



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 30 January 2025

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 28 November 2024 and 19 December 2024 (Pages 5 - 18)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given from):-
  - (a) The Public; (Pages 19 - 24)
  - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
8. Cabinet Reports.
  - (a) Council Tax Calculation of Tax Base 2025/26 – Report of the Executive Director, Resources and Governance (Pages 25 - 32)
  - (b) Climate Change Progress – Report of the Chief Executive (Pages 33 - 38)

- (c) Mid Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2024/25 – Report of the Executive Director, Resources and Governance (Pages 39 - 52)
  - (d) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 53 - 56)
  - (e) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 57 - 62)
  - (f) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 63 - 66)
  - (g) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 67 - 74)
  - (h) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 75 - 82)
  - (i) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 83 - 88)
  - (j) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 89 - 92)
  - (k) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 93 - 98)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 99 - 102)
  - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 103 - 106)
  - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 107 - 108)
  - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 109 - 114)
  - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 115 - 120)
10. Membership Changes - To consider any membership changes to Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies.



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

**Wednesday, 22 January 2025**

**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, Resources and Governance 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

This page is intentionally left blank

## COUNCIL

Thursday, 28 November 2024

**PRESENT** – The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Anderson, Bartch, Beckett, 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, Renton, Dr. Riley, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Baker, Coe and Mrs Scott.

**ABSENT** – Councillors Ray and Robinson.

### 32 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**Submitted** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 26 September 2024.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 26 September 2024, be approved as a correct record.

### 33 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

Councillor Lawley declared a non-Pecuniary interest in Minute 37 (b) below, as an employee of the Disclosure and Barring Service.

### 34 **SEALING.**

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

### 35 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

**Death of former-Councillor Rachel Mills** – The Mayor announced the death of former-Councillor Rachel Mills, who had passed away on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The Mayor referred to Councillor Mills' years of service.

**Death of former-Councillor John Vasey** - The Mayor announced the death of former-Councillor John Vasey, who had passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The Mayor referred to Councillor Vasey's years of service and highlighted that he had been Escort to his wife, former-Councillor Lee Vasey, during her Mayoral Year in 2011/12.

Members stood and observed a short silence in respect of their former colleagues.

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

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

There were seven questions, received with notice, from Members of the Public. Five Members of the Public attended the meeting to ask their question in person, and each received an answer thereon.

The Mayor requested that a written response be provided to those Members of the Public who did not attend to ask their question in person.

**(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.

**37 COUNCIL REPORTS.**

**(1) GAMBLING ACT POLICY REVIEW**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to approve the final draft of the Council's Statement of Principles to the Gambling Act 2005 (Gambling Policy), which was due to take effect from 1 January 2025.

The submitted report stated that the revised Gambling Policy was due to be renewed as part of a three-year cycle requirement within the Gambling Act. The draft policy, appended at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, had been supported by the General Licensing Committee at its meeting on 24 September 2024.

**RESOLVED** – That the revised Gambling Policy, which would apply to all licences issued from 1 January 2025, be approved.

**REASON** - The recommendation is supported to ensure standards are maintained to protect the public, in particular children and vulnerable adults and to provide an enforcement framework that takes into account guidance issued by the Gambling Commission.

**(2) CONSTITUTION UPDATE**

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to request approval for a number of changes to the Council's Constitution with effect from 1 January 2025.

The submitted report stated that the process for reviewing the constitution started earlier in the year and a number of proposed amendments, which were mostly what might be described as general housekeeping and updating rather than fundamental changes, were proposed. The proposed changes were outlined in the Appendix to the submitted report, with commentary and explanation in the main body of the submitted report on matters which required additional detail and consideration.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the changes to the Constitution, as detailed in the submitted report, unless otherwise stated, be approved to take effect from 1 January 2025.

- (b) That, subject to confirmation from the Disclosure and Barring Service that they will facilitate enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks, the Monitoring Officer be delegated to move forward with enhanced checks for Councillors appointed to serve as Cabinet members or on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, Adults Scrutiny Committee or Corporate Parenting Panel.
- (c) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated to update the Constitution to reflect the changes identified.

**REASONS** – (a) To ensure that the Constitution is clear, accurate and up-to-date; and

(b) To give effect to legislative changes.

**(3) REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE - CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) 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 and the recalculation of the percentage number of seats each political party/non-aligned Independents are entitled to.

The submitted report stated that since the last review of the political balance of the Council in September 2024, there had been a change to the political make-up of the Council following Councillor Robinson no longer being a Member of the Green Group on the Council. The submitted report clarified that Councillor Robinson will remain on the Council as an Independent Member.

Members were advised that Political Groups are allocated seats on the committees in accordance with political balance rules, which were set out in the report, and that, as a result of the change to the political balance, the Council was now required to review the allocation of seats to political groups.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the change to the political balance of the Council be noted.

- (b) That the Green Group lose one seat from the following Committees:
  - a) Adults Scrutiny Committee
  - b) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee, and
  - c) LEA Governors Committee.
- (c) That Councillor Robinson ceases to be a member of Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Committee;
- (d) That Councillor Coe ceases to be a member of the Climate Change Working Group;
- (e) That Councillor Robinson be appointed to the LEA Governors Committee and the Climate Change Working Group;
- (f) That it be noted that the Adults Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Housing

Scrutiny Committee will have one seat each that is unallocated at this time.

**REASON** - To reflect the changed political balance of the Council and to comply with legislation.

**38 CABINET REPORTS.**

**(1) COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - SCHEME APPROVAL 2025-26**

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to request approval for the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for 2025-26.

The submitted report stated that on 30 November 2023, Council approved the local CTS scheme for 2024-25 and the scheme became operational on 1 April 2024, and that Councils are required to set a CTS scheme each year and as part of that exercise:

- (a) Consider whether any changes should be made to the existing scheme, and
- (b) Where changes are made, consider what transitional protection, if any, should apply to anyone affected by those changes.

The submitted report set out the details of the CTS scheme for 2025-26, with no significant changes proposed to the existing scheme. The submitted report was considered by Cabinet on 5 November 2024, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Council.

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

- (b) That the CTS scheme for 2025-26, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved.

**REASONS** – (a) The Council is required to publish a local CTS scheme for 2025-26 by 11 March 2025.

- (b) The CTS schemes since 2013 have all been implemented successfully without any major challenges.
- (c) The continued application of a reduced entitlement for working aged people is still appropriate, given the current financial position of the Council.

**(2) CABINET REPORTS - TO CONSIDER THE PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW 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.

**(3) CABINET URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing a decision taken by Cabinet as a matter of urgency and to which the procedure for call-in could not be



applied.

**RESOLVED** – That the urgent decision taken by Cabinet be noted.

**REASON** – To comply with the Council’s Constitution.

**39 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.

**40 NOTICE OF MOTION**

**(1) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR HARKER AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR DULSTON**

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Harker, and seconded by Councillor Dulston:

**Promoting Civility in Politics**

**This Council notes:**

- a) That over recent years, political discourse in the UK has become increasingly uncivil, between politicians of different parties and between the public and politicians.
- b) There have been instances within the Borough of Darlington, both in meetings and online, where language and social media exchanges have become excessively uncivil.
- c) That in 2020, Darlington Borough Council adopted the United Darlington Charter, proposed by Cllr Harker and seconded by Cllr Mrs. Scott.

**This Council believes:**

- a) The majority of the public expects local Councillors to engage civilly with one another, in order to work together for the benefit of the whole Borough.
- b) Officers of Darlington Borough Council should be treated with respect in meetings, without fear of personal remarks or inappropriate questioning.
- c) Careless language and personal attacks can have serious consequences, as highlighted by the tragic murders of Sir David Amess and Jo Cox in recent years.
- d) Councillors and the public have the right to challenge policies and decisions in a civil and respectful manner.

**That this Council resolves:**

- a) To reaffirm the adoption of the United Darlington Charter.
- b) That all Darlington Borough Councillors should adopt the following Civility Pledge, put together by the Jo Cox Foundation, and hold each other accountable to keep it:

“As an elected representative, I pledge to:

1. Use a civil and constructive tone in political debate.
2. Act with integrity, honesty and compassion
3. Behave respectfully towards others, including those I disagree with”

- c) To promote civility in politics amongst Councillors, candidates and the public.

**RESOLVED** – That the Motion be Agreed.

**(2) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DULSTON AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR BARTCH**

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Dulston, and seconded by Councillor Bartch:

**Failure to Support Local Businesses Over Christmas**

**This Council notes:**

- a) the critical role small businesses play in sustaining the local economy and the need to commit to policies that prioritise their survival and growth;
- b) that this Labour-controlled Council has failed to consider introducing free parking during the Christmas period, a time when local businesses rely heavily on increased footfall to boost their sales and secure their livelihoods;
- c) that small businesses, already struggling under the national Labour Government’s punitive National Insurance tax hikes, are further disadvantaged by this Council’s failure to consider alleviating parking costs for potential shoppers;
- d) that other councils across the UK have recognised the importance of supporting their local economies during this festive season by implementing free or reduced parking, making this Council’s inaction even more glaring; and
- e) the harmful effects of the Labour Government’s National Insurance tax hike.

**This Council believes:**

- a) that the needs of the community and the businesses that form its backbone,

particularly during the festive season when the cost of living crisis and government-imposed financial burdens already weigh heavily on everyone, should not be ignored;

b) that free parking during the Christmas period would provide a much-needed lifeline to small businesses, encouraging greater footfall and boosting the local economy at a critical time;

c) that the combination of increased operational costs, higher taxes, and this Council's indifference, places an undue burden on local entrepreneurs, many of whom are on the brink of closure;

d) that its inaction demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of, or care for, the struggles faced by small business owners and residents in the borough;

e) that this failure also discourages residents from shopping locally, driving them to online retailers or larger shopping centres with more affordable or subsidised parking options.

**Council therefore resolves to:**

a) Acknowledge the detrimental impact on local businesses of its failure to consider offering free parking during the Christmas period and agrees to introduce free parking within the Town Centre during the months of December 2024 and January 2025; and

b) Undertake a marketing campaign promoting the above offer with a view to increasing footfall and boosting the local economy at a critical time.

At the request of five Members, a Named Vote was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:

**For the Motion:** The Mayor, Councillors Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Laing, Lee, Marshall, K. Nicholson, Tostevin and Walters (13).

**Against the Motion:** Councillors Ali, Anderson, Beckett, Cossins, Crumbie, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M. Nicholson, Porter, Dr. Riley, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms and Wallis (28).

**Abstentions:** Councillor Curry (1).

**NOTE:** At the time that the vote was taken, Councillors Allen, Pease and Renton had left the meeting.

The Motion was Lost.

**(3) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR SNEDKER AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR HENDERSON**

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Snedker, and seconded by Councillor Henderson:

Ending local government austerity and investing in local public services

This Council notes that:

a) Government grants to local authorities were cut by 40% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20, from £46.5bn to £28.0bn;

b) as a result, between 2010 and 2019, more than £30 billion in spending reductions (often termed austerity measures) were made to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services in the UK;

c) research shows these austerity measures have contributed to 335,000 excess deaths, resulted in a fall in the UK life expectancy, and culminated in UK workers being £11,000 worse off a year after years of wage stagnation;

d) at the same time, there has been a huge surge in demand for vital services provided by local authorities, such as adult social care, which takes up about three-quarters of Local Authority budgets. While the cost of delivering these services per capita has seen above inflation cost rises;

e) spending on social care grew by an average of 2.6% a year in real terms between 2014/15 and 2021/22;

f) this is less than the 3.4% a year increase in spending that the Health Foundation has calculated will be needed between 2024/25 and 2032/33 to meet future demand. This is equal to £8.3 billion overall;

g) The National Audit Office has recognised that the pressure on local authority finances “impacts on the funding available for adult social care”;

h) as a result of decreased funding and increased demand for services, since 2021 six local authorities have declared themselves effectively bankrupt, with many half of all councils warning they may have to do the same in the next five years; and

i) The Labour Party has not committed to increasing funding for local authorities, leaving the estimated £6bn black hole in council budgets unaddressed.

This Council believes that:

a) cuts to the government grants provided to local authorities must be reversed by the new government, in order to sufficiently fund growing demand for key services such as adult social care;

b) without adequate funding, the increased financial pressure from increased

demand for these services is likely to have serious negative financial implications for local authorities and Darlington Borough Council; and

c) as well as increased funding, the UK government and local authorities must commit to improving the working conditions of social workers.

This Council resolves to:

a) Write to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, and relevant Ministers of State to call for an end to local government austerity, and a significant and substantial investment in local government and public services. This will include a call for a sustained uplift to local authority funding to cover shortfalls in adult social care, education, homelessness, and other key services. It will also include an ask to provide multi-year funding settlements.

b) Work with providers, local NHS, and UNISON reps to explore the Ethical Care Charter within the term of current contracts, and report back to this council within six months on the practicalities of adopting stage 1 of the charter by the end of this Municipal Year, and proposals for adopting stages 2 and 3 of the charter.

c) Ask the government to revive the Fair Funding Review for Adult Social Care, which was put on hold by the Conservative government, for which Darlington Borough Council and its care providers had already done significant preparatory work.

The following Amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor Harker, and seconded by Councillor Anderson:

**This Council notes that:**

a) Government grants to local authorities were cut by 40% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20, from £46.5bn to £28.0bn;

b) as a result, between 2010 and 2019, more than £30 billion in spending reductions (often termed austerity measures) were made to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services in the UK;

c) research shows these austerity measures have contributed to 335,000 excess deaths, resulted in a fall in the UK life expectancy, and culminated in UK workers being £11,000 worse off a year after years of wage stagnation;

d) at the same time, there has been a huge surge in demand for vital services provided by local authorities, such as adult social care, which takes up about three-quarters of Local Authority budgets. While the cost of delivering these services per capita has seen above inflation cost rises;

e) spending on social care grew by an average of 2.6% a year in real terms between 2014/15 and 2021/22;

f) this is less than the 3.4% a year increase in spending that the Health Foundation has calculated will be needed between 2024/25 and 2032/33 to meet future demand. This is equal to £8.3 billion overall;

g) The National Audit Office has recognised that the pressure on local authority finances “impacts on the funding available for adult social care”;

h) as a result of decreased funding and increased demand for services, since 2021 six local authorities have declared themselves effectively bankrupt, with many half of all councils warning they may have to do the same in the next five years; and

i) the Labour Government has committed to: no return to austerity; multi-year funding settlements for local authorities; ending competitive bidding; a fair funding review

(j) the work done to date since 2017 to incorporate provisions within the Ethical Care Charter, thereby improving working conditions of care workers

**This Council believes that:**

a) the government should do everything in its power to ensure grants provided to local authorities sufficiently fund the growing demand for key services such as adult social care

b) without adequate funding, the increased financial pressure from increased demand for these services is likely to have serious negative financial implications for local authorities and Darlington Borough Council; and

**This Council resolves to:**

a) Further explore the Ethical Care Charter within the term of current contracts to determine the practicalities of adopting the remaining provisions.

The Amendment was Carried.

The Amendment became the Substantive Motion and was put to the meeting, and was Agreed.

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

Consideration was given to membership changes of the Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2024/25 that:

(a) That Councillor Dr. Riley replace Councillor Garner on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee;

(b) That Councillor Dr. Riley replace Councillor Garner on the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee;

(c) That Councillor Toms be removed from the Adults Scrutiny Committee;

- (d) That Councillor Mammolotti be removed from the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee;
- (e) That Councillor Holroyd be appointed to the Green Group vacancy on the Planning Applications Committee; and
- (f) That Councillor Toms be appointed to the Green Group vacancies on the Licencing Committees.

This page is intentionally left blank



## **COUNCIL**

Thursday, 19 December 2024

**PRESENT** – The Mayor, Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Bartch, Beckett, Cossins, Crudass, Mrs Culley, Curry, Dillon, Dulston, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Keir, Laing, Layton, Lee, Mahmud, Mammolotti, McCollom, McEwan, K Nicholson, Porter, Dr. Riley, Roche, Mrs Scott, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Ali, Coe, Crumbie, Durham, Garner, Lawley, Marshall, McGill, M Nicholson and Ray.

**ABSENT** – Councillors Pease, Renton and Robinson.

### **42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### **43 ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

There were no announcements made at the meeting.

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

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

There were no questions, received with notice, from Members of the Public.

#### **(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.

### **45 APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE (HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)**

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to approve the recommendation of the Human Resources Committee, in relation to the appointment of a new Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service).

The submitted report recalled that in September 2024 the Council approved a Senior Management Restructure, following notification from the current Chief Executive of his planned retirement. It was reported that a subsequent recruitment and selection process had been undertaken, in accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules for the Appointment of Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), as detailed in the Council's Constitution, and that the Human Resources Committee had met to interview three candidates for the post on 13 December 2024. An addendum to the submitted report was subsequently circulated to Members which detailed the recommendation of the Human Resources Committee, which Council were invited to approve.

**EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC - RESOLVED** - That, pursuant to Sections 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the ensuing item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in exclusion Paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.

**RESOLVED** - (a) That the recruitment process which has been followed for the appointment of the Council's Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) be noted;

(b) That the appointment of the candidate recommended by the Human Resources Committee as the Council's Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), subject to the satisfactory completion of the appropriate recruitment checks, be approved.

**REASON** - The recommendation is supported to enable a Chief Executive to be appointed and to discharge the duties and functions assigned to them by the role.

Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 30 January 2025

Question No.	Question received from	Respondent	Question
1.	Mr. Michael WALKER	Councillor McEWAN	‘According to section F04 of the climate change action plan, Darlington Borough Council, a council described by Cllr Harker as having a "financial black hole", are planning to "Have a pool of low emission/hybrid/electric cars for staff to use for work related travel to try and encourage staff members to travel to and from work more sustainably." I notice that in the most recent report the timescale for this is "ongoing" and "limited/no progress" has been made. Please can you tell me what progress has been made, how many electric cars will be purchased by the council and the total cost of this initiative?’
2.	Mr. Kevin BRACK	Councillor McEWAN	<p>‘Regarding the licence granted on 17 December 2024 by the Executive Director - Environment, Highways and Community Services,</p> <p>See the attached decision details <a href="#">Decision - Grant of Licence to install column mounted MultiTech Series 200 LoRaWAN gateway antenna and power supply units to circa 200 Lighting Columns across the Borough (to be identified in a schedule) for the purpose of monitoring water smart meters for Nort Darlington Borough Council</a></p> <p>Given that Darlington's street lights were changed to save energy, can you specify the electricity consumption used by the column-mounted antennas in the following states: standby, receiving, and transmission? Additionally, is the company responsible for the billing of this electricity usage, or are taxpayers expected to bear this cost through council tax?</p> <p>The council granted a licence to install column-mounted MultiTech Series 200 LoRaWAN gateway antennas and power supply units to approximately 200 lighting columns across the Borough, as identified in a schedule, for the purpose of monitoring water smart meters for Northumbrian Water.’</p>
3.	Mr. Alan MACNAB	Councillor McEWAN	‘I know the Skerningham Master Plan is not a Council document but nevertheless the Cabinet and a Scrutiny Committee considered it and found it to be sound. You said at Cabinet that the Master Plan was imperfect but it would be improved over time. There were clear contradictions in the Master Plan with the Local Plan and the

			<p>Skerningham Design Code. You have been given the contradictions which were pointed out by Whinfield Residents Association and by residents.</p> <p>I have a number of years' experience of policy development and report writing for consideration by senior officers and elected members. I would have been rightly criticised if I put an unsound document to senior officers and elected members; the document would have been deferred to ensure that there were no contradictions. The Master Plan comes into the category of an unsound document.</p> <p>My question is why did you allow such an imperfect document to be presented to Cabinet when you knew there were contradictions in it and not sent back to the authors of the Master Plan for the contradictions to be eliminated. What were your reasons for taking this action?</p> <p><b>Supplementary:</b> Residents found contradictions between the Skerningham Master Plan and the Local Plan and Design Code which were pointed out. If residents found there were contradictions why didn't the officers or if they did find them, why did they not take the necessary action to get them corrected?'</p>
4.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor GARNER	<p>'Our council took part in last year's <i>16 Days</i> campaign to highlight Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). It is especially pertinent to our area when the ONS Crime Survey shows '<i>The highest rate of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police was in the North East (19 incidents per 1,000 population) in YE March 2024.</i>'</p> <p>I followed one of the council's Facebook post links to the domestic abuse page. When I clicked on the '<i>Support for Women</i>' page the text read: "<i>The council is aware of the importance of understanding there are more genders than male and female.</i>" It was the same on the '<i>Support for Men</i>' page.</p> <p>I looked for a '<i>Support for People whose Genders aren't Male or Female</i>' section but there isn't one. I couldn't find any further references to the other '<i>genders</i>' on any of the domestic abuse pages.</p> <p>Therefore, the relevance of the statement is puzzling.</p>

			<p>Publicly available data shows that perpetrators of domestic abuse are overwhelmingly male, and the victims or survivors are overwhelmingly female.</p> <p>The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates <i>'approximately 7 in 100 women and 3 in 100 men'</i> experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024 [1].</p> <p>The Home Office's Homicide Index data show that <i>'65.4% of the victims of domestic homicide were female'. 'Of the 231 female domestic homicide victims, the suspect was male in the majority of cases (224). For male domestic homicide victims, the suspect was female in 39 cases out of 122. (YE March 2021 to YE March 2023).</i></p> <p>Cllr Garner, please could you <b>explain</b></p> <p><b>When</b> and <b>how</b> the council arrived at its statement, <i>'The council is aware of the importance of understanding there are more genders than male and female.'</i> Eg <b>who advised</b> it</p> <p><b>What</b> does <b>'understanding'</b> mean in terms of <b>policy</b> and <b>provision</b></p> <p>What <b>objective, stable &amp; measurable criteria</b> does the council use to categorise residents who are <i>'more genders than male and female'</i></p> <p>What is the <b>data</b> for those categorised as <i>'more genders than male and female'</i></p> <p>And, in Darlington, what is the <b>support offered</b> and the <b>resulting outcomes</b> for those categorised as <i>'more genders than male and female'</i> <b>in comparison</b> to those who are categorised as male or female?'</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Suzanne WOOD</p>	<p>Councillor GARNER</p>	<p>The infrastructure have predicted the occurrence of blackouts in the UK caused by the shortage of electricity.</p> <p>What plans have been prepared by Darlington Council to help the people of Darlington through these problems.</p>

<p>6.</p>	<p>Jack JAMES</p>	<p>Councillor McEWAN</p>	<p>"Just over 200 days ago, the British people elected a Labour Government. A super majority in the House of Commons which can pass legislation at the drop of a hat."</p> <p>"Since the 5th July 2024 there has been little hope for small businesses up and down this country, not just in Darlington."</p> <p>"Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer have backtracked on their election promises. Our economy is in decline. Our pensioners, our children, our small business owners, our NHS workers and many more face one of the most uncertain times."</p> <p>"Labour are out of touch with the working people of our country. As demonstrated yesterday at PMQs when Labour MPs cheered to the idea that the Employment Bill introduced by the Government would be the biggest expansion of trade union power ever."</p> <p>"Not helped of course by the Labour, Liberal and Green Councillors who blocked the motion to provide vital support needed to our local business over the Christmas Period despite being labelled as a lifeline for our local businesses."</p> <p>"But what makes this even more unbelievable is that you promised if elected as Mayor of the Tees Valley that you would and I quote "Bring back free parking to breathe life into our struggling town centres."</p> <p>"Isn't it strange that when elections come round Labour promises the world, yet deliver so little. Much like our Labour MP who has only just opened a constituency office. The people of Darlington deserve much, much better."</p> <p>"Children in this town need to feel proud of the place they live They need role models to look up to and the comfort that they can open a small business in this town and be supported by the local authority, something which is clearly lacking under this Labour administration."</p> <p>"So Councillor McEwan, please justify to the people of Darlington why you made this commitment whilst</p>
-----------	-------------------	------------------------------	--

			<p>seeking higher office yet fail to deliver on it now."</p> <p>"Could you please also provide further justification as to why this administration decided to fail our business owners despite knowing that our local area was failing and continues too."</p> <p>"And perhaps you could provide me with some real data and information which shows that by implementing this decision you would not be improving our town centre because voting it down clearly shows you feel this way."</p> <p>"I do hope you can answer my questions rather than differing as so many Labour Party officials do to a hysterical £22 billion black hole and 14-years of a Conservative Government."</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 23</p>	<p>7. Leanne CARROLL</p>	<p>Councillor McEWAN</p>	<p>'The landfill at Skerningham closed in 2004/2005 and was capped, however it is still actively and strongly venting gas all these years on. There is video evidence of this. The gas can be both odourless or eggy and seems to intensify during wet weather. Recently when it snowed, one of the vent stacks releasing gas was so loud it almost sounded like a boiling kettle. These loud hissing pipes have been reported to the Environment Agency on their incident hotline. The Environment Agency suggest a stand-off zone of 250m for any new housing. When Skerningham was deemed unsuitable for development in 2015, one constraint was high risk of contamination from the landfill. With responsibility for monitoring the site for gas emissions at the surface and for sub-surface migration lying with the operator, Thompsons of Prudhoe, who are required to submit six monthly reports, an Environmental Information Request submitted to the Environment Agency by a fellow resident revealed there are no Compliance Assessment Reports available for the period from the site's closure in 2004/2005 until 2019, when the reports are resumed noting the lack of compliance. It would be interesting to know if the Council requested to see compliance reports before including Skerningham for housing in the Local Plan in 2017, however my question is does the Council accept the recommendation of the Environment Agency that no houses should be built within 250m of the landfill and if the Council disagrees with this 250m buffer, how do they intend to evidence that decision in the light of the new information about off-gassing that Thompsons have never reported? Please do not answer this by saying this will be dealt with at planning-application stage, I would like an answer at this meeting, please.'</p>

This page is intentionally left blank



**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

## **COUNCIL TAX CALCULATION OF TAX BASE 2025/26**

---

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

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

---

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To determine the Council's tax base for 2025/26.

#### **Summary**

2. In accordance with Section 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the Council has to decide its tax base by 31 January in the year preceding that for which the tax base applies. This has then to be notified to any precepting authorities and is used in the calculation and setting of the Council Tax. The relevant tax base calculations are shown in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

#### **Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) The report for the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2025/26 be approved.
  - (b) The tax base for the Council of 35,904.5 and the individual tax base for the parishes as set out at Appendix 2 be approved.

#### **Reason**

4. The recommendations are supported to comply with statutory requirements, enabling the Council Tax for 2025/26 to be set by Council in February 2025.

**Elizabeth Davison**  
**Executive Director of Resources and Governance**

**Background Papers**

- (i) Council Tax regulations
- (ii) Council Tax database

Judith Murray: Extension 5401

Council Plan	This report has no implications for the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to inequalities
Tackling Climate Change	There are no climate change implications
Efficient and effective use of resources	The reports does not have any efficiency implications
Health and Well Being	There are no health and well being issues
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Wards Affected	The proposals affect all wards
Groups Affected	The proposals affect everyone liable for Council Tax
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not represent a change to the Budget or Policy framework
Key Decision	This is not an Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

5. The tax base is the total number of domestic properties in the Borough, calculated as a weighted average 'Band D equivalents'. The amount of Council Tax payable for properties in each of the eight valuation bands A to H is statutorily determined as proportions of Band D. The tax base is adjusted for discounts, exemptions and estimated changes over the coming year. An estimate of the collection rate is also applied. The tax base represents the amount of revenue that it is estimated will be raised by each £1 of band D Council Tax. It is, therefore, an important part of setting the Council Tax.
6. The council tax base is, for the purpose of calculating a billing authority's and a major precepting authority's council tax, the taxable capacity of an area or part of an area. The amounts are calculated for each financial year and represent the estimated number of chargeable dwellings after allowing for reductions and discounts and adjusted to take account of the authority's collection rate.
7. The regulations changed the formula for calculating the council tax base so as to take account of any reductions which will be made under the local council tax reduction scheme or increases for local premiums for empty or long-term empty dwellings and second homes.
8. Under the previous council tax benefit system, billing authorities received payment to cover 100% of the cost of council tax benefit paid. The council tax base was therefore unaffected by changes in council tax benefit granted because the billing authority did not forgo any council tax income from dwellings in receipt of council tax benefit.
9. However, under the local council tax support scheme, the council tax base is affected by whether a dwelling is in receipt of a council tax reduction awarded under the scheme, as the authority is foregoing council tax income from these dwellings.
10. Local council tax support reductions need to be reflected in the calculation of the council tax base, in order to calculate the correct amount of Band D council tax for the billing or major precepting authority area. If the council tax base did not reduce, authorities would set their council tax bills based on an incorrect level of taxable capacity. The outcome being that dwellings where an occupier was eligible to receive a reduction under the local authority's council tax reduction scheme would not be required to pay the full amount of council tax and the authority would not therefore be able to collect the correct amount of council tax to meet its council tax requirement, with a deficit being created on the collection fund.
11. Similarly, the tax base is increased by the premium generated through the empty and long term empty homes scheme whereby the consequent increase in the council tax base is used to lower council tax bills.
12. The actual calculation of the tax base is prescribed in the above regulations and has several components. Calculations must be made of the 'relevant amount' for the year, for each of the eight valuation bands as shown in the Council's Valuation List submitted by the Listing Officer (HM Revenue and Customs) on 30 November 2024 and the Band A(-)

category introduced with effect from 1 April 2000 to provide relief to disabled persons residing in Band A properties. The relevant amount for each band represents the number of chargeable dwellings, as adjusted for exemptions, disabled reductions, discounts and also estimated changes up to 31 March 2026. The final total for each band has to be converted to the equivalent number of Band D dwellings.

13. The relevant amounts for the individual bands are then totalled and the estimated collection rate for the year is applied. The collection rate is based on the proportion of the amount payable into the Collection Fund for the year, including appropriate adjustments for benefits and any transitional relief, which the Council believes will ultimately be collected. The resulting figure, plus any contributions in lieu from the Ministry of Defence in respect of forces accommodation, is the Council's tax base for its area for the year concerned.
14. The estimates and calculations outlined above in respect of the tax base for 2025/26 are shown in **Appendix 1**. Members will see that the calculations produce a total Band D equivalent of 36,235.1 (line 18) which, when combined with an estimated collection rate of 99.0% and contributions in lieu, results in an overall tax base figure of 35,904.5 which is a 1.71% increase on 2024/25.
15. Similar calculations also need to be made in respect of the parishes and in particular the same estimated collection rate must be applied as that used for the whole of the Council's area. The tax base calculations for each parish are as shown in **Appendix 2**.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

16. This is a technical report, which follows a prescribed format. There has been no consultation in compiling this report.

## DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2025/26

	Band	A (-)	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
1	Dwellings per Valuation List	0	23,159	11,162	7,779	5,919	3,562	1,396	683	54	53,714
2	Disabled Band Relief	0	(62)	(45)	(45)	(56)	(40)	(21)	(7)	(13)	(289)
3	Disabled Band Relief (Chargeable)	62	45	45	56	40	21	7	13	0	289
4	Disabled Band Relief (Adjusted)	62	(17)	0	11	(16)	(19)	(14)	6	(13)	0
5	Exemptions	0	(765)	(188)	(133)	(70)	(44)	(14)	(7)	0	(1,221)
6	Single discount (25%)	(27)	(11,035)	(4,298)	(2,569)	(1,422)	(652)	(255)	(88)	(2)	(20,348)
7	Double discount (50%)	(1)	(20)	(6)	(14)	(16)	(14)	(4)	(19)	(8)	(102)
8	Equated discounts	(7.25)	(2,768.75)	(1,077.50)	(649.25)	(363.50)	(170.00)	(65.75)	(31.50)	(4.50)	(5,138.00)
9	Empty Homes Premium 1 Yr (100%)	0	142	31	21	11	12	3	0	1	221
10	Empty Homes Premium (100%)	0	58	13	5	1	2	2	1	0	82
11	Empty Homes Premium (200%)	0	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
12	Empty Homes Premium (300%)	0	10	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	13
13	<b>Chargeable Dwellings</b>	<b>54.75</b>	<b>19,860.25</b>	<b>9,945.50</b>	<b>7,033.75</b>	<b>5,484.50</b>	<b>3,346.00</b>	<b>1,307.25</b>	<b>651.50</b>	<b>39.50</b>	<b>47,723.00</b>
14	Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)	(17.16)	(4,295.88)	(943.19)	(354.23)	(107.04)	(31.92)	(11.68)	(3.70)	(0)	(5,764.80)
15	<b>Chargeable Dwellings after CTRS</b>	<b>37.59</b>	<b>15,564.37</b>	<b>9,002.31</b>	<b>6,679.52</b>	<b>5,377.46</b>	<b>3,314.08</b>	<b>1,295.57</b>	<b>647.80</b>	<b>39.50</b>	<b>41,958.20</b>
16	Estimated Changes					441					441
17	Band D Multiplier	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
18	Band D Equivalent (Relevant Amount)	20.9	10,376.2	7,001.8	5,937.3	5,818.2	4,050.5	1,871.4	1,079.7	79.0	36,235.1
19	Estimated Collection Rate										99.0%
20	Contributions in Lieu					31.8					31.8
21	<b>Council Tax Base</b>										<b>35,904.5</b>

**ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2025/26 – EXPLANATION OF TERMS**

	Each column shows the totals for each Council Tax band A to H. The TOTAL column is the total for the whole Council. The Band A(-) column is the total in Band A where a disabled band relief applies.
<b>Lines</b>	
Line 1	The number of dwellings in each Council Tax band as per the Valuation List, as at 30/11/2024.
Line 2	The number of dwellings in each band where a disabled band relief applies
Line 3	The number of dwellings in each band after the disabled band relief has been applied
Line 4	The net number of dwellings in each band after the disabled band relief has been applied (Line 3 - Line 2)
Line 5	The number of dwellings in each band that are exempt from Council Tax (where an exemption applies), to be deducted from the total number of dwellings
Line 6	The number of dwellings in each band where a single (25%) discount applies
Line 7	The number of dwellings in each band where a double (50%) discount applies
Line 8	The adjustment for each band where a discount applies (Line 6 x 25%) + (Line 7 x 50%)
Line 9	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period between one and two years which attract a 100% Premium.
Line 10	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period between two and five years and which attract a 100% Premium.
Line 11	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period between five and ten years and which attract a 200% Premium.
Line 12	The number of properties that have been unoccupied or unfurnished for a period in excess of ten years and which attract a 300% Premium
Line 13	The equivalent number of chargeable dwellings before the application of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Line 14	The equivalent number of properties in receipt of council tax benefit in each band
Line 15	The equivalent number of properties after the application of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Line 16	The estimated number of additional band D equivalent dwellings that will be included in the tax base during 2025/26
Line 17	The band D multiplier that is applied to the number of chargeable dwellings in each band (this multiplier is prescribed in law)
Line 18	The adjusted number of chargeable dwellings in each band after applying the multiplier (Line 15 + Line 16) x Line 17
Line 19	The estimated percentage collection rate
Line 20	The estimated number of band D equivalent dwellings for contributions in lieu. (Armed Forces Accommodation)
Line 21	The Council Tax Base for 2025/26 (Line 18 x Line 19) + Line 20

**PARISH COUNCILS – ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2025/26**

<b>Parish</b>	<b>Current Parish Tax Base (1)</b>	<b>Adjusted Band D Equivalent 25/26 (2)</b>	<b>Collection Rate</b>	<b>Parish Tax Base</b>
Bishopton	178.1	182.3	99.0%	180.5
Heighington	1,116.1	1,132.9	99.0%	1,121.6
High Coniscliffe	111.1	113.6	99.0%	112.4
Hurworth	1,544.3	1,617.9	99.0%	1,601.7
Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent	349.7	352.2	99.0%	348.7
Middleton St. George	2,080.6	2,135.5	99.0%	2,114.1
Neasham	246.0	251.8	99.0%	249.3
Piercebridge	63.3	62.5	99.0%	61.9
Sadberge	307.2	312.0	99.0%	308.9
Whessoe	582.8	668.7	99.0%	662.0

**PARISH COUNCILS ESTIMATED TAX BASE 2025/26 – EXPLANATION OF TERMS**

<b>Columns</b>	
Current Parish Tax Base (1)	The current Council Tax base for each Parish, using the methodology set out in Appendix 1, for 2024/25
Adjusted Band D Equivalent 25/26 (2)	The calculated Council Tax base for each Parish, using the same methodology set out in Appendix 1, and after the estimated changes for 2025/26 have been applied
Collection Rate	The estimated percentage collection rate
Parish Tax Base	The Council Tax Base for 2025/26 for each Parish

This page is intentionally left blank



**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

## **CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS**

---

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

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

---

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Council on progress towards the Council's net zero target.

### **Summary**

2. As agreed in the Climate Emergency Declaration, this report is the 6-month interim report. The emissions data we gather is available annually, so there is no update on current emissions.
3. A climate change seminar for Council members was held on 19 September 2024.
4. The Darlington Eco Fair was held in June 2024. More than 5,000 people passed through the marquee.
5. The Highway Asset Management team annual maintenance programme for 2023/24 demonstrated a total reduction of over 348 tonnes in CO2 emissions.
6. In December, the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer submitted our report to Defra as part of a trial project for local authorities to report to the Secretary of State under the Climate Change Act's Adaptation Reporting Power.
7. Councillor McEwan, Portfolio Holder for the climate change work has met with all the Assistant Directors to receive feedback and progress on actions.
8. Following these meetings we have reviewed some of the delivery dates of actions, to allow for resources (staff and financial) to be managed.
9. The Housing Service is bidding for Wave three of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, through the Tees Valley Combined Authority. Should that bid be successful, Wave three will see a further 1600 of our homes below EPC C by 2028.
10. The Head of Environmental Services and Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer have worked together to commission a piece of work to calculate the carbon sequestration potential of council land. We are the first local authority in the UK to do this

work in this way. The report has been received and shows a positive result. However, it does not override the need to continue to decarbonise our buildings and service delivery.

### Recommendation

11. It is recommended that Council acknowledges the report.

### Reason

12. The recommendation is supported by the increasing public pressure to act on climate change, we run the risk of significant damage to our reputation if we do not deliver on our stated commitment to dealing with the Council's contribution to climate change.

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

### Background Papers

No background papers were used in producing this report.

Margaret Enstone : Extension 6229

Council Plan	This report reflects the Council Plan Core Principle in Tackling Climate Change.  In turn, actions that we take for climate change impact on our Council priorities. For example, as we improve our council stock, we improve the quality of life for our residents, leading to better health outcomes, which in turns means fewer days of school (or work), improved educational attainment and better work opportunities.
Addressing inequalities	Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. This report demonstrates how we are addressing our own carbon emissions and resilience, giving us the ability to demonstrate through good practice what other people can do themselves
Tackling Climate Change	The Council has recognised the need to consider the carbon impact of the decisions it makes. This report is a progress report of our journey to reducing our carbon emissions and adapting our services to the unavoidable effects of climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Our approach to reducing emissions will mean that resources are used more efficiently.
Health and Wellbeing	According to the WHO, climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. This report is a progress report of our journey to becoming a carbon neutral council.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no expected impact on Crime and Disorder in Darlington.
Wards Affected	This report covers how the Council is addressing its own carbon emissions and resilience. It will not affect any particular ward.

Groups Affected	This report covers how the Council is addressing its own carbon emissions and resilience. It will not affect any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

13. As agreed in the Climate Emergency Declaration, this report is the 6-month interim report. The emissions data we gather is available annually, so there is no update on current emissions.

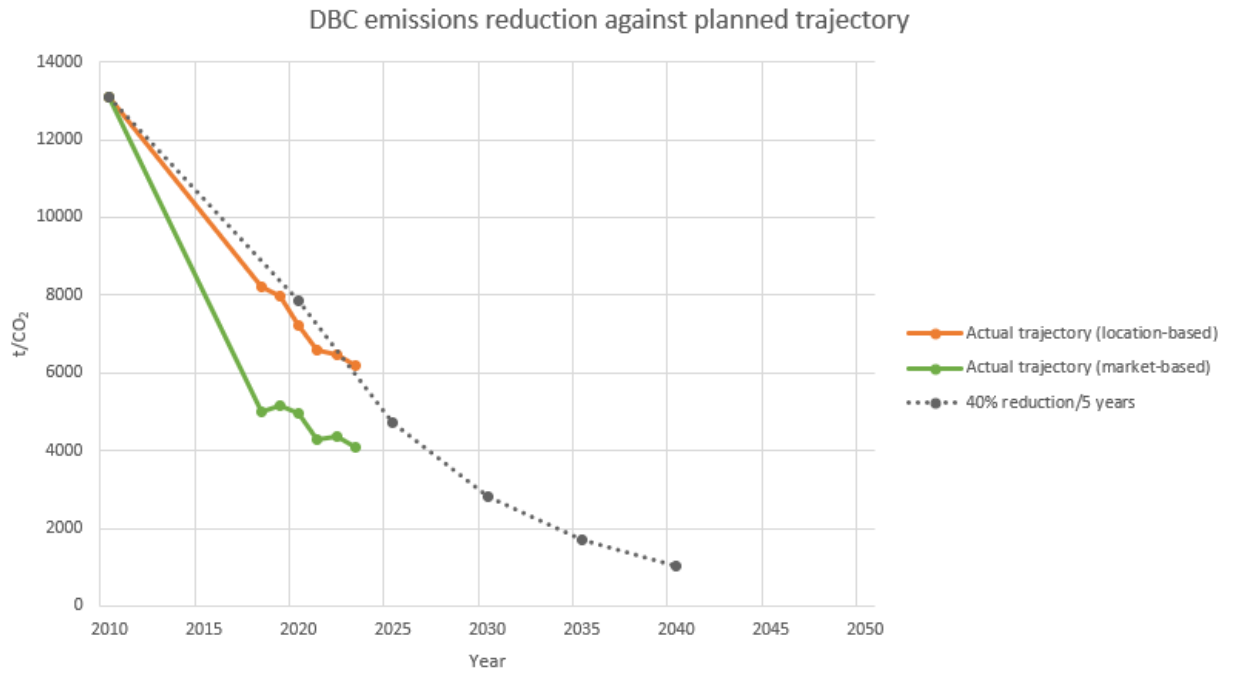
14. At the end of March 2024, our emissions were as follows:

	2010/11	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>
Streetlighting	3,487	759	596	515	458	412	418
Corporate Estate	7,564	5,928	5,907	5,014	4,864	4,709	4,579
Business Travel	2,050	1,509	1,482	1,426	1,270	1,328	1,192
Total estimated working from home emissions/tCO <sub>2</sub> e during lockdown				125			
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,101</b>	<b>8,196</b>	<b>7,985</b>	<b>7,080</b>	<b>6,592</b>	<b>6,449</b>	<b>6,190</b>

15. Electricity generation from the solar panels on the roof of the Town Hall:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	Generation	Generation	Generation	Generation	Generation	Generation
	kWh*	kWh	kWh	kWh	kWh	kWh
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,008</b>	<b>7,846</b>	<b>8,597</b>	<b>9,015</b>	<b>9,028</b>	<b>12,720</b>

16. Trajectory:

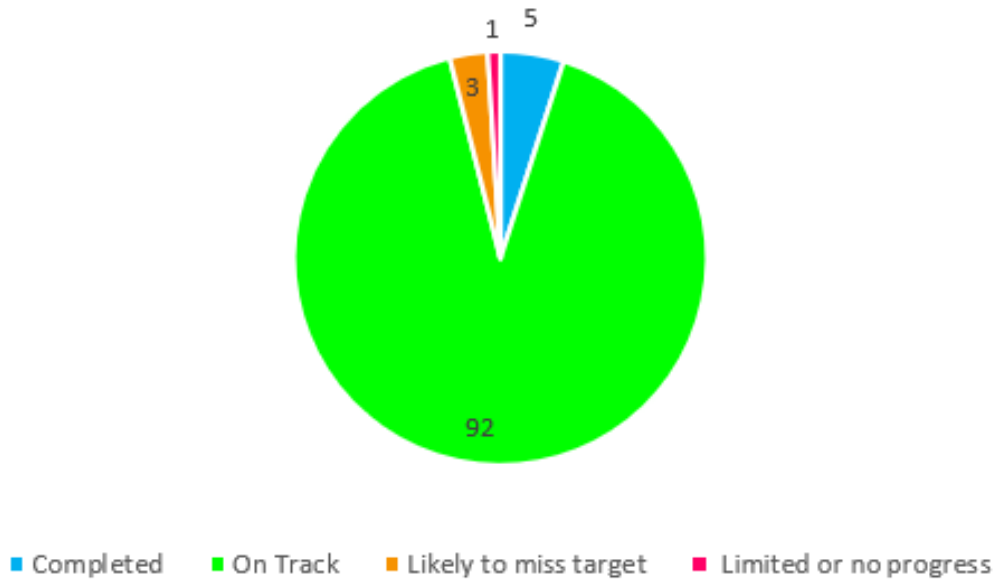


17. We report emissions as recommended by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and show both location-based emissions, which use the average grid emissions that reflect the energy that we are using and market-based emissions, which take into account the zero carbon tariff that we have chosen. The emissions we report are made up of the energy use in council buildings (not including council homes as we do not control how residents use the energy); business mileage; fleet emissions, and streetlighting and signs.
18. A climate change seminar for Council members was held on 19 September 2024. The seminar was attended by the Head of Local Energy from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and Phil Brennan from the Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE). Members also heard updates from three of the teams with the greatest impact on our carbon neutral target.
19. The Darlington Eco Fair was held in June 2024. More than 5,000 people passed through the marquee, participating in hands-on crafts, science demonstrations, and interactive theatre shows, while also exploring various eco-friendly products and services.
20. The Highway Asset Management team recently shared a report on total CO<sub>2</sub> reductions achieved through their annual maintenance programme. The report highlights a total reduction of over 348 tonnes in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during the reporting year 2023-24 (23% more than the last reporting year 2022-23). The Highway Asset Management team's use of low carbon materials and adopting sustainable practices during their maintenance program has resulted in carbon savings as well as financial savings.
21. In December, the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer submitted our report to Defra as part of a trial project for local authorities to report to the Secretary of State under the Climate Change Act's Adaptation Reporting Power. We are awaiting any feedback from the Department and any report on whether these reports will become mandatory in future. If they do, we expect them to be on the same five year cycle as the government's climate change risk assessments.

### Climate change action plan

- 22. Councillor McEwan, Portfolio Holder for the climate change work has met with all the Assistant Directors to receive feedback and progress on actions.
- 23. Following these meetings we have reviewed some of the delivery dates of actions, to allow for resources (staff and financial) to be managed. The mid-year status of projects is below:

Climate Action Points Status Q3 2024 (Total 101)



- 24. Highlights include that the Housing Service is currently delivering Wave two of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, due to be delivered by June 2025 and is bidding for Wave three, through the Tees Valley Combined Authority. Should that bid be successful, Wave 3 will see a further 1600 of our homes below EPC C by 2028.
- 25. The Head of Environmental Services and Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer have worked together to commission a piece of work to calculate the carbon sequestration potential of council land. We are the first local authority in the UK to do this work in this way.
- 26. The report has been received and shows a positive result. There is still more work to be done to ensure that tree cover data is correct. Also, the data for soil sequestration needs to be redone in two years to get an accurate result. However, we cannot be complacent and must continue with our efforts to reduce carbon emissions as far as possible.

### Communications

- 27. We continue to include a dedicated page in each issue of One Darlington.
- 28. Our social media messaging across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn from April to November 2024 reached more than 400,000.

### **Financial Implications**

29. Work continues to identify savings from projects across the Council for inclusion in the reserve fund, set aside for investment in future climate projects.

### **Legal Implications**

30. There are no legal implications, but with increasing public pressure to act on the threat of climate change, we must demonstrate how we will deliver on the motion commitments and protect the Council from future legal challenge.

### **HR Implications**

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

### **Estates & Property Advice**

32. The report does not affect the Council's land holdings or involve a lease, or license or any transfer or purchase of land.

### **Procurement Advice**

33. The report does not involve any purchase over £100k

### **Equalities Considerations**

34. Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. By ensuring that the Council is resilient to the effects of climate change, we ensure that we will be able to continue providing services to all residents

### **Consultation**

35. This report is a progress report for the Council's commitment to reducing its carbon emissions and increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change. No public consultation has been carried out.

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**MID YEAR PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT  
MONITORING REPORT 2024/25**

---

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

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

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and provides a mid-yearly review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities.

**Summary**

2. The mandatory Prudential Code, which governs Council's borrowing, requires Council approval of controls, called Prudential Indicators, relating to capital spending and borrowing. Prudential Indicators are set in three statutory annual reports, a forward looking annual treasury management strategy, a backward looking annual treasury management report and this mid-year update. The mid-year update follows Council's approval in February 2024 of the 2024/25 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy.
3. The key objectives of the three annual reports are:
  - (a) To ensure the governance of the large amounts of public money under the Council's Treasury Management activities:
    - (i) Complies with legislation.
    - (ii) Meets high standards set out in codes of practice.
  - (b) To ensure that borrowing is affordable.
  - (c) To report performance of the key activities of borrowing and investments.
4. The key proposed revisions to Prudential Indicators relate to the Operational Boundary will reduce to £179.323m and the Authorised Limit to £259.628m which will allow for any additional cashflow requirement.

## **Recommendations**

5. It is recommended that:
  - (a) The revised prudential indicators and limits within the report in Tables 1 to 6, 8, 10 and 12 to 17 are examined.
  - (b) The Treasury Management Budget (Financing Costs) projected outturn shown in Table 11 is noted.
  - (c) Council approve the updated prudential indicators.

## **Reasons**

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities;
  - (b) To inform Members of the performance of the Treasury Management function;
  - (c) To comply with the Local Government Act 2003;
  - (d) To enable further improvements to be made in the Council's Treasury Management function.

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

## **Background Papers**

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25
- (ii) Prudential Indicators & Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25
- (iii) Accounting records
- (iv) The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities

Judith Murray: Extension 5204



Council Plan	The Council's treasury management contributes to all priorities outlined within the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	This report is providing an update on prudential indicators and the monitoring of the Council's treasury management. There is therefore no impact as a result of this report.
Tackling Climate Change	This report is providing an update on prudential indicators and the monitoring of the Council's treasury management. There is therefore no impact as a result of this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report contains updated information regarding the Council's treasury management position
Health and Wellbeing	This report is providing an update on prudential indicators and the monitoring of treasury management therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Wards Affected	No specific impact on an individual area as a result of this report
Groups Affected	No specific impact on an individual area as a result of this report
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. This mid-year review report meets the regulatory framework requirement of treasury management. It also incorporates the needs of the Prudential Code to ensure monitoring of the capital expenditure plans and the Council's prudential indicators (PIs). The Treasury Strategy and the PIs were previously reported to Council on 15 February 2024.
8. This report concentrates on the revised positions for 2024/25. Future year's indicators will be revised when the impact of the MTFP 2025/26 onwards is known.
9. A summary of the revised headline indicators for 2024/25 is presented in Table 1 below. More detailed explanations of each indicator and any proposed changes are contained in the report. The revised indicators reflect the movement in the Capital MTFP since its approval in February 2024 and the means by which it is financed.

**Table 1 Headline Indicators**

	<b>2024/25 Original Estimate</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Estimate</b>
	£m	£m
Capital Expenditure (Tables 2 and 3)	70.088	69.646
Capital Financing Requirement (Table 4)	260.106	247.265
Operational Boundary for External Debt (Table 4 & 5)	183.973	179.323
Authorised Limit for External Debt (Table 6)	273.111	259.628
Ratio of Financing Costs to net revenue stream- General Fund (Table 14)	4.16%	4.10%
Ratio of Financing Costs to net revenue stream- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)(Table 14)	12.42%	12.49%

10. The capital expenditure plans and prudential indicators for capital expenditure are set out initially, as these provide the framework for the subsequent treasury management activity. The actual treasury management activity follows the capital framework and the position against the treasury management indicators is shown at the end.
11. The purpose of the report supports the objective in the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Investment Guidance which state that Members receive and adequately scrutinise the treasury service.
12. The underlying economic environment remains difficult for Councils. It is essential that the Council continues to monitor its cashflow in these times of high interest rates. Borrowing rates are higher than investment returns and this background encourages the Council to continue investing over the shorter term and with high quality counterparties but also limit any borrowing to only that which is essential and for the shorter term where possible until interest rates start to fall.

## Key Prudential Indicators

13. This part of the report is structured to update:
- (a) The Council’s capital expenditure plans
  - (b) How these plans are financed
  - (c) The impact of the changes in the capital expenditure plans on the PI’s and the underlying need to borrow
  - (d) Compliance and limits in place for borrowing activity
  - (e) Changes to the Annual Investment Strategy
  - (f) The revised financing costs budget for 2024/25

## Capital Expenditure PI

14. Table 2 shows the revised estimates for capital expenditure and the changes since the capital programme was agreed at the budget.

**Table 2**

Capital Expenditure by Service	2024/25 Original Estimate	2024/25 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
General Fund	31.038	20.876
HRA	27.270	43.032
<b>Total Estimated Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>58.308</b>	<b>63.908</b>
Loans to Joint Ventures	11.780	5.738
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.088</b>	<b>69.646</b>

15. The changes to the 2024/25 capital expenditure estimates have been notified to Cabinet as part of the Capital Budget monitoring process (Quarterly Project Position Statement Report).
16. The current capital programme that has not already been financed now stands at £151.869m but this includes a number of schemes that will be spent over a number of years not just in 2024/25. A reduction of £82.223m has been allowed for schemes which are known will be finalised in future years, but it is likely that other schemes will also slip into future years.

## Impact of Capital Expenditure Plans

### Changes to the financing of the Capital Programme

17. Table 3 draws together the main strategy elements of the capital expenditure plans shown above, highlighting the original elements of the capital programme, and the expected financing arrangements of this capital expenditure. The borrowing element (Borrowing Need) increases the underlying indebtedness of the Council by way of the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). Borrowing need is estimated to increase slightly for 2024/25 mainly

due to rising costs and additional schemes being approved. This direct borrowing need may also be supplemented by maturing debt and other treasury requirements.

**Table 3**

<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	2024/25 Original Estimate	2024/25 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
General Fund	31.038	20.876
HRA	27.270	43.032
Loans to Joint Ventures	11.780	5.738
<b>Total Capital expenditure</b>	<b>70.088</b>	<b>69.646</b>
<b>Financed By:</b>		
Capital Receipts – Housing	0.303	0.000
Capital Receipts –General Fund	4.840	0.887
Capital grants	26.198	16.319
JV Repayments	1.799	1.000
HRA Revenue Contributions	13.455	25.007
GF Revenue Contributions	0.000	0.651
<b>Total Financing</b>	<b>46.595</b>	<b>43.864</b>
<b>Borrowing Need</b>	<b>23.493</b>	<b>25.782</b>

### The Capital Financing Requirement (PI), External Debt (PI) and the Operational Boundary

18. Table 4 shows the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), which is the underlying external need to borrow for capital purposes. It shows the expected actual debt position over the period. This is called the Operational Boundary. The increase in Borrowing Need (Table 3) is around £2.3m and currently actual borrowing for the Council is £158.411m. It is proposed to set an actual borrowing figure of £171.411m this will accommodate the additional borrowing need and any debt requirements for cash flow purposes. Other Long-term liabilities (the PFI scheme) will be added to give the revised operational boundary for 2024/25.

### Prudential Indicator- External Debt/ Operational Boundary

**Table 4**

	2024/25 Original Estimate	2024/25 Revised Estimate
	£m	£m
<b>Prudential Indicator- Capital Financing Requirement</b>		
Opening CFR- Post Audit of Accounts	<b>241.020</b>	<b>233.973</b>
CFR General Fund	148.208	151.371
CFR General Fund PFI/Leasing IFRS	5.912	5.912
CFR – Housing	85.871	76.371
CFR – Loans to Joint Ventures	20.115	13.611
<b>Total Closing CFR</b>	<b>260.106</b>	<b>247.265</b>

Net Movement in CFR	19.086	13.292
Borrowing	176.061	171.411
Other long-Term Liabilities	5.912	5.912
<b>Total Debt 31 March- Operational Boundary</b>	<b>181.973</b>	<b>177.323</b>

### Limits to Borrowing Activity

19. The first key control over the treasury activity is a PI to ensure that over the medium term gross borrowing should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and the next two financial years. As shown in **Table 5** below.

**Table 5**

	2024/25 Original Estimate £m	2024/25 Revised Estimate £m	2025/26 Revised Estimate £m	2026/27 Revised Estimate £m
Gross borrowing	176.061	171.411	188.411	205.411
Plus Prudential Borrowing Leases	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000
Plus Other Long Term Liabilities	5.912	5.912	4.817	3.722
Total Gross Borrowing	<b>183.973</b>	<b>179.323</b>	<b>195.228</b>	<b>211.133</b>
CFR* (year-end position)	260.106	247.265	254.758	261.448

\* includes on balance sheet PFI schemes and finance leases

20. The Executive Director - Resources and Governance reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current and future years in complying with this PI.
21. A further PI controls the overall level of borrowing, this is the Authorised Limit which represents the limit beyond which borrowing is prohibited and needs to be set and revised by Members. It reflects the level of borrowing which while not desirable, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term. The Authorised Limit is currently set 5% above the Capital Financing Requirement to allow for any additional cashflow needs, the revised figure for 2024/25 has been raised by 5% of the new CFR total. Whilst it is not expected that borrowing would be at these levels this would allow additional borrowing to take place should market conditions change suddenly and swift action was required. This is a Statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003.
22. It is proposed to move the Authorised Limit in **Table 6** in line with the movement in the overall Capital Financing Requirement.

**Table 6**

<b>Authorised Limit for External Debt</b>	2024/25 Original Indicator £m	2024/25 Revised Indicator £m
Capital Financing Requirement	260.106	247.265
Additional headroom to Capital Financing Requirement	13.005	12.363
Total Authorised Limit for External Debt	<b>273.111</b>	<b>259.628</b>

**Interest Rate Forecasts Provided by Link Asset Services (as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024)****Table 7**

	Bank Rate	PWLB rates for borrowing purposes*			
		5 year	10 year	25 year	50 year
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>2024/25</b>					
Dec 2024	4.50	4.50	4.60	5.00	4.80
March 2025	4.00	4.30	4.40	4.80	4.60
<b>2025/26</b>					
June 2025	3.50	4.10	4.30	4.70	4.50
Sept 2025	3.25	4.00	4.10	4.50	4.30
Dec 2025	3.25	3.90	4.10	4.50	4.30
March 2026	3.25	3.90	4.10	4.40	4.20
<b>2026/27</b>					
June 2026	3.25	3.90	4.00	4.40	4.20
Sept 2026	3.00	3.90	4.00	4.40	4.20
Dec 2026	3.00	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.10
March 2027	3.00	3.80	3.90	4.30	4.10

\*PWLB rates above are for certainty rates (which are provided for those authorities that have disclosed their borrowing/capital plans to the government. Darlington Borough Council will be able to access these certainty rates which are 0.2% below PWLB's normal borrowing rates.

23. The latest Bank Rate increase was reviewed in September with no change from 5.00% being implemented. The next review will be in November with a cut to 4.75% anticipated, however, what happens for the remainder of 2024/25 and into 2025/26 will most likely depend on inflation and employment data releases as well as geo-political events.
24. The government's plans to raise public spending by around £16bn a year (0.6% GDP) have caused concerns that a big rise in taxes will be announced which could weaken GDP growth in the medium-term. However, raises in public spending tend to boost GDP by more than increases in taxes reduce it.
25. CPI inflation decreased to 1.7% in September with falls in transportation costs, furniture and household energy costs, however CPI inflation is expected to rise in the next couple of months, potentially reaching 2.9% in November before declining to around 2.0% by mid 2025.
26. The increasing uncertainties of the Middle East may also exert an upward pressure on inflation with oil prices rising in the aftermath of Iran's missile attack on Israel. China's recent outpouring of new fiscal support measures has also added to the upshift in broader commodity prices which in turn may impact on global inflation levels and thus monetary policy. The forecast is however for the bank rate to fall to 4.5% by the end of November with further cuts in 2025. In the second half of 2025 a more marked easing in inflation will prompt the Bank to speed up rate cuts eventually potentially reaching 3.0% by 2026.

## Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 and Annual Investment Strategy Update

27. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, (TMSS), for 2024/25 was approved by Council on 15 February 2024.
28. There are no policy changes to the TMSS.
29. The details in this report update the position in the light of the updated economic position and budgetary changes already approved.

### Debt Activity during 2024/25

30. The expected net borrowing need is set out in **Table 8**

**Table 8**

	<b>2024/25 Original Estimate £m</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Estimate £m</b>
CFR (year-end position) from Table 4	254.194	241.353
<u>Less</u> other long term liabilities PFI and finance leases	5.912	5.912
Net adjusted CFR (net year end position)	<b>260.106</b>	<b>247.265</b>
Expected Borrowing	181.973	177.333
(Under)/ Over borrowing	<b>(78.135)</b>	<b>(69.932)</b>

31. The Council has taken on £27m of new short debt in the current year to date which will either be replaced or will be repaid using short term maturing investments and any surplus cash.
32. The amount borrowed by the Council now stands at £158.411m, this excludes any additional cashflow loans which may be required. An additional £13.000m has been included in Table 8 above for estimated cashflow loans which may be required.
33. There will still be an element of under-borrowing by the Council at the end of March 2024.

### Property Funds

34. The Annual Investment Strategy highlighted the situation regarding the Lothbury Property Fund and it was confirmed in the 2023/24 Treasury Management Outturn report that unfortunately the Lothbury Property Fund was terminated in the first quarter of 2024/25 (30<sup>th</sup> May 2024).
35. The process of winding up the Lothbury Property Fund will take some time, as assets need to be sold and the distributions of funds can only be made once completed. This process is expected to be finalised by the end of March 2025, but this will depend upon how asset sales progress.
36. To date the Council has received three distributions from the sale of Lothbury assets. These have been invested in the UBS Triton Property Fund.

37. UBS Triton is a 5 star rated fund which offers returns of around 3.1% over 5 yrs, that is projected to increase to 5-8% per annum from 2025 to 2029.
38. Given these forecasts, and after extensive engagement and discussions with UBS Triton and with our advisors regarding alternative investment options, the Council have invested the funds received to date into UBS Triton. However investment decisions regarding future distributions will be made on receipt, in consideration of the best investment options and the Council's financial position at that point.
39. The latest projection is that future distributions from the Lothbury Fund will be a further £2.9m based upon the current value of their asset portfolio.
40. Maximising returns for the Council is key, so monitoring of the performance of all the property funds and other investments will continue to be a high priority.

### Debt Rescheduling

41. Debt rescheduling opportunities have been very limited in the current economic climate given the consequent structure of interest rates and following the increase in the margin added to gilt yields which has impacted PWLB new borrowing rates since October 2010. No debt rescheduling has therefore been undertaken to date in the current financial year.

### Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25

#### Investment Portfolio

42. In accordance with the Code, it is the Council's priority to ensure security of Capital and liquidity, and to obtain an appropriate level of return which is consistent with the Council's risk appetite. Successive interest rises over the past year have meant that current investment returns are much higher than we have seen in previous years and in line with the current bank rate of 5.00%. During this period of greater returns the Council are actively investing where possible.

#### Treasury Management Activity from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024

43. Current investment position – The Council held £40.749m of investments at 30/09/2024 and this is made up of the following types of investment.

**Table 9**

Sector	Country	Amount £m
AAA Money Market Funds	Sterling Funds	13.530
Property Funds* - CCLA	UK	10.000
Hermes	UK	10.000
Lothbury	UK	2.908
UBS Triton		4.311
<b>Total</b>		<b>40.749</b>

\* dividends are received from property funds



### Short Term Cashflow Investments

44. Cash balances are invested on a daily basis to maximise the benefit of temporary surplus funds. These include investments in Money Market Funds, the Government’s Debt Management Office and bank short term notice accounts. A total of 85 investments were made in the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 totalling c£148m these were for short periods of up to 180 days and earned interest of £0.501m on an average balance of £19.877m which equated to an annual average interest rate of 5.03%.

### Investment returns measured against the Service Performance Indicators

45. The target for our investment returns is to better or at least match a number of external comparators, this performance indicator is also known as yield benchmarking. As can be seen from Table 10, the short term investment achievements (up to 6 months) are above market expectations.

**Table 10**

	Cashflow Investments %
<b>Darlington Borough Council - Actual</b>	<b>5.03%</b>
<b>External Comparators</b>	
Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) – 6 months	4.96%

### Treasury Management Budget

46. There are three main elements within the Treasury Management Budget:-

- (a) Longer term capital investments interest earned – a cash amount of which earns interest and represents the Councils revenue balances, unused capital receipts, reserves and provisions, this will now include Property Funds.
- (b) Cash flow interest earned – the authority has consistently had a positive cash flow. Unlike long term capital investments it does not represent any particular sum but it is the consequence of many different influences such as receipt of grants, the relationship between debtors and creditors, cashing of cheques and payments to suppliers.
- (c) Debt serving costs – this is the principal and interest costs on the Council’s long term debt to finance the capital programme.

**Table 11 - Changes to the Financing Costs Budget 2024/25**

	£m	£m
<b>Original Financing Costs Budget 2024/25</b>		<b>3.547</b>
Add Increased debt costs	0.085	
Less Increased returns on Investments	(0.235)	
Less decreased returns on Property Funds	0.150	
Total adjustments		<b>0.000</b>
<b>Revised Treasury Management Budget 2024/25</b>		<b>3.547</b>

47. This statement concludes that the Treasury Management budget is forecast to Outturn on budget in 2024/25, this will be reflected in the current MTFP projections.

**Risk Benchmarking**

48. A regulatory development is the consideration and approval of security and liquidity benchmarks. Yield benchmarks are currently widely used to assess investment performance and these are shown in Table 12. Discrete security and liquidity benchmarks are also requirements of member reporting.

49. The following reports the current position against the benchmarks originally approved.

50. **Security** – The Council’s maximum security risk benchmarks for the current portfolio of investments, when compared to historic default tables were set as follows;

**0.077% historic risk of default when compared to the whole portfolio**

**Table 12**

<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Benchmark 2024/25</b>	<b>Actual May</b>	<b>Actual July</b>
Year 1	0.077%	0.000%	0.002%

N.B. this excludes Property Funds

51. The counterparties that we use are all high rated therefore our actual risk of default based on ratings attached to counterparties is very low.

52. The reason that there is no risk of default in May is due to the fact that all investments were in Money Market Funds which could be recalled at any time and carry no risk of default.

53. **Liquidity** – In respect of this area the Council set liquidity facilities/ benchmark to maintain

- (a) Bank overdraft - £0.100M
- (b) Liquid short term deposits of a least £3.000M available within a weeks notice
- (c) Weighted Average Life benchmark is expected to be 0.4 years with a maximum of 1 year

54. The Group Director of Operations can report that liquidity arrangements have been adequate for the year to date as shown in Table 13

**Table 13**

	<b>Benchmark 2024/25</b>	<b>Actual May</b>	<b>Actual July</b>
<b>Weighted Average Life</b>	0.4 – 1 year	0.00 years	0.52 years

55. The figures are for the whole portfolio of cash flow investments deposited with Money Market funds on a call basis (i.e. can be drawn on without notice) as well as call accounts that include a certain amount of notice required to recall the funds.

**Treasury Management Indicators**

56. **Actual and estimates of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream** – This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (financing costs net of interest and investment income) against the net revenue stream.

**Table 14**

	<b>2024/25 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Indicator</b>
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>4.16%</b>	<b>4.10%</b>
<b>HRA</b>	<b>12.42%</b>	<b>12.49%</b>

**Treasury Management Prudential indicators**

57. **Upper Limits on Variable Rate Exposure** – This indicator identifies a maximum limit for variable interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments.

58. **Upper Limits on Fixed Rate Exposure** – Similar to the previous indicator this cover a maximum limit on fixed interest rates

59. Historically for a number of years this Council has used these percentages; together they give flexibility to the treasury management strategy allowing the Council to take advantage of both fixed and variable rates in its portfolio whilst ensuring that its exposure to variable rates is limited.

**Table 15**

	<b>2024/25 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Indicator</b>
Limits on fixed interest rates	100%	100%
Limits on variable interest rates	40%	40%

60. **Maturity Structures of Borrowing** - These gross limits are set to reduce the Council’s exposure to large fixed rate loans (those instruments which carry a fixed interest for the duration of the instrument) falling due for refinancing. The higher limits for longer periods reflect the fact that longer maturity periods give more stability to the debt portfolio.

**Table 16 - Maturity Structures of Borrowing**

	<b>2024/25 Original indicator</b>	<b>2024/25 Actual to Date</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Indicator</b>
Under 12 months	40%	26%	40%
12 months to 2 years	50%	0%	50%
2 years to 5 years	60%	36%	60%
5 years to 10 years	80%	37%	80%
10 years and above	100%	100%	100%

61. **Total Principal Funds Invested** – These limits are set having regard to the amount of reserves available for longer term investment and show the limits to be placed on investments with final maturities beyond 1 year. This limit allows the authority to invest for longer periods if they give better rates than shorter periods. It also allows some stability in the interest returned to the Authority.

**Table 17 - Principal Funds Invested**

	<b>2024/25 Original Indicator</b>	<b>2024/25 Revised Indicator</b>
Maximum principal sums invested greater than 1 year	£50m	£50m

### **Conclusion**

62. The prudential indicators have been produced to take account of the Council’s borrowing position. The key borrowing indicator (the Operational Boundary) is £179.323m. The Council’s return on investments has been good, exceeding both of the targets. Based on the first six months of 2024/25 the Council’s borrowing and investments is forecast to be on target on the approved 2024/25 budget.

63. The Council’s treasury management activities comply with the required legislation and meet the high standards set out in the relevant codes of practice.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

64. No consultation was undertaken in the production of this report.

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW**

---

**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**

**Darlington Station**

2. As we move into 2025 and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the modern railway, improvements at Darlington Station continue to progress. Construction of the station building was completed on time in November 2024, enabling TVCA to handover this part of the project to Network Rail, allowing the fit out of the concourse to commence. Work to the multi storey car park and external areas is continuing ahead of scheduled completion in mid-2025.
3. Installation of the new platform 6 track has commenced and as of December was 70% complete. The remaining elements to the platform will be completed by the end of February. Preparatory work continues for the installation of the bridge, to connect the old station buildings and platforms with the new, and this is scheduled to be completed in early March 2025.
4. The preliminary designs for improvements to the Western Gateway have now been agreed with Active Travel England and detailed design work has commenced. Demolition of the remaining properties is expected to commence in early 2025 to enable the improvements work to commence later in the year. LNER are continuing their own designs for the Porte Cochere works and the interfaces between these two schemes are being carefully managed.
5. As a warm up to the celebrations this year for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the modern railway, I was delighted to attend the naming ceremony of LNER Azuma train, 801207. The train has of course been named "Darlington".

**Strategic Infrastructure**

**Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) update**

6. In the Autumn 2024 budget, the Government announced further funding to support and improve bus services in 2025/26. TVCA has been provisionally allocated £7.28m of funding in 2025/26 to support the delivery of the Tees Valley BSIP, which is an increased allocation compared to previous years.

7. The proposed BSIP investment programme for the year ahead is currently in development, with consideration being given to the existing activities funded by BSIP in 2024/25. Further details on the 2025/26 BSIP investment programme will be announced in early 2025/26. The BSIP investment programme will need to align with the emerging Local Growth Plan objectives and support the government's focus on increasing the employment rate as set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper.

### **Active Travel and Bus Priority Improvements**

8. TVCA will undertake further public engagement in February / March 2025 on scheme designs for Active travel and bus priority work across the Tees Valley, with statutory consultation then expected to commence in March / April 2025.
9. Development work is progressing on the programme with a target date of June 2025 for the schemes funded by £17.8m secured from the Levelling Up Fund. The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funded schemes are expected to commence on site from September 2025, with delivery anticipated over an 18-month period.
10. Within Darlington, Woodlands Road Phase 2, which extends the current scheme towards Cockerton, is expected to be in delivery from early 2025 as design works are more advanced and has now been through a final design review with Active Travel England.

### **Highways Maintenance Funding**

11. In the November 2024 budget the Government announced it will be investing almost £1.6 billion to maintain and renew the nation's roads, an increase of £500 million on 2024-25. Details were published prior to Christmas with TVCA set to receive up to £4.873 million in additional funding for 2025/26 on top of the £16.578 million already allocated per annum through the CRSTS Programme. Whilst a formal grant offer letter with further details is currently awaited, the published information highlights that DfT intend to introduce an incentive element, holding back 25% of the funding to ensure that best practice in sustainable highways asset management is followed.

### **Climate Change**

12. The Cross Party Climate Change Working Group met on 6 December and had a presentation from an external consultant on a tool for measuring scope 3 emissions. There are other consultants offering a similar service, so we are using this presentation to kick-start internal discussions of what we need to do.
13. We have signed an agreement with SSE for them to explore a heat network for the town centre. This will mean that with no financial risk to the council, there could be a low carbon heat option for us, the hospital and other commercial buildings in the town. We have not entered into any commitment that we will take heat from this heat network, and any future contract will be subject to the usual procurement procedures.

## Senior appointments

14. Due to impending retirements a number of key senior management roles have recently been appointed to. These are:
  - (a) Chief Executive – Rose Rouse, currently Chief Executive at Pendle Borough Council, to take over from Ian Williams, with a start date end of March.
  - (b) Assistant Director, Law and Governance – Amy Wennington, currently Head of Public Appointments and Governance at HM Treasury, though prior to that with Darlington Borough Council for over 15 years, taking over from Luke Swinhoe. Amy will start back with us on 7 April 2025.
  - (c) Assistant Director, Environmental Services and Community Safety – Ben Grabham, currently Head of Environmental Services at City of York Council, taking over from Ian Thompson who will be staying with us for a short time to ensure key projects are completed. Ben is due to start with us on 5 March 2025.
  - (d) At the time of drafting a Members panel has been reconvened for 23 January 2025 for the Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection role.

## External Meetings and Engagement

15. I attended the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary remembrance service in honour of the selfless sacrifice made by Pilot Officer William McMullen (428 Sqn CAF). McMullen was a Canadian pilot, whose Lancaster bomber caught fire during a training exercise. He sacrificed his own life to ensure the stricken aircraft landed in empty fields away from Darlington town.
16. In addition, I have attended various meetings and engagements since the previous meeting of Council, some of which are listed below:
  - (a) Mayor's Carol Service
  - (b) Citizenship ceremonies
  - (c) Transport for the North Board meeting in Manchester
  - (d) Darlington Town Deal Board
  - (e) LNER train naming
  - (f) Association of North East Councillors
  - (g) Various meetings with partners; Phil Forster, MD Teesside Airport; Ciaran Irvine, Durham Police DCC; representatives from SSE; Michelle Cooper, Point North (formerly County Durham Community Foundation).

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

This page is intentionally left blank



**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

---

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

**Environmental Health**

2. Environmental Health have been working on a significant project with the Council's Public Health team. The project involved carrying out environmental sampling visits to nursing and care homes to look at cleaning and infection control compliance. Approx. 180 swab samples were taken from random surfaces in catering areas which were analysed at a laboratory. Any failures were investigated, and advice given on best practice. Early indications have shown a significant yearly reduction in sickness outbreaks in care homes since the project started.
3. Environmental Health are consulted on and respond to approximately 260 planning consultations each year aiming for any development to achieve a high standard of amenity, to ensure any land contamination is remediated via the planning process and any adverse impacts on health and quality of life from noise are reduced to a minimum.
4. Environmental Health are continuing with the Care for Clean Air Campaign and progressing with actions to improve air quality that are included within the recently launched Council's Air Quality Strategy. This work has recently received media interest from ITV regional news and radio stations with Reid Street Primary School helping to spread the anti-idling message to parents and carers to switch off the engine when parked outside schools. The 'Burn Right' campaign is continuing this winter and providing advice on smoke control and the health impacts of wood burning stoves.

**Climate Change**

5. The six-monthly report is on the agenda for this meeting, so items will be covered under that item. However, I can report that we are making progress on the actions that were behind schedule at the end of 2023/24.
6. I regret to say that the Climate Change Officer has left the Council. We have commenced recruitment for a replacement.

**Development Management**

7. The application for the New Treasury Building has now been granted planning permission by the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. Further discussions have been had with the applicant's agent to further improve the design of the scheme. These discussions have been productive and are now complete. A further meeting with residents to explain the details of the scheme has taken place in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and local ward members. The Section 106 agreement associated

with the permission has yet to be signed. Whilst there is a commitment to the scheme it is likely that some further amendments to the scheme will be negotiated at the applicant's request. Following further discussions with the applicant it has been agreed that they will now progress with the 106 legal agreement to enable the Council to issue the decision.

8. The matter was presented to Members of the Planning Committee on 7 August 2024. A decision was made to approve subject to the signing of the above 106 agreement.
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 regarding the further involvement of nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission. This meeting has now taken place. Planning permission has been granted. Discussions with the developer for the Northern part of the site are well under way which have included extensive pre application discussions which have resulted in significant improvements to the scheme. A detailed submission is expected shortly.
10. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development are still 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. There is an increase in the use of Stop Notices to prevent the progression of unauthorised works, which has had a noticeable impact on staff resources.
11. The National Infrastructure Project 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 is currently being heard at a Public Inquiry. The Council and its partners are making submissions to the Inquiry, which is now drawing to a close.
12. 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 approved and is currently underway, which when complete will achieve a much-improved public realm.

### **Building Control**

13. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
14. Following the major changes to the Building Regulations, altered responsibilities and operating procedures have been introduced by the Building Safety Regulator under the umbrella of the HSE for the Building Control function. The Building Control team have been working hard to prepare all relevant reports which will soon need to be submitted to the BSR. Following these submissions, the BSR may request to undertake an audit of the DBC Building Control service. Extensive procedural internal planning is continuing to ensure alignment between Building Control KPI's and recording of those KPI's back to the Building Safety Regulator. These changes and additional requirements / roles / responsibilities are putting further stress on the resources available.
15. The government's Building Safety Levy will soon come into effect. We await the outcome as to whether Building Control will be the collectors and administrators of the Levy within

DBC. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn about the expectations from MHCLG. This may take up further, considerable resource from the Building Control service. MHCLG have confirmed a burdens fund will be available in relation to the introduction of the Levy which may need to be explored.

16. Regarding Dangerous structures:

- (a) Working together with Environmental Health, we continue to monitor the situation with Northgate House and take any action necessary under The Building Act.
- (b) British Steel – Whessoe Road retaining wall. Following structural surveys by the engineers Billingham George & Partners, recommended remediation works are being monitored. Further monitoring is ongoing by British Steel and their engineers.
- (c) General – It has been noted that there has been a higher than usual number of reported dangerous structures reported following vehicle collisions in recent months. All have been dealt with accordingly in relation to Building Control involvement, ensuring safety of the public within the Borough.

**Business Investment**

- 17. Business investment enquiries continue, with the main area of interests from the hospitality, hair and beauty, and health/well-being sectors.
- 18. The Business Investment Team continue to promote the range of business support services available through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. A range of business start-up, business growth and business innovation initiatives are now available, including business advice, guidance, development activities, technical expertise and financial support to local businesses. The Business Team are working collaboratively with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the service providers to raise awareness of these schemes and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.
- 19. Working with DWP, the “Experience Counts” Support for Work hub at Darlington Job Centre was delivered. The event, specifically targeted at jobseekers over 50 years of age, provided career advice, guidance, and opportunities as well as additional skills development help, transport assistance and a range of personalised support measures. The Support for Work hubs provide a vital role in improving an individual’s employment prospects.
- 20. The Business Investment team have attended the following Business Events:
  - (a) IMPACT: 2024 Successes and 2025 Plans– 12 December 2024
  - (b) National STEM Centre Learning Visit – 16 December 2024
  - (c) Department for Business & Trade - BT Acceleration and Intervention Delivery Team Darlington Site Visit – 24 January 2025
  - (d) Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership - Network and Learn Event – Hoptown Darlington - 29 January 2025

## **Estates**

21. The Blackwell parkland has been well used since it opened with many positive comments. The recent heavy rain and increased use over the Christmas period has highlighted some issues with the surface of the paths but these have been reported to the maintenance company for the parkland and will be addressed as we move forward into 2025. The 'Heritage Park' residential development by Homes by Esh is progressing well with a number of early purchases and the show home due to open shortly.
22. The proposed Burtree Garden Village development which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm is still moving forward with an anticipated start of the infrastructure works in February, subject to Cabinet approval.

## **Planning Policy**

23. The Government published the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on Thursday 12 December. One of the main change's centres around the Government's commitment to build 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament.
24. The Government have published mandatory yearly housing targets for each local planning authority. The figure for Darlington is 440 homes per year which is below the Local Plan target. The Government have again emphasised the importance of up-to-date Local Plans and have asked Local authorities to update their Local Development Scheme within six weeks of the publication of the NPPF. The updated LDS should include clear, realistic, and specific dates for consultation and submission of the local plan.
25. The Government have also published a working paper setting out a new approach to development and nature recovery. It proposes that developers pay into a 'Nature Restoration Fund' for improvements to nature as a quicker and simpler way of meeting their environmental obligations.
26. The aim of the new approach is to free up and accelerate development while driving nature recovery. The proposals will support more efficient and effective discharge of obligations arising from the Habitats Regulations and other legislation.
27. The measures are designed to be mutually beneficial for housing delivery, the economy and nature.
28. Officers will be providing feedback on the working paper.

## **Towns Fund**

29. Delivery onsite continues on the Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements continuing to a significant number of properties. Construction work is underway on the Coniscliffe Road public realm scheme, with completion expected in March 2025.
30. Planning approval is in place and our development partner Adavo are progressing enabling and refurbishment works at the former Northern Echo building. It is currently anticipated that the work will be completed to the ground floor in August 2025, providing the Adult

Skills centre, with completion of the building in 2026.

31. With Planning and Listed Building consents in place, the proposals for refurbishment of number 156 Northgate have been through a tendering exercise. A successful contractor has been selected and works are due to commence in March 2025 and will take approximately 40 weeks to complete.
32. Planning and Listed Building applications have been granted for proposals at the Edward Pease House in Northgate. The tender process seeking an appropriate contractor will now progress. Subject to which, the intention is to start on site in 2025.
33. The design of several property enhancements along Victoria Road continues to be developed, with progress made on several properties on site.

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

This page is intentionally left blank

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO**

---

**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****Care Quality Commission**

2. The Local Authority Information Return was forwarded on 12 July 2024, and on-site inspection date is arranged for week commencing on 20 January 2025. 10 people's cases were selected by the CQC for Case Tracking and the CQC will make direct contact with them between now and their on-site visit. The senior leadership team presentation to CQC was delivered to CQC on 11 December 2024. Staff focus groups have been identified for panel discussions with CQC and preparation sessions are planned with identified Practitioners, these sessions are being supported by Head of Adults and Principal Social Worker. It is anticipated further information and data will need to be provided ahead of the on-site inspection date. Agencies, and internal/external partners are likely to be contacted prior to the on-site inspection and the Carers Resource have already held a discussion with CQC. As Cabinet Member for Adults, I will be meeting with CQC as part of the inspection process, as will Councillor Lorraine Tostevin, Councillor Kate Mammolotti as shadow portfolio holders, and Councillor Andrew Anderson as Chair of the Adults Scrutiny Committee.

**Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)**

3. Adult Social Care have experienced a significant increase in demand for major works and a new process has been implemented to manage the demand and flow. A risk assessment identifies those at highest risk and urgency which may result in delays for progression for those assessed at moderate or low need. The agreed approach is consistent across adults and children's social care and the data system aligned to enable this governance approach. Communications have been uploaded on the website to manage expectations. All those waiting who have been identified as high risk and impact have been progressed at this time. We remain in communication with the individuals impacted by this delay. We are awaiting announcement of the Better Care Fund Grant allocation for DFG.

**Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)**

4. DoLS referrals have remained stable and agency allocations continue to be reduced. Adult Social Care continue to look at opportunities to ensure legal updates to enable allocation within teams following Best Interest Assessor (BIA) refresher training and shadowing.

## **Safeguarding (SG)**

5. Referrals remain stable with lower numbers of Safeguarding concerns however complexity remains increased.
6. The Risk Notification pilot continues to impact positively reducing the number of Safeguarding referrals where the s42 criteria hasn't been met by 200 since 1 April 2024. We have increased the pilot to include x6 residential care providers and x1 domiciliary care provider. Ongoing opportunities are observed to increase providers within this pilot.

## **Executive Strategy Process**

7. We have 2 care homes currently in Executive strategy. One home is making good progress towards their action plan with joint working between Public Health, Commissioning and contacting, Integrated Health Board and Adult Social Care. Admissions are now supported to the care home and closely monitored to ensure oversight and governance. The second home has only recently entered the process (11 December 2024). We continue to review all people currently living at the home to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

## **Adult Social Care Teams**

8. Following significant pressures within the acute health settings referrals have increased. These are predominately community crisis and hospital discharge referrals. Community referrals into RIACT evidenced a 100% increase in quarter 1 and 2 and hospital discharge referrals 9%. We are anticipating a significant increase during the next few months due to the winter pressures. The teams work flexibly to manage demand and the BCF is being utilised to provide additional capacity where required.
9. We have observed an increase in discharges supported with x2 carers which impacts on capacity in reablement, RAPID and the wider care market. Short Break Stay beds remain at a stable number and have not increased despite these pressures. The approach remains that we continue to support home first as much as possible.

## **Commissioning and Contracts**

10. The Durham County Carers Support (DCCS) Volunteers is a local charity that supports unpaid family carers in County Durham and Darlington. The charity was nationally recognised for its outstanding work with carers and was awarded the prestigious King's Award for Voluntary Service. The DCCS was also a key member of Darlington's Carers Strategy Steering Group which worked closely with the Council in developing "Darlington's Commitment to Carers' strategy (2023-2028).
11. Early in the year, the Council embarked upon a re-procurement exercise for its Home Care and Supported Living Contract. The re-procurement included home care services and specialist supported living arrangements. It is anticipated that the new arrangements will come into effect and fully operational by 3 February 2025.
12. Commissioning continues to work closely with Adult Services colleagues, CDDFT (County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust), NECS (North of England Care System Support), Darlington Primary Care Network (PCN) and local care providers to jointly



develop resilience in care provision during this winter. This is to prepare for and address the challenges of increased pressures in the health and social care system during the winter period.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

13. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners met on 11 November 2024. There are no safeguarding adult updates to provide from that meeting as the agenda was child focussed.
14. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 19 November 2024, and it received the annual report from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board which outlined their statutory safeguarding responsibilities and how they are discharged across the north and south of the region. Adult Social Care provided an overview of the transformation practice changes that have taken place within Adult Social Care over the past year which were well received by partners.
15. An update was provided by Durham Constabulary on Right Care, Right Person which highlighted there is good engagement with partner agencies. All incidents are dealt with by call handlers who have been trained to ask appropriate questions to understand why police attendance is required. If a police response is not required, it may be signposted to another agency. An escalation policy has been implemented for those practitioners who feel a police response is the best.
16. Following a revision of Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance in 2023, there will be changes made to strengthen Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements. There are no changes proposed to the Integrated Adults and Children's Partnership structure as it is recognised this is effective and having joint arrangements has strengthened partnership working, details will be published later this month.

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

This page is intentionally left blank

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

---

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

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

**Children's Front Door**

2. Following the identification of an increase in work and the need to ensure this does not impact on quality and decision making, the Children's Front Door management team have been focusing on the social work led Children's Initial Advice Team. Work is ongoing around the quality assurance of contacts and telephone calls to ensure that we are appropriately and proportionately managing risk and this has been successful thus far.
3. The Missing and Exploited service is currently being reviewed; this review includes an in-depth piece of work led by Barnardo's. Findings and recommendations from this review will help shape this area of the service as we move into 2025 and will ensure there is a sharp focus on this vital area of safeguarding.
4. The 4 Kids Project continue to assist with good outcomes for children and families where domestic abuse is a feature. The team have expanded the age range for children they work with as it has been identified how when there are larger sibling groups and there are older children these older children often lose out on being offered vital services. Any impact on capacity will be continually reviewed and there is work underway around how data can assist with reporting on outcomes and impact.
5. The Child and Family Time Service continues to be busy providing services for children and their families where they are cared for by the Local authority. The team are proud of the success they had providing a Santa's grotto for the children with their parents during family time. Capacity for family time sessions is currently stable.

**Building Stronger Families Service**

6. The refreshed Early Help Assessment is now live on the Early Help Module system and staff and families have embraced the tool and the improvements. It is much more relational and families are completing the tool alongside their worker, allowing for a much more family led process. There is a sharper focus on bringing in family networks and external partners to the plan and communication events have taken place this month with schools in the first instance, this will be broadened out to other partners, for example, Health in 2025. The Early Help Assessment has been launched at these partnership events to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the Borough for our families regardless of who is

delivering intervention. The Early Help Strategic Board is also helping to promote the use of this new assessment across other agencies and this will assist with partnership buy-in.

7. In line with the new Department for Education and government focus on building Multi Agency Teams, planning is in place to begin the process at a Senior Leadership Level in the first instance whilst we await further guidance. Given the impact this will have across both Internal and External partner agencies, it will require a collaborative approach, mapping out the localities and how the new process will work in practice, ensuring that families continue to receive a seamless and proportionate service.

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

8. At a recent Strategic Board Development Session, members determined the Key Priorities for the 25/26 agenda. Partners were engaged throughout and provided meaningful discussions. The Youth Justice Board gave positive feedback in the way in which the board engages with Partners and at a Strategic Level, we are assured that our focus is in line with expectations.
9. HMIP have determined their new Inspection Regime which will commence in March 2025. The focus is less on process and more engaging in a Child First Approach. Victim Standards will now be inspected in its own right and members should be assured that our offer for victims has been highlighted as best practice by the Youth Justice Board. Board Members have been fully engaged in the process and have a good understanding of the expectations on them and the oversight and governance that they provide to the Service.

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

10. At the end of October 2024 there were 278 children on a child in need plan and 105 children subject to child protection plans with 54 assessments completed by month end taking us to a total of 477 this year. Assessment timeliness has remained consistently at around 91.8% with out of date assessment's being linked to practitioners leaving or being unexpectedly on leave. We have seen some improvement over the year and continue to prioritise this as a service area.
11. We have continued our focus on the quality of strategy discussions and ensuring our decision making is appropriate. A review of 11 families who had had a strategy discussion was completed in December 2024 and this highlighted that in only one instance a strategy discussion wasn't appropriate/could have been voided with all others being appropriate. It has highlighted an increase in children progressing to an Initial Child Protection Conference but not being made subject to a Child Protection Plan. This requires further curiosity to ensure decision making is correct.
12. Focused practice sessions with the workforce have continued and the legal pathway and assessment and planning sessions have been completed. These are well attended by all care planning teams and are leading to improved practice. These will continue in the new year but with two sessions focused on managers, a session on reflective supervision and a session on strategy discussions. The teams have identified having a focused session on harm away from home would further help the team.

13. Earlier in 2024 the Keeping Families Together and Family Group Conferencing service moved to sit under care planning. This has led to an increase in the use of Family Group Conferences, and they are embedded from a much earlier stage in the life of a child's involvement with social care. Keeping Families Together have experienced some staffing changes with new workers recruited and a move from the Assessment and Safeguarding team family workers, moving to sit with KFT. This means we can offer the intensive edge of care support as well as lower-level targeted support for families with a lower need.
14. Workloads across the care planning teams continue to be appropriate with two social workers having 25 children and all other social workers having less than 25. We are supporting a number of social work students across the workforce and have only one agency social worker across the service, meaning our children are offered increased stability.

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

15. We continue to expand our taster flat offer using support from our Personal Advisors with the service provision with one flat has now been refurbished and completed. We continue to hold 13 flats. The provision is supporting young people to transition to independence with a high level of support. We are currently fitting Video Doorbells to the properties to improve levels of security and oversight for the flats and our young people. The flats are utilised alongside our Staying Close project to support and prepare our young people to live independently. We have a planned move from an external residential provision into a Flat mid-January 2025 once a property becomes available.
16. From the 12 taster flats currently occupied, only three of the young people in these are under 18 years of age. We have nine care leavers who are over 18 years of age and are currently bidding on properties to move on. Two of those nine have received tenancy offers and are in the process of moving to their own North Star properties. We have two over 18's who were previously Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who continue to wait for a decision on their right to remain status. They have both moved into a two-bed taster flat due to Darlington's legal requirement to financially support.
17. We currently have 278 children in care, we are seeing a steady decrease in numbers of children looked after. In August 2024 we had 286 children in Care, a drop from June's figure of 298 and a further reduction from January 2024 when the number of looked after children was 321. 22 of the 278 children accommodated 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 have been introduced to reduce delay for children and ensure discharge of care order plans are progressing. We are currently working hard to reunify several families back home and discharge the care order of these children. We look forward to offering an update on the progress of these plans.
18. There are currently 143 care leavers being supported by the team aged 18-25. An increase from 140 in August 2024, we also support 50 care experienced young people under the age of 18 years. 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.

19. We were successful in obtaining funding for three new projects: Family Finding, Mentoring and a Safe Space youth provision. Family finding provides support from three Lifelong Links workers who are working with a stable 27 children and young people in our care, this remains constant. The team are assisting children and young people to establish a network of support alongside contribution from a dedicated life story worker and a therapeutic worker. The service took time to gather momentum and receive buy in from colleagues and young people, we now feel we have gathered momentum, and our numbers are slowly increasing.
20. The mentoring programme offers the opportunity for care experienced adults to become mentors for younger children in care and our care experienced young people. We have successfully recruited and trained 11 care experienced young people to date. 86 young people are now attached to the programme an increase from 58 In August 2024 and 22 since March 2024, we are considering an additional three referrals. The matching process has been incredibly positive for all concerned and rewarding emotionally for all parties. Our mentors are often holding down jobs, raising their own families whilst also helping younger children in our care.
21. Safe space is a youth provision operated 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. Sessions are delivered every Monday evening. The funding for this project has been extended with further sessions continuing next year, we have submitted a funding application to the rotary club to support with operational costs to continue this valuable support to children in our care.
22. Staying Close remains a significant strength; we are currently supporting 22 young people. This number remains constant as young people come to the end of their support journey and have achieved their goals. A further two young people are due to close to the service and replaced with two new young people. The project has supported 33 young people move on from Residential and Foster placements into their own accommodation since April 2024. The project has developed to offer seven days per week service for young people most in need. Some comments from workers feedback about the young people are "he is 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. "Thank you for what I have learned and your help".
23. As detailed earlier, we are currently supporting 22 unaccompanied children and have received an additional transfer referral and are in process of sourcing a placement. We are mandated to support a maximum of 22 children and young people. Our next unaccompanied young person will turn 18 on 27/04/2025. We can expect additional referrals from that point onwards. Within the last year, we have supported nine new unaccompanied children. Eight were transferred from the Home Office, one arrived in Darlington on foot.
24. In addition to unaccompanied children support, we are supporting 21 young adults through leaving care support.

25. Our nine unaccompanied young people have travelled to the UK from a range of countries, these include two young people travelled from Afghanistan, one from Eritrea, two from Iran, two from Sudan, one from Albania, one from Vietnam and one from Guinea.
26. In terms of placement of children, we have 12 unaccompanied young people placed in Darlington and nine outside of Darlington with six of these placed at a distance.

### **Fostering and Supported Lodgings**

27. We have 65 approved foster carers, with 30 households supporting 55 children, 23.9 % of which are long term matched. We have 68 approved connected carers, with 39 households supporting 46 children, accounting for 30.9% of the children in foster care.

### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

28. The Team organised a drop-in session in October advertised via social media and despite some interest this was not successful. Patterns in recruitment in previous years is that recruitment reduces in lead up to Christmas, but then increases following Christmas and so we have plans to put out messages about Fostering in the New Year to capitalise on the post-Christmas interest we have seen in previous years. In 2025 the recruitment strategy alongside Fostering with North East's recruitment is to target certain key dates in the year such as:

- (a) Social Work Week – March 2025
- (b) Fostering Fortnight – May 2025
- (c) World Refugee Day – June 2025
- (d) Supported Lodgings Week – July 2025
- (e) Kinship Carers Week – October 2025

We will adopt a co-ordinated approach within the council using our social media, PR, and marketing to really sell and support our fostering offer. Events such as bowling, attending Hope Town etc and events at local amenities during the above weeks can create some good content and awareness.

29. We have approved ten new foster carers since April 2024 and have four assessments with a fostering panel dates of January 2025 and April 2025. We have two applicants at Initial Visit stage. We have 2 Supported Lodgings assessments underway and one Foster Carer who has resigned and is being assessed as a Supported Lodgings Provider. We have one mother & baby carer approved and we are finalising guidance/policy around this foster placement with additional carers expressing an interest in being assessed additionally as a mother & baby carer.
30. We continue to promote recruitment through the DBC Facebook page. We have established monthly meetings between the team and colleagues in Communications. This will ensure that Fostering is covered regularly in the One Darlington Magazine, and we will twin-track this by pushing live news and information through social media.

### **Retention & Support of Carers**

31. The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team continues to run monthly coffee mornings and support meetings for carers to meet each other and to listen and interact with different speakers. We have recently had the child exploitation team at events, Barnardo's, a Health Visitor and our online safety team. We have developed a Buddy system in house and have five carers identified as Buddy's, they have met with carers during the application and assessment process as well as supporting new and existing carers. For 2025 we are introducing a New Carers group to support new carers with training, development, and key messages during their first year.
32. We are seeing a shift in demand in children requiring care, we have older children with more complex needs and less demand with babies. We are finding that we have several baby carers who have capacity, but unwilling / lacking confidence to offer a home to older children. We are developing a multi-agency teenager in Fostering strategy and have a working group arranged for 16 January 2025.

### **Homes for our Children**

33. Cedars continues to offer emergency and short break placements. We have successfully recruited to staffing posts following the home moving to a full-time service.
34. Gilling Crescent staff and young people all move to Butterfield Drive on 7 December 2024 following receiving Ofsted registration on 2nd December 2024.
35. Gilling Crescent children's will be repurposed, creating additional placements for children in our care. Given the ages of children as young as four placed in external residential homes, we are looking at options to repurpose the home to support children aged 4 – 12 with a planned move to support them on from the home into foster care.
36. The Registered Managers and Senior posts for Gilling were advertised and recruited to. Six FTE posts were advertised for the home, five full-time positions were recruited to with a mixture of current staff moving to Gilling and new external recruitment. We are going back out to advert for 2 x part time staff to cover the vacant one FTE post. Staff are remaining in their current roles or in recruitment process.
37. Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) is a form of psychotherapy that can help form and repair connections and attachments between children, young people and their parent/carers. This type of therapy can help children/young people who find it hard to feel safe and secure with parents/carers due to difficult or traumatic early life experiences. These early experiences can result in the young person experiencing high levels of anxiety that result in them wanting to control their relationships and struggle with their emotions. Children's Residential Service is going to use DDP to support our young people. The majority of our homes staff have attended with Leon Crook who is an advanced practitioner in the therapeutic service a session to gain an overview of DDP to put into practice within the homes.

### **Education**

38. Longfield Academy was recently inspected by Ofsted. The academy was judged "Good" across all four key judgement areas. Inspectors recognised that significant improvements have been made since the academy was judged "Inadequate" at the last inspection.



Inspectors commented that the academy has ensured that pupils study an ambitious curriculum that is well suited to their needs. There is a broad range of subjects that pupils benefit from, and pupils are happy, kind and friendly. Following this inspection Darlington has no schools that are judged to be inadequate.

39. Ofsted has also recently inspected Carmel College. Inspectors judged the college “Outstanding” across all five key judgement areas, including the sixth form provision. The inspection report details the outstanding support that the college gives to pupils. Inspectors recognised the college values pupils for who they are, going beyond the expected to help every pupil succeed and live life to the full. Carmel College has high aspirations for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the personal development programme is exceptional. In short, pupils flourish.

### **Youth Unemployment**

40. The 18-24 claimant count has remained static at 7.1% with 530 young people in July 2024 rising to 535 in October 2024. Darlington at 7.1% is still higher than North-East average (6.2%) and National average (5.4%). The North-East average has also risen by 0.3%, and the England average by 0.2%, in the same period.
41. October 2024 figures for the Tees Valley shows mainly an increase across other authorities, with the exception of Redcar & Cleveland, and are as follows (July 2024 figures in brackets):
- (a) 8.6% (7.8%) Stockton
  - (b) 8.4% (8.1%) Hartlepool
  - (c) 8.2% (7.9%) Middlesbrough
  - (d) 7.4% (7.5%) Redcar & Cleveland
  - (e) 7.1% (7.1%) Darlington
42. The Council run Darlington Employment Initiative (DEI) offers employability support to economically inactive people of all ages, with a focus on; those looking after the family/home, those early retirees over 50, and those who are short term sick (under 12 months). The programme runs until 31 March 2025 and is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The government has just announced there will be a one year extension of UKSPF funding but it has not been confirmed yet whether this will include DEI.
43. The two staff started the programme mid-February 2024 and the target is for 104 starts with 24 participants in employment by programme end. By the end of November 2024, the team had engaged 137 participants (against an overall contract target of 104) with 65 moved into employment (against an overall contract target of 24). Of those above 72 of the 137 participants were aged 16-24 (53%) with 33 of those moving into work (46%).

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

44. In line with the priorities in Darlington’s children’s sufficiency and commissioning strategy, a further expansion to Ofsted regulated Supported Accommodation for young people aged 16-17 will take place in Darlington from January 2025. The expansion will include a new 11

bed service operated by Reach Out Care and a further increase in capacity at the existing Ofsted regulated YMCA accommodation by five beds.

45. Throughout December and January officers across commissioning, placements, performance, children's operational services and finance are undertaking a regional piece of work with the 12 NE councils to profile and analysis placements costs with a particular focus on the cost of external residential care. This regional workstream will provide insightful regional benchmarks and cost profiling to be used as part of fee increase request review process and support collaborative fee negotiations.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership**

46. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners met on 11 November and were presented with the final report of the Child J Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review for approval. There were a number of learning points identified with four key themes for learning which included the children's lived experience, parental mental health and the impact on the family, multi-agency working and unseen/unconsidered men/caregivers. Plans are to publish the final report in the new year when both the criminal investigation and care proceedings for child J's sibling are concluded. In the interim, the partnership will take forward the learning.
47. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 19 November and it received the annual report from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board which outlined their statutory safeguarding responsibilities and how they are discharged across the north and south of the region. Adult Social Care provided an overview of the transformation practice changes that have taken place within Adult Social Care over the past year which were well received by partners.
48. An update was provided by Durham Constabulary on Right Care, Right Person which highlighted there is good engagement with partner agencies. All incidents are dealt with by call handlers who have been trained to ask appropriate questions to understand why police attendance is required. If a police response is not required, it may be signposted to another agency. An escalation policy has been implemented for those practitioners who feel a police response is the best.
49. The group received a presentation on the proposed revised Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements following a revision of Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance in 2023. There will be changes made to strengthen the current arrangements which include clarifying roles and responsibilities of Lead and Delegated Safeguarding Partners, introduction of partnership chair role, emphasising the role of education in safeguarding arrangements and strengthening accountability. There are no changes proposed to the Integrated Adults and Children's Partnership structure as it is recognised this is effective and having joint arrangements has strengthened partnership working, details will be published later this month.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

---

**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**

2. During October, we launched a communications and marketing campaign for Stoptober encouraging people to make a fresh quit and self-refer to the Darlington Stop Smoking Hub. The campaign generated 72 referrals, which was double the number of referrals seen for the same period in 2023.
3. The Targeted Lung Health Checks (TLHC) will now be coming to Darlington in late spring and will be supported by the Stop Smoking Service. This is a national programme that identifies people aged 55-74years at increased risk of lung cancer, usually people who smoke or have smoked in the past.
4. The Government has announced that the additional funding allocated to local authorities this year, for investment in local Stop Smoking Services and support, will continue in 2025/26.
5. The Eyes on the Baby project is ongoing with the completion of training continuing to rise. The training comes in three strands dependant on the level of workforce interaction with vulnerable families in Darlington. To date we have had 42 people complete Strand 1, 37 complete Strand 2 and 39 Strand 3. This is a multi-agency approach that is so far engaging senior officers from across several of our internal departments, the 0-19 Service, Durham Constabulary and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue, with more work to do until the pilot project is due to end in April. The training will continue to be in place locally with participation still encouraged.

**Health and Well Being Board**

6. The Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS) was approved at the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held on 5 December 2024. The vision of the Strategy is that Darlington is a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and live well. The Strategy can be accessed [here](#).
7. The Strategy takes a life course approach, underpinned by a focus on healthy places. The key priorities are set out below.

## Best Start in Life: Children and Young People

- (a) Pregnancy and early years
- (b) Mental health and resilience

### 7.1 Staying Healthy: Living Well

- (c) Making smoking history
- (d) Mental health and wellbeing

### 7.2 Staying Healthy: Ageing Well

- e) Minimise time in ill health
- f) Maximise independence

### 7.3 Healthy Places

- g) Workplace health and good work
- h) Healthier environments

8. Over the next four years implementation of the JLHWS will be underpinned by a detailed review of the eight priorities, with an annual programme to be agreed, focusing on two priorities each year. This will provide the opportunity for a 'deep dive' into each of the priorities, through which information will be shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board on performance indicators, health inequalities, programmes of delivery and any identified gaps or areas of risk. This work will involve different stakeholders as appropriate and relevant to the particular priority being reviewed and will be brought forward to the Health and Wellbeing Board for discussion, through which additional actions for partners on the Board, or wider stakeholders, may be identified.
9. During 2028/29 (the final year of the JLHWS) the Health and Wellbeing Board will focus on reviewing the overall impact of the strategy and learning from what has worked well and not so well. This will inform the development of the next JLHWS, from 2030 onward.

## **Housing Services**

### **Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**

10. Consultation has recently ended on our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030, which has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children's Services, Health, Probation, Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. The strategy will be considered by Cabinet on 4 March 2025.
11. Our strategy aims to be, not just a Council document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:
  - (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington.

- (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home.
  - (c) That the right support is in place at the right time.
  - (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.
12. The co-produced six key priority areas to enable us to achieve this vision are:
- (a) Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.
  - (b) Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan.
  - (c) Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
  - (d) Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs.
  - (e) Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
  - (f) Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.

### **Rough Sleeper Count**

13. As part of the Government's Rough Sleeper Initiative, an annual count of rough sleepers took place in November. The aim of the count is to ascertain how many individuals are sleeping rough through-out the North-East region on a specific night and all 12 Local Authorities in the region took part.
14. The count identified 6 people sleeping rough in Darlington. As part of our new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, our aim is to eliminate rough sleeping in Darlington for good. Anyone who finds a person rough sleeping is encouraged to report them to Streetlink who will aim to connect them to local services. Further information can be found on their website at: [www.thestreetlink.org.uk](http://www.thestreetlink.org.uk)

### **Lifeline Services Meals Review**

15. Lifeline Services recently conducted a review and tenant's survey of the meals provision within our Extra Care schemes (Dalkeith House, Oban Court, and Rosemary Court). We asked our tenants several questions about the meals (taste, choice and standard), the service they receive, our staff and whether they feel the service provides value for money. A total of 62 responses were received and, by nature of the schemes where they live, many tenants were supported to enable them to express their opinions.
16. Overall, over 75 per cent of the tenants were satisfied with the meals and a lot of positive and constructive feedback was given, which we will use to continue to develop the service going forward.

## **Apprenticeships in Housing Services**

17. Members will be pleased to hear that our Housing Services teams continue to promote apprenticeships to provide people with a clear path to a career and the skills they need to succeed in our workplace.
18. We currently have a number of apprentices in Housing Services, as follows:
  - (a) Within our Housing Buildings Maintenance team, we have two Apprentice Joiners, one Apprentice Electrician, two Apprentice Plumbers and two Apprentice Plasterers. All apprentices will be working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3, and City and Guilds level 3 diplomas. The aim is to employ all of our apprentices within the Housing Buildings Maintenance team at the end of their apprenticeship.
  - (b) Within our Housing Building Surveying team, we have one Apprentice Surveyor working towards a BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment and we are aiming to have a permanent post available at the successful completion of the apprenticeship.
  - (c) We have a number of apprentices working towards a NVQ level 3 in Business Administration. Two apprentices in our Housing Asset and Compliance Team, one apprentice in our Lifeline Services team, one apprentice in our Housing Options team and one apprentice in our Housing Tenancy Management team. We are also actively recruiting to a new apprenticeship role in our Housing Refugee and Enforcement team. Towards the end of their apprenticeships, we will be actively supporting our apprentices to apply for suitable posts within the Council.

## **Tenant Involvement**

19. The Tenants Panel and Online Tenants Panel are a vital part of the services which we provide in Housing Services. The members of both panels give us a clear understanding of how the decisions we make with them, affect our tenants. With members involvement in implementing and changing policies and procedures, we have a clear understanding of what our tenants want and expect from us. More importantly, our tenants feel they have a voice and that they are listened to.
20. In December, Housing Services held a Tenants Panel Celebration event, which was attended by members of our Tenants Panel to celebrate their amazing work and the contribution to improving Housing Services over the last year. Tenant Panel members were thanked for all their work during the year and were commended for successful gaining an award through the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) for their contributions to the community.

## **Tenancy Enforcement**

21. Our Housing Services team continues to address serious anti-social behaviour, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring all of our tenants enjoy their right to a safe home and community.

22. An eviction was carried out in November 2024 for a tenant living in the Eastbourne area of Darlington. The tenant had subjected neighbours to various forms of anti-social behaviour, which included drug related anti-social behaviour, noise nuisance and damage to Council property. The Tenancy Enforcement Team worked collaboratively with the Police and neighbours to secure this eviction.
23. A Closure Order was obtained November 2024 against a tenant living in the Cockerton area of Darlington. The tenant, and numerous visitors to the property, had subjected neighbours to various forms of anti-social behaviour which included drug related anti-social behaviour and nuisance caused by visitors to the address. The Tenancy Enforcement Officer, who worked collaboratively with the Police to ensure the order was executed, attended Ward surgeries with the Police to re-assure residents and explain the actions being taken.

### Tenant Satisfaction Measures

24. Members will recall that I reported the outcome of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey for 2023-24, which showed high levels tenant satisfaction for our Council housing, reflecting the excellent services provided. The Regulator of Social Housing has recently published comparative data, which not only shows above average satisfaction for Darlington compared to other social housing providers across the country, as well as comparisons with other stock holding Local Authorities, but most of the measures place our services within the top quartile of performance.
25. The TSM survey for 2024-25 has recently been completed and I will report the outcomes for this as soon as it is available.

### TSM Results 2023-24

TSM	DBC Result	Average Result (all landlords)	LA Average Result	DBC Quartile
TP01 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord	76%	71.3%	68.2%	Quartile 1
TP02 Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service	80%	72.3%	70.5%	Quartile 1
TP03 Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair	80%	67.4%	66.1%	Quartile 1
TP04 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained	78%	70.8%	66.9%	Quartile 1

<b>TSM</b>	<b>DBC Result</b>	<b>Average Result (all landlords)</b>	<b>LA Average Result</b>	<b>DBC Quartile</b>
TP05 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe	81%	76.7%	73.5%	Quartile 1
TP06 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	66%	60.4%	55.8%	Quartile 1
TP07 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them	72%	70.3%	67.0%	Quartile 2
TP08 Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect	78%	76.8%	73.5%	Quartile 2
TP09 Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling	38%	34.5%	29.1%	Quartile 1
TP10 Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	68%	65.1%	63.1%	Quartile 2
TP11 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	65%	63.1%	59.5%	Quartile 2
TP12 Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling antisocial behaviour	58%	57.8%	54.0%	Quartile 2

### **Energy Efficiency of Council Homes**

26. As part of our Housing Services Climate Change Strategy, energy efficiency work on the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) phase 2 continues to be delivered in the Lascelles and Red Hall areas. Four properties have been completed in Lascelles, and work has commenced on a further 40 properties in this area.
27. The work includes the replacement of old external wall insulation and render, replacement of windows and old timber external doors, upgrading loft insulation, energy efficiency lights and improvements to ventilation in the properties. Enabling works have also commenced in Red Hall site with scaffolding being erected and the old external wall



insulation being removed on a number of properties.

28. In total, 130 Council properties will be upgraded by June 2025 at a total cost of £2.38m, including £1.27m of Government Grant funding. This demonstrates our ongoing commitment to improving the energy efficiency of our homes and reducing our tenants' energy bills.

### **Dolphin Centre**

29. The Dolphin Centre provided four very successful Christmas party nights during December which included a live band, three course meal and a disco. The events were attended by 700 guests and feedback from all evenings was extremely positive. December was an incredibly busy period for the team, with events every weekend, in addition to a very busy period of daily business in all areas.
30. Two new Student Champions have been recruited from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College. The roles cover student engagement on what students would like to see available at the Dolphin Centre, mystery shopping in business areas and will also promote student activities and opportunities at the centre. The students have started by promoting the student discount card and student memberships.
31. As part of the conditions of the Swimming Pool Support Fund award that the Dolphin Centre received for the installation of PVs and a new CHP unit, Sport England arranged for a detailed Environmental Audit to be carried out on the Dolphin Centre. The audit rated the centre at 77 per cent which, given the age of the facility, was a positive outcome. There have been some useful suggestions that the team are currently considering as part of the mechanical and electrical project due to start in early 2025.

### **Holiday Activity Programme**

32. The HAF programme (Holiday Activities and Food) is for children aged 5 to 16 who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. The programme took place over the Christmas school holiday period providing Christmas-themed activities, including trips to the pantomime at the Hippodrome and Christmas activities at Hopetown. Darlington Borough Council are currently waiting for details on future HAF funding which will continue to allow eligible children to make the most of facilities available through leisure and cultural services.

### **Eastbourne Sports Complex**

33. Site visits to the complex have increased during the period of reporting, through engagement with new customers and sessions, including, sessions provided by The Extra Yard (who offer strength and condition activities for children and young people), indoor bowls for adults, Funability Club for children with SEND, and the site is now host to all Darlington District school teams. The team are working with Durham FA and the Football Foundation to improve the ancillary and grass pitch facilities on site, to increase footfall and to support the medium-term financial plan target.

## **Health in Haughton**

34. The Health in Haughton Matters constitution have been successful with an application to the National Lottery Awards for All grant for £20,000. This will include 'Move to Lose' sessions (incorporating weight loss goals), Mat Pilates, Netball and a children's sports provision put in place in the local area, adding additional activity to the current programme, which continues to receive over 300 attendances each month.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

---

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

**Climate Change**

2. Hoptown Darlington has embedded a range of climate and sustainability measures since opening in July 2024. Waste is kept to a minimum in the Clocktower Café, which stocks locally sourced products wherever possible, and plates provided to customers in the café are 100 percent compostable and biodegradable. Food waste produced is separated and collected by a local company, Bio Capital, an official sponsor of the site.
3. A recent exhibition at Darlington Library, 'Recycled, Reused, Revealed' by artist, Helen Winthorpe-Kendrick, explored themes of repurposing discarded materials and addressed the impact of the textiles industry on the climate. There were 2,242 visits to the exhibition between Saturday 9 November and Friday 6 December. A 'meet the artist' exhibition opening also attracted over 40 people and included a talk exploring exhibition's themes.
4. The infrastructure used by the events team continues to prioritise the use of in-house or locally sourced stock wherever possible. Picket fencing has been re-used for the last 4 years and continues to be useful. Print is kept to a minimum, with social media being a key marketing tool for all events happening in Darlington.

**Highway Maintenance Programme**

5. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
  - (a) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190 km)
6. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
  - (a) Unc. Roundhill Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (1.68 km)
  - (b) B6280 Yarm Road Hundens Lane Crossroads: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.231 km)

**Bus Services**

7. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) have entered into a new contract to provide advertising bus shelters. All advertising shelters will be reviewed and then a programme of renewals and refurbishments will be established based on the results, with the aim of improving the quality of waiting facility infrastructures for passengers.
8. A scheme offering cheaper fares for people aged under 22 is offering 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 is going well. The 'kids travel free' offer during the summer holidays was also available in October half term: for every fare paying adult a

child under 11 could travel with them for free. Both schemes are continuing until March 2025 and will be reviewed if funding is available, and the schemes demonstrate value for money.

9. The supported bus services in Darlington (including 3 and 4 (evenings and Sundays), 6/6A, 16, 17 and 18) and the Tees Flex service are all funded by TVCA until March 2025. Funding beyond March 2025 has been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) funding through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) process. It is anticipated that the funding will be used to continue funding the currently supported services.

### Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

10. Table 1 below shows progress on all our SRTS schemes that are currently being developed. The construction dates are anticipated and will be dependent upon the outcome of consultation and the availability of construction resource at that time.

Scheme	Ward Member Briefing	Scheme Consultation	Portfolio Holder sign-off	Traffic Regulation Order Consultation	Potential Cabinet (if we receive objections)	Construction (currently programmed)
Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Nov/Dec 2024	March 2025	Easter 2025 holidays with work carried out for two weeks during term time - four week duration
Stanhope Road North Puffin Crossing	Jan 2025	Commenced w/c 4 Nov 2024 with DAD	Awaiting outcome of consultation; currently collating responses	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	June/July 2025
St Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Consultation ended 23 Oct 2024	Awaiting review of consultation; currently collating responses	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	School summer holidays 2025
St Bede's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	School summer holidays 2025
Longfield School Puffin crossing	Complete	Q & A has been added as part of consultation which will now commence	Awaiting outcome of consultation	May 2025	Sept 2025	Oct 2025

		w/c 13 Jan 2025				
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Jan/Feb 2025	Jan 2025	Awaiting outcome of consultation and decision on funding	TBD	TBD	TBD

**Table 1:** Progress of the current programme of SRTS schemes

### Hopetown Darlington

11. Hopetown Darlington has recently been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, receiving the ‘VisitEngland Welcome’ accolade in October, which recognises excellence within the visitor attraction sector. This was followed by winning the highly prestigious ‘North East Culture Award for Best Museum or Cultural Venue’ in November, and the ‘Visitor Economy Award’ in December.
12. November marked the opening of ‘Experiment!’ a state-of-the-art railway-themed time travel immersive experience. Comparable to rides in the largest theme parks, ‘Experiment!’ uses large-scale digital screens and motion simulation to take passengers from Darlington across the world, showcasing the story of rail travel from its birth up until the modern day and beyond. Reviews have been exceptionally positive from adults and children alike, making it the perfect addition to any visit.
13. Hopetown Darlington celebrated Christmas with ‘Ho-Ho-Hopetown’, which featured two new quality attractions in the Carriage Works: Santa at Hopetown Darlington and the Enchanted Reindeer Trail. The Exhibition Hall was decorated with pine trees, custom made festive buildings, a magnificent Santa's Grotto and the newly-restored replica Locomotion No. 1. The replica remained on site until mid-January, allowing visitors to see the locomotive in the Carriage Works before it left for testing in preparation for the bicentenary celebrations in September 2025.

### Darlington Hippodrome

14. Panto season took place from Friday 6 December to Tuesday 31 December with a production of Sleeping Beauty, starring Su Pollard and Lee Mead. The pantomime stars appeared on ITV's 'This Morning' in early December, where they discussed the show's opening night and celebrated the art of panto. This year’s show provided the box office with record sales.
15. The theatre’s ‘A Place for Everyone fund’ enabled large numbers of schools and community groups to attend the pantomime, including the residents of Rose Lodge Care Home, who said: “Our residents and staff that came to see Sleeping Beauty yesterday would love to pass along our deepest gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to come along to watch. We all had the most fantastic time. One of our residents had never been to a pantomime before, so this was great to be able to enable him to attend one, too. Thank you ever so much.”

## **Libraries**

16. Members of the team from Darlington Libraries attended the first regional Libraries Connected Northeast Conference at Newcastle Library, which provided the opportunity to hear from inspirational keynote speakers, including Dr Darren Chetty and author, Joseph Coelho.
17. Over the Christmas period, Darlington Library hosted a Santa's Grotto experience, utilising the Reminiscence Room, which was turned into a magical grotto where Santa met with individual children and parents, before gifting presents and (animal friendly) 'reindeer food' to take home. These events were a huge success, providing families with babies and pre-school children with a high quality, well-priced experience in a magical venue.
18. During the Christmas period, the libraries also held Christmas Rhymetime parties, parties with The Grinch and Cindy-Lou, and Elsa and Olaf, as well as Christmas crafts, movie nights and live festive music for a range of audiences.
19. Special festive themed Musical Memories events at both Darlington and Cockerton Library were held during December. The events for older people and those with dementia saw around 55 people enjoy a range of performed songs from the past, including some Christmas numbers. Tea, coffee, mince pies and biscuits were provided. A quiz and talk about the past and days gone by ensured that everyone could join in.
20. During the period of September to December 2024, 20 classes visited 'The Hive' at Darlington Library, to take part in coding, animation, 3D design and print and virtual reality workshops, engaging children with STEAM activities and learning.

## **Creative Darlington**

21. Darlington Society of Arts held a group exhibition in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library from Saturday 21 December 2024 to Thursday 20 February 2025; the seventh there since it opened in May 2012. The group, who share a love of art, hold fortnightly meetings at Holy Trinity Youth and Community Centre and receive frequent input from guest speakers and other artists/demonstrators.
22. In 2024/25, Heritage and Culture fund budget was allocated to support Broken Scar Productions postproduction and screening of a short film about Arthur Wharton titled 'A Light That Never Fades', which was screened at the Forum Music Studios in Darlington on 22 January 2025. The film's cast includes Derek Griffiths in the role of Arthur Wharton. Broken Scar Productions and the Arthur Wharton Foundation attended a Trailblazers awards night hosted by the Black Footballers Partnership at the Houses of Parliament in October 2024 to introduce the film, which runs for approximately 20 minutes in length (sitting within the short film category of many film festivals). The film was commissioned by the Arthur Wharton Foundation, with support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, and is expected to feature in their ongoing work with young people of secondary school age and above.

## **Town Centre Partnership and Events**

23. Businesses attended a presentation by the Like Us team, demonstrating the grants and training available as part of the Digital Transformation Programme. Many Darlington businesses have already signed up to this programme which offers free videography, website building and marketing support mentors.
24. We have been working with the Innovation Challenge team to create a specific project linked to improving perceptions of the town centre, examining opportunities to increase footfall. There are currently four businesses developing project ideas for this challenge to see if their ideas can develop into projects with the TVCA Innovation Challenge programme.
25. The town centre team programmed a drop-in day for businesses to learn about 2025 events and how they can get involved. These sessions aim to encourage more engagement and support from local businesses with opportunities for them to benefit from increased customers and footfall in their business and the town centre.
26. Ice Sculptures appeared across the town centre in December, attracting increased footfall and movement around the town centre. This annual event is popular with all ages, with visitors following maps to location the icy creations. Although it was postponed due to weather conditions, the event was held on Saturday 14 December and attracted thousands of visitors to Darlington.
27. Chinese New Year was celebrated in Darlington town centre on 25 January. This popular cultural celebration brings colour and animation into the town centre, with spectacular lion dance performances from the Chinese community.

## **Environmental Services**

28. The garden waste subscription service ceased in mid-December, with the total tonnage received recorded as 2,841 tonnes on 5 December 2024. This is up from 2,800 last year.
29. On 7 January 2025, Cabinet considered a report on the Environment Act 2021, specifically about implementing weekly food waste and simpler recycling collections. After considering the options presented, Cabinet agreed to implement Option 4, summarised as follows:
  - (a) Continuation of fortnightly collections of residual waste, using the same bins.
  - (b) Dry recycling and food waste will be weekly in a similar vehicle to the existing recycling vehicle. Food waste will be collected in the front pod of the vehicle. In the split body back of the vehicle, paper and card will be collected in one side and then co-mingled glass, tins and plastic in the other side.
  - (c) Each household will be issued with a 5-7 litre internal caddie to store food waste in the kitchen and a 23 litre external bin that to be placed at kerbside weekly.
  - (d) Residents will also be issued initially with a roll of 52 compostable bags to use in the internal caddie.
  - (e) It is intended for the new service to commence in March 2026.

**Councillor Libby McCollom**

**Local Services Portfolio**



**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO**

---

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

**Revenues and Benefits**

2. Members will be pleased to hear that our Revenues and Benefits team continue to promote apprenticeships to provide people with a clear path to a career and the skills they need to succeed in our workplace. A number of recent apprentices have successfully completed their apprenticeships and secured employment within the team, as follows:
  - (a) One Apprentice started in January 2020 and was successful in gaining a post as Revenues and Benefits Assistant. Whilst in that post, she successfully completed her NVQ level 3 qualification in Business Administration. Since then, she has progressed from a Revenues and Benefits Advisor to her current role as a Revenues and Benefits Officer.
  - (b) One Apprentice started in April 2021 and was successful in gaining a post as Revenues and Benefits Assistant. Whilst in that post, he successfully completed his NVQ level 3 qualification in Business Administration. Since then, he has progressed to his current role as a Revenues and Benefits Advisor.
  - (c) One Apprentice started in August 2022 and was successful in gaining a post as Revenues and Benefits Assistant. Whilst in this post, she successfully completed her NVQ level 3 qualification in Business Administration.
  - (d) One Apprentice started in September 2023 and was successful in gaining a post as Revenues and Benefits Assistant. Whilst in this post, he is currently working towards completing his NVQ level 3 qualification in Business Administration.
  - (e) One Apprentice started in October 2023 and was successful in gaining a post as Revenues and Benefits Advisor. Whilst in this post, she is currently working towards completing her NVQ level 3 qualification in Business Administration.

**Customer Services**

3. Following some concerning customer incidents in the Contact Centre interview rooms, secure safety screens have been installed into three of the busiest rooms, to provide more security for staff, and to help them feel safe and secure should an incident arise. The screens which are a thick, safety glass, add more protection having been fitted from the desktop to ceiling, and can withstand items such as chairs being thrown at them. Feedback from staff is that they now feel safer in the interview rooms in the event of an incident. The new screens will provide reassurance and protection for our staff, whose safety is our

top priority.

4. Our Customer Services team has been working in partnership with Civic Enforcement to remove a fraudulent Blue Badge from being mis-used in Darlington. The fraudulent Blue Badge was confiscated, logged for evidence and destroyed. A further four misuses of Blue Badges are currently being investigated by our teams and should hopefully give reassurance to residents that this type of fraudulent activity is taken seriously by the Council.
5. Following a review of processes and procedures for the administration of Blue Badge discretionary applications, which need to be referred to an Occupational Therapist, the Customer Services team has managed to reduce the wait time from 16 weeks to 8 weeks, therefore improving the customer journey and reducing customer complaints.

### **Customer Services Strategy**

6. Consultation has recently ended for our new Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030, which is due to be considered by Cabinet on 4 March 2025.
7. Our strategy sets out our aims for delivering excellent customer services and value for money for our residents and includes:
  - (a) Our commitments to how we will deliver services to our residents.
  - (b) Our performance standards, responding to telephone and face to face enquiries, email and written correspondence.
  - (c) The support we will provide customers who are digitally excluded.
  - (d) How we will listen to our customers, including complaints, and how we will use this to improve services.

### **Climate Change**

8. Work is underway looking at the feasibility of converting the remaining fluorescent lighting in the Town Hall to LED lighting.
9. Funding has been secured through a successful application with Sports England to contribute to the Dolphin Centre Photovoltaics (PV) installation and Replacement Combined Heat and Power unit (CHP). Works are due to start in March and will include a new 399 panel PV array and a replacement 100KW CHP.
10. Works have begun to trial a water treatment product in the Town Hall heating system to assess and demonstrate claimed efficiencies of between 15 and 25% for gas consumption. The product alters the chemistry of the water to make it heat faster and radiate heat more efficiently. Results will be known by the Spring and will determine use in other sites.
11. A feasibility study has begun with a view to submitting a bid for funding from the Green Heat Network fund in January. Inspections have taken place by Scottish and Southern Energy of the Town Hall, Dolphin Centre, Hippodrome and Crown Street Library as

potential sites for inclusion in the proposed District Heating Scheme.

12. As part of the preparations for the annual billing for Council Tax and Business Rates 2025-26, which will take place in March, our Revenues and Benefits team continue to promote our e-billing service, which helps to reduce costs and our carbon footprint.
13. Good progress has been made in 2024-25 with over 4,800 bills being sent paperless. However, this figure represents only 11% of all bills sent and more work needs to be done to encourage local residents and businesses to sign up to this service, which is quick and easy to do. I would also encourage Members who are not yet signed up to e-billing to do so straight away.

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

14. 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 TVCA, the internal area has now been handed over to Network Rail to start the fit out works and the external areas are mostly complete.
  - (b) Neasham Road and Sherborne housing schemes continue to progress well on site.
  - (c) The No.156 Northgate refurbishment scheme has gone out to tender, and the returns are currently being evaluated by the Project Team. A Contractor for the works will be appointed shortly.
  - (d) The main refurbishment work at the former Northern Echo Building is to commence shortly following the completion of the Asbestos removal works.
  - (e) The next phase of demolition at the Skinnergate Housing site for the former St Mary's Club property at the rear of the site is due to commence in the new year.
15. Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
16. There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

### **Staff Wellbeing**

17. This month saw the return of the January Wellness calendar following the success of the initiative in 2024. This provided all staff with activities and suggestions to help think about their health, body and mind. There were also a number of one off sessions provided by the Dolphin Centre with discounts to inspire staff to try a new activity. We also had our Employee Wellness fair on 23<sup>rd</sup> January with internal and external wellness specialists providing staff with guidance and advice.

## **Digital Darlington Strategy**

18. The draft Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 was published for public consultation on 2 December 2024 and ran until 12 January 2025. Public awareness of the planned consultation was initially raised in the autumn edition of the One Darlington magazine and subsequently promoted via the council's website, social media profiles, via our VCS partners, to staff, and all councillors were asked to help raise awareness of the consultation too. The consultation was online, and paper copies were made available in the Customer Services Centre, with the offer of copies in alternative formats upon request. The Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy on 30 January 2025. The aim is to seek cabinet approval for the strategy on 4 March 2025 once all the consultation feedback, and feedback from the scrutiny committee has been gathered and analysed.

## **Elections Act 2022**

19. On 7 May 2024, the changes introduced in the Elections Act 2022 to the franchise of European Union (EU) citizens came into force which meant that the general right of those citizens to register, vote and stand in local government elections and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections was reviewed. There are around 121 EU citizens that did not respond to the review, and they will be deleted from the Register of Electors prior to the deadline of 31 January 2025.
20. The final element of the Elections Act 2022 to be introduced are further changes to postal voting, with the introduction of the requirement for a fresh application to be made every three years. From January 2025, the majority of the current postal voters (around 15,000), will be requested to submit a fresh application by the deadline of 31 January 2026. If they do not complete a fresh application their postal vote will be cancelled and they will need to visit a polling station to cast their vote at future elections, unless they re-apply for a postal vote, at a later date.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

**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)**

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends for all Darlington

Darlington	YTD Nov 2023	YTD Nov 2024
Crime	8333	7208
ASB	1647	1800

**Crime**

2. The year-to-date figure is significantly lower than the same period last year, by 14%. Aspects of crime being showing increasing trends are burglary, shoplifting, racially aggravated crime, drugs and possession of weapons. All reported incidents of violence reduced to varying amounts (average 19%) and harassment reduced by 25%.
3. The Police, together with partners, have responded through crime prevention campaigns; The annual Winter Nights Campaign which focuses upon acquisitive crime has begun, with additional media coverage upon the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the CCTV facilities in Darlington, Begging and promotion of Number 40 to attract additional volunteers.

**ASB**

4. The year-to-date figure is higher than the same period last year. During the reporting period there was an increase in anti-social behaviour over a period of time associated with a gathering of youths travelling from outside the area into the Town Centre and causing significant issues of ASB. Additional measures were introduced to combat the ASB including a Police led ASB - Dispersal Order relevant to the town centre, additional uniformed staff on patrol, increased youth intervention work (YES), increased staffing within CCTV room and civic enforcement remedies being progressed against key individuals.
5. During the reporting period the Young People’s Engagement & Justice Service have received 27 referrals into the Early Intervention & Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
6. Future Pathways ASB evening sessions continue and the provision is now engaging with cohort 4 with a total of 12 young people referred and 10 active referrals at this current period.

7. Between 23 October 2024 and 4 December 2024.
  - (a) 3 young people received first warnings for ASB
  - (b) 4 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
  - (c) 7 committed ABA breaches
  - (d) 4 young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
  - (e) 12 young people are awaiting interview
  - (f) 1 Young person has a pending Civil Injunction

### **Other Operational Updates**

8. Feedback from managers at council venues confirms there have been very few reported instances of customers feeling unsafe or being victims of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour within those venues. To date issues have been addressed on a case by case basis. We are pleased the vast majority of people have positive experiences in our venues, but to ensure we have an accurate and holistic understanding of our customers experiences, specifically in relation to feeling and being safe, a council wide approach is being established to record any reported issues. This information will be used to assess and understand any emerging patterns of unacceptable behaviour, and to help building managers introduce appropriate interventions if needed.

### **Parking Facilities**

9. The replacement programme, which will allow the facility for all 'on-street' machines to take payment by card, and parking app has been completed.
10. The Town Hall, Archer Street, Commercial Street West, Kendrew Street East, Kendrew Street West and Park Place East car parks have been reassessed and secured the Safer Parking Award, which demonstrates the facility provides Police accredited parking in relation to quality management, effective surveillance, appropriate lighting and a clean environment.

### **Environmental Crime**

11. 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) 85 enviro crime cases (of which 67 closed)
  - (b) 5 Fixed Penalty Notices issued (3 for fly tipping, 1 for household duty of care and 1 for failing to produce waste transfer notes)
  - (c) 16 Community Protection Warnings (CPN) issued

- (d) 2 Community Protection Notices (CPN) issued
- (e) A company director was prosecuted for 4 offences (2 S34 duty of care and 2 transporting waste for profit without a licence)
- (f) A householder was prosecuted for breach of a CPN
- (g) 3 individuals were prosecuted for obstructing investigations – 1 was ordered to pay £1192.70
- (h) Trail cameras to improve CCTV deployment options are being used

### **Begging Incidents**

12. Begging incidents between July and November 2024 show a significant decrease from 38 in July to 11 in November. There has been dedicated patrols and joined up partnership working.
13. There is currently a cohort of 10 people begging whom we are engaging with through all available support mechanism. The following support has been offered through our dedicated 'out-reach work' during this financial year:-
  - (a) 16 individuals have been engaged on over 314 occasions.
  - (b) 14 referrals made to Housing support and five people allocated secured accommodation.
  - (c) 112 occasions whereby financial support and advice regarding benefits provided.
  - (d) 20 referrals made to support the physical and mental health of those begging including GP referrals.
  - (e) 29 referrals made to support groups and agencies managing addictions.
  - (f) 261 occasions where support has been directly provided for foodstuffs and nutrition.
14. The council continue to promote public information in relation to begging through media and marketing.

### **Licensing**

15. A couple have been summoned to Peterlee Magistrates Court for breeding/selling dogs without a licence. These offences came to light when a pup that was sold by them died from suspected parvo virus. Numerous litters of pups had been sold by the couple since 2017. They pleaded not guilty, and a trial has been fixed for 19 March 2025
16. A Pre-Christmas nighttime taxi enforcement operation was carried out to check vehicle safety and driver documentation. This was in collaboration with Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary. During the operation 57 vehicles were examined, of which two in Darlington were immediately suspended following safety concerns.

17. A revised pavement café policy has been approved for public consultation by the Licensing Committee. There are several proposed amendments that will assist the hospitality trade and maintain their vibrancy. It will also bring the policy in line with the Business and Planning Act that was made permanent in 2024.
18. Planning has begun on new Animal Welfare (Primate Licences) (England) Regulations 2024. There will be a phased introduction of these regulations in 2025 to be fully implemented in April 2026.

### **Trading Standards**

19. Trading Standards will always try to engage with business owners and landlords of businesses found to be selling illegal vapes or counterfeit cigarettes. A three-month premise closure order due to expire was granted a further three-month extension by the Magistrates Court until February due to a lack of engagement with the Council who believed that the illegal activity would recommence as soon as the closure order expired.
20. Trading Standards are working hard to complete the majority of their annual programmed inspections before the end of the financial year.
21. Street sellers of counterfeit perfumes have been a problem however swift action by CCTV, Civic Enforcement and a visit from Trading Standards to seize the illegal goods has kept such matters to a minimum. A press release and radio interview have ensured that the wider message around spending money wisely and how to avoid purchasing unsafe or counterfeit goods is available to the public.
22. All premises licensed to store explosives with Darlington Borough Council have been inspected by the Trading Standards team. The premises are principally fireworks retailers so additional checks on age verification processes and staff training were made to ensure consumer safety.

### **Darlington Cares**

23. At the last Board meeting plans were agreed to work with the careers leads of Darlington's secondary schools so that there is an easier structured way for schools to engage with businesses in Darlington. Employer in lessons, Assemblies Employability workshops Apprentice visit or talks, Enterprise activity, Careers clubs, providing work experience opportunities.
24. During Covid, similar to other voluntary organisations, Darlington Cares found that levels of volunteering fell significantly. However, there has been a steady recovery and during 2024, 10,000 hours of volunteering have been delivered across the three focuses of environment, education and social justice.
25. As in previous years, through Darlington Cares, a Volunteer Fair will be held in the Dolphin Centre Sports Hall on Tuesday 4 February between 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm. The event allows people who are considering volunteering to meet with the voluntary and community organisations of Darlington.



### **Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership (DEEP)**

26. DEEP which was set up in 2023 and is administered by Darlington Cares is a local initiative that encourages businesses to work together to tackle climate change and achieve net zero targets. Membership continues to grow with Latimer Hinks being the latest company to join.
27. DEEP hold a series of network and learn events with the next one to be held at Hopetown on January 29, 2025. In addition, a 'market place' event is to be held on 21 February in Central Hall where businesses can connect with local providers of Net Zero solutions helping them reduce their carbon footprint.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

28. The Council maintains a strong and productive relationship with the voluntary and community sector through the VCSE engagement group.
29. Local voluntary sector organisations are delivering elements of the Household Support Fund, targeting households struggling the most using the Low-Income Family Tracker. New to this round, Citizen's Advice Bureau are administering a fund helping those who are struggling with significant debt which is open to application through their website.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

30. Work is ongoing to understand the requirements on the council for the provision of single sex spaces. Feedback has been gathered from several groups and individuals to help us understand their perspectives on the matter, but the Council's position must be aligned with legislation. To date, current legislation is being interpreted in different ways at both local and national levels. The main issue to overcome is the definition of sex within the Equality Act 2010, and we are monitoring two legal cases currently going through the courts (Nurses vs. County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, and For Women Scotland Ltd vs. The Scottish Ministers). The outcome from these cases may lead to case law which in turn may help to inform the council's position.

**Councillor Jim Garner**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**

This page is intentionally left blank

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

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

**Autism Strategy and Action Plan Update**

2. We received a report to update the Committee on the progress made to date in relation to the National Autism Strategy, and the subsequent actions within Darlington. The report reflected a joint position statement from the Integrated Care Board (ICB), the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley (TEVW) NHS Foundation Trust and the Council.
3. The report provided a definition of the condition, gave an overview of the national context and outlined the priority areas of focus for the National Autism Strategy 2021-26, which included the aim of improving understanding and acceptance of Autism within society, the work being undertaken to prevent mental health crisis for people with Autism, and the support provided to encourage more Autistic people into employment.
4. The report also outlined the work being done across the Borough to tackle health and care inequalities for autistic people, and to build the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care.
5. We welcomed the involvement of 'Inclusion North' in the development of a local strategy and were keen to invite representatives to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
6. The Committee entered into discussion on the number of adults in the North-East who had received an autism diagnosis, and how many of these adults were accessing Mental Health services. Members were also keen to know how the numbers on the waiting list for a diagnosis compared to one year ago, and whether the number of inpatients with autism, and the number of inpatients suspected of having autism, but who did not have a diagnosis, was monitored.
7. Concerns were also raised in relation to the contrast between the target to reduce waiting lists alongside the increased identification of people suspected of being autistic. Members were also keen to ensure that the support for the local working group had been budgeted for, in light of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 - 2028/29**

8. As with all Scrutiny Committees, the Assistant Director, Resources, submitted a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

9. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 3 December 2024, as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within our remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 20 January 2025, for consideration.
10. We were reminded that a briefing had been delivered to Councillors on 11 December 2024, which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the MTFP, and we were advised that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2025/26 with an update on the draft financial settlement provided to Members.
11. Concerns were expressed in relation to the use of reserves to balance the budget, and whilst it was acknowledged that the proposed additional funding received as part of the draft financial settlement was welcome, it was noted that it was still proposed that the Council's reserves would still run out prior to the end of the plan should circumstances remain the same.
12. Members recognised the additional pressures created by the increase in National Insurance contributions, and the concerns raised by suppliers, however we noted that the Council did not have the resource to support the uplift.
13. Discussion ensued on the position in other authorities and Members cited examples where authorities were not in the position to budget for such a lengthy period, and speculated on the manner in which funding might be distributed in a fairer way in future.

#### **CQC Assurance Framework – Update**

14. The Committee received an update on the CQC Assurance Framework, which is a structured approach, introduced by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), to evaluating the performance of local authorities in delivering Adult Social Care services. The Framework is aligned with the goals of the Health and Care Act 2022, which aims to ensure high-quality, equitable, and sustainable care for individuals in need.
15. Members received an update on the requirements of the CQC Assurance Framework, the duties and responsibilities of the Local Authority and were provided with an updated timeline for the, at the time, forthcoming inspection, which actually commenced on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025.
16. We welcomed the update from the Assistant Director, Adults, and questioned the possible delay between inspection and the publication of the final report within the timeline, and whether there was any redress in terms of this.
17. Discussion ensued on the national context as regard to the new inspection regime, the logistics in terms of the CQC establishing the inspection structure, and the potential for reflection and targeted inspections at the conclusion of the initial inspection process. Members felt that it was encouraging that staff retention had vastly improved in

Darlington, that the Council maintained a positive workforce, and we hoped that this would be reflected in the CQC outcome.

18. Clarification was sought in relation to the selected areas for improvement or development in terms of the self-assessment, with Members advised that the self-assessment reflected the Council's own interpretation based on national directives and performance indicators, with some specific areas prioritised for completion.

### **Hospital Discharges**

19. We were presented with a report which provided an overview of the requirements on the Local Authority to support hospital discharges and to provide an update on how Darlington is performing in terms of hospital discharges. The Committee was informed that local authorities (LAs) play an essential role in supporting hospital discharges to ensure that people transitioned smoothly from hospital care to appropriate community or home settings, and we were advised that this involved close collaboration with the NHS to prevent delayed discharges and to support people's recovery and well-being after their hospital stay. Our involvement in hospital discharges forms part of the broader health and social care integration effort in the UK, which aimed to provide joined-up, patient/person-centred care across settings, and the key duties of the authority in this process were summarised within the submitted report.
20. Members reflected on the difference between services in Darlington and other areas, noting that the services provided upon discharge in Darlington were markedly better than those experienced in other areas.
21. Discussion ensued on the number of patients involved in delayed transfers of care (DTOC) from acute physical health settings, with Members pleased to note that these figures were extremely low, and any such cases were as a result of systemic failures rather than by the local authority.

### **Transitional Services (preparing for adulthood for young people with care and support needs)**

22. We received a report from both the Assistant Director, Adults, and the Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, which provided Members with an update on the responsibilities for the Local Authority in relation to support young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in preparation for adulthood.
23. It was noted that the Care Act 2014 places several duties on Local Authorities in England to ensure young people with care and support needs are well-prepared for adulthood. This included young people with disabilities or those who may need ongoing care as they transition from Children's Services to Adult Services, and the report summarised the key areas for preparing young people for adulthood and the key SEND duties of Local Authorities, both of which aimed to give young people a stable, supportive framework for moving into adult life, with a focus on well-being, independence, and meaningful community engagement.
24. The Committee entered into discussion on the process of reassessment and annual review and where assured that young people moving from children's services to adult services are

reviewed regularly. It was noted that there were a number of overdue reviews for adults receiving long term care and support. Members were assured that a risk management approach had been adopted with those with the greatest need/complexity being reviewed first.

### **Adult Social Care during the Coronavirus Pandemic – Update on Task and Finish Group Recommendations**

25. Further to the recommendations submitted to this Scrutiny Committee on 16 April 2024, by the Adult Social Care during the Coronavirus Pandemic Task and Finish Group, we received an update report on the recommendations presented to the Committee. The submitted report stated that the purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to assess the view of both Adult Social Care (ASC) staff (both Darlington Borough Council employees and commissioned staff) and end users in terms of the changes that were required due to Covid and the associated lockdowns.
26. It was reported that the Task and Finish Group gave consideration to the new methods of working that staff and care recipients particularly liked, so that the Council could consider whether these methods should continue to be used / offered as an option after the Covid lockdowns ended. The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, together with the actions undertaken since the final report of the Task and Finish Group was submitted to the Committee, were outlined within the submitted report.
27. Members noted that there were some recommendations outside the sphere of the Council's remit and were unable to directly influence care settings, however Members were pleased that the Council maintained a commitment to liaising with such settings. Members also noted the impact that the pandemic was continuing to have in terms of waiting lists.
28. We received assurances that the Council's website and the Living Well website had been updated, that residents were being encouraged to access the website via the Netcall service, and that those with additional eligible needs were being signposted in accordance with the Council's duty to do so.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

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

---

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.

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 - 2028/29**

2. The Assistant Director – Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited members to discuss and give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to the areas within their remit and forward views to a special meeting the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
3. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation that the council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2025/26 which the Assistant Director Resources briefed the committee on the headline changes. It was also highlighted that the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) has been received in late December 2024, covering the 2025/26 period only.
4. Points of note included a one-off Children and Families Grant payment, increasing resources by £0.7m and the New Homes Bonus being extended for a further year resulting in a further increase in resources however such additional resources will be used to offset negative changes such as the end of the Services Grant.
5. In summary we noted that positive progress is being made overall with additional funding, however, there remains a significant annual funding deficit.
6. Questions were raised which included as to whether a breakdown of spending for individual services is available with the response that further information to that displayed in appendix 1 can be provided if members contact officers with their specific requests.
7. It was also asked as to whether updated figures will be included in the MTFP as they become available, with officers confirming that the most up-to-date version of the plan will be provided for Cabinet in February and for the Special Meeting of the Council on 20 February 2025.
8. Discussions were held in which members credited officers within Children’s Services for their positive work in reducing costs by bringing services in-house and reducing the number of external placements.
9. We considered the MTFP and members agreed to:
  - (a) Forward any further comments to the Chair prior to the Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2025.

- (b) That authority be given to the Chair, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers, to agree the Minutes of this meeting prior to their inclusion in the Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2025.

### **SEND Strategy 2025-2029**

10. We welcomed the Assistant Director Education and Inclusion who presented the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025-2029 which details the key elements of the Strategy and the planned implementation with partners.
11. Members were informed that the SEND Strategy establishes our strategic approach to the delivery of SEND services for children and young people in Darlington, ensuring the offer is coordinated and responsive to the needs of our community. The strategy sets out our shared local area vision, principles, and priorities to ensure that partners across the Darlington local area are working together effectively to identify, assess and meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from birth to the age of 25. The SEND Strategy has been coproduced with partners across the borough, and is fundamental to implementing partners responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014. It reflects the ambitions and priorities of the Council Plan and other key strategic documents.
12. Questions were raised which included how relevant information regarding SEND and EHCPs is being provided to parents with the response that the offer is displayed in as clear terms as possible on the Council website and that outreach and accessibility remains a focus. With “Let’s Talk SEND” sessions promoted on social media and via flyers including QR codes with evening and online sessions being planned for the future. It was also asked what impact engagement with children / families had on the development of the strategy with officers confirming that they were heavily included with engagement with children in early years being a priority. Clarifications of tribunal outcomes was asked with info provided that nationally, 98% of tribunal decisions go against Local Authorities however in Darlington this figure is far lower which underscores the effectiveness of work with parents and carers.
13. It was asked to whether academisation is an issue to SEND delivery with officers confirming that SENCO staff are present in each school to aid with delivery and if any issues are raised to the Local Authority, they are always considered carefully.
14. Discussions were held which included the possibility of a Task and Finish group to look into message delivery. A member also highlighted that parents have reported difficulties in accessing dyslexia diagnoses which officers agreed to look into.
15. We agreed the recommendations and noted the priorities outlined in the strategy.
16. We were also provided with an update on progress made on the Council’s Safety Valve agreement to address historic deficit in the High Needs Block which supports education provision for young people with Special Educational Needs. The council entered into the “Safety Valve” agreement with the Department for Education (DfE), enabling funding over



a 5-year period to address the accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block (HNB).

17. We noted the Safety Valve terms of agreement and progress made to this date.

### **Transitional Services**

18. The Assistant Director Education and Inclusion provided members with an update on the responsibilities for the Local Authority in relation to support young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to prepare for adulthood.

The Care Act 2014 places several duties on Local Authorities in England to ensure young people with care and support needs are well-prepared for adulthood. This includes young people with disabilities or those who may need ongoing care as they transition from Children's to Adult Services.

19. A member expressed their appreciation for the work being done in this area and asked the key policies of the plan with the response that working with families is a constant priority and maintaining the responsibility of Children's Services to support individuals into the care of Adult's Services.

20. We noted the content of the report and agreed the suggested recommendations.

### **Work Programme**

21. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2024/25, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

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

This page is intentionally left blank

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

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

---

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.

**Medium Term Financial Plan**

2. The Committee received and members were given the opportunity to consider the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 at a special meeting.
3. The report noted that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 3 December 2024 as the basis for consultation. The Committee was asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the Committee's remit.
4. We recognised that the MTFP was subject to change as the final settlement figures had not yet been released by the Central Government.
5. Members raised the pressures around Adult Social Care and increased package costs as well as questioning if expenditure in Children's services would increase going forward and how this would be monitored.
6. We recognised that the Council would receive payment for Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging. It was explained that this grant funding was not included in the draft MTFP as the allocations had not been confirmed at the time of publishing.
7. We scrutinised the additional pressures around the crematorium and whether this had been looked at to reflect in the MTFP and how frequently this is reviewed.

**Stronger Community Fund**

8. The Committee reviewed a report on the use of the Stronger Communities Fund in the first 6 months of the annual scheme and which invited consideration on the continuation of the scheme.
9. The report explained that Cabinet, at its meeting held on 6th February 2024, agreed to the continuation of the Stronger Communities Fund for the 2024/25 financial year. It also stated that there is no provision for the Stronger Community Fund in the current MTFP proposals and that we should consider this.
10. Spend against the £50,000 was set out, with information on what has been spent on an individual Councillor basis. It was noted that all of the funding must be given to the grant recipient by 31 March 2025.

11. We discussed the increased checks of the Stronger Community Fund and it was suggested that if an example of the paperwork could have been given it may encourage Members to use their funds.
12. We discussed that the Stronger Community Fund had helped Councillors support activities in their wards through the funding. Members expressed that they would like the fund to continue.

### **Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2024/25**

13. At the ordinary meeting of the Committee on the 16th January Members received a report on key performance indicators for Quarter 2 of 2024/25, which reported on 23 areas.
14. The Committee had a lengthy discussion around Fly Tipping indicators. Members wanted to better understand the reasons for the relatively low number of fly-tipping prosecutions and how money from the court fines was shared between the council and the courts. Members also wanted to understand what other strategies were used to reduce fly-tipping.
15. Theatre and Library figures were also discussed, officers were asked if they expected further increases for attendance at the Hippodrome as a way to increase income. The Committee also raised concerns over the temporary closure of Crown Street Library which was caused by a leaking roof, officers reported that the issue had been identified and . We also touched on the Hopetown Figures and asked officers if they had performed well against the original business plan.
16. The committee touched on the road safety figures and asked how involved the Council is on any injuries/fatality cases. Officers explained that the Traffic Management team work alongside the police and complete any improvements which are found to be necessary.
17. We requested Crematorium figures to be included in the Performance Indicators.

### **Public Sector Executives Group**

18. The Committee received a report on the work of the Public Sector Executive Group.
19. The Report stated that the group had considered the Long-Term Plan for Town initiative, the emerging Police and Crime Plan, the exploration of a data sharing tool to improve collaboration of safeguarding as well as the implications of the Autumn Budget Statement.
20. Members of the Committee agreed that the report lacked a level of detail sufficient enough to allow for proper scrutiny of the working of the Public Sector Executive Group. As Chair, I will work with the portfolio holder and relevant officers to ensure that an improved report returns to the Committee.

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

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

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

**Medium Term Financial Plan**

2. We received a report, which invited us to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29, and forward any views.
3. A briefing was delivered to Councillors on 11 December 2024 which provided an overview and highlighted key points in the plan. It was noted that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2025/26.
4. The Assistant Director Resources gave an update of the headline changes to funding from the draft settlement which included:
  - The settlement provides draft allocations for 2025/26 only.
  - Additional funding from the Chancellors budget has been allocated through an increase in Social Care grant and a new Recovery grant, we estimate to receive circa. £1m more than estimated.
  - Several Children's Social Care grants have continued and rolled together, increasing resources by circa £0.7m.
  - A new Children's Social Care Prevention grant, £0.6m.
  - The New Homes Bonus has been extended for one year, £0.545m.
  - The Services grant has ended reducing income by £0.166m.
  - No allocations have been received for the National Insurance offset, but £515m has been allocated nationally and it is estimated the grant will be £0.67m less than included in the MTFP. There is no allocation for the HRA or suppliers through this grant.
  - There will be updates to the expenditure since the MTFP was published for example CPI inflationary and demand changes which will offset these changes.
  - The Council has also received an allocation for Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging of £2.6m, officers are working through the additional service requirements this funding brings.
  - In summary the draft settlement for 2025/26 is positive, but there remains a significant annual funding deficit.
5. We recognised that the MTFP was subject to change due to the confirmation of the Central Government Funding, further clarification was sought around the Council's estimated income for the period of this plan and whether estimates would be updated and circulated.

6. We discussed the price inflation and how the largest element which had increased was ICT costs. We asked if delaying the software systems had been considered to save in these areas.
7. We discussed the Leisure facilities such as the Dolphin Centre, Hippodrome etc which had been ran with a financial subsidy, we wanted clarification whether these facilities had been operating at a loss.
8. We discussed the Risk Reserve, we wanted to comprehend what this would cover and if this was different to the General Reserves. Confirmation was sought around the utilisation of the Risk Reserves and what other Reserves the Council holds.
9. We discussed the Council's estimated income around the National Insurance Offset, Members asked how much National Insurance will cost to the Council, officers advised that that allocations had not been received as yet, but estimated a shortfall on the general fund directly employed staff of circa £0.670m and additionally there is no funding for staff or charges into the Housing Revenue Account and there is no funding for suppliers in this allocation. Allocations will be received in the final settlement.
10. The report explained main area of reduced income in Financing costs was due to a change in reporting requirements for the Minimum Revenue Provision, we wanted to recognise what had changed in the MRP.
11. We discussed the increase in Pre-Application Planning Advice fees, Members sought further reasoning on this, officers advised that increase is to reflect the quality of the advice that the Council Offers.
12. We mentioned that we would like to see the Stronger Community Fund continue for the 2025/26 Financial Year.

### **Section 106 Funding**

13. We received a report which provided us with an update on the position with respect to Planning Section 106 (S106) Agreements of its information and monitoring.
14. The report explained that the S106 agreements are legal agreements which have secured financial contributions from developers to run in tandem with planning permissions, to make developments acceptable and fund infrastructure in the vicinity of the development.
15. The report included information which showed the current position in relation to the live S106 agreements as of November 2024. It was explained that the live S106 planning agreements currently had a total value of £33.5m and from these agreements the Council had received £19.9m and in that respect £9.4m had been spent on obligations agreed with developers. It was also stated that the remaining amount of money had been allocated to infrastructure projects which were either in progress or had been planned to be so.
16. We ensued into conversation around the £19.9m of £33.5m which had been received by the council, we wanted clarification whether there was any risk of the Council not to receive the remaining.

17. We wanted to understand whether the money had to be spent by certain dates and whether applications put in are discussed with the appropriate Local Ward Councillors.
18. Conversation followed with regards to the Sustainable Transport Contribution, the report detailed a £1.5M contribution towards Teesside International Airport, Members queried what this was for.

### **Darlington Market Update**

19. We received a report which provided an update for us on the position with respect to the redevelopment of the Darlington Indoor Market.
20. It was explained that in 2017 the Council entered a lease/partnership agreement with the Market Asset Management Ltd (MAM) for the management, refurbishment of the Victorian Indoor Market and the management and improvement of the Darlington's Outdoor Market. The report also explained that it was not a management agreement, but it was based on a long-term lease with MAM and the Council.
21. The report clarified that during a period of tenancy negotiations within the indoor market and from the impact of Covid 19 restrictions on the refurbishment of the indoor market commenced. The report detailed the phases of the development of the indoor market.
22. The report included the new stalls and other various groups who had utilised the indoor market for events and some private sector organisations which hosted corporate meetings.
23. The report also stated that the Outdoor Market which MAM operated had witnessed a significant growth because of various developments, with its income had gone up by 116% on last year and capacity often at its limit on Mondays and Saturdays.
24. It was stated during the meeting that phase 3 of the improvements had now been completed.
25. We asked what the current vacancy rate was for the indoor market and requested further clarification around the high turn over for the food stalls, officers explained that the turnover had now settled.
26. We asked whether local events in the indoor market could be a useful for publication of the Indoor and Outdoor Markets.

### **Darlington Town Fund**

27. We received a report which provided an update to us on the progress of the current position with regard to the Towns Fund programme within Darlington.
28. The report stated that the Council had an allocation of £23.3M capital funding from the Government to fund projects to revitalise and improve the town along with £446,000 revenue funding to enable programme development.

29. We noted the funding included T-Levels facility, Skinnergate & The Yards, Victoria Road, a contribution of £4.508M to the development of the completed Hopetown Visitor attraction and in Northgate and the acquisition of properties and land to enable further intervention projects. Alongside the success the report detailed the projects which had a higher risk of delivery within the timescale of the Town Fund.
30. Also included in the report were the projects that had been announced and progressed within the Town Fund. However, the allocation of the budget had been paused to enable further consideration by Government. Notification had been received that the proposal is to allocate this funding to the Council, but guidance from the Government is now awaited.
31. We expressed our disappointment with regards to Northgate House, Officers explained that this was due to the lack of communication from the property owners to Council Officers and that the Council is still working on an outcome.
32. We wanted to know if officers had received any information regarding the success of the T-Levels facility at Darlington College. We also asked if a breakdown of the remaining funds could be given and where it would be spent.

### **Skerningham Masterplan**

33. We received a report which was submitted following the receipt of a “call-in” from Cabinet held on 3 December 2024 (Minute C76) in relation to its decision in respect of the Skerningham Masterplan. The ‘call-in’ was submitted by four Members of this Scrutiny Committee.
34. We invited those Members who had signed the documentation and who had requested that the decision be ‘called-in’ to outline their reasons for that decision and, in doing so, the Members raised questions and sought clarification to understand the School Yields data in respect of these assumptions and the discrepancy between the Council’s numbers, the Department of Education’s numbers and the Local Plan; to review recent traffic modelling in respect of additional car journeys and the road capacity to ensure the infrastructure phasing is acceptable; and to review relevant documents that considered the routes of the Skerningham Masterplan, to see why the decision was taken to choose an option that goes through Skerningham Woods.
35. The meeting was opened up to questions in the order of the documentation given by the 4 Members of the Committee. It was asked if there is a legal duty for Council’s and DFE’s numbers to match, and officers explained that the Council’s numbers are based on the national average across England, and that latest figures from July had been given to the developers. We asked for a breakdown on how the Council will obtain these numbers based on Darlington’s school for this development.
36. We asked for further clarification on how many secondary school children will be able to attend the Education Village during Phase 1 of the development, or if they would have to attend Longfield Academy. Officers explained that due to the new Ofsted Inspection carried out at Longfield Academy it is expected for numbers to become available at the Education Village.



37. We scrutinised whether the number of spaces available at Longfield Academy had also included the consideration of the Burtree Garden Village Development. Officers explained that all housing developments are included in the pupil projections. We asked how the layout of the Skerningham Masterplan would affect Longfield Academy, and the Education Village based on what part of the development people would reside in. Officers advised that each development is assigned a school, but also parental preference will be factored in too.
38. Questions then moved on to the second part of the document submitted by the 4 members of the Scrutiny Committee, we stated that we would find an updated Traffic Modelling useful. Officers advised that the Traffic Model is reliable and valid for 5 years.
39. We referred to paragraph 15 of the Cabinet Report and asked for clarity with regards to how the Masterplan Document sits underneath the Local Plan and Design code. Conversation then ensued onto the Distributor Road and the bridge scheduled in the final Phase. We scrutinised whether there would be issues with the initiation of the distributor road until the Little Burden Roundabout improvements had been completed. Other attendees of the meeting wanted clarification on how the traffic around the Whinfield area would be able to cope with the Development.
40. Questions opened for the final part of the document signed by Members of the Committee. Members went on to discuss how the Masterplan should have included precise details of the Distributor Road that would go through Skerningham Woods.
41. In relation to all three of the areas specified in the call in, having considered and heard all the information presented at the meeting, we felt satisfied with the decision of Cabinet at Minute C76 and that no further action in relation to the call in was required.

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

This page is intentionally left blank

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

---

**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

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

**Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29**

2. We gave consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 which had been agreed by Cabinet on 3 December 2024 as the basis for consultation. We were asked to consider the MTFP, in particular those services and finances within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, held on 20 January 2025, for consideration.
3. Members were informed that since the MTFP had been published for consultation, the Council had received notification of the draft financial settlement for 2025/26. The key headlines were outlined, with Members noting that whilst the estimated income was circa. £2m better than expected for 2025/26, there still remained a number of pressures and uncertainties.
4. Members raised concerns regarding their ability to agree the MTFP given the changes following the draft financial settlement and were informed that the MTFP would be updated prior to Cabinet on 4 February 2025.
5. Discussion ensued regarding the impact of National Insurance contribution increases on health service providers, noting that all service providers would be impacted by this increase as there was no specific funding for this going forward. Members were informed that the Council would be reviewing the sustainability of provisions; and following a suggestion by a Member for more in-house services, Members were informed that the Council regularly reviewed costs of in-house and external providers as part of the tender process. Members also noted the intentions of Housing Services to purchase properties for use as temporary accommodation.
6. Reference was made to the income generated by the proposed increase in car parking tariffs which would support a range of other services. Members suggested that this be publicised more widely to help mitigate negativity surrounding the increase in the tariffs. Members entered into a discussion regarding the savings generated by the back office, in particular staff vacancies.
7. Clarification was sought regarding the funding for concessionary fares and Tees Valley Combined Authority funding. A number of suggestions were also raised, including the potential for a review of council tax banding, request for additional funding from the Tees Valley Combined Authority for sustainable transport and increased resident permit parking charges. Members were informed that a review of residential parking locations was due to be undertaken in the Spring.

## **Climate Change**

8. We gave consideration to the revised briefing note for Scrutiny Committees drafted by the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer, in relation to the Council's commitment to tackling climate change. The briefing note reminded Members that tackling climate change was a shared responsibility, was deeply connected to other policy issues and local action was necessary for sustainable solution and that Scrutiny had a critical role to play in these cross-cutting issues.
9. Members noted that climate change as a stand-alone issue sits within the remit of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, however everything that the Council does either has an impact on, or is impacted by, climate change, so it is important that all Scrutiny Committees ensure that everything that comes before us has considered this.
10. We did suggest that external organisations also be encouraged to include climate considerations in any updates provided to this committee.

## **Housing Revenue Account – Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29**

11. We gave consideration to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025-26 to 2028-29 prior to recommendation by Cabinet on 4 February 2025 and Council on 20 February 2025.
12. Details were provided on the key decisions within the HRA for 2025-26 which includes a proposed revenue expenditure of £30.186M, a proposed Capital Programme of £30.092M and a proposed weekly rent increase of 2.7 per cent.
13. Councils have the discretion to inflate rents by CPI plus 1 per cent, which means a rent increase of 2.7 per cent for 2025-26. Members were reminded that a 6.7 per cent increase was agreed in February 2024 for the current financial year, although rents could have been increased to 7.7 per cent.
14. Considering the current economic pressures faced by tenants and balancing this with increased costs of maintaining and improving Council housing and the need to deliver the Councils ambitious capital and energy efficiency programmes, an increase of 2.7 per cent was recommended which equated to an average £2.81 increase in weekly rents. Members were also informed that Cabinet also recommended that service charges be increased by an appropriate inflationary amount.
15. A presentation accompanied the report, outlining the consultation exercise undertaken with Darlington Borough Council tenants in relation to the proposed rent charges for 2025/2026.
16. We discussed the use of text messages as means of communicating with tenants, which has seen an increase in responses from tenants and we were informed of the range of mechanisms in place to support tenants that were struggling to pay their rent, including the tenancy sustainment team.

17. Members also discussed the budget for responsive repairs and maintenance and roofing repairs and clarity was sought in relation to lifeline services
18. This Scrutiny Committee supports the average weekly rent increase of 2.7 per cent for 2025/26, increases to the garage rents and services charges, the revenue budget, Housing Business Plan and capital programme.

### **Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025/2030**

19. We gave consideration to the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 prior to approval by Cabinet on 4 March 2025.
20. We were informed that Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years. The Council's previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 successfully delivered a number of aims and objectives to reduce homelessness and deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
21. Members were advised that over the past few years and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has had to deal with a significant increase in demand for homeless services and that whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.
22. We noted that the strategy has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children's Services, Health, Probation, the Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector with the aim to be a document that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.
23. We were provided with details of the long term vision and the six co-produced key priority areas to achieve this vision. Members also noted the action plan contained within the strategy, setting out key actions to deliver the six priority areas. Details were also provided of the Council's statutory homeless duties and figures for increases in homelessness and costs.
24. We discussed the increase in homeless presentation, in particular for those leaving hospital/prison. Members were informed that the housing team works closely with Darlington Memorial Hospital, attends discharge meetings and has a presence at West Park, to ensure that support is provided to those being discharged. Members requested that the figures for hospital/prison be separated.
25. We queried those required to leave asylum seeker accommodation and noted that overall the number of asylum seekers housed in Darlington is low. Discussion also ensued regarding 'sofa surfers' and those presenting homeless due to their property no longer being suitable due to ill health, noting the actions taken for these presentations.

26. We have agreed to the onward submission of the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 to Cabinet and have also agreed to review the strategy 2025-2030 on an annual basis.

### **Performance Indicators – Quarter 2 2024/2025**

27. We received Quarter 2 performance data against key performance indicators for 2024/25.
28. Members were informed that data was available for nine of the twelve Housing and Culture indicators, with seven of the nine indicators showing performance better than from when last reported and two showing performance not as good as when last reported.
29. In relation to Public Health indicators it was reported that twelve annual indicators have been updated since quarter 4 2023/24 and that nine of the twelve indicators were showing performance better than from when last reported, two were showing performance not as good as when last reported and one was showing performance that remained the same.
30. We discussed in particular the percentage of eligible population aged 40-74 offered an NHS Health Check who received an NHS Health Check in the five-year period, which has seen a decline. We noted that whilst there has been a decline, Darlington is statistically better than the North East and England and there will be a focus on targeted action to increase uptake in areas of the Borough where health outcomes are poorest. Whilst this might reduce overall uptake it is important to take such action to reduce health inequalities.
31. We have requested further details regarding hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children, noting that an audit and mapping exercise is underway and the outcome and recommendations from the work can be shared with Members once available. We also requested further details of the school toothbrushing scheme.
32. Members have agreed to remove the performance Indicator 'PBH052 - (PHOF D10) Adjusted antibiotic prescribing in primary care by the NHS' from the set of indicators for this Scrutiny Committee and that any further updates will be provided by the Integrated Care Board.

### **Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust - Progress with the Trust's Quality Priorities 2024/25**

33. We welcomed an update on the Trust's Quality Account quality priorities for 2024/25, including key updates on delivery of the measures in place to deliver the priorities.
34. Members were reminded by the Director of Public Health that self-harm and suicide is a health and wellbeing key priority, highlighting that Darlington has the highest suicide rate in England. National data available indicates that 27 per cent of people who lost their lives to suicide were known to mental health services, and it is important to understand the local picture.
35. We discussed in particular relapse prevention and support for those on the waiting list for services. Members were assured that the Trust has seen an improvement in wait times

and that all patients receive an initial assessment, ongoing assessments of their risks and that a keeping in touch service is in place. Work is continuing to reduce waiting lists.

36. Members also noted that for those patients with limited support, the Trust has a multidisciplinary approach, working closely with a range of other agencies and for those patients without family, with a patients consent, the Trust will engage with friends. Members noted in addition, an advocacy service is available to patients.

### **Work Programme**

37. 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 programme and items can be added as necessary.
38. Following concerns, it was agreed that Members be provided with figures for flu and covid vaccination uptake in Darlington, including Local Authority staff.

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

This page is intentionally left blank