



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Cabinet Agenda

5.00 pm

Tuesday, 4 March 2025

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 4 February 2025 (Pages 5 - 14)
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 Transport Plan - Delivery Report 2025 –
Report of the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services.
(Pages 15 - 42)
8. Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025/30 –
Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance.
(Pages 43 - 78)
9. Consultation on the Renewal of the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order and

Introduction of a Borough Wide Public Space Protection Order –
Report of the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services.
(Pages 79 - 96)

10. Land at Coniscliffe Road, Darlington – Report of the Chief Executive.
(Pages 97 - 110)
11. Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 –
Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance.
(Pages 111 - 140)
12. Customer Services Strategy 2025/30 –
Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance.
(Pages 141 - 156)
13. Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) –
Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance.
(Pages 157 - 160)
14. Land at Faverdale - Burtree Garden Village - Proposed Infrastructure Development
Agreement (IDA) – Report of the Chief Executive.
(Pages 161 - 170)
15. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which
Cabinet appoints.
16. 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.
17. Questions.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

18. 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, 24 February 2025

**Town Hall
Darlington.**

Membership

Councillors Curry, Garner, Harker, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, 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
MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2025**

CABINET

Tuesday, 4 February 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Harker (Chair), Curry, Garner, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, Roche and Wallis

INVITEES – Councillors Dulston

APOLOGIES – Councillors K Nicholson and Snedker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Bartch and Mrs Culley

C98 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

C99 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.

C100 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 7 JANUARY 2025.

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 7 January 2025.

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

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C101 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

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

C102 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

C103 KEY DECISIONS:-

(1) SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS 2026/27

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of People requesting that consideration be given to the Local Authority's admission arrangements for the 2026/27 academic year for the

two maintained schools in the Borough.

The submitted report stated that, in line with the School Admissions Code 2021, an Admission Authority was required to annually determine the admission arrangements used to allocate places for schools for which it was the admission authority by 28 February in the determination year; outlined the legal implications; and the consultation process.

RESOLVED – That the admission arrangements, as appended to the submitted report, for the two remaining maintained primary schools in Darlington for entry in the 2026/27 academic year, and for the administration of in-year applications thereafter, be approved.

REASON - All admission authorities are under a statutory duty to determine admission arrangements for schools for which it is the admission authority every academic year.

(2) UPDATED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS) 2025/28

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to the revised timetable for commencing a review of the existing Local Plan rather than look to produce a separate Climate Change Development Plan Document (DPD) and to consult on an updated Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) alongside this process.

The submitted report stated that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) made in December 2024, required all local planning authorities to produce an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) by no later than 6 March 2025. The LDS sets out the planning policy documents that the Council would prepare over the next three years; when the key stages or preparation would be; the scope of each document; and the resources available for, and risks to, their preparation.

It was reported that an up-to-date Local Plan was essential to meet the development needs of the Borough and to enable the Council to shape and maintain control of development; it was a framework for growth; it set out how Darlington would grow, adapt and change and importantly how this would be achieved and managed; provided the Council with the required spatial guidance and direction to contribute to and enable the structured development of the Borough in support of both the Council's drive for a growing economy, building stronger communities and creating opportunities for all; stated the the current Plan had been adopted in February 2022 covering the period 2016 to 2036; and highlighted the benefits of an early review.

RESOLVED - That the Local Development Scheme (2025-2028), as appended to the submitted report, be approved to take immediate effect.

REASON - The Council is required to have an up-to-date Local Development Scheme (Planning & Compulsory Act 2004, as amended by Section 111, Localism Act 2011).

C104 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 TO 2028/29

Pursuant to Minute C79/Dec/24, the Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio

introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance requesting that consideration be given to the proposals for the revenue budget, capital programme, rent levels and service charges for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2025/26, in the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to 2028/29 and the 30-year Business Plan.

The submitted report stated that the Council was the largest provider of social housing in the Borough, providing 5,260 homes to local residents; the homes were of a high standard of accommodation that met the Decent Homes Standard; as a result of the high quality of the homes and the services provided they were in high demand; and to meet that demand the Council had an ambitious programme to build new homes in Darlington, funded through capital receipts from the right to buy sales, grant funding and estimated borrowing of £13.8m. The proposed revenue budget expenditure of £30.186m included £6.693m to fund responsive repairs and maintenance and £15.947m contribution to the capital programme. The proposed capital programme of £30.092m included funding for work to current properties and £16.925m to complete capital schemes approved in previous years and to deliver the new build Council housing programme and property acquisitions.

It was reported that the key decision to be made regarding the HRA each year was the balance between setting rent and service charge levels that were affordable to the Council's tenants whilst ensuring there was sufficient resources to invest in housing stock, tackle climate change, meet Decent Home Standards and Fire Safety Regulations and maintain services. Local Authorities had the discretion to increase rents by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) plus one per cent and as the CPI for September 2023 was 1.7 per cent Members could decide to increase rents by up to 2.7 per cent.

RESOLVED - That it be recommended to the special meeting of Council scheduled to be held on Thursday 20 February 2025 that :-

- (a) an average weekly rent increase of 2.7 per cent for 2025/26 be implemented, giving an average social rent of £86.15 and affordable rent of £97.55;
- (b) garage rents and service charges be increased, as shown in Table 3 of the submitted report;
- (c) the revenue budget, as attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved;
- (d) the Housing Business Plan, as attached at Appendix 2 of the submitted report, be agreed; and
- (e) the capital programme, as attached at Appendix 3 of the submitted report, be approved.

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

C105 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

Pursuant to Minute C80/Dec/24, the Leader introduced the report of the Chief Officers

Executive (previously circulated) proposing a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 (also previously circulated) including setting a budget and council tax increase for 2025/26, to Council at its meeting scheduled for Thursday 20 February 2025, for approval.

The submitted report stated that the Council was facing unparalleled financial challenges stemming from reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 where the Council's budget was reduced by £46m in real terms; the aftermath of Covid; the unstable economic climate; increased cost of living; high inflation; income deprivation and rising poverty; and increased demand for services in particular adult and children's social care and homeless, with the numbers of people in temporary accommodation rising significantly over the last couple of years.

It was reported that, in order to protect services as far as possible, all budgets had been reviewed and challenged, with savings of £3.651m being achieved in 2025/26; the Council could deliver a 2025/26 budget which would allow net revenue investment in Darlington and its residents of £137m and capital investment of £97m; a balanced position could be delivered in 2027/28 utilising reserves; there would be a budget deficit of £5.2m in 2028/29, if no additional funding was forthcoming; and that the Government had committed to a fundamental reform of the local government funding system.

The detailed revenue estimates 2024/25; budget pressures and savings; fees and charges proposals 2025/26; assumptions used to prepare estimates; projected Revenue Outturn 2024/25; Capital MTFP 2025/26 to 2028/29; and the minutes from the meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny held on 20 January 2025, were all appended to the submitted report.

Particular reference was made at the meeting to how the savings had been achieved; the financial challenges and sustainability gap facing the Council; how the Council was helping its residents with the cost of living; and the removal of the Stronger Community Fund. The Leder, Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio, Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio and the Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio responded thereon.

RESOLVED – (a) That the responses and comments received to the consultation, as detailed in the submitted report, be noted.

(b) That it be recommended to the special meeting of Council scheduled to be held on Thursday 20 February 2025, that the Revenue Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Capital Programme, as set out in Appendices 6 and 7 respectively of the submitted report, be approved, including:-

- (i) a Council Tax increase of 2.99 per cent plus a two per cent Adult Social Care Precept to fund social care for 2025/26;
- (ii) the Schedule of Charges, as set out in Appendix 3, of the submitted report; and
- (iii) the efficiency savings, transformation and services reviewed, as proposed in the

submitted report.

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

(b) To enable the Council to continue to plan services and finances over the medium term.

(c) To ensure decisions can be made in a timely manner.

(d) To reduce the pressures on the MTFP in the medium term.

(e) To ensure investment in the Council's assets is maintained.

C106 CALENDAR OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Leader introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance requesting that consideration be given to the Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year (also previously circulated).

RESOLVED – (a) That the Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings 2025/26, as appended to the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the proposed dates for the meetings of Council be referred to the Annual Council meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday 22 May 2025, for approval.

(c) That the dates of the first meeting of each of the Committees, be agreed, and the proposed dates for future meetings, as detailed in the calendar as appended to the submitted report, be considered by each Committee at their first meeting in the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

REASON – (a) To ensure that the calendar of meetings is approved to assist with forward planning.

(b) To enable the meetings of Council to be approved.

(c) To enable each individual Committee to consider the dates for their respective meetings.

C107 DARLINGTON CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance requesting that consideration be given to the Council's Capital Strategy 2025/26 (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities 2024 required every Council to publish a Capital Strategy; it should be reviewed on an annual basis; and that in accordance with the regulations the Council published its first strategy in 2019/20.

RESOLVED – That the Capital Strategy for 2025/26, as appended to the submitted report, be endorsed, and forwarded to Council, for approval.

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

(b) To ensure the Council adopts the Prudential Code for Capital Finance 2024.

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

C108 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 - QUARTER 3

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance providing a 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 third revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2024/25 and that the latest projections showed an overall decline of £0.885m on the 2024/28 Medium Term Financial Plan, which was due to £1.982m of departmental pressures and a decline in corporate resources of £0.224m, offset by £1.321m of additional balances following the 2023/24 outturn. The change in the forecast year end budget position had improved by £0.479m between Quarter 2 and Quarter 3, however, a small number of service areas continued to have significant budget pressures that had increased during the year.

Particular reference was made at the meeting to the overspend in the Children's Services budget. The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio responded thereon.

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

(b) That the carry forward of resources, as detailed in paragraphs 14, be noted and approved.

(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.

C109 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - QUARTER 3 2024/25

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services and the Executive Director of Resources and Governance 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 that programme.

The submitted report stated that the projected outturn of the current Capital Programme was £330.800m against an approved programme of £330.901m; 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) 2024/25 to 2027/28; the current project position statement showed that there were 26 live projects currently being managed by the Council, with an overall projected outturn value of £157.563m, 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 sourced 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 in resources, as detailed in paragraph 22 of the submitted report, be noted.

(d) That the adjustments to resources, as detailed in paragraph 24 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.

C110 PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2025/26

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance (previously circulated) requesting consideration be given to reviewing the Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2025/26 to 2027/28 relating to capital expenditure and Treasury Management activity; a policy statement relating to the Minimum Revenue Provision; and the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy for 2025/26.

The submitted report outlined the Council's Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 to 2027/28; set out the expected treasury operations for that period; and reported that the expenditure plans, Treasury Management and Prudential Borrowing activities indicated that they were within the statutory framework and consistent with the relevant codes of practice, were prudent, affordable and sustainable and were an integral part of the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans.

RESOLVED - That it be recommended to the special meeting of Council scheduled to be held

on Thursday 20 February 2025 that:-

(a) the Prudential Indicators and limits for 2025/26 to 2076/28, as summarised in Tables 1 and 2 of the submitted report, be approved;

(b) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement, as detailed in paragraphs 39 to 48 of the submitted report, be approved;

(c) the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 to 2027/28, as summarised in paragraphs 52 to 82 of the submitted report, be approved; and

(d) the Annual Investment Strategy 2025/26, as contained in paragraphs 83 to 114 of the submitted report, be approved.

REASONS - (a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance on investments.

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

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

C111 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

C112 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.

C113 (REPORT CALLED-IN) KEY DECISION - DARLINGTON INDOOR MARKET

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive requesting that consideration be given to the making of revisions to the terms of the loan agreement between this Council and Market Asset Management (MAM) Darlington.

The submitted stated that in June 2017 the Council agreed to the appointment of MAM Darlington to manage both the Indoor Market and the external markets within Darlington; that significant investment to address the fabric of the indoor market building was required; outlined the loan agreement with MAM; the risks; and the financial, legal and HR implications of the proposal.

Discussion ensued on the establishment of the Board and its membership.

RESOLVED – (a) That the renegotiation of the loan agreement with Market Asset Management Darlington, as detailed in the submitted report, be agreed.

(b) That the Executive Director Resources and Governance be authorised to finalise the loan agreement.

(c) That a local Board be established, chaired by the lead member, to oversee the direction of the market and to take back a degree of control in the future of the market.

REASONS – (a) To enable the repayment of the loan.

(b) The Indoor Market plays a pivotal role in the town centre economy. Further disruption and a reduction in confidence would have a negative impact upon the current operation of the market.

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2025**

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CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

DARLINGTON TRANSPORT PLAN – DELIVERY REPORT 2025

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Libby McCollom,
Local Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley,
Executive Director of Environment, Highways & Community Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides Members with an annual update on delivery of the Darlington Transport Plan. It outlines delivery, performance and public satisfaction in 2024/25 and seeks approval for the 2025/26 programme, including the release of funding.

Summary

2. In 2022/23 the Darlington Transport Strategy for the borough, a Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy were adopted by Council, and work continues in implementing the associated action plans. A progress report on the schemes delivered in 2024/25 and the proposed programme of schemes for 2025/26 is detailed in **Appendix A**, with indicative funding allocations for schemes at **Appendix C**. In the Autumn Budget 2024 additional highways maintenance funding was announced for 2025/26 with £4.873M allocated to the Tees Valley, 25% is being held back currently based on unknown criteria that will follow.
3. The Tees Valley region has secured significant funding from Government, including the £310M City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) programme and £6.851M Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The Tees Valley region has notionally been allocated funding of £978M for the second round of the CRSTS which covers the period 2027/28 to 2031/32. There has been good progress on the development and delivery of the transport capital programme including working in partnership with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to deliver elements of the strategic transport plan. An update on schemes delivered in partnership with TVCA is included as **Appendix B**.
4. The Council continues to monitor transport patterns, highway condition, road safety and public satisfaction to inform investment decisions. Details of the Performance Indicators and public satisfaction are included at **Appendix D**.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that:

- (a) Members note the progress in delivery of the Darlington Transport Plan and agree to release £3,067,984 as outlined in Appendix C to deliver the 2025/26 proposed projects identified in Appendix A.
- (b) Members delegate authority to the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Local Services, to agree and release funding for a programme of additional highway maintenance schemes funded from the new allocation of highway maintenance funding that has yet to be confirmed.
- (c) Members delegate authority to the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Local Services, to explore opportunities to reprofile highway maintenance funding from future years to make most efficient use of resources and vary the delivery programme in year if required.
- (d) Members delegate authority to the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to agree bidding if required on external funding opportunities, and release funding from successful bids or Government grants. This includes:
 - (i) The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).
 - (ii) Schemes as detailed in the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Delivery Plan.
 - (iii) Active Travel Fund (ATF) – active travel capital.
 - (iv) Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding.
 - (v) Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant (TSOG).
 - (vi) Any other relevant funding which is made available in 25/26.
- (e) Members note the performance data relating to transport services, detailed in Appendix D.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To continue to deliver Darlington's Transport Strategy as set out in the Darlington Transport Plan, Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy 2022 - 2030, which support the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan 2016 – 2030 (STP).
- (b) To maximise the opportunities to maintain highways assets for the benefit of all road

users.

- (c) To assist TVCA in the delivery of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, and Bus Service Improvement Plan programmes and associated action plans, in line with Government guidance.

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services

Background Papers

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

Joanne Roberts: Extension 3187

Council Plan	The Transport Programme supports delivery of the outcomes identified in the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	<p>An Equalities and Disability Impact Assessment was undertaken in the preparation of the Darlington Transport Plan.</p> <p>The Plan seeks to achieve a fairer society by enabling people to access jobs, education, training, health, food and green spaces; and to achieve a better quality of life for all by improving the journey experience and minimising the negative impacts of transport such as noise, air pollution and accidents on the natural environment, heritage, landscape and people.</p> <p>As highway schemes have an impact on the built environment, disability groups are consulted to ensure the needs of disabled people are considered.</p>
Tackling Climate Change	<p>Carbon emissions and their impact have been considered in the preparation of the Darlington Transport Plan and its implementation.</p> <p>The transport programme seeks to reduce carbon emissions from transport through a shift towards electric and hydrogen vehicles from petrol and diesel. The programme also seeks to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport and mass public transport, as well as seeking ways to reduce the need to travel or travel shorter distances.</p> <p>Specific consideration of Carbon impact and Climate change are reflected in highway design, construction and asset management all seek to minimise the impact of transport through flood risk management, Sustainable Urban Drainage, recycling highway materials, low energy lighting (LED), low energy processes and electric fleet vehicles.</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	The Darlington Transport Plan seeks to implement schemes that demonstrate value for money and/or deliver the greatest outcomes at a local level.

	<p>Schemes are identified and prioritised to meet the objectives in the Transport Strategy. Maintaining the highway network will reduce traffic disruption in the longer term and improve network management. Vehicle delay has a negative impact on the economy, including logistics and freight.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>Health and wellbeing implications have been considered in the preparation of the Darlington Transport Plan and its implementation.</p> <p>The transport strategy seeks to achieve better health and longer life expectancy for everyone by reducing the risk of death, injury or illness from transport and by providing travel options to keep people active and independent. The development and delivery of specific transport schemes will support these outcomes.</p>
S17 Crime and Disorder	<p>Crime and disorder implications were considered in the preparation of the Darlington Transport Plan and will be considered in the development and delivery of specific transport schemes or measures.</p>
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	There are no proposals that impact on specific groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	<p>This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework. The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan was adopted by TVCA Cabinet on 31/01/2020 as the Local Transport Plan for the Tees Valley including the constituent local authorities.</p> <p>The Darlington Transport Plan sets out local priorities and provides an overarching policy framework for other subsidiary documents such as the Asset Management Plan and Rights of Way Improvement Plan.</p>
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 direct impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

National Context

7. Government published figures show domestic transport providing the largest share of the UK's carbon emissions (29%), the DfT is focusing on the switch to zero emission cars/vans, which will be the single biggest carbon saving measure in the UK's journey to Net Zero. In December 2023, Government announced the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which requires 80% of new cars and 70% of new vans sold in the UK to be zero emission by 2035.
8. Charging options for drivers continue to grow at pace, with the most recent statistics on zap map as of September 2024 show 70,434 public charge points have been installed across the country¹, a 41% increase compared to September 2023 when 49,882 public charge points were available. The Government's aim being 300,000 by 2030.
9. In addition, the Government is providing Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding, which supports combined authorities and local authorities to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking.
10. Nationally, people's travel behaviour and choices have changed, because of the pandemic, a period of rising cost of living, and by attitudes to climate change and sustainable travel. DfT commissioned research into public attitudes, travel needs and behaviours², which was published in April 2023. Respondents were asked what would encourage them to use public transport more, with financial incentives commonly mentioned, along with more frequent and punctual services. A third of people found it difficult to choose the most suitable ticket when travelling by public transport. The introduction of the £2 single fare cap in January 2023, will have helped alleviate this issue, however this cap has now been raised to £3 which does bring uncertainty to the passenger about what is the best available fare. This cap is in place until the end of 2025 with the Government confirming they are looking at reform.
11. New government guidance on Local Transport Plans (LTPs) has been delayed, however it is anticipated to have an emphasis on decarbonisation. It is expected that the guidance will include a requirement for an EV charging strategy to be published as a detailed supporting document to the LTP itself and for the incorporation of decarbonisation into the planning process.
12. In October 2023, the previous Government launched Network North, a £36bn plan to improve the country's transport, with £19.8bn of funds redirected to the North from the

¹ <https://www.zap-map.com/news/uk-hits-70000-public-electric-vehicle-charge-points-milestone#:~:text=As%20of%20September%202024%2C%20there,when%2049%2C882%20devices%20were%20recorded.>

² [Our changing travel – how people's travel choices are changing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

cancellation of the northern leg of HS2. This has been announced as CRSTS2 with TVCA's indicative allocation £978M for 2027/28 to 2031/32. This was announced by the previous Government and to date this has not been amended by the current Government.

13. On local 'A' roads for the year ending December 2023³, the national average delay to vehicle traffic is 47.9 seconds per vehicle per mile compared to free flow. This is up from 45.5 seconds on the previous calendar year.

Regional and Local Context

14. TVCA is the Local Transport Authority (LTA) for the Tees Valley. TVCA set the Strategic Transport Plan for the region for the period 2019 - 2029 with the vision to "provide a high quality, quick, affordable, reliable, low carbon and safe transport network for people and freight to move within, to and from Tees Valley".
15. In November 2022, the Council adopted the Darlington Transport Plan, Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy 2022 - 2030, following a consultation process. The Darlington Transport Plan sets out how the priorities set out in the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan (STP) will be delivered in Darlington and provides the strategic framework to support growth, through improved transport infrastructure and the promotion of sustainable and active transport initiatives.
16. TVCA currently provide the Tees Flex on-demand bus service. The current service is funded until the end of March 2025. It is currently being evaluated and future operation will be subject to the decision on what the 2025/26 BSIP funding allocation will prioritise. This decision is awaited.
17. Darlington has a crucial role to play at a local level in enabling the transition to EVs, in proactively supporting the delivery of the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure (EVCI) and helping to ensure that the transition is integrated into wider local transport and community needs. A project for the roll out of charging points in Council owned car parks is complete, with 58 charge points installed. The Tees Valley wide strategy for on street charging is being led by TVCA and a localised Darlington strategy has been developed.
18. The Council receives additional specific funding allocations to deliver specific schemes within the Borough that contribute toward our transport strategies and the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan. This involves working in partnership with TVCA on developing transport initiatives that benefit Darlington residents. We will continue to work in partnership on TVCA funded projects and programmes, the details are in Appendix B.
19. Major development work at Darlington Station is continuing. The project is being delivered by TVCA in partnership with Network Rail, LNER and Darlington Borough Council with work due to be completed by late 2025.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/travel-time-measures-for-the-strategic-road-network-and-local-a-roads-january-to-december-2023/travel-time-measures-for-local-a-roads-january-to-december-2023-report#:~:text=The%20average%20delay%20on%20local,from%2048.2%20spvpm%20in%202019.>

20. TVCA have allocated £250m from the CRSTS2 programme to deliver the Darlington Northern Link Road to provide a new strategic link, better connecting the A66 to the A1(M) to the north of Darlington enabling growth along the A66 corridor. A review of route option assessments is underway by TVCA, the results of which will help inform proposals.

Progress on Delivery in 2024/25

21. Over the last 12 months there has been significant capital and revenue investment in transport in Darlington. Details of schemes and programmes that have been delivered are outlined in Appendix A.









































Proposed Delivery in 2025/26




22. The Council receives a specific Local Highway Authority Funding allocation from TVCA each year through CRSTS (formerly Local Transport Plan funding) to deliver local improvement schemes and highway maintenance priorities. The Integrated Transport Block programme (Darlington Transport Plan delivery) will be delivered to manage and improve the highway network. Appendix A outlines the schemes proposed to be developed and/or delivered during 2025/26 with the funding plan for the programme outlined at Appendix C. This is developed and aligned to the objectives of the Darlington Transport Plan, which are to:

- (a) Reduce transport's impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing;
- (b) Improve safety for all road users;
- (c) Connect people to job and training opportunities and link communities;
- (d) Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre and;
- (e) Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.

Performance and Public Satisfaction

23. During the year, monitoring information is provided by bus operators that is commercially sensitive to demonstrate how well the transport system is operating. In addition to this, each year Darlington takes part in the National Highways and Transport Network Public Satisfaction Survey. This survey collects public perspectives on, and satisfaction with, highway and transport services in Local Authority areas. The summary is included in Appendix D.
24. Overall, Darlington performs well when compared to other participating local authorities, within the Tees Valley (five local authorities), North East (twelve local authorities) and the National Average. The key indicators show improvement in 2024 over 2023 in most areas, as can be seen in the overall summary below. The overall key indicators are shown at Appendix D.

Theme	Actual Scores		Average Scores			Rank	
	2024	2023	TVCA	North East	National Average	TVCA Rank	NE Rank
 Overall	48	47 	48 	47 	46 	2	3
 Public Transport	48	44 	50 	50 	51 	3	5
 Walking/Cycling	53	52 	50 	49 	50 	1	1
 Tackling Congestion	44	44 	45 	44 	42 	3	5
 Road Safety	55	54 	53 	52 	50 	1	1
 Highway Maintenance	44	45 	43 	42 	41 	2	2
 Accessibility	72	72 	68 	67 	67 	1	1
 Communications	49	48 	47 	46 	46 	1	1

Key  2024 score greater than  2024 score less than  2024 score equal to

25. It should be noted that, in terms of satisfaction with local bus services, the vast majority of which are provided by bus operators on a commercial basis, there has been a small improvement in satisfaction from 44% in 2023, to 48% in 2024. This is below the national average of 51% and may be because a number of Arriva services were withdrawn in 2023. Most of these services were replaced by TVCA contract and public confidence in the reliability of services could be returning.
26. In terms of lowest scoring areas, public perception of the condition of the highway, is shown to have declined by 1% this year compared to last year. We have prioritised maintaining the highway for a number of years and will continue to do so including allocating additional funding announced last Autumn when criteria is published.

Financial Implications

27. In April 2022, the Secretary of State for Transport confirmed that TVCA was to receive the full allocation of £310M of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding to invest in local transport networks
28. TVCA, as LTA, are responsible for allocating regional funding for transport programmes and projects to Tees Valley Authorities. Grant Funding Agreements between TVCA and DBC will be agreed through Asset Management Group with sign off by our S151 Officer.
29. CRSTS funding enables Local Highways Authorities to carry out their responsibilities under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the highway network. This multi-year settlement has introduced an ability for funding to be reprofiled within the CRSTS period to suit maintenance needs of the individual Highway Authorities, which is currently being explored.
30. TVCA has allocated £3.068M to Darlington Borough Council in 2025/26 from CRSTS funding for local funding, formerly Local Transport Plan funding. The funding plan for proposed schemes is outline at Appendix C.

Legal Implications

31. The statutory duty for the Local Transport Plan moved to TVCA in 2016, as part of the devolution deal. TVCA produced a Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan to fulfil this duty, which was approved by TVCA Cabinet on 31 January 2020.
32. The five constituent local authorities were asked to produce a Local Implementation Plan (Darlington Transport Plan). This demonstrates how Darlington Council, as the highway authority, will support the delivery of the Strategic Transport Plan at a local level and sets out local priorities, policies and actions. Adopted as part of the Council's policy framework in November 2022, the Transport Plan draws together other local policies on parking, asset management, traffic management, Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and links to other corporate plans, including the Council Plan.

Consultation

33. No consultation has been undertaken for this report. However, the programmes proposed in the report are aligned with the Darlington Transport Plan that were subject to public consultation. Public consultation and stakeholder engagement is undertaken on an individual basis at appropriate stages of scheme and strategy development.

Outcome of Consultation

34. Responses to individual consultations are used to propose final scheme designs.
35. The Darlington Transport Plan Delivery Plan was presented at the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee on 27 February 2025.

Delivery of Darlington Transport Capital Programme schemes in 2024/25 and proposed delivery in 2025/26

Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26																																		
Highways Maintenance - funding to maintain the highway network including structures and street lighting (CRSTS Local Highway Authority Funding)																																					
Schemes	Manage	<p>A programme of highway maintenance schemes were delivered, as below:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="651 564 1375 1394"> <tr> <td rowspan="4" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">A Roads</td> <td>A68</td> <td>West Auckland Road</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A67</td> <td>Coniscliffe Road (Phase 4)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A67</td> <td>Piercebridge</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Various</td> <td>Retexturing</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">B Roads</td> <td>B6280</td> <td>Yarm Road</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">C Roads</td> <td>C38a</td> <td>Neasham Road (Phase 3)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3;"></td> </tr> </table>	A Roads	A68	West Auckland Road	A67	Coniscliffe Road (Phase 4)	A67	Piercebridge	Various	Retexturing	B Roads	B6280	Yarm Road			C Roads	C38a	Neasham Road (Phase 3)			<p>The following maintenance schemes have been identified as the current priority based on the condition data surveys. This is a rolling programme and subject to tender returns:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1438 639 2188 1385"> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">A Roads</td> <td>A67</td> <td>Sadberge Road roundabout</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A1150</td> <td>Stockton Rd/Whinfield Rd Roundabout</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">B Roads</td> <td>B6280</td> <td>Carmel Road North</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2" style="background-color: #d9ead3; text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">C Roads</td> <td>C38</td> <td>Neasham Road, Neasham</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C88</td> <td>Whessoe Road</td> </tr> </table>	A Roads	A67	Sadberge Road roundabout	A1150	Stockton Rd/Whinfield Rd Roundabout	B Roads	B6280	Carmel Road North			C Roads	C38	Neasham Road, Neasham	C88	Whessoe Road
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	C88	Whessoe Road																																			

Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25		Proposed delivery 2025/26		
		Unclassified Roads	Unc	Swaledale Road (Phase 2) Barmpton Lane West Auckland Road West Back Lane (Q4)	Unclassified Roads	Unc Allington Way Barnes Road (Phase 3) Crown Street/East Street/Quebec Street Darynton Close Green Tree Yard Mary Court Welbeck Avenue
Footways			Footways	Bates Avenue		
	<p>In addition, micro asphalt and patching programmes were carried out across the borough, which continues the investment in unclassified roads, which are predominantly residential streets. Street Lighting, Bridges, Structures and other highway assets were also maintained.</p>			<p>In addition, the micro asphalt and patching programmes will include roads across the borough. Street Lighting, Bridges, Structures and other highway assets will also be maintained.</p>		

Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26	
Integrated Transport Block - funding to manage and improve the highway network (CRSTS Local Highway Authority Funding)				
Network Management				
Traffic monitoring	Improve	Traffic and active travel related monitoring surveys and cordon counts are carried out across Darlington.		
Traffic counter replacement Programme		Traffic counter sites across Darlington are maintained and replaced when necessary and operate via solar power where possible.		
Active and sustainable transport				
Improvements to bus passenger and cycling facilities (town centre)	Improve	Bus stop audits have continued across the Borough to ensure repair and replacement is undertaken where necessary.	TVCA have procured an advertising shelter contract that will be used when considering future suitable sites for bus shelters with advertising.	
Dropped kerbs		A programme of dropped kerbs has been carried out throughout the year, as below:	Requests for dropped kerbs will be assessed against the available budget.	
		Location		Description of Work
		West Auckland Rd/Smithy Lane		3 no. drop crossings
		Waterside		1 no. drop kerb
		Sutton Close		1 no. dropped crossing
		Henry St		6 no. dropped crossings
		Judith St		2 no. dropped crossings
		Elton Parade		4 no. dropped crossings and 2 no. dropped kerbs
		Widdowfield St		4 no. dropped crossings
Brunswick St	3 no. dropped kerbs			

Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26
Public Rights of Way (PROW)		The PROW network was improved and maintained as needed with sign replacement/posts/stiles/duck boards and a new footbridge installation in Summerhouses.	The PROW network will be improved and maintained including the replacement of signs/posts/stiles/duck boards. In addition it is proposed to remove access control points to ensure the PROW network is accessible as far as possible and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is to be updated.
Walking and cycling routes		<p><u>Stockton & Darlington Railway – Walking & Cycling Route</u> As part of the Heritage Action Zone and the culture strategy for rail heritage there is an ambition to develop a 26-mile walking and cycling route as near to the original alignment of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) as possible. Whilst it is recognised that this is a challenge in terms of deliverability, the aim is to get as much of it in place as possible by September 2025, to celebrate the bicentenary of the railway. The following two sections (ID21 & ID2) have been identified as a priority for implementation:</p> <p><u>Feasibility - ID21 – S&DR Mill Lane roundabout to Airport roundabout A67</u> The scheme continues to be developed so that a preferred achievable scheme can be delivered.</p> <p><u>Feasibility - ID2 – S&DR Connection to Durham boundary at Coatham Mundeville</u> The preferred route between the boundary with Durham County Council (DCC) has been identified and is likely to follow a parallel route to the A1 and tie into existing routes.</p>	<p><u>Delivery - ID21 – S&DR Mill Lane roundabout to Airport Roundabout A67</u> The scheme will be costed and constructed if within budget.</p> <p><u>Delivery - ID2 – S&DR Connection to Durham boundary at Coatham Mundeville</u> The scheme will be fully designed, costed and constructed if within budget.</p> <p><u>Delivery - Redmire Close Cycle Path</u> Following completion of design work, the scheme will be costed, and if within budget will move to construction.</p>



Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26
Car Club		<p>The need for a car club in the Town Centre was identified as part of the Parking Strategy and the Town Centre Transport Plan. It is envisaged that it will support the Town Centre Strategy particularly in terms of encouraging more people to live in the Town Centre.</p> <p>Feasibility work is ongoing and will be presented to the Cabinet Member for next steps decision.</p>	<p>If a successful scheme is agreed, funding will be prioritised in a future financial year.</p>
A68 Corridor Improvements (Cockerton Roundabouts)		<p>Consultation on Cockerton Roundabout improvements commenced in January 2022. As a result of consultation, a number of changes were made to the scheme, including provision of a new crossing pedestrian crossing point outside Cockerton Library, verge parking on West Auckland Road and the size of the roundabout islands to maintain as much green space as possible and working with local residents and businesses to inform how this will look in the future.</p> <p>A well-developed scheme has been subject to consultation with Active Travel England (ATE) on the active travel elements, that has been an evolving process.</p> <p>The scheme is subject to a Business Case that is being developed by TVCA to justify the CRSTS funded element that will be subject of a Grant Funding Agreement</p> <p>267 Carmel Road North is now unoccupied, and demolition will be undertaken following the appropriate consents being received.</p>	<p>The schemes have been developed and have been subject to the review process of Active Travel England. Work continues to get all aspects to detailed design, fully costed and suitable for delivery.</p>

Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26
Speed Management and Road Safety programmes			
<p>School speed management and safety schemes</p>	<p>Manage</p>	<p><u>Safer Routes to Schools (SRTS)</u> Following consultation on a proposal for a 20mph scheme for St. Augustine’s RC Primary School, the scheme design has been updated and further consultation undertaken.</p> <p>Hurworth School safe route to school was implemented during the Summer of 2024 with final works to be planned once drainage designs are completed.</p> <p>A scheme has also been designed for the Federation of Abbey Schools (schemes on Abbey Road and Cleveland Terrace) and consultation took place in January 2024. TROs are currently being drafted.</p> <p>Longfield School SRTS scheme developed and consultation to be undertaken Q4 2024/25</p> <p>The feasibility has been carried out for a scheme for Mowden Junior/Infants (Fulthorpe/Barnes Road/Conyers Ave). Consultation to be undertaken during Q4 of 2024/25.</p> <p>Controlled crossing point on Stanhope Road North has been developed and will be consulted on, includes link through park that will require planning permission</p>	<p><u>Safer Routes to Schools (SRTS)</u></p> <p>St Augustine’s Primary School SRTS construction will be undertaken during Summer holidays 2025.</p> <p>Abbey Schools scheme implementation proposed for Easter and Summer holidays 2025.</p> <p>A scheme design will be progressed for St. Bede’s RC Primary School (Thompson Street East) and consultation will take place with the school and local residents.</p> <p>Longfield School SRTS – work does not need to be completed during school holidays so will be programmed during 2025/26</p> <p>Mowden school will be revised if required following consultation and if budget and programme permits will be delivered in 2025/26.</p> <p>Education Village – Potential improvements to be developed for Salters Lane South/Kielder Drive</p> <p>Controlled crossing point on Stanhope Road will be implemented subject to consultation, planning consent, programme and if budget in the financial year permits.</p>


Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26
		<p><u>Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS)</u> A Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) policy was developed to set out the rationale and mechanism for prioritising sites where VAS may be installed.</p> <p>Tranche 1 of the VAS programme has been completed, and we have installed equipment in eight locations. As part of Tranche 2 we have identified a number of locations, several of which are to be located within the vicinity of Safer Routes to School (SRTS) schemes.</p>	<p>Improvements to St Aidan’s School – School Crossing Patrol site</p> <p>Improvements to St George’s School - School Crossing Patrol site</p> <p><u>Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS)</u> Signs will be installed as part of Tranche 2, with sites as part of SRTS Schemes installed during scheme delivery. It is proposed to fund those VAS through the scheme budget.</p> <p>A further six to eight sites will be identified as part of Tranche 3, applying the VAS policy, funded within existing budget allocation.</p>
Area wide 20mph zones		Surveys have been undertaken to establish existing traffic calming features in Eastbourne/Firthmoor, to confirm which streets meets the criteria for establishing a 20mph zone, a scheme is under development.	Additional budget has been identified to deliver the Eastbourne/Firthmoor scheme in 2025/26. We will liaise with the police to identify whether any additional traffic calming features are required and implement the zones, subject to legal orders (TROs).
Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (Active Neighbourhoods) and other solutions		The Darlington Transport Plan 2022-2030 identified Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) as a potential intervention as part of our Safer Roads objective. They were not identified as a specific action in the associated action plan, but we are minded to consider a trial area within the plan period.	Undertake further research and feasibility of schemes, identifying potential benefits and consequences of LTNs and produce process to identify suitable locations.


Scheme Type	Manage/ Improve	Progress on delivery in 2024/25	Proposed delivery 2025/26
		<p>We will look at the feasibility for an LTN in a trial area in Darlington. In deciding the trial location, issues such as public support, impact on emergency response times and displacement of traffic onto other roads will be important factors to consider. We will also need to consider the impact of the LTN on parking as some on street spaces will be lost to accommodate the features and allow vehicles to turn around at the point closure.</p> <p>The former Government published a review into LTN's, that is helping to inform a process that is under development.</p>	


Projects and Programmes Delivered in Partnership with TVCA (TVCA funded)

Mode	Funding	Progress Update
		CRSTS – City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlements BSIP – Bus Service Improvement Plan ZEBRA - Zero Emission Bus Regional Area ATF – Active Travel Fund LEVI – Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund <u>Checking if any other funding streams</u>
All 	CRSTS	<u>Tees Valley Digital Delivery Plan</u> Funding through the CRSTS programme will deliver the Tees Valley Digital Delivery Plan from 2022 to 2026. The plan identifies a number of digital and transport needs of the residents, businesses and key stakeholders in the region. This user-centric approach ensures that digital solutions will be developed that meet these needs and solve real issues and challenges. This plan supports the wider Tees Valley Digital Strategy, which sets an ambitious target of becoming the UK's first Smart Region by 2032, covering the three foundations of digital infrastructure, innovation and inclusions and skills. This digital programme of investment will benefit all road users.
	CRSTS	<u>Transforming Town Centre Accessibility</u> A project to improve the Victoria Road entrance to Darlington Station including refurbishment of the portico, public realm area and bus stops is in development.
Bus 	BSIP	<u>Bus Service Improvements – supported bus services</u> TVCA received £1.5m of BSIP+ funding for 2023/24 and a further £1.5m for 2024/25, to support bus service improvements. In addition, in October 2023, TVCA received a further allocation of £3.851M of BSIP funding for 2024/25. In 2023, the bus network in Tees Valley was subject to commercial service cuts from July 2023 and subsequently TVCA and the Local Authorities carried out an extensive review of all changes and it was collectively agreed that 2023/24 BSIP+ funding would be used to mitigate the impact of these cuts. This funding has been used to secure the following services until March 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service 6/6A, Darlington & Stockton (Stagecoach) previously service 12 (Darlington), and part of service 17 (Stockton). • Services 17 & 18, Darlington (Arriva) previously part of services 3 & 3A. • Evening and Sunday services 3 & 4, Darlington (Arriva). Funding for 2025/26 has been announced with £7.278M allocated to TVCA. This sees an increase in provision. The Government has also retained a bus fare cap, increased to £3 from £2 until the end of

	<p>December 2025, whilst the Government considers further bus reform in the coming year.</p> <p>The funding for the young person’s fare offer, £1 per journey for under 22s is funded until June 2025.</p> <p>In addition, the current DBC contract for the operation of service 16 was retendered in August 2024, and the service is funded to the end of March 2025 in line with other supported bus service contracts funded through BSIP.</p> <p>TVCA are currently looking into the existing incentives and supported bus services and whether they should be procured beyond the current end dates indicated, along with other potential initiatives using the allocated BSIP funding, an announcement is expected shortly.</p>
<p>CRSTS</p>	<p><u>Advertising bus shelter contract</u></p> <p>TVCA tendered for the replacement of the existing individually led Local Authority contracts with Clear Channel UK (CCUK), for a Tees Valley wide contract. CCUK were awarded the contract to provide and maintain advertising shelters in Tees Valley and offered the choice of two options for renewing the current stock of shelters and advertising revenue share. TVCA have opted to adopt their refurbishment option, which will involve CCUK installing several new digital advertising screens, and replacing shelters when they reach end of life. There is also a commitment to replace all shelters in major hubs such as the town centre.</p>
<p>CRSTS</p>	<p>The CRSTS business case identified a high-level list of bus priority schemes to be delivered across the Tees Valley. Since confirmation of funding, work has been progressing on finalising the list of schemes.</p> <p><u>Darlington Western Connectivity – Town Centre to Faverdale</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bondgate roundabout/Greenbank Road/Bondgate traffic signal improvements • Cockerton roundabout and Carmel Road/Woodland Road dual roundabouts <p><u>Darlington Eastern Connectivity – Town Centre to Morton Park onward to Teesside Airport</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tornado Way/McMullen Road (Yarm Road to B6279) bus priority <p><u>Darlington Northern Connectivity – Town Centre to Harrowgate Hill</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burtree Lane Junction • A1150/Thompson Street East roundabout. <p>Design work on the schemes is underway and at varying stages. Grant funding agreements in some cases need to be finalised.</p>

	ZEBRA2	<p><u>Tees Valley Zero Emission Bus Regional Area 2 (ZEBRA 2)</u> Zero emission buses are being invested in and will be arriving in the Tees Valley from February 2025 with a number proposed for operation in Darlington. We are awaiting confirmation from the DfT on the exact details.</p>
<p>Active Travel </p>	ATE funding	<p>The Active Travel Hub programme operates in Darlington and across the Tees Valley, with further emphasis on local community engagement and public consultation, to support the delivery of Darlington’s and TVCA’s ambitious vision for the LCWIP, with capital funding from Active Travel England (ATE).</p> <p>TVCA is reviewing the existing delivery model and an update is expected shortly as the current contract expires at the end of March 2025.</p>
<p><u>Walking and Cycling Route Investment</u> The active travel elements of the ATF, CRSTS, LUF2, ATF funded corridors detailed below are part of the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which is a long-term strategy to deliver a connected network of walking and cycling routes across the Tees Valley.</p>		
<p>ATF</p> <p><u>Woodland Road - Phase 2 (ATF3) & (CRSTS)</u> Woodland Road (Hollyhurst Road junction) – Denes (Tennis Court) – Deneside Road.</p> <p>Consultation on a proposed design has been carried out, and following feedback from ATE, DBC have received final sign off in December 2024. It is expected to be on site early in the new financial year 2025/26.</p> <p><u>Darlington Station, Victoria Road entrance (ATF4E) & (Town’s Deal)</u> In November 2023, TVCA submitted a bid to ATE, for active travel improvements to the Victoria Road entrance to Darlington rail station, which form part of wider improvements to the public realm.</p>		
<p>CRSTS</p> <p><u>West Auckland Road - Phase 3 (CRSTS)</u> A68 Deneside Road - Brinkburn Road.</p> <p>A design for walking/cycling route has been separated from the overall DBC roundabout improvement works, for consideration by TVCA. The scheme design has been reviewed by ATE who provided feedback on various elements.</p> <p><u>Yarm Road</u> Yarm Road to Teesside Airport</p> <p>WSP are carrying out feasibility work on various route options for a walking and cycling route linking Yarm Road to Teesside Airport.</p>		

	LUF2	<p><u>Connecting Northgate to the Town Centre</u></p> <p>WSP have undertaken a feasibility study to improve the connection between Northgate and the Town Centre, this proposal is currently out to consultation and will be delivered in the financial year 2025/26 to meet funding requirements.</p>
<p>Motorists</p> 	LEVI	<p><u>Electric Vehicle Infrastructure</u></p> <p>TVCA, in collaboration with the five Local Authorities, is delivering EV Charging Infrastructure, to achieve the EV related outcomes and actions set out in the STP. The project will set out the anticipated public EV Charging Infrastructure requirements across the Tees Valley and how local charging needs will be met over time to service the forecasted growth in EVs in the region.</p> <p><u>Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund</u></p> <p>The government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund aims to deliver a step-change in the scale of deployment of local, primarily low power, on-street EV charging infrastructure across England, and accelerate the commercialisation of, and investment in, the local charging infrastructure sector. Residents without off street parking are the primary focus of the LEVI fund.</p>
	TSOG	<p><u>Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant (TSOG)</u></p> <p>In December 2023, TVCA submitted a bid to DfT to replace unreliable and obsolete equipment in the traffic signals system. DBC have identified a priority list for signals that require replacement. The programme is managed by TVCA and Middlesbrough Council Traffic Signals and work will be complete by March 2026.</p> <p>TVCA are delivering a project to introduce advanced technology for traffic signals. The bid for funding was successful and the first phase has been implemented in Stockton which is currently being monitored. It is expected to roll out phase 2 in 2025/26 with Darlington sites being included in this phase.</p>
	CRSTS	<p>Improvements to the Urban Traffic Management Control System (UTMC) which will enable better management of the highway network and improve the efficient movement of buses will continue to be delivered by TVCA. The first phase of the delivery programme includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The upgrade of the UTMC system; (b) Expansion of traffic signal connectivity to enable further development of a Smart Region approach to traffic management; the Fusion system is being developed. (c) The repair, service and reinstatement of traffic counters to enable strategies for traffic management to be implemented; (d) Additional CCTV cameras linked back to control rooms; (e) Dynamic journey time routes, providing real-time and accurate travel time information of transit vehicles to assist passengers in planning their trips to minimise waiting times; (f) ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) cameras to provide

		<p>journey time data;</p> <p>(g) Diversion routes for unplanned events and;</p> <p>(h) VMS signs to support major events, roadworks, incidents, and road safety campaigns around the Tees Valley.</p>
<p>Rail</p> 	<p>CRSTS</p>	<p><u>Station Enhancements</u></p> <p>Access improvement work is proposed for stations across the Tees Valley including North Road Station. Feasibility is progressing with key stakeholders including Network Rail and the train operator Northern. The aim is to integrate the station more effectively with local transport and ultimately improving the passenger experience.</p>

Local Highway Authority Funding – Darlington Transport Capital Programme 2025/26

The annual allocation split is identified in TVCA’s Constitution and the breakdown, received in 2021/22 (although there’s no requirement to maintain the same spending profile):

Highway Maintenance	Integrated Transport Block (Darlington Transport Plan delivery)	TOTAL
£2,174,998	£892,986	£3,067,984

Highways Maintenance – funding to maintain the highway network including structures and street lighting.

Allocation 25/26	£
Highways Maintenance	2,174,998
Less Fees (10%)	-217,450
Total	1,957,458

Integrated Transport Block - funding to manage and improve the highway network⁴

Darlington Transport Plan Objectives	Scheme	2024/25 (£k)	2025/26 (£k)
Network Management			
Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.	Traffic monitoring	20	20
	Traffic counter replacement programme	10	10
Active and sustainable transport			
Reduce transport’s impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing.	Improvements to bus passenger and cycling facilities (town centre)	50 – bus	10 – cycling
		20 - cycling	50 – PIP (Punctuality Improvement Partnership)
Connect people to job and training opportunities and link communities.	Dropped kerbs	50	50
	Public Rights of Way	15	60 (Stockton & Darlington Railway cycle links and Rights of Way Improvement Plan)
Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre.			
Maintain and effectively	Walking and cycling routes	225	130

⁴ The integrated transport block represents a programme of transport improvements. Funding may be moved between elements as detailed design is completed.

manage a resilient transport system.	Car Club	0	0
	A68 Corridor Improvements	200	0
Speed Management and Road Safety programmes			
Improve safety for all road users	School speed management and safety schemes	140	330
	Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and other solutions	30	0
	Resident Parking Zone	0	50
	Area wide 20mph zones	0	50
	Subtotal	760	760
	Fees (15%)	133	133
	Total	893	893

Performance and monitoring information – 2023/24

1. Monitoring data for Public Transport, Traffic and Road Safety

Public Transport	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
NHT Survey (reference PTB104) views of buses arriving on time	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	42%	38%	41%
Concessionary Fares Patronage	2,167,240	628,055	1,094,852	1,262,825	1,373,451	Final data awaited
Rail Patronage (all stations combined)	2,507,812	575,088	2,147,338	2,336,372	2,472,920	Final data awaited

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Road User Counts	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Peak period traffic counts	19,023	14,753	18,460	19,417	18,836	18,322*
24 hour traffic count (average)	125,017	94,007	117,811	120,815	121,286	122,601*
No of cycling trips	1,614	1,637	1,581	1,494	1767	1788*
No of walking trips in the town centre	111,042	48,958	83,124	Data not available	104,539	103, 798*

Notes for road user counts:

Peak period and 24 hour traffic counts are AM & PM combined flows

Cycle count data taken from 19 sites around the Borough.

Walking data taken from quarterly surveys from 12 sites around the ring road leading to the town centre.

**2024/25 data estimated based on counts throughout the year.*

Road Safety

Road Safety - Casualties (calendar year)		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Fatal or Seriously injured road user casualties (KSI)	Adult	44	27	36	43	38	43
	Child	5	2	5	4	0	2
	Total	49	29	41	47	38	45
Number of slightly injured road user casualties	Adult	151	97	105	72	81	95
	Child	15	14	8	17	12	16
	Total	166	111	113	89	93	111

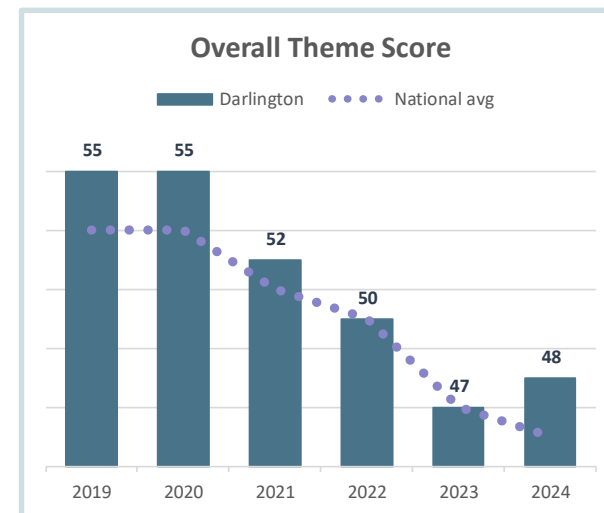
Road Safety - School Pedestrian Training (school year)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
% of children taking part in pedestrian training from participating schools	52%	10%	47%	62%	49%	Available August 2025

Road Safety - School Cycling Training (financial year)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
% of children taking part in cycle training (Year 5) from participating schools	25%	13%	29%	32%	34%	Available April 2025

2 – National Highways and Transport - Public Satisfaction Survey – 2024

Overall Summary

Theme	Actual Scores		Average Scores			Rank	
	2024	2023	TVCA	North East	National Average	TVCA Rank	NE Rank
Overall	48	47	48	47	46	2	3
Public Transport	48	44	50	50	51	3	5
Walking/Cycling	53	52	50	49	50	1	1
Tackling Congestion	44	44	45	44	42	3	5
Road Safety	55	54	53	52	50	1	1
Highway Maintenance	44	45	43	42	41	2	2
Accessibility	72	72	68	67	67	1	1
Communications	49	48	47	46	46	1	1



Key 2024 score greater than 2024 score less than 2024 score equal to

Highlights / Lowlights

HMQI13 - Provision of street-lights	86	HMQI11 - Number of potholes	12
PTQI08 - Provision of bus Stops	84	HMBI 30 - Speed of repair to damaged roads	22
WCQI30 - Provision of Pavements and pedestrian areas	84	HMBI 01 - Condition of road surfaces	23
10 out of 12 Accessibility indicators in the top 20	Average 75	CMQI07 - Informed about local air quality	24
PTBI 05 - How easy buses are to get on/off	70	HMBI 13 - Deals with Potholes and damaged roads	25
PTBI 12 - Raised kerbs at bus stops	69	HMBI 31 - Quality of repair to damaged roads	25
PTBI 10 - Personal safety on the bus	67	KBI 23 - Condition of highways	25
KBI 25 - Street lighting	66	CMQI06 - Informed about action to repair local roads	29
PTBI 09 - Helpfulness of drivers	66	CMQI20 - Informed about council actions on climate change	30
RSQI09 - Provision of speed controls	66	HMQI12 - Action to repair local roads	30

Indicator Performance


Total Indicators: 157


Above Average		Getting Better	
124	79%	109	69%


Below Average		Getting Worse	
33	21%	50	31%


Overall Key Indicators

	Actual Scores		Average Scores		
	2024	2023	TVCA	North East	National Average


Overall 					
01. Overall (Theme Score)	48	47 ↑	48 ↔	47 ↑	46 ↑
KBI 00 - Overall Satisfaction	43	44 ↓	43 ↔	42 ↑	42 ↑
KBI 01 - Importance vs Satisfaction (local)	51	49 ↑	50 ↑	49 ↑	49 ↑
KBI 02 - Importance vs Satisfaction (national)	51	49 ↑	50 ↑	49 ↑	49 ↑


Walking/Cycling 					
Overall Walking/Cycling	53	52 ↑	50 ↑	49 ↑	50 ↑
KBI 11 - Pavements & Footpaths (overall)	51	51 ↔	46 ↑	47 ↑	49 ↑
KBI 12 - Pavements & Footpaths (aspects)	51	52 ↓	48 ↑	48 ↑	48 ↑
KBI 13 - Cycle routes and facilities (overall)	54	52 ↑	51 ↑	50 ↑	50 ↑
KBI 14 - Cycle routes and facilities (aspects)	55	53 ↑	50 ↑	49 ↑	49 ↑
KBI 15 - Rights of way (overall)	57	54 ↑	54 ↑	53 ↑	53 ↑
KBI 16 - Rights of way (aspects)	51	50 ↑	48 ↑	48 ↑	48 ↑


Road Safety 					
Overall Road Safety	55	54 ↑	53 ↑	52 ↑	50 ↑
KBI 20 - Road safety locally	57	53 ↑	54 ↑	53 ↑	50 ↑
KBI 21 - Road safety environment	56	56 ↔	55 ↑	53 ↑	52 ↑
KBI 22 - Road safety education	53	54 ↓	49 ↑	48 ↑	46 ↑

Accessibility 					
Overall Accessibility	72	72 ↔	68 ↑	67 ↑	67 ↑
KBI 03 - Ease of Access (all)	76	75 ↑	74 ↑	72 ↑	71 ↑
KBI 04 - Ease of Access (disabilities)	66	69 ↓	63 ↑	61 ↑	62 ↑
KBI 05 - Ease of Access (no car)	74	72 ↑	68 ↑	68 ↑	67 ↑
ACQ125 - EV charging points	41	30 ↑	41 ↔	38 ↑	38 ↑

	Actual Scores		Average Scores		
	2024	2023	TVCA	North East	National Average

Public Transport 					
Overall Public Transport	48	44 ↑	50 ↓	50 ↓	51 ↓
KBI 06 - Local bus services (overall)	53	45 ↑	53 ↔	53 ↔	55 ↓
KBI 07 - Local bus services (aspects)	42	36 ↑	48 ↓	49 ↓	49 ↓
KBI 08 - Public transport information	32	25 ↑	30 ↑	31 ↑	35 ↓
KBI 09 - Taxi/mini cab services	56	51 ↑	60 ↓	60 ↓	61 ↓
KBI 10 - Community Transport	57	54 ↑	56 ↑	55 ↑	54 ↑
KQI 03 - Responsive transport	52	51 ↑	53 ↓	51 ↑	52 ↔
KQI 05 - Public transport information (aspects)	47	45 ↑	47 ↔	48 ↓	50 ↓

Tackling Congestion 					
Overall Tackling Congestion	44	44 ↔	45 ↓	44 ↔	42 ↑
KBI 17 - Traffic levels & congestion	45	43 ↑	46 ↓	45 ↔	40 ↑
KBI 18 - Management of roadworks	47	44 ↑	47 ↔	45 ↑	43 ↑
KBI 19 - Traffic management	36	39 ↓	36 ↔	39 ↓	38 ↓
KQI 04 - Traffic pollution	49	48 ↑	49 ↔	49 ↔	45 ↑

Highway Maintenance 					
Overall Highways Maintenance	44	45 ↓	43 ↑	42 ↑	41 ↑
KBI 23 - Condition of highways	25	28 ↓	25 ↔	24 ↑	24 ↑
KBI 24 - Highway maintenance	45	46 ↓	42 ↑	42 ↑	41 ↑
KBI 25 - Street lighting	66	62 ↑	64 ↑	62 ↑	60 ↑
KBI 26 - Highway enforcement/obstructions	40	43 ↓	39 ↑	38 ↑	38 ↑

Communications 					
Overall Communications	49	48 ↓	47 ↑	46 ↑	46 ↑
KQI 02 - Communication (aspects)	49	48 ↓	47 ↑	46 ↑	46 ↑

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2025-2030

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

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director - Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.

Summary

2. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years.
3. Together with our partners, Darlington Borough Council has an excellent track record in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 successfully delivered a number of aims and objectives to reduce homelessness and deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
4. However, over the past few years, and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has had to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.
5. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children's Services, Health, Probation, the Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. It aims to be, not just a Council document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.
6. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:

- (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington
- (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home
- (c) That the right support is in place at the right time
- (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Recommendations

- 7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note the content of this report, and
 - (b) Approve the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 at **Appendix 1**.

Reasons

- 8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To ensure Darlington has a strategic and joined up approach to preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - (b) The Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources and Governance

Background Papers

- (i) The Housing Act 1996
- (ii) The Homelessness Act 2002
- (iii) The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's HOMES priority to provide affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	People experiencing homelessness can be amongst the most disadvantaged groups and therefore, reducing the risk of homelessness will have a positive impact on addressing inequalities
Tackling Climate Change	Investing in energy efficiency measures in tenant's homes will help to reduce utility bills and prevent homelessness due to affordability issues
Efficient and effective use of resources	This strategy aims to improve the quality and reduce the cost of temporary emergency accommodation, which will have a positive impact on those people affected by homelessness
Health and Wellbeing	There are significant benefits to health and wellbeing by reducing the risk of homelessness
S17 Crime and Disorder	Reducing the risk of homelessness should also have a positive impact on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour
Wards Affected	All wards are potentially affected
Groups Affected	Anyone who may be at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This report does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report does not represent an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report aims to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst young people and care leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

9. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years.
10. Together with our partners, Darlington Borough Council has an excellent track record in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 successfully delivered a number of aims and objectives to reduce homelessness and deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
11. However, over the past few years, and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has had to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.

The Council's Statutory Homeless Duties

12. The Council's statutory duties in relation to its homelessness services include the following:
 - (a) **A prevention duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible household at risk of homelessness within 56 days, regardless of priority need. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live.
 - (b) **A relief duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to help a household to secure suitable accommodation. Help could be, for example, providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit or working with a private landlord to make properties available.
 - (c) **Personal Housing Plans:** the Council must carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing needs, support needs and the circumstances that led to them becoming homeless.
 - (d) **Main housing duty:** the Council's main housing duty is to provide temporary accommodation until such time as the duty is ended, either by an offer of settled accommodation or for another specified reason. In addition, we must be satisfied that the applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless.

Increases in Homelessness and Costs

13. As well as the pressures created since the Covid-19 pandemic, the lifting of the ban on section 21 (“no fault”) evictions in June 2021 has also created an increase in homeless presentations and requests for housing advice. In 2023-24, we received 1,357 presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to pre-Covid levels of 835 in 2019-20, an increase of 63%. **Table 1** below shows a breakdown of the reasons for homeless presentations and the percentage changes. The most common reasons for homeless presentations in 2023-24 have been because of:

- (a) Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate (32%)
- (b) People’s private tenancy coming to an end - served section 21 notice (18%)
- (c) Victims of domestic abuse (13%)
- (d) People leaving hospital or prison (12%)

Table 1 – Homeless presentation increases in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

Reason for homeless presentation	2019-20	2023-24	Change
Family no longer willing to accommodate	232	306	+32%
End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (section 21 notice)	152	238	+57%
Domestic abuse - victim	73	177	+142%
Leaving hospital/prison	51	169	+231%
Friends no longer willing to accommodate	114	128	+12%
Relationship with partner ended (non-domestic abuse)	82	80	-2%
Evicted from supported accommodation	27	60	+122%
End of social housing tenancy	28	51	+82%
Required to leave asylum seeker accommodation	13	34	+162%
End of non-Assured Shorthold Tenancy	16	23	+44%
Non-racially motivated violence or harassment	26	22	-15%
Property disrepair	6	14	+133%
Property no longer suitable due to ill health/disability	0	12	-
Mortgage repossession/arrears	10	11	+10%
Loss of Looked After Child placement	0	7	-
Fire/flood/emergency	5	5	0%
Domestic Abuse - Perpetrator	0	6	-
Loss of tied accommodation	0	4	-
Racially motivated violence or harassment	0	3	-
Homes for Ukraine sponsorship breakdown	0	2	-
Total	835	1,357	+63%

14. The main reasons given for family or friends no longer willing to accommodate in 2023-24 (the largest category) were:
- (a) Sofa surfing (so not a long-term option)
 - (b) Overcrowding
 - (c) Arguments
 - (d) The friends and family losing their accommodation
 - (e) Drug and alcohol use
 - (f) Benefits entitlement/tenancy rights affected.
15. As well as the increase in presentations, the nights spent in temporary accommodation has increased significantly (a 137% increase year on year in the first quarter of 2024-25), because of the difficulties to move people on to permanent settled accommodation.
16. **Table 2** below shows the number of households placed in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 (485) compared to pre-Covid levels in 2019-20 (174), an increase of 179%.

Table 2 – Homeless households placed in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

	2019-20	2023-24	2024-25
April	7	40	32
May	8	39	40
June	13	42	37
July	11	32	40
August	22	53	43
September	18	37	29
October	16	29	
November	13	36	
December	15	43	
January	24	63	
February	14	45	
March	13	26	
Total	174	485	

17. **Table 3** below shows the number of nights spent in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 (9,616) compared to pre-Covid levels in 2019-20 (1,486), an increase of 547%. The nights spent in temporary accommodation for the first two quarters of 2024-25 is already 8,004 and is therefore on course to be over 16,000 for the year, over 10 times the level in 2019-20.

Table 3 – Nights spent in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

	2019-20	2023-24	2024-25
April	65	529	923
May	74	494	1,337
June	93	454	1,246
July	234	624	1,413
August	241	709	1,738
September	176	847	1,347
October	65	526	
November	96	515	
December	91	949	
January	157	1,426	
February	47	1,287	
March	147	1,256	
Total	1,486	9,616	

18. The cost of temporary accommodation is paid for by our Housing Options service, and most of those costs are covered by Housing Benefit claims, paid by the Council. Any remaining costs can usually be met from the Government’s annual Homeless Prevention Grant.

19. The Council has a statutory duty to administer Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In most cases, Housing Benefit payments are fully subsidised by the DWP. However, in certain cases, such as temporary accommodation for homeless people and some supported accommodation, the DWP subsidy does not meet the full cost of the Housing Benefit paid. These are the claims that will not migrate to Universal Credit and so will remain the responsibility of the Council.

20. In 2019-20, we paid £214k in Housing Benefit for temporary accommodation and received £146k in subsidy from the DWP, leaving a shortfall of £68k. However, in 2023-24, we paid £897k in Housing Benefit for temporary accommodation and received £315k in subsidy from the DWP, leaving a shortfall of £582k. For 2024-25, the Housing Benefit subsidy loss is estimated to be £1.176m, of which £952k is due to homeless temporary accommodation.

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

21. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 is set within the framework of the legislation governing how we must exercise our statutory duties in relation to how we deal with homelessness, set out in paragraph 12.

22. Our strategy has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children’s Services, Health, Probation, the Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. It aims to be, not just a Council

document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.

23. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:
 - (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington.
 - (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home.
 - (c) That the right support is in place at the right time.
 - (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

24. The co-produced six key priority areas to enable us to achieve this vision are:
 - (a) Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.
 - (b) Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan.
 - (c) Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
 - (d) Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs.
 - (e) Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
 - (f) Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.

25. Many people are already in crisis before they approach our homelessness service, therefore the strategy reflects the need to focus on prevention and early intervention. We want fewer people in Darlington to experience the trauma of homelessness and ensure that those who do, can find a settled home quicker.

26. The action plan contained within the strategy sets out the key actions required to deliver our six priority areas. The actions range from sourcing more, and better quality, temporary accommodation and move-on accommodation, working better with our key partners to help reduce homelessness, and providing accommodation to specific groups, particularly those presenting with multiple or complex needs.

Outcome of Consultation

27. A consultation exercise has taken place to seek a wide range of views on our draft Strategy. We received 91 responses to our public on-line survey, and the results are set out in **Appendix 2**, together with a summary of comments made.

Equalities considerations

28. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 seeks to remove barriers which people can face in accessing housing and homelessness support.
29. People experiencing homelessness can have multiple disadvantages and it is important to identify when individuals require additional support and appropriate reasonable adjustments. This may include assisted communication or specific approaches and strategies that are known to be helpful to best engage and support the individual.
30. Where an applicant's first language is not English, we will provide interpreting services and publicise the availability of these services to residents and community organisations.
31. We will ensure all the priorities within the strategy meet the needs of all groups of people, in particular those who are the most marginalised in our communities. We will engage with our communities including people who have experienced homelessness and make sure current and future service provisions meet the need of our communities.

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Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

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Introduction

Everyone in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home, and yet many are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy made significant progress in helping our residents to stay in their homes, through early intervention and strong partnership working. However, more and more of our residents are now finding themselves homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, for many reasons and we recognise that the challenge of preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is both national and local.

This strategy sets out our ambition to meet these challenges, working in partnership with local providers to deliver better outcomes for our residents at risk of homelessness and to reduce rough sleeping. Such are the challenges with homelessness at present, that we cannot manage this on our own. We must seek to build upon relationships we have with the many local landlords and agencies who are committed to providing excellent and affordable housing.

Timely homelessness prevention advice and support at the earliest opportunity will also be critical and we need to make that advice easily accessible to anyone who needs it, as well as also being able to provide the accommodation that people need in an emergency. We are also aware how homelessness can be particularly difficult for families, and we need to ensure that children do not spend lengthy periods in temporary accommodation.

Many of those who are struggling with homelessness are now facing long periods awaiting re-housing, often in circumstances which are far from ideal, and it is important therefore that we do as much as possible to ensure they have the right support and decent living conditions. Ideally, homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring, but we recognise that much will need to be done to make progress with this ambition. With over 2,000 people awaiting re-housing on our Housing Register, we also recognise that we must plan the future supply of housing in Darlington.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who contributed to developing this new strategy, including our residents, charities and voluntary organisations, Council staff, social housing providers and health services. You have told us what you think of our current work, and you have shared with us your ideas on how we can improve.

I would also like to thank everyone who works with us every day to help deliver the services that contribute to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member for Health and Housing

Vision

This strategy sets out a framework of broad priorities and key actions which we will work towards in achieving our vision for homelessness in Darlington.

Our long-term visions are simple yet ambitious:

- To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington.
- That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home.
- That the right support is in place at the right time.
- Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

We recognise that homelessness is complex and increasingly that creative and innovative responses are required.

We cannot tackle or prevent homelessness alone and this strategy has been prepared in partnership with other registered landlords, Council Members, statutory and voluntary sector agencies. Homelessness is not a single issue, and we all have a contribution to make and a role to play.

The co-produced 6 key priority areas to enable us to achieve this vision are:

- Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.
- Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan.
- Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
- Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs.
- Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
- Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.

This document provides a framework for public and voluntary organisations in Darlington to work together, with a common approach, to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

Many people are already in crisis before they approach a homelessness service, therefore the strategy reflects the need to focus on prevention and early intervention. We want fewer people in Darlington to experience the trauma of homelessness and ensure that those who do can find a settled home quicker.

Relevant Legislation

The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy has been developed in response to a number of legal duties and powers, and with regard to national and local policy.

Homelessness Act 2002 and Housing Act 1996

While the Homelessness Act 2002 contains the strategic duties, the main operational legislation on homelessness is contained in the Housing Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”). This includes a statutory definition of homelessness which broadly means that you may be legally homeless if:

- You have no legal right to live in accommodation anywhere in the world.
- You have a home but cannot get into it for some reason.
- It is not reasonable to stay in your home, for example because you are at risk of violence or abuse or because of affordability problems.
- You are forced to live apart from your family, or people you normally live with, because there is no suitable accommodation for you.
- You are living in very poor conditions, such as overcrowding.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

This Act made sweeping changes to the 1996 Act demonstrating the direction of government policy: towards a more collaborative approach between the local housing authority and the customer and also between public bodies, with a focus upon preventing homelessness rather than tackling it once it has happened. The key changes were:

- **A prevention duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible household at risk of homelessness within 56 days, regardless of priority need. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live.
- **A relief duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to help a household to secure suitable accommodation. Help could be, for example, providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit or working with a private landlord to make properties available.
- **Personal Housing Plans:** Personal Housing Plans: the Council must carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant’s housing needs, support needs and the circumstances that led to them becoming homeless.
- **A Duty to Refer:** certain named public authorities must refer users of their service, who they have reason to believe are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to a local housing authority of the service user’s choice. The aim of this is to help people to get access to homeless services as soon as possible and ensure that people’s housing needs are considered when they come into contact with a range of public bodies.

Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Government published a Rough Sleeper Strategy in August 2018 that lays out their commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. The work to deliver these aims is built around three core pillars:

- Prevention - understanding the issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk.
- Intervention - helping those already sleeping rough with swift support tailored to their individual circumstances.
- Recovery - supporting people in finding a new home and rebuilding their lives.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

The major proposal for reform was the introduction of Universal Credit, which replaced the previous in and out of work benefits. Welfare reforms present ongoing challenges to households in receipt of benefits and to the organisations and individuals that house and support them. Most notably, since the introduction of Universal Credit, local authorities and social housing providers have reported its impact on claimants' ability to meet their household costs.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

This Act addresses the needs of victims of domestic abuse, the act imposes a duty on the Council's to provide support in safe accommodation and that all eligible victims of domestic abuse have a priority need for assistance.

The Care Act 2014

The Care Act set a strong expectation that agencies would work together to protect children, young adults and people with care and support needs.

Children Act 1989

The Children Act sets out clear expectations on the requirement for suitable housing for 16- and 17-year-olds, looked after children and preparing care leavers for independent living. Subsequent guidance and case law has clarified how social and housing services should work together.

Current provision and achievements from the previous strategy

Darlington Borough Council provides a dedicated Housing Options team within the Housing Services department and has strong links to other internal and external departments such as Social Services, Public Health, Police and Probation.

The Housing Options team provide a dedicated, specialist service which offers signposting, advice and support to individuals who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless. They work in line with current homeless legislation and provide free of charge information and advice relating to:

- Preventing homelessness.
- Securing long-term and short-term accommodation.
- The rights of homeless households or those threatened with homelessness.
- Services available to homeless households or those threatened with homelessness and how to access them.
- Domestic abuse services.
- Substance misuse services and support.
- Supported accommodation.

Darlington Borough Council have excellent links with the voluntary sector and organisations within the town who help support and deliver the achievements within the previous strategy.

We look forward to building upon this and creating new partnership working as a priority within this strategy. Details of all the help available and the agencies involved can be found in the [Housing Services – A guide to homelessness advice and support in Darlington leaflet](#) (link to follow)

Our achievements from the previous strategy include:

- Established an effective Duty to Refer process and ensured professional partners and agencies are aware of this process.
- Improved our needs assessments to ensure it helps us to address individuals' issues.
- Improved the information available on the Darlington Borough Council website.
- Increased the use of social media and other digital platforms (podcasts) to ensure homeless persons have access to the right information easily.
- Collaborated with local hospitals to reduce homelessness issues from hospital discharges.
- Reduced the risk of young people becoming homeless through establishing positive support pathways for young people with colleagues in Childrens Services.
- Created a specialist Mental Health Officer post within the Housing Options team to work with Mental Health services to improve support to those households.
- Introduced a new, easy to use social housing allocation system for Council Housing and agreed nomination agreements with all other registered providers in Darlington.

- Introduced an interest free loan scheme (Homeless Prevention Fund) to improve access to private rented sector properties.
- Built effective links with the Department of Work and Pensions to address welfare benefit challenges (such as introduction of Universal Credit).
- Set up a Rough Sleeping Action Group to look at ways to reduce repeat homelessness and prevent rough sleeping.
- Established multi-agency groups to help identify and address the needs of individuals.
- Established Preventing Begging Meetings for all agencies to look at joined-up and innovative ways to reduce begging in the Borough.
- Established the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum to support and improve partnership working and information sharing.
- Continued to work closely with and build new relationships with voluntary sector agencies and looked for ways of increasing support for individuals.
- Created a temporary, specialist Domestic Abuse Officer post, through government funding, within the Housing Options team to work with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to improve support.

Guiding Principles

At the core of our strategy are a number of guiding principles that underpin our approach to both the development and delivery of homelessness services.

These principles have been co-produced with the wider homelessness sector partners in Darlington and Council colleagues. They are:

Partnership Working

We have a strong focus on partnership working and will look to expand upon the relationships developed to tackle the many challenges that exist around homelessness and inequalities.

Person Centred

We work with people as individuals and support their unique situations, aspirations, strengths, and personal challenges.

Solution Focused

We create, share, and replicate best practice and innovation to find lasting solutions in responses to homelessness and its prevention across Darlington.

Responsive

We respond quickly and effectively, ensuring we safeguard people and provide effective flexible services. Whilst we focus our efforts on prevention, where homelessness does occur, we aim to make sure the experience is as brief as possible and not repeated.

Current national and local context

People become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment, and life events which push people into homelessness. People can be forced into homelessness when they leave prison, care or the armed forces with no home to go to. Many people experiencing homelessness have escaped a violent or abusive relationship. People also become homeless because they can no longer afford the rent or mortgage.

What is the national data telling us?

- 94,560 households in England had initial homelessness assessments between January to March 2024, which is an increase of 10.8% compared to January to March 2023.
- 86,520 were owed a duty to prevent or relieve homelessness between January to March 2024.
- 38,440 were assessed as being threatened with homelessness, with an increase of 1.2% due to section 21 notices between January to March 2024.

- 48,080 households were assessed as homeless and owed a relief duty between January to March 2024, which is up 11.4% on January to March 2023, those with children in the household increased by 6.9% compared to the same period in 2023.
- 17,120 households were accepted as owed a main homeless duty between January to March 2024, up 19.8% from January to March 2023.
- As of 31 March 2024, 117,450 households were in temporary accommodation, which is a 12.3% increase from 31 March 2023. Those with children increased by 14.7% and single households by 8.5%.

What are the local challenges?

We have seen:

- A significant increase in homeless presentations in Darlington since 2019-2020.
- A 57% increase in presentations since 2019-2020 in section 21 notices (no fault evictions) within the Private Rented Sector. This rose from 152 in 2019-2020 to 238 in 2023-2024.
- Increasing numbers of presentations with multiple needs, making placement and long-term sustainment of tenancies more difficult. The number of presentations from people with one or more need rose from 485 in 2019-2020 to 1,039 in 2023-2024.
- An increase in presentations of people suffering domestic abuse, which was 13% of all presentations in 2023-2024, and this was a 142% increase from 2019-2020.
- An increase in presentations from hospital and prison leavers, including those from the early release scheme from prisons (Probation Refresh). Presentations rose from 51 in 2019-2020 to 169 in 2023-2024.
- An increasing number of households leaving the asylum system after gaining leave to remain. This rose from 13 in 2019-2020 to 34 in 2023-2024.
- A reduction in the number of affordable and suitable move on accommodation within the Borough.
- A lack of specialist accommodation for clients trying to withdraw from substance misuse.
- A lack of specialised accommodation for those with complex needs.
- A reduced number of suitable temporary accommodation meaning out of area placements have increased.
- An increase in presentations from families experiencing homelessness.
- An increase in presentations of people suffering homelessness due to mortgage arrears.

The 6 priority areas identified within our vision reflect the current picture within the homeless sector both locally and nationally.

Working in partnership to prevent homelessness

Working in partnership to prevent homelessness is a key area within the homelessness sector. To have a universal approach to prevention within Darlington will help reduce homelessness in the town. The work within the previous strategy shows some the positive work in this area, but we will continue to build on this.

Prevention and early intervention can help sustain tenancies and can prevent a person from becoming homeless. Most people approach the Council for help when they are in a crisis so by focusing on early homeless prevention, we can help save tenancies and stop a person becoming homeless.

By working in partnership to prevent homelessness we can recognise and understand the signs of a person not managing in their home and work together to provide support to save the tenancy and prevent homelessness.

Tackling Rough Sleeping

The longer someone experiences rough sleeping the more likely they are to face challenges around trauma, mental health and drug misuse.

The Ending Rough Sleeper Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good>) sets out the national agenda around ending rough sleeping nationally, it focuses on areas of preventing rough sleeping, delivering intervention where appropriate, support recovery and providing transparent and joined up working.

Our Rough Sleeper Plan 2024-2025, which was agreed by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and is reviewed annually, builds on the national Ending Rough Sleeping Plan and includes the following themes:

- Reviewing and improving accommodation for chaotic clients.
- Raising awareness with other agencies and build good relations to reduce the chance of someone rough sleeping.
- Build on the current Rough Sleeper Action Group to ensure agencies play their part in preventing, identifying and supporting rough sleepers.

Move on Accommodation

Darlington has thrived on a good private rented market within the town. In 2023-2024, 18.47% of the town population live in private sector housing. However, there has been a shift in the market following Covid and the new, proposed Renters Reform Bill are adding pressure onto private landlords and reducing access to private rented homes.

These pressures affect the number of long-term rented homes available for clients to move on to, and whilst we have an excellent social housing market it cannot manage the demand for accommodation alone.

Whilst the new Renters Reform Bill aims to give private renters greater security and stability within their homes, which in turn should reduce homelessness, it has had the short-term

effect of increasing the number of private rented tenants being issued a legal notice of eviction.

It has been proven that working with private landlords to support them through changes can increase access to accommodation which can reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation. This can help to reduce costs to Council's and ensure homeless persons can access longer-term accommodation.

Temporary Accommodation

The average length of stay in temporary accommodation in Darlington has increased from 8.5 days in 2019-2020 to 19.8 days in 2023-2024, increasing the net cost of temporary accommodation from £68k in 2019-2020 to an estimated £952k in 2024-2025.

This can predominantly be due to lack of permanent move on accommodation due to the changes in the private rented sector in Darlington.

As a consequence to the longer stays, temporary accommodation availability has reduced and a reliance on accommodation outside of Darlington, hotels and B&B's to meet statutory requirements has occurred.

It has proven that by increasing the availability of temporary accommodation and reducing the time spent in temporary accommodation will reduce costs to a local authority. This helps to improve the experience for the homeless client with better, longer-term outcomes.

Affordability of temporary and move-on accommodation is a significant factor as the local housing allowance remains low with no uplift since 2011 so does not reflect the current economy and rent charges.

Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people

The reasons for homelessness are as individual as people themselves, however, we recognise that those with additional needs such as addiction issues have an increased risk of homelessness. In particular substance misuse and mental health can be a significant factor.

Support for people suffering from these addictions are essential, to help prevent and deal with homelessness. The highest needs for clients presenting to us are:

- Mental health issues.
- Substance misuse.
- Physical health issues.
- Offending history.

Other particular groups of people are also at higher risk of homelessness, and these include:

- Prison leavers.
- Survivors of domestic abuse.
- Refugee and those that have been granted leave to remain.
- Young people (16-25) and care leavers.

- Veterans and those leaving the armed forces.

Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources

Appropriate funding is a key to this strategy and will ensure we can provide the appropriate support and accommodation for homeless households.

We will work in partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and local agencies and charities to secure funding opportunities to help resource viable solutions to tackle homelessness in Darlington.

Previous funding from the government has included short-term funding such as:

- Rough sleeper initiative (RSI) which funded:
 - 2 x Housing First properties - Housing First is an approach which prioritises access to permanent housing with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support for residents that emphasises choice and control.
 - 1 x Regional Rough Sleeper Coordinator post who co-ordinates good practice across the Tees Valley to help prevent rough sleeping.
 - 1 x Outreach Support Worker post who attends to any reports of rough sleepers in the Borough from StreetLink and provides immediate support.
 - 1 x Housing Navigator post who triages any Duty to Refer referrals from agencies and arranges contact with the affected person.
- Rough Sleeper accommodation programme (RSAP):
 - 4 x units of Next Steps accommodation - The Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding provides funding for property costs and support.
 - 3 x units of move on accommodation from supported/hostel accommodation to build on independent living skills.
- Single Household Accommodation Programme (SHAP)
 - Funding for accommodation and support from 18- to 25-year-olds.
- Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AfEO)
 - Funding to support ex-offenders into private rented accommodation.
- Domestic Abuse New Burdens Funding
 - 1 Housing Options Officer post (Domestic Abuse) short term funding to provide specialist support and advice to victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Action plan

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
Source additional temporary accommodation	Reduced use of B&B/hotel accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBC Commissioning DBC Housing Services Registered Social Housing providers Charities
Source more rented move-on accommodation	<p>Reduced time spent in temporary accommodation</p> <p>Less children in temporary accommodation</p> <p>Reduced void periods in Council accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBC Commissioning DBC Housing Services DBC Private Sector Housing Local lettings agencies and landlords Registered Social Housing providers Charities
Re-establish multi-agency homeless forum	Improved partnership working and outcomes for homeless clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBC Commissioning DBC Housing Services Registered Social Housing providers Charities DBC Private Sector Housing Representatives of private landlords Probation Police Fire Service Public Health

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAD • DAR
Establish shared goals with partner agencies	Improved referrals, prevention and move-on plans Rough Sleeper Action Group attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services • Registered Social Housing providers • Charities • DBC Private Sector Housing • Probation • Police • Fire Service • Public Health
Source additional specialist temporary and longer-term accommodation including Housing First	Improved offer for those with multiple and complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs • Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services • Registered Social Housing providers • Charities
Raise awareness in the community and with agencies and charities	Improved referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services • Registered Social Housing providers

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
		statutory agencies to prevent homelessness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charities • DBC Private Sector Housing • Probation • Police • Fire Service • Public Health • DAD • DAR
Identify higher risk groups, working with partner agencies to understand and improve support available to specific groups	Improved understanding of issues and improved offer to specific groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Housing Services • Registered Social Housing providers • Charities • DBC Private Sector Housing • Probation • Police • Fire Service • Public Health • DAD • DAR • Social Services
Identify funding opportunities	Improved resources and new services developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
Identify and build on existing support networks	Improved partnership working and outcomes for homeless clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Housing Services
Improve communication and engagement with private landlords	Increased prevention and reduced number of homeless clients from private rented properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Housing Services • DBC Private Sector Housing
Continue to provide Domestic Abuse a dedicated Housing Options Officer	Continued support for victims of Domestic Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services • Public Health

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources 	
Explore landlord incentives to help increased access to private rented sector	Increased move-on accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Housing Services • DBC Private Sector Housing
Review the pathway into specialist services	Increased number of households with complex needs rehoused into settled housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs • Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Commissioning • DBC Housing Services • Public Health
Improve information available to homeless persons and professionals	Clients and professionals better informed of the support and processes involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness • Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBC Housing Services

Equality and Diversity

We are committed to ensuring all parts of the community can access, engage with and benefit from services.

This strategy seeks to remove barriers which people can face in accessing housing and homelessness support.

People experiencing homelessness can have multiple disadvantages and it is important to identify when individuals require additional support and appropriate reasonable adjustments. This may include assisted communication or specific approaches and strategies that are known to be helpful to best engage and support the individual.

Where an applicant's first language is not English, we will provide interpreting services and publicise the availability of these services to residents and community organisations.

We will ensure all the priorities within the strategy meet the needs of all groups of people, in particular those who are the most marginalised in our communities. We will engage with our communities including people who have experienced homelessness and make sure current and future service provisions meet the need of our communities.

Performance Monitoring and Review

This strategy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, as part of the existing governance arrangements and will involve key stakeholders, partners and agencies in its delivery.

To assist with our continuous improvement and to ensure we meet the key priority areas, we will collate and monitor performance information. We will re-establish our multi-agency homeless forum and hold regular meetings with our key partners and stakeholders.

Our Homeless Forum will lead on the delivery of the action plan, through task and finish groups, reporting progress on a regular basis.

Members will also be provided with an annual review of performance, against the action plan, at the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

Outcome of Consultation – Survey Results

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our visions?

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington	85.7%	7.7%	4.4%	2.2%
That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home	82.4%	7.7%	6.6%	3.3%
That the right support is in place at the right time	85.7%	4.4%	8.8%	1.1%
Where homelessness occurs, it is rare, brief and non-recurrent	63.7%	5.5%	27.5%	3.3%

Comments

We are pleased that the vision recognises that the approach to homelessness should be holistic and inclusive. We also agree with an approach that places such an emphasis on early intervention.
Only proviso is what do you do with those who don't want to be housed/helped?
At Citizens Advice the clients we see have been through the homelessness system and refused due to antisocial behaviour drink drug or mental health issues causing them to be a risk for housing.
Too many homeless people are denied accommodation by the Housing Options team due to drug/alcohol issues or offending histories that were linked to their substance misuse. This is unfair and the council needs to have options to make sure no one is forced to sleep rough due to a lack of supported temporary accommodation. Other councils have much more resources in this area, and it is not acceptable that people in Darlington suffer a postcode lottery with homelessness services due to the council being the third smallest in the country.
I've been sleeping on my dad's couch for a year and still haven't been given a home.
I am helping a severely disabled friend through this journey, it's very frustrating for him as he keeps being told he will be put up in a hotel if he is evicted from his home (section 21) no fault eviction. He is disabled and 78 years old and is worried sick he will be put in a hotel room.
Need to make accommodation affordable and available for the long term.
These are the views of any caring human being, but can the council afford it?
Hoping there will be proper support for people not just "Here is a nice home", and that will be right, but support for addictions, budgeting, cooking properly all need support.
Very clear visions, I appreciate homelessness will never be completely resolved but think these visions are important to show the aims of the Council.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the co-produced six key priority areas to enable us to achieve the visions?

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness	90.1%	4.9%	2.5%	2.5%
Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan	85.2%	7.4%	3.7%	3.7%
Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation	84.0%	4.9%	7.4%	3.7%
Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs	84.0%	6.2%	4.9%	4.9%
Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision	88.9%	4.9%	3.7%	2.5%
Securing funding to increase accommodation and Resources	88.9%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%

Comments

Support is important.
Fully agree with the six priority areas. As the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner we are keen to work in partnership to improve community safety and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. The key groups we have an interest in are (though not limited to) those experiencing domestic abuse, people who misuse substances and alcohol and those who are leaving custody. These are all groups at high risk of homelessness, and it is pleasing to see they are included in the strategy.
The rough sleeper plan does not go far enough in helping those sleeping rough. A much more compassionate and modern approach is needed. For example, abolishing the begging committee and focusing on modern evidence-based approaches.
I don't particularly agree with increasing the temporary accommodation because effectively everyone should have a secure place to live but people who have those complex needs need better supported accommodation to enable them to have a better chance of sustaining a tenancy.
Properties should be fit for purpose and not just a landlord cash fund.
We agree with all of the 6 priorities, all partners maximising what they can offer. As a

suggestion, potentially DBC could examine their own resources and systems in regards to ensuring voids are kept to a minimum, i.e. setting a 3 month turn around for an empty property. Also, potential look at privately owned empty homes.
As before, very laudable and absolutely brilliant but what do you propose for those who will not be helped?
As before, the main clients seen are those with complex multiple needs - no available accommodation due to risk and previous history of complex behaviour issues. These are the street homeless or sofa surfing, which is detriment to their health. A plan for temporary/ interim housing and support is needed to help them move into accommodation.
You send people on their way and say something like, you're not priority.
Agree with them all, if it is possible to get the priorities put into place.
A variety of services / providers are needed to meet the needs of people holistically, supporting people both proactively and reactively (given the current climate) to meet peoples increasing needs.
Forces veterans seem to face particular problems.
All great ideas but for a lot of these people it is a life choice.
I believe the 6 priorities will assist in achieving the aims, and give particular emphasis on the key groups most affected by homelessness.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the actions identified within the strategy?

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Source additional temporary accommodation	79.8%	6.3%	6.3%	7.6%
Source more move-on accommodation	81.0%	7.6%	6.3%	5.1%
Re-establish multi-agency homeless forum	83.5%	5.1%	3.8%	7.6%
Establish shared goals with partner agencies	88.6%	3.8%	2.5%	5.1%
Source additional specialist temporary and longer-term accommodation including Housing First	87.3%	3.8%	5.1%	3.8%
Raise awareness in the community and with agencies and charities	86.1%	5.1%	5.1%	3.8%
Identify higher risk groups, working with partner agencies to understand and improve support available to specific groups	84.8%	6.3%	3.8%	5.1%
Identify funding opportunities	87.3%	3.8%	3.8%	5.1%
Identify and build on existing support networks	88.6%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Improve communication and engagement with private landlords	82.3%	7.6%	5.1%	5.1%

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Continue to provide Domestic Abuse a dedicated Housing Options Officer	84.8%	8.9%	2.5%	3.8%
Explore landlord incentives to help increased access to private rented sector	72.1%	12.7%	5.1%	10.1%
Review the pathway into specialist services	75.9%	12.7%	1.3%	10.1%
Improve information available to homeless persons and professionals	86.1%	6.3%	2.5%	5.1%

Comments

A slight caution around more temporary accommodation. Whilst temporary accommodation is important it is equally important that there is not an over-reliance on this. As previous, it is pleasing to see that higher risk groups are considered, and it is essential to work with partners to understand issues and improve support available to these specific groups so that they can maintain tenancies and be safe and secure in their homes.
There needs to be increased homelessness prevention and timely referrals for money advice from independent and regulated providers. DBC routinely do not spend the whole DHP pot and allocate towards the end of the financial year. This suggests that there could be more proactive prevention work.
Forums needed and compassionate committed people involved to support complex needs. Problem being they decline the services already provided.
Raising awareness and making links, communicating with others must lead to actual progress and solutions not just become talking shops.
There has been no mention on the Council only accepting applications for homelessness on the day of eviction, instead of saying when they receive the notification of eviction start processing.
The Council needs to move to a position of looking for ways that legislation can be interpreted positively to actually resolve homelessness rather than using it to gate-keep and exclude vulnerable people on technical legal grounds.
I really agree with the transitional model, we need to consider supported accommodation models too.
Depends on the incentives to Landlords. It should not be money, and it would have to be legal and monitored.
Very important to keep at least one dedicated Domestic Abuse Officer, as these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and require as much help and assistance as possible.

Overall, how satisfied are you with the Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030?

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
43.6%	29.5%	19.2%	5.1%	2.6%

Comments

<p>The Strategy is good, the funding, budget and resource to support it isn't. The Government needs to recognise that not having a home for those people with complex needs is highly likely to result in more crime, rough sleeping and a decline in mental health. They don't recognise that.</p>
<p>I am so glad to have read this plan this morning - I feel a lot more hope for the homeless.</p>
<p>This is a very comprehensive and realistic view of the current situation and offers practical ways forward.</p>
<p>It is a comprehensive document that highlights the increase in service demands pre-COVID and post-COVID. These concerns and availability of funds has left a big question mark on us all, which is "How did we get here?".</p>
<p>Would like key names and contacts to help those with complex needs and a reassurance they will at least be housed that day even if temporarily.</p>
<p>Sorry but really don't think it's any good when they say we will phone you back and don't.</p>
<p>I don't believe the strategy goes far enough or is explicit enough with regards to the practicality's day to day for homeless service users. Particularly around the very harsh interpretation of the priority need test that some service users receive from officers. Also, the no second night out scheme is often not adhered to by officers. I see this through my work in another public service in Darlington supporting vulnerable adults who may be denied accommodation through something as simple as being on the waiting list for secondary care but not yet allocated a CPN etc. The strategy grandstands about making rough sleeping a rare occurrence but on the ground the officers do not take this seriously enough. Anyone who claims to be rough sleeping should be given the benefit of the doubt in a moral society.</p>
<p>Should aim to abolish TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION.</p>
<p>As explained in the first comment, (name withheld) has been on the list for a long time and we work closely with a Humankind case worker, he has automated bidding from the Council, but little or no updates, no communication unless he instigates it. As I said, very agitating for an elderly gent, through no fault of his own.</p>
<p>I think this strategy gives the perfect balance between preventing and helping those who are homeless. It's important that everyone works together, and those people that have genuine need for homeless assistance know where to access it and are given it. It's clear that the Council cannot do this alone and it's great to see that other agencies and groups have been involved. I hope they continue and increase their support to the Council.</p>

Additional Comments Received

Darlington Assistance for Refugees (DAR)

The strategy identifies refugees as having a high risk of homelessness but doesn't explain why. We suggest they:

- Are vulnerable due to language
- Lack finance to secure loans or offer deposits
- Have no access to utility bills needed for proof of ID
- Are not in a position to find guarantors
- Are subject to a "cliff edge" of 28 days' notice to leave Mears accommodation.

To counter this, we suggest improved coordination between the Home Office, Mears, the Council, housing providers and local charities including DAR. The Home Office, Mears and other housing providers should also be partners included in the action plan.

Numbers of asylum seekers will increase as local authorities have been told by the regional Migration Partnership that Darlington has not reached the designated saturation point.

In the absence of available accommodation, refugees are increasingly being accommodated in expensive temporary accommodation.

The private rented sector:

- Expensive option for refugees.
- The Local Housing Allowance has been frozen once again this year, meaning that while rents continue to increase, there is a growing gap in the Housing Benefit available to cover this. The Council should raise this with Central Government.
- There is high demand for private rented property and private landlords are choosing not to accommodate the most vulnerable in society.

Temporary accommodation:

- Other local authorities are able to buy up houses in Darlington and use them for temporary accommodation (Durham for example). Why is this not an option for Darlington Borough Council?

Acquisition and refurbishment to increase housing stock:

- The Council should explore the opportunities for the acquisition and refurbishment of long-term empty properties and poor quality private rented stock.
- Schemes such as those developed by Back on the Map in Sunderland and Community Campus '86 in Teesside could be replicated here.
- There is the potential to use and develop the building skills of asylum seekers and refugees and students at Darlington College in developing a scheme of this nature.

Supported Housing:

We feel strongly that Supported Housing providers should offer move-on accommodation for a period of time. Most do not do this, because it reduces their income. Some organisations like Action Foundation offer, housing for those with No Recourse to Public Funds, Supported Housing, move-on housing, and direct links with private landlords (not through agencies who charge £400 for references and have rigid guidelines around who is eligible for renting properties on their books). This ensures a flow of tenants who progress through the system and who are ultimately in private accommodation.

- We feel that the cost of Supported Housing is not value for money if it continues to trap tenants into not working and claiming benefits.
- All Supported Housing providers should be monitored to ensure they provide genuine support enabling the majority of their tenants to move into independent living within private or social housing.
- Stricter controls should exist asking for evidence of progress in moving on.
- Often those who need Supported Housing the most, cannot access it because it is clogged up with long term tenants.
- Tenants in supported housing should have a grace period of at least 4 months if they find work (for more than 16hrs/week) so that they are able to save for a deposit and have evidence of an income.
- Open Door North East also has good relationships with private landlords who take refugee tenants because they know they are offered support.
- This saves landlords the agency fees.

Local Authority and Social Housing:

More social and council homes should be built in the Borough to provide more move-on options.

DAR has been shocked to witness that the council properties allocated to those granted leave to remain do not have carpets and curtains. We understand that these are removed by the council as a matter of course. This has made properties uncomfortable and hard to heat, and added to the hardship experienced not just by refugees but also others struggling with the cost of living crisis. We believe there must be a way of consulting with prospective tenants and allowing the option of deep cleaning rather than removal when requested by them. Other Social Housing providers retain furnishings giving potential tenants the options so we feel it shouldn't be beyond DBC to do this.

Darlington Borough Council – Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care are experiencing increased referrals for people without a fixed abode, leading to 'sofa surfing' and/or street homelessness and at times a blend of both. This exposes our most vulnerable people in our communities to exploitation and risk of abuse. Within Adult Social Care we cannot begin to meet people's needs effectively without accommodation in place.

We welcome the strategy and in particular the development of housing for specific groups of people, including those with complex needs and specialist housing and support offers, which we hope will address housing for those people with previous forensic risks, which are

experienced as the most difficult to support within current housing provision as well as increasing temporary housing options. Limited specialist housing impacts on available options following hospital discharge and can lead to unnecessary placements in short stay residential care beds.

700 Club

On behalf of the 700 Club, we would like to offer a warm commendation of the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The proposed Strategy is comprehensive, covering everything from the individual rough sleeper to the families in temporary accommodation. It offers an honest depiction of the difficulties that Darlington faces, including lack of move on accommodation, a high prevalence of mental health problems, etc. and this reflects what we are seeing on a day-to-day basis within our services.

The strategy is ambitious, with a positive emphasis on prevention. It also recognizes the complexity of homelessness as something that can only be answered by working together. We look forward to our continuing partnership with DBC and the excellent Housing Options Team.

Darlington Borough Council – Commissioning

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Plan (2025-30) sets out a clear and positive strategy in respect of the Council's response to a major societal challenge. There is a strong focus on early intervention and prevention of homelessness. The Council commissions a range of service with Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) (across all ages) to support this agenda including, housing related support services and accommodation based/outreach services to support people suffering domestic abuse. These commissioned services are critical in the provision and maintenance of supported accommodation, re-settlement and outreach support for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

It is also recognised that "move on" accommodation is essential, especially for people with complex needs and require specialist housing. The exploration and development of this specialist housing option benefits the wider health and social care system in Darlington. It is through the continuing close working partnership between VCSE, Housing, Commissioning, housing developers and operational services such as Adult Services that we will deliver the objectives set out in the plan.

**CABINET
4 MARCH 2025**

**CONSULTATION ON THE RENEWAL OF THE TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER
AND INTRODUCTION OF A BOROUGH WIDE PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER**

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Jim Garner,
Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley,
Executive Director Environment Highways and Community Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult on the renewal of a revised Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) and to consult on a Borough wide PSPO.

Summary

Public Space Protection Orders

2. Local partners have a range of tools and powers at their disposal to respond and manage concerns about anti-social behaviour (ASB), from measures aimed at tackling the causes of ASB, awareness-raising, signposting for support, through to enforcement. Used proportionately and only in the right circumstances, PSPOs allow local areas to try and counter unreasonable and persistent behaviour that affects the quality of life of its residents and business. Issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) will only generally be considered when other means of addressing behaviour have not been successful.

Town Centre Public Space Protection Order

3. The town centre PSPO has been in place since 2019, and it was last renewed in 2022. The order lasts for three years, and a review must be undertaken if it is to be renewed. The order has been reviewed and it is proposed to consult on renewal as it is considered necessary to retain the powers in the PSPO to assist managing antisocial behaviour, when it occurs. As part of the renewal process the defined area that the PSPO covers and some of the wording of the existing powers are proposed to be amended to improve the effectiveness of the order and these changes are explained in the main report.
4. It is also proposed to consult on some new powers that could be included in the order. These relate to feeding of wild birds in the town centre that has created multiple issues for users of the town centre and businesses; and the anti-social use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards that can cause issues for the public and businesses. More detail on the proposed powers and the application of them are in the main report.

Borough-wide PSPO

5. It is also proposed to consult on the introduction of a new Borough wide PSPO. It is proposed to consult on additional powers across the Borough where there is evidence to justify the introduction of a PSPO to deal with Begging, where this is being displaced from the town centre, the management of side waste and the increasing issues associated with stray dogs. More detail on the proposed powers and the application of them are in the main report.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Members approve consultation on:
 - (a) The renewal of a revised Town Centre PSPO as outlined in this report.
 - (b) The introduction of a Borough wide PSPO as outlined in this report.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To provide powers to officers, including Police, PCSOs and Civic Enforcement Officers, to manage various types of anti-social behaviour.
 - (b) To improve the quality of life of persons visiting and working in the area covered by the PSPO

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director – Environment, Highways & Community Services

Background Papers

The Town Centre PSPO was last considered by Cabinet on 22 June 2022.

Scott Richardson: Extension 6753

Council Plan	The additional powers that a PSPO provides can have a positive influence on multiple priorities in the Council Plan and help deliver the ambition and vision.
Addressing inequalities	There are no impacts as a result of this report. An equality impact assessment is being undertaken during the consultation process, which may identify how the PSPO could address inequality.
Tackling Climate Change	The additional powers associated with dealing with side waste across the Borough could have a positive impact on the amount of waste collected and encourage more recycling.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The additional powers could have a positive impact on the demand for Council resources if behaviour is changed in a positive way.
Health and Wellbeing	Anti-social behaviour within the town centre and other locations around the Borough can impact negatively on the health and wellbeing of individuals.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There will be a positive impact on crime and disorder in the town centre and the borough if the PSPOs are approved following consultation.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	No particular group will be impacted differently as a result of this report.
Budget and Policy Framework	No impact on the Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

The Existing Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)

8. The existing PSPO covers the town centre (extents shown at **Appendix 1**) and came into force on 2 July 2022 and will expire on 1 July 2025.
9. The current town centre PSPO provides the Council with powers to deal with the following:
 - (a) Persons acting in an anti-social manner who continue to drink alcohol in public places, which are not licensed premises, after they have been asked to stop.
 - (b) Persons acting in an anti-social manner who fail to surrender any alcohol in their possession in public places, which are not licensed premises, when asked to do so.
 - (c) Begging
 - (d) Threatening behaviour

Consultation on the renewal of the Town Centre PSPO

10. The anti-social behaviour activities covered by the PSPO are still an issue within the town centre. In the past twelve months, there has been 204 reports of anti-social behaviour in the town centre. More recently, from 1 September 2024 to 20 December 2024, 94 reports of anti-social behaviour were made which again directly relate to that area.
11. The Council must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that certain conditions have been met to renew or introduce a PSPO. Officers have reviewed the evidence required and despite some improvements and initiatives they are satisfied that the required conditions have been met to consider renewal of the order and the current areas that it covers.
12. The council has continued to work closely with a range of partners to tackle these issues. Examples of initiatives include the PubWatch and ShopWatch schemes, Number Forty, and the monthly Cuppa with a Copper engagement events, which offer reassurance that ASB is being dealt with. Campaigns to encourage people to report ASB have also been run over a number of years. Preventing Begging in Darlington is a multi-agency group which works to reduce the number of people begging in the town and educate the public of the best way to help. PSPOs always work in conjunction with these other and other ongoing initiatives.
13. The key milestones and actions are outlined in **Appendix 2**.
14. Officers have also reviewed the effectiveness of the wording of the current PSPO and there are some amendments recommended relating to the alcohol use clauses to try and improve effectiveness of the order.
 - (a) ALCOHOL controls: It is proposed to remove the wording “acting in an anti-social manner” as this effectively allows drinking to occur until it becomes an issue. The suggested deletion enables proactive approaches to address drinking before it

becomes a problem for the wider community.

15. This will result in proactive enforcement options in relation to alcohol consumption in public spaces and guidance will be developed to ensure an acceptable and proportionate approach is taken by Civic Enforcement Officers in relation to alcohol consumption.

New considerations for the Town Centre PSPO

16. There are some new considerations that are to be consulted upon. It is proposed to extend the area covered by the PSPO to include Victoria Road from the Station entrance area to Feethams as shown at **Appendix A**. This is an important gateway to the town centre that has experienced issues of ASB covered by the PSPO.
17. There are also two activities that the Council receive complaints about in the town centre that cause issues to the public and businesses and it is recommended that the following matters are consulted upon for inclusion in the PSPO.

Feeding Birds

18. Feeding birds in the town centre can cause issues for the public, businesses and potentially to birds and wildlife in the urban environment. The majority of people do follow advice and guidance when asked to refrain from feeding pigeons, but some do not and hence it is recommended that a new condition is consulted upon for inclusion in the town centre PSPO that prevents the feeding of birds/pigeons.
19. There is a substantial bird population in the town centre and a number of initiatives have been tried to manage the situation. For example, physical measures on buildings, deterrents such as birds of prey being flown. However, ongoing feeding is an issue that contributes to multiple issues for the Council, residents and businesses to manage.
 - (a) Health concerns - Pigeons can carry diseases that affect humans, such as histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis, which can transmit to humans through inhalation of contaminated droppings. When people feed pigeons, they increase the likelihood of these birds congregating in large numbers, heightening disease transmission risks within the community.
 - (b) Public safety - Increased pigeon populations due to regular feeding can contribute to safety hazards. Large flocks may create unclean spaces and cause slip-and-fall incidents in heavily trafficked areas. Pigeon feeding can lead to significant environmental issues. Excess food often leads to waste accumulation, attracting pests such as rats and increasing the risk of contamination in our surroundings. This places demand on resources to keep the town clean.
 - (c) Risks to bird populations feeding can create potential hazards for their health. When people feed birds, their natural foraging behaviours are altered, leading to several adverse outcomes:
 - (i) Overpopulation: Regular feeding encourages birds to congregate in large numbers, which leads to increased competition for food and limited resources.

- (ii) Nutritional Imbalance: Birds can often consume processed or human food that lacks essential nutrients, resulting in malnutrition and health issues.
- (iii) Disease Transmission: Naturally occurring diseases spread easily in large groups, causing outbreaks that can weaken bird populations.

20. It is recommended that a new condition be consulted upon that would provide additional powers to deter the feeding of birds/pigeons within the Town Centre.

Anti-social use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards in the town centre

21. Another activity that the Council received regular complaints about is the anti-social use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards can cause issues for the public, businesses.
22. The responsible and legal use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards is not an issue. However, some use is not considered social and causes concern in terms of public safety and damage to Council property. For example, the use of street furniture and steps to perform stunts and tricks can cause damage and more importantly safety concerns to the public. The locations that this happens can often be in heavily trafficked. The locations where people gather to perform stunts are also taken out of legitimate use. For example, if stunts are being performed on benches or steps, they are potentially out of use for the function they were installed. For example, a bench may not be available for a person who needs to sit down for health and mobility reasons.
23. It is recommended that a new condition is consulted upon for inclusion in the town centre PSPO and that would provide additional powers to try and deter Anti-social use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards.
24. The condition is anticipated to cover any person entering the town centre PSPO area, identified as riding, cycling, skateboarding, riding a manual scooter or using an E-bike or E-scooter, within the restricted area must not ride in a dangerous careless or inconsiderate manner and/or in a manner that is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any pedestrian including but not limited to aggressive riding, riding at speed, weaving between pedestrians or performing stunts.
25. More detail on the proposals for consultation are included at **Appendix 3**.

Consultation on a new borough wide PSPO

26. Other authorities have borough wide PSPOs for certain circumstances. Based on experience and evidence from the Civic Enforcement Team and issues that get raised with them a boroughwide PSPO could be considered for certain issues because of the impact on our communities, financially and on service delivery.
27. It is proposed that a borough wide PSPO is consulted upon that would provide the Council with powers to deter and assist manage the following:

Begging

28. Begging is an ongoing concern in the town centre but action being taken has reduced numbers and there is evidence of displacement from the town centre into other parts of the Borough.
29. It is recommended that powers in the town centre PSPO are consulted upon for inclusion in the Borough-wide PSPO.

Side waste

30. Side waste is an ongoing issue that the Council faces and has to manage. There have been 111 reported cases since April 2024. Waste must be placed for collection in a receptacle that is acceptable to the Council. The Council provides adequate receptacles to deal with normal volumes of waste from households. If residents also recycle correctly there is a potential over provision of capacity in the residual waste bin. It is in the interests of the Council and residents both financially and from an environmental perspective to reduce waste generated and recycle correctly.
31. The inclusion of this matter in a borough wide PSPO would provide additional options to staff and provide a more effective way to deter the issue. This would allow a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to be issued after the service of a s46 notice should the householder continue to comply. This is potentially more effective and efficient than progressing matters through the current process, which requires a Community Protection Warning & Notice to be issued before enforcement action can commence through the Courts. The issue of side waste affects most areas of Darlington including the outlying villages. Members should note that if an FPN is issued under a PSPO and it is not paid it still requires court action, unlike parking fines which are civil contraventions.
32. It is recommended that additional powers to manage side waste are consulted upon for inclusion in the borough wide PSPO.

Stray Dogs

33. Stray Dogs are increasing in number, and the Council has dealt with 231 dogs since April 2024. The increase is not just a Darlington issue but something that is being experienced across the region. This is placing pressure on organisations that previously worked charitably to support re-homing, but they have had to change their models to cover costs, which has been passed on the Councils. Therefore, we need to be able to try and encourage more responsible behaviour.
34. As mentioned previously officers will always try to encourage compliance. The inclusion of powers relating stray dogs would give enforcement officers another option in terms of how they try and manage the service. The Council would only consider the use of an FPN if engagement and warnings didn't work.
35. It is recommended that additional powers to manage stray dogs are consulted upon for inclusion in the borough wide PSPO.
36. More detail on the proposals for consultation are included at **Appendix 4**.

Guidance & Application of the PSPO powers

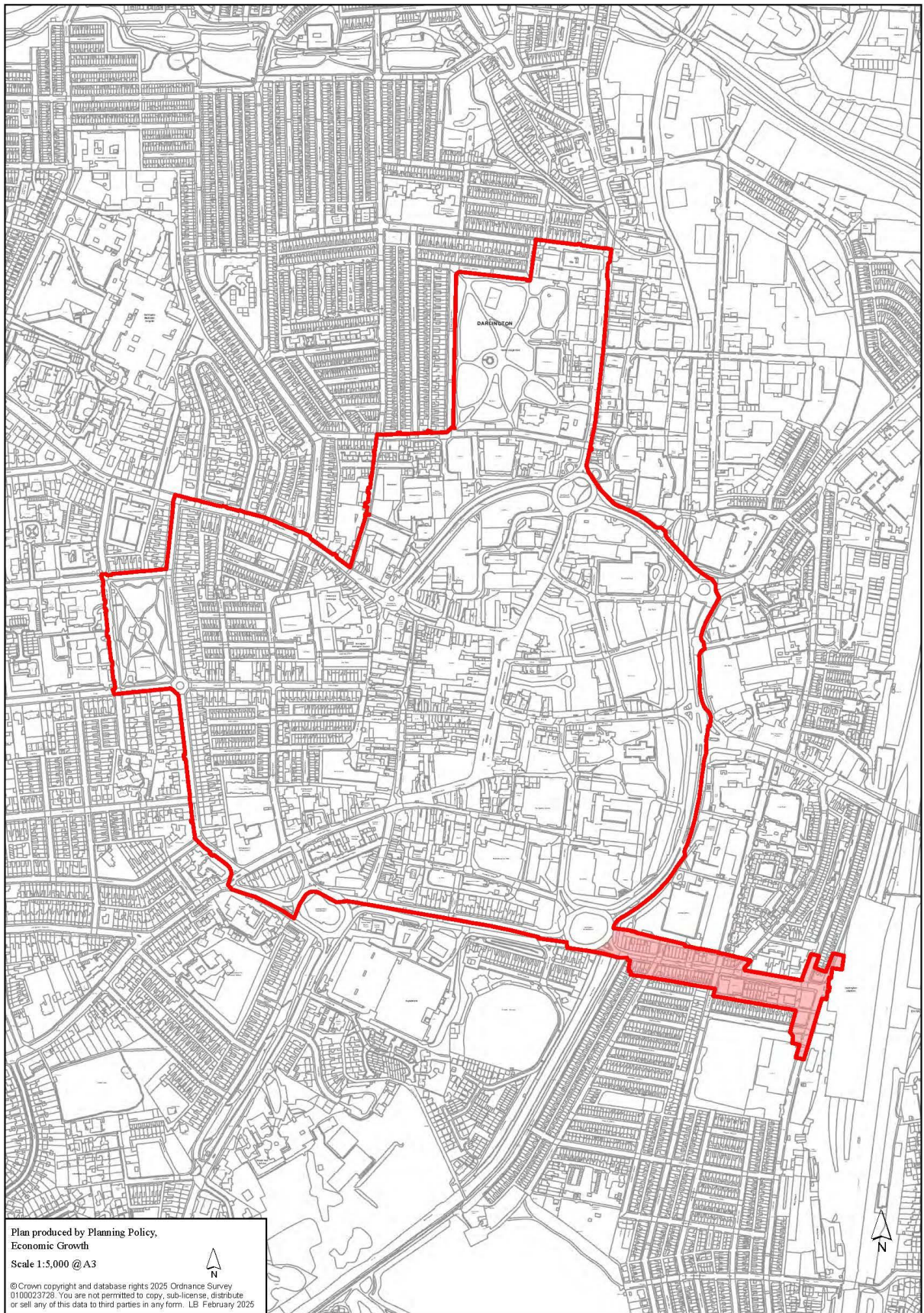
37. The use of a PSPO and FPNS is an additional tool the Civic Enforcement Officers who will try and secure compliance by encouragement before enforcement. A draft guidance and application note is included at **Appendix 5** and this will be developed through the consultation and scrutiny process to ensure a consistent and transparent approach to the use and intention of the PSPO is developed.

Legal Implications

38. Under section 66 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 an individual who lives in the restricted area or who regularly works in or visits that area may apply to the High Court to question the validity of a PSPO. The grounds on which an application under this section may be made are either that the local authority did not have the power to make the order, or to include particular prohibitions or requirements imposed by the order; or that a requirement under the 2014 Act was not complied with.
39. If an application under this section the High Court is satisfied that - (a) the local authority did not have power to make the PSPO, or to include particular prohibitions or requirements imposed by it, or (b) the interests of the applicant have been substantially prejudiced by a failure to comply with a requirement under the 2014 Act, the Court may quash the PSPO or any of the prohibitions or requirements imposed by it. It is therefore important that a thorough consultation exercise is carried out in order to mitigate the risk of such a challenge should a decision ultimately be made to renew the town centre PSPO with the proposed changes and for a borough wide PSPO.

Appendix 1 –Boundary of the Town Centre PSPO.

The shaded area shows the proposed extension to the area covered by the PSPO



Appendix 2 – Key Milestones

Milestone	Dates	Action
Cabinet	4 Mar 2025	To seek approval to consult on proposals
Consultation Period	<p style="text-align: center;">Consultation and Scrutiny</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A 6 week period is proposed to commence 6 Mar - 16 Apr 2025 subject to Cabinet approval to consult.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The proposals will be considered by the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process on .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Equality Impact Assessment</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This assessment will be undertaken during the period of consultation and considered as part of the report to Cabinet in June 2025.</p>	
Cabinet	June 2025	To consider consultation and make a decision on the Town Centre PSPO order and the introduction of a Borough Wide PSPO
If approved the PSPO could be introduced 1st JULY 2025		

Appendix 3 Proposed Town Centre PSPO Modifications for consultation

The table below outlines the proposed Town Centre PSPO changes and the rationale for those changes to be consulted upon.

Proposed Terms and Prohibitions	Changes and Rationale
<p>Area Covered Proposed change to the boundary of the area covered by the PSPO.</p>	<p>It is proposed to extend the area covered by the PSPO to include Victoria Road from the Station entrance area to Feethams as shown at Appendix A. This is an important gateway to the town centre that has experienced issues of ASB covered by the PSPO.</p>
<p>Alcohol Persons who continue to drink alcohol in public places, which are not licensed premises, after they have been asked to stop.</p> <p>Any person who continues drinking alcohol in a public place, which is not a licenced premises, when asked to stop by a constable or a person authorised by the Council for this purpose commits an offence.</p>	<p>AMENDED WORDING: It is proposed to remove the wording “acting in an anti-social manner”</p> <p>The wording was introduced upon the making of the last PSPO to tackle those persons acting in a disruptive manner within the Town Centre. However, this has posed challenges operationally with officers being unable to deal with groups of adults who congregate in various locations within the Town Centre to drink alcohol from 8am until their behaviour becomes disruptive.</p> <p>Complaints from local businesses regarding these adults gathering continue to be received, particularly from businesses in and around Tubwell Row and members of the public who walk through St Cuthberts churchyard. The proposed re-wording of the prohibition would allow officers to deal with the groups of adults drinking alcohol before any disruptive behaviour occurred.</p>
<p>Alcohol Persons who fail to surrender any alcohol in their possession in public places, which are not licenced premises, when asked to do so.</p>	<p>AMENDED WORDING: It is proposed to remove the wording “acting in an anti-social manner” for the same rationale as outlined above.</p>

Proposed Terms and Prohibitions	Changes and Rationale
<p>Any person who fails to surrender any alcohol in his possession in a public place, which is not a licenced premises, when asked to do so by a constable or a person authorised by the Council for this commits an offence.</p>	
<p>Birds/Pigeons Continuing to feed Birds/pigeons after they have been asked to stop.</p> <p>No person at any time shall provide, or deposit food for the purpose of feeding or attracting birds/pigeons, within the Restricted Area save where the owner, occupier or other person, or authority having control of the land has consented (generally or specifically) to them doing so.</p>	<p>NEW PROHIBITION: It is proposed to add a clause into the PSPO to prevent the feeding of birds/pigeons within the Town Centre.</p> <p>Currently enforcement of this falls under s87 of the Environment Protection Act 1990 (Littering Offences). For a fixed penalty notice (FPN) to be issued a person must be seen to deposit waste onto the ground and then leave the area. No offence is committed if a person feeds birds/pigeons and remains in the area until the food is consumed. The Town Centre continues have issues with the number of pigeons, which are attracted by persons feeding them on a daily basis and this prohibition will allow officers to prevent this from occurring.</p>
<p>Anti-social use of a skateboards, scooters, skates or bicycles Anti-social use of a skateboard, scooter, skates or bicycle causing damage to property and/or nuisance or annoyance to other persons.</p> <p>No person shall ride upon a skateboard, scooter, skates or bicycle in a manner which could cause damage to property or nuisance or annoyance to one or more persons.</p>	<p>NEW PROHIBITION: It is proposed to add a clause to prevent the anti-social use of bicycles, scooters, skates and skateboards in the Town Centre.</p> <p>This is to enable action to be taken against persons who act in an anti-social manner. For example, by riding these into shops, cycling in an aggressive manner towards members of the public before veering away at the last moment and by performing wheelies/stunts in public area. The proposed prohibitions would allow officers to effectively deal with these issues by the use of warnings and fines for young people aged 14 or over, and by issuing fixed penalty notices for adults.</p>
<p>Threatening behaviour No person shall use threatening or intimidating behaviour towards any other person.</p>	<p>NO CHANGES</p>

Proposed Terms and Prohibitions	Changes and Rationale
Begging	NO CHANGES. If Members decide to progress a Borough Wide PSPO it is proposed begging would be included in both the Town Centre PSPO and included in the Borough Wide PSPO.

Appendix 4 Proposed Borough Wide PSPO for consultation

The table below outlines proposed inclusions to be consulted upon for a new Borough Wide PSPO.

Proposed Terms and Prohibitions	Changes and Rationale
<p>Begging No person shall sit or loiter in any place for the purpose of begging. No person shall ask members of the public for money whether by placing an item before them for the receipt of money or otherwise.</p> <p>The guidance (page 8) states: “The activity restricted by an Order must be carried out in a public place, which is defined in the legislation as ‘any place to which the public or any section of the public has access, on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission.”</p> <p>In effect, FPNs can be issued for begging in these areas.</p>	<p>EXISTING PROHIBITION WIDENED FROM TOWN CENTRE PSPO TO BOROUGH WIDE PSPO: As a result of the action taken in the Town Centre to deal with the issue of begging, the issue is being displaced to other areas with Darlington. Beggars now are active in areas such as Cockerton, Neasham Road retail park, North Road retail park and reports have been received from ASDA on Whinfield Road of beggars in that location. The extension of the prohibition would allow the enforcement element of our four-tier approach to deal with the issue into any area of Darlington where begging occurs.</p>
<p>Household waste presentation In relation to household waste presentation, each Relevant Person is required to ensure that all household waste presented, or to be presented for collection from Relevant Premises shall be contained in receptacles of such kind and number as may be specified in any notice served by the Council under Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and in accordance with any further requirements of such notice.</p> <p>Each Relevant Person shall have an equal and separate responsibility in relation to the requirement above, whether physically present at the Relevant Property or not.</p> <p>No person shall be in breach of these requirements if that person demonstrates that they have taken all reasonable steps available to that person to secure compliance,</p>	<p>NEW PROHIBITION: This would allow a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to be issued after the service of a s46 notice should the householder continue to mispresent their waste. This is potentially more effective and efficient than progressing matters through the current process which requires a Community Protection Warning & Notice to be issued before enforcement action can commence.</p> <p>The issue of side waste affects most areas of Darlington including the outlying villages.</p>

Proposed Terms and Prohibitions	Changes and Rationale
<p>provided that proof of the same will lie with that person.</p> <p><i>This applies to all persons (“the Relevant Person”) in a position to control residential premises located within the Restricted Area (“the Relevant Property”).</i></p> <p><i>For the purposes of this Order, Relevant Person means any person residing in, whether permanently, or temporarily, by legal right or simple occupation, any premises situated in the specified area and any owner or managing agent of any premises let on a periodic tenancy and situated within the Restricted Area.</i></p>	
<p>Allowing a dog to stray</p> <p>A person who is responsible for a dog must not permit, allow or fail to prevent the dog from being unaccompanied in the Restricted Area.</p> <p>Where a person who is responsible for a dog wishes to rely upon an exemption set out in this Order, they must demonstrate that they satisfy the requirements of the exemption.</p> <p>Shall not apply to a person who is on the Registered as blind or partially sighted and is responsible for an assistance dog. For the purposes of this Order an “Assistance Dog” is defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A dog which has been trained to guide a blind or partially sighted person; or A dog which has been trained to assist a deaf person; or b) A dog which has been trained to assist a disabled person who has a disability that consists of epilepsy or otherwise affects the person’s mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination or ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects. 	<p>NEW PROHIBITION: The introduction of this prohibition would allow officers to issue FPN’s to those persons who allow their dog to stray, with exemptions in place for assistance dogs.</p> <p>There is increasing demand on the service and need to kennel stray dogs. The PSPO is seen as an option to enable officer to encourage more responsible ownership.</p>

Appendix 5 Draft Guidance and Application of PSPO powers

Town Centre

Prohibition	Use
Alcohol prohibitions	<p>In areas frequented by known “street drinkers” (e.g. St Peters Churchyard & Tubwell Row) officers will approach the individuals and advise them of the terms of the order and request that they either stop drinking and surrender any alcohol or move outside of the PSPO area. If persons do not comply with the instructions, their details will be obtained, and a fixed penalty notice (FPN) will be issued.</p> <p>The prohibition may also be used where events are taking place within the PSPO area and persons are becoming problematic but not committing public order offences.</p> <p>This will not be applied to responsible legal alcohol consumption. For example, a picnic or other event.</p>
Feeding wild birds	<p>Persons who are witnessed feeding wild birds in the PSPO area will be approached and advised of the terms within the PSPO and requested to stop.</p> <p>Where these persons continue to feed the wild birds, their details will be taken, and a FPN will be issued.</p>
Anti-social use of cycles etc.	<p>Where persons are witnessed riding/skating in an anti-social manner as outlined in the order they will be approached by officers and instructed to stop.</p> <p>If the person is identified as aged between 10 and 18 and carries out the instruction to stop, a verbal warning will be given, this being followed up in writing to both the young person and their parent/guardian. Where the behaviour continues despite this instruction the details will be taken and action taken as detailed below.</p> <p>Aged 18+ – A FPN will be issued</p> <p>Persons aged 16 & 17 – details will be taken, and consultation will take place with the Youth Justice & Engagement Service as to whether a FPN should be issued. If a FPN is issued, the parent/guardian will be informed. Where a FPN is</p>

	<p>not considered to be the appropriate action, a referral into the youth justice & engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p> <p>Persons aged 14 & 15 - details will be taken, and consultation will take place with the Youth Justice & Engagement Service as to whether a FPN should be issued. If a FPN is issued, the parent/guardian will be informed. Where a FPN is not considered to be the appropriate action, a referral into the youth justice & engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p> <p>Persons aged between 10 & 13 – a FPN will not be issued, a referral to the youth justice and engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p>
Threatening behaviour	<p>Persons engaging in threatening behaviour will initially be instructed to stop. If the behaviour continues, details will be obtained, and the appropriate action would be taken as detailed below;</p> <p>Aged 18+ – A FPN will be issued</p> <p>Persons aged 16 & 17 – details will be taken, and consultation will take place with the Youth Justice & Engagement Service as to whether a FPN should be issued. If a FPN is issued, the parent/guardian will be informed. Where a FPN is not considered to be the appropriate action, a referral into the youth justice & engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p> <p>Persons aged 14 & 15 - details will be taken, and consultation will take place with the Youth Justice & Engagement Service as to whether a FPN should be issued. If a FPN is issued, the parent/guardian will be informed. Where a FPN is not considered to be the appropriate action, a referral into the youth justice & engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p> <p>Persons aged between 10 & 13 – a FPN will not be issued, a referral to the youth justice and engagement service will be made to work with the young person to prevent further offending.</p>

Boroughwide

Prohibition	Use
Begging	<p>The approach to dealing with those begging within the Town Centre will be continued boroughwide. Those persons who are found to be begging are offered support with finding accommodation, support to overcome any addictions they may have and encouraged to stop begging and move away from the location before any enforcement action is considered. Those persons found to be habitually begging are discussed at the bi-monthly multi-agency “Begging Group” with agreed targeted actions to support the individual to stop begging.</p> <p>Those individuals who continue to beg despite being offered all available support will be issued FPN’s. Further enforcement action to prevent the individual from carrying out the behaviour in the area will also be considered where the begging group consider it proportionate (e.g. injunctions or criminal behaviour orders).</p>
Household Waste Presentation	<p>Those individuals who are found to be presenting household waste incorrectly on the first instance will be issued with a warning letter and a notice under s46 of the Environment Act 1990 which specifies how waste must be presented in the future. Should any support needs be identified at this time, e.g. assisted bin collection, these will be actioned by the officer.</p> <p>Should an individual continue to present household waste incorrectly a FPN will be issued. Those individuals who habitually present waste incorrectly may be summonsed to Court for the offence.</p>
Allowing a dog to stray	<p>Where a dog is found straying for the first time a warning letter for breaching the PSPO will be issued to the owner stating that if the dog is found to be straying again then a FPN may be issued.</p> <p>A FPN could be issued for allowing dogs to stray and are non-microchipped or those with incorrect chip details. Where a dog is found straying on more than one occasion a FPN will be issued to the owner.</p> <p>Should an owner habitually allow their dog to stray, consideration will be given for a file to be presented to Court of prosecution.</p> <p>Assistance dogs are exempt from the PSPO.</p>

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

LAND AT CONISCLIFFE ROAD, DARLINGTON

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

Responsible Director –
Ian Williams, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. Subject to planning permission being obtained for residential development on land owned by the Council, as shown at **Appendix 1**, to seek approval to acquire a house, house plot and orchard on Coniscliffe Road.
2. To seek approval to release funding so that a detailed planning application can be submitted by the Council's Joint Venture partner Homes by ESH Ltd.

Summary

3. The Council owns circa 5.7 Ha (14.12 acres) of land at Coniscliffe Road as shown on the plan at Appendix 1. Currently there is no viable access and egress to this land and acquiring the house and plot would enable the land to be considered for potential development. Subject to the proposed acquisition and subject to planning permission, the Council's Joint Venture partner could bring the land forward for residential development.
4. The owners of the house and plot have agreed to sell to the Council and provisional terms are detailed in **Part III Appendix 2** of this report.
5. The estimated business case for the acquisition is detailed in Part III Appendix 2, together with anticipated fees, so that a detailed planning application could be worked up with our Joint Venture partner Homes by ESH Ltd.
6. A further report would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration with the sale terms to Homes by ESH Ltd and seeking authority for the establishment of a new Joint Venture company. This would be accompanied by a detailed site layout plan showing the actual number of houses proposed.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Cabinet approves the acquisition of house, house plot and orchard on Coniscliffe Road, subject to planning, together with the release of funding so that a detailed planning application can be submitted by Homes by ESH Ltd, on the terms set out in Appendix 2 Part III of this report.
 - (b) The Assistant Director for Law and Governance be authorised to complete the transfers of land; accordingly.
 - (c) The Chief Executive and/or Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection be given delegated approval to negotiate terms in line with the report.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
 - (a) To secure land for future residential development;
 - (b) To give the Council control of a large area of land for future residential development.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

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

Guy Metcalfe: Extension 6725

Council Plan	This proposal will help to provide new and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	No implications
Tackling Climate Change	Improved energy efficiency of buildings through Building Control regulations.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The acquisition is expected to result in a capital receipt for the Council.
Health and Wellbeing	No implications
S17 Crime and Disorder	No implications
Wards Affected	Hummersknott
Groups Affected	None
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is 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

9. The Council owns circa (5.7 Ha) 14.12 acres of land located to the north of Coniscliffe Road. It is understood that the site could be developed for a residential development under the Local Plan, but it currently has no viable access points.
10. It is proposed that feasibility work is undertaken with our Joint Venture Partner, Homes by ESH Ltd who would submit the planning application. Subject to planning permission for the Council's land being obtained, the Council would then complete the acquisition. A further report would then be submitted to Cabinet for consideration, to the proposed sale terms with the Joint Venture.
11. Currently the site with access is envisaged to accommodate a mixed residential site of approximately 70-90 new homes, and a mix of 3/4/5 bed detached homes. However, these details are subject to change as the application is considered through the planning process.

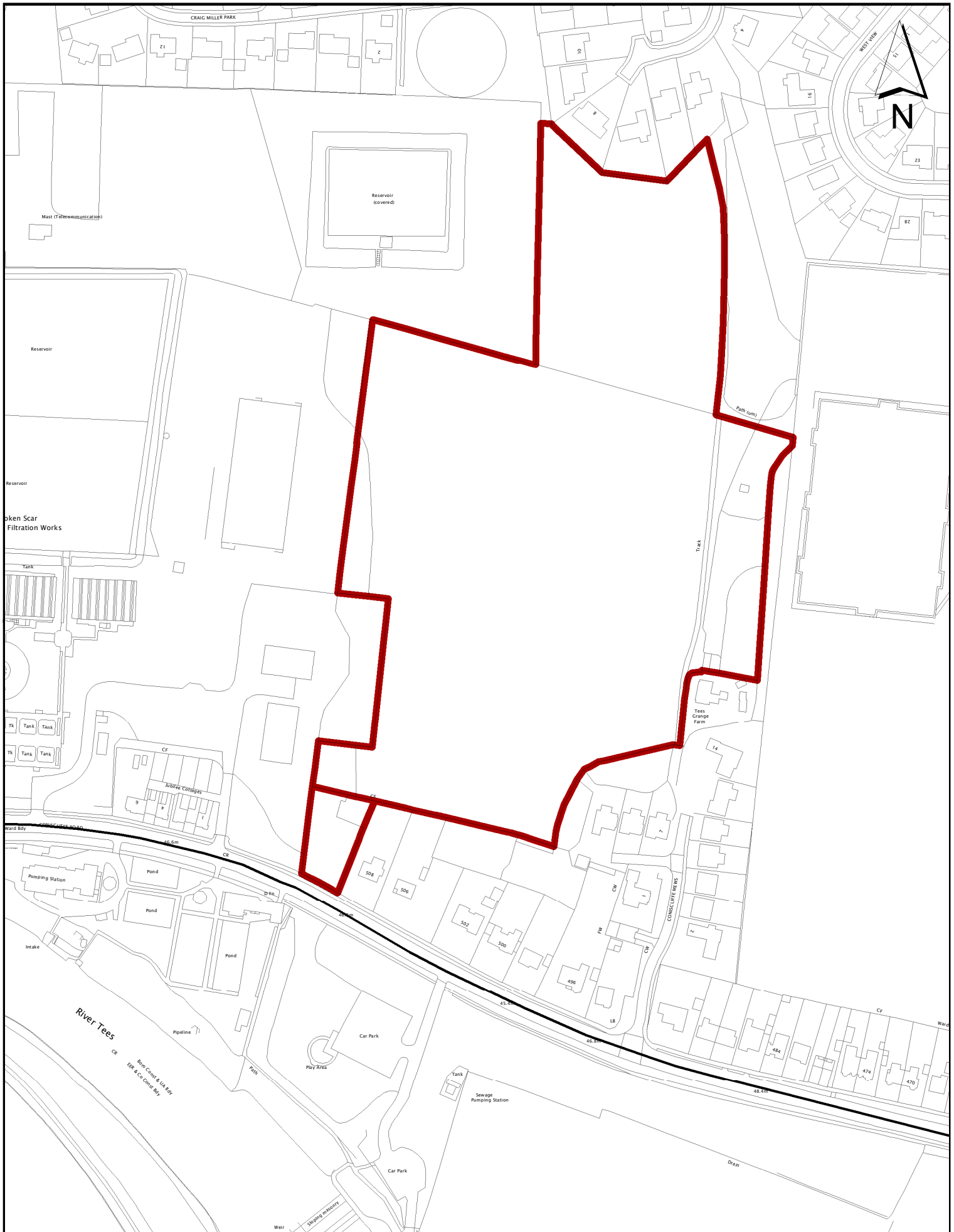
Financial Implications

12. It is proposed that funding is released from the Council's Investment Fund. A further report will be brought back to Cabinet in the future detailing the capital receipt the Council would achieve from the sale to the Joint Venture for Member's consideration.

Legal Implications

13. Reports on Title have been requested and due diligence is being undertaken.

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DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
 ESTATES, RESOURCES GROUP
 TOWN HALL, FEETHAMS
 DARLINGTON
 Co. DURHAM
 DL1 5QT

Project Title: **DBC LAND OWNERSHIP**
 Drawing Title: **TEES GRANGE FARM LAND APPENDIX 1**

Scale: 1 : 2500	Ref:
Date: 16/09/13	Area:
Drawn: RMH	

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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**CABINET
4 MARCH 2025**

DIGITAL DARLINGTON STRATEGY 2025-30

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

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director – Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval for the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 and associated action plan.

Summary

2. The Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 (**Appendix 1**) is aligned with the Customer Services Strategy (2025-30). The focus of the strategy is to maximise the productivity and efficiency that can be achieved from technology through customer access to services and via back office systems. The strategy adopts a 'digital first' approach when it comes accessing council services by those who can do so, allowing resources to be allocated to support those people who cannot.
3. Successful delivery of the strategy relies upon several factors. Having a clear understanding of digital exclusion and those affected by it enables us to explore potential interventions and ensure that no-one is left unable to access our services.
4. The strategy draws together several existing work strands together with some new ones into a single strategy and action plan. It is based on four themes.
 - (a) Customer focused
 - (b) Digital exclusion
 - (c) Encourage adoption of digital channels
 - (d) Maximising the benefits of existing ICT systems, and explore, assess, and implement emerging technologies
5. The associated action plan sets out the key actions and deliverables to be achieved during the five year life of the strategy. Advancements in technologies can happen rapidly, so the

plan has been designed in an agile way to enable to the council to consider and respond to these opportunities when they emerge.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 and associated action plan.

Reasons

7. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) This will provide the council with a structured approach to the consideration and adoption emerging technology.
 - (b) There will be a clear understanding of digital exclusion locally, and this knowledge will be used to inform the development of online services, and to signpost people to support so they can develop skills and access services digitally.
 - (c) Supports the Council's drive for improved efficiency and productivity.

Executive Director – Resources and Governance
Elizabeth Davison

Background Papers

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

Neil Bowerbank : Extension 4025

Council Plan	The strategy supports the Council Plan core principle of effective and efficient use of resources.
Addressing inequalities	Considers digital exclusion and measures to be considered to address it.
Tackling Climate Change	The strategy encourages the use of online services, therefore helping some people avoid the need to travel. Online forms reduce the need for printed materials.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The strategy supports the core principle of effective and efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	Provides easier access to services for some people, reducing the need to visit the town hall or other venues.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Some of the online services support the reporting, recording and analysis of crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All residents
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the Budget and Policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers, but the provision of some online services will be of benefit to these groups of people.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Providing council services online opens many opportunities for residents, businesses and the Council. The Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 aims to maximise the use of technology to help Darlington Borough Council (DBC) achieve its core principle of efficient and effective use of resources, particularly in response to the growing financial pressures it faces. Running alongside the Customer Services Strategy it supports the Council's Productivity Plan and Council Plan 2024-27 by exploring opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery.
9. Digital Darlington is delivered through a series of activities that focus on the provision of services online, maximising the benefits achievable through our corporate ICT systems and associated processes, and the exploitation of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence where there are clear cost benefits.
10. It reinforces the pre-established principle of taking a 'Digital First' approach towards access to council services wherever possible. The scale and impact of digital exclusion, and those affected by it will be continually monitored and action will be taken to ensure no-one is prevented from accessing our services.
11. With over 240 Council functions already available online, more will be introduced where there are clear benefits in doing so. We have made significant investments in corporate ICT

systems, infrastructure, and skills, and it is important that such investments maximise the benefits they can bring to our customers and the Council.

12. The Digital Darlington Strategy (2025-2030) pulls together several existing work strands and some new ones into a single strategy and action plan. It is based on four themes.
 - (a) **Customer focused** - Online services will be designed around the customer, with a primary focus being on ensuring they are easy to access, easy to use, and useful. For most of our customers, their preferred method of contact is online, particularly for our high volume transactions.
 - (b) **Digital exclusion** - We will maintain a clear understanding of the barriers preventing our customers from accessing our services online and use this information to inform the development and roll out of our online services.
 - (c) **Encourage adoption of digital channels** - We will raise awareness of the availability of DBC online services, build trust in their use, and encourage people to use them instead of other channels of contact.
 - (d) **Maximising the benefits of existing ICT system, and explore, assess, and implement emerging technologies** - We will maximise the benefits that can be achieved for our customer facing functions and back-office systems from new and emerging technologies.
13. The suite of actions that enable delivery of the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 are clearly stated in the strategy's delivery plan. There are likely to be changes to customer habits and technology during this life of the strategy so the delivery plan will be reviewed annually.
14. A copy of the *draft Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-2030* is appended to this report.

Financial Implications

15. Much of the strategy and action plan draws together existing workstreams that are already resourced. Throughout the life of the strategy, consideration will need to be given to additional actions and interventions such as the purchase of *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* solutions as the benefits of such technology become clearer. We may also need to review the suite of interventions available that help more people get online. Given the pace of change in technology, changing consumer trends, and the evolving Government approach to AI, the strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually.

Legal Implications

16. Our systems and processes are already tightly governed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), but AI within the UK is yet to be subjected to dedicated UK legislation (February 2024). At present, existing legislation, such as GDPR, is used to govern the use of this technology. It will be necessary throughout the life of the strategy to maintain an oversight of new or changes to existing legislation.

HR Implications

17. The Council will need to continually invest in skills development if it is to maximise the benefits of the technology it uses. Comprehensive training and support is already provided to staff who are using the corporate systems, but it is likely that more training and support will be needed if the Council wishes to benefit from emerging technologies such as AI.

Consultation

18. The draft Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-2030 went out for public consultation from 2 December 2024 to 12 January 2025 alongside the Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 as there are several interdependencies between the two. The consultation was promoted via the One Darlington magazine, social media, the corporate website (consultations section), and distributed to our partners in the voluntary and community sector. Paper copies of the strategy and feedback forms were made available within the customer services centre, and copies in alternative languages and formats were to be made available upon request. All Councillors were asked to help raise awareness of the consultation via their available channels.
19. Despite a range of channels being used and a prolonged consultation period to encourage feedback from local people and organisations, a total of seven responses were received that are specific to the Digital Darlington strategy. While the responses do not provide a representative set of views for the population of the Borough, they have provided some helpful insights.
20. On the 30 January 2025 the strategy was presented to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny committee to seek their views.

Outcome of Consultation

21. The profile of the responders to the public consultation who provided personal information was:
 - (a) All live in within a Darlington post code.
 - (b) All are aged between 60-75.
 - (c) All identified as *White Includes British, Northern Irish, Irish, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma or any other White background.*
 - (d) 66% considered themselves to have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.
 - (e) None were claiming benefits.
 - (f) There was an equal split between people identifying as male or female.
22. Within the public consultation several questions were asked about issues relating to digital exclusion:

Question	Response
Do you have access to the Internet at home or at work?	[4 people answered the question] Yes = 50% No = 25% Prefer not to say = 25%
Do you feel you have the skills and confidence to use the Internet to report issues and purchase things online?	[4 people answered the question] Yes = 25% No = 50% Prefer not to say = 25%
Would you need assistance to access council services online?	[4 people answered the question] Yes = 25% No = 50% Prefer not to say = 25%

23. Three comments were received as part of the public consultation. Two of the comments highlighted concerns about people not having the necessary equipment or the skills to access the Internet. This reinforces the importance of the Digital Exclusion strand within the strategy.
24. The third comment made several points: *“It mentions training staff and creating in-house expertise but doesn't mention taking on apprentices, which would be cost effective and improve opportunities for inexperienced staff. Agree its best not to be in forefront of new technology - it often results in costly cul-de-sac sand increases risk. Using established technology and software may not give the perfect result but if you can get a good result at a much lower cost. Focus on metrics that matter, stability and useability is more important than having a response in 2 seconds rather than 3. Basically a good idea in principle but how it is implemented will have a huge impact on how effective it is and there must be an alternative available for people who can't do it online. Need to make sure the language used avoids jargon and has explanatory notes. If possible set up target user groups to give feedback on usability of mock ups before actually building the software. Make sure it is readable by having medium to large fonts in contrasting colour and preferably allowing zoom options. have a feedback option on each page so any issues can be identified and dealt with early. As the online pages are updated standardise page layouts, language and options where possible. Action feedback and respond to queries. Where people already have an online account, populate any new forms with existing information and ask them to confirm. Consider having planned user sessions at the library”*
25. All the points within this comprehensive response are aligned with the ambitions within the strategy and action plan. The suggestion about user sessions is aligned with best practice and we will explore this further.
26. The Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed strategy and action plan on 30 January 2025. There was substantial debate during the committee meeting, but nothing emerged to suggest any changes are needed to the strategy. The points made were aligned with the actions already identified within the strategy's delivery plan.

Suggestion	Response
More useable search function on the website.	This is aligned with action 1 in the delivery plan
Consider user / focus groups to inform website usability.	This is aligned with best practice and will be explored further. It is aligned with actions 1 & 2
Integration of systems to create a single point of access	This is an established ambition and aligned with action 12, but there are technical barriers to overcome, significant costs to consider, and constraints around General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to be understood.
Consider opening up ChatGPT to staff to enable service efficiencies.	This is aligned with action 13.
Explore collaboration opportunities to tackle digital exclusion.	This is aligned with actions 8 & 9.
Collate and analyse data / stats to help inform service decisions, and understand the impact of technology.	This is aligned with action 11.
Raise awareness with Government about issues with system supplier dominance.	We are already doing this through various channels and will continue to do so.

Equalities considerations

27. An equality impact assessment (EIA) for the strategy has been completed (**Appendix 2**). It identifies more positive than negative impacts of the strategy. The negative impacts are associated with factors linked to digital exclusion, but there are dedicated work streams within the strategy that aim to help address this.

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DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Digital Darlington Strategy

(2025-2030)

DRAFT

Introduction

Providing council services online opens many opportunities for residents, businesses and the Council. The *Digital Darlington Strategy* aims to maximise the use of technology to help Darlington Borough Council achieve its key principle of *efficient and effective use of resources*, particularly in response to the growing financial pressures it faces. Running alongside the Customer Services Strategy it supports the Council's *Productivity Plan and Council Plan 2024-27* by exploring opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery.



Digital Darlington is delivered through a series of activities that focus on the provision of services online, maximising the benefits achievable through our corporate ICT systems and associated processes, and the exploitation of emerging technologies such as *artificial intelligence* where there are clear cost benefits.

We are taking a 'Digital First' approach towards access to council services wherever possible, but the scale and impact of digital exclusion and those affected by it will be continually monitored. We will continue to take action where possible to ensure no-one is prevented from accessing our services.

An ambition within the Council Plan is to have ***thriving places and connected communities***, and delivery of the Digital Darlington Strategy will play a role alongside other local, regional and national strategies and plans that help residents become digitally connected and benefit from opportunities offered online.

Councillor Mandy Porter

Cabinet Member for Resources

Our Vision

Taking a 'digital first' approach to public services.

The Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021-24 established a clear vision that “where possible, we will provide digital access to all our services” and “we will expect customers who can self-serve to do so, so that we can focus our resources on the people who need our help the most”.

As we head into 2025 this vision remains unchanged and it is being carried forward within the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30. At a time when council finances are under greater pressure than ever before it is imperative that we explore and exploit new and emerging technologies for customer facing services and back office processes as they become more affordable, accessible, usable, and offer significant opportunities for the council to operate more efficiently.

With over 240 council functions already available online, more will be introduced where there are clear benefits in doing so. We have made significant investments in corporate ICT systems, infrastructure, and skills, and it is important that such investments maximise the benefits they can bring to our customers and the council.

Before providing services online, the impact on people who are digitally excluded will be considered, and interventions will be provided if needed so that no-one is left being unable to access our services.

Progress with the Digital Darlington Strategy will be reported every 6 months as part of the Council Plan performance reports.

Theme 1: Customer focused

Online services will be designed around the customer, with a primary focus being on ensuring they are easy to access, easy to use, and useful. For most of our customers, their preferred method of contact is online, particularly for our high volume transactions.

Ensuring our customers find our online information and services easily accessible, easy to use, and useful is essential if we are to be successful at getting them to do more online and help reduce our running costs. We are mindful that customer online habits can change, and we need to respond to this.

Our online content and functions are designed to meet statutory web accessibility standards, which can be subject to change, so monitoring is in place to ensure we remain compliant. Our web editors are trained to produce content in accessible formats. In 2022 a comprehensive review to ensure a significant majority of web pages were written in plain English was completed. This was complimented with plain English training that was delivered to around 90 staff, many of whom are web editors.

Over time there is a natural build up of web pages and functions therefore requiring a focused and comprehensive review every few years to ensure content remains up to date and accurate. This typically leads to a review of the website structure and key entry points such as the home page.

The system used to manage our websites is regularly updated for several reasons such as new functions, security patches, and in response to the changes with browsers such as Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge. Occasionally an update is so significant that it requires hundreds of bespoke functions to be rebuilt. There was an update of this type in 2024. Work on the update has started and will be completed in 2025 for the corporate website and 2026 for our microsites.

The **intended outcomes from this theme** are to make it **easier for our customers to access our services online**, and to reduce the **cost of service delivery for the council**. This will be achieved by ensuring our online channels are easy to access and use so they become the preferred method of contact for our customers, reducing demand on our more costly contact channels. To be successful our online services must be designed to meet the needs of our customers.

Theme 2: Digital exclusion

We will maintain a clear understanding of the barriers preventing our customers from accessing our services online and use this information to inform the development and roll out of our online services.

Digital exclusion comes in several forms. Some people don't have access to a good infrastructure to enable them to go online due to where they live, or barriers could be around the cost of equipment and broadband or data packages needed to get online. Emerging technology and various initiatives at national and regional levels are helping to address infrastructure issues. Locally, we provide free Internet access in our libraries and our Customer Services Centre for people trying to use the Council's online services. During the past few years, we have led and supported several pilot initiatives to help people overcome the financial challenges, such as the refurbishment and free distribution of old equipment and the provision of data packages. These were short term projects with varying degrees of success, but learning from them was shared within the council and with key partners, and some elements are now part of mainstream service delivery.

Having the right skills, and the confidence to apply those skills can be a challenge for some people. The Council's learning and skills service provides courses to help people develop the skills to get online, and staff are available in several council venues including the Customer Services Centre to provide support when needed, and this is reflected in the Customer Services Strategy. Some of our front line staff who regularly engage with our customers out in the community are developing the skills to be able to offer some basic support and advice where opportunities allow.

There are some fantastic organisations within the non-profit and the voluntary and community sectors that are helping people to overcome their digital barriers and we will help to promote these initiatives where possible. We will continue to identify and promote the different initiatives available to help people develop their online skills.

Some people do not trust technology and avoid using online services. People are right to be vigilant and we have a role to reinforce that message, but we also need to reassure people that online council services are safe and secure.

Some people do not understand the potential benefits of doing things online and therefore do not want to spend time overcoming any digital barriers they might face. It is important that we raise awareness of the potential benefits, not just in relation to council services, but for the wider opportunities such as reducing the costs of household bills.

There are limited statistics available regarding the scale of digital exclusion, particularly at local levels, but there is anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that COVID restrictions were a catalyst for many people to overcome some of the barriers. Sadly, the recent cost of living crisis may have introduced some barriers to people getting online. We will continue to gather, analyse, and report on the available data and potential interventions available to inform our decisions about the types of services we will provide online, based on the

different people who will use them. Our work to make our online services easy to access and use aims to encourage more people to adopt this method of contact.

The **intended outcome from this theme** is to **maximise the use of and benefits available from** our current ICT systems and online services, and technology we may adopt in the future. This will be achieved by having a good understanding of our customers to inform the current and potential use of our online services. We will be able to make informed decisions about our investments in technologies, and where interventions may be required to enable people to use them.

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Theme 3: Encourage adoption of digital channels

We will raise awareness of the availability of DBC online services, build trust in their use, and encourage people to use them instead of other channels of contact.

We have been successful in raising awareness of the online channels available to our customers for several years, and for many people online access to services is their default preference. As more services become available online and the challenges of digital exclusion continue to be addressed, there is a need for us to continue with these campaigns.

Our campaigns will be informed by our learning around digital exclusion. In addition to promoting the online services that are available, the campaigns will raise awareness of the support available to people that will help them to overcome some of the digital exclusion barriers they may face.

Encouraging people to use online services will have wider benefits for them, not only making some tasks more convenient to do, but also opening up opportunities to reduce household costs by finding cheaper deals for the products and services they might need.

The success of the campaigns will be measured by monitoring how people access our services, with the aim of having more people access our services online where they are available as opposed to other channels of contact.

The **intended outcomes from this theme** are to **provide a more convenient service that is cheaper for our customers to access**, for example removing the need to travel to the Town Hall, and to **reduce the cost of service delivery**. This will be achieved by raising awareness of the information and services available online, the benefits they bring, and encouraging people to use our online channels in place of existing more costly contact methods.

Theme 4: Maximise benefits of existing ICT systems, and explore, assess, and implement emerging technologies

We will maximise the benefits that can be achieved for our customer facing functions and back-office systems from new and emerging technologies.

We are committed to looking for new and emerging technologies that can bring efficiencies, improve productivity, and provide better experiences for our customers.

As part of our web development plan, recent actions to improve public facing services have included the creation of a Darlington Borough Council mobile phone app, enhancements to the MyDarlington account system, with work ongoing in preparation for the roll out of a suite of Alexa skills. We are continually working with our ICT system suppliers to develop more self-service options for our customer.

We have over 15 back office systems. Some are developed in house but most are provided commercially. Commercial systems are continually being enhanced and, in many cases, the new features offer opportunities to improve productivity and generate more efficient processes. We are closely monitoring supplier road maps to identify such opportunities, but they need to be carefully considered as they usually come with increased financial costs. Implementation of these benefits are being delivered through several work programmes at corporate and service levels. There is limited competition in many of the ICT system supplier markets so ensuring value for money is an ongoing challenge.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained a high profile across most sectors, with opportunities for improvements to productivity emerging within local government. Our approach to the adoption of AI is being developed but we need to be mindful of the pace at which this technology is evolving, and picking the right time to adopt it is important. Being an early adopter can bring quick wins, but it can also be costly, time consuming, resource intensive, and may not lead to a sufficient return on investment. Legislation around AI continues to evolve and can affect the way in which it needs to be governed. Customer perceptions of AI are evolving too and may change at short notice which could affect trust in and therefore use of this technology.

Developing or adopting new and emerging technologies can require a significant investment in the ICT solution and the specialist ICT skills required for its implementation and ongoing support. It is imperative these factors are carefully considered in advance of any decisions around implementation.

There is a need to ensure there are sufficient generic ICT skills within the workforce. This will help to gain maximum productivity from our commonly used ICT applications, and it will enable some of our customer facing staff to support some of our digitally excluded service users.

Being a small local authority with significant budget pressures, being an early adopter of emerging technologies that don't have proven benefits may be too much of a risk to carry

unless we are able to secure external funding for the activity that can offset some of the financial risk.

The **intended outcomes from this theme** are to **reduce the cost of service delivery** and **increase productivity**. This will be achieved by maximising the benefits such as process efficiencies and increased productivity that can be accomplished using our existing back office and customer facing systems. It will also be achieved through the adoption of emerging technology where there is a clear business case to do so.

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Delivery Plan

The suite of actions that enable delivery of the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 are listed in the following table. There are likely to be changes to customer habits and technology during this life of the strategy so the delivery plan will be reviewed annually.

Key			
Focused work		Ongoing activity	

Key priorities for 2025-30			2025/6	2026/7	2027/8	2028/9	2029/30
Action	Theme						
1	1	Comprehensive review of the corporate website content and structure to ensure it is easy to use, understand, and is accessible.					
2	1	Comprehensive review of existing website functions to ensure they remain user friendly and accessible.					
3	1	Enable single sign on for Customer relationship managements systems (CRMs) where technology and costs allow.					
4	1	Continue to push systems suppliers for improvements to automated case progress updates for customers who have reported issues via our website.					
5	1	Ensure the software underpinning the corporate website remains up to date.					
6	1	Ensure the software underpinning corporate microsities remains up to date.					
7	2	Monitor and report on digital exclusion, with a focus on access to council services.					
8	2	Advise on interventions to be considered to address digital exclusion, and provide interventions when resources allow.					
9	2 & 3	Promote interventions that are delivered by the council and key partners that help address digital exclusion.					
10	3	Campaign(s) to raise awareness of online services and encourage use of them (reviewed annually).					
11	3	Monitor and report on the ways people access our high volume services, primarily associated with the customer services contact centre.					
12	4	Identify, assess and where appropriate implement new and emerging technologies that will improve customer access to council services, create efficiencies, and improve productivity within the council.					
13	4	Develop a plan for the assessment and adoption of artificial intelligence. Delivery of the plan to commence in 2025 but actions reviewed annually due to the rapid changes in this technology.					
14	4	Identify, assess and where appropriate implement new and emerging technologies that will improve back office					

Key priorities for 2025-30			2025/6	2026/7	2027/8	2028/9	2029/30
Action	Theme						
		processes, create efficiencies, and improve productivity within the council.					
15	4	Comprehensive review of the Corporate Intranet.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	4	Ensure we have a digitally skilled workforce capable of maximising the benefits from the available technology.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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DARLINGTON

Borough Council

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:	Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30	
Name of Directorate and Service Area:	Resources and Governance. Strategy, Performance and Communications.	
Lead Officer and contact details	Neil Bowerbank Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications	
Assistant Director accountable for this EIA	Neil Bowerbank Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications	
Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:	Eleanor Swan Inclusion, Engagement and Performance Manager	

When did the EIA process start?	2 December 2024	
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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?)
The Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 sets out the council’s vision, priorities and key actions for the application of customer facing and back office technology for the next 5 year. A key theme within the strategy focuses on digital exclusion.
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)
<p>There are several reasons for the introduction of this strategy. Many of the actions within it are already being progressed, and the strategy is pulling them together. The main aims of the strategy are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide 24/7 access to as many council services as possible - Maximise the benefits of the existing ICT infrastructure the council has already invested in - Help to increase efficiency and productivity within the council - Establish a structured approach to analysis and adoption of new and emerging technology
What will change? What will be different for service users/ customers and/ or staff?
<p>More services will be provided online, and people will be encouraged to use online channels if they are capable of doing so, freeing up resource to support those who cannot.</p> <p>More staff will make use of existing and new technology to help them be more productive and enabling increase efficiency in service delivery.</p>
What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to the EIA?
<p>A key theme of the strategy is to understand the local impacts of digital exclusion and the people affected by it. There is an ongoing process of gathering the available information to help inform decisions. This will include looking at national and local data, and working with service areas that work directly with people to better understand digital exclusion and the impacts. Support and signposting to help people access online services and develop the skills to do so is part of the strategy too.</p> <p>Advancements in technology are monitored by staff who are responsible for managing our corporate ICT systems. As opportunities emerge and are considered, decisions on whether to adopt them are taken by the Systems and Information Governance Group.</p> <p>The application of artificial intelligence (AI) is considered as part of this strategy. Testing this technology , understanding the potential benefits it could bring, establishing clear governance, and developing staff skills are actions that will be progressed throughout the life of the strategy.</p>
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?)
The draft strategy was open to public consultation between 2 December 2024 and 12 January 2025. The consultation was promoted via the One Darlington magazine, the corporate website, social media, and all

councillors were ask to raise awareness of it via their own channels. The consultation documents were available online and in printed format via the customer services centre. Information in alternative formats was available upon request. Information about the draft strategy and consultation was circulated to local voluntary sector organisations via the strategy Voluntary and Community Sector group.

There was minimal response to the consultation, with most response being from people over 65. A small number of comments were received, one endorsing the strategy and suggesting we explore apprenticeships to help with skills development, and the other two highlighting skills deficiencies that some people have for accessing online services.

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)

Most of the actions aligned with the strategy are already planned and resourced. Anything new, such as the purchase of new technology will be subjected to a business case and robust scrutiny with a requirement to achieve a sufficient return on investment.

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		X	X	<p>Positive impact For many people, accessing services online is the default and preferred method of engagement on the grounds of convenience, time and cost (less travel).</p> <p>Negative impact Statistics show a higher proportion of people over the age of 65 experience digital exclusion when compared to other age groups. There can be a lack of confidence in technology with older people which can lead to people preferring not to engage online. If there are fewer options for people to contact the council offline this may create a barrier.</p>
Disability (Mobility Impairment, Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Long Term Limiting Illness, Multiple Impairments, Other – Specify)		X	X	<p>Positive impact For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p> <p>Negative impact Some disabilities can make it difficult for people to access online services. Where possible, online services provided by the council are designed with access in mind and aim to meet various accessibility standards (e.g. being compatible with screen readers and being written in plain English).</p> <p>People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>
Sex	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Race		X	X	<p>Positive impact Online services provide the opportunity for people to access services in their own time, in their preferred location, and at their own pace. This could be particularly beneficial to people who cannot read or speak English, and may need assistance from others.</p> <p>Negative impact By default, information on the Council’s website is provided in English, although content is designed to be machine read and could therefore benefit from automated translation services. While automated translation services are available and improving, they are not perfect.</p> <p>People who are new to the country are also more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>
Gender Reassignment	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Sexual Orientation	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Religion or belief	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Pregnancy or maternity		X		<p>Positive impact For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p>
Marriage or civil partnership	N/A	N/A	N/A	
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)

<p>Live in a rural location?</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>Positive impact For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p> <p>Negative impact Some rural locations do not have strong Internet connections, meaning that residents may struggle to access online services.</p>
<p>Are carers?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p>Are on a low income? (consider child poverty)</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>Positive impact For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel and the associated costs.</p> <p>People on low income may be in need of more support from council services when compared to people on higher incomes. Online services could make it more convenient for people to access all the support they need in one place.</p> <p>Negative impact People on low income may struggle to pay for Internet access, or the required equipment.</p>
<p>Are care experienced?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	

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?

Based on the information gathered so far, people on low income and over the age 65 or with certain disabilities may be negatively affected more than others. People on low income may require more support from council services, and those over 65 are more likely to be digitally excluded.

Section 5: Analysis

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

N/A

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

N/A

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

Making the online experience better and easier to access will foster good relations between people using council services and the council.

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

Work will continue to understand digital exclusion and those affected by it. While people will be encouraged to use online services, those who are unable to do so will be able to access services through other methods. A workstream in the strategy focuses on helping people identify ways of overcoming digital exclusion to ensure any negative impacts of services being online are mitigated.

Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

Officer Completing the Form:		
Signed	Name:	Neil Bowerbank
	Date:	31 January 2025
	Job Title:	Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications
Assistant Director:		
Signed	Name:	Neil Bowerbank
	Date:	31 January 2025
	Service:	Strategy, Performance and Communications

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)
Positive and Negative impacts identified – recommend continuing with the activity
Explanation of why the option above has been chosen (Including any advice given by legal services)
This EIA identifies more positive than negative impacts of the strategy. The negative impacts are associated with factors linked to digital exclusion, but there are dedicated work streams within the strategy that aim to help tackle this.
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?)
Feedback will be gathered in several ways. We will be monitoring usage of our online services via regular reports. We have a link to a feedback form on the majority of web pages through which people can provide feedback relating to the website. We will gather feedback from staff and partners who may receive comments from residents attempting to use our online services.

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
<p>Statistics show a higher proportion of people over the age of 65 experience digital exclusion when compared to other age groups. There can be a lack of confidence in technology with older people which can lead to people preferring not to engage online. If there are fewer options for people to contact the council offline this may create a barrier.</p>	<p>The Council will always ensure people are able to access its services. It does have the expectation that those who can, will use online channels where available, freeing up time to enable staff to support those who cannot.</p>	<p>The Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications is responsible for the strategy and associated action plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the life of the strategy.</p>
<p>Some disabilities can make it difficult for people to access online services. Where possible, online services provided by the council are designed with access in mind and aim to meet various accessibility standards (e.g. being compatible with screen readers and being written in plain English).</p> <p>People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>	<p>The strategy contains actions that aim to help people overcome the various barriers linked to digital exclusion.</p> <p>There are actions within the strategy that focus on making our online services easy to use, and these actions include compliance with accessibility standards.</p>		
<p>Some rural locations do not have strong Internet connections, meaning that residents may struggle to access online services.</p>			
<p>People on low income may struggle to pay for Internet access, or the required equipment.</p>			

Performance Management	
Date of the next review of the EIA	The next formal review will be when the strategy is refreshed, but the individual impacts will be subject to ongoing review as part of the action plan associated with the strategy.
How often will the EIA action plan be reviewed?	See above
Who will carry out this review?	Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications.

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY 2025-2030

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Mandy Porter,
Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director - Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030.

Summary

2. The Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how we will support customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
3. Included in the strategy are our Customer Standards, which set out the timescales and standards our customers can expect from all Council services when they contact us.
4. A public consultation exercise has been undertaken on the strategy and feedback is given at paragraph 9. This report was considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 30 January 2025, who received the outcome of the consultation, and agreed the report's onward submission for consideration by Cabinet.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note the content of this report, and
 - (b) Approve the Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 at **Appendix 1**.

Reason

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To ensure residents receive a consistent level of customer service from all Council services, no matter how they contact us.

- (b) To ensure that advice, assistance and support is given to anyone who is digitally excluded, to maximise the productivity and efficiency that can be achieved from technology in accordance with the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources and Governance

Background Papers

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

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's ECONOMY priority to build a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all
Addressing inequalities	The Customer Services Strategy will ensure that residents who are digitally excluded are provided with appropriate support
Tackling Climate Change	The strategy aims to support residents to use online services, therefore helping some people avoid the need to travel
Efficient and effective use of resources	The continued promotion of on-line services with support for those who are digitally excluded will deliver efficiencies for the Council and its customers
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All residents
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is an Executive 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

7. The Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how we will support customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
8. The strategy focusses on seven key aims:
 - (a) **Providing excellent customer services** – delivering all services through face to face, telephone or digital channels to our customer standards. Our Customer Standards set out the timescales and standards our customers can expect from all Council services when they contact us.
 - (b) **Making it clear how customers can contact us** – ensuring that digital channels are the first choice for contacting the Council, but always providing customers with information about how they can speak to a member of staff.
 - (c) **Making it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't** – being clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
 - (d) **Providing support for those customers who are digitally excluded** – expecting those customers who can use digital self-serve channels to do so, freeing up our staff to help and support those customers who cannot use our on-line services and ensure no-one is left behind.
 - (e) **Delivering value for money** – using technology and customer data to improve services and deliver efficiencies, investing any savings into providing extra support for customers who need it.
 - (f) **Investing in our people** – ensuring our staff have the right skills and IT equipment to deliver services and support our customers.
 - (g) **Listening to our customers and using this to improve our services** – asking customers about the services they have received and using this feedback to make improvements, including complaints about our services.

Consultation

9. A public consultation exercise was undertaken on the strategy during December 2024 to January 2025 alongside the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-2030, as there are several interdependencies between the two.

Outcome of Consultation

10. Overall, limited responses were received from the consultation exercise. Respondents were asked to comment on the strategy, and the following was received:

- (a) Two comments raised concerns about residents who are digitally excluded. One of these related to residents without internet access; “I worry that too many services are becoming online preventing access to those without internet or unable to use”. The Customer Service strategy makes it clear that “we will provide computer access to Council services and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre, free of charge”.
- (b) The second comment was around “vulnerable” residents who would be “unable to utilise these facilities”. Again, the strategy makes it clear that “for those who cannot use digital services, we will provide full support”.
- (c) One comment was around the lack of a “general phone number”. Members may recall that the General Enquiries line was discontinued in 2018 and that our new Netcall system directs customers automatically and efficiently to the correct service. Full details of all contact numbers are published on our website and regularly in the One Darlington magazine.
- (d) The final comment was around the lack of “feedback on status when a report is made”. The Customer Service strategy makes it clear that “we will explain how long we will take to answer telephones and deal with requests, and we will keep customers updated with progress, where we can”. It will be up to each service to determine how they update customers about enquiries or set their own individual response times (for example, how quickly we will resolve a housing repair).

Darlington Borough Council

Customer Services Strategy

2025 - 2030

Introduction

Delivering excellent services to our customers lies at the heart of our work. Whether you're applying for a parking permit, registering a birth, visiting our waste recycling centre, accessing social care, or using any other of our wide range of services, we want to provide you with the best possible experience.

We have a clear approach to make every interaction with our customers, whether big or small, a positive and valuable experience. This will provide us with the opportunity to deliver support, build trust, foster collaboration, and drive positive and lasting change.

The development of this strategy reflects our commitment to listen, learn and respond to the needs of our diverse communities. Our ongoing work as part of this strategy will give us a detailed picture of the changing needs and expectations of our customers and how we can work together to make a real difference.

Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member for Resources

Our vision

We want to deliver excellent customer services that are easy to use and provide value for money to all our residents.

We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so, so that we can focus our resources on supporting the people who need our help the most.

We will put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Our aims

We will provide excellent customer services

- We will provide excellent customer services through face to face, telephone or digital channels.
- We will minimise waiting times and ensure customers are connected to the right member of staff who can resolve their enquiry at the first point of contact.
- Our focus will be on quality, ensuring we get things right first time. By doing this we will reduce the need for customers to contact the Council repeated times to get their enquiry resolved.
- We will deliver all our services to our Customer Standards and publish how we perform against these.
- We will be helpful, compassionate and responsive to customers' needs by putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience.

We will make it clear how customers can contact us

- Information about how customers can contact us will be provided on our website and in our One Darlington magazine. Digital channels, where available, will always be the first choice, but clear information on how customers can speak to staff, will also be provided.
- We will make all our written communications easy to understand and clear about how customers can contact the Council.
- We will provide information in ways to suit our customers and ensure we make use of assistive technologies to improve access for people with disabilities.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure appointments are available.

We will make it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't

- We will ensure all information about Council services is available on our website.
- We will be clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
- We will explain how long we will take to answer telephones and deal with requests, and we will keep customers updated with progress, where we can.
- We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so.
- We will be clear about what help and support we can provide to those customers who cannot use digital services.
- We will ensure staff are available in our Customer Services Centre, to provide support for our customers to access digital services.

We will provide support for those customers who are digitally excluded

- Whilst we will promote the shift to digital channels to deliver most services and communicate with residents, we will also ensure that no-one is left behind.
- Our aim will be to get more people on-line and connected to the Council's digital services, where we can.
- For those who can use digital services, we will provide the right level of support for these customers.
- For those who cannot use digital services, we will provide full support.
- For those customers who cannot access the Council's digital services for whatever reason, we will always provide contact with a member of staff to assist.
- For those customers who cannot physically access the internet or who do not have the financial means to go on-line, we will provide computer access to Council services and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre, free of charge.

We will deliver value for money

- We will use customer data to improve services for our customers and make them more efficient and accessible.
- Our main focus will be to ensure our staff resources are available to help those people who need the most support.
- We will use new technology to make processes more efficient and ensure a joined-up approach from service request to service delivery, in line with our Digital Darlington Strategy (include link).
- We will reduce the amount of paper we use, which will also help to reduce our carbon footprint.
- We will invest any savings from digital efficiencies into providing extra support for our customers to use our digital services.

We will invest in our people

- We will provide our staff with the right equipment and training to do their jobs efficiently and help our customers.
- We will ensure all front-line staff receive regular customer focussed training.
- We will be clear about our expectations for staff and recognise when they go the extra mile to help our customers.
- We will regularly ask our staff about how we can improve our services.
- We will keep our front-line staff safe and make this our first priority. We will make it clear to customers what behaviours are unacceptable and take action against those who verbally or physically abuse our staff.
- We will take reasonably practicable measures to preserve the mental health and wellbeing of our staff, whilst they are at work.

We will listen to our customers and use this to improve services

- We will listen to our customers and use their feedback to improve services.
- We will ask our customers about the service they have received and what we could do to improve.
- We will use customer data to better understand what our customers need and whether our services meet those expectations.
- We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.
- We will provide information on what we have done to improve services because of customer feedback.

How will we know if we have got it right?

- Our customers will be able to tell us about their experiences.
- We will meet our Customer Standards.
- Customer satisfaction will improve.
- Our customers will find it quick and easy to access Council services.
- Our data will show more customers are accessing services in the ways they wanted to.
- Our data will show that more customers are using our digital services.
- Our data will show that more customers will be using the computers and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre to access Council services.
- Our data will show that we are delivering excellent customer services at good value.
- Our Digital Darlington Strategy will demonstrate how we are using new technology to make our services more efficient.
- Our staff will tell us about how we can help them deliver excellent customer services.
- Our customers will say that our staff are delivering an excellent customer experience and that that they listen to them.
- We will receive fewer complaints about customer experience.
- Our data and reports will show evidence of learning from customer complaints.

Customer Standards

Our Commitment

We are committed to delivering excellent customer service to you across all Council services and to ensure you receive a consistent standard of service. We put our customers at the heart of everything we do.

Our Customer Standards set out the timescales and standards you can expect from all Council services when you contact us. These standards apply however you contact us.

Respect

We will be respectful to our communities, residents, the Council, each other as colleagues as well as service users, stakeholders, and wider partners.

Innovative

We will be innovative in everything we do and continually look for improvements to ensure we offer quality services.

Collaborate

We will act collaboratively and ensure our successful journey of partnership working continues to ensure we maximise opportunities to achieve success.

Deliver

We will aim to deliver quality services to all and strive to always deliver the best we can with the resources available.

Access to Our Services

We offer a variety of ways for you to contact us. We're available:

- Online
- Via email
- In person at the Town Hall via appointment
- By phone*

*an emergency service is available 365 days each year by phone.

Our Standards

General Standards

We will:

- Treat everyone fairly and respectfully, always showing courtesy and sensitivity.
- Be polite, helpful, open, and honest.
- Listen to you and explain decisions and outcomes clearly to you.
- Respect your rights to privacy and confidentiality and provide private areas for confidential enquiries.
- Ensure our information is easily accessible and in Plain English.
- Aim to solve as many queries as we can at the first point of contact.
- Avoid using jargon or technical terms when we explain things to you.
- Display our photo ID and staff will provide you with their name and contact details, if requested.
- Encourage feedback and use this to improve services.
- Provide interpreters on request.

Online Standards

We will:

- Make it easy for you to find what you want online.
- Enable you to report issues, apply for, pay, request, submit and book safely and securely.
- Allow you to register for customer accounts, which can offer personalised information.
- Provide access to Council news, information and consultations.
- Ensure appropriate support is available to you to access and use the self-serve elements of our website.

Telephone Standards

We will:

- Provide all callers with a standard greeting, consisting of a greeting, the section name and the name of the person answering the phone,
- Give your details and the nature of your query, if we pass you onto another person, so you don't have to repeat it.
- Provide you with a reference number, where appropriate, should you need to contact us again.

Correspondence Standards

We will:

- Treat emails and letters in the same way.
- Ensure all emails and letters provide you with the contact details of the service responding.
- Ensure we use a standard out of office message and auto signature to ensure consistency.

Face to Face Standards

We will:

- Offer all visitors to the Town Hall a specific timed appointment.
- Aim to attend to you at your appointment time.
- Ensure we have appropriate levels of staffing to assist you as quickly as possible.

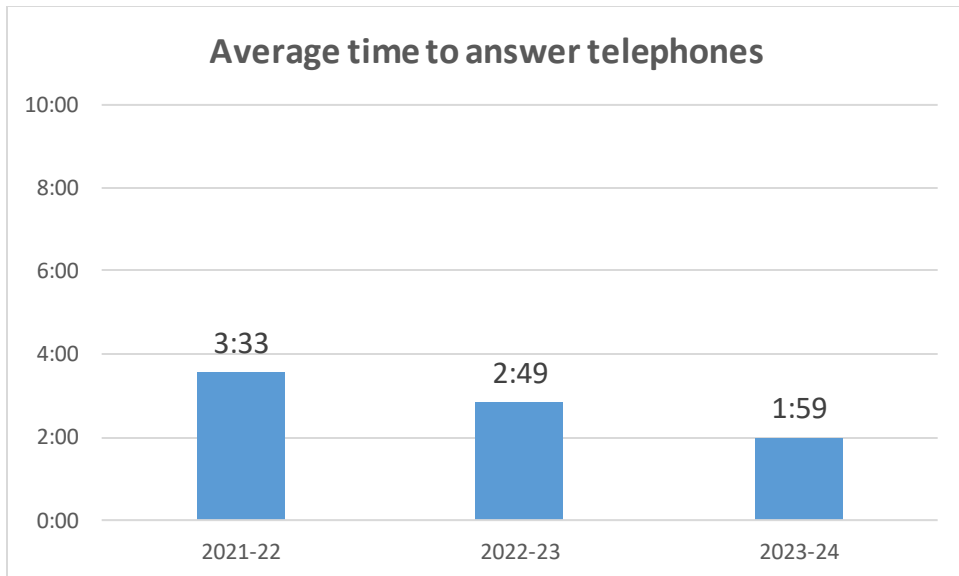
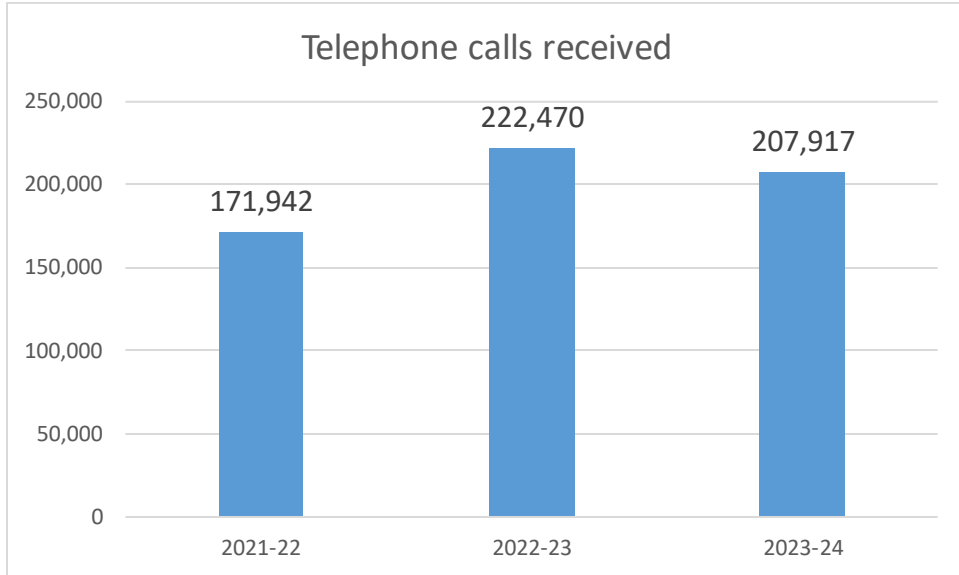
Performance Standards

We will:

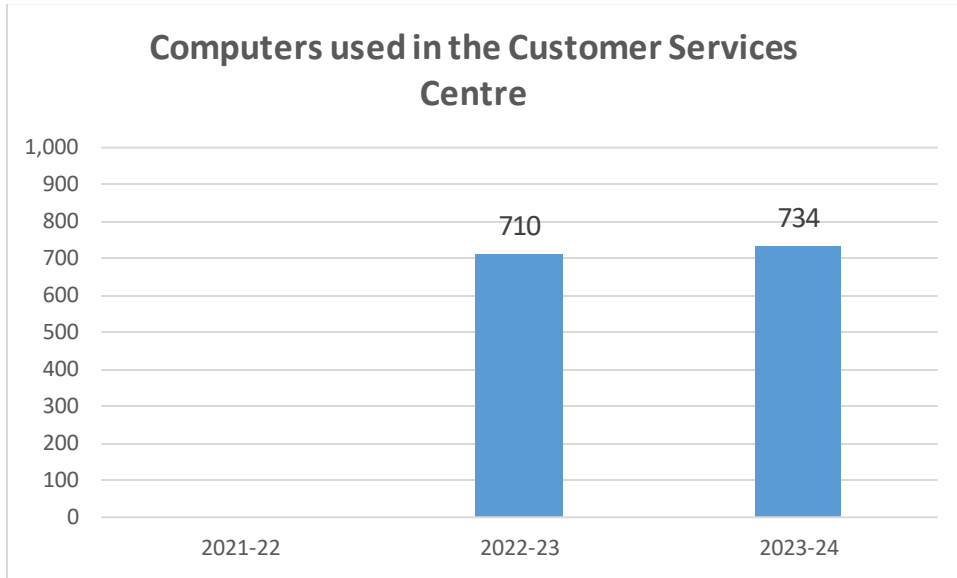
- Measure our performance through customer feedback, complaints and comments.
- Provide this information annually, so you can see how we are doing and what we are doing to ensure we achieve our targets.
- Encourage customers to give us feedback on our performance either online, in person, by telephone or in writing and use this to improve our services.
- Provide annual reports on complaints, compliments and comments received.
- Aim to answer all internal and external calls through our telephone system within an average of 5 minutes.
- Respond to all letters and emails within 7 working days of receiving them. If we cannot provide a full response to you in that timescale, we will contact you to agree a response time.

How we are performing

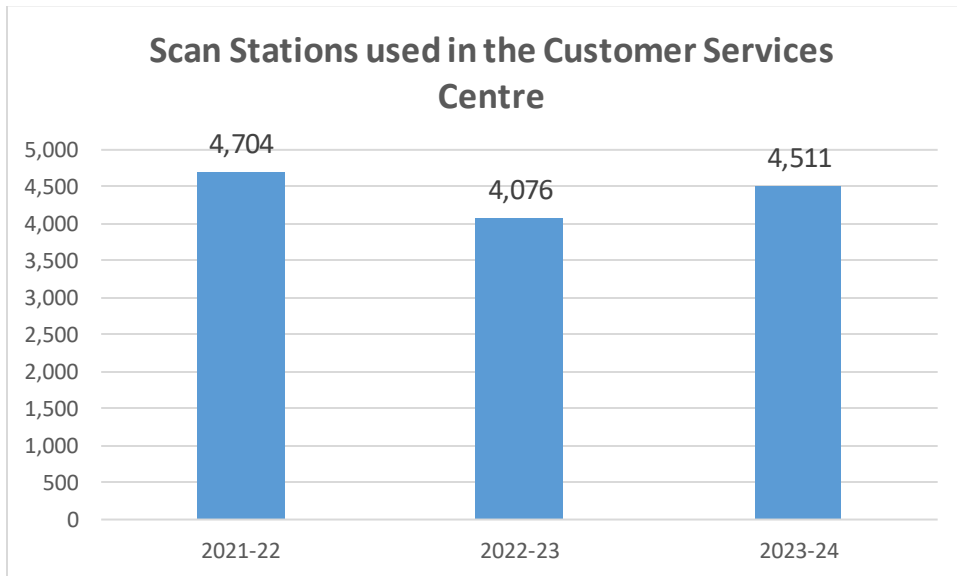
Telephones



Digital Access



No data held for 2021-22



**CABINET
4 MARCH 2025**

REGULATORY INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA)

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director – Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report informs and updates Members about issues relevant to the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and developments that have taken place since the last report to Cabinet in September 2024.

Summary

2. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (“RIPA”) enables local authorities to carry out certain types of surveillance activity, as long as specified procedures are followed. The information obtained as a result of surveillance operations can be relied upon in court proceedings providing RIPA is complied with.
3. The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (“IPA”) is the main legislation governing the acquisition of communications data. The information obtained as a result of these acquisitions can also be relied upon in court proceedings providing IPA is complied with.
4. This report updates members on issues relevant to this area of work and gives details of RIPA directed surveillance applications and IPA communications data applications that have been authorised since the last report to Cabinet.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Members:-
 - (a) Note the issues raised in the report
 - (b) Members receive further reports on the Council’s use of RIPA and IPA and other associated issues.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) In order to ensure that the Council complies with the legal obligations under RIPA, IPA and national guidance.
 - (b) To help in raising awareness and giving transparency about the use of RIPA and IPA in this Council.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director, Resources and Governance

Background Papers

General Information: Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office website: [Home page - IPCO](#)

Jim Langley : Extension 3137

Council Plan	The appropriate use of powers can help improve the quality of lives, local communities and the environment.
Addressing inequalities	The RIPA Policy treats all groups equally
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues that this report needs to address
Efficient and effective use of resources	Clarity about the lawful use of RIPA and IPA will help in understanding their efficient and effective use
Health and Wellbeing	There are no specific implications for Health and Wellbeing
S17 Crime and Disorder	The appropriate use of and oversight of RIPA and IPA powers can help the Council to provide evidence to support prosecutions and tackle crime.
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This does not represent a change to the Council's 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	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office

7. As advised previously on 1 March 2024, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) and the Office for Communications Data Authorisations (OCDA) merged – creating a single body dealing with regulation in this area. Since then the new organisation has been reviewing the way that it undertakes its role and developing new strategic plans.
8. The IPCO publishes quarterly newsletters on its work which are available from the website [Correspondence - IPCO](#). There is nothing specific that needs to be drawn to the attention of Cabinet at this time.

Training and awareness raising – Update

9. Training sessions were held in October 2024 for Council Officers in service areas that use or may need to consider using RIPA. This training was delivered by Jim Langley the Principal Lawyer (Litigation).
10. In addition, all of the designated Authorising Officers and members of the Chief Officers Executive also received refresher RIPA training and there was also training for members of the Chief Officers Board. This training was delivered by the Assistant Director, Law and Governance.

11. It is an essential requirement for us to conduct annual refresher training with our staff and we have to demonstrate our compliance with this requirement when we are inspected by IPCO.
12. Information about the need to consider RIPA was highlighted in the December 2024 Annual Governance newsletter, which is circulated to staff.
13. This bi-annual report as well as other staff coms are also part of the process of raising awareness.

Bi-Annual Report Regarding this Council's RIPA and IPA usage

Directed Surveillance Authorisations

14. There have been no authorisations granted since the last Cabinet Report.

Communications Data Authorisations

15. There have been no authorisations granted since the last Cabinet Report.

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

LAND AT FAVERDALE – BURTREE GARDEN VILLAGE
PROPOSED INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT (IDA)

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor McEwan, Economy Portfolio
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to enter into an Infrastructure Development Agreement (IDA) with Homes England.

Summary

2. At the meeting of Cabinet in March 2020, approval was obtained to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to grant an option or access rights to Homes England for the construction and adoption of a spine road over the Council's land and provision of strategic infrastructure as shown at **Appendix 1**, to facilitate the Burtree Garden Village Masterplan proposals.
3. A hybrid planning application was submitted by Homes England for Phase 1 of the Burtree Garden Village and has subsequently been approved by the Council's Planning Committee. The application consisted of a detailed application for the main roads and infrastructure and outline for the housing development cells. This application includes Council land as shown on the plan Cells L, M, N and O. Homes by ESH Ltd, the Council's Joint Venture partner is currently working up proposals to submit a reserved matter planning application and a further report to Cabinet will be submitted seeking approval for Homes by Esh Ltd to build the homes.
4. Heads of Terms, for the IDA have been agreed in principle with Homes England and are outlined in **Appendix 2, Part III report**.
5. Further Council land, to the east of the Spine Road known as cell CH will be opened up for development and feasibility works are ongoing.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that: -

- (a) Members agree to the Council entering into the IDA with Homes England in line with the terms set out in Appendix 2 Part III report.
- (b) Delegated Authority is given to the Chief Executive and Executive Director Economy and Public Protection in consultation with respective portfolio holders, to negotiate the IDA substantively in line with the terms set out in Appendix 2 Part III report, together with any other approvals and agreements required to facilitate the work covered by this report, and
- (c) The Assistant Director Law and Governance be authorised to document and complete the IDA accordingly.

Reasons

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

- (a) To promote new development and Economic Growth on Burtree Garden Village.
- (b) The provision of roads and strategic infrastructure should allow the Council to bring forward its land for residential development.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

- (i) Land at Faverdale/Burtree Garden Village Cell CH Feasibility Works - Cabinet 16/7/24
- (ii) Land at Faverdale/Burtree Garden Village Feasibility Works - Cabinet 5/10/21

Guy Metcalfe: Extension 6725

Council Plan	It is proposed that through the planning process, new affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents would be provided. Local Environment – it is envisaged the proposed development and Garden Village would support a clean and sustainable borough
Addressing inequalities	None
Tackling Climate Change	It is proposed the development would be accessible by sustainable transport modes which would help ensure the carbon footprint of the development is acceptable. The new development would be compliant with the latest Building Regulations to promote energy efficiency of the properties.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The workload resulting from the recommendations assumes staffing resources at existing levels, i.e. staff that have left are replaced.
Health and Wellbeing	The report has no implications for health and wellbeing.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	Brinkburn and Faverdale
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	Budget assumptions are detailed in Part 111 of this report.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
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. The Burtree Garden Village Master planning Visioning Document currently provides for a mixed-use site of circa 2,000 homes and circa 200,000 sq. metres of employment space. The first phase proposals are for circa 750 dwellings and currently includes mixed uses to include retail, school, community facilities, employment, and office space.
9. It is proposed that the Council and Homes England enter into an Infrastructure Development Agreement on the terms and conditions detailed in **Appendix 2** attached and to be considered in Part III of the report. This would allow Homes England to enter onto the Council's land and build a new Spine Road from Rotary Way up to Burtree Lane together with the strategic infrastructure to include SUDS, a pumping station, and services to enable the Phase 1 land to be brought forward for development.

10. Timing of the proposed infrastructure works are important, as this allows the Council to bring forward land in our ownership for development once the works by Homes England are completed. Homes by Esh Ltd, the Council's Joint Venture partner are currently undertaking feasibility work and preparing a reserved matters planning application for Cells L, M and O and a report will be submitted to Cabinet on the proposed disposal terms for consideration by Members.
11. The Council owns land to the east of the new Spine Road, which will be opened up for development by the proposed infrastructure works. This site, referred to as cell CH is outside of the Phase 1 planning application and Homes by Esh Ltd are working up proposals to bring this land forward for residential development and a report will be submitted to Cabinet on completion.

Financial Implications

12. Homes England requires a financial contribution from the Council towards the infrastructure works. Details of the principal heads of terms agreed are provided in Appendix 2, Part III report. It is proposed that the costs would be recovered by future capital receipts and forward funded by the Council's Investment Fund.

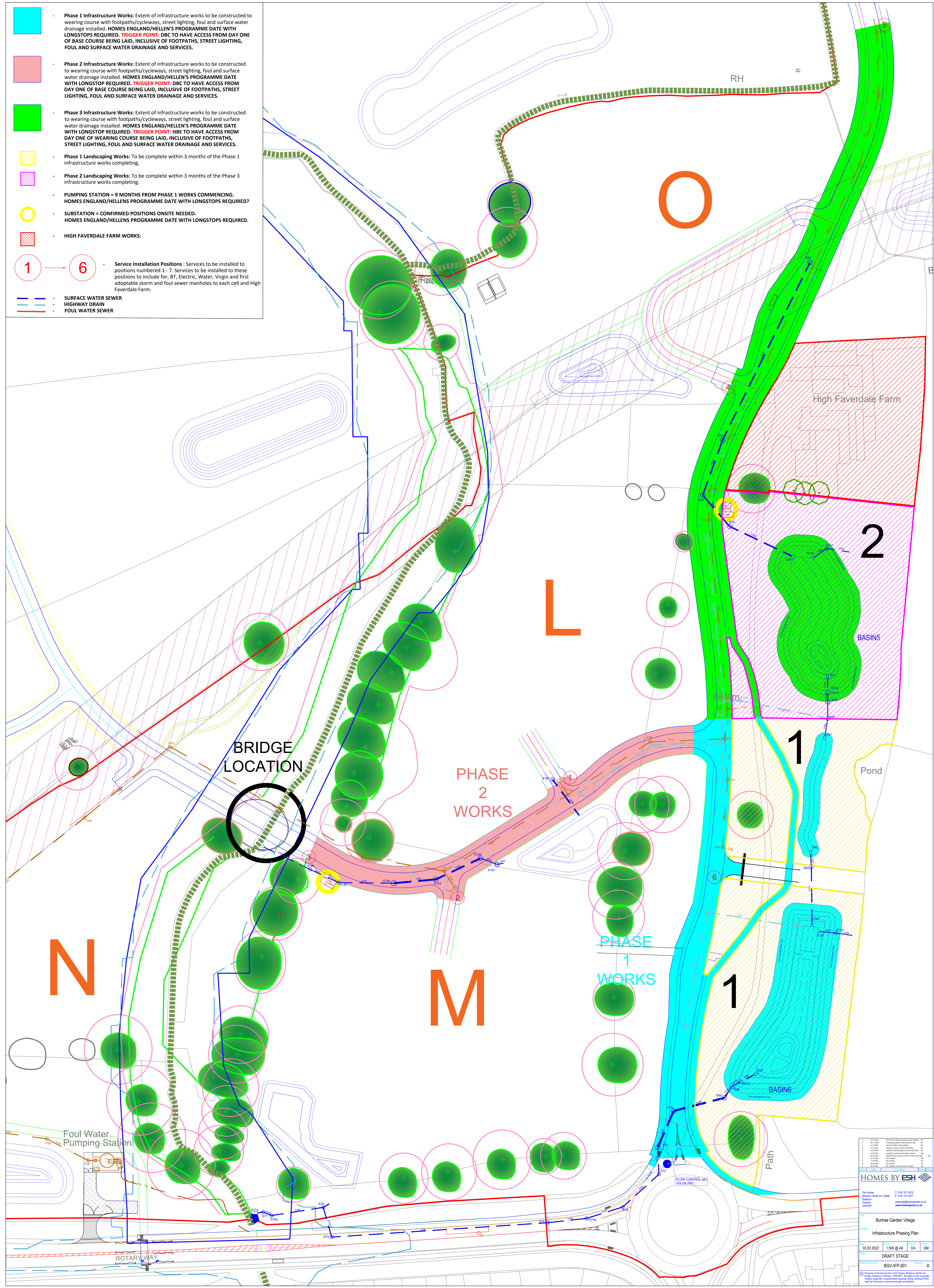
Legal Implications

13. Cabinet approval to the proposed Infrastructure Development Agreement is sought on the basis terms agreed are in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and represents 'best consideration reasonably obtainable'.

Procurement Advice

14. All procurement activity will be in line with the Councils Contract Procedure Rules and current Procurement Legislation.

- Phase 1 Infrastructure Works:** Extent of infrastructure works to be constructed to wearing course with footpaths/cycleways, street lighting, foul and surface water drainage installed. **HOMES ENGLAND/HELLEN'S PROGRAMME DATE WITH LONGSTOPS REQUIRED. TRIGGER POINT: DBC TO HAVE ACCESS FROM DAY ONE OF BASE COURSE BEING LAID, INCLUSIVE OF FOOTPATHS, STREET LIGHTING, FOUL AND SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE AND SERVICES.**
 - Phase 2 Infrastructure Works:** Extent of infrastructure works to be constructed to wearing course with footpaths/cycleways, street lighting, foul and surface water drainage installed. **HOMES ENGLAND/HELLEN'S PROGRAMME DATE WITH LONGSTOP REQUIRED. TRIGGER POINT: DBC TO HAVE ACCESS FROM DAY ONE OF BASE COURSE BEING LAID, INCLUSIVE OF FOOTPATHS, STREET LIGHTING, FOUL AND SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE AND SERVICES.**
 - Phase 3 Infrastructure Works:** Extent of infrastructure works to be constructed to wearing course with footpaths/cycleways, street lighting, foul and surface water drainage installed. **HOMES ENGLAND/HELLEN'S PROGRAMME DATE WITH LONGSTOP REQUIRED. TRIGGER POINT: HBE TO HAVE ACCESS FROM DAY ONE OF WEARING COURSE BEING LAID, INCLUSIVE OF FOOTPATHS, STREET LIGHTING, FOUL AND SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE AND SERVICES.**
 - Phase 1 Landscaping Works:** To be complete within 3 months of the Phase 1 infrastructure works completing.
 - Phase 2 Landscaping Works:** To be complete within 3 months of the Phase 3 infrastructure works completing.
 - PUMPING STATION = 9 MONTHS FROM PHASE 1 WORKS COMMENCING. HOMES ENGLAND/HELLEN'S PROGRAMME DATE WITH LONGSTOPS REQUIRED?**
 - SUBSTATION = CONFIRMED POSITIONS ONSITE NEEDED. HOMES ENGLAND/HELLEN'S PROGRAMME DATE WITH LONGSTOPS REQUIRED.**
 - HIGH FAVERDALE FARM WORKS:**
 - Service Installation Positions:** Services to be installed to positions numbered 1 - 7. Services to be installed to these positions to include for; BT, Electric, Water, Virgin and first adoptable storm and foul sewer manholes to each cell and High Faverdale Farm.
- SURFACE WATER SEWER
 - HIGHWAY DRAIN
 - FOUL WATER SEWER



HOMES BY ESH Esh House T 0191 317 4210 Broomfield North Inc. Essex F 0191 317 4211 Durham www.homesbyesh.co.uk 24th April 2022			
Burtree Garden Village Infrastructure Phasing Plan			
Date: 03.02.2022 Scale: DRAFT STAGE Drawing Number: BGV-IFF-001	Author: AD Designer: DA Checker: DM	Status: DRAFT STAGE	Revision: K
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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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