



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

# Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 18 July 2024

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

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

1. Introductions / Attendance at Meeting.
2. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Meetings of this Council held on 16 May 2024 and 23 May 2024 (Pages 5 - 10)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given from):-
  - (a) The Public; (Pages 11 - 16)
  - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
  - (a) Review of Political Balance - Changes to Committee Membership – Report of the Group Director of Operations (Pages 17 - 22)
8. Cabinet Reports.
  - (a) Darlington Council Plan 2024-2027 – Report of the Chief Officers Executive (Pages 23 -

66)

- (b) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 67 - 70)
  - (c) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 71 - 76)
  - (d) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 77 - 78)
  - (e) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 79 - 88)
  - (f) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 89 - 94)
  - (g) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 95 - 100)
  - (h) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 101 - 106)
  - (i) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 107 - 110)
  - (j) Cabinet Urgent Decisions – Report of the Chief Officers Executive (Pages 111 - 114)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 115 - 116)
  - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 117 - 118)
  - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 119 - 120)
  - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 121 - 122)
  - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 123 - 126)

10. Motions of Notice

- (a) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Snedker and seconded by Councillor Lawley –

**Opposing Minimum Service Levels**

That this Council:

(a) notes:

- (i) the right to strike is a fundamental British freedom which is protected by international law; this can be seen in the Human Rights Act, Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Labour Organisation's Convention 87 and Article 6(4) of the European Social Charter;

(ii) the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 sets out that when employees in relevant sectors democratically vote to strike they can be required to work by use of a “work notice” and sacked if they don’t comply; and

(iii) the Joint Committee on Human Rights has expressed concern that this legislation is not compatible with the UK’s commitments to human rights for workers and trade union members;

(b) believes:

(i) the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 is a direct attack on the right to strike, a fundamental freedom;

(ii) the Act undermines constructive industrial relations and is likely to inflame and prolong disputes;

(iii) the regime initiated by the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, including the provision allowing employers to issue a “work notice” is draconian, unnecessary and unworkable;

(iv) the issuing of a “work notice” by an employer compelling named workers to attend work under threat of dismissal with no recourse to the courts is a denial of justice; and

(v) that this Act is a direct attack on the freedoms of the ordinary, hardworking residents of our borough;

(c) resolves:

(i) to not issue a “work notice” - because, if issued a “work notice”, would deny its staff the opportunity to exercise a fundamental human right, the right to go on strike, the Council is an upholder of human rights for residents and workers in the borough; and

(ii) to work with unions in the borough/district/city, especially those in the school and college sector, municipal transport and fire and rescue services to oppose this legislation;

11. Membership Changes - To consider any membership changes to Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies.



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

**Wednesday, 10 July 2024**

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

**Membership**

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

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Paul Dalton, Democratic and Elections Officer, Operations Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. Fridays Email: [paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk) or Telephone 01325 405805



## COUNCIL

Thursday, 16 May 2024

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

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Ali, Bartch, Crumbie, Mahmud, Renton and Mrs Scott.

**ABSENT** – Councillor Keir.

### 79 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 21 MARCH 2024**

**Submitted** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 21 March 2024.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 21 March 2024, be approved as a correct record.

### 80 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### 81 **SEALING.**

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

### 82 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

There were no announcements made at the meeting.

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

#### **(1) THE PUBLIC;**

There were three questions, with notice, from Members of the Public, who each received an answer thereon.

#### **(2) MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;**

There were no questions from Members, where notice had been given, for the Mayor, Members of the Cabinet, or the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

### 84 **COUNCIL REPORTS.**

There were no reports to be decided by Council, which had not been considered by Cabinet.

**85 CABINET REPORTS.**

The Cabinet Members each gave a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken under their relevant portfolio during the previous cycle of meetings. Cabinet Members answered questions on their portfolios.

**86 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-**

The Scrutiny Committee Chairs each submitted a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken by their relevant Scrutiny Committee during the last cycle of Committee meetings, and responded to any questions thereon.

**87 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND OTHER BODIES.**

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**ANNUAL COUNCIL**  
Thursday, 23 May 2024

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

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Ali, Marshall, Dr. Riley and Robinson.

**ABSENT** – Councillor Renton.

**1 DEATH OF LEAH HARRISON - WEDNESDAY, 22ND MAY 2024**

The Mayor advised Members of the sudden and tragic death of Leah Harrison, a ten-year old pupil from Mount Pleasant Primary School. The Mayor reported that Leah was involved in tragic accident whilst on a school trip to Carlton-in-Cleveland near Osmotherley on Wednesday, 22nd May 2024.

Members were informed that Children’s Services were working with Leah’s family, loved ones and friends to offer any support they required at such a difficult time.

As a mark of respect, Members stood and observed a short silence in memory of Leah.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**3 TO ELECT A MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the election of a Mayor for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Robert Michael Donoghue be elected Mayor of the Borough of Darlington for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

Following his election, the Mayor made and subscribed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, and :-

- (i) Was invested with the Chain of Office;
- (ii) Announced his decision to support the Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre (RSACC) and Recovery Connections (Darlington);
- (iii) Announced that his Chaplain would be Reverend Stephanie Price; and
- (iv) Announced that his Mayoress for the Mayoral Year would be his wife, Mrs. Margaret Donoghue.

**4 RETIRING MAYOR - VOTE OF THANKS**

A vote of thanks was proposed to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress.

**RESOLVED** – That the cordial thanks of the Council are due, and hereby tendered, to Councillor Jan Cossins and Ellie Cossins for the exemplary manner in which they have discharged the duties of the high office of Mayor and Mayoress of this Borough during the past Municipal Year.

**5 TO APPOINT A DEPUTY MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the appointment of a Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Sonia Kane be appointed Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Darlington for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

**6 THE MAYOR OR CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO MAKE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT MAY BE NECESSARY.**

There were no further announcements were reported at the meeting.

**7 APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the membership of the various Committees for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the appointment of Members to the various Committees, as detailed in the Appendix to the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That any consequential changes be made to the Council's Constitution.

**REASON** – To comply with the nominations received.

**8 REPRESENTATION ON OTHER BODIES 2024/25**

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to representation on other bodies for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** – That the nominations to the other bodies, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the submitted report, be approved.

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

**9 TO APPROVE A PROGRAMME OF ORDINARY MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE 2024/25 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

**Submitted** – A programme of Ordinary Meetings of the Council for the 2024/25 Municipal

Year.

**RESOLVED** – That the programme of Ordinary Meetings be approved.

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Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 18 July 2024

| Item No. 6 (a) - Questions submitted on Notice from Members of the Public |              |                   |   |
|---|--------------|-------------------|---|
| Question No.  | Questioner   | Respondent        | Question  |
| 1.  | Leigh TAYLOR | Councillor HARKER | <p>“Cllr Harker, you recently confirmed the council is finally working on addressing its inconsistent and incoherent toilet provision – ‘...initially this will be a review of policy and best practice, over the next few weeks. This will then be followed by public engagement in September.’ As this followed Sir Keir Starmer’s recent response to “Do biological males with gender recognition certificates have the right to enter women-only spaces? It’s a simple yes/no question.”, with, “No. They don’t have that right. They shouldn’t. That’s why I’ve always said biological women’s spaces need to be protected.” it seems to indicate the Labour party now realises that warnings of unintended consequences of men transgressing women’s boundaries were not bigoted, far right or hyperbole.</p> <p>The reasoning for the provision of separate sex toilets is well established; based on hygiene, privacy, dignity, fairness, inclusion, security, and deterrence of anti-social behaviour and crime. It’s become overly complicated in recent years due to ambiguous language and misleading guidance about what the law says. But there’s a simple solution - clear guidance, policies and signage about which toilets are single sex, and where there is a unisex option, lets everyone use the facilities in privacy and certainty.</p> <p>Of all the reasons, it is especially pertinent that toilets are finally being addressed because when residents responded to the draft council plan, they repeatedly prioritised the council addressing safety, anti-social behaviour and crime. Unfortunately, some men pose a risk to women but we don’t know which ones will just by looking at them. Moreover, the ONS annual crime survey 2021 notes that almost 1 in 5 incidents of rape and sexual assaults happen in a public place or building hence the blanket policy of excluding males from female spaces on a safeguarding basis. Because as a council you aren't recording incidents of sexual offending [Sexual offences range from voyeurism, indecent exposure, masturbation and harassment to sexual violence - assault and rape] on the council estate it's necessary to look at MoJ data to understand why, in 2024, being</p> |

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|  |  |  | <p>female is still almost synonymous with being assaulted &amp; raped. Far from equality being achieved in the 14 years since the Equality Act 2010, we are still vulnerable on the basis of our sex: 99% of sentenced sex offenders are men; 88% of those sexually offended against are female. Being granted a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) isn't subject to a risk assessment and as MoJ data shows male patterning offending doesn't appear to be reduced by 'identifying as trans'. Of the England and Wales prison population, 16% of males are sex offenders; 5% of females are sex offenders; 60% of men who 'identify as women' are sex offenders. Men may say they identify as women; they may even hold the legal fiction of 'changing sex' but...</p> <p>Cllr Harker, as the council carries out 'the work', and to ensure its comparison with best practice, will it:</p> <p>A. explain in full all the toilet provision it's responsible for and those it leases (eg the indoor market) so all users are aware of the range of provision, the signage and its actual meaning eg Crown Street Library's female provision is a "ladies" toilets sign which somehow supposedly informs users that it is for those born female AND men who have acquired the 'legal sex of female' (by a GRC) but NOT men who don't hold a GRC or those who only have the Protected Characteristic of Gender Reassignment</p> <p>B. detail how any current toilet provision which is effectively operating mixed sex toilets, provides female users with hygiene, dignity, privacy and safety from harassment, flashing, voyeurism, filming and hidden cameras, being the stimuli for masturbation, or assault and rape</p> <p>C. clarify the rationale for some toilet provision not using the separate sex exceptions for single sex designations without ambiguity, as the separate sex exceptions in the Equality Act apply at the level of a service or a rule. They do not require a case-by-case assessment for each individual and the holding of a GRC doesn't allow the use of opposite sex facilities.</p> <p>D. as the new council plan states one of the approaches is to be 'data driven and intelligence led', will it provide comprehensive data on the effect of current policy and provision?"</p> |
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| <p>2.</p> | <p>Michael WALKER</p> | <p>Councillor HARKER</p> | <p>“I am sure you are aware of the situation facing several nurses at the Darlington Memorial Hospital. The policy at the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) permits any staff member to identify as the opposite gender and to access single-sex changing rooms, toilets or showers on that basis. This policy has understandably left many biological female staff members experiencing panic attacks and feeling anxious about their safety, especially after a biological, sexually active male has started using the facilities. I understand the nurses have launched a legal challenge against the Trust, as failing to provide female staff with changing facilities separate from male staff can constitute a form of ‘indirect discrimination’ against women under the Equality Act. Please can you tell me if the Council policy on using changing rooms, toilets or showers is the same as the CDDFT’s - anybody can use whichever facilities they wish or are male spaces only for biological males, and female spaces only for biological females?”</p>  |
| <p>3.</p> | <p>Leanne CARROLL</p> | <p>Councillor McEWAN</p> | <p>“On page 68 of today’s agenda it says about Skerningham:</p> <p>“Developers have carried out a consultation exercise on the Masterplan for the area. The next part of the process is for the Council to consider whether or not it can agree the Masterplan.”</p> <p>At a TVCA Cabinet meeting in January, it was confirmed that the previous preferred route alignment of the Darlington Northern Link Road (DNLR), Route A north of the Skerne, would be reviewed.</p> <p>In addition, the Tees Valley Mayor told visitors to his Facebook page that the route was between Route A and B again and he posted a map of Routes A and B, which showed Route B going south of the Skerne right through the Skerningham allocation. This map was also posted by my Whinfield councillors and the former MP, Peter Gibson.</p> <p>All references to the DNLR had to be removed from the Design Code to not conflict with the Local Plan.</p> <p>David Hand has also previously said in a public meeting that the Skerningham distributor road is the internal road and not the DNLR and that the two roads are “totally, totally different”.</p> |

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|         |    |                                     | <p>Until residents know that this distributor road mentioned in the Local Plan, Design Code and Masterplan won't morph into the DNLR, I would hope moves to look at whether or not to agree the Masterplan are delayed.</p> <p>Will the decision to consider whether or not to agree the Masterplan therefore need to wait until the route of the DNLR has been finalised and when do you expect this to be?"</p>  |
| Page 14 | 4  | Alex SWAINSTON<br>Councillor McEWAN | <p>"Under a new Labour Gov, Mr Reed (now Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) pledged to push for criminal sanctions against water company executives who failed to prevent sewage contaminating Britain's waterways.</p> <p>OFWAT is investigating water companies over suspicions of widespread illegal sewage discharges across the network from thousands of treatment plants.</p> <p>Are we going to get similar investigations and proper prosecutions against landfills? Ashcourts in Darlington has been continuing to poison the air and affecting residents physical and mental health with the toxic gas leaks of methane and hydrogen sulphide for nearly a year. Not just affecting Brafferton but Aycliffe Village, Coatham Mundeville, Harrowgate Hill, Faverdale and A1 road users.</p> <p>This is going on elsewhere in the country also and is clearly as big of an issue as sewage.</p> <p>Why are DBC allowing this company to dispose of their waste illegally? We know Ashcourts have breached several licensing laws and should therefore be held to account. I have access to the CAR reports which include the damning sentence...</p> <p>'Landfill gas is not being effectively collected which is continuing to cause odours to have significant impact on the quality of life for the local community.'</p> |
|         | 5. | Katie WALSH<br>Councillor McEWAN    | <p>"What exactly is going to happen with Aycliffe Landfill and the continued odours? The new government has swept in and said that they will look at taking the water companies to task. Will they be looking for the same type of enforcement with landfills, such as, Aycliffe that continue to</p>  |

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|    |                 |                            | <p>blight many local communities on a regular basis.</p> <p>Despite the EA's involvement many communities across Darlington and Newton Aycliffe are suffering the awful smells of hydrogen sulphide despite being told repeatedly that these smells will abate.</p> <p>I would appreciate knowing why agencies feel it is acceptable that communities have to live like this for nearly a year?"</p>  |
| 6. | Stewart HODGSON | Councillor<br>McEWAN (TBC) | <p>"Why should anyone have to live life breathing in toxic air and a smell that turns your stomach?<br/>Clean fresh air should be unlimited and available to all.</p> <p>The waste site has been there a good few years with no problems but since Ashcourt took over they are forcing local residents of Aycliffe Village, Newton Aycliffe, Brafferton and as far Cockerton and Whinfield to suffer.</p> <p>The waste site was operated for many years with no problem all residents affected should not have to suffer to allow Ashcourts to profit."</p> |

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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## **REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE – CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

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**Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader**

**Responsible Director -  
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To advise Council of the outcome of a review to the political balance of the Authority resulting from a change to the membership of a political group.

#### **Summary**

2. Since the last review of the political balance of the Council in May 2024 there has been a change to the political make-up of the Council, following Councillor Pease's resignation from the Conservative Group to sit as an Independent Member.
3. Political Groups are allocated seats on the committees in accordance with political balance rules, which are set out in the report.
4. As a result of the change to the political balance the Council is now required to review the allocation of seats to political groups.

#### **Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that Council :-
  - (a) Notes the change to the political balance of the Council.
  - (b) Approves the allocation of seats as set out in para 14 of this report.
  - (c) Agrees to the re-allocation of two additional seats to an Independent Member. One seat on the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee (with a reduction of one seat on this Committee from the Conservative Group) and one seat on the Members Standards Hearing Committee (with a reduction of one seat on this Committee from the Conservative Group).

**Reason**

6. To reflect the changed political balance of the Council and to comply with legislation.

**Elizabeth Davison**  
**Group Director of Operations**

**Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Shirley Wright Extension 5998

|  |  |
|--|--|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | The report contributes to the prevention of crime and disorder, in a number of ways, through the involvement of Councillors in the work of those Committees.   |
| Health and Wellbeing                             | The appointment of Councillors to the various Committees will enable the health and well-being of the people of the Borough to be highlighted through the work, policies and decisions of those Committees                       |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | The appointment of Councillors, will enable any carbon impact issues to be considered in the development of policies and other decisions through the work of those Committees.   |
| Diversity  | The report does not directly contribute to diversity, however the appointment of Councillors to the Committees will enable any diversity issues to be considered through the work of those Committees.                           |
| Wards Affected                                   | This report does not immediately affect any wards within the Borough.  |
| Groups Affected                                  | This report does not have any direct impact on the various community groups, however, the work of the Committee may have an affect on those groups.  |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | The appointment of Councillors will enable any Budget and Policy Framework issues to be considered when making decisions.  |
| Key Decision                                     | This is a non Executive decision.  |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision.  |
| Council Plan                                     | The report contributes to the delivery of the objectives of the Council Plan in a number of ways through the involvement of Councillors in the work of those Committees.   |
| Efficiency                                       | There are no direct efficiencies to the Council from the information within the report, however, the appointment of Councillors to the Committees will enable any efficiencies to be identified in the work of those Committees. |
| 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 Council must allocate seats on committees to political groups in accordance with political balance rules. The rules for the allocation of seats are set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.
8. Section 15(5) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 sets out the principles as follows :-
  - (a) not all the seats on the body are allocated to the same political group;
  - (b) that the majority of the seats on the body is allocated to a particular political group if the number of persons belonging to that group is a majority in full council;
  - (c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the number of seats on the ordinary committees of a relevant authority which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the ordinary committees of that authority as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority; and
  - (d) subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, that the number of the seats on the body which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the number of all the seats on that body as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority.
9. Following the resignation of Councillor Pease as a member of the Conservative Group and notification of his intention to become an Independent Member, it is necessary to review the political balance and determine the allocation of seats on committees to ensure they reflect the revised balance.
10. The current composition of the Council is Labour 24 Members, Conservative 13 Members, Greens 7 Members, Liberal Democrats 3 Members and Independents 3 Members.

### Political Balance

11. The Committees to which the political balance rules apply are sometimes referred to as Counting Committees. The process for allocation is to count up the aggregate number of seats across all the counting committees and then work out then overall number of seats to be allocated to particular groups according to their strength and also to Independent Members. Individual Committees are then considered by overall size and the number of seats is calculated by reference to the percentage representation individual groups/independent Members. Seats are then allocated to individual committees.
12. Allocating seats in a proportionate way on individual committee to reflect the group/political distribution of members as a whole is more problematic the smaller committees become in size but also by the greater number of differing groups. This will mean that it may not be possible to reflect the political balance on every committee, particularly for members of smaller groups, but balance will be sought as far as is reasonably practicable.

13. In respect of this Council, the number of Counting seats available is 104 as follows :-

**Table 1**

| <b>Counting Committees</b>                        | <b>Seats</b> |
|---|--------------|
| Human Resources Committee                         | 11           |
| Members Standards Hearing Committee               | 5            |
| Audit Committee                                   | 6            |
| LEA Governors Committee                           | 4            |
| Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee | 10           |
| Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee      | 10           |
| Adults Scrutiny Committee                         | 10           |
| Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee          | 10           |
| Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee             | 10           |
| Planning Committee                                | 14           |
| Licensing Committee                               | 14           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                      | <b>104</b>   |

14. Using 104 as the total number of seats across the counting committees and, following the resignation of Councillor Pease from the Conservative Group, the total number of seats each Group is entitled to is shown in the table below.

**Table 2**

| <b>GROUP</b>              | <b>NO. OF MEMBERS</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>% OF SEATS</b> | <b>SEATS ALLOCATED (ROUNDED)</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Conservatives             | 13                    | 26       | 27.04             | 27                               |
| Labour                    | 24                    | 48       | 49.92             | 50                               |
| Green                     | 7                     | 14       | 14.56             | 15                               |
| Liberal Democrats         | 3                     | 6        | 6.24              | 6                                |
| Independent (non-aligned) | 3                     | 6        | 6.24              | 6                                |

15. The 104 seats are currently (as agreed by Annual Council in May 2024) allocated as follows :-



**Table 3**

| <b>COMMITTEE</b>                                  | <b>LAB</b> | <b>CON</b> | <b>GREENS</b> | <b>LIB DEM</b> | <b>IND<br/>(Non-aligned)</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|---|------------|------------|---------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Human Resources Committee                         | 5          | 3          | 1             | 1              | 1                            | 11           |
| Members Standards Hearing Committee               | 2          | 2          | 1             |                |                              | 5            |
| Audit Committee                                   | 3          | 2          | 1             |                |                              | 6            |
| LEA Governors Committee                           | 2          | 1          | 1             |                |                              | 4            |
| Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee | 5          | 3          | 1             | 1              |                              | 10           |
| Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee      | 5          | 2          | 1             | 1              | 1                            | 10           |
| Adults Scrutiny Committee                         | 5          | 2          | 2             |                | 1                            | 10           |
| Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee          | 5          | 3          | 1             | 1              |                              | 10           |
| Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee             | 5          | 3          | 2             |                |                              | 10           |
| Planning Committee                                | 7          | 4          | 2             | 1              |                              | 14           |
| Licensing Committee                               | 6          | 4          | 2             | 1              | 1                            | 14           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                      | <b>50</b>  | <b>29</b>  | <b>15</b>     | <b>6</b>       | <b>4</b>                     | <b>104</b>   |

**Revised Composition**

16. As Members will see from table 3 above, the Conservative Group are currently over represented by two seats and these two seats need to be re-allocated to an Independent Member to ensure the overall political balance of the Council is maintained.

**Review**

17. In reviewing the political make up of Committees, it is suggested that the two Independent seats should be allocated as follows:
- One on the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee, and
  - One the Members' Standard Hearing Committee.

In both cases the Conservative Group will have one seat less on each of these committees.

**Working Groups**

18. The Council has established two Working Groups, the Climate Change Working Group and the Council Decision-Making and Scrutiny Working Group and whilst these are not formal Committees, the terms of reference for these groups do require the allocation of seats to be calculated in accordance with the political balance calculation.

19. Table 4 sets out the current political balance of these Working Groups

**Table 4**

| <b>GROUP NAME</b>                                | <b>NO OF SEATS</b> | <b>LAB</b> | <b>CONS</b> | <b>GREENS</b> | <b>LIB DEMS</b> | <b>IND (NON-ALIGNED)</b> |
|--|--------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Climate Change Working Group                     | 5                  | 2          | 1           | 1             | 1               | 0                        |
| Council Decision Making and the Scrutiny Process | 10                 | 5          | 3           | 1             | 1               | 0                        |

20. Having reviewed the political balance on the Council, it is considered that the two working groups continue to meet the political balance requirements and no further changes are required to the membership on those Groups.

**Outcome of Consultation**

21. No formal consultation has taken place on the report other than with the relevant Group Leaders

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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## **DARLINGTON COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2027**

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

**Responsible Director -  
Chief Officers Executive**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

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

#### **Summary**

2. On the 5 March 2024 Cabinet agreed to a public consultation on the draft Council Plan. The consultation ran from 6 March to 25 April 2024. Social media promotion reached over 20,000 people, an article on the consultation was included in the One Darlington magazine and members were asked to promote the consultation within their wards. All scrutiny committees considered and supported the draft plan.
3. 315 responses to the survey were received. The summary report of the survey analysis is attached as **Appendix A**. There are some changes to the plan outlined in the main report.
4. The draft plan will be presented to Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024 with the recommendations to approve and refer to Council for consideration and adoption. Subject to Cabinet's referral, approval is sought on the Council Plan 2024-2027 attached as **Appendix B**. It sets out the long-term ambitions and a vision for Darlington, and priorities for delivery over the life of the plan. Development of the final plan has been informed by the responses to the survey and conversations with stakeholders and residents during the consultation period.

#### **Recommendations**

5. It is recommended that Council:-
  - (a) Note and consider the outcome of the consultation (Appendix A)
  - (b) Approve the revised Council Plan 2024-27 (Appendix B)

#### **Reason**

6. The recommendations are supported as the Council Plan is the strategic document that sets out the council's long term ambitions for Darlington and shorter-term priorities and

actions. Approval of the plan is needed to provide guidance to the organisation, and clarity for the public and our partners on the Council’s strategic priorities.

### Chief Officers Executive

#### Background Papers

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

Lynne Davies 5070

|  |  |
|--|--|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | The Council Plan prioritises the safety of our residents and communities. The Communities Priority identifies key actions that we will deliver in partnership. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome.  |
| Health and Wellbeing                             | The Council Plan prioritises the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities. The Health and Wellbeing Priority identifies many actions and good health will be an important outcome across the plan. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome improving health and reducing health inequalities. |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | The Council Plan prioritises addressing carbon impact and climate change. Addressing climate change is a core principle and will be considered in everything the council does. The performance monitoring framework will include measures to demonstrate progress against this outcome.  |
| Diversity  | Addressing inequalities is a core principle within the plan. A desktop Equality Impact Assessment has not identified any significant negative impacts on protected characteristics. The key deliverables referenced in the plan will be progressed through other strategies and plans and will involve separate equality impact assessments where appropriate.             |
| Wards Affected                                   | All  |
| Groups Affected                                  | Whole Population   |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | The Council plan will be part of the policy framework and will be the primary strategy against which strategies and plans demonstrate their contribution. Specifically to the Council Plan core principles, vision, ambition, and priorities.  |
| Key Decision                                     | The Council plan is part of the policy framework with Cabinet recommending that Council approve the Council Plan.  |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision.  |
| Council Plan                                     | This is the Council Plan 2024-27 proposed for adoption.  |
| Efficiency                                       | The draft Council Plan prioritises efficient and effective resources as a core principle and will be considered in all council business.   |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | The Council remains committed to ensuring the best outcomes for Looked After Children and contains a number of priority actions that will have a positive impact on this group.  |

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

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

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

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

### **Financial Implications**

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

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# Council Plan 2024-27

# Public Consultation on the Draft Plan

## Survey Analysis

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**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

# Overview of the consultation

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



# Survey Analysis

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



# Response Rate

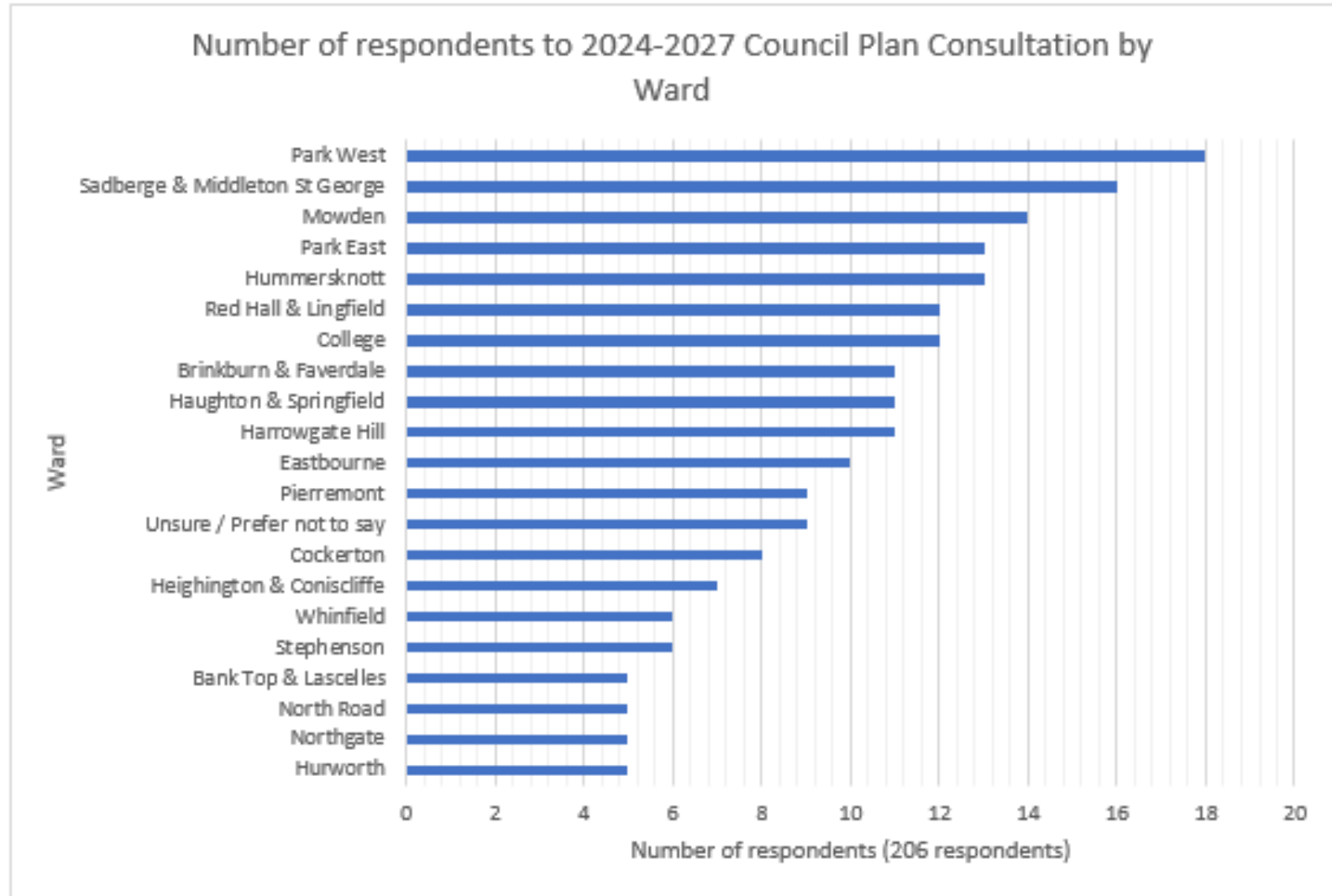
- Five times the number of responses to previous council plan consultation
- 315 responses, all online
- 5% responded on behalf of an organisation (11), 1% on behalf of an individual
- 200/315 answered the question about their sex
  - 51% identified themselves as Female
  - 42% identified themselves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



# All wards are represented

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

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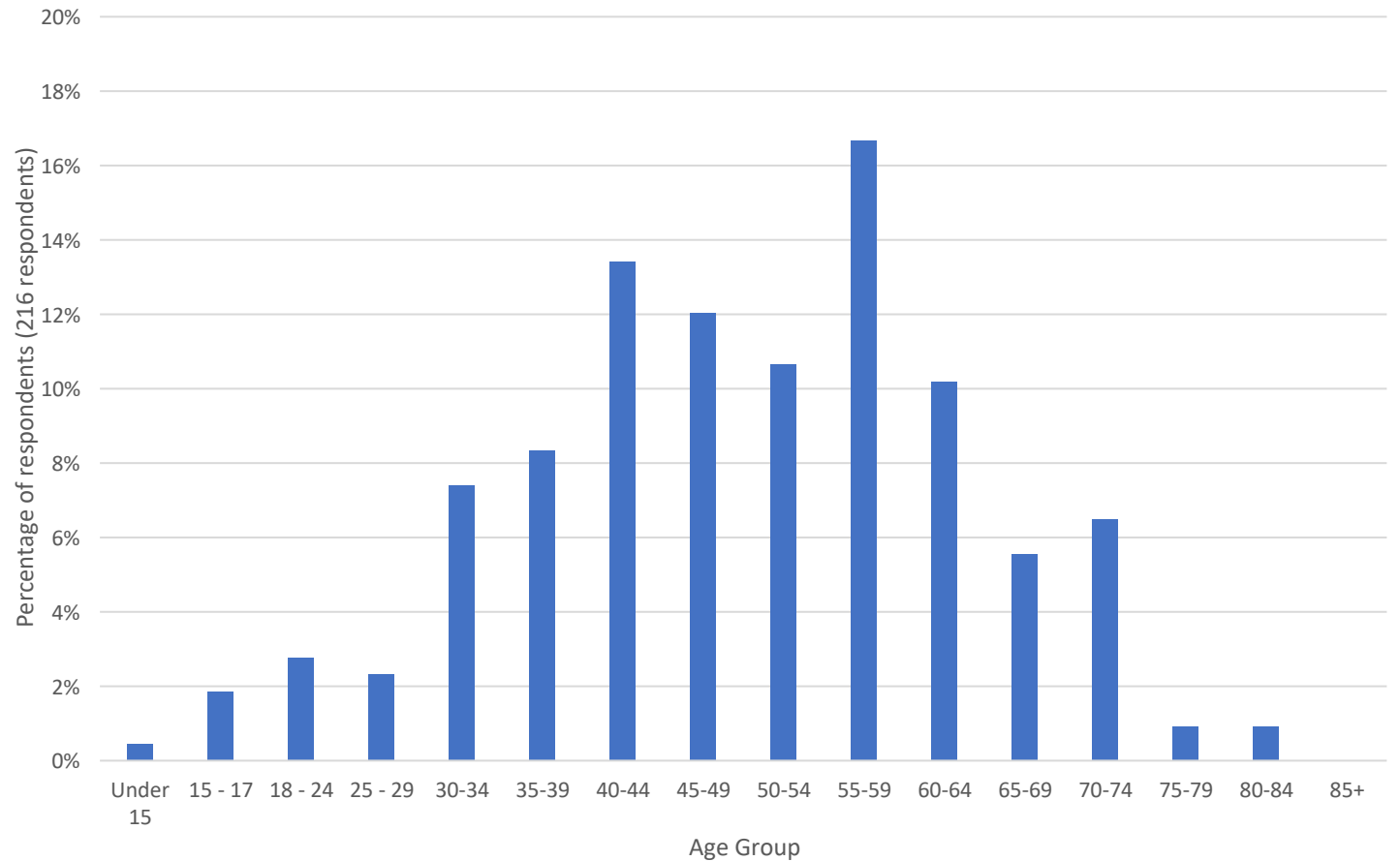


# All age groups under 84 years old represented

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

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

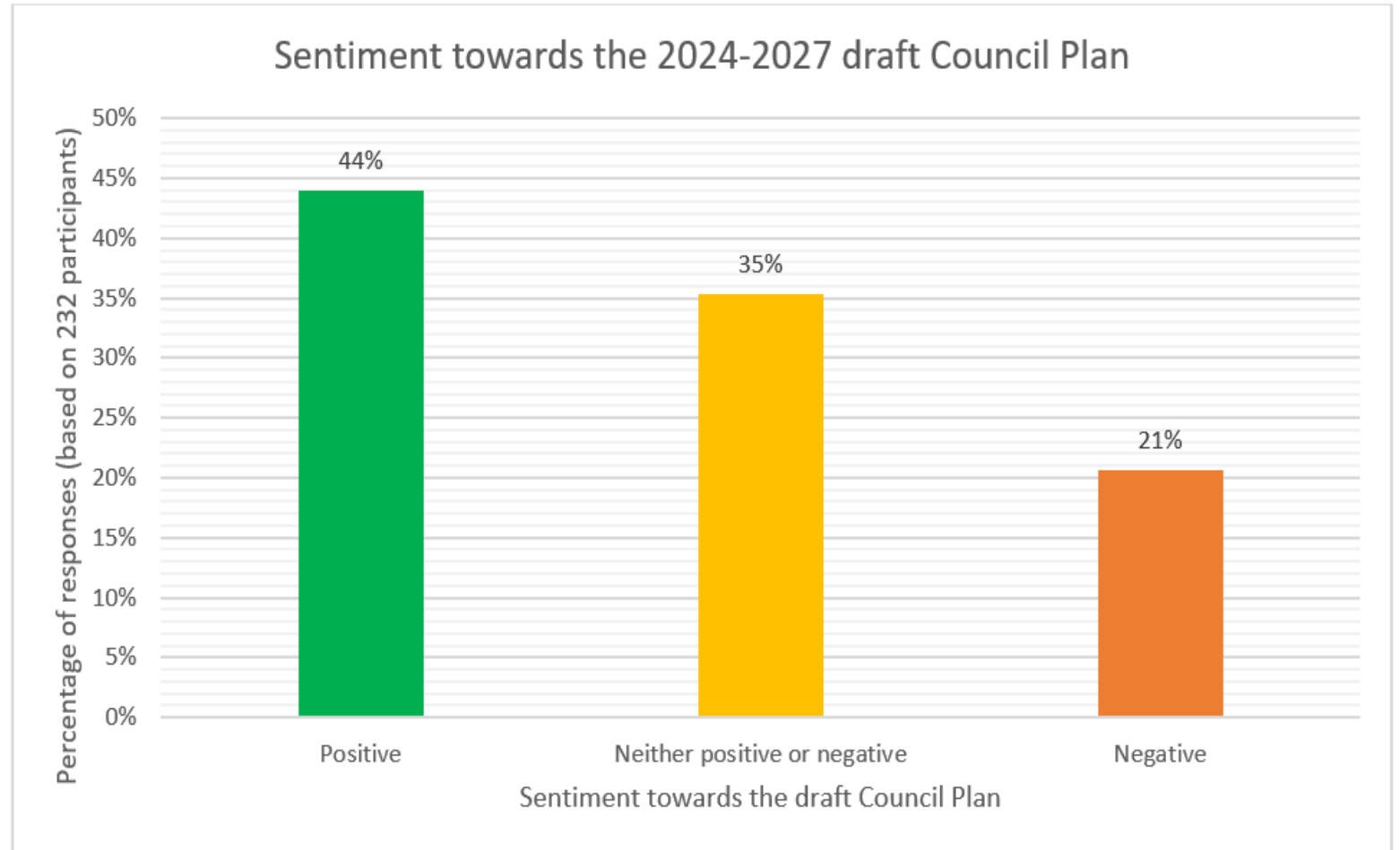




# More people are satisfied than dissatisfied with the plan

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

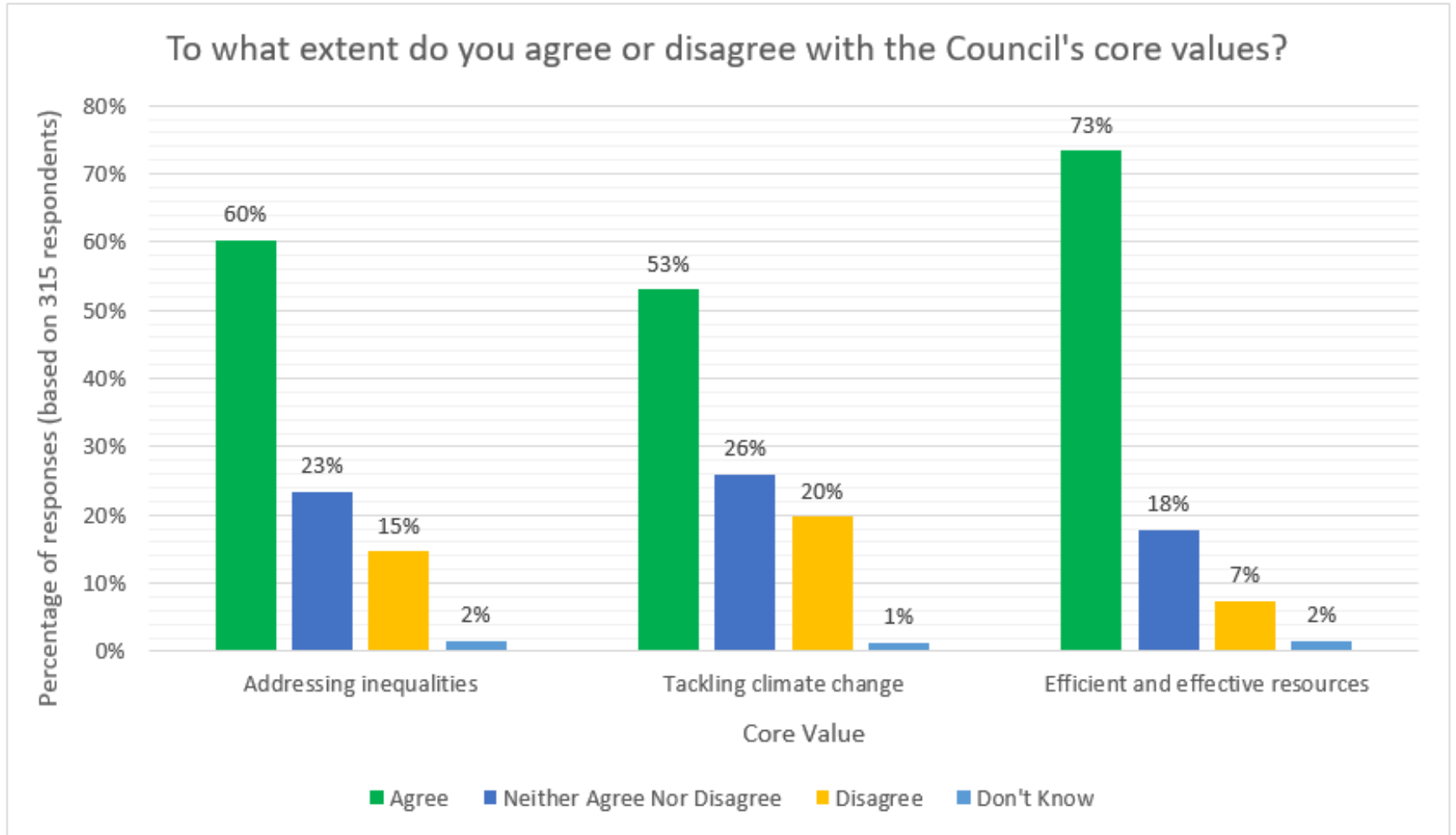
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# Most support for core value: efficient and effective use of resources

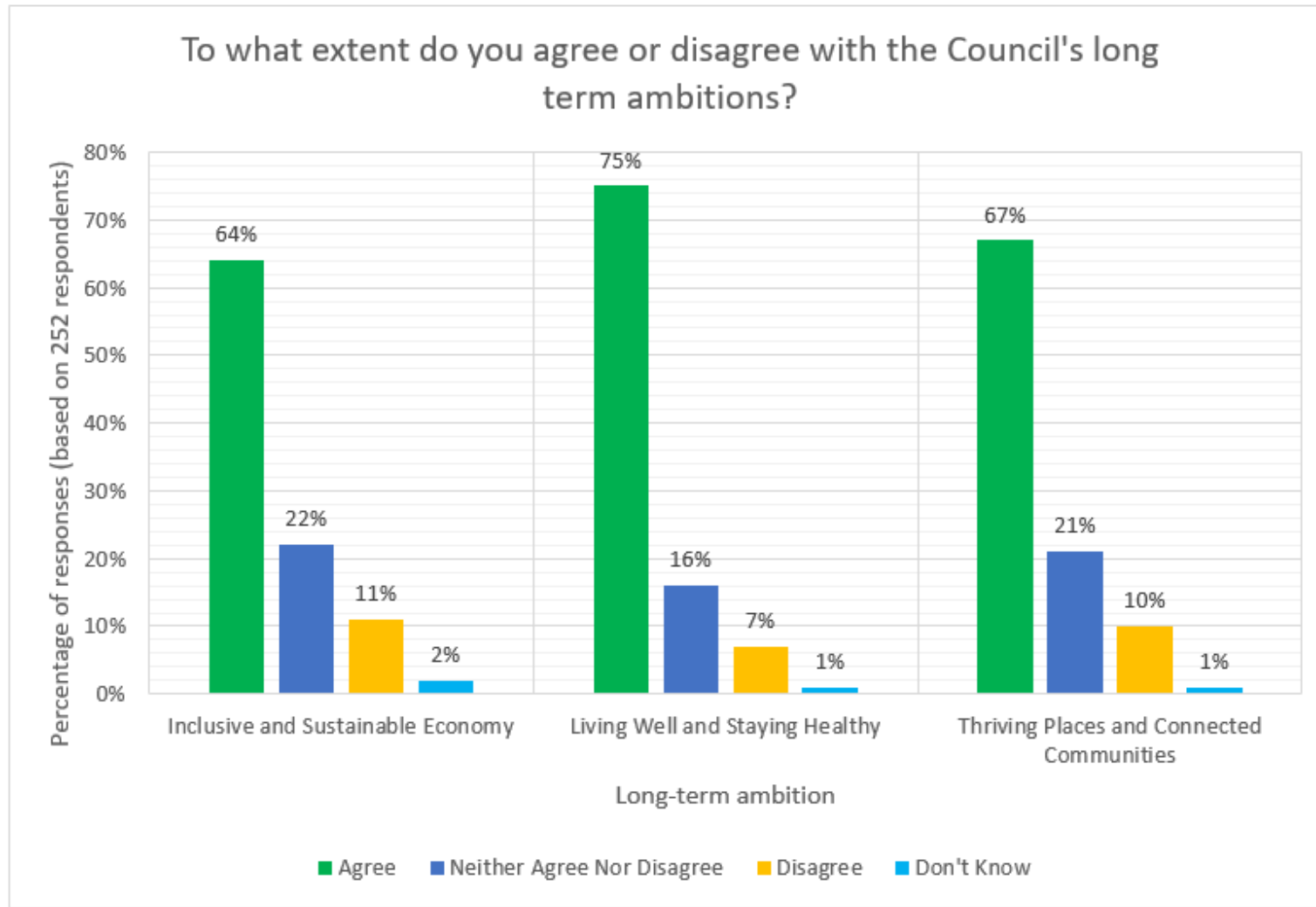
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- 315/315 respondents answered this question
- High levels of support for all three core values
- More people disagreed with climate change
- More females than males supported addressing inequalities and tackling climate change; more males disagreed





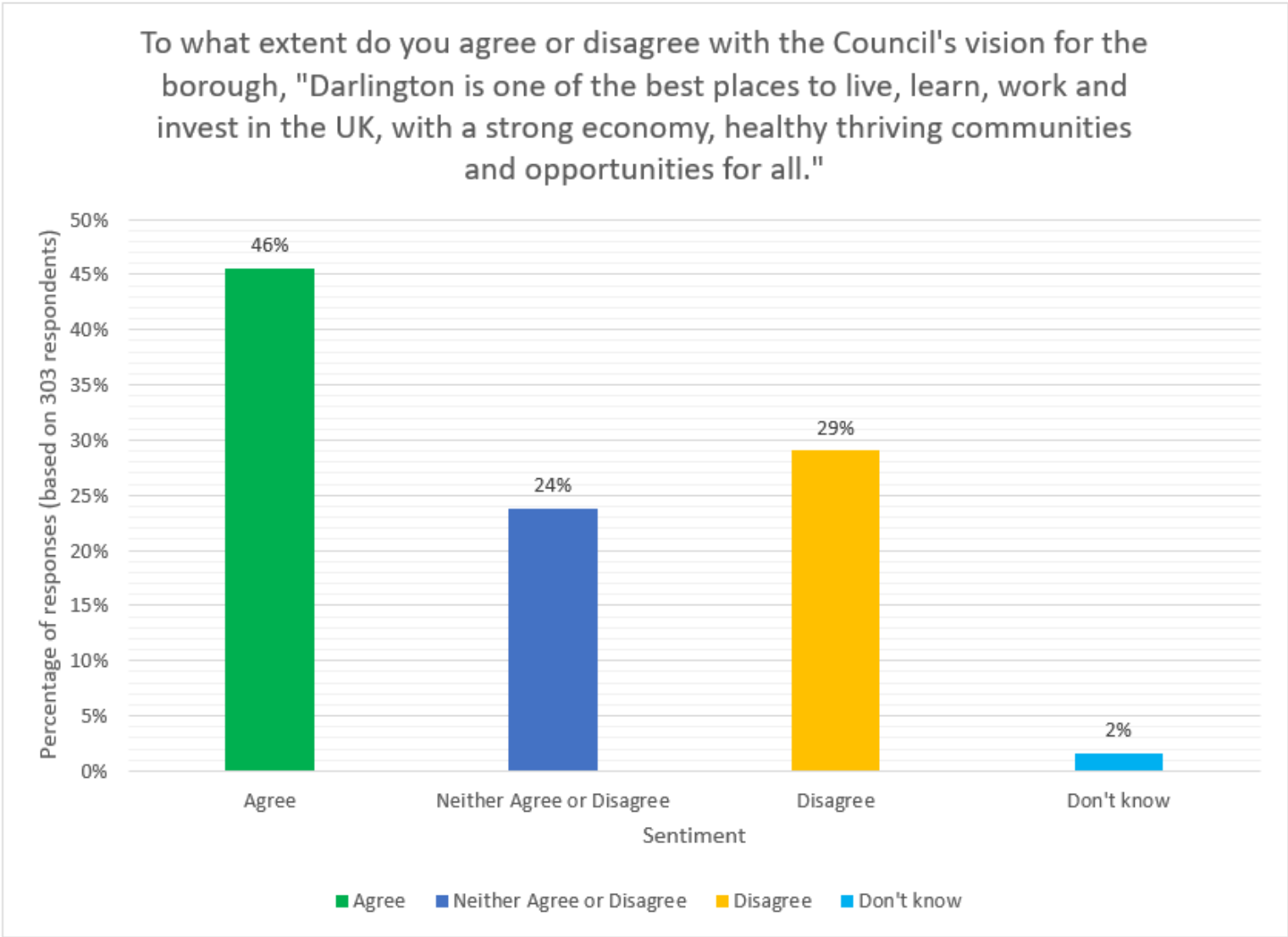
# More people agreed with Living Well and Staying Healthy



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



# Vision

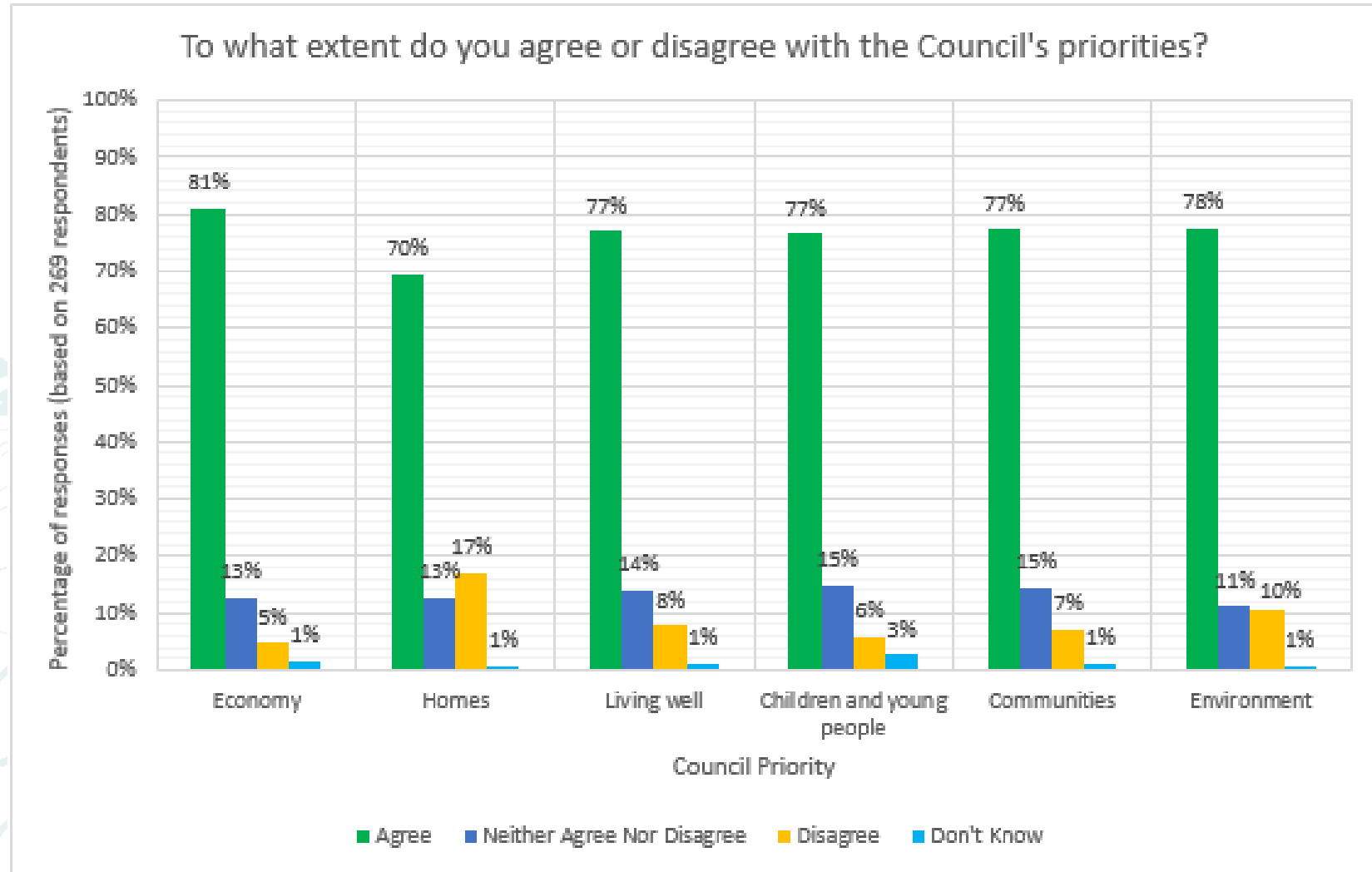


- More people agreed than disagreed with the vision
- 60% males agreed compared with 46% females
- 40-49 age group agreed the most at 62%



# 70% or more of respondents agree with each priority

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



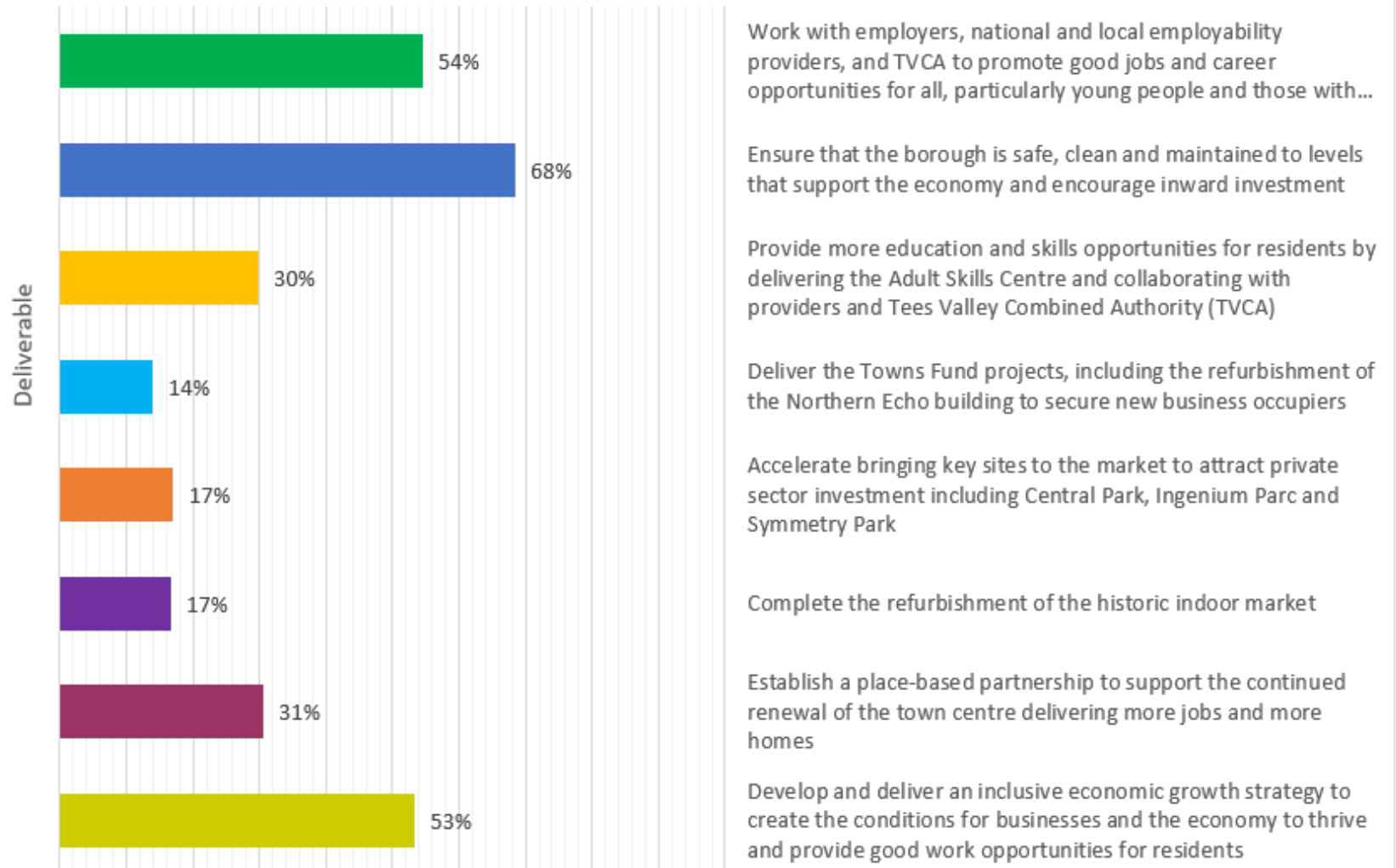
# Economy

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

From the following list please choose up to three of the deliverables that you feel are the most important to you within Priority 1 - Economy

Percentage of responses (based on 259 participants)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

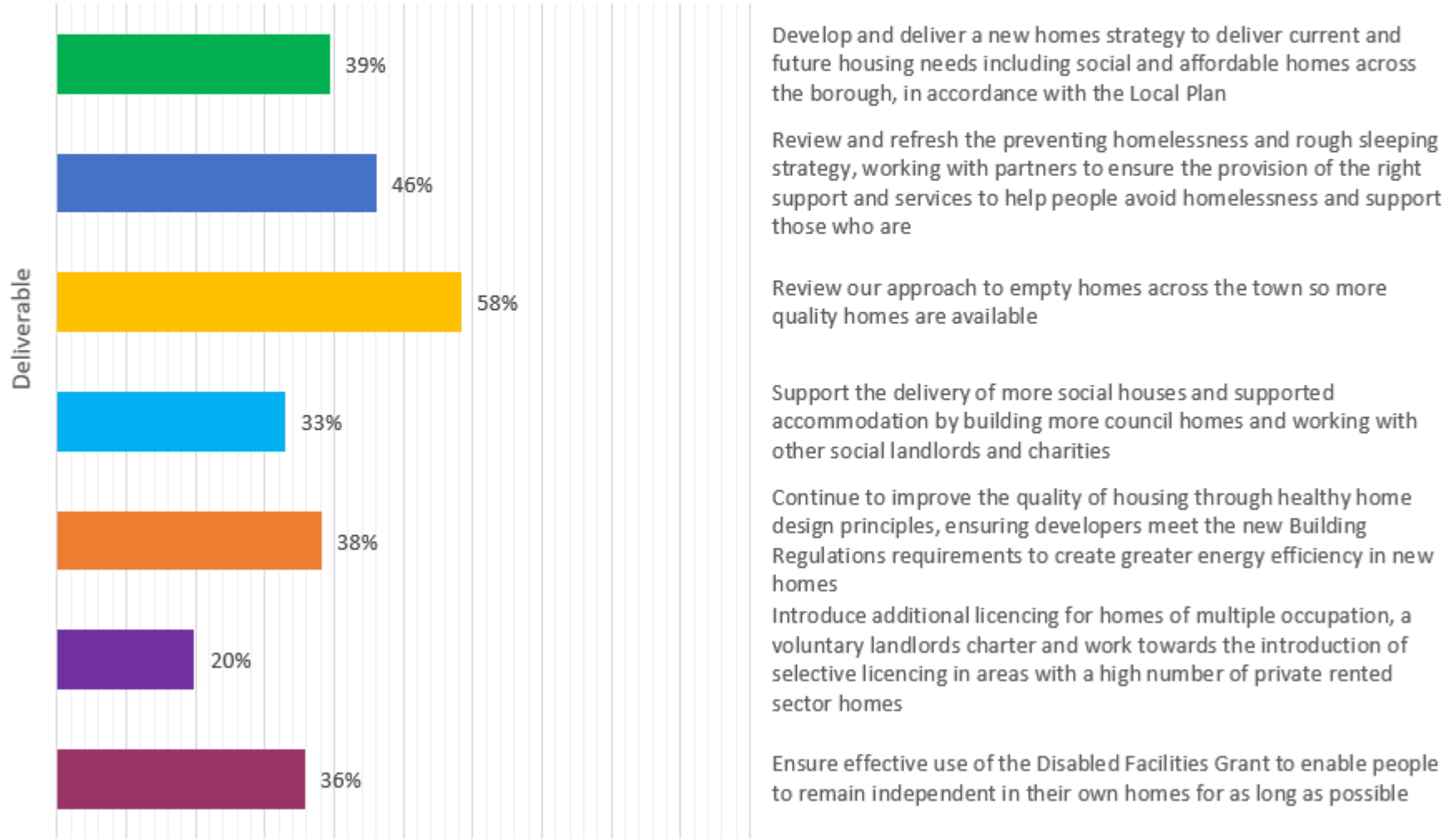


# Homes

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

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

Percentage of responses (based on 252 participants)  
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

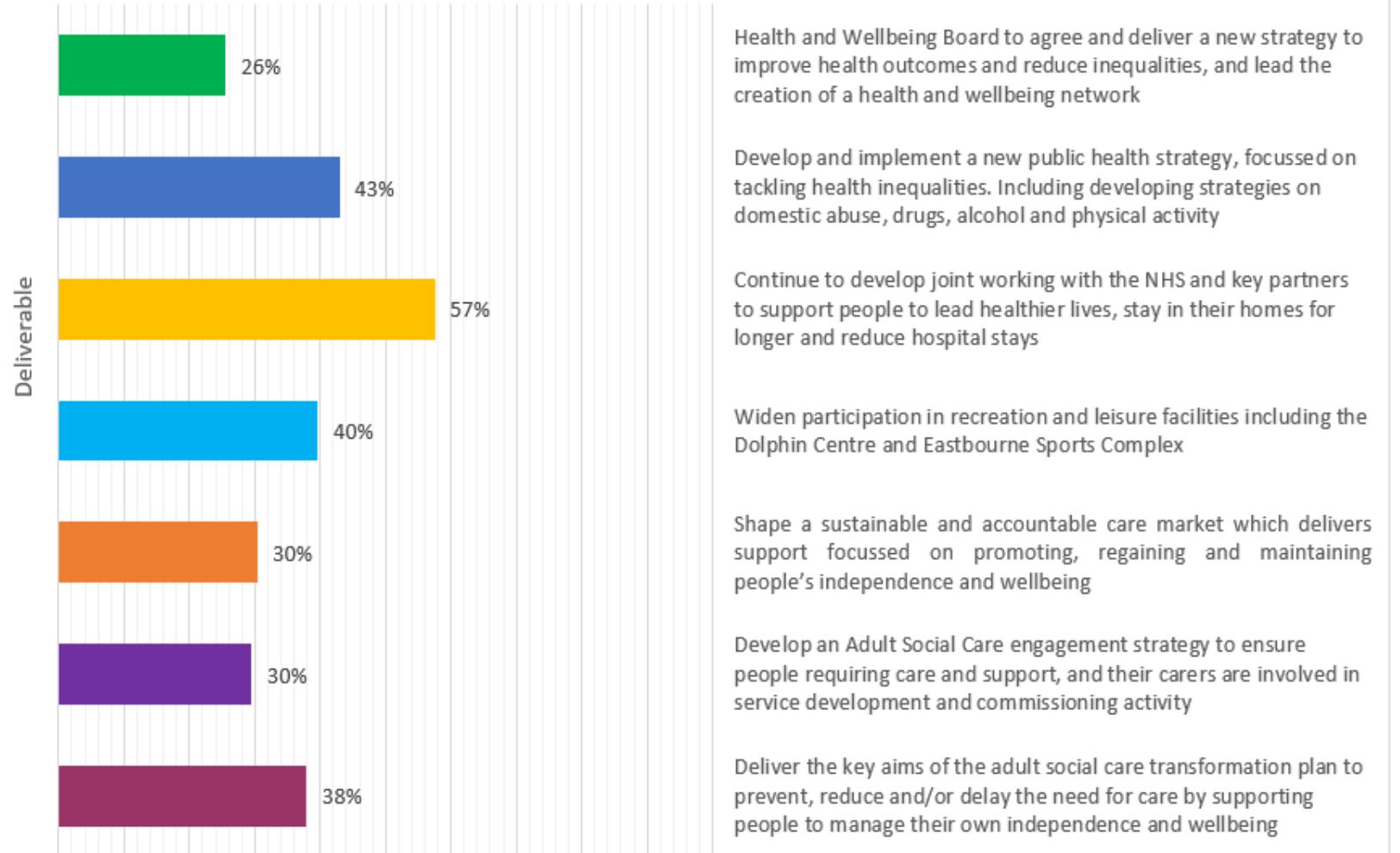


# Living Well

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

From the following list please choose up to three of the deliverables that you feel are the most important to you within Priority 3 - Living Well

Percentage of responses (based on 247 participants)  
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%





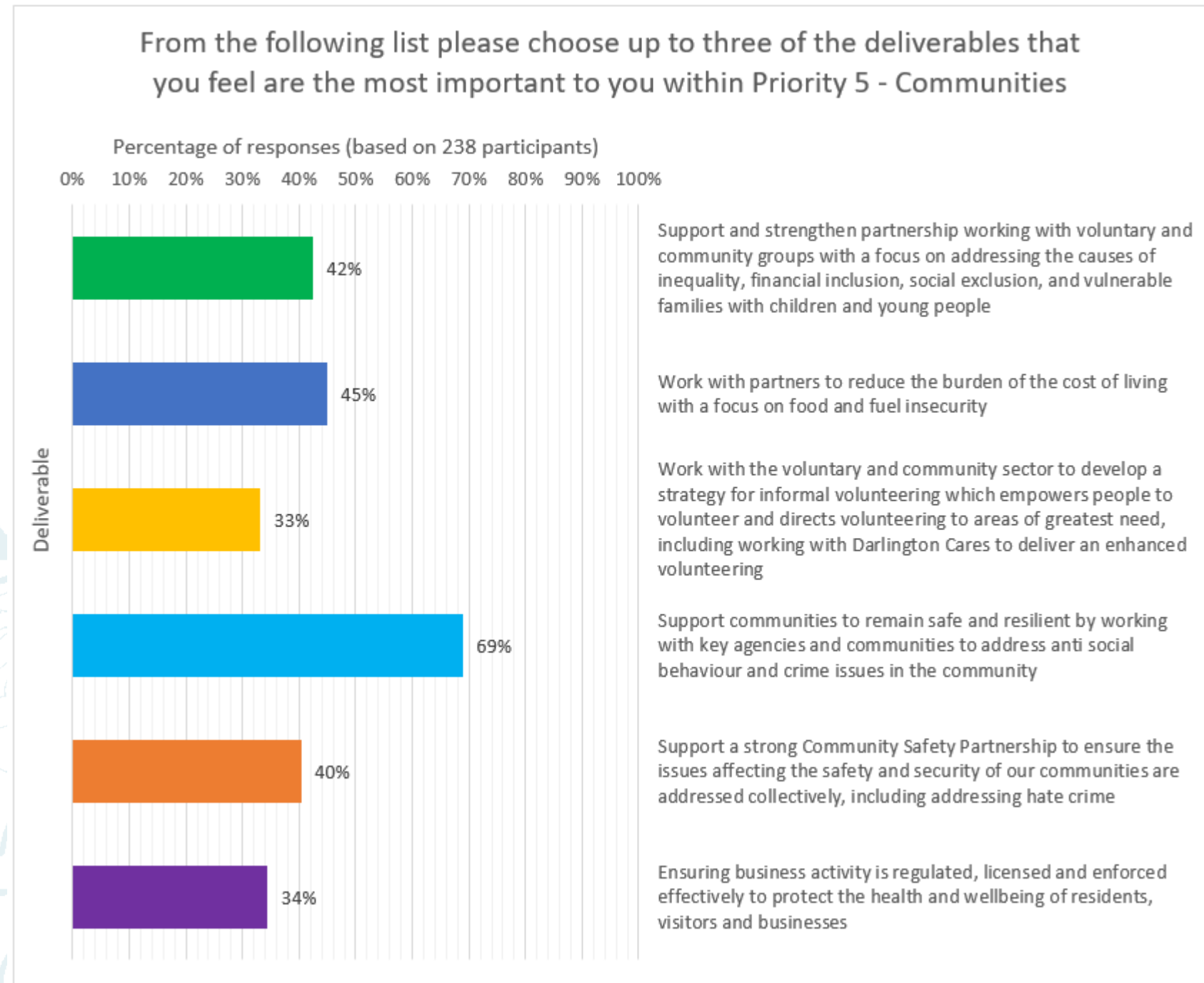
# Children and Young People

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



# Communities

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



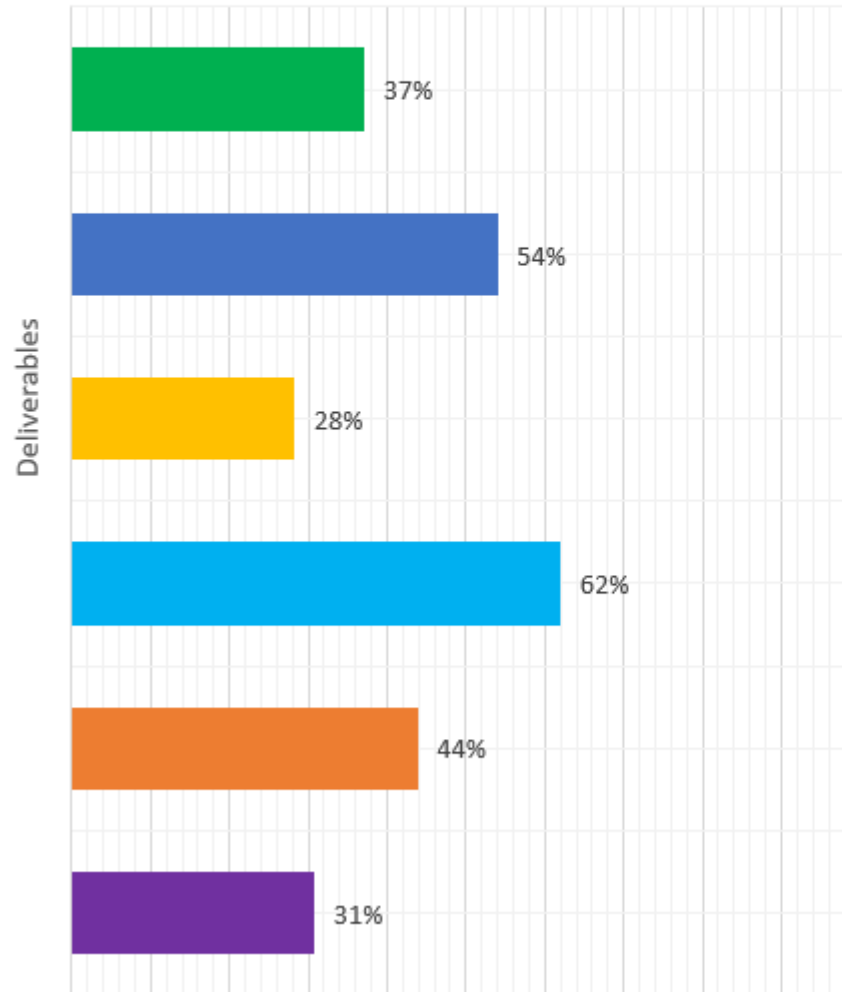


# Environment

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

From the following list please choose up to three of the deliverables that you feel are the most important to you within Priority 6 - Environment

Percentage of responses (based on 237 participants)  
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%



Celebrate the opening of Hopetown and deliver a successful 2025 festival programme that helps to promote Darlington as a destination for visitors and investment

Work with local stakeholders and businesses to promote a diverse and accessible programme of events that maximises footfall in the town centre and has a positive impact on the local economy

Deliver revised supplementary planning documents that guide better design in new developments and contribute to a sense of pride in place

Enable improvements in transport systems by working in partnership with TVCA and public transport operators to deliver the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme, including the improvement of bus facilities and the reliability of...

Introduce food waste collections and encourage residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average

Work with statutory bodies to progress studies of flood risk in Darlington and enable funding to be sought to mitigate the impact of climate change

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

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

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



# Overall Themes and Comments

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

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

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



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**STRUCTURE OF FINAL COUNCIL PLAN**

**FOREWORD**

**INTRODUCTION**

**OUR PLAN FOR DARLINGTON**

**CORE PRINCIPLES**

**AMBITIONS**

**PRIORITIES**

**OUR APPROACH**

**PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

**ANNEX**

- Infographic
- Consultation responses summary
-

## FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**[Add signature of the Leader and photo]**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

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



## OUR PLAN FOR DARLINGTON

### Core Principles

Addressing inequalities

Efficient and effective use of resources

Tackling climate change

### What Success Looks Like – Our Ambitions

Inclusive and sustainable economy

Living well and staying healthy

Thriving places and connected communities

### Vision for the Borough

Darlington is one of best places to live, learn, work and invest in the UK, with a strong and sustainable economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all

### Our Priorities

#### Economy:

A strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all

#### Homes:

Affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents

#### Living Well:

A healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most

#### Children & Young People:

Best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations

#### Communities:

Safer, healthier and more engaged communities

#### Local Environment:

A well connected, clean and sustainable borough

### Our Approach

Collaborate and work in partnership

Data driven and intelligence led

Embed core principles in decision-making

Deliver through key strategies and plans

Model core values in our work and behaviours

Share key challenges and share success

## **CORE PRINCIPLES**

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

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

### **Addressing inequalities**

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

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

### **Tackling climate change**

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

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

### **Efficient and effective resources**

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

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

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

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

## **WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE – THREE AMBITIONS**

### **An Inclusive and sustainable economy will have:**

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

### **Living well and staying healthy will mean:**

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

### **Thriving places and connected communities will have:**

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

## **PRIORITIES**

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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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



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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Key Deliverables**

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

## **OUR APPROACH**

### **Collaborate and work in partnership**

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

### **Data driven and intelligence led**

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

### **Embed core principles in decision making**

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

### **Deliver through key strategies and plans**

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

### **Model our core values in our work and behaviours**

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

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

### **Share key challenges and celebrate success**

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

### **PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

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

**ANNEX 1 – OUR BOROUGH: KEY DATA INFOGRAPHIC**

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

## **ANNEX 2 – SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

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

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

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

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

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

The key themes from the comments:

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

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

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

**Strategic Transport**

**Bus Service Improvement Plan**

2. Working with the bus operators and local authorities through the Enhanced Bus Partnership, Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has submitted an updated version of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as required by government. This sets out achievements so far and vision for the future of bus services in the area, focussed on an ambitious five-point delivery plan:
  - (a) A Sustainable network for the future;
  - (b) Bus priority improvements – new infrastructure and digital investment to prioritise bus on core corridors and improve customer experience;
  - (c) Improved fare offer – simpler fares, a new offer for young people and targeted promotions to drive growth;
  - (d) Enhanced customer experience – putting the needs of customers at the heart of service delivery and improving information provision with one brand identity; and
  - (e) Decarbonising the bus fleet – one of the first regions in the UK to have an entirely zero emission local bus fleet.
3. Part of the 2024/25 BSIP funding allocation has been used to launch a fare offer for passengers aged under 22. The offer commenced on 16 June 2024 and means anyone aged under 22 can travel for no more than £1 on single journeys (note it is a capped fare, so no child fares will increase as a result). In addition, a £3 day ticket for the same age range that can be used across services in the Tees Valley has been implemented.
4. The proposal mirrors the offer already in place across the North-East and was an ambition set out in the November 2022 Tees Valley BSIP. Operators will be reimbursed on a 'no better no worse' basis, meaning being a part of the scheme is cost neutral to them. This is the same principle we apply when reimbursing them through the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The offer will initially be in place for 12 months from the start date and the budget allocation across this period is £3.5m.

## **Darlington Station**

5. The May Bank Holiday marked a little over a year since the LNER surface car park closed and construction started on the multi-storey car park and station building at Darlington Station. Work is continuing to be delivered on programme and completion of the first section of the building remains on target for September 2024, with final completion and handover to Network Rail / LNER for fit out in February 2025.
6. Linked to the new car park / station building, the Eastern gateway highway works, which will see improvements to Neasham Road, are expected to be delivered following the building completion.
7. On the opposite side of the station, preparatory work on the Western gateway is continuing, with pre-demolition work at an advanced stage. The current target dates are for the remaining two properties to be demolished over the Winter and the improvements to be delivered by Autumn 2025. Final programmes are subject to confirmation on the appointment of a contractor.
8. Alongside the TVCA led works, Network Rail continue to make good progress with their parts of the project. Works to Smithfield Road Bridge are due to complete in September. Installation of the pre-cast platform units has commenced for Platforms 5 and 6. Further works are continuing within the existing station in preparation for the installation of the new footbridge later this year.
9. LNER and TVCA have co-funded the production of a digital model covering all of the works at Darlington Station. Produced by a local business, Core Systems, this has enabled a virtual video to be released showing how the station will look following completion of the project and allows customers to understand in advance how they'll be able to navigate their way through the station.

## **City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 2 (2027-2032)**

10. Development work continues on the projects identified and agreed by the TVCA Cabinet in January 2024. TVCA is working with all local authorities on the development of the programme and engaging with government on the process for funding release.

## **Climate Change**

11. The last meeting of the Cross-Party Climate Change Working Group was held on 25 April. The group discussed the carbon footprint of the council's catering services, how the council can support our residents to reduce purchase of high carbon intensive products and ensuring we use artificial intelligence safely.

## **Tees Valley Combined Authority**

12. At the Annual General meeting appointments were made to the Boards and Committees and I retained the Transport and Infrastructure portfolio.



## **External Meetings and Engagement**

13. I have attended various meetings and engagements since the previous meeting of Council, some of which are listed below:

- (a) The Installation of the new Chancellor of Teesside University, Baroness Chapman
- (b) Briefings with the borough's MPs
- (c) Meetings of TVCA, including chairing the Transport Committee, and various briefings
- (d) Meetings with other Tees Valley leaders
- (e) The Memorial Service at St. George's Hotel, Teesside Airport, organised by MSG Memorial Association
- (f) Darlington Health and Wellbeing board meeting, and workshops
- (g) Meetings with Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner
- (h) D-Day 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event at St Cuthbert's Church
- (i) Armed Forces Day event, Market Square
- (j) Citizenship Ceremony
- (k) I joined TCPS Association's celebration of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first sod being cut for the Tees Cottage Pumping Station
- (l) Towns Board to discuss Long Term Plan for Towns
- (m) Various meetings of Transport for the North

**Councillor Steve Harker**  
**Leader of the Council**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

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

**Environmental Health**

2. You will be aware of the disturbing events that have occurred in funeral homes in Hull/East Riding and the Government request for Environmental Health officer help. Environmental Health Officers have attended the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) training sessions and have visited the six Funeral Businesses in Darlington to carry out reassurance visits. The Team will report back to the MOJ on any findings from the visits however Environmental Health have not found any major issues during the funeral business visits in Darlington.
3. Environmental Health promoted Noise Action Week 2024 in May asking people to be considerate to neighbours and keep noise down. This included signage on the digital billboard and social media messages. Noise complaints are on the increase with Environmental Health investigating 911 complaints received in 2023/24.
4. Environmental Health assisted with the fire at the Ashcourt Waste Transfer Station on Mewburn Road/Whessoe Road, Darlington with Environmental Health Officer's attending site to provide liaison between the Fire Brigade and the Council.

**Climate Change**

5. Work has started on the annual report for 2023/24, which will be presented to Cabinet and Council in September. Emissions continue to fall and are now almost 53% lower than our 2010 baseline.
6. We are arranging a Members briefing on 19 September, where we can delve into the issues more deeply.
7. The Eco Fair held on 8<sup>th</sup> June was very successful, with 5-6,000 enjoying the stalls and activities.

**Development Management**

8. The application for the New Treasury Building is now with the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. We have already had a meeting with the applicants to discuss further detail regarding the appearance of the building. These discussions have been productive and are ongoing. A request has been made to the Government's agent to organise a meeting with local residents to explain directly to them the benefits and likely impacts upon them. The outcome of this engagement will form part of the decision-making process.

9. Further work is ongoing following the Outline Approvals for housing recently Granted at Coniscliffe Park. A 106 legal agreement has now been signed. Discussions have been held with the developers with regard to the further involvement of nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission. The details and modifications as a result of this engagement have been incorporated into plans which will form part of the detailed planning submission.
10. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development are currently increasing. Most reports continue to be solved at officer level. All more significant cases where there are ongoing investigations, Members are updated confidentially at Planning Committee on a Monthly basis.
11. The National Infrastructure PIERproject at Byers Green for solar panels is now progressing. Unlike most applications a decision on the matter will be dealt with by a Government Inspector, not the Council. The matter will be heard at a Public Inquiry. The Council will be making submissions to the Inquiry in due course.

### **Building Control**

12. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported. Awaiting submission of Northern Echo Building Control application.

### **Building Safety Regulator**

13. Two Surveyors are now fully validated for the BSR with remaining surveyors progressing toward validation allowing the service to continue to function legally under the Building Safety Act 2022. Internal procedures are being developed further to align Building Control KPI's with BSR KPI's.
14. ICT are programming Uniform database reports for KPI reporting to the BSR. ICT programming has been slower than expected and this may affect the reporting to the BSR in July.

### **Towns Fund**

15. Delivery onsite continues along Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements completed to a significant number of properties and to the public realm. The planning application for Coniscliffe Road public realm proposals has been submitted.
16. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
17. The proposals for the re-development of number 156 Northgate have now received Planning approval. The tender process to appoint a suitable contractor has been commenced.
18. The funding for the redevelopment of the former Northern Echo building, within the town centre, has been secured. Following a procurement process the Council has entered into contract with our preferred partner, Adavo. It is anticipated that structural work will commence in August, subject to gaining the necessary statutory notices. It is anticipated

that the work will be completed in March 2026.

19. The design of proposals for the Edward Pease House continues to be progressed. Planning and Listed Building consents will be applied for later in 2024.
20. The design of several property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and have now commenced.
21. As part of the budget speech in March 2024 it was announced that Darlington had been selected as part of the second tranche of the Long-term Plan for Towns. The funding will amount to £20m over 10-year period 25% revenue 75% capital. The emphasis of the fund is on focussing upon the development of interventions through community groups with an aim of developing community, civic and social fabric for an area. The membership of the Town Board has increased to reflect the overall ambition of an increase in community representation. A future cabinet report detailing the fund and the required governance arrangements will be presented in due course.

### **Business Investment Team**

22. The number of business investment enquiries continues, with the main area of interest from the hospitality sector.
23. TVCA have now launched the UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support programme, with projects in place to support business start, growth and innovation. The Business Investment Team is working with TVCA to raise awareness of the new support measures and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.
24. Officers from the Business Investment Team attended the UK Real Estate and Inward Investment Festival in Leeds. This three-day event brought together more than 13,000 representatives from the public sector, civil service, investors, funders, developers, and housebuilders. The team, working alongside colleagues from TVCA were there to promote opportunities for investment in Darlington and raise the profile of the Borough by highlighting all of the current investments now underway. Hopefully this will lead to potentially more investment enquiries.
25. The Business Investment Team have been promoting the Kings Awards, one of the most prestigious business accolades in the UK, encouraging local businesses to submit applications. One such business is NCB Hazcheck (based at Faverdale) who have been awarded the King's Awards for Enterprise for Innovation, awarded in recognition of their class leading Hazcheck Detect Cargo Screening software.
26. Plans are now in development for an autumn Jobs Fair on 2 October 2024.

### **Estates**

#### **Blackwell Parkland**

27. The restoration of the Blackwell Parkland including the pond, railings and perimeter walls are nearing completion and together with the mown paths and wildflower meadows the

whole area has been transformed. Public reaction to the works has been well received and it is anticipated the park will be open to the public this summer.

### **Faverdale Burtree Garden Village**

28. Planning permission for Phase 1 of the proposed Garden Village development has recently been granted subject to the Section 106 agreement and work to bring forward Reserved Matters applications in respect of Cells L, M & O on the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm are being progressed. The main spine road to serve Phase 1 is to be built between Rotary Way and Burtree Lane and tenders for the road and infrastructure work are due to be issued by Homes England, early July 2024.

### **Special Free School at West Park**

29. In reference to the Cabinet Report dated 7 November 2023, terms for the leasing of land to the Department for Education (DfE) for the construction of a new SEND school have now been set out in principle, subject to Council approval. The DfE will shortly begin a feasibility study which will inform the costs for which the Council is responsible, subject to agreement of a cap on costs. A further cabinet report is targeted for late 2024/early 2025 following the outcome of this work.

### **Planning Policy**

#### **Burtree Garden Village**

30. The Masterplan for the area has been agreed and the first planning application has been considered and approved by the Planning Committee.

#### **Skerningham Garden Village**

31. Developers have carried out a consultation exercise on the Masterplan for the area. The next part of the process is for the Council to consider whether or not it can agree the Masterplan.

### **Homes Strategy**

32. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy, and we are currently in a period of engagement with stakeholders. A draft for consideration and wider consultation will be placed before Members after approval of the Council Plan.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain/Nutrient Neutrality**

33. The Council continues to update information on its website on both Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality.

### **Conservation Areas**

34. Following the recommendations from the work that was carried out on the Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone a suggested amendment to the Northgate

Conservation Area has been proposed and Cabinet approval has been sought for a thorough consultation to be carried out with all interested parties.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Economy Portfolio**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of the Report**

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

**Operational Services**

2. The waiting list for the Adult Contact Team continues to be reviewed and risk assessed to ensure there is robust oversight. The current wait list stands at 75, which is a small increase from 65, with no high priorities waiting.
3. The Occupational Therapy waiting list has reduced to 155, all those waiting have had an initial contact and assessed as low priority, e.g. Bathing (117), Stair access (10), Banister rails (10), Access and Egress (8), Rehousing (4) Other (5). The number of people awaiting blue badges renewals or new applications continues to increase, however each application is being risk assessed to manage the most urgent first. A paper will be presented to Cabinet in September to alleviate the requirements of the current policy with the purpose of reducing the backlog and streamlining the application and renewal process.
4. The team have successfully recruited to the sensory Impairment officer and the waiting list has reduced for visual impairment from 35 and is now 27. There is no wait currently for hearing impairment.
5. The teams have recently benefited from training including Continuing Healthcare, Care Act Refresher. We have also rolled out Best Interest Assessor (BIA) refresher training. We also have x2 current Social Workers completing their Advanced Mental Health Professional (AMHP) training which will further enhance the AMHP rota to enable prompt response to Mental Health Act Assessments.
6. The teams continue to respond well to hospital discharge demand. Hospital admission rates have not reduced following winter pressures and we continue to achieve a strong discharge performance.
7. Right Care Right Person stage 1 concerns for safety went live on 10 June 2024 for Durham Constabulary. In readiness for this Adult and Children Social care have launched a joint practice guidance which identifies police risk assessment and triage to enable Practitioners to articulate relevant information to inform a decision for police attendance. An escalation process is identified initially via management structures then via Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP). We have developed monitoring arrangements to support data collection and analysis of police attendance requests in relation to appropriateness and outcomes for the individual.
8. Three care homes were within our Executive Strategy Procedures (ESP) at the beginning of the year, and we are pleased to identify that two were closed to ESP this month with one

remaining. Positive joint working with CQC, commissioning and contracting colleagues, Public Health and Adult Social Care alongside the providers has supported positive outcomes and improvements.

9. Adult Social Care Senior Leadership team have introduced briefing sessions for the wider team to support regular updates and further build on our readiness for the Care Quality Commission inspection of Adult Social Care.

### **Commissioning and Contracts**

10. The Council received 82 tender submissions for the Homecare and Supported Living contract procurement. The range of services included in this contract consist of home care, specialist supported living arrangements and “shared lives” arrangements. Commissioning and Contracts staff will now work with Procurement and Adults Services operational colleagues to evaluate the tenders during the next few months. It is expected that the new contract will be awarded to successful care providers on 5 November, with the contract being mobilised and operational by 2 February 2025.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

11. An Adult Learning Lessons Review is ongoing following the death of two individuals in a house fire. An Independent Author has been appointed to lead the review to understand how agencies worked together to identify key learning opportunities to help promote and improve multi-agency practice. A draft report has been presented to the Statutory Partners on the 25 June and discussions will take place as to what will be published in due course.
12. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group have not met in this period and therefore, there are no further adult safeguarding updates to provide at this time.

**Councillor Anne-Marie Curry**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults**

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

**Placement Sufficiency Update**

2. Since the Placement Sufficiency Strategy was launched, awareness raising of the new offer for foster carers has been publicised, with additional focus during the Foster Care Fortnight Campaign which will be outlined later in the report.
3. Since the launch of the new foster carer offer our numbers of foster carers has increased from 49 to 51. We have received eight enquiries since the new offer was launched and currently have 12 sets of foster carers actively progressing through the assessment process.
4. In terms of our childrens Homes, in the next stage of our expansion our home at Gilling Crescent is due to move to a new build property at Butterfield Drive. A site visit was undertaken on 3 June 2024. Ofsted stage one registration has been submitted and handover of the site was planned for later in July for our young people to move in. At this stage Gilling Crescent will be repurposed creating additional local placements for our children in care.

**Children's Front Door**

5. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) continues to perform well. The main focus of improvement during 2023/24 was to ensure the right service was provided to families, and this focus stemmed from a rise in referrals to social care during 2022/23. Analysis of this led to refresher training of the use of the model applied by social workers in CIAT being delivered. This was successful and there has been a decrease in the conversion rate of contacts to referrals to social care from 17.4% to 12.1%. There is now a focus on ensuring that social workers always consider partnership working when exploring what the right service for families might be. Universal services, as well as internal and external Early Help options are to become a focus once immediate protection or historic and complex matters of abuse have been ruled out. The refresher training has now been added to the Workforce Development Training Directory and will be embedded into learning for social workers.
6. Re-referrals to Social Care increased during 2023/24 with 24.1% of referrals to Social Care being re-referrals within 12 months. Work is underway across CIAT and Assessment and Safeguarding, along with the Quality Team to ensure that themes and actions are addressed and the loop is closed for learning in order to see improvements in this area.

7. The 4 Kids project continues to be a pivotal role with our children and families that have experienced domestic violence and the feedback that they receive is very positive. The two workers attend daily triage in respect of police safeguarding forms and are able to provide the social workers with Body Worn Camera Footage, this assists with their decision making in the contact enquiry stage.

*"Absolutely brilliant work...were very good with me from the moment they made contact. They provided me with lots of useful information and ongoing support."*

*"Think it is a great service."*

*"Very helpful and understanding."*

8. During recent months we have given several external partners the opportunity to shadow within CIAT and partners who have taken up this offer have fed back how helpful this was in terms of developing a deeper insight into the work that takes place at the Front Door.
9. The survey monkey evidenced excellent feedback for the Children's Initial Advice Team year end 23/24.

*"It was very helpful and I feel the young person will be given the support she needs".*

*"Social worker was very supportive, listened to my concerns and explained the process in detail around next steps. She had excellent communication skills was kind and friendly. She expressed empathy towards the family but placed the child's needs at the centre of the support".*

*"took the time to gather information".*

10. There has been a reduction in children who go missing during 2023/24 and within this cohort there is a significant reduction of children in our care going missing. This is the result of excellent work carried out with children's homes and with Children's Homes Managers and staff, there has also been an improvement with regard to Return Home Interviews offered and completed within 72 hours.
11. Child exploitation continues to be monitored and disrupted with the assistance of the Missing and Exploited Group (MEG), this multi-agency meeting is held fortnightly. There is continual improvement being made to this complex area of safeguarding and one improvement is that the Child Exploitation Matrix is now populated onto the Department's Liquid Logic electronic system and this means that all information where exploitation is a feature is held on the child's case file and is easily accessible.

### **Building Stronger Families Service**

12. Targeted groups continue to be successful. Evaluation is underway as with all groups to identify areas for improvement but also give an indication as to what families are asking for in terms of support.
13. Staff are working efficiently to ensure that families get the support they need, and there is a focus on trying to reduce the number of re-referrals in the future by ensuring there is appropriate step-down at the conclusion of any work with families, this is part of a larger piece of work being carried out across the whole service. When work with Building Stronger Families ends the family are able to access a number of groups giving longer term

support through the family hub model. In addition, we are driving forward and supporting staff and partners in the consideration of step down to universal services. This is an ongoing piece of work which we hope will have a positive impact on the families in order to prevent escalation back into statutory services.

14. The Early Help Assessment is currently under review. The aim is to produce a more succinct and family friendly assessment, it will be less intimidating for the family to read, and they will work through a programme with the team around the family that reflects everyone's voices, and a final plan that supports the family to sustain the progress that they have made. It is likely to be launched later in the year with the intention that there will be a pilot of the new assessment undertaken by management.

### **Young People's Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)**

15. The service recently undertook an in-depth audit of those young people who had come into the system as First Time Entrants and in particular those entering with a history of sexual offending. The findings were scrutinised at the YPEJS Strategic Management Board and actions were borne out of this to ensure oversight remains. However, in year, performance would indicate that the FTE's have reduced back to a rate that does not cause concern.
16. Confirmation has been received that an additional 0.5 Victim Liaison Officer will join the service following a successful application for further funding via the Immediate Justice grant. This will enhance our current provision when working with all victims of crime.
17. On 1 April, all Youth Justice Services now have to complete a new assessment tool when working with those Young People under the prevention and diversion route. Staff training was completed and the team welcome this new focus which is aimed to be more relational.
18. The management team are currently writing the Annual Strategic Plan which is a requirement of the Youth Justice Board in order that we continue to receive grant funding. This is due for completion by the end of June and we are on track to do this.

### **Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities**

19. We now have the end of year performance data available which shows that in 2023/2024, 1,554 children had a Children & Families assessment completed of which 904 were outcome as 'no further action', 20.3% resulted in a child in need plan, 1.9% led to a strategy discussion, 19.1% led to other actions including a step down to BSF or continuing with current plan and 0.5% were outcome as coming in to care.
20. 324 children were open to a Child in Need plan at the end of March 2024. Since towards the end of 2023 we have seen a steady increase in the number of CiN plans open which has coincided with the increase of CP plans and the decrease in Children in Care.
21. 196 children became subject to a Child Protection Plan in 2023/2024, this is an increase from 131 in 2022/2023 however this coincides with the focused work on ensuring children enter into care only when necessary and following the right support.

22. There are currently 570 children open to the Assessment and Safeguarding teams. Workloads have reduced across the teams to a manageable level with only two social workers currently having over 25 children allocated.
23. Quality audits completed have consistently seen better outcomes with 84% across the year being Good and 8% outstanding.
24. There are currently 86 children open to the children with disabilities team. This includes children active for an assessment and those open for a review of their care packages. Currently social care advice sits within the team and a wider discussion has taken place for this to sit within the children's front door to ensure that full advice, not just focused on disabilities, is offered as part of the EHCP. There is currently one child who has an unregulated placement in place subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLs) due to significant concerns arising from her emotional health presentation following her discharge from a mental health hospital. This is reviewed weekly by the Service Manager and regularly with the Head of Service and Assistant Director of Children's Services.

### **Looked After and Care Leaver information**

25. We continue to expand out taster flat provision and currently we have 12 flats. This is supporting young people to transition to independence with support. They are utilised by our Staying Close project.
26. Work has progressed to secure a further taster flat through DBC Housing Services. The approved target growth of seven spaces of additional taster flat capacity approved by Council has been achieved.
27. A young person has been identified to move into the additional taster flat later this month, this young person is currently in an external residential placement at a weekly cost of £4,093. The four young people to date who have moved/due to move into the expanded taster flat capacity had a combined weekly external residential placement cost in the region of £17,000.
28. As of 31 March 2024, the number of looked after children was 300, this figure is lower than 29 February 2024, when we had 310 looked after children and 321 looked after children at the end of January 2024. 18 of these children are unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children. The reduction in looked after children is a result of focused work across all services to ensure when children become looked after, all other support has been considered. Monthly tracking meetings are held to reduce delay for children and ensure plans are progressed.
29. There are 134 care leavers currently being supported by the team aged 18-25. The service supports 186 care experienced aged 16-25. We keep in touch with all our care leavers and there are regular opportunities for them to come together for activities and support. These events are organised daily during holiday periods such as walks, and other free activities are organised. Other examples are cookery and budgeting classes and clothes swap shops.
30. We have been successful in obtaining funding for three new projects; Family Finding, Mentoring and a Safe Space youth provision. Family finding is supported by three

additional Lifelong Links workers are now in post and supporting 24 children with one young person waiting to be allocated. The team is supporting children and young people to establish a network of support as well as support from a dedicated life story social worker and a therapeutic worker. The service feels like it has now gathered momentum and is growing in its numbers.

31. The mentoring programme offers the opportunity for care experienced adults to become mentors for younger children in care. We have successfully recruited and trained 13 care experienced young people to date. 36 young people are attached to the programme with additional referrals under consideration. The matching process has been incredible positive for all concerned and rewarding emotionally for all parties. It was really good to hear from some of the brilliant mentors at an event in Duke Street recently, when children in care and their mentors enjoyed pizza and chat at Hideaway Bar. Our mentors are often holding down jobs, bringing up their own families whilst also helping younger children in care. It is a fantastic initiative and promises to go from strength to strength.
32. Safe space is a youth provision ran by the team for children in our care. It is a mix of social and focused activities aimed at reducing loneliness, anti-social behaviour and supporting children's emotional health. The service is held every Monday evening. We would like to take this out into the community with events involving Police, Fire, and health services/education over the summer holidays as well as tree planting and litter picks with an environmental friendly and sustainable BBQ date to be confirmed.
33. Staying Close remains a significant strength. We are currently supporting 21 young people as part of this pilot, funded by the DfE. This has reduced by one young person who no longer needs the support. Further consideration around referrals is being reviewed. Some comments from workers feedback about the young people are "growing into himself and is happy" "House Proud and in work", "Rings for help when needs it". It is a great that one young person has progressed to a level where he feels he no longer needs this intense support.
34. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) – We are currently supporting 18 unaccompanied children, we are mandated to support a maximum of 22 children and young people. One young person turns 18 in June 2024 and another two in July 2024, we can therefore expect additional and new referrals in the coming months.
35. Within the last year, we supported 11 new and additional unaccompanied children. Ten transferred from the Home Office, one on foot.
36. Of the ten home office mandated referrals, two young people travelled from Afghanistan, two travelled from Eritrea, two travelled from Turkey and one each from the following countries, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, and Egypt.
37. In addition to the children, we offer support to 14 over-18 year olds through leaving care support.

### **Fostering and Supported Lodgings**

38. Foster Care Fortnight campaign took place from 13-26 May 2024. This year's theme was Fostering Moments, celebrating the moments that define fostering journeys, big and

small. I joined the team delivering face to face recruitment drop-in sessions across the town and attendance at events including the food festival, dolphin centre, Park Run, tractors and diggers day and a foster carer recognition event at Bannatyne's hotel. Throughout the events we shared special fostering moments through social media reaching 34,000 views. The highest viewing figures was a video viewed of Dawn (one of our in house foster carers) describing her passion for fostering and support children in our care.

39. Marketing data shows the social media campaign achieved good reach although the link clicks were lower than had been hoped for.
40. In May we received four new fostering enquiries (eight since the new offer was introduced). Three new applications were received in May (5 since offer introduced) and supported two new sets of carers to approval at fostering panel.
41. Foster with Northeast is a regional pilot whereby carers contact a central hub to make their initial enquiry. Between October 2023 – May 2024, the service received 28 new enquiries. Work is ongoing to understand and track how applicants became interested in fostering. This data will support the service in understanding the success and impact of online marketing driven by the hub and our fostering service face to face events.
42. Together with Cllr. Allen, I attended the launch of our second Mockingbird constellation on 15th March 2024, which is where several fostering families are supported by a hub carer who has a spare bedroom. Within constellation one, we are supporting seven sets of carers with 15 children and within constellation two, we are supporting six sets of carers with 10 children.
43. Our supported accommodation applications are in process with Ofsted to ensure we abide by the new regulations which came into effect in October 2023. There has been a slight delay to registration due to the resignation received from our previous Fostering and Supported Lodging team manager as well as recruitment to a new team manager who is in the process of registering with Ofsted.

### **Homes for our Children**

44. Cedars, Dunrobin Close, Lancaster Close, Harewood Hill Lodge and Gilling Crescent children homes all received our annual Ofsted inspection. I am thrilled all homes were graded as 'Good'. This time last year, we had one home (Harewood) graded as "Good", with other homes graded as "Requires Improvement". This is a huge achievement for the team with Cedars as a brand-new provision and Lancaster opening as a new build home.
45. Cedars offers emergency care and short breaks for children on the edge of becoming looked after. Cedars initially operated Friday to Monday. Following investment, Cedars has expanded operating hours over seven days in line with mainstream children's homes. Recruitment activity is underway to secure additional staffing to facilitate the increase in service offer. Once positions are appointed to, a revised Statement of Purpose will be submitted to Ofsted.
46. We now have the end of year performance data available which shows that in 2023/2024 Cedars supported 38 children, utilising 116 nights at a placement cost saving of £235,305.



19 Children were supported through outreach work, some of which progressed to short breaks. This is an impressive figure given the service operated Friday – Monday, we relied heavily on staff agreeing to work overtime and outside of their agreed hours.

47. Gilling Crescent is our next home to move to a new build property at Butterfield Drive. A site visit was undertaken on 3 June 2025. Ofsted stage one registration has been submitted and handover of the site is planned for later this month for our young people to move in.
48. When our children and staff move, work will commence on re purposing Gilling Crescent children’s home as a therapeutic home focusing on supporting young people out of residential care and into foster placements.
49. Dunrobin Close will be our third home to move to a new build property. We experienced a delay in site build due to environmental regulations around waste neutrality, this has now been resolved and the site is planned to re-open July 2024 to re commence the build.
50. Our three mainstream children’s homes (Dunrobin, Gilling and Lancaster) remain at full occupancy, each home supports three young people in our care.
51. Harewood Lodge continues to offer short breaks to children with a disability. Occupancy is 80% with 12% utilised by children from other Local Authorities (Durham, Stockton, Redcar and Leeds). This equates to 149 beds commissioned each year at a cost of £670 per night generating £99,830.00 a year.
52. With support from commissioning colleagues, we have contacted regional authorities to advise of capacity. Delivery costs for Harewood have been reprofiled for 2024- 2025 and uplift notifications made to placing councils. Further work will take place with social work colleagues to discuss referrals and increase internal capacity.

### **Youth Unemployment**

53. The Darlington 18–24-year-old claimant count has fallen from 545 young people in March 2024 to 515 young people in May 2024. Darlington’s claimant count at 6.9% is higher than the North-East average of 5.9% and the national average of 5.1%.
54. The May 2024 figures for the Tees Valley are as follows:

|                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| a) Hartlepool           | 8.7% |
| b) Redcar and Cleveland | 7.7% |
| c) Middlesbrough        | 7.8% |
| d) Stockton -on-Tees    | 7.7% |
| e) Darlington           | 6.9% |

### **Education**

55. West Park Academy was recently inspected by Ofsted and judged to be a “Good” school. Inspectors recognised leaders have high expectations, pupils achieve well and pupils are happy in this vibrant school.

56. Bishopton Redmarshall has also recently been inspected and judged by Ofsted to be a “Good” school. Inspectors recognised that Bishopton Redmarshall is an inclusive and welcoming place to learn. Leaders have high expectations for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and parents and carers are appreciative of the care and support provided for pupils.
57. George Dent Nursery School has retained its “Outstanding” rating following its recent Ofsted inspection. Inspectors recognised that children thrive at George Dent and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Leaders have high ambition for all children and those with special educational needs and disabilities benefit from highly effective care, support and guidance. Children receive exceptional support through their learning and play; highly skilled practitioners bring the curriculum to life and children are offered rich experiences as part of that curriculum.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

58. The Safeguarding Partnership is undertaking a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) following the death of a 22-month old child who collapsed at home and died the following day due to a fatal head injury consistent with non-accidental injury. Mother’s partner has subsequently been charged with murder and mother charged with child neglect. The purpose of the review is to understand how agencies worked together and identify what could have been done differently. The review will identify key themes and learning points to promote across the partnership to improve practice going forward. An Independent Author has been appointed to lead the review and the preliminary analysis will be presented to the Statutory Partners on 25 June. A report will be published in due course following the conclusion of the criminal investigation.
59. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group have not met in this period and therefore, there are no further child safeguarding updates to provide at this time.

### **Children’s Commissioning and Contracts**

60. Darlington commissioners have been working with colleagues across the Tees Valley to expand the range of contracted Alternative Education provision. This type of provision is arranged by councils for pupils who due to a range of reasons (e.g. illness or exclusion) are not able to attend mainstream education. The sub regional framework contract has been re-opened to new providers, and tender evaluations are currently underway. The aim is to increase the number of Alternative Education providers and support as many children as possible to return to mainstream education. New providers to the contract will be in place ahead of the new academic year.
61. Work has been undertaken to refresh and update the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy for 2024/5. The refreshed strategy includes an update on a number of priorities. This includes mobilisation of the first new build children’s home and Ofsted registration requirements for the new supported accommodation regulations for all in borough services for 16- and 17-year- old Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The strategy also outlines future priorities for this forthcoming year such as the expansion to the existing range of supported accommodation

and the mobilisation of the second new build children's home. The strategy is available to view on the Council's website.

**Councillor Nick Wallis**  
**Children and Young People Portfolio**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Health and Housing Portfolio were as follows: -

**Public Health**

**Water Fluoridation**

2. The Government's consultation period on expanding community water fluoridation schemes across the Northeast of England has been extended until 11:59pm on 31st July 2024. As outlined in my last report, the Health and Care Act 2022 provides powers for the Secretary of State to introduce, vary and terminate community water fluoridation schemes. For clarity this consultation is being run by the Government and the decision on expanding community water fluoridation rests solely with the Secretary of State for Health.
3. The consultation is highlighted on Darlington Borough Council's website and was promoted via One Darlington magazine. Darlington Borough Council's Director of Public Health is consulting on this issue with members of the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board. Anyone, including members and local residents, can submit responses to this public consultation. Further information is available [here](#).

**Eyes on the Baby**

4. Following a successful roll out in both Durham and Northumberland, we are implementing the Eyes on the Baby project in Darlington. Eyes on the Baby is a training and implementation package which will help to promote safer infant sleep and prevent sudden infant deaths. The training has been grouped into three strands based on the frequency and type of contact with families. The training will be virtual and hosted on our Safeguarding Partnerships ME learning platform.
5. There is a steering group formed that is made up of representatives across multiple services who will manage the implementation of the training. This group includes:
  - (a) Public Health
  - (b) Housing
  - (c) Early Years & Childcare
  - (d) Primary Care Network
  - (e) Durham University
  - (f) Harrogate and District Foundation Trust (0-19 Service)
  - (g) County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust

- (h) Durham Constabulary
- (i) Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

### **Summer Green Spaces programme**

6. This year our summer holiday provision returns, delivered by Outdoor Ambition Ltd. The programme will again visit 16 sites across Darlington aimed at young people aged 7-12, with a focus on being active, team building, fun and communication. It will support those young people transitioning to secondary school as well as encourage play and utilising very local green space. This starts on Monday 29 July and will run until Friday 30 August, inclusive of the bank holiday.

### **Targeted Lung Health Check Programme**

7. Work is underway to implement the targeted lung health check programme in Darlington from October 2024, for 3 months. People aged between 55 – 74 years who smoke or have smoked previously may be offered a lung health check through the programme. Invites will be issued on a practice-by-practice basis.
8. The targeted lung health check programme aims to find lung cancer early and sometimes before any symptoms are displayed.
9. Lung health checks also look at how well your lungs are working and can help diagnose lung cancer early. Early diagnosis can make lung cancer more treatable and make treatment more successful.
10. People who smoke will be directly referred to the Stop Smoking Service. Darlington are piloting having a Stop Smoking Advisor located in the same venue for immediate triage into the service.

### **Mental Health Network**

11. The new Mental Health Network was launched on 5 June. This is funded by Public Health and managed by Darlington Healthwatch. It was well attended with representatives from across sectors including senior health professionals, voluntary sector representatives and faith leaders. The network will feed into the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and will align to local strategies / plans to ensure there is an output and focus, as well as utilising the time to share best practice and gain support for this important issue. The network is funded for 12 months, but discussion has already started regarding how this can be continued.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

12. Work continues to develop the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, with three workshops held between May and June to develop thinking about vision, ambitions, priorities and actions. There was very good engagement with the workshops, with a whole range of agencies represented, and the next phase is to develop the content into a draft strategy.
13. The themes of the workshops and participant numbers are below:
  - (a) Workshop 1 Best start in Life (children & young people): - 25 attendees

- (b) Workshop 2 Healthy Places and Healthy Ways of Working - 15 attendees
- (c) Workshop 3 Staying Healthy: Living Well and Ageing Well - 18 attendees

### **Drug Strategy Investment in Treatment and Recovery (D-SITAR)**

14. RAND Europe and partners at King's College London National Addiction Centre, The University of Manchester and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust have been awarded funding through the National Institute for Health and Care Research to conduct an independent evaluation of the first three years of the 10 year drug strategy 'From Harm to Hope'. Darlington has been selected as one of ten case study sites for this study, which is looking at the funding provided to local authorities to improve treatment and recovery services for people who use drugs.
15. This research will help the government find out what does and does not work and will inform how the programme is implemented after the first three years of funding.

### **Housing Services**

#### **Electrical Safety Roundtable Awards**

16. I am very pleased that Mark Graham, our Housing Services Electrical Manager has been selected as category winner in the Electrical Safety Roundtable Above and Beyond Awards 2023. Mark has been awarded the Changemaker of the Year 2023 for all his work going above and beyond the legal requirements for a social housing provider to improve compliance and is on track for 100% of Council properties to have a Domestic Electrical Condition Report (DEICR) dated within the last 5 years.
17. The Electrical Safety Roundtable noted that Mark was empowered to make this happen and on the ongoing journey to electrical safety has achieved incredible results. Mark has achieved a rapid turnaround in the percentage of our housing stock with a valid DEICR. Tenant safety is of the upmost importance and I am hugely grateful for the work of Mark and his team.

### **Tenancy Enforcement**

18. Our Housing Services Tenancy Enforcement team continue to ensure that our tenants enjoy the right to a safe home and community by taking firm action against those who commit anti-social behaviour (ASB). A 12-month ASB injunction with power of arrest was obtained against a tenant's partner, residing at a Council property in the North Road ward. The injunction was obtained for alcohol related ASB, including threats with a weapon. The injunction prevents the partner from causing any ASB, otherwise risks being arrested and sent to prison, as well as the tenant losing her home.
19. In a separate case, a 2-year suspended possession order was obtained for a Council property in the Park East ward. The order was obtained following neglect of the property and lack of engagement by the tenant with Housing Services staff. A closure order for another property in the Park East ward was granted by the Magistrates Court. This means that the property has been closed and secured, preventing the tenant from entry. The tenant had engaged with drug dealing from the property and possession of various drugs

were found inside by the Police. Local residents were reported to be very happy with the firm action taken by Housing Services in partnership with the Police.

### **New Build**

20. The first 22 properties at the Neasham Road site have been completed, including a five-bedroom house for Children's Services. 21 properties were advertised in June and interest has been very high, as expected, with over 2,000 applications received. The process of allocations is now underway, with the first tenants due to move in, in August.
21. This is a significant milestone for the largest Council housing project this century. A further phase of 18 properties is due to be completed in September, followed by a third phase of 14 properties in December. The remaining 96 properties will be completed in 2025.

### **Dolphin Centre**

#### **Water Safety Talks**

22. In the lead up to the summer holidays and as incidents around water increase, primary schools in Darlington were offered the opportunity for the swim teaching team to attend assemblies to share important water safety messages. 20 schools in the town have benefitted from the service to raise awareness of the water safety code with children.

### **Students**

23. A student discount card was released at the beginning of the academic year and launched in fresher's week. This has proven to be very popular, with 571 games of bowling recorded since the off-peak offer (connected to the student discount card) was released in September 2023. Just short of 500 students have taken advantage of student membership, and a total of 397 student discount cards are now in circulation. Preparation is currently underway to attend fresher's week again in September to make students aware of the offers available to them at the Dolphin Centre.

### **May Half Term**

24. The May half term holiday period was very busy in the centre with many families visiting the pool, bowling and soft play facilities. Just short of 1,000 visits to soft play and 1,000 games of bowling were enjoyed during the week, which contributed to a very successful trading period in hospitality.



## **Eastbourne Sports Complex**

### **Holiday Activity Project**

25. The HAF programme (Holiday Activities and Food) is for children who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. The programme ran for 9 days over the Easter holidays and engaged with 956 children. The overall attendance was 2,031 and 17% of SEND children were engaged. The programme had a digital presence in the town and was promoted on social media. A wide variety of physical and enrichment activities were provided, including Bowling, Escape Room, Pottery Painting and Circus School. A total of 44 providers delivered on the programme.

### **Health in Haughton Matters**

26. The Health in Haughton Matters Project continues to flourish with over 300 attendances recorded in February, March, April, and May. The project currently consists of Tai Chi, Yoga, Pilates, Dance Fit and Low Impact Fitness. The Health in Haughton Matters Committee have now formed a Facebook page to keep everyone up to date. This has facilitated participants to take ownership of the programme, which has had a significant impact on attendance.

**Councillor Matthew Roche**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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

**Highway Maintenance Programme**

2. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now on site:
  - (a) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (18 sites)
  - (b) Heighington Footways (Phase 3): Footway Reconstruction (0.319km)
3. The following Highway Maintenance schemes are due to start:
  - (a) Avon Road Estate Footways (phase 2): Footway Resurfacing (0.404km)
  - (b) C38a Neasham Road (Phase 3): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.214km)
  - (c) A1150 Salters Lane North: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.891km)
  - (d) A68 West Auckland Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.510km)
  - (e) Micro Asphalt / Surface Dressing Contract (4.185km, 27 sites)
  - (f) A67 Piercebridge: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.882km)
  - (g) Unc. Roundhill Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (1.68km)
  - (h) B6280 Yarm Road Hundens Lane X Roads: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.231km)
  - (i) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190km)
4. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now complete:
  - (a) Unc Swaledale Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.275km)
  - (b) A67 Coniscliffe Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.440km)
  - (c) Unc Barmpton Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.810km)
  - (d) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (18 sites)
  - (e) A167 Croft Road (Tees View) Carriageway Remedials (0.050km)
  - (f) Unc Riverside Way: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.310km)

### **Safer Routes to School (SRTS)**

5. A consultation has been completed on a scheme that will introduce a 20mph zone on Abbey Road and Cleveland Terrace covering the frontages of Abbey Infant and Junior Schools. There is general support for the proposals, and we are in the process of producing an Engagement Report summarising consultee responses. Subject to traffic regulation orders we are aiming to deliver the scheme towards the end of the financial year.
6. A scheme for St. Augustine's Primary School was previously consulted on. Taking account of responses received, a revised scheme will be consulted on in July.
7. A scheme for St. Bede Primary School on Thompson Street East was consulted on, with a closing date of Sunday 23 June.
8. A scheme for Hurworth Comprehensive was consulted on and is programmed to be delivered during the summer holidays from Wednesday 24 July.
9. A scheme for Longfield School will be consulted on in July.
10. Feasibility work is about to begin for a scheme at Mowden Junior School.

### **Bus Services**

11. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. Initially this will involve minor changes to reflect TVCA's new branding, with further work planned for a complete re-design that will be accompanied by a process of user group testing and consultation. The aim of the re-design is to improve the quality of information for passengers.
12. TVCA planned to launch a new scheme on 16 June that will bring in cheaper fares for people aged under 22. This will comprise of a £1 single fare and a £3 day ticket which will primarily be valid in Tees Valley, but will also allow cross boundary travel into the Transport North East Area. TVCA are expected to share a marketing and communications plan for the new fares offer imminently.
13. TVCA as Local Transport Authority has produced a 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This is required to secure the release of its BSIP funding allocation for 2024/25. The 2024 refresh is an update to the original 2021 BSIP, which includes updating the baseline to 2023/24 including highlighting achievements made since 2021; setting out the improvement programme for 24/25 and getting ready for 2025 and beyond, ready for delivery as opportunities for funding arise.

## **Rail Education Programme**

14. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership recruited a Rail Education Officer in September 2023 to deliver a programme of rail safety and confidence sessions in schools within a 1.5-mile corridor of the Bishop Line, between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. The two-year programme is funded by the rail industry and since sessions began in schools in November 2023 the programme has now been delivered in 19 schools in total, ten in Darlington – Corporation Road Primary, Firthmoor Primary, Gurney Pease Academy, Heathfield Academy, Northwood Primary, Red Hall Primary, Springfield Academy, St Bede's RC Primary, St George's CE Academy and St John's CE Academy.

## **Hopetown Darlington**

15. Work on Darlington's newest visitor attraction, Hopetown Darlington, is now complete. A press day was held on Monday 15 July and the site opened to the public on Tuesday 16 July.
16. Tickets for site admission, Wagon Woods, Brick Journeys and summer activities are available to book on the site's website: [www.hopetowndarlington.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.hopetowndarlington.co.uk/whats-on).
17. An official launch day will take place in late September to coincide with the 199th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

## **Darlington Hippodrome**

### **Show Programme**

18. During the period of reporting, a broad mix of shows have proved popular with a wide range of audiences. Highlights have included a comedy take on Oscar Wilde with 'The Importance of Being Earnest?', as well as family favourite 'Bluey', sold out tribute shows 'Taylormania' and 'Rumours of Fleetwood Mac', Strictly's 'Anton & Giovanni' and David Walliams' stage adaptation of his book 'Awful Auntie'. The Hipp @ The Hullabaloo programme has presented Edinburgh Fringe previews, including comedians Tom Stade and Gareth Mutch.

### **Hippodrome Hires and Community Performances**

19. A successful period for dance school hires, which has included hosting Infinity Dance School, Melanie Edmondson School of Dance and the Joanne Banks Dancers. The Hippodrome's Youth Theatre and Youth Dance classes have also presented their own end of year performances and showcases in both the Hippodrome and Hullabaloo Theatre.

## **Libraries**

### **Schools**

20. Darlington Library worked closely with schools to establish the value of the library's schools' packages, which were produced for the reopening in 2023. Results have been very positive, with 100 percent of responders advising they were satisfied with the number and variety of workshops provided. Respondents advised that the sessions: -
  - (a) Supported pupils learning and attainment
  - (b) Engaged pupils not ordinarily engaged
  - (c) Enhanced the curriculum
  - (d) Were exciting and not something they could generally offer within their school
21. 100 percent of respondents said that they were likely to purchase the package again for the next school year.
22. A further event will be arranged for school leaders to visit the library, see The Hive and the equipment offered, and hear about the school packages, with an early-bird offer to book for next year.

### **Dementia Support**

23. A monthly drop-in session is offered for those with dementia and their families, utilising the Reminiscence Room alongside the specially curated Reminiscence Collection, with staff on hand to support. The Art Gallery is also a meeting place with games and jigsaws, as well as an opportunity to participate in a watercolours group suitable for all abilities.
24. Improvements have been made to signage and wayfinding within the library, and the team have benefitted from Dementia Friendly Training.

### **Crossing The Tees Book Festival**

25. Crossing the Tees is back for its 11th year, with a range of events and workshops at Darlington Library and neighbouring Tees Valley libraries to take part in. The festival celebrates books and the written word, including opportunities to see and hear from authors and the chance for participants to develop their own writing skills.

## **Summer Reading Challenge**

26. In anticipation of the Summer Reading Challenge which commenced on Thursday 18 July, the team visited schools to promote the benefits of participating in the challenge. The challenge aims to support schools by keeping children reading over the school holidays to help prevent the "dip" in attainment they notice in September.
27. During the challenge, children aged 0 - 16 who borrow a book will be entered into a draw to win some fantastic prizes, including a PlayStation, a flying simulator experience, panto tickets, cuddly toys, and Lego sets. Prizes are funded by the Library budget and by engaging businesses who provide sponsorship. An extensive activity programme also runs alongside the challenge to keep families entertained, educated, and involved during the summer school holidays.

## **Hark!**

28. Thanks to funding secured by the Creative Darlington Manager, Darlington Library will hold another exciting 'HARK!' Event. HARK! is an adult event which blends music, poetry and spoken word, offering a licensed bar and a different experience to other events held within libraries. HARK! often engages audiences from different towns and cities helping to put Darlington on the cultural map.

## **Creative Darlington**

29. Darlington Borough Council Heritage and Culture Fund programme budget support of £2,000 was confirmed with Tracks Darlington, following their receipt of an Arts Council England Project Funding grant offer of £30,000 in May 2024. This will support delivery of Last Train Home 2024, a music and comedy festival, on Saturday 7 September 2024 at Darlington Hippodrome, The Hullabaloo, and The Forum Music Studios and associated events, including an earlier Last Train home Express event at Hopetown Darlington.
30. As part of Local Heritage Month 2024, artist Elaine Vizer gave a talk at Darlington Library on Saturday 18 May on the evolution of photographic techniques from Cyanotypes to Digital Photography. The artist's photography exhibition was also on display in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library until Thursday 13 June 2024.
31. Penguin published author, Lisette Auton, presented a reading event on Thursday 30 May which shared work from seven participants of the monthly creative writing sessions for adults she is leading at Darlington Library as part of the 'Your Library Story' creative programme, which is supported by Arts Council England Project Funding. 20 people attended the event.
32. Creative Darlington supported free 'Positive Poetry – Writing Towards Wellbeing' workshops at Darlington Library, which were held from Friday 14 June 2024 until early July 2024 and led by writers from Tees Women Poets.

### **Town Centre Partnership and Events**

33. The summer events programme for 2024 has built on last year's programme with the addition of more cultural events and animation to encourage visitors to explore the town centre.
34. Emergency Services Day, which was held on Saturday 1 June, continues to be a very popular event on the market square, with thousands of families visiting the event to see ambulances, fire engines and police cars. The event continues to be a fantastic engagement opportunity for local public services.
35. On Friday 21 June, we welcomed British Cycling to the town centre as part of the British National Road Championships. The Circuit Championship races attracted visitors from across the region and beyond and the event was supported by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), as part of an effort to grow to grow cycling and tourism links in the region.
36. On Wednesday 17 July, Northumbria in Bloom judges visited Darlington to conduct their summer visit, which brought teams together from across the council to showcase the town centre. On the same day, the GOLD Tea Dance also returned to the town centre.

### **Climate Change**

37. The Eco Fair was very well received and included a marquee with exhibitors and activities linked to sustainable living. The event on Saturday 8 June attracted over 5,000 visitors to the town centre and raised awareness of environmental issues and projects. Feedback from exhibitors will enable the town centre team to further develop the event for 2025.

**Councillor Libby McCollom**  
**Local Services Portfolio**



**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

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

**Customer Services**

2. Our Customer Services team continue to deliver excellent services to our residents, in line with our published customer standards. The key highlights of our performance in 2023-24 is as follows:
  - (a) The total number of telephone calls received through our corporate Netcall telephony system was 207,917, which is a 6.5% reduction in the number of calls received in 2022-23 (an indication that more people using our on-line services, as part of our Customer Services and Digital Strategy).
  - (b) The average percentage of calls answered was 92%, an increase from 87% in 2022-23.
  - (c) The average telephone call waiting time was 1:59 minutes, a reduction from 2:49 minutes in 2022-23, and well within the customer standards of 5 minutes.
  - (d) The monthly average of walk-in visitors to our Customer Services Centre was 1,200, an increase from 822 in 2022-23.
  - (e) The monthly average of e-mails received by Customer Services was 1,576, an increase from 1,378 in 2022-23.
  - (f) Over 375 customers on average each month are using the Scan Stations based in our Customer Services Centre to upload documents to support various applications.
  - (g) A new callback facility has been trialled by Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits and the plan is to roll this out to all services during 2024-25. Initial statistics show this is having a positive impact on the customer journey and waiting times.

**Revenues and Benefits**

3. Our Revenues and Benefits team continue to perform exceptionally well in recovering long-standing debts to the Council, including the following cases, which also demonstrate the supportive role that the team undertake in establishing entitlement to benefits:
  - (a) A local resident owed over £2,600 in overpaid Housing Benefit. Following correspondence with the Revenues and Benefits team, a payment arrangement was made, and the debt was cleared in full, in May 2024.

- (b) The owner of an unoccupied property owed a substantial amount of Council Tax debt. Following attempts to recovery the outstanding sum, the Revenues and Benefits team pursued a bankruptcy petition with the owner. It then came to light that the owner was in the process of selling another property in Stockton-on-Tees but couldn't proceed with the sale due to the bankruptcy petition. As a result, the owner's solicitors cleared the outstanding debt and costs totalling £11,445.
- (c) A local resident owed over £5,700 in unpaid Council Tax going back to 2013. Numerous attempts were made to recover the outstanding sums, and eventually, the debtor agreed to a payment arrangement. Payments were intermittent and the Revenues and Benefits team kept in constant contact with the debtor to ensure he kept to the arrangement; the final payment being received in March 2024.
- (d) A property development company owed over £19,900 in unpaid Council Tax on several properties in Darlington. Following contact from our solicitors, the company made a repayment proposal, which was rejected. They eventually agreed to our terms to pay 50% of the debt in full, followed by monthly instalments; the final payment being received in January 2024.
- (e) A local resident owed over £3,900 in unpaid Council Tax and following numerous visits and correspondence, a monthly arrangement was made, and the debt was paid in full in March 2024.
- (f) A local resident owed over £5,400 in unpaid Council Tax and following numerous visits and correspondence, it was identified that he had entitlement to Council Tax Support and Single Person Discount. The debt was reduced to just over £1,500 and a monthly instalment arrangement was set up.

#### **Capital Projects and Design Services Management**

- 4. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
  - (a) On the Bank Top Railway Station scheme which is being managed by the Tees Valley Combined Authority, the external cladding to the car park and new station building is nearing completion.
  - (b) The Hopetown Darlington project continues onsite with refurbishment works to the former Head of Steam, Goods Shed and Carriageworks buildings. The construction of the new car park is now complete and open to visitors. The entrance works to the Goods Shed directly off McNay Street are also complete and now provide an accessible new access route to North Road Railway station.
  - (c) Site work is progressing on the first phase at the Neasham Road housing scheme.
  - (d) A planning application submitted for refurbishment works to No.156 Northgate has been successful and the detailed design for the scheme is now being worked up.
  - (e) A development partner has been appointed for the refurbishment and subsequent operation of the former Northern Echo building.

- (f) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
- (g) There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs .

**Climate Change – Conversion to Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting in the Town Hall**

- 5. Corporate Landlord are programming the conversion of the Town Hall to LED lighting. The provisional numbers for the programme require an investment of around £70k (from existing budgets) that will create a utility saving of circa £32k pa based on current rates and a saving of 56 tonnes of carbon.
- 6. Work is progressing on feasibility of conversion on the remainder of Council assets. The following table demonstrates several of our larger buildings that have already been converted:-

| <b>Operational Buildings</b>    |                                      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Hippodrome                      | Already LED                          |
| Feethams Multi-storey Car Park  | Already LED                          |
| Crematorium                     | Already LED                          |
| Crown Street Library            | Already LED                          |
| Lingfield Way Salt Barn         | Already LED                          |
| Allington Depot                 | Already LED                          |
| Eastbourne Sports Complex       | Already LED                          |
| Head of Steam                   | Conversion as part of Hopetown works |
| Eastbourne Sports Running Track | Already LED                          |
| Surestart (McNay Street)        | Already LED                          |
| Cockerton Library               | Already LED                          |

**Online content and functionality**

- 7. The Hopetown website was launched in May and is based on designs provided by Hemingway Design. Its main feature is a hybrid integration between our content management system and a third-party electronic point of sale (EPOS) system. This enables ticket sales and associated event information to be merged and managed via a third-party platform. Hopetown events have been added to the Darlington Application Programming Interface (API) meaning that in the future we will be able to automatically add Hopetown events to our main event feeds on Darlington.gov.uk and Enjoydarlington.co.uk websites. The foundations laid here mean we'll be able to do the same thing with the Hippodrome events when that site gets its upgrade next year.

## **Corporate Systems and Processes**

8. The education modules within the Early Years and Education System (EYES) application were implemented in September 2023. Subsequent work with the SEN Team and system supplier has led to the modules being bedded in, and we are starting to see the benefits. Other services which were offline such as Attendance and Exclusions are now able to process data much quicker and can identify trends much more easily. We successfully processed both Primary and Secondary School admission applications, with outcomes being promptly emailed to applicants, and many acceptances being swiftly received. The next phase of the EYES programme has started and will involve implementation of the Education Delegation portal and a finance module, and further work to enhance some Early Years processes.
9. The customer services CRM system (Verint) is undergoing a major upgrade. User acceptance testing is nearing completion and in the coming weeks the upgraded system will be implemented into the live environment. This upgrade will bring several new features and benefits which will help to streamline some processes within customer services.

## **Corporate communications and marketing**

10. Key activities carried out by the communications and marketing team during recent months include pre-launch support for Hopetown Darlington, developing a town centre communications and marketing plan for 2024-26, promoting the Council Plan consultation, pre-election activities for the May and July elections, and producing the Summer 2024 edition of One Darlington.

## **United Kingdom Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) – 4 July 2024**

11. The UK Parliamentary General Election took place on Thursday 4 July 2024. The election was held on the new Parliamentary Boundaries which came into force on the dissolution of Parliament on 30 May 2024. The new Darlington County Constituency now includes the Heighington and Coniscliffe Ward with the wards of Hurworth, Sadberge and Middleton St. George now voting in the Stockton West County Constituency. Previously all three wards voted in the Sedgefield Constituency. The arrangements for the Stockton West Constituency were co-ordinated by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.
12. Given the short notice period in terms of calling the election, the Democratic Services team worked within incredibly tight timescales to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place in terms of the nomination process, staffing, securing venues as Polling Stations and liaising with our printers to produce the required paperwork. A total of 158 staff were employed and trained to work at 47 Polling Stations throughout the day, and around 82 staff were employed to work on the Count later that evening, with a significant number of staff allocated to other key roles in the lead up to the election.
13. Following the ending of the 15-year limit on voting for British citizens living abroad on 16 January 2024, the number of overseas electors applying to register and vote at the Parliamentary election increased. There were also a large number of electors registering to vote and applying for absent votes, once the election had been announced on 21 May.

## **Elections Act 2022**

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

## **Annual Canvass 2024**

15. As a result of the UKPGE taking place on 4 July 2024, the start of the Annual Canvass has been delayed. It is anticipated that the initial data match will take place at the end of July / early August 2024, with the annual canvass forms going out to all properties shortly afterwards.

**Councillor Mandy Porter**  
**Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio**

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**COUNCIL  
18 JULY 2024**

**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

1. Since the last meeting of Council the updates for the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows:

**Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

2. Reporting parameters in relation to crime and ASB have changed over recent years, which has meant it is difficult to secure a like for like comparisons between years. The most recent changes should have nearly worked through the system meaning these figures are becoming more comparable. However, there can be more changes to reporting parameters and this needs to be monitored.

**Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington**

| Darlington | YTD May 2023 | YTD May 2024 |
|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Crime      | 2197         | 1928         |
| ASB        | 406          | 437          |

3. The combined total of Crime and ASB across Darlington has reduced by a total of 238 incidents when compared to the previous year.
4. The areas of crime showing an increase include burglary, vehicle crime and shoplifting. The Police, together with partners have responded through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrols, proactive operations, use of criminal powers and targeting suspects which has resulted in arrests. The combination of these activities is seeing reductions relating to burglary and vehicle crime.
5. Areas showing a current increase in ASB include the Town Centre and North Road. Partners have increased patrols in these areas, targeted offenders and identified several individuals who are now subject of further investigation and intervention by the relevant services.

**Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington Town Centre**

| Darlington Town Centre | YTD May 2023 | YTD May 2024 |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Crime                  | 264          | 260          |
| ASB                    | 24           | 47           |

6. The combined total of Crime and ASB across Darlington town centre has increased by a total of 19 incidents when compared to the previous year.
7. Reported crime has remained relatively static. However, the areas of crime showing an increase include violence against the person, sexual offences, burglary and racially aggravated crime.

8. There is a relatively increase in ASB, which equates to an increase of 24 incidents. Working with partners we are analysing the data to determine any specific patterns or intervention requirements and will monitor this trend closely. Since the last reporting period:
  - (a) 3 young people received first warnings for ASB
  - (b) 4 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
  - (c) 5 committed ABA breaches
  - (d) 4 young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
  - (e) 1 young person is pending assessment
9. There are currently 13 young people about to successfully complete the first cohort (ten-week programme) of the Future Pathways intervention programmes since restart.

### **Operational Updates**

### **Environmental Crime**

10. Since the last reporting period officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes, the figures below provide an overview of activity:
  - (a) 31 environmental cases have been received (of which 22 have been closed)
  - (b) 1 successful prosecution (fail to assist investigation)
  - (c) 1 case file submitted to legal (fail to assist investigation).
  - (d) 1 Fixed Penalty Notice issued (Breach of Community Protection Notice)
  - (e) 1 Community Protection Notice issued
  - (f) 7 Community Protection Warnings issued

### **Community Resilience**

11. "Prevent" is one part of the Government's Counter-Terrorism strategy "Contest". The Council went through a Home Office benchmarking process for Local Authorities delivering Prevent and this demonstrated significant progress. Out of the seven benchmarks the council 'exceeded' delivery outcomes in five and 'met' delivery outcomes in the remaining two.
12. Channel is part of the prevent agenda and aimed at protecting vulnerable people being drawn into terrorism. The annual 'Channel Panel Assurance Statement' was submitted to the Home Office. This statement captures local authority compliance with the duty and demonstrated we 'fully met' 23 out of 24 criteria and we 'mostly met' the remaining one.
13. The 'Emergency Services Day' was held in the Market this provided an opportunity for engagement with members of the public, explain their roles, encourage reporting and answer questions on issues such as anti-social behaviour, car parking, XL bullies. The event showcased the strong partnerships between the Council and emergency service partners.
14. Number Forty now has a designated co-ordinator and 41 volunteers helping support the community. Recent developments include:



- (a) additional training focusing on 'First Contact techniques', Safeguarding and Naxolone use/awareness;
- (b) the introduction and operation of two 'Street Friends' on a Friday and Saturday evening. 'Street Friends' proactively engage with those in the Town Centre providing intervention, support and care wherever necessary.
- (c) provision of a screen at the front of the premises which promotes relevant safety and health advice, and
- (d) integration with Housing and Public Health colleagues especially around improved information exchange, which is resulting in speedier solutions being identified for most service users.

### **Licensing and Trading Standards**

- 15. Uber have applied for an Operator's licence in Darlington. This is being presently being processed. Uber vehicles from Stockton and Durham can already be seen in Darlington as they can lawfully take cross border bookings.
- 16. Two further successful prosecutions of unlicensed dog breeders have taken place. They were found guilty at Peterlee Magistrates Court and the cases were adjourned for reports before sentencing.
- 17. The defendant in the case of Operation Stallion which relates to trademark offences involving counterfeit watches has pleaded guilty to ten charges under the Trade Marks Act. A sentencing hearing is scheduled.
- 18. Partnership work continues to tackle the supply of illegal cigarettes and vapes, with a focus on the wider impacts of this illegal activity. A three-month premises closure order was granted by Peterlee Magistrates Court in relation to a Darlington Town Centre store namely Magic Vape on Tubwell Row.
- 19. Trading Standards have signed up to the National Scambusters team and been able to return money to two elderly victims of fraudulent mail scams. Their mail had been intercepted by the National team and Trading Standards were able to re-unite these victims with at least some of their money. When returning this money Trading Standards have been able to offer advice on how these types of frauds work and how to avoid them.
- 20. People selling counterfeit goods in the town centre have been targeted by CCTV. Joint working between Civic Enforcement, Police and Trading Standards resulted in the goods being seized, sending a clear message that this illegal activity will not be tolerated and we will take action to protect consumers and legitimate traders.
- 21. Shopwatch Members met in the Dolphin Centre and participants were provided with "welcome packs" and they were briefed members on current developments around retail crime. Matters discussed included personal safety, reporting procedures, youth engagement referrals for young people causing nuisance within retail areas and problem-solving around those begging and sleeping rough.

22. Reports of begging have increased and a series of actions are progressing. The inclusion of the Integrated Management Unit of the police to manage those people who continue to beg, despite all forms of support, coaching and advice is proving beneficial. A new communication plan involving the provision of posters has also been produced to tackle the problems associated with begging in the town centre.

**Councillor Dr Amanda Riley**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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## **CABINET URGENT DECISIONS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader of the Council**

**Responsible Director - Chief Officers Executive**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To report the urgent decisions made by Cabinet to which the procedure for calling-in could not be applied, as contained in this Council's Constitution.

**NOTE** – The topics of the reports outlined below are not to be the subject of debate by Council. However, Councillors may ask technical or factual questions to the relevant Group Director as to the reason(s) for urgency.

#### **Recommendation**

2. That the urgent decisions taken be noted.

#### **Reasons**

3. To comply with this Council's Constitution.

#### **Chief Officers Executive**

#### **Background Papers**

Report to Cabinet entitled 'Household Support Fund 2024' submitted on 7 May 2024.

Paul Dalton : Extension 5805

|  |   |
|--|---|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | The contents of this report has been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its areas. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect. |
| Health and Well Being                            | Any impact in relation to Health and Well Being are referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.   |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | Any impact in relation to Carbon Impact is referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.  |
| Diversity  | Any impact in relation to Diversity is referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.  |
| Wards Affected                                   | Any impact in relation to Wards Affected are referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.  |
| Groups Affected                                  | Any impact in relation to Groups Affected are referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.   |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.  |
| Key Decision                                     | This is a non-Executive decision.   |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision.   |
| Council Plan                                     | Any impact in relation to Council Plan are referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.  |
| Efficiency                                       | Any impact in relation to Efficiency is referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.   |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | Any impact in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers are referred to in the individual reports submitted to Cabinet.  |

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

4. Contained within this Council's Constitution is a procedure for Scrutiny Committees to call-in decisions of Cabinet. This call-in procedure does not apply where the decision being taken by Cabinet or an Officer is urgent.
5. A decision will be urgent if any delay, which is likely to be caused by the call-in process, would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public interest.
6. The Constitution states that decisions taken as a matter of urgency must be reported to the next available meeting of the Council, together with the reasons for urgency and, given below, are details of such decisions taken since the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 16 May 2024:

|               |                             |  |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--|
| C135/May/2024 | Household Support Fund 2024 | The start date of the fund was April 1 <sup>st</sup> 2024, and the Plan needed to be submitted by 10 May 2024. |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--|

**Outcome of Consultation**

7. No formal consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this report.

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Work Programme 2024/25**

2. Members of the Committee gave consideration to items that they would like to be included on this Committee's Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2024/25.
3. We felt that it would be important to receive a regular update on the Care Quality Commission's (CQC's) Assurance Framework, and so this will be a standard item on the Agenda for the remainder of this Municipal Year, alongside the standard items already received by the Committee.
4. A number of further items were suggested by Members, which included an update for Members on the Commitment to Carers Strategy and the work being undertaken by the Council to address Domestic Abuse, in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
5. New items also included an overview by Commissioning Services on Shared Lives, some work on Transitional Services, a report on the actions taken in respect of the recommendations made by the Adult Social Care during the Pandemic Task and Finish Group, an exploration of the Darlington Care Network for Providers, the mapping of provisions within the Borough, including Commissioned Services, and a desire to revisit the work of the Loneliness and Connected Communities Task and Finish Group. Members requested that our regular Key Performance Indicator reports also included budgetary information.

**Councillor Andrew Anderson**  
**Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Work Programme**

2. The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme.
3. We proposed the following items be added to the Work Programme; Transitional Service Update, SEND Policy Review, Transport Review, and Autism Review. Discussion ensued around adding further items these included Calm in Communities for quieter times in restaurants for parents with SEND children. Another proposed item was around the Councils website and how it can promote what is going on in Darlington for children and young people.
4. We proposed a report on Home Education, how the number of children educated at home has increased and how do parents receive support for this. We wanted to understand how parents are supposed to support uniform alterations and purchasing additional equipment that might be required for the academic year.
5. Discussion ensued around Key Performance Indicators, we wanted to clarify how to review and scrutinize KPIS's. We spoke about the Gap Analysis and measures of KPIS's should be one of the main focuses when reviewing them. Further discussion ensued around organising a training session for Education and Children and Young Peoples KPI's for members of Scrutiny to get a better understanding.
6. A discussion was held around inviting care leavers and children in care to the Scrutiny meetings to allow the opportunity to give their own views and ask questions. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel encouraged other Scrutiny Members to come along to these meetings.

**Councillor Hilary Allen**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

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**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Darlington Cultural Strategy Action Plan for 2024/2025**

2. We received an update of the progress on delivering priorities in the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 and the 2023/24 Action Plan.
3. Members were informed that the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 was approved back in 2022/23 and was informed by research, including previous Darlington focused Arts Enquiry Report, development work since that date and discussion with stakeholders including: Arts Council England, Tees Valley Combined Authority, and the Creative Darlington Board.
4. We were advised that the main drivers for the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 are to focus on cultural vision and assist advocacy and fundraising towards cultural priorities within the timespan of the document. The strategy used a definition of culture set out by the department of Culture, Media and Sport which covers the following areas: Arts, Architecture, Crafts, Creative Industries, Design, Heritage, Historic Environment, Museums and Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Film, Broadcasting and Media.
5. We were notified of the five priorities which Darlington Cultural Strategy seeks to address between 2022 and 2026 which are; To creatively celebrate Darlington's contribution to the birth of the modern passenger railway, For Darlington to have accessible, diverse and vibrant culture, encouraging economic growth, For Darlington to champion engagement with culture, particularly amongst children and young people, For culture to thrive within Darlington Borough and attract visitors to the Town Centre, For Darlington to have a thriving theatre offer involving people of all ages.
6. We wanted clarification around the usage of the building known as The Bridge – Centre for Visual Arts and whether Darlington Borough Council arts equipment there may be utilised in future.
7. The report stated that Darlington promoted an extensive programme of events throughout 2023/24 which attracted visitors of all ages to Darlington Town Centre, in addition to the Eurovision and Coronation Programme, plus children and young people focused events. We wanted to identify what percentage of children attended these events and how this information can be recorded in future.
8. We entered discussion around the Darlington Borough Council Website and how the Hoptown attraction has not been promoted through this. We also discussed how to organise events in smaller villages outside of the Town Centre, officers advised works from

Darlington Borough Art Collection might be exhibited within buildings owned by Darlington Borough Council subject to locations having display space and facilities.

**Work Programme 2023/24**

9. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25 and possible review topics; the work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.
10. A discussion was held in respect of the current items on the work programme and we proposed a number of items to add the Work Programme 2024/25. Some of the proposed items included the Complaints Logging System which we would utilise in our wards, Parking Review Policy, Allotment Strategy, Policy Review on Rubbish/Fly Tipping, Town Centre Programme and the Parking Review Policy.

**Councillor James McGill**  
**Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee**

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Outturn 2022/23**

2. We received an update on current projects and information on the delivery of the Council's Capital Programme, the financial outturn position as at 31 March 2023 and proposed financing of the 2022/23 capital expenditure as delivered by Assistant Director – Transport and Capital Projects.
3. We were updated that there had been significant enhancements made to the Council's assets in three major programme areas of schools, housing and transport which used mainly external funding as well as several other largescale schemes in the Borough. The investments delivered a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and most importantly to Council services. This included refurbishments of Council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel.
4. We were advised that the total capital expenditure for 2023/24 was £60.084m. The report included that the Council currently had 27 live projects with an overall project outturn value of £158.405m. Most projects have been running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.
5. We discussed the Skinnergate project and the delay in demolition, we wanted clarification whether the demolition had started yet. Conversation merged into Darlington Station Demolitions, whether the compensation amount has been agreed yet and if this will affect the programme itself. The report stated that the Railway Heritage Quarter had a significant amount of money still in dispute, we wanted to understand if this would be resolved at the end of the contract.
6. We wanted officers to expand on the risks and disputes as detailed in the report for the Railway Heritage Quarter, whether the risks were unusual for this type of construction project.
7. We questioned why cost inflation is not reflected in Appendix 6 for the Library, officers confirmed it is factored in and will be reflected next time. Members also questioned if the replacement of electric/old gas Boilers scheme is part of the heat scheme that is used amongst other Councils.

**Revenue Budget Outturn 2022/23**

8. It was reported to us that the Councils General Fund reserves position at the 31 March 2024 is £17.667m, which is an improvement of £0.545m on the planned balances in the 2023-27 MTFP. This improvement related to the £0.484m underspend in the Councils 2022/23 financial results, £1059m projected Group overspends in the 2023/24 financial year and a £1.119m improvement in corporate resources. The report included a number of carry forward requests which will assist in the projected slippage and pressure of the coming year.
9. We discussed the improvements going forward and how this affects the financial situation. Members scrutinised the overspend on agency staff and how we will be able to cease this.
10. The report stated that the Concessionary Fares and Sustainable Transport, concessionary fare scheme by TVCA was refunded £0.103m, we wanted clarification around what the refund will be used on. We scrutinised the decrease on income from the crematorium and wanted to understand what has been put into effect to increase the income.
11. Discussion continued around the Council being subject to Artificial Intelligence, we wanted to understand what this meant and how it will be used. We wanted clarification around the Under Collection of Rent and Bad Debt Provision, is this normal and how this can be resolved.

### **Work Programme**

12. We have agreed our work programme for the Municipal Year 2024/25 and will continue to monitor and adapt this.
13. We proposed the following items be added to the Work Programme, Market Asset Management, Office Demand Study, Agile Working, Cost of Living Support, Artificial Intelligence and The Use of This, Section 106 Funding, Railway Heritage Quarter, Hopetown, Usage of the Council Building, and Procurement.

**Councillor Rebecca Baker**  
**Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**CDDFT Quality Accounts 2023-24**

2. The Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider the draft Quality Accounts 2023/2024 for County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. The Committee considered that the Quality Account was clearly set out and noted the positive performance set out against the 2023/2024 priorities, expressing satisfaction that most services had been rated as “good” and the “outstanding” rating of the End-of-Life Care service.
3. We noted that the Trust has a zero tolerance for pressure ulcers and on-site infections alongside and reinforcing the core concepts of hand-hygiene and cleanliness and the emphasis on early-recognition from staff in order to isolate patients appropriately.
4. We raised questions regarding cases of sepsis and its early-warning signs, the desired standards of maternity care, sustainability of the Trust’s desired quality priorities, staffing levels, staff satisfaction, assessment criteria for new patients, the availability of staff trained to handle mental health issues. The Trust’s representative provided satisfactory responses to all queries and took note of member’s suggestions, such as including Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacterales (CPE) infection levels in the final draft.
5. We noted the quality priorities for 2024/2025 which reflected the Quality Strategy priorities and further priorities where further work was required to meet the 2023/2024 objectives.
6. Overall, the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Trust’s Quality Accounts and would like to receive six monthly reports on the progress being made, to enable them to provide a more detailed and valuable contribution to the Quality Accounts in the future.
7. Members agreed that the Chair of this meeting be given authority to agree the written response to County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust on this draft 2023/2024 Quality Accounts in order to meet the 23 June 2024 deadline for response.

### **Housing Services gas and Electrical Safety Policies 2024-2029.**

8. We welcomed the Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues who presented the draft Housing Services Domestic Gas and Heating Safety Policy 2024-2029 and were informed that the policies set out the Local Authority’s legal obligations in relation to gas and electrical safety, together with the responsibilities for our staff, contractors and our tenants, to ensure they are not put at risk from the effects of gas and electricity.
9. We were informed that all works are carried out by fully qualified staff with full safety checks on homes requiring work and that as a housing provider, the Council takes all reasonable steps to ensure compliance and mitigate risks arising from health and safety assessments.
10. We noted the content of the report and supported its onward submission to 16 July 2024 Cabinet.

### **Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy**

11. The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues presented the draft Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2029, acknowledging that domestic abuse is often a hidden problem, but we want all our tenants and household members to be safe from the impact of domestic abuse.  
The policy highlights the commitment to tackle domestic abuse in Council properties and how Housing Services will aim to manage and support any cases to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation, when they need it.
12. We were informed that Consultation was undertaken in May 2024 with the Tenants Panel, Public Health, Harbour and Family Help, with full support given to the proposed Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy.
13. We raised questions including the implications of increased housing waiting lists with the response that domestic abuse victims are given the highest priority and it was highlighted that members believe the service is doing positive work, acknowledging the challenges faced when rehousing victims of domestic abuse.
14. We noted the content of the report and support its onward submission to 16 July 2024 Cabinet.

### **Air Quality Strategy 2024-2029**

15. We welcomed the Environmental Health Manager who presented the proposed Air Quality Strategy 2024-2029 for Darlington which is required by law to be produced. The goals of the strategy being to improve air quality, raise the profile and importance of air quality and provide information about local air quality.
16. We were informed of the six aims of the strategy which also outlines work that has been carried out in each area and future actions for each:



- a) Reduce emissions and protect public health.
- b) Raise awareness and influence change.
- c) Lead by example
- d) Decrease exposure to air pollutants.
- e) Consider the impact of development on air quality.
- f) Ensure compliance with legislation.

17. We raised questions regarding car idling and wood burning in the town with assurance provided that these are being looked at going forward. A member also raised discussion regarding car-use and suggested that bus subsidies could be a useful incentive if possible.
18. We noted the proposed strategy and support its onward submission to Cabinet.

### **Work Programme 2024/25**

19. We noted the report, previously circulated and that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which members would like to suggest should be included on this Committee's Work Programme for 2024/25.
20. We suggested that the following items be included in the 2024/25 Work Programme for this Scrutiny Committee:
- a) Sexual Health Provision including methods of access.
  - b) Drug Abuse including understanding of numbers and offered provision / preventative measures.
  - c) Chronic Illness and preventative measures.
  - d) Wider Determinants of Health
  - e) Insulation Standards in Council Properties
  - f) CDDFT Quality Accounts – 6 Monthly Update

**Councillor Mary Layton**  
**Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**

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