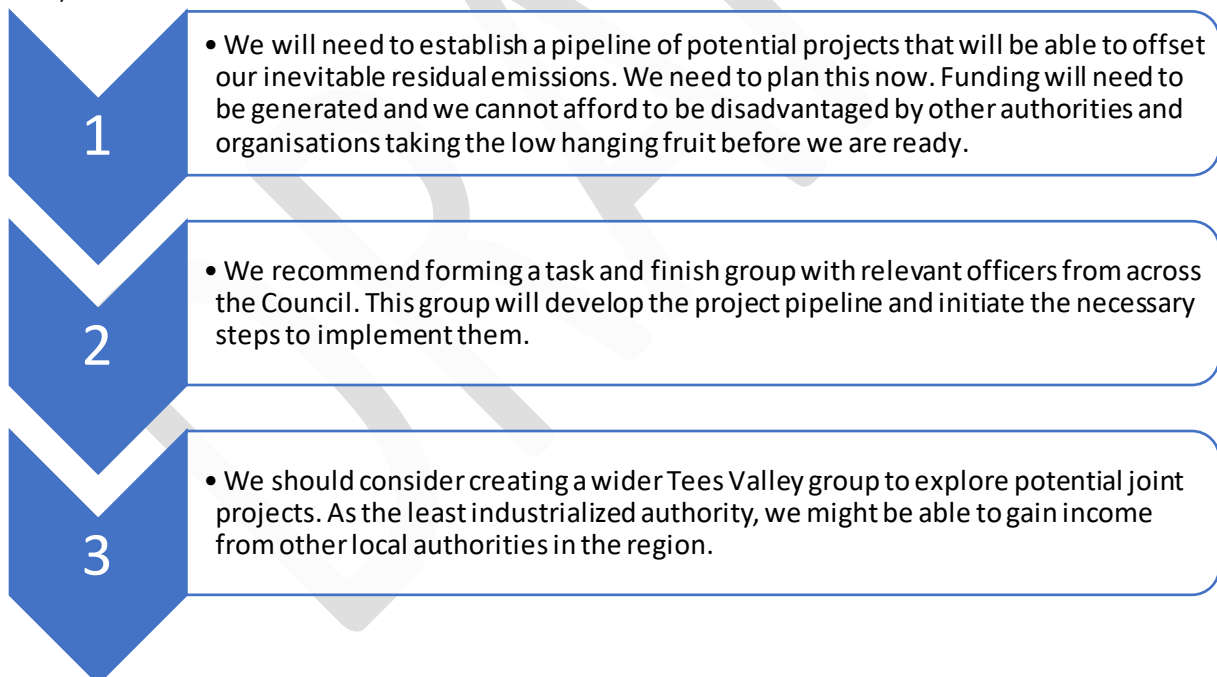
### Purchasing Carbon Credits

Along with the above-mentioned projects, Darlington Borough Council, as part of its carbon offsetting strategy, can also purchase Carbon Credits generated by projects that aim to reduce or remove carbon emissions in other parts of the world, mainly the developing countries. The price of the carbon credits can vary depending upon various factors like the standard under which the credits have been issued and the scale, technology and impact of the project, normally starting from £10 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub>e as a minimum. However, there are challenges associated with it. As most of the projects are happening in other parts of the world, there are risks involved like credibility and legitimacy, risk of reversal, additionality risk and political instability etc.

### Challenges of Voluntary Carbon Market

The voluntary carbon market (VCM) is relatively new, unregulated, and not covered by international treaties, making it vulnerable to abuse due to its lack of legal foundation. Consequently, many offset projects lack credibility or legitimacy, with concerns about greenwashing and double counting being prevalent. Voluntary offset funds carry significant risks. However, in 2020, Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England, entered the field of climate change finance and regulation. He led efforts to establish the Taskforce on Scaling Voluntary Carbon Markets, emphasizing the importance of voluntary markets in combating climate change and the need for transparent standards. This initiative offers hope for a future regulatory framework to legitimize offsetting schemes.

### Way Forward



**CABINET  
8 OCTOBER 2024**

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**SCHEDULE OF TRANSACTIONS**

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

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams  
Chief Executive**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider and to seek approval of the terms negotiated in respect of the Schedule of Transactions as set out below.

<b>TRANSACTION</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF TRANSACTION</b>	<b>MINUTE REF</b>
<u>Leases - In</u> Long lease of North Road Station Museum from Network Rail	Decennial rent review (by reference to Retail Prices Index)	

**Summary**

2. It is necessary for Cabinet to approve terms negotiated by the officers within the Chief Executive and Economic Growth Group on behalf of the Council to enable contractually binding contracts to be completed. The Part III **Appendix 1** details the terms negotiated for consideration and approval.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that the schedule (Appendix 1) be approved, and the transactions completed on the terms and conditions detailed therein.

**Reason**

4. Terms negotiated require approval by Cabinet before binding itself contractually to a transaction.

**Ian Williams  
Chief Executive**

## Background Papers

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

Guy Metcalfe : Extension 6725

Council Plan	Growing the local economy, encouraging new investment in the Borough and maximising employment opportunities.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to inequalities which this report needs to address.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no impacts on climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Any additional costs will be met from within existing budgets.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to Health & Wellbeing which this report needs to address.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime & Disorder.
Wards Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any Group is considered to be minimal.
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.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There are no issues in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

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

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